Achieving Success

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Achieving the Dream
Community Colleges Count

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE
Accelerating Achievement

Contents

FEATURE

New Publication from Jobs for the Future

TYING FUNDING TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE OUTCOMES:
Models, Tools, and Recommendations for States

The imperative for more college credentials in an era of constrained resources for higher education is driving states to consider new approaches. State governments are testing the power of several policy levers to change individual and institutional behaviors in ways that increase and accelerate college completion. One of these is the formula used to allocate public funding to institutions. Typically, states fund public colleges and universities based on their enrollments. Recently, however, several states, such as those involved in Achieving the Dream and Developmental Education Initiative, have experimented with new performance-based funding models. These systems allocate some percentage of state support on the basis of institutional progress in improving student retention, progression, or completion of credentials—not just on enrollment levels.

The emergence of Performance Funding 2.0 models in states like Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, and Washington State is providing rich examples of how states can use changes in the funding formula to: redirect state priorities and investments; drive institutional adoption of best processes and practices to help more students succeed; and promote significant changes in institutional behavior and resource allocation that do not require intrusive, inflexible mandates.

JFF has produced a set of three policy tools to help states understand the opportunities and challenges presented by Performance Funding 2.0—and to inform the development of funding systems that are more aligned with the critical public priorities of persistence and completion. The first section is a reflection on Ohio's new performance-based funding system, written by former Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor Eric Fingerhut. The second section is by JFF's Richard Kazis, who prepared a set of recommendations for states to consider when thinking through performance funding design and implementation. The final section summarizes the characteristics of performance-based funding models in 11 Achieving the Dream states.

These three tools should serve as useful guides to state policymakers and key stakeholders as they explore and implement strategies for aligning funding more directly with desired educational and economic outcomes for a state and its residents.

To download the publication, please go to http://www.jff.org/publications/education/tying-funding-community-college-outcomes/1398.

Nurturing Faculty Leadership to Accelerate the Diffusion of Innovation

As states wrestle with how to increase completion rates of community college students, they would do well to more fully engage college faculty in policy and programmatic reforms. Doing so has led to better statewide policy and stronger faculty buy-in for significant reforms such as redesigning developmental courses and sequences, according to state and college members of the Achieving the Dream and Developmental Education Initiative policy network participating in a recent meeting convened on December 12, 2011 by Jobs for the Future.

Drawing on the experiences of 11 network states present at the meeting entitled "State Policy Infrastructure for Faculty Engagement and Innovation Diffusion," attendees identified key ways for states to engage faculty strategically in reform efforts. They include: enlisting faculty on state-level committees charged with recommending policy and programmatic changes; helping faculty to make better use of data on student outcomes to inform classroom practices; and expanding the availability of state-supported professional development to prepare faculty for the need to teach differently.

South Carolina informed the group of several ways in which its Technical College System supports the connection of policy and practice through faculty engagement. Many years ago, for example, the system office established a series of institutional peer groups across the state's colleges in an effort to promote system-wide sharing of information and consensus building among groups with similar responsibilities at each college. When SCTCS considers a new system-wide policy, related policy recommendations are sent to the appropriate institutional peer group for review and input. Hope Rivers, vice president for academic and student affairs, asserts that this practice is embedded in the culture of both the system office and institutions. "More times than not, it yields positive results for the system as a whole," Rivers explains. "It not only lets the faculty know about changes coming down the road, but it also lets them have a say in how things will be structured in the future."

Participants also examined strategies for engaging faculty as users of data and research to inform both policy and practice, noting that disseminating data to faculty can build an understanding of, and support for, developmental education reform and for curricular and pedagogical changes that are most effective in improving student success. In Virginia, for example, data has strengthened anecdotes based on classroom experiences into evidence worthy of guiding committee decisions, according to Susan Wood, vice chancellor for academic services and research at Virginia Community College System.

Greg Stoup, vice president of RP Group who led the data discussion, built on Wood's statement by saying, "States and colleges need to support a culture of experimentation. When complementing classroom experiences, data can guide faculty members in testing different teaching strategies, which ultimately could inform policy decisions."

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Identifying Trade-offs that Block Developmental Education Improvement
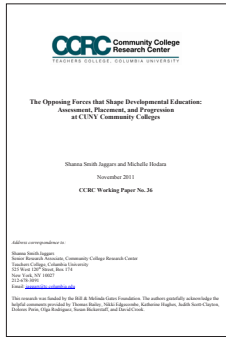
Jobs for the Future caught up with Community College Research Center's Shanna Smith Jaggars to glean state policy lessons from her recent paper, *The Opposing Forces that Shape Developmental Education: Assessment, Placement, and Progression at CUNY Community Colleges*.

Jaggars argues that three sets of opposing forces hold back developmental education improvement efforts. "By opposing forces," Jaggars explains, "I mean different goals that people [such as state policymakers and college leaders] have that may seem to be at loggerheads."

"Since we don't have strong evidence about what the best [policy] approach is," says Jaggars, "that leaves a lot of room for the colleges to feel like whatever policy has been pressed down on them from on high is wrong." This dynamic sets up the first set of opposing forces—**system-wide consistency versus institutional autonomy**. On one hand, coherence and consistency decreases confusion and increases the chances that students will be treated equitably in each community college across the state. On the other hand, local colleges think they know their students best and want flexibility to meet their unique needs. Though seemingly in opposition, both positions have merit.

The second set of opposing forces is **efficient versus effective assessment**. "Community colleges [feel they] have to use standardized tests to place students into developmental education because of their efficiency," says Jaggars. But standardized assessments are weakly correlated to student completion. A more individualized approach that uses multiple measures could be more effective. But "if we want something that's more effective," Jaggars says, "it's going to be almost certainly less efficient." Once again, both positions have merit. Assessment must be efficient and effective.

The third and final set of opposing forces is **student progression versus enforcing academic standards**. There is evidence that academically underprepared students who are allowed to enroll in college-level courses with built-in supports can be successful. But this is not necessarily good news for faculty. According to Jaggars, "Faculty think acceleration will result in a flood of underprepared students; and they're afraid that means they would have to either start failing more students or lower their standards." Indeed, a central challenge in designing accelerated strategies is to ensure that academic standards are maintained at a high level.

Jaggars concludes with advice about how to ease the tensions between each set of opposing forces. Increased communication and better feedback loops between state policymakers and community colleges can increase mutual understanding and buy-in for institutional practices and state policies, and bring both parties from the poles to the middle. "What I'm trying to do with this study," Jaggars explains, "is pull apart the big bundled package that is developmental education and think about: What are the assessment and programmatic problems we need to address? And how can we make these different pieces work together more effectively?"

Common Core Assessments Raise Placement Policy Questions for Community Colleges

In September 2010, the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top program funded two efforts to assess college readiness, according to the Common Core State Standards. The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), a consortium of 21 states, and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) with 24 participating states, will roll out new English and math assessment tools in the 2014-15 school year.

"We're assessing what English and mathematics skills are required to graduate from high school and be ready for college, with the same expectation for two-year colleges as four-year colleges," said Allison Jones, vice president for postsecondary collaboration at Achieve, which directs PARCC. A work group will ensure that the instruments developed by the consortia are comparable.

Postsecondary agencies and associations in the Achieving the Dream and Developmental Education Initiative network have been watching developments closely to determine the implications for postsecondary and when and how to get involved. One widespread hope is that these new exams can fuel the growing national trend of early assessments and early remediation. "The eleventh-grade assessment is key," said Jaci King, SBAC's director of higher education collaboration. Schools can identify which students need remedial work to become college ready, and can draw on SBAC's pedagogical bank of coursework developed by schools and colleges together.

"There's an opportunity for community colleges and schools to really use the senior year to help students get ready, to work together to remediate," King said. "When I've talked to community college presidents about this, that's the aspect they get really excited about: forging a close working relationship with their local schools."

SBAC is also currently working with its states' higher education leads to form state-level teams. "This is an opportunity to forge much stronger K-16 relationships," King says, "to bridge a historical divide and really get all the talent in the states and colleges to row together in the best interests of our schools and our students."

State policy leaders are eager to see how these new assessments will impact existing state and college placement processes. According to Jones, both assessments will be used to determine whether students should begin in developmental or credit-bearing courses. The exams will not, however, determine what level of developmental education a student needs.

The challenge for all institutions is to think more systematically and collectively about placement than ever before. "People have to wrap their minds around the notion that we have to forge consensus, along state lines as well—that wherever you live, college ready is college ready," King said. http://gettingpastgo.org/blog/2012/02/06/parcc-college-readiness-exams-approach-to-assessment-and-placement/

For more information about PARCC: http://www.parcconline.org/

For more information about SBAC: http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/

Data-Driven Improvement

Commentary:
Do College Completion Rates Really Measure Quality?
Chronicle of Higher Education. March 2012.

Seven higher education experts answer the question: "Do college completion rates really measure quality?" One author asserts that completion must not only measure degree attainment, but also the "real learning" that has occurred; another claims that the nation's institutional and policy leaders must address *why* we are failing so many students before we can determine how to tackle the issue of quality.

http://chronicle.com/article/Do-College-Completion-Rates/131029/

Building Pathways to Transfer:
Community Colleges that Break the Chain of Failure for Students of Color
The Civil Rights Project. February 2012.

This study analyzes the practices of five California community colleges with disproportionately high transfer rates of high school students of color, finding that strategic and deliberate outreach to these students is key to a successful transfer.

http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/college-access/diversity/building-pathways-to-transfer-community-colleges-that-break-the-chain-of-failure-for-students-of-color

Investments in Innovation

Integrating Student Services with Instruction:
Chaffey College's Long Journey to Success
Policy Analysis for California Education. February 2012.

Even though Norton Grubb and Robert Gabriner's analysis focuses on various support services, this report highlights how the Chaffey story is really about developing a broad structure necessary for success both in developmental education specifically and for all students in general.

http://www.stanford.edu/group/pace/cgi-bin/wordpress/integrating-student-services-with-instruction-chaffey-colleges-long-journey-to-success

Farther Faster:
Six Promising Programs Show How Career Pathway Bridges Help Basic Skills Students Earn Credentials That Matter
CLASP. 2011.

This brief highlights six promising programs for helping lower-skilled students move farther and faster along college and career pathways. Because creating such bridges requires collaboration across college silos, they can also transform the way colleges operate.

http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/Farther-Faster.pdf

Policy Supports

Lifting the Fog on Inequitable Financial Aid Policies
The Education Trust. November 2011.

At every level, from the federal government to the campus, spending has shifted away from the students who most need support and toward those who will attend college no matter what. This report attempts to "lift the fog" on inequitable financial aid policies to show how decision makers can work to make college more affordable for the lowest-income students.

http://www.edtrust.org/dc/publication/lifting-the-fog-on-inequitable-financial-aid-policies

Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?
Community College Research Center. February 2012.

This paper contributes to the literature by analyzing the predictive validity of one of the most commonly used assessments. Author Judith Scott-Clayton found that placement exams are more predictive of success in math than in English, and more predictive of who is likely to do well in college-level coursework than of who is likely to fail.

http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=1026
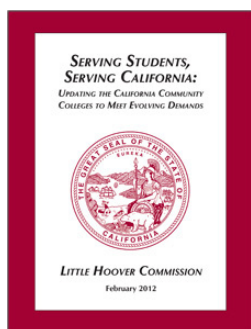
Serving Students, Serving California: Updating the California Community Colleges to Meet Evolving Demands
Little Hoover Commission. February 2012.

The state of California is not producing the number of graduates necessary to serve its evolving economy. This report identifies potential barriers and proposes next steps for getting its community colleges back on track to higher graduate rates and a thriving workforce. These barriers include: a funding system that lacks transparency and consistency; a separation of the system's leaders from funding decisions; and a general lack of agreement on the system's priorities, in part because of its decentralized structure.

http://www.lhc.ca.gov/studies/210/report210.html