



## **Aspirations Survey of Maine High Schools: Results**

Executive Summary, December 2013

Maine ranks 11th of the 50 states for on-time high school graduation, but we are only average for college-going and college completion. College costs are growing much faster than inflation, and student debt is rising sharply. Yet the economic payoff to a college degree relative to a high school diploma continues to increase. With the goal of learning about how these trends influence Maine students' college aspirations and intentions, this year the Mitchell Institute worked with Great Schools Partnership, Maine Community Foundation, and MELMAC to develop a survey of Maine high school principals and guidance counselors. The survey results summarized in this report suggest some of the best ways to support high aspirations for Maine's young people and their educational communities.

In June and July 2013, we received 155 survey responses:

- Respondents work at 108 different high schools—representing 84% of Maine's 129 public high schools.
- 16 responses are from staff at Career and Technical Education (CTE) Centers—representing 50% of Maine's 28 CTEs.
- 89 survey responses are from school counselors—57% of the total;
- 55 responses are from high school principals—35% of the total; and
- 11 are from CTE directors—7% of the total.

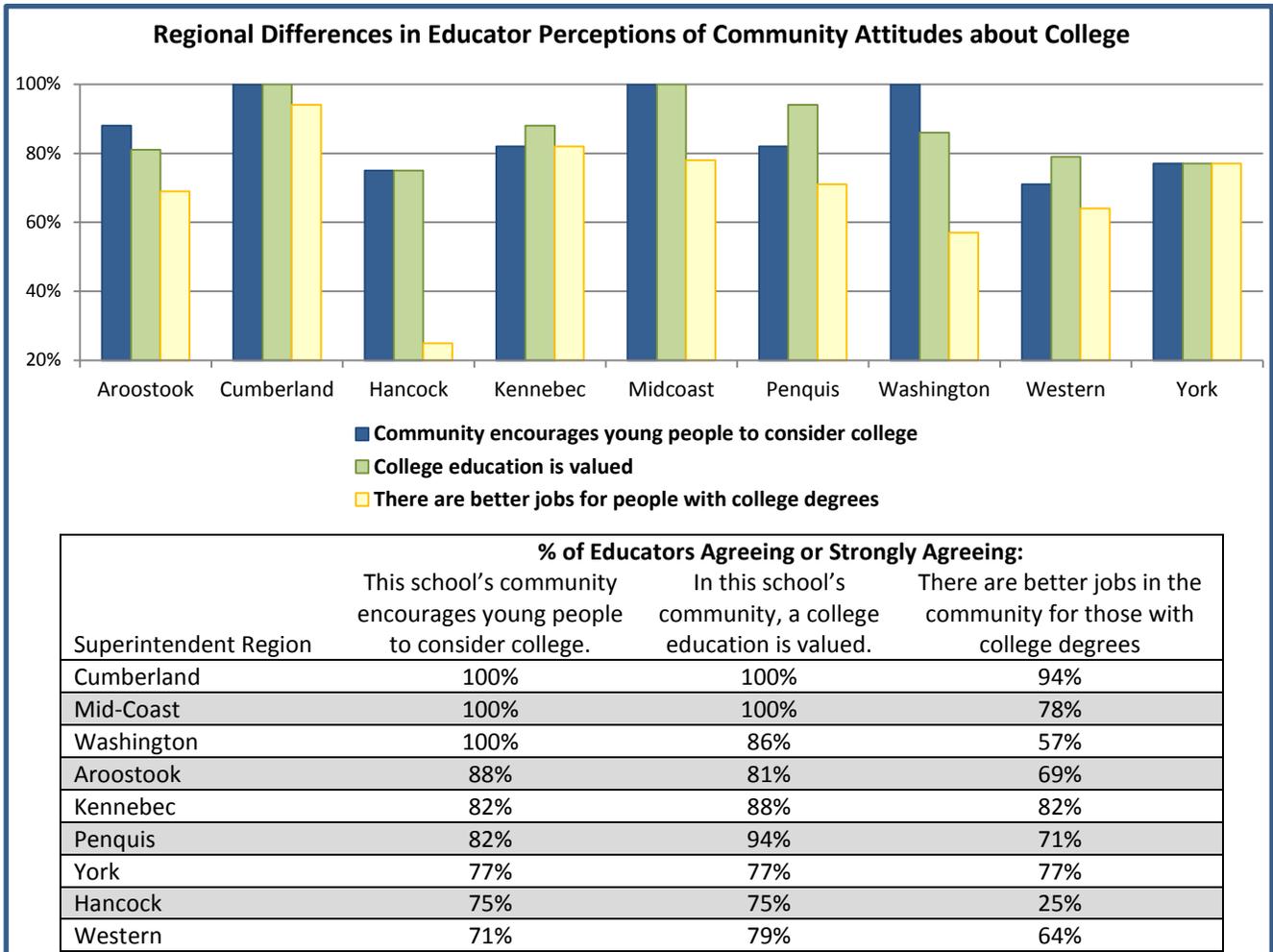
### **Key Findings**

- 1. Maine educators report that their communities encourage and value college education, but there is significant regional variation.**
  - 89% agree (including 31% that strongly agree) that a college education is valued in their school's community. Agreement ranges from 75% in Hancock County to 100% in Cumberland County and Midcoast Maine.
  - 88% agree (38% strongly agree) that their school's community encourages young people to consider going to college. Agreement ranges from 71% in Western Maine to 100% in Cumberland, Midcoast, and Washington County.
  - Agreement that there are better jobs within the community for young people with college degrees ranges from 25% in Hancock County to 94% in Cumberland County.
  
- 2. College-going graduates are perceived as less likely than peers to stay in the local area.**
  - While 75% of Maine educators agree that there are better jobs in their community for people with college degrees than for those with only a high school education,
  - 84% believe their graduates who *do not* go to college are more likely to stay in the local area after high school than are peers who go to college.

**3. Many educators believe that communities should address aspirations earlier.**

- While more than three-quarters (77%) say that either elementary or middle grades is the ideal time to begin addressing college aspirations, only about one-half (49%) say their communities actually start addressing college aspirations before high school.

**4. Exposure to college campuses and job-shadowing are the top two experiences educators wish they could provide more for students.** When asked for ‘blue-sky’ thinking about effective actions to encourage aspirations, many educators also expressed a need for more guidance staff, financial aid counseling and application assistance, and better college-prep curricula in high school.



**5. Educators prioritize four main factors in college preparation as follows:**

- 1) Academic preparation;
- 2) Character traits;
- 3) Family support;
- 4) Financial literacy

Our survey results suggest that, to better support Maine students’ aspirations, we need to:

- More clearly demonstrate the connections between postsecondary education and the labor market both at home and beyond, and
- Start earlier to help students shape their plans for the future.