



# ENGAGEMENT *RISING*

A Decade of  
CCSSE Data  
Shows Improvements  
Across the Board

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## Foreword

In 2001, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*) was created to provide information about student engagement, a key indicator of learning and, therefore, of the quality of community colleges. The focus was helping colleges use survey data to guide efforts to improve student learning and retention. In 2003, to further assist colleges in this work, the Center designed benchmarks to establish national norms of educational practice and performance. Now, through the tireless work of many, the Center is encouraged to report that engagement has risen steadily over the past decade.

Community colleges have come a long way. The rise in engagement reported in these pages is not accidental, and the Center believes it is due to the dedicated and committed individuals who have worked to improve the educational experiences for all community college students. In a time of rising enrollments, downturns in economies, and the charge to increase completion rates, colleges have also benefited from additional support. These reinforcements have come through the generous funding of foundations and the continued support of Achieving the Dream, the American Association of Community Colleges, the Community College Research Center, Completion by Design, the Charles A. Dana Center, the League for Innovation in the Community College, and others.

This report is dedicated to all of the colleges that have participated in *CCSSE* over the years. Through their commitment to improving outcomes for students and their participation in *CCSSE*, we are able to report these encouraging results. We are privileged to work alongside these colleges and be a part of the work they do every day to ensure that students are successful.

*Evelyn Waiwaiole*  
*Director*  
*Center for Community College Student Engagement*

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Published by the Center for Community College Student Engagement.

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Please cite this report as follows: Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2015). *Engagement rising: A decade of CCSSE data shows improvements across the board*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Program in Higher Education Leadership.

# Engagement Rising Steadily

For more than 10 years, the Center for Community College Student Engagement has worked with colleges to answer the most important question in higher education: How can we best restructure policy and practice to help the most students succeed?

The Center—along with Achieving the Dream, the Community College Research Center, Completion by Design, and other efforts—has led the field in understanding and using data to improve practice. Now, findings from more than 10 years of *CCSSE* survey administrations show an unmistakable trend: **consistent, continuous improvement in engagement.**

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (*CCSSE*), the Center's flagship survey, helps colleges measure—and track—students' engagement with their coursework, their peers, and college faculty and staff.

Eleven years of data show a steady rise in engagement. Student demographics have been relatively stable across this time, so the progress is not likely to be related to demographic shifts in who is attending college but instead is the result of intentional changes in policy and practice.

Pages 3–11 of this report provide detail on a number of survey items for which engagement has changed the most.

## CCSSE: A Decade of Improvement

The Center began by providing data about individual student behaviors and experiences and then about benchmarks, which group survey items into conceptually related areas of engagement. Benchmarks allow colleges to conduct high-level comparisons of their performance to that of similar institutions and to the full *CCSSE* cohort.

Colleges received detailed information about their students, along with tools to help them understand their findings and, in particular, the ability to disaggregate their data and assess the experiences of various student groups. Across the country, colleges targeted areas for

improvement, designed interventions to better serve their students, and repeated *CCSSE* to measure their progress.

Over time, the Center provided more extensive analysis, including special-focus item sets that explore specific areas of practice; an online reporting system, which allows colleges to conduct subgroup analyses and make data comparisons; and analyses of more complex practices (e.g., first-year experience and learning community). With each innovation, more colleges participated in *CCSSE*—and more colleges incorporated the regular use of data into their planning and practice.



## The *CCSSE* Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement. The *CCSSE* benchmarks measure behaviors that educational research has shown to be powerful contributors to effective teaching, learning, and student persistence. The *CCSSE* Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice are as follows:

- Active and collaborative learning
- Academic challenge
- Support for learners
- Student effort
- Student-faculty interaction



# Engagement Trends Up

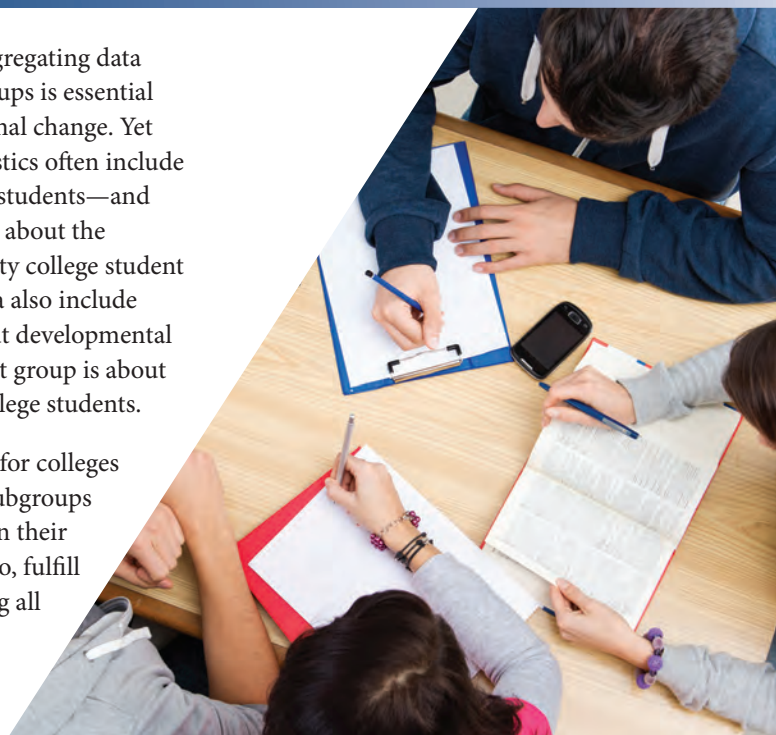
More than a decade of *CCSSE* data shows a consistent rise in engagement. The following pages highlight the survey items that show the strongest improvement in student behaviors and experiences related to student success.

The findings are organized by benchmark and disaggregated by enrollment status (part-time and full-time) and developmental status. (Developmental students are those who have taken or plan to take at least one developmental class.)

Part-time students represent about two-thirds of community college students, and they typically are less engaged than are full-time students. Developmental students, roughly half of the community college population, typically are more engaged but tend to be less successful.

For many colleges, disaggregating data for these two student groups is essential for meaningful institutional change. Yet national graduation statistics often include only first-time, full-time students—and thereby omit critical data about the majority of the community college student population. National data also include limited information about developmental students even though that group is about half of all community college students.

*CCSSE* data make it easy for colleges to focus on the student subgroups that are most prevalent on their campuses and, in doing so, fulfill their mission of educating all of the students who walk through their doors.



## Who Attends Community College: Then and Now

From 2004 to 2014, 853 public two-year colleges across the nation participated in *CCSSE*. These colleges served nearly 6.4 million students, 85% of U.S. community college students.

*CCSSE* respondents are generally representative of the full community college population with the exception of enrollment status and age, and results are mathematically weighted to adjust for the bias created by sampling at the classroom level. The makeup of the community college student population has not changed markedly since the 2004 *CCSSE* administration with the exception of an increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino students. For full details of *CCSSE* respondent characteristics from 2004 to 2014, visit [www.ccsse.org/center/publications](http://www.ccsse.org/center/publications).

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.  
Sources: *IPEDS 2004, 2005, and 2013*

		2004	2013
<b>ENROLLMENT STATUS</b>	Part-time	61%	62%
	Full-time	39%	38%
<b>RACE/ ETHNICITY</b>	American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	1%
	Asian	7%	6%
	Black or African American	13%	14%
	Hispanic/Latino	14%	20%
	White	58%	50%
	Other	5%	7%
	Nonresident Alien	1%	1%
<b>SEX</b>	Male	41%	44%
	Female	59%	56%
		2005	2013
<b>AGE</b>	Traditional age (18–24)	55%	58%
	Non-traditional age (25–65+)	44%	42%

# Part-Time and Full-Time Students

From 2004 to 2014, for every survey item in every benchmark, engagement has increased or remained the same for all students. And the news for part-time students is good: the gap between part-time and full-time student engagement is closing on most items.



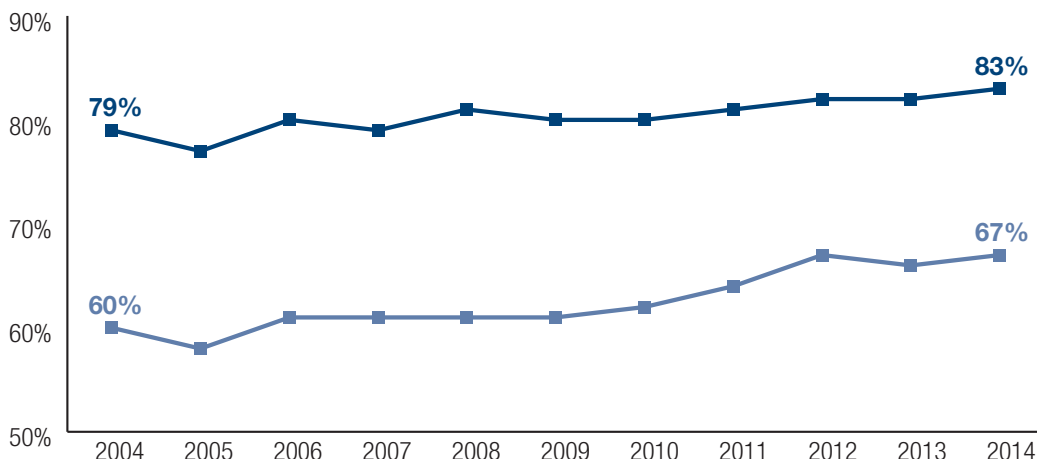
## ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

### Made a class presentation

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

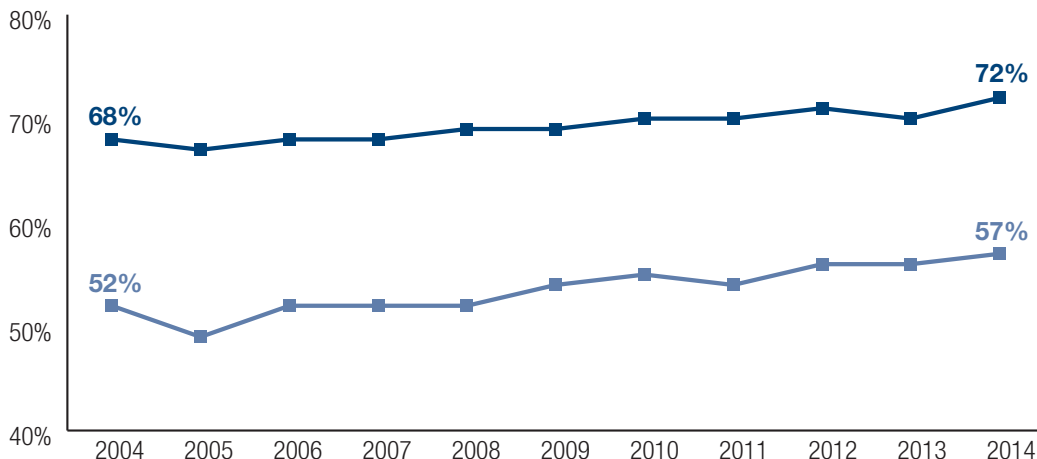
- Full-time students
- Part-time students



### Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

- Full-time students
- Part-time students



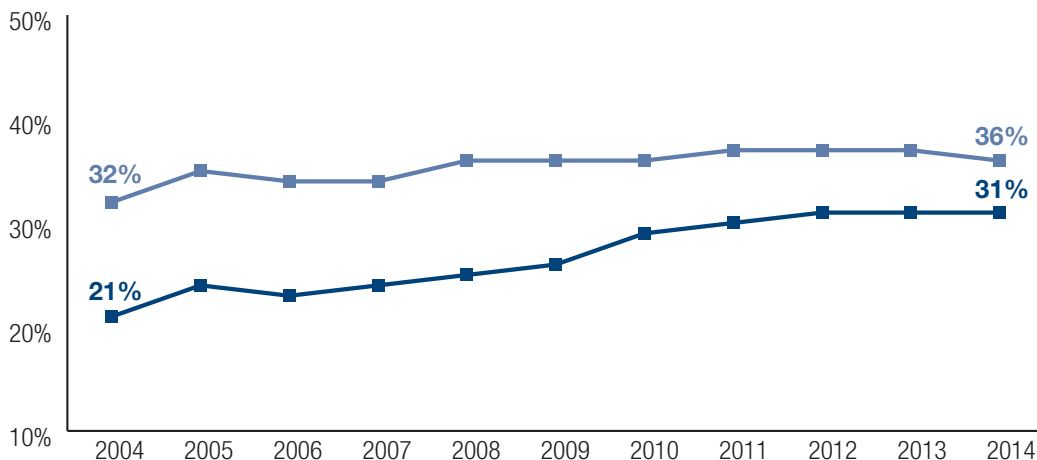
## STUDENT EFFORT

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

### Come to class without completing readings or assignments

Students who reported *never*

- Full-time students
- Part-time students



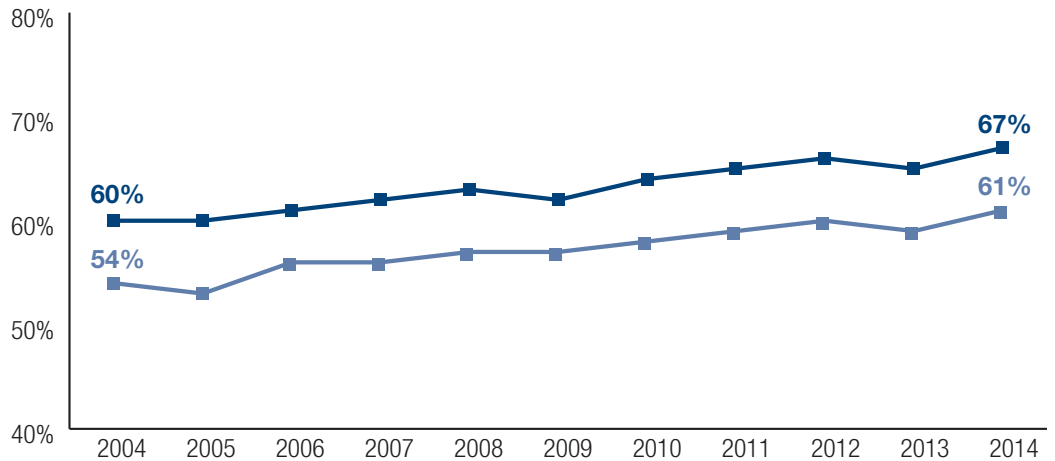
## ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?

### Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

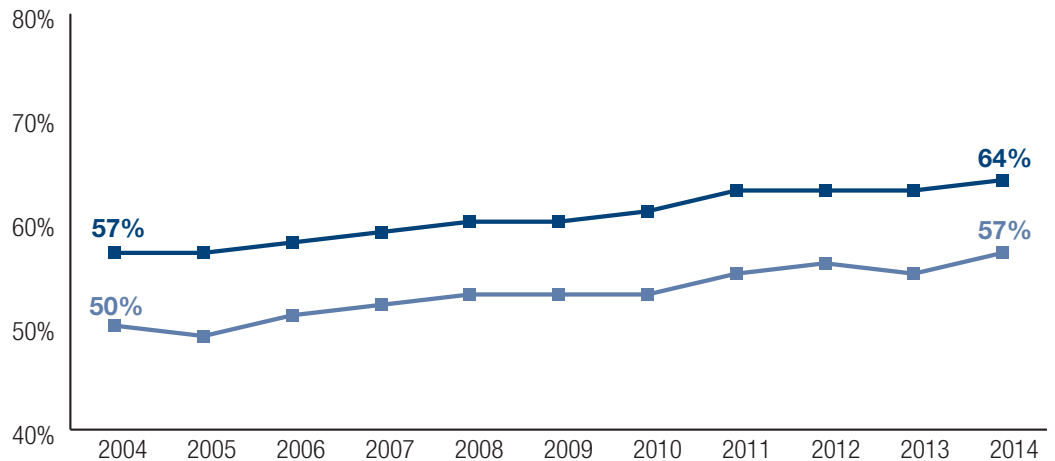
■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students



### Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

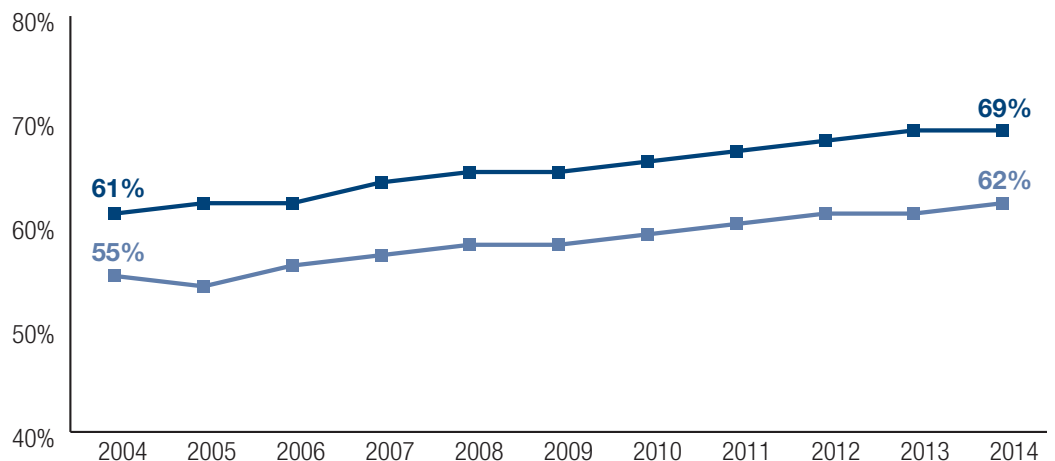
■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students



### Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students



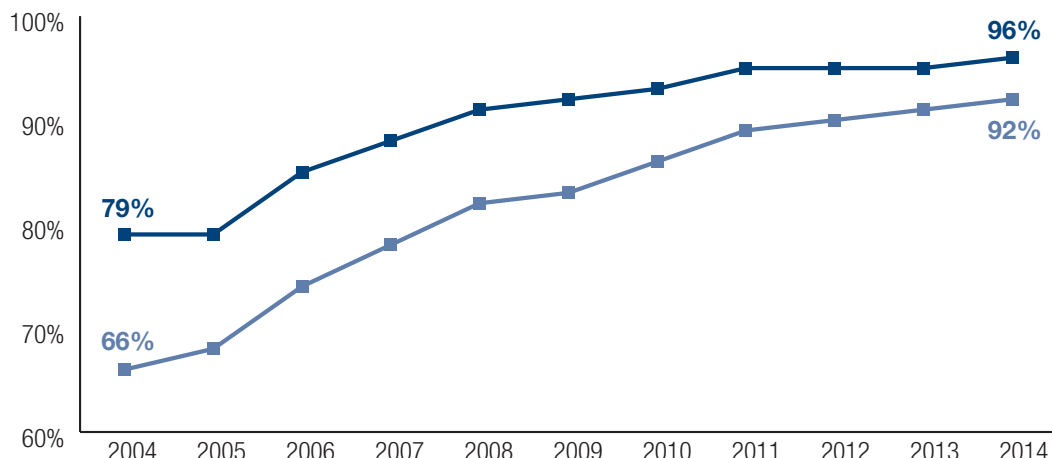
## STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

### Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

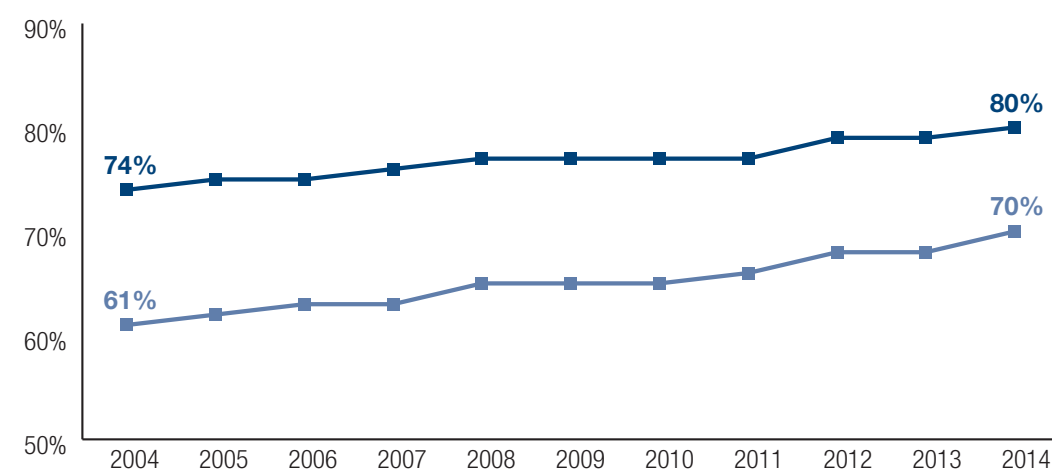
■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students



### Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

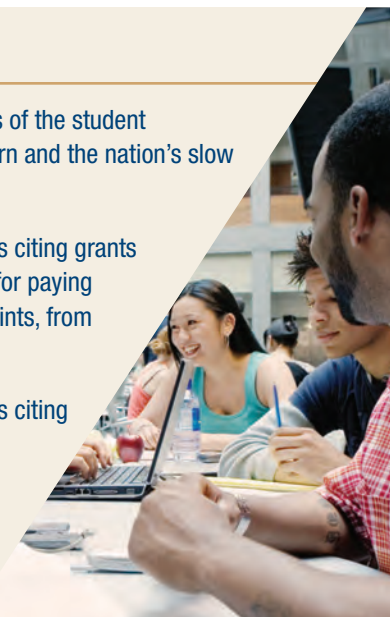
■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students



## The Economy's Impact on Students

In addition to providing detailed information about engagement, *CCSSE* survey items explore other aspects of the student experience. One collection of *CCSSE* items, for example, illustrates how the 2007–2009 economic downturn and the nation's slow economic recovery have affected students. From 2004 to 2014, all of the following changes occurred:

- The percentage of part-time students reporting that they worked more than 30 hours per week dropped 15 percentage points, from 54% to 39%.
- As students' work hours fell, the percentage of students saying that they most frequently took day classes increased 13 percentage points, from 64% to 77%.
- The percentage of full-time students saying that they had a goal of obtaining or updating job-related skills rose 9 percentage points, from 66% to 75%.
- The percentage of all students citing grants and scholarships as sources for paying tuition rose 15 percentage points, from 43% to 58%.
- The percentage of all students citing loans as a source for paying tuition rose 12 percentage points, from 22% to 34%.



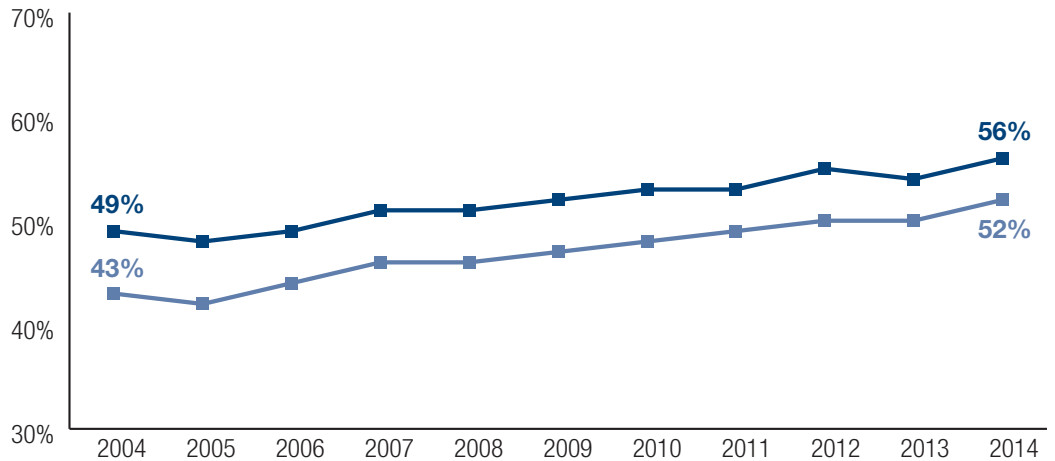
## SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

How much does this college emphasize each of the following?

### Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

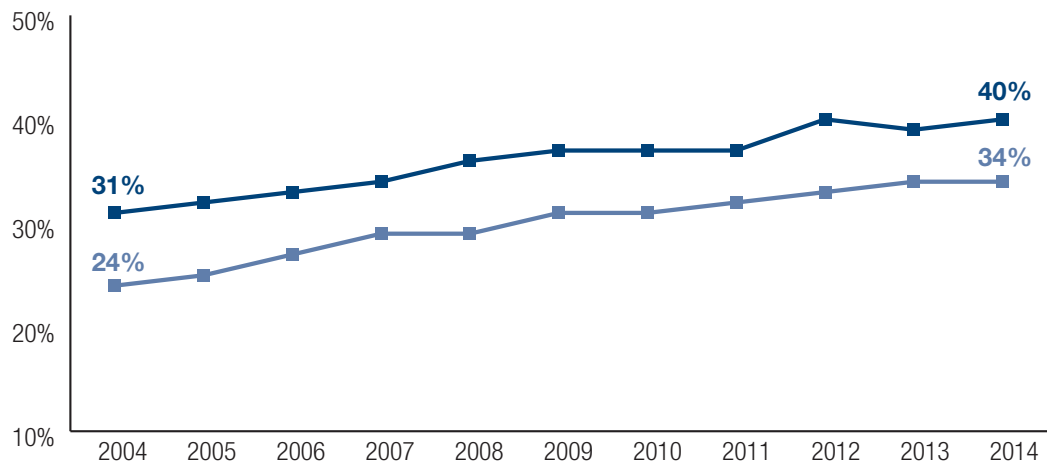
■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students



### Providing the support you need to thrive socially

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

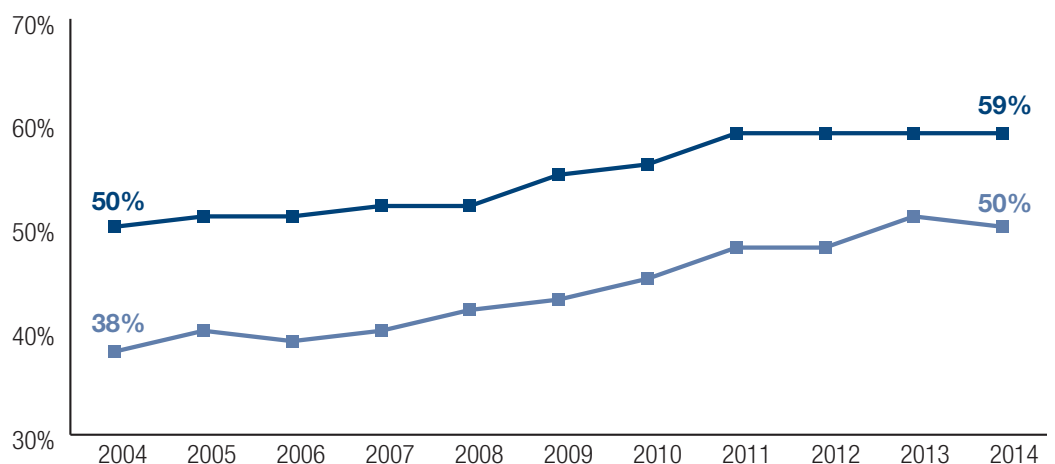
■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students



### Providing the financial support you need to afford your education

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

■ Full-time students  
■ Part-time students





# Developmental and Non-Developmental Students

CCSSE data have consistently shown developmental students to be more engaged than non-developmental students. However, the non-developmental students are closing the gap on many items. As in the case of part-time students, the less-engaged group is becoming more engaged at a faster rate.



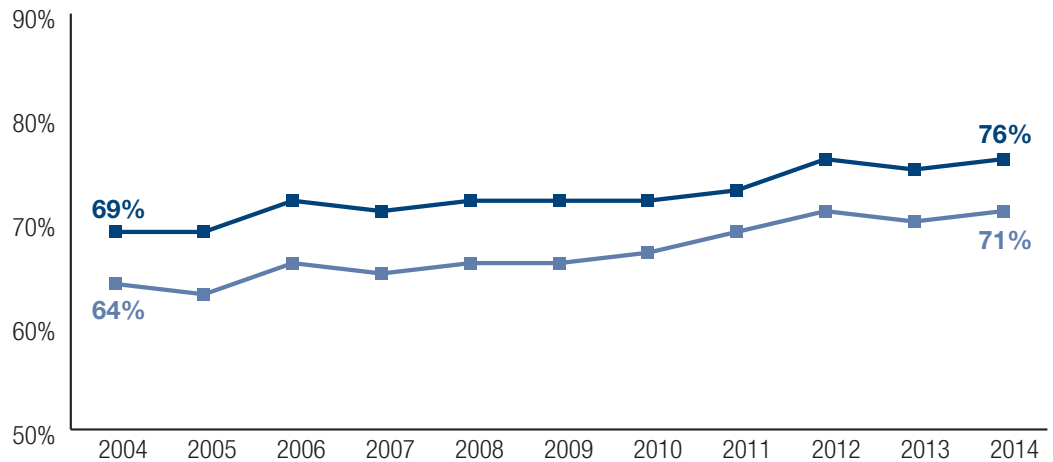
## ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

### Made a class presentation

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

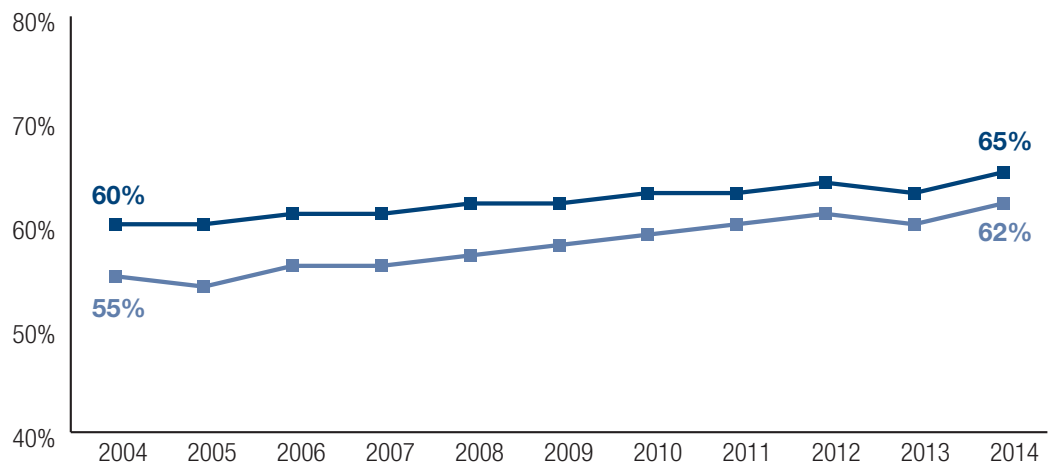
- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students



### Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students



## Methodology

The data in this report include responses from students who completed CCSSE between 2004 and 2014. Oversample respondents and those meeting standard exclusionary criteria were not included in the analysis. Items with frequency responses were dichotomized into *ever (sometimes, often, very often)* versus *never* responses, and items with agreement responses (*very little, some, quite a bit, and very much*) were dichotomized into *very little/some* versus *quite a bit/very much* responses.

This report includes only items for which, between 2004 and 2014, there was at least a 7 percentage point difference between the lowest and highest percentages in one of the combined response categories. A full description of the methodology and the results for all survey items can be found at [www.ccsse.org/center/publications](http://www.ccsse.org/center/publications).

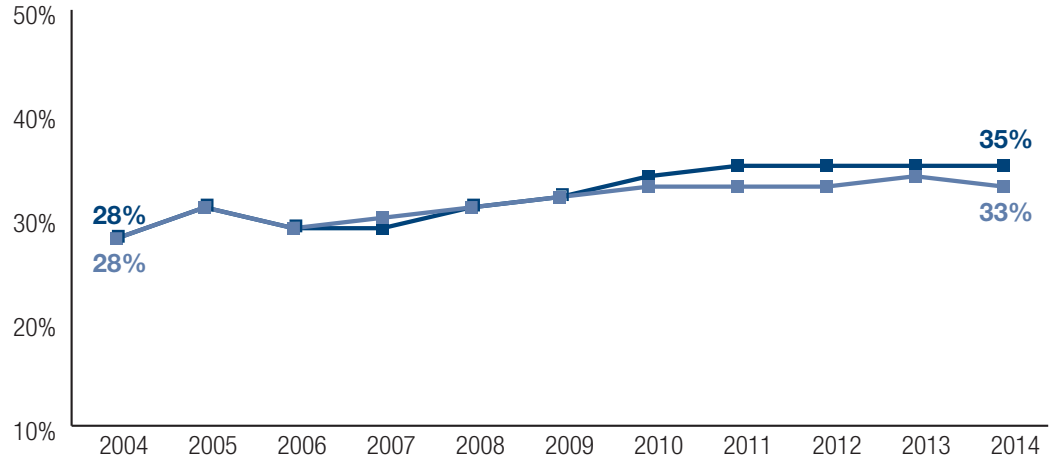
## STUDENT EFFORT

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

### Come to class without completing readings or assignments

Students who reported *never*

- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students



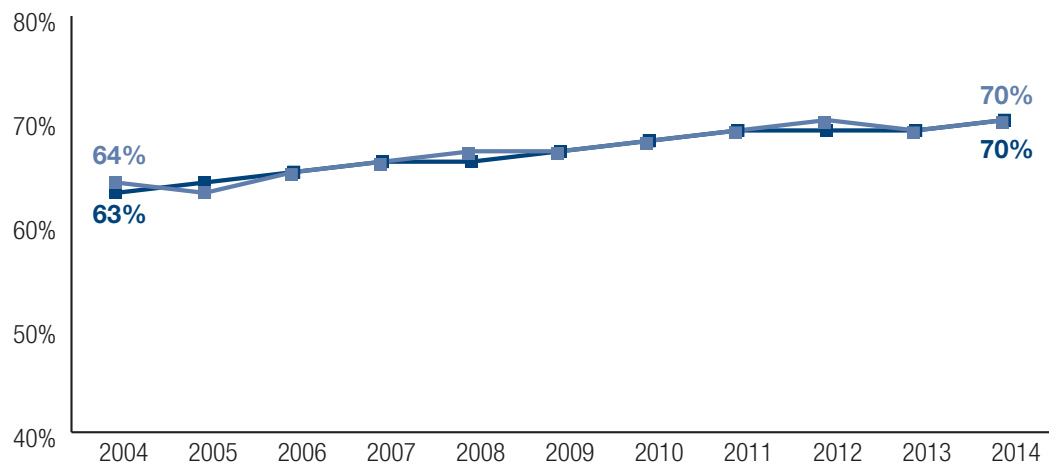
## ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?

### Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

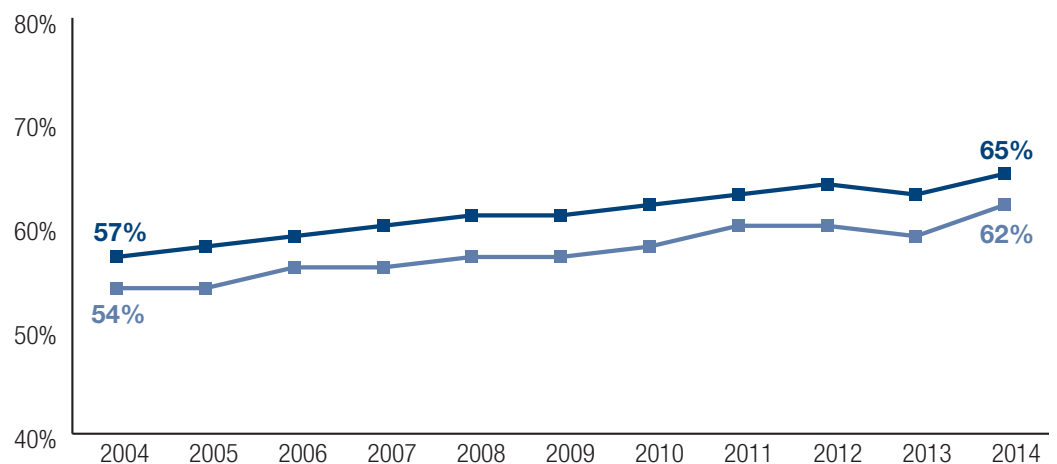
- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students



### Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

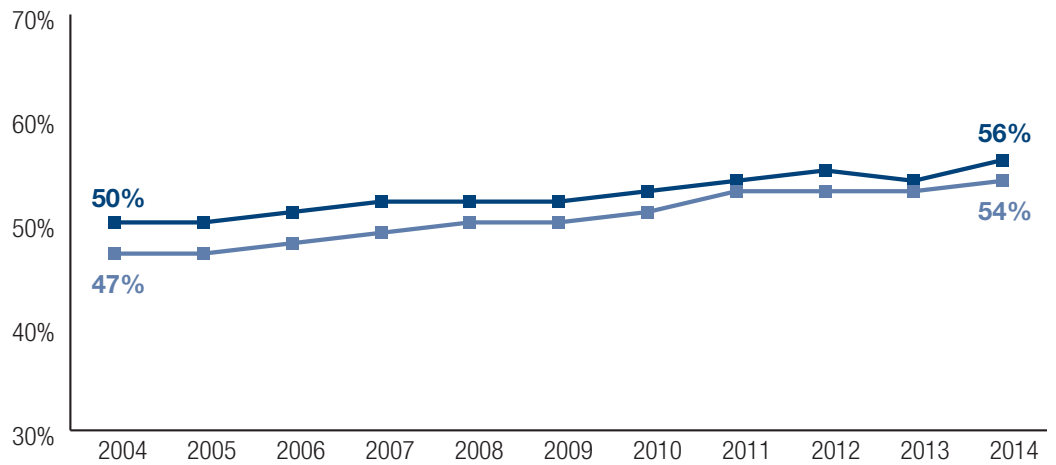
- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students



### Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

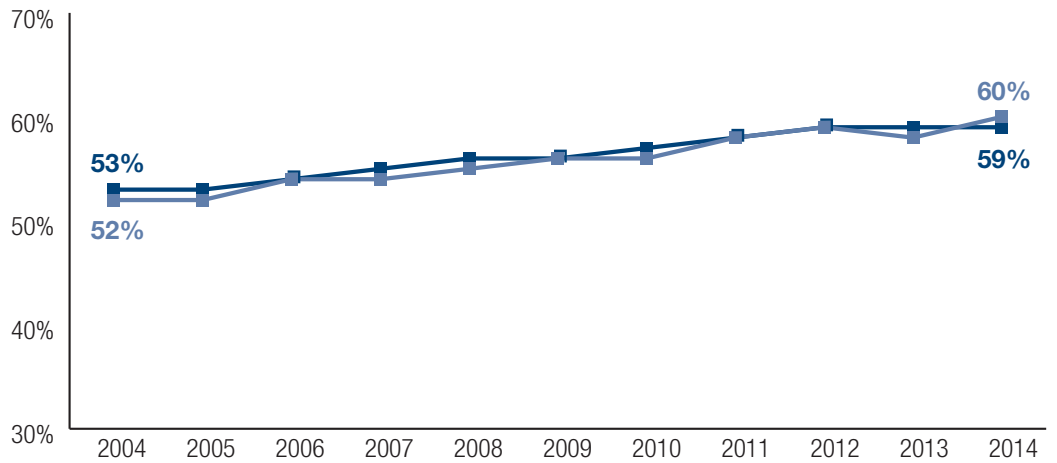
■ Developmental students  
■ Non-developmental students



### Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

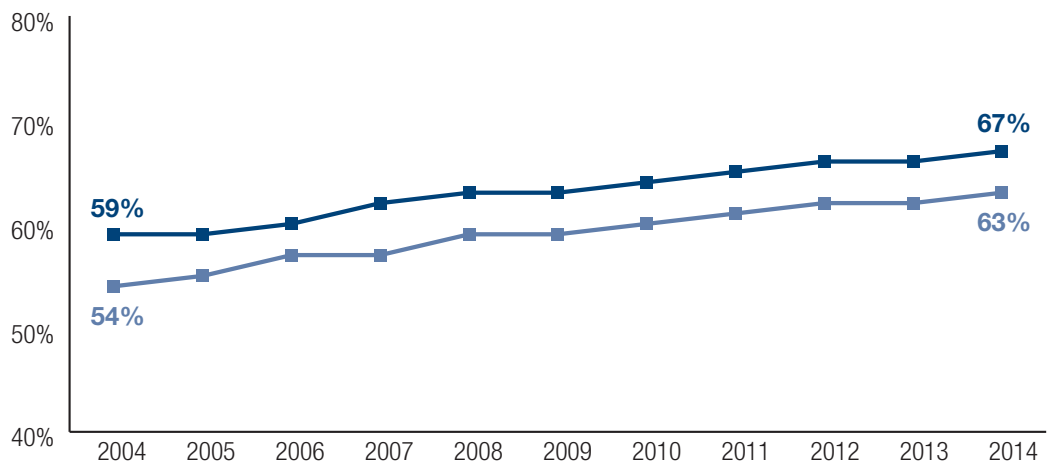
■ Developmental students  
■ Non-developmental students



### Using information you have read or heard to perform a new skill

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

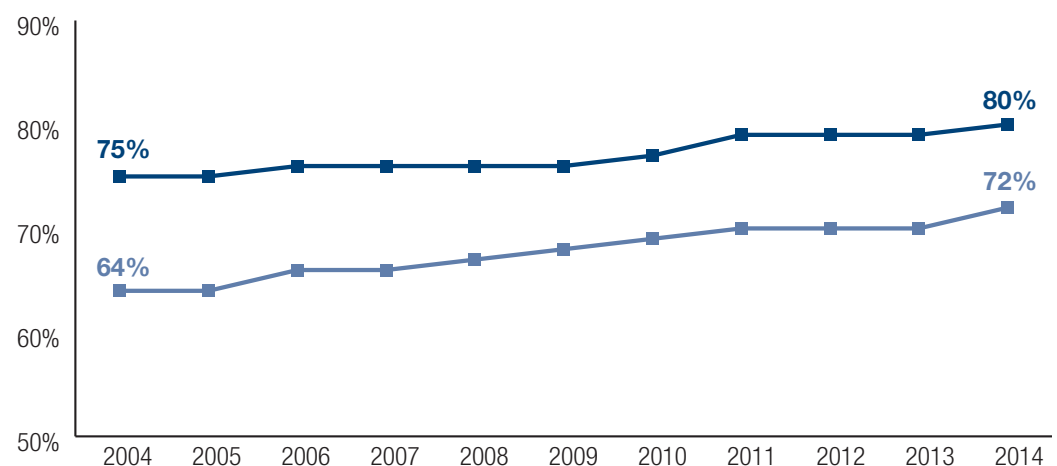
■ Developmental students  
■ Non-developmental students



### How much does this college emphasize encouraging you to spend significant amounts of time studying?

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

■ Developmental students  
■ Non-developmental students



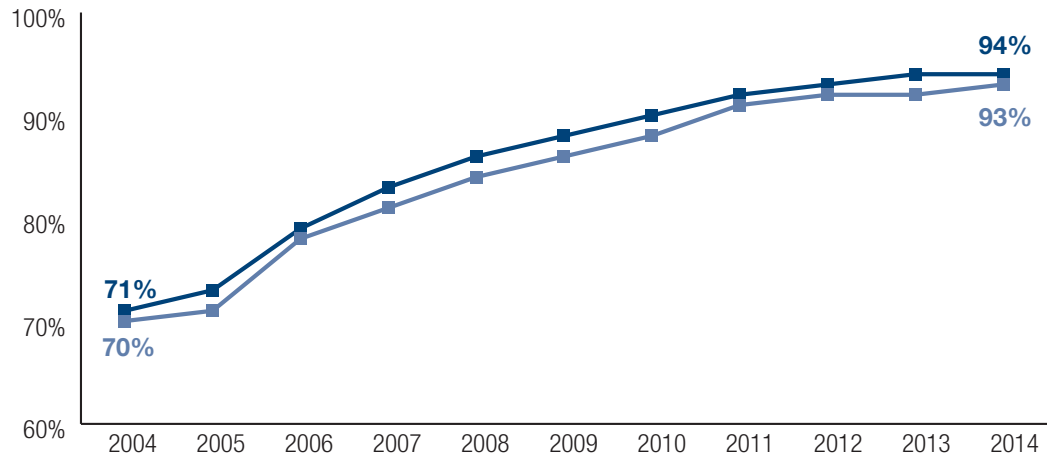
## STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

### Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

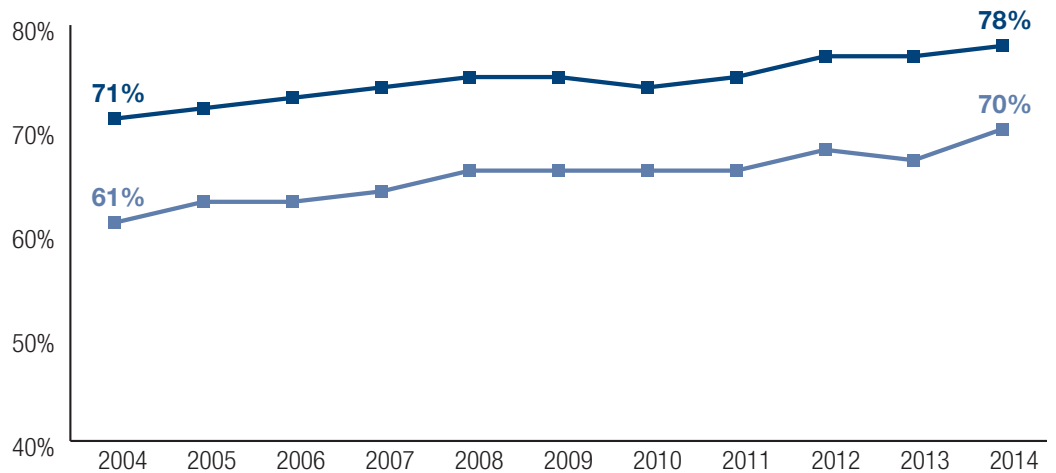
■ Developmental students  
■ Non-developmental students



### Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

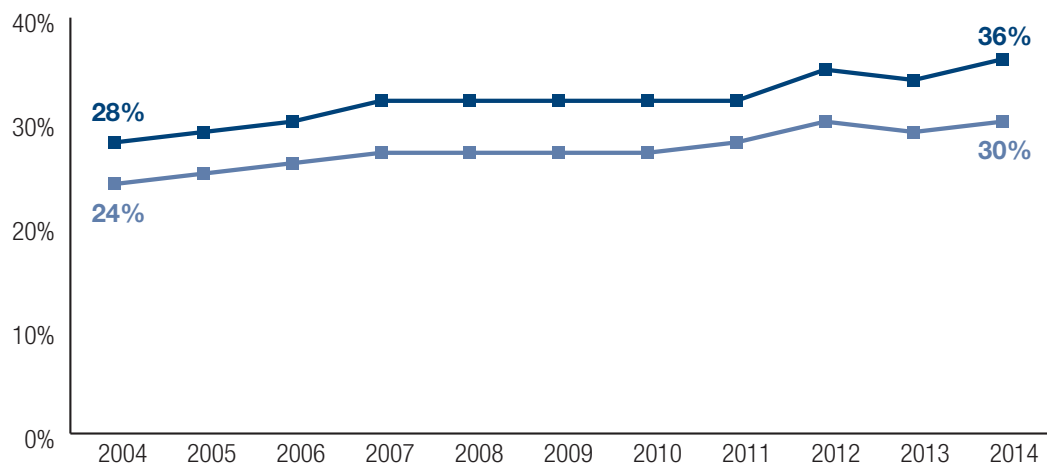
■ Developmental students  
■ Non-developmental students



### Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework

Students who reported *sometimes, often, or very often*

■ Developmental students  
■ Non-developmental students



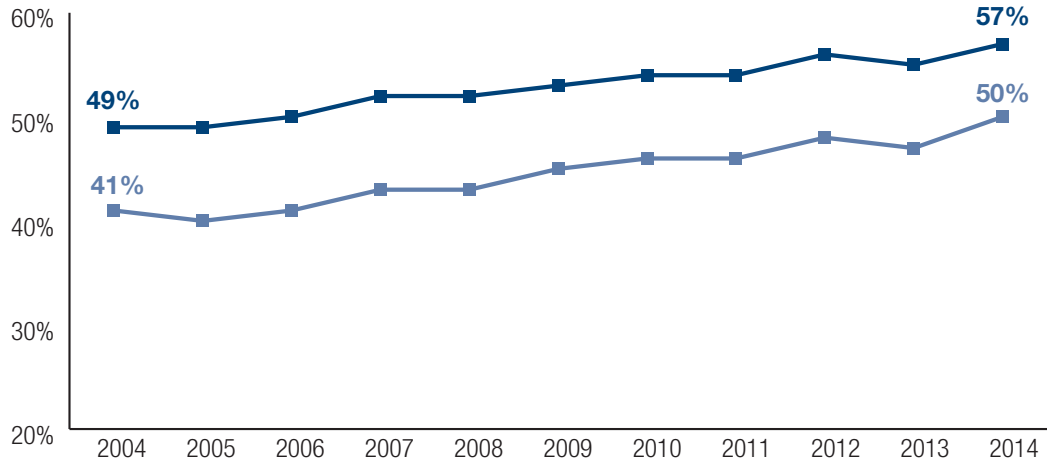
## SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

How much does this college emphasize each of the following?

### Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

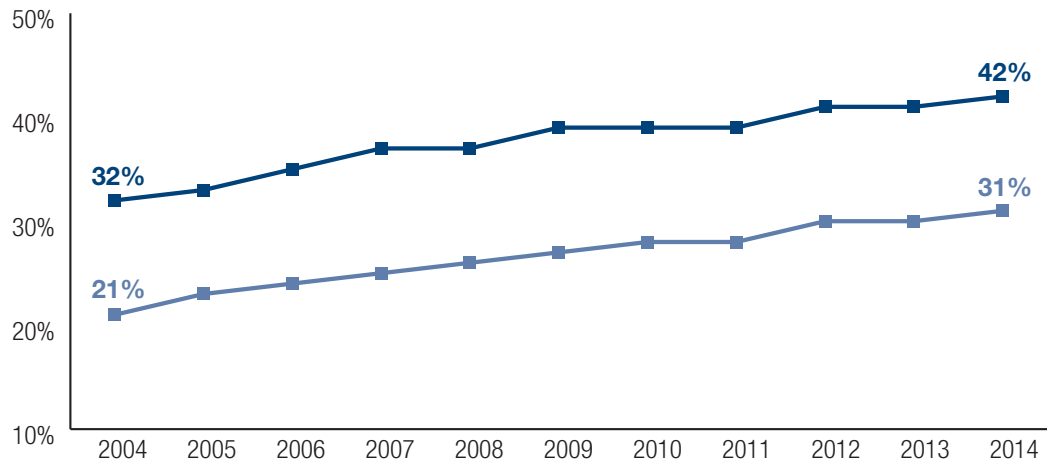
- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students



### Providing the support you need to thrive socially

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

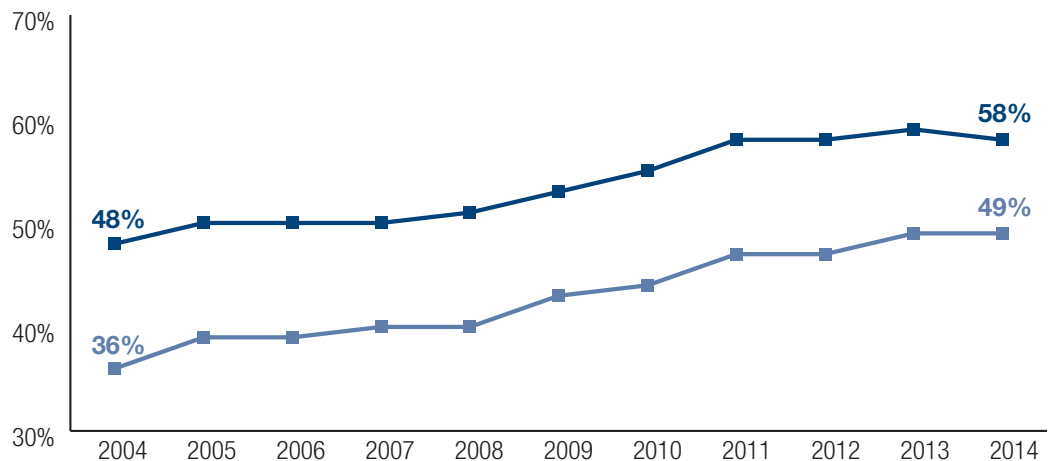
- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students



### Providing the financial support you need to afford your education

Students who reported *quite a bit* or *very much*

- Developmental students
- Non-developmental students





# Effective Practice Changes Student Behavior

Community colleges are well positioned to help the nation attain its goal of improved college completion. The data in this report, along with other research and findings from the field, illustrate what is possible when colleges use data to inform policy and practice.

Colleges can design the student experience to require actions that improve engagement. Consider these examples:

- CCSSE data disprove a misperception that today's students, rooted in texting and social media, do not communicate with instructors by e-mail. Many colleges provide e-mail accounts to all students, and some require students to use them. And in 2014, 94% of students reported that they used e-mail to communicate with an instructor, an increase of 23 percentage points since 2004.
- Recent CCSSE findings on high-impact practices show that 76% of students report that all of their instructors clearly explained a class attendance policy that included consequences for not attending class.

## Scaling High-Impact Practices

Even though engagement is trending up in many crucial areas, Center research indicates that few students experience high-impact practices—the practices shown to be most effective. (The Center's recent series on high-impact practices provides further detail.)

The current CCSSE instrument asks about several high-impact practices. The data show that engagement with these high-impact practices has risen, but orientation is the only one with growth that met the Center's criteria for notable change. And findings from other Center research show that the numbers of students experiencing most high-impact practices continue to be too low to see meaningful change at the institutional level.

Clearly, bringing high-impact practices to scale is a critical challenge for community colleges. Findings in this report, along with other research, indicate that when colleges use data to inform policy and practice, the colleges can influence student behaviors—and improve engagement.

If colleges use this leverage intentionally—so that the typical student experience requires engaging in multiple high-impact practices—it is reasonable to expect that engagement will increase more quickly for more students.

And the percentage of full-time students who *never* skipped class rose 12 percentage points (from 38% to 50%) between 2004 and 2014.

Throughout the past decade, Center staff have interacted with many colleges that use CCSSE data for institutional improvement.

Many of these colleges have shared stories of real progress based on student outcome data. While there is still work ahead to make engagement inescapable for all students, this review of a decade of CCSSE data confirms that the field is heading in the right direction.

## CCSSE Refresh Will Support Future Efforts

To ensure ongoing support of colleges and their work, the Center is refreshing the CCSSE instrument so that it is better aligned with colleges' current needs. Implementation of the better, but still familiar, CCSSE will begin with the spring 2017 survey administration.



Feedback from member colleges, ongoing analysis of CCSSE data, and cognitive interviews with community college students have informed—and will continue to inform—all survey changes. Updates include the following:

- Items about high-impact practices will be part of the main survey instead of a special-focus item set. With this change, colleges will be able to better evaluate their use of these important practices and measure their impact over time.
- Items that are no longer providing relevant data (e.g., items about outdated technology) will be eliminated.
- Some language will be updated to make students' response options more precise.
- The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE) will be updated in a manner consistent with the changes in the CCSSE instrument.

To learn more, visit [www.ccsse.org/refresh](http://www.ccsse.org/refresh).

“CCSSE data provide a great resource for any community college striving to measure student success, set policy, and improve learner outcomes. The data not only augment traditional institutional data with engagement metrics, but also enable colleges to compare their students' experiences with those of their peers. Because of this, a college can draw upon a more comprehensive view of its strengths and challenges to build an action plan.”

— Larry Litecky, Achieving the Dream Leadership Coach

# CCSSE Fuels Positive Institutional Change

## St. Petersburg College (FL) | William Law, President

The Center has helped colleges across the country become more intentional about using data to move the needle on student success. For example, **St. Petersburg College (FL)** credits its work with Center data—collecting, tracking, and using data to measure outcomes—for motivating key changes in institutional policy.

The college administered the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE), and the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) consecutively in 2011, 2012, and 2013. The data collected from these survey administrations were used by the campus provosts to create The College Experience, which integrates the 13 high-impact practices identified by the Center.

St. Petersburg also participated in the 2012 Entering Student Success Institute, the 2013 High-Impact Practices Institute, and the 2013 Kresge Foundation Student Success Institute: Men of Color in Community Colleges. These institutes, all hosted by the Center, allowed the college's leadership team to dive into and work closely with CCSSE and SENSE data. The institutes revealed key differences between various student groups and provided insight into how students were affected by college policies. As a result of this data exploration, the college dramatically changed its project management approach, became more proactive in training frontline staff, and improved communication with both staff and students.

“Because the *CCSSE* benchmarks are well aligned with the Achieving the Dream (ATD) principles, *CCSSE* data help ATD institutions analyze achievement gaps, identify student success strategies, and track their progress over time. For example, **Century College (MN)** used the *CCSSE* benchmarks to develop the GPS (Goals + Plans = Success) Student Life Plan. The college is continuing to use *CCSSE* data to track the effectiveness of this initiative. Similarly, **Jefferson Community and Technical College (KY)** used *CCSSE* benchmarks to identify priorities and continues to use the data to measure progress.”

— Martha Romero, Achieving the Dream Leadership Coach

## Palo Alto College (TX) | R. Michael Flores, President

**Palo Alto College (TX)** administers *CCSSE* every two years as one of several methods of gauging student engagement and success. The college uses *CCSSE* data to improve processes and procedures so that they better promote student success.

For example, 2009 *CCSSE* results indicated a need to increase active and collaborative learning across all disciplines. Subsequent focus groups with students and faculty reinforced the need to move away from lecture-and-repeat teaching methods—and led to the development of problem-based learning as the college's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) topic. Classes implementing problem-based learning are now oversampled as part of each *CCSSE* administration to determine whether participating students perceive this active learning strategy as more beneficial and engaging than traditional teaching methods.

*CCSSE* data also support general education assessments at the college. Faculty have selected specific *CCSSE* items to measure student perceptions of personal competencies in critical thinking, communication, teamwork, personal responsibility, social responsibility, and empirical and quantitative skills. Using the survey responses, faculty develop action plans to improve student outcomes in these areas.

*CCSSE* data have informed several other initiatives at Palo Alto College and within the Alamo Colleges District. Since fall 2012, for example, the college has expanded learning communities to include one in three first-time-in-college students, a total of more than 450 students across

38 course sections. In addition, *CCSSE* data related to student participation in tutoring services led to the college's requiring tutoring for all students in developmental math and reading courses. And responses from students regarding the advising process helped the district develop a unique AlamoAdvise process model, which now serves as the advising model for all of the Alamo Colleges.





## Center National Advisory Board

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Education Management Systems  
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Stanford University

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Colleges

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Editorial and design by KSA-Plus Communications, Inc.

## Center for Community College Student Engagement

Program in Higher Education Leadership

College of Education  
The University of Texas at Austin  
3316 Grandview Street  
Austin, TX 78705

T: 512.471.6807 F: 512.471.4209  
[info@cccse.org](mailto:info@cccse.org)  
[www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org)