

Report Urges Changes at Community Colleges to Prepare Students for High-Paying Jobs

[By JAMILAH EVELYN](#)

Community colleges are the best conduits for helping low-income people out of poverty, but state policy makers, and even the institutions themselves, often hinder training that leads to lucrative careers, according to a report released today by a nonprofit employment-consulting group.

"Building a Career Pathways System," by the Workforce Strategy Center, a nonprofit management-consultant group, contends that community colleges need to restructure to eliminate departmental divisions, that state and regional work-force programs need to make better connections with the colleges, and that policy makers need to redirect funds.

The report cites community colleges' disparate missions as the single largest barrier, noting that the colleges' programs for training workers, providing remedial education, and preparing students to transfer to four-year colleges usually are "in effect, a group of separate institutions."

The report argues that creating lasting career opportunities for low-income people hinges on an education integrated with academic and vocational training.

"Because of the way the colleges are structured, students don't move between the departments," said Julian L. Alssid, co-director of the center. "Faculty and administrators often don't communicate very effectively between the departments."

The report also recommends greater cooperation among two-year colleges, welfare and social-services agencies, adult-education providers, and work-force agencies. These groups "have always operated as separate entities with independent (although clearly overlapping) missions," the report says.

Further, the report says that policy makers provide disincentives for community colleges to emphasize training for disadvantaged students in several ways: by tying institutional funds to the number of full-time students; by providing greater financial-aid opportunities for full-time students; and by measuring community colleges based on the proportion of students who transfer to four-year institutions.

"We're hoping to encourage people to look at the big picture," said Mr. Alssid. "It's probably hard to argue against many of these recommendations. But they will require a big cultural shift in the colleges and in the way that policy makers view the colleges and the other agencies that need to be involved in making these changes."

The report praised officials in California, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington State for setting up programs and policies that encourage successful training of workers.

The report can be downloaded from [the company's Web site](#).