**New Jersey Health Professions Consortium:
A Collaboration of
Community Colleges**

Issue Brief
Noncredit-to-Credit Connections:
Lessons from the New Jersey Health Professions
Pathways to Regional Excellence Project (NJ-PREP)

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In 2010, the Northern NJ Health Professions Consortium (NNJHPC) received a Health Professions Opportunity Grant from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The 10 college consortium from across Northern NJ had a mission to create pathways in Health Professions education leading to gainful employment. In 2014, The Consortium received a TAACCCT grant from the USDOL and became known as the New Jersey Health Professions Consortium (NJHPC). At this time the Consortium grew to 12 colleges[1] across the State of NJ and broadened its career pathways focus to include non-credit – credit credentials, prior learning assessment and employment. Overall, NJHPC has represented and continually connects with the community colleges in the State. Its focus is to build, develop and foster communication and collaboration to ensure students enter and complete educational programs in the health professions leading to family sustaining wages in this high-demand sector. The TAACCCT grant ended in 2018 after serving 3,500 New Jersey residents. NJHPC has commissioned Rutgers to prepare this brief describing lessons learned throughout the Consortium.

Projections for the healthcare workforce continue to be very positive, with high labor market demand and a variety of relatively well-paying jobs,[2] making the sector an attractive career choice. Noncredit programs, the first point of entry for many career pathways in the health professions, offer open-access entry points to career training that make them particularly advantageous to students from traditionally disadvantaged groups. The ease of enrollment offered by such programs, as well as their flexibility in both format and location, provide opportunities for students to explore career pathways, like these, even if they have little or no prior college experience.[3] Consequently, many colleges are developing career pathways systems that allow individuals to enter and exit educational programs while pursing employment opportunities, across fields including health professions.[4] Such pathways are particularly important for low-income adults looking for ways to enter a new career, immediately earn money, and also pursue the additional education necessary for career advancement.[5] Although many healthcare career pathways begin with short-term noncredit programs, advancement often requires students to move into a credit-bearing program as individuals advance further along the pathway line. The ability to make this transition between programs is therefore important to students' long-term success in the field.

Unfortunately, there is often little to no organizational connection between institutions' noncredit and credit programs and very little support built into the system to help students navigate the transition between them.[6] To make career pathways a reality for students, developing and implementing institutional reforms to create *educational pathways* between noncredit and credit programs are essential.[7] Traditional organizational structures and cultures in higher education can make the development of formal bridges between noncredit and credit programs challenging unless the colleges intentionally promote these reforms. Regardless of organizational structure, colleges can use a range of different strategies to approach reforms to their noncredit and credit programming to address student and labor-market needs.[8] This brief explores the challenges and promising practices encountered by a group of colleges implementing these reforms.

To address the challenges of noncredit-to-credit transition and to build an infrastructure for career pathways in the health professions, the New Jersey Health Professions Pathways to Regional Excellence Project (NJ-PREP), a consortium led by Bergen Community College that included 12 New Jersey community colleges,[9] was funded by Round 4 of the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career and Training (TAACCCT) grants. The TAACCCT grants focused on "advancing innovative, sector-based system change in regional and statewide economies" with the goal of "creating industry-driven strategies that are responsive to regional labor markets and state economies."[10] A significant goal of the grant was to develop career pathways designed to build connections between noncredit programs and credit-bearing courses and programs. To serve this goal, the consortium colleges sought to implement a wide range of strategies particular to their programs that would help improve these connections. In this brief, we examine the range of these activities within the NJ-PREP Consortium, focusing on the organizational level: how colleges have internalized and executed consortium-level goals for building noncredit-to-credit connections. We also explore the challenges colleges have faced in their attempts to realize those goals and the achievements that have been accomplished across the Consortium. Specifically, this brief examines the following questions:

- ❖ What strategies did colleges use to build connections between noncredit and credit programs?

- ❖ What organizational issues did colleges face in building connections between noncredit and credit programs?

This study is one of three issue briefs exploring different facets of career-pathway development through the NJ-PREP program. In this brief, we explore an important transition point in the educational component of career pathways: the transition from noncredit to credit programs. Another brief examined the broader ecosystem of career pathways, focusing on how these pathways were viewed by stakeholders in the education, employer, and student populations.[11] A third brief explores one tool the Consortium deployed to promote the goal of building connections between noncredit and credit programs: a standard prior learning assessment (PLA) policy based on guidance from across the Consortium (McKay & Edwards, 2018).[12,13]

METHODS

This brief is qualitative in nature. It encompasses data from interviews and focus groups conducted over a period of three years (from the fall of 2015 through the spring of 2018) during multiple site visits. Interviews were audio recorded, and notes were taken either onsite or from the audio recordings. Notes were uploaded, coded, and analyzed using NVivo 11, a qualitative data management system. Data were first divided into themes and categories, then subcoded to further define data categories. A total of 274 interviews and focus groups were conducted over the entire grant period, including 111 interviews with college leadership (e.g., presidents, vice presidents, deans, associate deans, the grant leadership team), 109 interviews with staff (i.e., program staff, student counselors, and advisors), 23 interviews with instructors, 13 interviews with employers, 2 interviews with workforce partners, and 16 focus groups with students (each one containing from 3 to 10 students).

FINDINGS

Building connections between noncredit and credit programs took many forms across the 12 consortium colleges. The full array of strategies the colleges used to build these connections was specific to each program – and each program, in turn, was embedded within the context of a specific college, with its own unique set of organizational supports and barriers. We began, therefore, by searching the data for two main themes. First, we sought to identify common strategies implemented across the colleges. Second, we examined common organizational issues – both challenges and facilitating factors – that arose in the context of implementing these strategies. We describe each in turn.

Strategies to Build Noncredit-to-Credit Pathways

Articulating noncredit programming to credit degrees.

Several colleges have internal agreements in place that allow students who complete particular noncredit courses to later get credit for those courses if they pursue particular associate degrees at the college. For example, at Ocean, students completing the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) program can apply for a total of 14 credits once they have passed their national certification test. They can then get these credits applied toward a general degree. At Sussex, students completing the Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) program can petition the institution for 30 college credits toward an associate of applied sciences degree (AAS) in Health Sciences. Middlesex offers pathways to a generic AAS through its healthcare programs. Noncredit programs in the health professions, such as Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CADC), and Home Health Aide (HHA), articulate to an AAS. At Essex, CMA and Patient Care Technician (PCT) students who enroll in health science at the school are given six credits toward a general science program. CNA students are given three credits.

Other colleges have been developing plans to articulate their noncredit health professions programs to credit-bearing degree programs. Through the TAACCCT grant, Morris is currently developing pathways to a AAS in health professions through its healthcare programs. The degree is designed so that all noncredit programs in the health professions offered by the college, including Medical Billing and Coding, CNA, CADC, and HHA, articulate to its AAS in Health Professions. Union built a bridge to its Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program. After students complete the noncredit PCT, they are eligible to take a "bootcamp" class to prepare for the LPN. Students who complete the bootcamp class can test out of an introductory nursing course, saving them money and accelerating their time to degree. At Essex, leadership and staff on the noncredit side are working with the nursing department to build a track from the CNA, CCMA, and PCT programs first to the LPN and then to the Registered Nursing (RN) programs. The concept is that the certificates will articulate to the LPN degree, which will articulate to the RN degree. There are also plans to develop a new course designed to replace LPN 100 for noncredit students transitioning into the program. Currently a required course, LPN 100 repeats much of what the certified students would already have learned in their noncredit courses. At Hudson, the college recognized the need to consider revisions to its noncredit programming to make it better align with credit-bearing programming; doing so would allow credits to be granted more easily to transitioning students.

Despite these efforts, concerns exist about how noncredit work would articulate in further education toward a bachelor's degree. Even with the potential benefits of connecting noncredit and credit programming, multiple challenges exist. Some of the associate degrees where noncredit work can be applied for credit are terminal or do not have clear pathways to a four-year degree or employment. For example, some health-related AAS degrees are viewed as terminal degrees, meaning students who wish to further stack or articulate the degree may find it difficult to do so. While transfer pathways can be possible with select four-year colleges and degree programs, in many cases these pathways are not well known among college staff, administrators, or students. Additionally, credits do not always count toward degree requirements. For example, at Ocean, while some noncredit healthcare programs will articulate to the credit side, those credits can only be counted as electives toward a general degree; students must still take some elements of the programming over again once they transfer to the credit side. Nevertheless, the credits help students complete more education than they would have received if they had left with a certificate alone. Colleges report working on further clarifying their career pathways to foster students' education and employment advancement.

Building noncredit-to-credit connections in healthcare programs can be a slower process than building such connections within other institutional programs. Moves toward building noncredit-to-credit connections often occur within non-healthcare-related programs at institutions first, then eventually spread to healthcare programming. At some colleges, efforts to promote articulation are occurring at the institution level and are in the process of spreading to the programs in the health professions. Upper-level administrators at Hudson and Bergen both referred to successful connections being built at their schools, detailing strides taken for automotive, manufacturing, culinary arts, supply chain management, graphic design, fashion design, and other programs. They noted, however, that the healthcare department deans at their schools had considered movement but had not yet taken any action within their own departments. In most cases, healthcare programming seems to be an area where building connections between noncredit and credit programming is challenging and is often slower to occur. One administrator believed the regulations involved in healthcare education were responsible for these delays, pointing out that it is "not as easy" to make changes within healthcare programs as it is in most other departments.

Faculty and staff reluctance can slow the process of connecting noncredit with credit-bearing programming. One reason articulation can be slow or challenging is reluctance from some staff and faculty members to accept noncredit coursework for credits. Interviewees at most of the schools mentioned at least one instance of faculty pushback to plans to connect noncredit with credit programs. Some faculty simply see noncredit certificates as unnecessary for employment and thus see such programming as a waste of time for students who wish to enter the healthcare industry. Other faculty and staff have the perception that bridging noncredit programming to credit programming is unnecessary. Some mentioned that students "don't need the credit, necessarily," noting that some students are not "college ready" and are better served by receiving a certificate through noncredit programming and using that certificate to immediately find work.

Some schools are developing other ways to document learning acquired from noncredit programming. Some schools have developed or are developing alternatives to directly connect noncredit and credit programming by having students document their learning in specific noncredit classes relative to specific credit classes. Hudson, for example, has created a "work-life portfolio" process that allows students to showcase work and life accomplishments that can articulate to credit at the school. Credits granted through the process have reportedly tripled over the past two years at the school. Administrators at Essex are considering competency-based testing for its CNA program. If the plan is implemented, students who pass the test could receive 6 credits toward a health-related AAS. Other schools created new programming or modified existing programming to create agreements that would help students finish certain courses or programs and then test out of the same or similar courses for credit. For several of the schools, medical terminology is a perfect fit for this version of articulation, since the course can be virtually the same regardless of whether it is conducted for credit. In a similar model, curriculum can be duplicated so that noncredit courses literally match their credit equivalent. At Essex, medical terminology is taught by the department of chemistry, biology, and allied health. Staff and leadership at the school are currently trying to allow noncredit students to qualify for three credits if they complete medical terminology and continue to credit programming. Having the course embedded in the credit side of programming is convenient because faculty and staff overlap, and the complexity and standards of the course are not generally questioned. These types of strategies are discussed in more detail in the companion brief on credit for prior learning.

Some schools are focusing on improving advising and supports to help noncredit students transition to credit-bearing programming. Some schools offer resources specifically intended to help noncredit students bridge some of the gaps in the information that is provided to them. Noncredit students at RVCC, for example, are given access to tutoring, a testing center, and a pre-Accuplacer workshop. This helps serve noncredit students who are considering taking credit-bearing classes but may not have had access to the same college-preparatory resources as credit-side students prior to enrollment. Hudson offers a Pre-National League of Nursing (NLN) Admission Exam Preparation Course to help students prepare for that exam. The Pre-NLN, which is used to identify the most qualified candidates among those interested in taking the clinical course at a local nursing school, evaluates the academic ability of nursing majors. County College of Morris created a publication called *Connections* that illustrates pathways from noncredit programs to credit programs. They also host open houses and focus some recruitment efforts on moving noncredit students into the credit side of programming. At one consortium college, there is a general awareness that students coming from the noncredit side are candidates for further education on the credit side. One staff member said there is "more awareness" that "just because you come for a certificate or noncredit program doesn't mean that's the end of it [education] for you. [We] want to see you again, get you working, so your larger ambitions can be realized."

There are procedural differences between noncredit and credit programming at most schools. At most of the consortium schools, the noncredit side of programming uses an enrollment process that is different from that used for credit programming. Most noncredit students do not fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, either, since noncredit programs do not qualify for financial aid. To prepare all students for education on the credit side, Essex staff now encourages all students to fill out a FAFSA. They are even considering making it a requirement because once the FAFSA is completed, it is "easy to enroll them into the [college] system." Currently, students only need to fill out a noncredit registration form; requiring them to fill out the FAFSA and the college application would allow them to see what they could qualify for and teach them how to access those funds. Staff acknowledge that the financial aid process can be very confusing for students and that this new requirement would give them resources to help them through the process. Additionally, by filling out the form, students are made aware of pathways into credit programming.

Some schools are considering including noncredit programming in their guided pathways reforms. Many of the consortium colleges were also participating in the state's Student Success Center's guided pathways reform initiative, and some of these colleges saw building connections between noncredit and credit programs as part of this initiative. Through guided pathways reforms, the colleges sought to review their program offerings with the goal of clarifying and mapping out educational pathways for their students. At some colleges, this review of programming included their noncredit offerings as well; this holistic approach provided a unique opportunity for these colleges to broadly consider at an organizational level how their noncredit programs could be better connected with their credit offerings. When college leaders at Passaic considered how to map out pathways for students to move from noncredit to credit programs, the plan they arrived at created "on-ramps" to meta-majors that can be accomplished through noncredit programming. College leadership involved in implementing guided pathways reforms at Mercer also reported considering noncredit as part of their process of mapping pathways within the college. At some other colleges, however, some instructors, staff, and administrators saw guided pathways as a reform initiative that pertained only to credit-bearing programming.

Some schools are working to increase coordination between noncredit and credit programming. While noncredit and credit programs often operate independently, some colleges have taken steps to increase the amount of coordination between the programs. At Middlesex, for example, credit and noncredit courses are now published together in the same course schedule instead of being published separately. Likewise, instead of holding separate orientations for noncredit and credit students as they have in the past, leadership and faculty from both programs now present together at a single student orientation. There has recently been turnover in leadership at Middlesex. An interim dean is serving the noncredit side of programming. However, faculty and mid-level leadership at Middlesex are engaged and forward-thinking, and they are optimistic that once new leadership is in place, plans for clear internal connections between related noncredit and credit departments can proceed. Additionally, several schools now invite their noncredit departmental leadership to participate in academic planning meetings, which, according to several interviewees, has given noncredit faculty, staff, and administrators a "voice at the table" they previously lacked.

Others are also focusing on co-locating noncredit and credit programs. Shared space between noncredit and credit programming seems to help raise student awareness about what programs are available on each side and what the process is for transitioning between them. Bergen's new health sciences building and simulation facility, for example, has brought both forms of programming together. Students share space, participate in simulations together, and converse in the hallways. This has led to increased awareness among noncredit students regarding what options are available to them on the credit side. Middlesex is considering a similar shared-space model. They believe more frequent interaction among students from both programs would lead to more noncredit students pursuing credit-based education. Ocean will soon open a new building and has plans to co-locate its noncredit and credit programs there.

Some schools are promoting credit-to-noncredit transitions for students who are already earning credits but could use noncredit courses to enhance their knowledge and skills. For some credit students, noncredit programs may provide an attractive option. They can offer opportunities for students to bolster their skills while remaining in a credit-bearing program, or they can present an alternative path for students who find they do not like or are not succeeding in their original program. At Mercer, staff realized that credit students might be interested in their noncredit offerings for these reasons. Students who thought they would not be able to handle the coursework to get a BSN, for example, were dropping out of school instead of pursuing an associate degree or another certificate. As one staff member said, "there are a number of different degree directions students can go if they don't reach the place they want." Awareness about these options may help retain some students who would otherwise stop pursuing education.

Some schools are requiring noncredit as a prerequisite for credit programs. Noncredit programs can provide a good entry point for credit programs; in some cases, colleges have made completion of a noncredit program a requirement to enter a credit program. At Brookdale, for example, noncredit programs are required as prerequisites for the nursing program: Nursing students must first complete both the CNA and PCT programs. Staff report that by "mixing" the students in the classroom – combining those that are taking the certificate as their end goal with those that are using the program as a prerequisite – students who had not planned to continue their education are exposed to, and can thus be inspired by,

information about continued education and careers. One staff member said, "if you can get them [students] out of their shell . . . a person starts to set goals that are beyond their situation."

Other schools are offering the option to take a course as credit-bearing or noncredit. Another way to provide flexibility and connection between noncredit and credit programming is to simply offer the course and then give students the ability to choose whether they want to take it for credit. Passaic's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) course gives students the option to take the program via a credit route or a noncredit route. They can earn three credits for the coursework if they choose to do so. Students must make the decision prior to beginning the course.

Organizational Issues in Implementation

Building connections between noncredit and credit programming is a complicated reform to pursue largely because of organizational issues within the colleges. College leadership plays an important role in deciding whether to prioritize these connections, while college boards or committees play an important role in approving potential changes. Organizational and structural issues can further influence the process, affecting, for example, whether noncredit and credit programming are run from separate units within the college. Finally, faculty or staff attitudes toward connecting the programs can have an important impact on any plan's adoption and whether it spreads across departments in the college. This section discusses the multiple organizational issues – both challenges and facilitating factors – that consortium schools faced during implementation.

Leadership support is essential. Leadership – or changes in leadership – can facilitate or hinder the implementation of connections between noncredit and credit programs. The issues of greatest interest to institutional leadership generally receive the most attention. If the interest of leadership is focused on building connections between noncredit and credit programs, progress can be made. At Morris, for example, where a new president introduced a new strategic plan that made articulation a priority, transitions within the institution are getting easier. At Brookdale, likewise, institutional leadership was focused on the noncredit/credit relationship, and changes were being discussed. In contrast, leadership at one college was focused more on "getting people jobs than on getting them credits. By helping students get jobs, they felt they were encouraging students to work and then continue their education later rather than finish a certification and apply it immediately for credit in pursuit of a degree. Building noncredit-to-credit connections could be seen as incongruent with such a focus, as simplifying those transitions for students could serve to undermine leadership's goal of moving students from that college directly into the workforce.

In addition, sustained leadership on these issues can have an important impact on implementation since these reforms often take time to complete. At some schools, implementation of noncredit-to-credit articulation has been in process for a very long time – since long before the TAACCCT grant even began. Raritan Valley, for example, calls its relationship between the two sides of programming "evolutionary." Over the years, gradual change has taken place. As new leadership has come on board, articulation has occurred incrementally. Departments have sought to build certificate programs that articulate into degrees and career pathways. In contrast, some schools experienced turnover in leadership that resulted in multiple visions for the noncredit/credit relationship, and competing ideas slowed progress. Choosing courses that "equate" to credit-side courses can also be challenging, especially since faculty must agree on the course equivalencies. Some staff members commented that decisions must be made by college leadership, and although staff are sometimes enthusiastic about the options, it is not staff that make the decisions. Many staff members commented that "buy-in" must come "from the top."

Faculty influences the process. Many college faculty on the noncredit side of programming are adjuncts, which can also create some challenges. Noncredit faculty are often recruited from industry, which makes it difficult for colleges to offer enough pay to compete with industry salaries. Therefore, there are often shortages and turnover among faculty on the noncredit side, which can lead to available faculty having less time to devote to building connections with credit programs. Conversely, traditional faculty workloads usually mean traditional faculty have less time to implement changes than do adjuncts. One staff member commented that traditional faculty workload structures make working out things like connections between noncredit and credit programming difficult. But because faculty at the college where she works have flexibility in their jobs, the staff member noted that things had been easier on her campus. Faculty at some schools do not have such flexibility. She commented that "If we didn't have that [flexibility], I'm not sure some of this [creating connections] could work." Creating connections requires flexibility and some "changes in existing structures." Additionally, at least one staff-member-unionized

consortium college noted that differences in unionization across credit and noncredit programs could create some challenges and potentially raise concerns about "union-busting."

Compartmentalized departments can be a challenge to building connections. Noncredit and credit programming is structured differently at different institutions. At some schools, the two sides are distinctly separated, belonging to different departments with different deans, faculty, and staff. At others, they are separate but co-located, and elsewhere, they are under the same leadership. At schools where the two sides of programming are separated and located in different areas, creating articulation between the two can be very challenging. Having someone at the leadership level who understands both noncredit and credit programming has proven useful at some schools. At another consortium college, staff on the noncredit side know very little about how the credit side operates or what kind of services and resources they have available for students. Likewise, the credit side of healthcare programming is often unaware of what certificates noncredit programming has to offer or how similar their courses may be. A staff member at this college recounted a situation where a prospective student who was ineligible for credit classes had asked about a noncredit certification but was never connected to the correct person on the noncredit side. Similarly, student events held by one side are often not advertised to the other side.

Advising and support services for noncredit students are lacking. Noncredit programs usually have fewer resources available to students than noncredit programs. At some schools, noncredit students do not have a student ID, cannot use campus computer labs, and do not have access to libraries or parking. Likewise, separate orientations are usually held for noncredit and credit students. One staff member noted that if a noncredit student "wants to go on" to a credit-bearing program, "there is not a lot of support because they are shifting to an entirely new bureaucracy on the credit side. They are on their own in a totally new world to get into that program." For noncredit students who wish to move to the credit side, how to make the transition can be confusing because of the lack of advising and support services available to them. When asked what resources are available for noncredit students who are interested in pursuing credit-based education, many staff members and instructors said students could talk to an advisor "just like any credit student" could. However, noncredit students may not be aware of available resources or how to access them. Students also reported that the process is sometimes "scary" and "confusing." Many students seem to lack confidence at first about whether they can succeed in credit-bearing coursework, and it is likely this lack of confidence colors their perceptions about how to proceed. Most interviewees stated that students learn about career pathways and how to move from noncredit to credit programming informally – most often through one or two people in noncredit-allied health departments. A few mentioned that information can be received through student services. Some staff members mentioned formal advertising being done by the school. For the most part, students reported hearing about the option to pursue credit-based education through faculty or staff in their program or through other students. Given this, it is not surprising that staff at most of the consortium schools reported that not many students move from noncredit to credit programming.

College staff viewed noncredit and credit programs as serving different student populations and thus serving distinct institutional missions. In several colleges, faculty and staff reported that they felt noncredit and credit programs serve different student populations with different needs. Interviewees generally described credit-seeking students as traditional-age students who most often go to school full time, while the noncredit side of programming included more nontraditional students with work and/or care responsibilities. Some interviewed faculty and staff members described credit-seeking students as "having it together," "being motivated," or knowing what they wanted out of their education or career. They were also described by several interviewees as being self-motivated and able to find information on their own. Noncredit students, on the other hand, were sometimes described as being unsure of what they wanted in terms of a career, lacking clear expectations, or needing extra help to make decisions about their educational path. A staff member at one college said faculty feel that the noncredit side has the "most poverty[-stricken students who are] not going to do well academically." This staff member noted the noncredit healthcare department was trying to get over that challenging image by educating faculty that the differences between students were minor: "the only difference is maybe they want to get a job a little faster. Or to go to school to explore. [They're] not really different." Some college staff voiced concern over student preparedness, time management, or external responsibilities such as work or care responsibilities that might stand in the way of student success. There was a general feeling among these staff that noncredit students may not be able to achieve academically at the same level as their credit-seeking counterparts and thus may not be as successful.

There are differing perceptions of student preparedness among college staff on the noncredit and credit sides of programming. Many instructors, staff, and leaders interviewed on the noncredit side seemed to think credit-bearing work was an achievable goal for their students and that noncredit work should apply for credits if the coursework was comparable. One member of college leadership said "any time you can have anything articulated that links my success here to my success somewhere else is invaluable. I think the sky's the limit for anyone." Many credit-side faculty and some staff, however, stated that students should probably find employment before continuing their education. Partly this seemed to stem from a desire to help noncredit students offset costs by trying to find an employer willing to offer tuition reimbursement. Others seemed to imply that noncredit students should try working in the field before further applying themselves to something that may be challenging. Some administrators and higher-level school leadership, although also supportive of student effort, seemed less optimistic than other staff regarding whether noncredit students could succeed on the credit side of education.

This stigma – that noncredit students are less capable than credit students – is a pervasive one. Among faculty and staff at the 12 colleges we visited, concern over connecting noncredit and credit programming was a recurrent theme. Some schools had a cultivated image of being a liberal arts transfer college, and faculty worked hard to maintain that image. By increasing the credit capabilities of workforce-oriented programs, some faculty feel the reputation of the school could be diminished. In most cases, there has been an evolution to a more positive perception regarding noncredit-to-credit connections, but it has been gradual. At one consortium college, some credit programs at the school were recently moved into the workforce area of the college "after tremendous debate." It was an unclear relationship, however, and was still evolving.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

For most schools, the process of building pathways between noncredit and credit programs has been gradual and will continue to be. However, national conversations and legislation have been encouraging efforts to create credit opportunities and pathways for students. To do so, colleges can engage in the following efforts:

➢ Provide leadership and vision to support noncredit-to-credit connections.
➢ Include noncredit programming in collegewide reform efforts such as guided pathways reforms.
➢ Continue to develop mechanisms, including testing, PLA, and the development of connections between noncredit and credit programming, to help students gain credit for their noncredit coursework.
➢ Improve advising and support resources available to noncredit students.
➢ Work to create awareness among college staff about career pathways and the value of noncredit-to-credit connections.
➢ Promote coordination across noncredit and credit units to bridge gaps resulting from separate organizational structures.

Of the 12 schools in the Consortium, most planned to continue to make connections between their noncredit and credit programming and to create true paths for students to earn credit for noncredit education. In these ways, the TAACCCT grant created an opportunity that some schools embraced. Across the Consortium, the TAACCCT grant brought awareness to the issue of building connections between noncredit and credit programs. While some schools are further along the continuum of noncredit-to-credit connection than others, the grant process has illuminated next steps for each of the schools. It has also illuminated challenges that are facing schools nationwide relative to articulation. Although the goal of connecting the two sides is worthy, the journey is slow and often challenging. Successes, however, are rewarding for students and colleges alike.

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[1] The colleges funded through the TAACCT Round 4 grant, whose activities are the subject of this brief include: Bergen Community College (Lead Agency), Brookdale Community College, County College of Morris, Essex County College, Hudson County Community College, Mercer County Community College, Ocean County College, Passaic County Community College, Raritan Valley Community College, Sussex County Community College, and Union County College.

[2] Torpey, E. (2014, Spring). Healthcare: Millions of jobs now and in the future. *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, pp. 27–43. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website: https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/spring/art03.pdf.

[3] Grubb, W. N., Badway, N., & Bell, D. (2003, March). Community colleges and the equity agenda: The potential of noncredit education. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 586*(1), 218–240. doi: 10.1177/0002716202250226

[4] Kazis, R. (2016, March). *MDRC research on career pathways* (Issue Brief). New York, NY: MDRC.

[5] Pusser, B., Breneman, D. W., Gansneder, B. M., Kohl, K., Levin, J. S., Milam, J. H. and Turner, S. E. (2007, March). *Returning to learning: Adults' success in college is key to America's future* (New Agenda Series). Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED496188)

[6] Voorhees, R. A., & Milam, J. H. (2005). *The hidden college: Noncredit education in the United States*. Winchester, VA: HigherEd.org.

[7] In these briefs, we use the term "career pathways" to describe the broader concept of education-to-career pathways. The term "educational pathways" is used to describe a subset of career pathways: the routes students take through the institution of higher education in preparation for entry and advancement in employment. As a community-college-based grant, the bulk of the reforms in NJ-PREP career pathway development happened in the educational portion of the pathways.

[8] Van Noy, M., Jacobs, J., Korey, S., Bailey, T., & Hughes, K. L. (2008). *The landscape of noncredit workforce education: State policies and community college practices*. New York, NY: Community College Research Center.

[9] Colleges participating in the NJ-PREP Consortium included: Bergen Community College, Middlesex Community College, Union County College, County College of Morris, Brookdale Community College, Mercer Community College, Ocean Community College, Essex Community College, Sussex Community College, Passaic Community College, Raritan Valley Community College, and Hudson Community College.

[10] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. (2014). *Notice of Availability of Funds and Solicitation for Grant Applications for Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants Program* (CFDA No. 17.282). Retrieved from: Notice of Availability of Funds and Solicitation for Grant Applications for Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants Program

[11] Haviland, S., & Van Noy, M. (2018, June). Reflections on career pathways in health care: College, employer and student perspectives on the New Jersey Health Professions Pathways to Regional Excellence Project (NJ-PREP) (Evaluation Issue Brief #1). New Brunswick, NJ: Education & Employment Research Center, Rutgers University.

[12] McKay, H., & Edwards, R. (2018, June). Prior learning assessment policy and practice in the New Jersey Health Professions Pathways to Regional Excellence Project (NJ-PREP) (Evaluation Issue Brief #3). New Brunswick, NJ: Education & Employment Research Center, Rutgers University.

[13] The Consortium also worked with Thomas Edison State University to have consortium programs reviewed for credit recommendations. This strategy is discussed in the final evaluation report.