

The Completion Agenda:

Post-Secondary Education Leaders' Perspectives On Issues Of/Strategies for Increasing Completion Rates

Key findings from an online survey among post-secondary education leaders

Conducted November/December 2011 by Hart Research Associates
Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Research Methodology

- Hart Research conducted an online survey among 84 leaders of community colleges and 160 leaders of four-year colleges and universities, conducted November 17 through December 23, 2011.
- 91% of respondents are presidents/chancellors/CEOs, and respondents have been employed by their institution for an average of 11 years.
- Respondents were recruited from the membership of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC) and the membership of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), with the assistance of these organizations.
- Respondents were informed that the research was being conducted on behalf of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and they were guaranteed anonymity for their participation.

Overview of Key Findings

- Completion and retention are top-of-mind priorities for many post-secondary leaders, though leaders at community colleges place significantly greater importance on completion than do their peers at four-year institutions.
- Most leaders say their institutions have set goals to increase completion rates.
- Leaders of both four-year institutions and community colleges indicate their institutions are engaging in a variety of approaches aimed at increasing completion rates.
- Leaders at four-year institutions indicate that hands-on learning experiences and redesigning general education and first-year experiences and implementing more structured advising systems are among those practices on which they are focused to increase completion rates and meet their goals for improving learning. Community college leaders say that new learning models that combine traditional and online education and redesigning developmental education are among the most widely used practices for increasing completion rates at community colleges today.

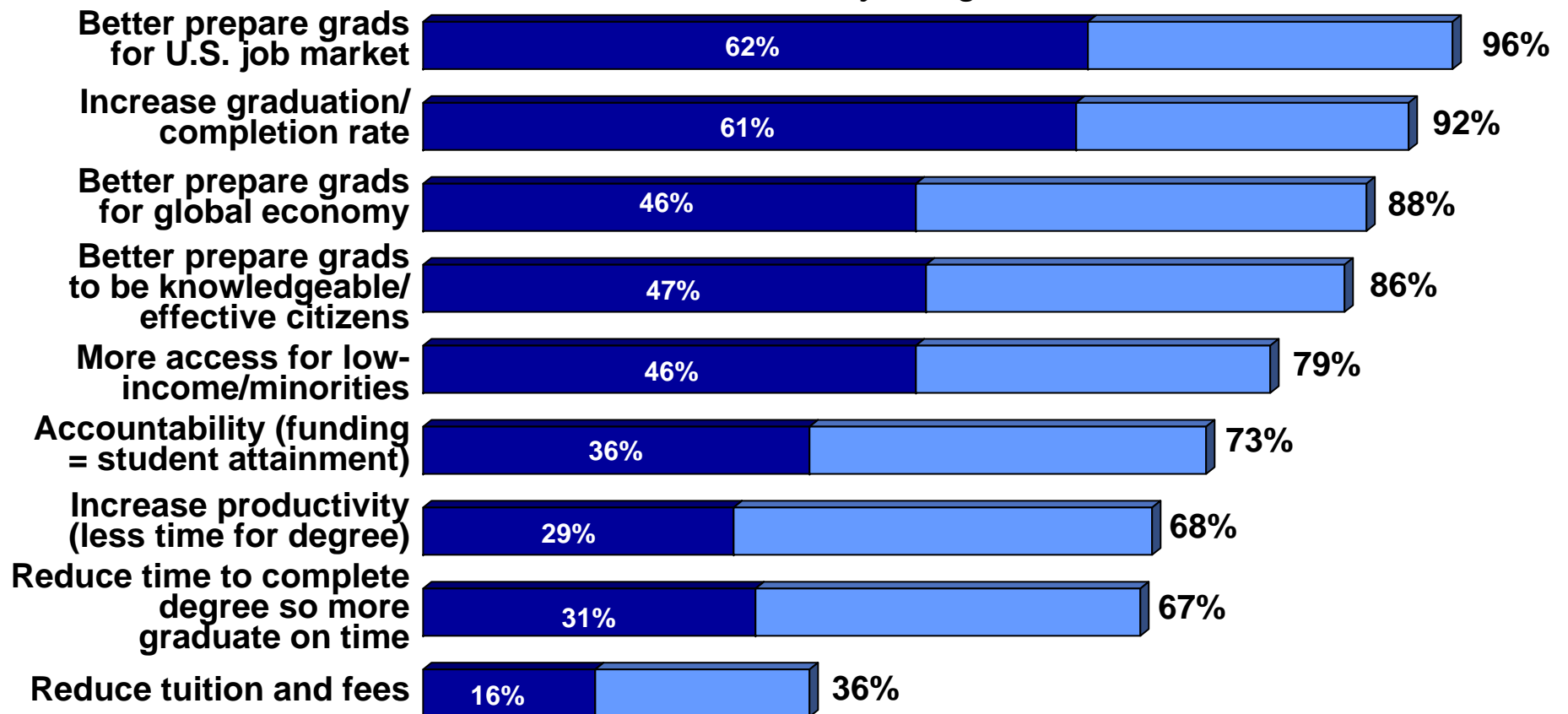
Overview of Key Findings

- Community college leaders perceive a variety of barriers to increasing completion rates, including both external factors (lack of preparation, too many students need to work, not enough funding) and internal factors (remediation programs not effective enough). Leaders of four-year colleges discern few barriers beyond a lack of financial aid.
- Few post-secondary leaders feel that government policies – either state or federal – facilitate changes needed to increase completion, and notable proportions of leaders feel they are actually a barrier.
- Leaders of four-year colleges are more concerned than those at community colleges about potential tradeoffs to incentives for increasing completion.
- Both audiences are most concerned about curtailing access to traditionally underrepresented groups of students.

Community colleges place high priority on completion, but reducing time to a degree and increasing productivity rank lower.

■ Absolutely essential goal for my institution
 ■ Very important goal for my institution

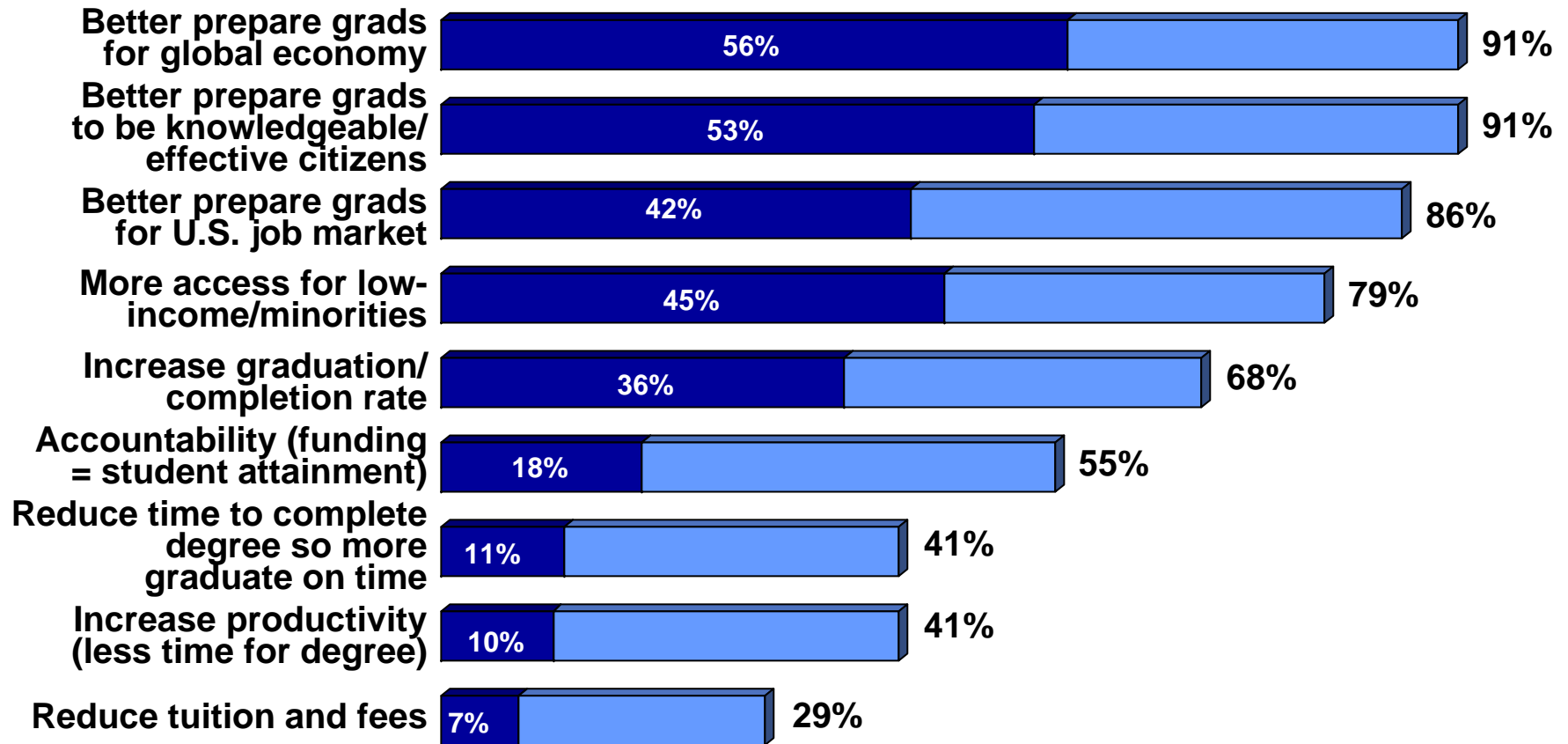
Community college leaders



Four-year institutions place highest priority on preparing students for success in the global and local economy and to be knowledgeable, effective citizens.

■ Absolutely essential goal for my institution
 ■ Very important goal for my institution

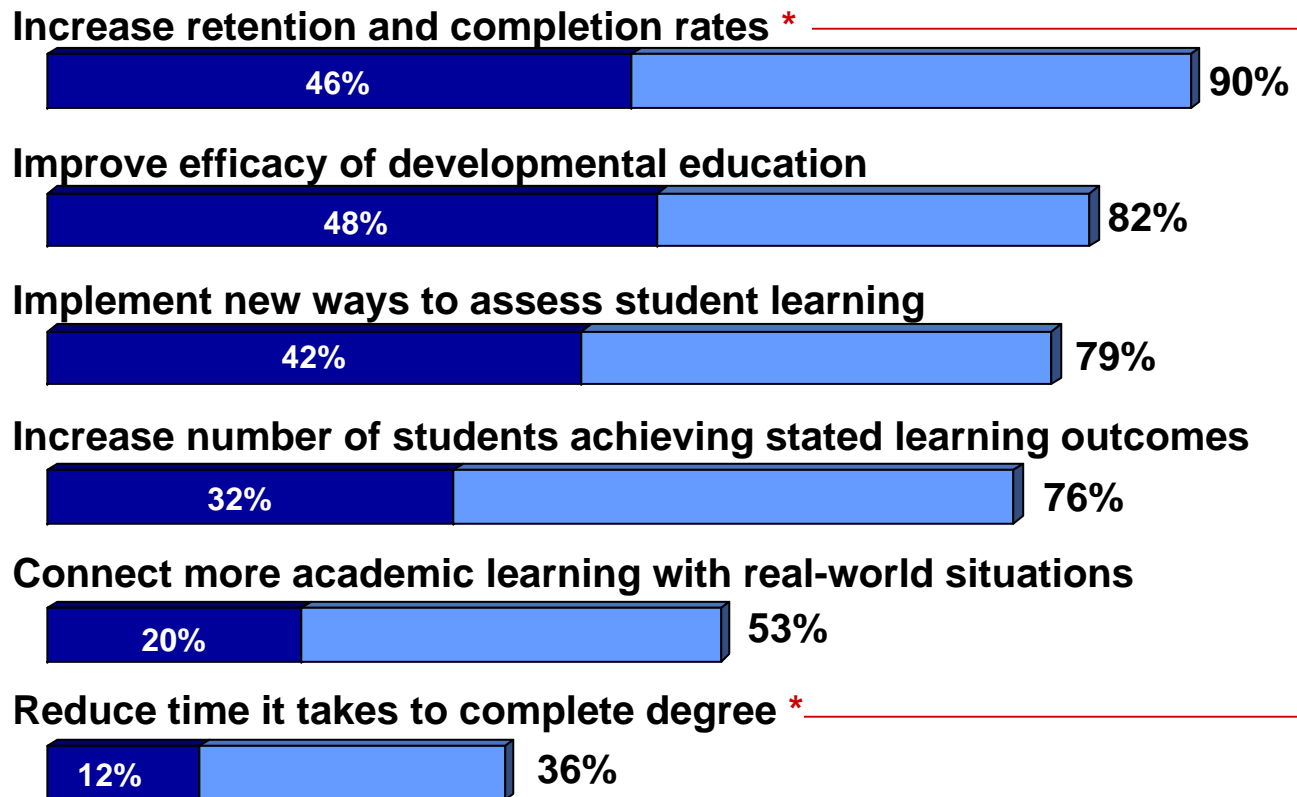
Four-year college leaders



Most community colleges have set a goal to increase completion rates. They are also notably more likely than four-year colleges to have set a goal to improve developmental education.

Community college leaders

■ My institution has made significant changes toward achieving this ■ My institution has made some changes



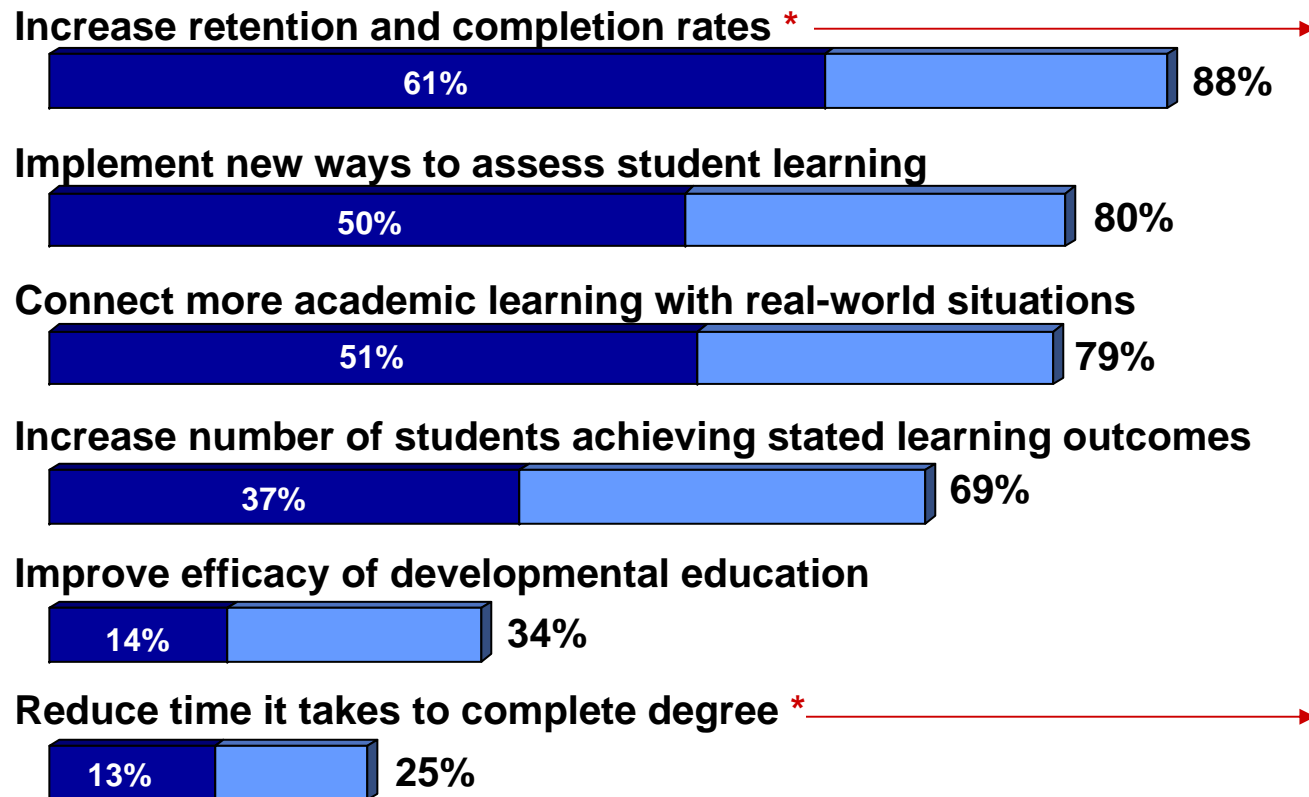
* What changes have you made in these two areas:

More developmental education courses	35%
Improved advising	24%
Increased academic support services	15%
Redesigned/streamlined curricula	12%
Early alert to quickly identify problems	8%
Improved programs for first-year students	8%
Increased financial aid	6%
Assigned faculty/staff specifically to retention	5%

Most four-year institutions have set goals to increase retention and completion, including three in five that have made significant changes in this regard. Few have set a goal to reduce time to degree.

Four-year college leaders

■ My institution has made significant changes toward achieving this ■ My institution has made some changes

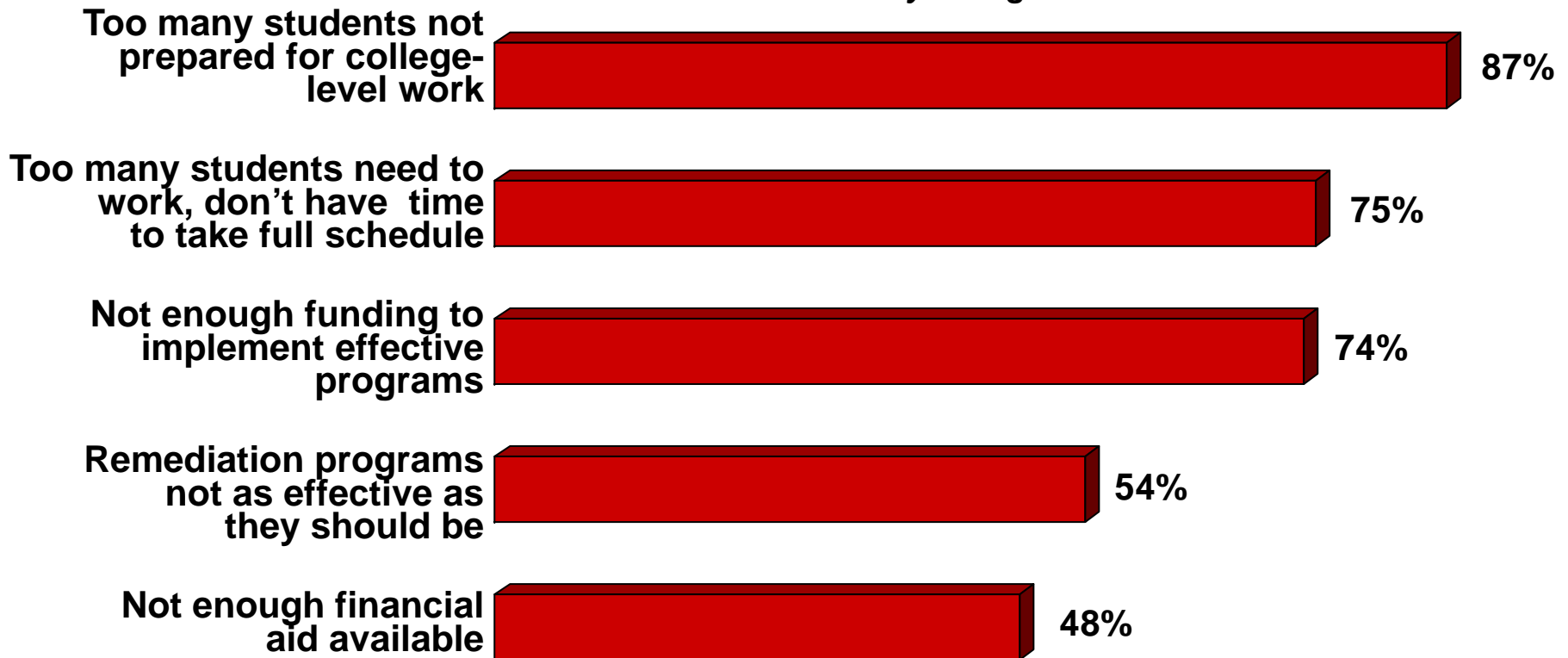


- * What changes have you made in these two areas:
- Improved advising** 30%
 - Increased academic support services** 28%
 - Increased financial aid 17%
 - Early alert to quickly identify problems 16%
 - Improved programs for first-year students 14%
 - Assigned faculty/staff specifically to retention 14%
 - Redesigned/streamlined curricula 9%
 - More developmental education courses 4%

Community college leaders believe lack of preparation, many students needing to work, and not enough funding for effective programs are the biggest barriers to completion at their institutions.

■ Very/fairly major barrier to increasing the number of students completing education at my institution

Community college leaders



Community college leaders believe other factors are NOT major barriers to completion.

■ Very/fairly major barrier to increasing the number of students completing education at my institution



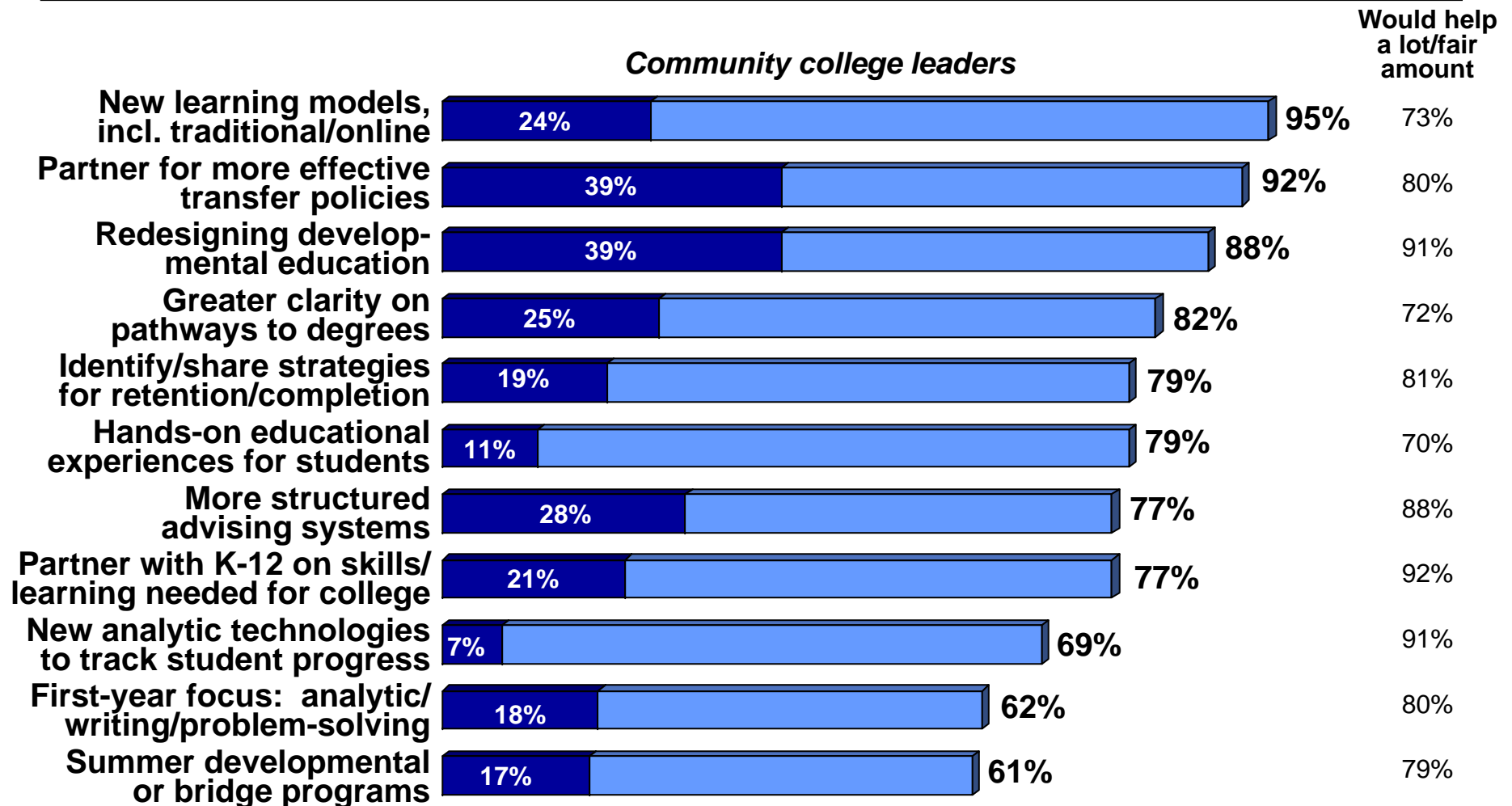
With the exception of lack of financial aid, leaders of four-year colleges see few factors as major barriers to completion at their institutions.

% four-year college leaders saying each is a very/fairly major barrier to increasing the number of students completing education at their institution

- 60%** **Not enough financial aid available**
- 37%** **Not enough funding to implement effective programs**
- 36%** **Too many students not prepared for college-level work**
- 30%** **Too many students need to work, don't have time for full schedule**
- 21%** **Not enough options for non-traditional schedules**
- 18%** **Transfer policies from community college to four-year not aligned**
- 16%** **More faculty training needed to help students succeed**
- 13%** **Remediation programs not as effective as they should be**
- 11%** **Students lack clear path to degree**
- 10%** **Too many classes taught by faculty without training in pedagogy**
- 7%** **Too many classes taught by part-time faculty or TAs**
- 6%** **Oversubscribed courses, students can't take needed courses**

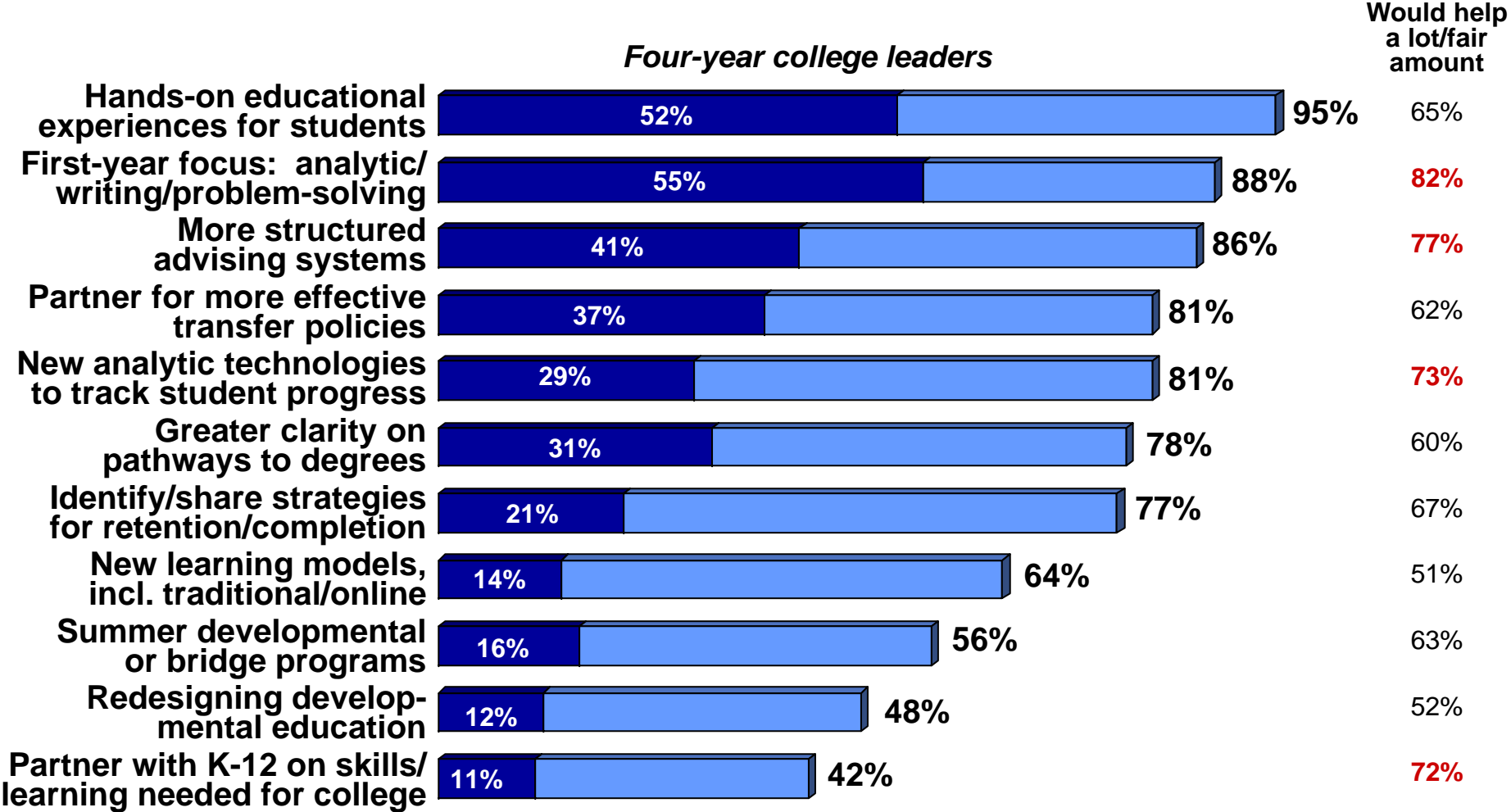
Community college leaders report on their institution's approaches to increasing completion rates.

■ My institution is doing this on a broad scale
 ■ My institution is doing this, but would like to expand efforts



Four-year college leaders report on their institution's approaches to increasing completion rates.

■ My institution is doing this on a broad scale
 ■ My institution is doing this, but would like to expand efforts



Large majorities of both types of institutions are offering internships, service learning, and first-year seminars.

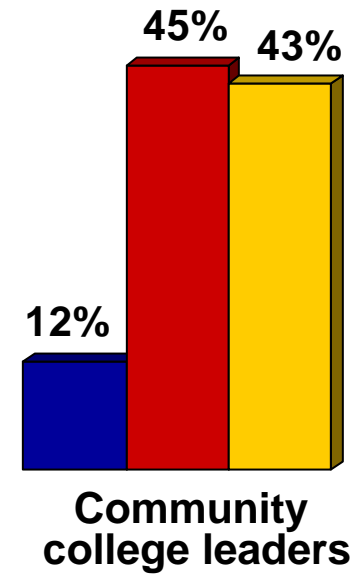
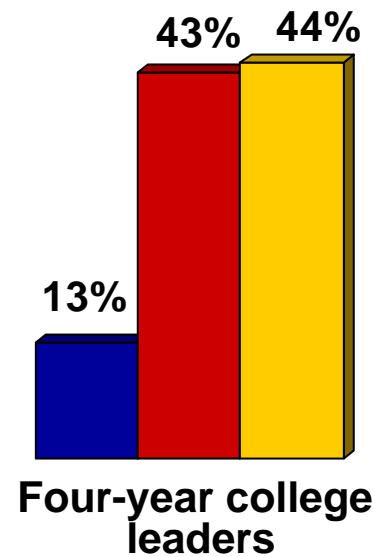
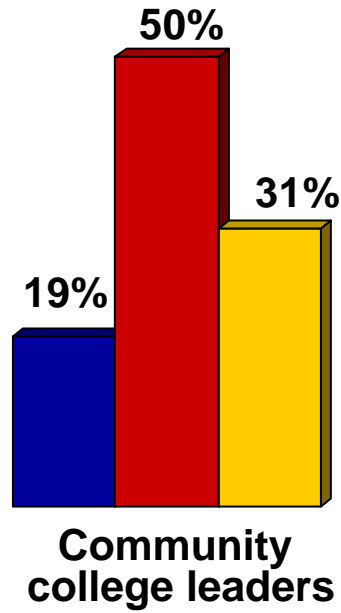
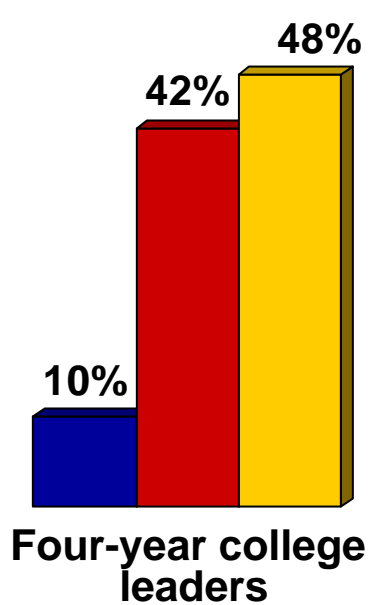
<i>My institution offers this:</i>	Four-year college leaders	Community college leaders
Internships and practicums	93%	72%
Undergraduate research programs	91%	18%
Service learning programs	87%	67%
Required capstone projects	86%	49%
First-year seminars and courses that prepare students to succeed in college	84%	62%
Learning communities that involve cohorts of students taking courses linked to a theme or topic	76%	52%
E-portfolios that help students demonstrate and track their own learning	56%	39%

Few leaders think state or federal government policies facilitate changes needed to increase completion rates.

View Of State Government

View Of Federal Government

- Current policies facilitate changes needed to increase completion rates
- Current policies are a barrier to changes needed to increase completion rates
- Current policies make no difference to our completion rates



LEADERS AT BOTH TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS ARE MOST CONCERNED THAT INCENTIVES TO INCREASE COMPLETION RATES COULD HAVE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES ON ACCESS FOR UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

This is a legitimate concern regarding the consequences of policymakers creating incentives to increase completion rates while funding is being reduced:

