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January 15, 2026

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
c/o Elena Roig and Karen Nadeau
Office of Policy and Legal Analysis
13 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

The Maine Community College System is providing this letter in accordance with 20-A MRSA §10013. This law requires the Maine Community College System (MCCS), University of Maine System (UMS), and Maine Maritime Academy (MMA) to provide the following information about first-generation college students:

- A. Data regarding enrollment of first-generation college students and educational outcomes, including graduation rates for first-generation college students compared with other college students; and
- B. A summary of strategies used, and activities undertaken to increase enrollment and graduation rates of first-generation college students and any available data indicating the effect of those strategies and activities; and
- C. Plans for or recommendations regarding new strategies or actions designed to increase enrollment and graduation rates of first-generation college students.

A decade ago, to meet the requirements of the legislation, MCCS worked with the University of Maine System and Maine Maritime Academy to coordinate data collection and reporting to promote a common framework for determining enrollment and educational outcomes of first-generation college students. Additionally, the three institutions agreed that for the purpose of this report, we would define a first-generation student as one with neither parent having completed a college degree. Each institution determined the level of college completion appropriate to its mission.

For MCCS, a student is first-generation if neither parent has earned an associate degree. For UMS and MMA, a student is first-generation if neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree. For consistency, we are also providing data on MCCS students with neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree.

The three institutions agreed that questions on applications for admission related to parents' highest level of education should provide students the opportunity to be specific about the degree completed by each parent. Since previously this information had not been consistently requested or collected by MCCS, our colleges revised their applications for new students entering in the fall of 2014.



Enrollment by first-generation college status:

Community colleges serve more first-generation students than any other sector of U.S. higher education. According to a 2018 study by the National Center for Education Statistics, slightly more than half of all first-generation college students attend a community college.¹

Although approximately one-quarter of students entering two- and four-year colleges in the United States each year are first-generation (as defined by parental attainment of a post-secondary education experience), that figure is nearly twice as high at Maine's colleges where 39% of entering students' parents had not completed an associate and 53% had not completed a bachelor's degree.

The percentage of entering MCCC students who are first-generation has generally declined in the years since we began tracking this data in Fall 2014 and this year was no exception. The following table provides an overview of Systemwide data from Fall 2019 to Fall 2025.

Table 1: Percent of Students who are First-Generation at the Post-Secondary Level

MCCC Entering Students	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
Neither parent has an associate degree	46%	44%	42%	41%	40%	42%	39%
Neither parent has a bachelor's degree	64%	62%	58%	58%	57%	58%	53%

As the percent of Americans with a college degree increases, the share of children who are first-generation college going continues to shrink. For context, according to the US Census, the percentage of Maine residents aged 25 and over with an associate degree or higher has increased by 13.1%.

- 2010 = 33.7% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher
- 2014 = 37.3% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher
- 2018 = 41.2% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher
- 2022 = 46.8% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher
- 2023 = 49.3% of Maine residents have an associate degree or higher

This is a 15.6% **gain** in the years for which data is available. This data tells an important story, not only about our success but that of all of Maine's institutions of higher education. We are educating people and reducing the portion of our population who are first generation moving forward.

At the same time, MCCC has focused our efforts on Maine adults who have some college but did not complete their degree. Maine has seen improvement in these numbers as well.

- 2010 = 20.1% (188,340) have some college with no degree
- 2014 = 20.3% (194,760) have some college with no degree
- 2018 = 20.4% (200,338) have some college with no degree
- 2022 = 17.8% (182,869) have some college with no degree

This metric suggests that our efforts to promote education to those aged 25+ with some college but no degree has resulted in a growth in educational attainment. This will likely decrease the pool of first-generation students going forward.



Student outcomes:

This report details three-year outcomes (150% time to completion) for first-generation college students who entered a Maine community college in the fall semester, 2016 through to the fall semester 2022. The data captures graduation, transfer, and still-enrolled rates using methods consistent with National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reporting.

From the Spring 2020 semester through Spring 2021, COVID-19 had a significant impact on our students' ability to persist and complete their education, especially those who are low-income, many of whom are first generation. That reality is reflected in the three-year outcomes for first-generation students who entered MCCS in the fall of 2019 and in 2020 particularly. While outcomes for students who entered in fall of 2022 have certainly improved, our colleges are still seeing students, both first-generation and not, who have greater needs in order to persist and complete their degree. Supporting these students to successful outcomes informs and frames how we use resources and structure our work. This is a “high touch” cohort of students, and our hardworking faculty and staff are adopting best practices, like Guided Pathways, to provide support and meet student needs.

Our colleges remain focused on the student success initiatives outlined in this report and on the impact they have had, and will continue to have, on first-generation and other groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education.



“As a first-generation student, the journey into higher education can be filled with confusion, self-doubt, and challenging terrain. It can also be awe-inspiring, adventurous, risky, and exhilarating.”

— SMCC First-Generation Student

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, *Stats in Brief, First-Generation Students: College Access, Persistence, and Postbachelor's Outcome*, February 2018, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018421.pdf>.

Three-year outcomes of entering degree-seeking students (Fall Cohorts 2016 – 2022)

Fall 2016 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-generation Neither parent has Associate degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	26%	28%	27%	27%
Still Enrolled	11%	12%	11%	12%
Transferred	15%	20%	16%	20%
Not Attending	49%	41%	47%	40%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2017 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First- generation Neither parent has Associate degree	Not first- generation One or both parents has Associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	23%	28%	25%	27%
Still Enrolled	10%	10%	10%	9%
Transferred	15%	20%	16%	22%
Not Attending	52%	42%	49%	42%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2018 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First- generation Neither parent has Associate degree	Not first- generation One or both parents has Associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	25%	30%	27%	31%
Still Enrolled	9%	9%	9%	10%
Transferred	14%	18%	15%	18%
Not Attending	51%	42%	49%	41%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2019 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First- generation Neither parent has Associate degree	Not first- generation One or both parents has Associate degree	First-generation Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	Not first-generation One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	16%	20%	17%	21%
Still Enrolled	22%	22%	21%	23%
Transferred	10%	12%	10%	13%
Not Attending	52%	46%	52%	43%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2020 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-Generation	Not First-Generation	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
	Neither parent has associate degree	One or both parents has associate degree	Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	22%	30%	24%	30%
Still Enrolled	10%	9%	9%	9%
Transferred	16%	16%	15%	17%
Not Attending	52%	45%	51%	44%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2021 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-Generation	Not First-Generation	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
	Neither parent has associate degree	One or both parents has associate degree	Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	27%	34%	29%	33%
Still Enrolled	9%	8%	9%	8%
Transferred	12%	18%	13%	19%
Not Attending	51%	40%	49%	39%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Fall 2022 Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-Generation	Not First-Generation	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
	Neither parent has Associate degree	One or both parents has Associate degree	Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	26%	32%	27%	33%
Still Enrolled	11%	9%	10%	9%
Transferred	9%	13%	9%	15%
Not Attending	55%	46%	54%	43%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

The data disaggregated by first-generation status are included in the appendix to this report.

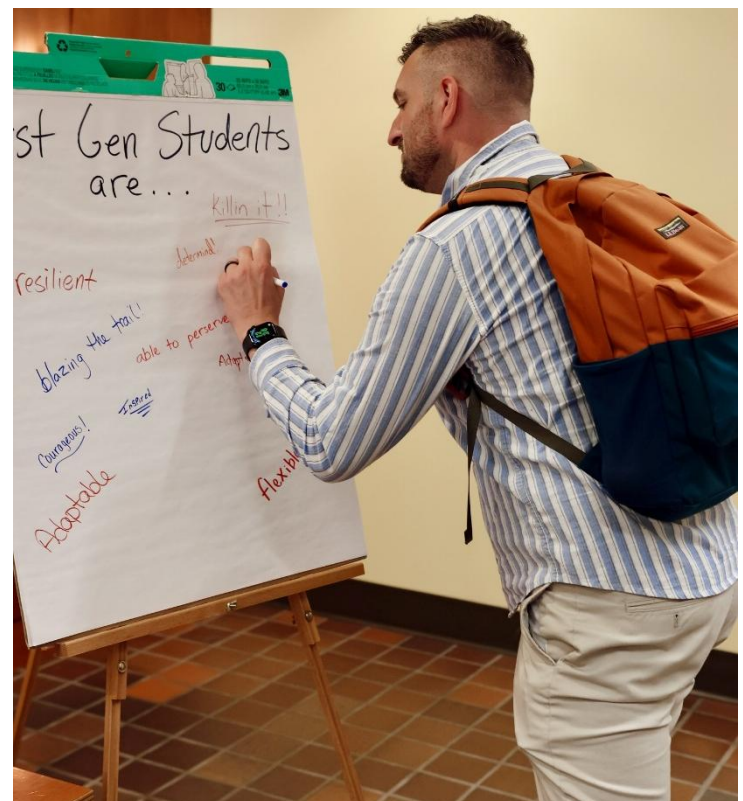
Targeted strategies:

MCCS has placed a strategic focus on student success measures designed to support first-generation students and others who traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education and who often face significant challenges in accessing postsecondary education, succeeding academically once they enroll, and completing a degree. All of the colleges of the Maine Community College System strive to be as responsive as possible within our limited resources.

One great example of a small but important effort is from Central Maine Community College.

The cornerstone of our engagement with first generation students continues to be TRIO's First-Gen Celebration in early November. At this event students are invited to share their experience as a first-generation college student or show their support for those who are. TRIO offers stickers and pins identifying anyone, including students and employees, who is first-gen to wear, as well as door hangers for first-gen employee offices.

One last minor, but possibly impactful, touch is the CMCC Admissions department adds a little extra swag in a prospective student's tour bag when they indicate through casual conversation that they are a first-generation student. The Director of Admissions said that the item changes but tends to be something that plants the seed that "You can do hard things and we've got your back!"



Systemwide strategies include:

- **EMBARK, DUAL ENROLLMENT, AND HIGH SCHOOL PATHWAYS** (formerly Early College for ME) through the high school-to-college transition. Our colleges' work extends into the secondary realm through a number of statewide programs which support and encourage students through the high school-to-college transition. The Maine Community College System offers the Embark scholarship program to over 80 Maine high schools and CTEs. Here, college-based access advisors travel to secondary schools to meet with Maine students who need additional support as they transition from high school to college and then connect them to the career, academic, and financial resources they need for success in and beyond community college. The program's outcomes indicate that the early advising and guidance have a lasting impact, as Embark students who enroll in community college are more likely to return for their second year and graduate on time.

Our colleges also enroll over 7,000 Maine secondary students each year as early college students. Their courses take place on college campuses, online, or within secondary schools. Again, these students are supported by a network of advisors and college-based structures designed to help high school students identify a path and start their academic journey while still in high school. To that end, courses are offered as a part of a pathway that aligns to and provides Early College students a jump start in their college program of study, ensuring that more students earn credits with a purpose. In the future, and in collaboration with local secondary partners, our colleges will be working to scale some of the more innovative and successful dual enrollment opportunities such as Spring Ahead and Early College pathways. Spring Ahead, a near full-time college immersion experience for graduating seniors, has achieved near 100% college matriculation rates in recent years while prioritizing equitable access, and our early college pathways helped students earn actual college credentials within a year of high school completion. In fact, earlier this month, SMCC welcomed its largest Spring Ahead cohort to date with 75 high school students from 12 partner schools including Windham High School, the cohorts newest member.

- **TRIO Student Support Services Programs** at each of our colleges. These programs are designed specifically to serve low-income, first-generation college students and offer comprehensive, individual support through academic planning, tutoring, financial aid assistance, financial literacy, and guidance in course selection and registration.
- **On-campus employment opportunities** that allow students to build their work schedule around their classes and provide them with a stronger sense of community and a stronger support network.
- **Intensive college readiness experiences** offered at no cost in the summer before student enrolls in a program of study.

In addition, MCCS has expanded the number of college navigators, or advisors, at all seven colleges, to help ensure that students—especially those with little experience of college—have the academic and personal supports they need to persist and complete a college degree. As a part of our Guided Pathways efforts detailed in other reports, the colleges are also adopting a pathway approach to advising. Pathway advisors develop a deep understanding of the programs of study within their pathway and are assigned students who have selected that pathway. Advisors work collaboratively with the program faculty advisor to help students enter and stay on their chosen pathway. Clearly defined pathways simplify student decision-making and shifts the advising focus away from choosing classes to supporting progress toward the student's goals.

Finally, we remain committed to making sure our colleges are as affordable as possible. Maine's community colleges continue to offer the lowest tuition and fees in New England.

I would be glad to meet with you at any time to address questions the Committee may have regarding our students who are the first in their family to attend college.

Sincerely,

Becky Smith
Director of Government and Community Relations

cc: Pender Makin, Commissioner, Department of Education
Joseph Marro, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor

² <https://completecollege.org/strategy/math-pathways/>

³ <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/accelerated-pathways-student-success-mathematics.pdf>

Appendix

Maine Community College System

The source for data in the tables is the MCCS Data Mart. Only first-time and transfer-in students with reported parental education levels are included. Data are self-reported by applicants on the application for admission.

Fall 2025 Entering Degree-Seeking Students First-Generation Students by College

	Entering Students	Neither parent has a(n):			
		Associate Degree		Bachelor's Degree	
College	#	#	%	#	%
CMCC	1215	562	46%	737	61%
EMCC	680	231	34%	342	50%
KVCC	399	161	40%	225	56%
NMCC	189	72	38%	109	58%
SMCC	1,616	547	34%	747	46%
WCCC	142	63	44%	88	62%
YCCC	314	119	38%	160	51%
MCCS Total	4,555	1,755	39%	2,408	53%

Only first-time and transfer-in students with reported parental education levels are included in the table above.

Three-Year Outcomes for Fall 2022 Entering Cohort

Status	Associate		Bachelor's	
	First-Generation	Not First-Generation	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
	Neither parent has Associate degree	One or both parents has Associate degree	Neither parent has Bachelor's degree	One or both parents has Bachelor's degree
Graduated	26%	32%	27%	33%
Still Enrolled	11%	9%	10%	9%
Transferred	9%	13%	9%	15%
Not Attending	55%	46%	54%	43%
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Only first-time and transfer-in students with reported parental education levels are included in the table above. Fall 2022 total entering students: 5,427. Percentage may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Three-Year Outcomes of Fall 2022 Entering Degree-Seeking Students by First-Generation Status and College		First-Generation				Not First-Generation			
		Neither parent has a(n):				One (or more) parent has at least a(n):			
		Associate		Bachelor's		Associate		Bachelor's	
College	Status	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
CMCC	Graduated	79	26%	123	29%	148	31%	100	30%
	Still Enrolled	26	8%	33	8%	29	6%	20	6%
	Transferred	27	9%	36	8%	56	12%	44	13%
	Not Attending	174	57%	235	55%	245	51%	167	50%
	Total	306	100%	427	100%	478	100%	331	100%
EMCC	Graduated	62	32%	104	33%	162	37%	115	38%
	Still Enrolled	14	7%	21	7%	22	5%	14	5%
	Transferred	13	7%	21	7%	49	11%	36	12%
	Not Attending	105	54%	169	54%	206	47%	137	45%
	Total	194	100%	315	100%	439	100%	302	100%
KVCC	Graduated	50	46%	73	47%	61	46%	34	43%
	Still Enrolled	4	4%	7	4%	10	7%	7	9%
	Transferred	8	7%	10	6%	13	10%	10	13%
	Not Attending	47	43%	66	42%	50	37%	28	35%
	Total	109	100%	156	100%	134	100%	79	100%
NMCC	Graduated	32	37%	48	40%	58	49%	40	51%
	Still Enrolled	6	7%	9	7%	8	7%	5	6%
	Transferred	6	7%	8	7%	8	7%	4	5%
	Not Attending	43	49%	56	46%	44	37%	30	38%
	Total	87	100%	121	100%	118	100%	79	100%
SMCC	Graduated	107	18%	157	19%	291	26%	237	29%
	Still Enrolled	94	16%	126	15%	148	13%	112	13%
	Transferred	58	10%	92	11%	185	17%	148	18%
	Not Attending	334	56%	470	56%	486	44%	334	40%
	Total	593	100%	845	100%	1110	100%	831	100%
WCCC	Graduated	12	24%	23	33%	30	49%	16	46%
	Still Enrolled	6	12%	6	9%	1	2%	1	3%
	Transferred	2	4%	2	3%	2	3%	2	6%
	Not Attending	29	59%	39	56%	28	46%	16	46%
	Total	49	100%	70	100%	61	100%	35	100%
YCCC	Graduated	11	25%	13	22%	14	26%	11	31%
	Still Enrolled	4	9%	4	7%	1	2%	1	3%
	Transferred	5	11%	8	13%	5	9%	2	6%
	Not Attending	24	55%	35	58%	33	62%	22	61%
	Total	44	100%	60	100%	53	100%	36	100%
MCCS Total	Graduated	353	26%	541	27%	764	32%	553	33%
	Still Enrolled	154	11%	206	10%	219	9%	160	9%
	Transferred	119	9%	177	9%	318	13%	246	15%
	Not Attending	756	55%	1070	54%	1092	46%	734	43%
	Total	1382	100%	1994	100%	2393	100%	1693	100%

