

## Approaching Your CCSSE Results

### Introduction

Each member college's results should be considered in terms of its own mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics. However, *CCSSE* has developed a set of recommendations regarding the analysis and interpretation of your results based on feedback from member institutions, conference and workshop presentations, and experts in the field.

### The “Big Picture”

*CCSSE* recommends asking general questions first and using Institutional Report tables to help answer such questions. General questions might include the following:

- ★ What data confirm facts you already knew?
- ★ What results had you not expected?
- ★ Is your sample representative of your entire population of students?

Tables from the report that assist with this general review include the following:

★ **Table 1: Respondents to Underlying Populations Comparisons**—This one-page table details respondent characteristics from your college compared to population data for 1) your college, 2) similarly-sized 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort colleges, and 3) the 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort. The specific characteristics examined include gender, race/ethnicity, age, and enrollment status.

★ **First Look**—These reports highlight those items where your college falls notably above or below the mean of your comparison group broken out

by all students and enrollment status (part- and full-time).

★ **Frequency Report: All Students**—This report provides item-by-item percentage responses for all students at your institution. In addition, it displays asterisks for those items that are significantly different, when applicable, from your comparison group.

★ **Benchmark Reports**—Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement. *CCSSE*'s five benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important in quality educational practice.<sup>1</sup> The benchmarks are used to compare your institution's performance to that of similar institutions and with the 2009 *CCSSE* Cohort. Data are presented in both tabular and graph form.

### Digging Deeper

*CCSSE* also recommends taking the time to examine your results in greater detail, especially the items that comprise the five *CCSSE* benchmarks. Review of individual survey items can shed light on specific aspects of your institution's efforts that are not detailed in the “big picture” reports mentioned previously. Both the Means Summary and Frequency Distribution tables assist with such efforts.

★ **Means Summary**—These reports provide item-by-item means for students at your institution contrasted with a comparison group and the *CCSSE* Cohort. Other useful statistics found in these reports include 1) significance, 2) effect size, 3) standard deviation, and 4) standard error of the mean. The actual magnitude of some item score differences may seem trivial, even though they are highly reliable and statistically

<sup>1</sup>See Benchmark Overview for a detailed description of the five *CCSSE* benchmarks.

significant; hence, the presentation of the effect size indicator and other statistics will aid in the interpretation of the magnitude of the differences on any given item.

★ **Frequency Distributions**—This report summarizes the observed frequencies of occurrence (counts and percentages) of the values for each item on the survey. Such statistics are useful for easily locating the highest and lowest scores as well as understanding how the data are distributed across response categories.

## Reaching for Excellence

Standardized reports are an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean as well as allowing for comparisons across similar colleges. While such reports are quite useful, they should only serve as a starting point. Better educational outcomes are the result of using data wisely and being relentless about putting it in front of faculty and staff – and using the data to focus effort and promote positive change. Given such requirements, CCSSE also provides the following tips for examining and interpreting your data.

### **Tip #1: Compare your college to high-performing colleges**

CCSSE provides a Benchmark Deciles Report for each institution, which provides an indication of your college's performance relative to the highest-performing colleges. Your college may aspire, for example, to attain performance in one or more benchmark area equivalent to the performances of the top ten percent of community colleges nationally. The decile report lets you know where you stand in relation to that aspiration. Deciles are percentiles that divide the frequency of benchmark scores into 10 equal groups.

Deciles are listed for the 2009 CCSSE Cohort of colleges and for each appropriate breakdown according to size and urbanicity. To help gauge a college's performance relative to the comparison groups, the shaded area on the tables indicates the deciles that are less than or equal to your benchmark scores.

The definition of "high-performing" certainly may vary, but CCSSE typically classifies high performers as those institutions scoring at or above the 80th

percentile on at least three benchmarks.

In addition, CCSSE encourages colleges to review the work of MetLife Foundation Best-Practice Colleges. Selection of these award-winning colleges was based on the institutions' performances on a retention index reflecting results on three CCSSE benchmarks that are related to student retention.

Brief descriptions of the award winners are located on CCSSE's Web site: <http://www.ccsse.org/retention/bestpractices>.

### **Tip #2: Measure your college's performance in terms of your least-engaged student group**

In certain cases, colleges may know which group on campus is least engaged, while in others, further analysis of the data helps yield that information. In each scenario, filtering and calculations using your raw data file will be necessary.

CCSSE has developed classifications for the following groups of students that are typically of interest in community college efforts to improve student outcomes:

- 1) **First-generation students:** those who are the first in their immediate families to attend college
- 2) **Developmental students:** those who have taken or plan to take developmental courses while attending college
- 3) **High-risk students:** those with multiple risk factors such as being single parents, having to care for dependents, attending college part-time, etc.

You may also wish to explore levels of engagement of minority student groups, returning female students, or other groups.

Please contact CCSSE for information regarding the survey items used in creating these groups.

Once you have identified your least-engaged group, CCSSE recommends that you run comparisons between this group and the remainder of your college population, as well as comparing the results for the least-engaged group and the 2009 CCSSE Cohort.

### **Tip #3: Gauge work in areas most strongly valued**

CCSSE always recommends examining your results in light of your institution's vision, mission, and/or strategic objectives. Before reviewing your data, you may want to identify key issues by answering

questions like these:

- ★ What are the high-priority objectives in your college's strategic plan?
- ★ What benchmarks, trends, or services are most important to your college? Examples might include particular benchmarks (academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, etc.); critical issues, such as retention; and services that are key to student success, such as academic advising or college orientation.
- ★ What educational practices most concern your college?
- ★ How do your mission and specific programs at your college relate to the CCSSE benchmarks and survey items?
- ★ What new programs are being developed at your college?

For example, if your college scored low on *student-faculty interaction*, a high priority on your campus, then ascertain the specific survey items of that benchmark that require attention; or, if your college scored high on all benchmarks, focus on ways to continue strengthening these areas.

**Tip #4: Compare where you are now with where you want to be**

Another useful way to examine your institution's results is to perform a gap analysis looking at where you are now versus where you want to be. Questions to consider include the following:

- ★ What issues have been identified for your college through self-study for reaffirmation of accreditation — or recommendations from the visiting team?
- ★ What strengths or opportunities for improvement in your college have been identified through other data-gathering or institutional research efforts?
- ★ Are there emerging trends that fit with your college's strengths?
- ★ Are there emerging trends that amplify areas where your college needs improvement?

Once questions such as these have been addressed, utilizing your CCSSE results in conjunction with other institutionally-relevant data, a set of strategic goals can be established and then pursued at your college.

## CCSSE in Action: Communicating about and Using your Results

High levels of student engagement are the product of an institution-wide commitment, not discrete initiatives. In other words, quality education is not an event—it's a culture. CCSSE is committed to helping you build that culture at your college, and we provide a Communications Toolkit as a key resource for those efforts.

The 7-step plan below can be tailored and implemented to help you share your college's results and launch a dialogue with key internal and external constituencies. CCSSE's Web site ([www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org)) also offers various resources, including an online search engine, references, and other tools to help you communicate about your results.

### Step 1:

Identify your internal and external audiences. Internal constituencies may include governing board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. External audiences might include the media, policymakers, business leaders, K-12 educators, and community-based organizations. What do you want them to know about the survey and your results? What questions will they have? What do you want them to do with the information?

### Step 2:

Set parameters—for yourself and your various audiences—that establish what data will and won't be used for. For example, you may choose to use results to design faculty development opportunities, noting that they are inappropriate for use in evaluation of individual faculty members. You may want to use data immediately with external audiences, or you may choose to focus internally at first and then, at a later date, demonstrate data-driven changes to external constituents.

### Step 3:

Develop storylines that relate to issues relevant to your college and geographic area. Ask yourself, "What are the stories our students are telling us through this survey? What do these stories say about the educational experience we are providing?" Examples of potential storylines are included in the "Communication Tools" located at <http://www.ccsse.org/members/communications>.

#### **Step 4:**

Engage your audiences, particularly your internal audiences, in ways that encourage them to move forward. Create forums that help people understand what the data mean so they can use the information to develop improvement strategies.

#### **Step 5:**

Work within your college's culture. For example, some colleges may want to organize conversations by department; others will benefit more from interdisciplinary and cross-functional discussions. Some will find it natural to incorporate improvement initiatives into their annual planning process, and some will want to convene an annual convocation or launch a special initiative on student engagement.

#### **Step 6:**

Listen to your various audiences. The best ideas often come from unexpected places. By all means, report back to the college community on action taken in response to survey results — and the ideas generated in discussions about the survey. And, don't forget students. The survey emphasizes that they have a role to play in their own learning, and these are their observations on their educational experiences. Meet with student government and encourage student-faculty discussions. Consider using selected *CCSSE* items in new venues, such as incorporating them into students' evaluations of courses and faculty. The *CCSSE* Course Feedback Form is an instrument that could be used in this manner: <http://www.ccsse.org/publications/toolkit>.

#### **Step 7:**

Don't shy away from the data. Information, whether positive or negative, can help improve educational practice and performance. Use it to dispel myths, showcase your college's best practices, and set the bar higher for the future.

*CCSSE's* Web site, [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org), is aimed at promoting public understanding of the work of community colleges, supporting institutional improvement, and advancing public discussion about new ways of defining and examining quality in higher education.

The Web site is a primary vehicle for putting survey results in context. Special features for *CCSSE* member colleges include a *CCSSE* Toolkit that contains resources to help colleges understand their survey results, communicate them to various audiences, and use them to target institutional improvement initiatives. The "Communications" section of the Toolkit contains the following documents:

#### ***Drop-In Overview Template***

*CCSSE* suggests that you complete the Drop-In Overview template and then circulate a copy of it to key constituency groups. Once it is completed, it can be used to conduct guided conversations or focus groups to promote a better understanding of your institution's survey findings and their potential implications for improvement initiatives.

#### ***Developing Storylines to Communicate Results***

These sample storylines use hypothetical situations with hypothetical data to provide ideas for stories that can be told using *CCSSE* results. This isn't about spin. *CCSSE's* purpose is to be straightforward about data, both when the results make us shine and when they cause us to question—and improve—our current practices. These storylines are intended to inform, engage, and highlight important issues. Similar stories, geared to your college, your community, and your survey results, might be used with internal college groups, governing board members, community groups, and other audiences.

#### ***PowerPoint Presentation Template***

Use this PowerPoint template as a starting point for custom presentations to both internal and external audiences.

#### ***Sample News Release***

Customize this sample press release to highlight your college's *CCSSE* results.

### ***Sample News Release for College Newspaper***

Use this sample news release for your college newspaper to introduce the *Community College Student Report* to your students—what it is, what it measures, and what it can do.

### ***Sample Fact Sheet***

Customize this sample fact sheet to highlight your college's CCSSE results.

### ***Sample Letters to the Editor***

These sample letters to the editor provide background on key issues. Customize them with your specific CCSSE results and tie them to events in your area.

### ***Tips for Working with the Media***

Use these tips so you can be better prepared to talk with the media about your CCSSE results and other aspects of college quality and performance.

**The “Using CCSSE” section of the Toolkit contains the following documents:**

#### ***Tips on Gaining Support for Using CCSSE***

CCSSE will be most valuable to the colleges if there are college-wide communication efforts both prior to survey administration and after results are returned. Dialogue with faculty, staff, and administrators about the purpose of the survey and its connection to college issues and priorities, and sharing information about how results can advance college goals, will engage college faculty and staff who can make positive changes.

#### ***Tips for Engaging Faculty to Strengthen Student Success***

This guide offers tips to help faculty understand CCSSE as a valuable tool for strengthening student success, tips on ways faculty can engage in using CCSSE results, and examples of how other colleges have elicited faculty participation with their CCSSE results.

#### ***Faculty Predictions***

Use this document to jump start discussions with faculty and staff. Start the session by asking participants to provide the answers they predict (or hope) students provided. Then have the full group go through the items and provide the actual student responses from your Institutional Report. Discuss whether and why faculty predictions differ from

actual student responses.

#### ***Student Services Staff Predictions***

Use this document to jump start discussions with student services staff. Start the session by asking participants to provide the answers they predict (or hope) students provided. Then have the full group go through the items and provide the actual student responses from your Institutional Report. Discuss whether and why student services staff predictions differ from actual student responses.

#### ***The CCSSE Accreditation Toolkits***

Because all regional accreditation associations require evidence of student learning and of efforts to improve student outcomes, CCSSE results could be appropriately used in institutional self-studies. This information is particularly powerful if CCSSE results are corroborated by other institutional data such as results from other national or local surveys, review of institutional records, or student focus groups. The CCSSE Accreditation Toolkits are individually tailored for each of the six regional higher education accrediting bodies. Each toolkit includes the following:

- ★ a model regional accreditation timeline and advice about including CCSSE administrations in that timeline
- ★ a section that aligns the CCSSE items to your accrediting body's standards and criteria
- ★ examples of how colleges in your accrediting region have used CCSSE results for their review purposes

Use these toolkit items to help you communicate and use your college's results and launch a dialogue with key internal and external constituencies. All the tools can be customized for your college.

**The “Strengthening Student Engagement” section of the Toolkit contains the following documents:**

#### ***The CCSSE Course Feedback Form***

The **CCSSE Course Feedback Form**—an end-of-course evaluation instrument for course-level and program-level assessment—was developed with the assistance of an advisory panel of administrators, counselors, and faculty members from six CCSSE member colleges. The instrument is based on student engagement items from the CCSSE survey and additional course feedback items submitted and reviewed by our advisory panel members. The **CCSSE Course Feedback**

**Form** is provided free of charge and is intended for local administration and data analysis.

### ***The CCSSE Classroom Observation Form***

The **CCSSE Classroom Observation Form** was designed as a professional development tool to be used by deans, department heads, mentor faculty, and peer faculty. The instrument includes standard classroom review items, but keeps student engagement as its primary area of focus.

The **CCSSE Classroom Observation Form** is provided free of charge and is intended for local data collection and analysis, in accord with the college's policies.

**The “Student Focus Groups” section of the Toolkit contains information that will help you conduct focus groups and collect qualitative data on your campus:**

### ***The Student Focus Groups Toolkit***

Your *CCSSE* data provide a great deal of information to help you identify strengths and areas in need of improvement at your college. Generally, the data will point you to specific areas where you'll want to focus your attention. Before you begin to consider improvement strategies, you may want to learn more about student experiences in those areas pinpointed through the *CCSSE* survey. *CCSSE* encourages you to hold focus groups to gather this information. These structured discussions will help you better understand students' experiences, as well as uncover possible strategies to consider for improvement. They will provide qualitative information to enhance your *CCSSE* data. **The Student Focus Group Toolkit** contains instructions for planning focus groups and recruiting focus group participants, discussion tools to use during the focus groups, and a focus group summary report sample.

The Web site also features a comprehensive search-the-data section (<http://www.ccsse.org/members/search>). The user can generate a report showing *CCSSE* results for all large, urban colleges; for all small, rural colleges; or for the participating colleges in a particular state or accrediting region. Results are presented in drill-down charts that display information in easy-to-manage steps. Users first see a graph that shows general results; then, they can click on various parts of the graph to get the details behind the numbers.

We intend to regularly update the *CCSSE* Web site with other examples about how community colleges are using their *CCSSE* data as we learn about them. In that regard, please keep us informed about how you are using, or plan to use, your *CCSSE* results by contacting *CCSSE* at [info@ccsse.org](mailto:info@ccsse.org) or at 512-471-6807.

## **CCSSE in Action: CCSSE Member Colleges Communicate about their Results**

### ***Paradise Valley Community College (AZ)***

Paradise Valley Community College (PVCC) held a series of workshops to provide an overview of *CCSSE* survey data and lay out an action plan and timeline. The action plan called on each division or department to share *CCSSE* findings with faculty and staff, identify data-driven strategies for improving teaching and learning, and document ways in which faculty and staff implemented the pilot strategies. A series of e-briefings related to *CCSSE* shared promising practices from other colleges and relevant research. For example, “A Dozen Easy-to-Implement *CCSSE* Plans for Faculty” included suggestions such as scheduling appointments with students and requiring internship experiences. PVCC also created the Student Engagement-*CCSSE* Awards, through which faculty members who submitted *CCSSE* action plans could win stipends to purchase resources for teaching and learning.

### ***Illinois Central College (IL)***

When Illinois Central College (ICC) received its *CCSSE* results, the college gathered faculty members and staff to review them. Participants broke into small groups and discussed four questions regarding the college's results: Do the data reflect your experience at ICC? Do the data mean something for you in your role? Is average where we want to be as a college? If not, how can we attempt to improve the results in the future? Each group focused on one benchmark. Participants then shared responses and suggestions for improvement.

### ***North Hennepin Community College (MN)***

To engage faculty members in reviewing *CCSSE* results, North Hennepin Community College gathered faculty members and asked them to predict students' responses to the survey items. Instead of doing this exercise on paper, the college used personal response system “clickers” and got immediate feedback after posing each question. The actual student data then

were displayed for discussion. After getting this feedback, the faculty members were randomly divided into groups and assigned one *CCSSE* benchmark. Each group identified two priorities for change related to their benchmark. These priorities now are part of the college's assessment plan initiatives.

### **CCSSE in Action: CCSSE Member Colleges Use their Results**

#### ***LaGuardia Community College (NY)***

When comparing its 2005 and 2007 *CCSSE* results, LaGuardia Community College saw an increase in the percentage of students reporting that they *likely* or *very likely* would withdraw from college because they were academically underprepared. In response, college leaders intensified instructional and support services for basic skills students.

#### ***Century College (MN)***

After its first *CCSSE* administration in 2005, Century College set out to design and implement several new initiatives based on its Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark scores. The college gathered and shared best practices in student-faculty interaction through brown-bag discussions and faculty interviews, which resulted in "Building Connections with Students" materials sent to all faculty. In an effort to focus awareness among students about the availability of faculty, a campaign to promote the use of office hours was launched through the distribution of informational bookmarks; in addition, the campus orientation handbook and student academic planner were updated to include information about faculty and student interaction alongside information about student support services.

#### ***Tallahassee Community College (FL)***

After *CCSSE* results revealed that students thought the college focused more on memorization than critical thinking, Tallahassee Community College intentionally infused higher-order thinking skills throughout its curriculum. The college also developed learning communities that address students' needs along a continuum from novice to experienced learners.

#### ***Coastal Bend College (TX)***

As part of the college's Quality Enhancement Plan, and in order to increase student learning outcomes, Coastal Bend College implemented a Supplemental Instruction program for students

enrolled in Intermediate and College Algebra—courses identified as "gatekeepers" at the institution. Because *CCSSE* asks students about the frequency, importance, and satisfaction of tutoring services, the college is able to collect data about this service as it contemplates expanding the Supplemental Instruction program into the English and reading curriculums. student success.