Manchester Community College officials say that upwards of three-fourths of all students who enter MCC are academically unprepared. "They can't read, they can't write, and they can't do math," says newly named provost and chief academic officer, Sandra Palmer.

With urging from state higher education officials, Palmer has focused on ensuring students are prepared and stay enrolled at MCC. "The idea behind PA 12-40 is that there's got to be a better way because remediation is really dead the way that it was being offered," Palmer said. "It's not working across the country."

The college will have to report to the Board of Regents, which oversees the state's 17 colleges and universities, on how it is making progress in responding to the requirements of the new legislation. A small percentage of MCC students who enter the college below an eighth-grade level aren't able to take remedial classes and are offered "transitional strategies." These are supposed to be at either no cost or no cost to students, with the state paying most of the amount. The town's adult education department is working on providing some of these services, but the college will offer one section for these students in the fall, Palmer said.

MCC officials say they are also working with math and English teachers at neighbor high schools to ensure students are better prepared. One of the goals in the college's new strategic plan includes adding more full-time faculty over the next five years. Officials say that full-time faculty are more engaged with students, offering support like office hours and advising — which helps with keeping students active in the college.

Currently, around 32 percent of MCC faculty members are full-time, while the remainder is part-time. That ratio had been reversed, but has changed over time with less funding, Palmer said. The college recently received additional money from the state and plans to hire five new faculty members.

The college has an annual operating budget of $53 million, and more than 15,000 students are enrolled, a slight decrease from last year. There are 10,800 students taking classes for credit, while the remainder are enrolling in continuing education and certification-preparation classes.

Under a recent change, the college will now be able to keep tuition it collects from students, rather than having it go to the community college system and be redistributed. Officials are working to boost enrollment through avenues like a new advertising campaign that seeks to attract different types of students, such as those who might want to join the college's new honors program.

"We're a jack of all trades. That's how I think of community colleges," Palmer said. "We do so much for so many people in so many different ways."