SCALING AND SUSTAINING STATE PROGRESS IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

BY LARA K. COUTURIER

A POLICY BRIEF BASED ON DEI SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL DATA OCTOBER 2011
Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count is a national nonprofit dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Data-driven, student-centered, and built on the values of equity and excellence, Achieving the Dream is closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success nationwide by: 1) transforming community college practices; 2) leading policy change; 3) generating knowledge; and 4) engaging the public. Launched as an initiative in 2004 with funding from Lumina Foundation, Achieving the Dream is today the largest non-governmental reform movement for student success in community college history. With more than 160 community colleges and institutions, more than 100 coaches and advisors, and 16 state policy teams—working throughout 30 states and the District of Columbia—Achieving the Dream helps 3.5 million community college students have a better chance of realizing greater economic opportunity and achieving their dreams.

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Jobs for the Future develops, implements, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In 200 communities across 43 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers. JFF leads the state-policy and capacity-building efforts for both Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative.

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MDC’s mission is to help organizations and communities close the gaps that separate people from opportunity. It has been publishing research and developing programs in education, government policy, workforce development, and asset building for more than 40 years. MDC was the managing partner of Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count for six years and was responsible for its incubation as a national nonprofit and is the managing partner of the Developmental Education Initiative.

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The Developmental Education Initiative consists of 15 Achieving the Dream community colleges that are building on demonstrated results to scale up developmental education innovations at their institutions. Six states are committed to further advancement of their Achieving the Dream state policy work in the developmental education realm. Managed by MDC with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation, the initiative aims to expand groundbreaking remedial education programs that experts say are key to dramatically boosting the college completion rates of low-income students and students of color. The innovations developed by the colleges and states participating in the Developmental Education Initiative will help community colleges understand what programs are effective in helping students needing developmental education succeed and how to deliver these results to even more students.

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SCALING AND SUSTAINING:  
STATE PROGRESS IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

A policy brief based on data captured by the Developmental Education Initiative’s State Policy Framework Self-Assessment Tool
SUBSTANTIVE AND INNOVATIVE POLICY CHANGES DESIGNED TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION ARE UNDERWAY IN THE SIX STATES INVOLVED WITH THE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE, EVEN IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL, BASED ON THE DEI STATE POLICY FRAMEWORK, PROVIDES CONCRETE DATA DEMONSTRATING THE SCOPE AND MAGNITUDE OF THESE CHANGES IN CONNECTICUT, FLORIDA, NORTH CAROLINA, OHIO, VIRGINIA, AND TEXAS. IT ALSO PROVIDES INSIGHT INTO POLICY TRENDS THAT THE STATES ARE PURSUING AS THEY SEEK TO USE POLICY TO ACCELERATE, SUSTAIN, AND SCALE UP DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INNOVATIONS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES.

This analysis of data from the DEI Self-Assessment Tool covers policy changes between 2009 and 2010, the first year of the initiative. Analyses for 2010 to 2011, and for 2011 to 2012, will follow in subsequent years. The DEI Self-Assessment Tool, analysis of its findings, and other products such as case studies comprise a broader evaluation of the state policy effort of the Developmental Education Initiative.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE STATE POLICY FRAMEWORK

The DEI state policy effort, led by Jobs for the Future, focuses on five policy levers—described in the State Policy Framework—that states have at their disposal to support more effective ways of changing the organization and delivery of developmental education. The policy levers are:

- **DATA AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**
- **DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INNOVATION/REDESIGN**
- **ALIGNED EXPECTATIONS WITH K-12**
- **ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT**
- **FINANCE**
With assistance from JFF, the DEI states organized the policy levers into a strategy for change. When combined, the levers interact to form a three-part strategy for state-level policy change that can augment, accelerate, and spread successful developmental education innovation:

- **Data-driven improvement** encourages innovation by making institutional performance more transparent through the regular collection, analysis, and dissemination of a consistent set of indicators.

- **State-level innovation investment** helps states align and coordinate financial support from multiple sources to provide incentives for the development, testing, and scaling up of effective models for helping students succeed.

- **Policy supports** provide overarching assistance for underprepared students and facilitate the implementation and scale-up of promising models and practices.

**THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL**

The Self-Assessment Tool, developed by JFF in collaboration with DEI state teams and lead organizations, poses 55 questions about whether particular state policies are in place in each of the five policy levers. The questions were crafted based on a literature review of the most promising processes and policies in developmental education, as well as extensive input from state and national experts. Many questions in the Self-Assessment Tool push DEI state teams to stretch as they strive to establish what they themselves have defined to be an optimal policy environment for promoting developmental education student success.
Each year, using the *Self-Assessment Tool* as their guide, DEI state teams review their states’ policymaking environments, recording whether they have particular policies in place, are making progress instituting them, or have made those policies a priority for future action. To facilitate those discussions, the *Self-Assessment Tool* includes such questions as:

- Does the state’s community college data system link to the K-12 data system in ways that can inform institutions?
- Is a college-readiness diagnostic test, administered in junior or senior year to high school students, required by statute, rule, or policy?
- Does the state incent the creation of clear, directed pathways to graduation, such as time-to-degree contracts, encouragement of full-time status, and/or degree mapping/educational plans?

Analyzing the answers from year to year reveals the extent to which each state is building an optimal policy environment for student success. The responses also illustrate the degree to which states are implementing the three-part DEI policy change strategy.

**SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IS UNDERWAY**

When entering the Developmental Education Initiative, the six states agreed to take on—and be accountable for—an aggressive policy agenda. Having collaborated since 2004 in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, the six DEI states were well positioned to take on one of higher education’s most daunting challenges: improving student success in developmental education. States showed that they were ready and willing to tackle serious policy change. This analysis shows that they did so in a relatively short time. Indeed, many policies not in place when these states first joined Achieving the Dream are now accepted policy in all six.

For the first year of the initiative, the *Self-Assessment Tool* captured a 40 percent decrease in the number of times the states noted they had not implemented particular policies. In other words, states either instituted new policies or began the process of discussing and developing them in 40 percent of the developmental education-related areas where no policies were in place in 2009. States also reported a 20 percent increase in the number of new policies put in place during the first year.
Because all six DEI states participated in Achieving the Dream, they also could provide data for the year they entered that initiative (either 2004 or 2005). This analysis yields a seven-year view of how far the states have shifted their policy agendas toward fostering student success.

States reported considerable progress in policy change between 2004-05 and 2010. The Self-Assessment Tool reveals a 70 percent increase in the number of preferred policies put in place since Achieving the Dream began and a 60 percent decrease in the number of policies not instituted or considered. These numbers suggest that over the past seven years, the DEI states have embraced the State Policy Framework and a strong focus on student success, and they have driven their states toward considerable positive policy change.

| TABLE 1: POLICY CHANGES, 2009 TO 2010, IN THE SIX DEI STATES* |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
|                        | 2009            | 2010        | CHANGE     |
| NO POLICY IN PLACE     | 145             | 87          | -40%       |
| YES—POLICY IN PLACE    | 160             | 192         | +20%       |
| POLICY UNDER DISCUSSION OR IN PROGRESS | 25 | 51 | +104% |

* The tool asks 55 questions about policy changes; with six states, the total is 330 possible policies in place.

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| TABLE 2: POLICY CHANGES, ATD BASELINE YEAR (2004-05) TO 2010, IN THE SIX DEI STATES |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
|                        | 2004-05         | 2010        | CHANGE     |
| NO POLICY IN PLACE     | 215             | 87          | -60%       |
| YES—POLICY IN PLACE    | 113             | 192         | +70%       |
| POLICY UNDER DISCUSSION OR IN PROGRESS | 1 | 51 | N/A |
POLICY TRENDS: WHAT THE DATA SHOW

PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON INNOVATION AND REDESIGN

The highest concentration of change since the beginning of both Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative appears within the Developmental Education Innovation/Redesign policy lever. Before joining Achieving the Dream in 2004-05, the DEI states did not make it a priority to either establish task forces to guide ambitious redesigns, or to encourage colleges to innovate. For the ATD baseline years (2004/2005), the DEI states reported a total of only 10 “yes” answers within this policy lever. By 2009, the number of “yes” answers had increased to 23, and by 2010 it had grown to 42. This finding demonstrates that DEI states are aligning with the priorities of the DEI State Policy Framework, which emphasizes innovation and redesign. Some of the more dramatic changes include:

- In 2004-05, one state had a workgroup or task force focused on developing innovations for developmental education; all six had workgroups in place in 2010.
- In 2004-05, no state provided funding to encourage institutions to be innovative and test new strategies to improve student outcomes in developmental education; four of the six DEI states did so by 2010.
- In 2004-05, no state had taken concrete action to move away from systems based on traditional, semester-length courses; four had done so by 2010.

DATA AND K-12 ALIGNMENT CONTINUE AS CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

The policy levers Aligned Expectations with K-12 and Data and Performance Measurement reflected the second and third greatest shifts by 2010.

DEI states are seeking ways of partnering with K-12 on college readiness. For example:

- While only one state had clearly defined college readiness standards in 2004-05, all six had done so by 2010.
- All six states provide feedback reports to high schools in 2010, up from just three in 2004-05.
- Three states now have a statute, rule, or policy enabling students to remediate academic deficiencies before high school graduation.

Much like during their participation in Achieving the Dream, DEI states are also continuing to make collection, analysis, and use of data a prerequisite for pursuing policy changes. For example:

- All six DEI states disseminate data or reports on student outcomes to a variety of stakeholders at least annually.
- Performance measures for five of the six states now include intermediate measures of student success.
- Five of the six states’ data systems allow for comparisons among peer institutions.

POLICY SUPPORTS: BUILDING PROCESSES, CAPACITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

As they institute preferred policies, states are also developing processes that build state capacity for effective policy change. Sustainable policy changes require attention to process, including: clear leadership support; communication; funding; the inclusion of key stakeholders; relationship- and trust-building; institutional research capacity; and professional development for leaders, stakeholders, and faculty. States have, for example, institutionalized the process of reporting student outcomes to key stakeholders, created task forces focused on developing ideas for systemic reform, made research on effectiveness of innovations a high priority, and developed relationships with the K-12 sector through linked data systems, improved student assessments, school-college partnerships, and feedback reporting.
POLICY TRENDS:
PROGRESS IN THE STATES

INVESTMENT IN INNOVATION AND REDESIGN

States are aligning financial support from multiple sources, including state, federal, and private funding, to provide incentives for designing, implementing, and testing alternative approaches to developmental education.

Texas

Texas invested $7 million in developmental education innovation and demonstration projects in 2009. As a part of the initiative, five demonstration colleges received grants to revamp their developmental education offerings, including to redesign instructional delivery to reduce the time students spend in developmental education.

The colleges are creating acceleration models that collapse two courses into one and modular strategies that split the curriculum into discrete modules offered in shorter periods of time. Each college is also implementing developmental education innovations that are not course-based, such as pre-testing/retesting strategies, intensive refresher courses, and early assessment. The colleges are in the second year of implementation. Texas believes that the results from the demonstration colleges will show where the state should make additional investments to scale up successful results.

Virginia

The Virginia Community College System is deep into the process of fully redesigning developmental education across its 23 institutions. Starting in 2012, the colleges will place students who test into developmental mathematics into a module or series of modules that address their specific academic needs, rather than place them into full semester courses. The redesign is not a pilot: all the colleges will offer the modules instead of traditional semester-length courses.

To undergird its modular strategy, Virginia is revamping its placement and assessment system. The system office is collaborating with a testing organization to develop an assessment that has robust diagnostic capability, which will enable colleges to pinpoint the academic needs of students and place them in appropriate modules.

A DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

States have mounted intentional and coordinated processes to respond to the implications of troubling data on outcomes for developmental education students—and to develop plans of action for dramatically improving developmental education and college completion outcomes.

Connecticut

The Connecticut Community College System is leading a data-driven improvement process to:

- Focus its 12 colleges on the low completion rates for students who test into developmental education; and
- Facilitate the formation of a consensus across the colleges on the most effective and efficient strategies to improve success rates in developmental education.

During a May 2010 forum, the CCCS presented system-wide and college data on developmental education outcomes. The stark data, showing very low success rates among students with the greatest need for basic skills, sparked the creation of a task force on developmental education. The task force has led the difficult work of finding common ground across the colleges on the highest leverage strategies to improve outcomes in developmental education.
Thus far, the task force (still in operation) has recommended forging agreement:

> That the purpose of developmental education is to prepare students to succeed in college as opposed to delivering basic skills instruction;

> That developmental courses should be attempted in the first or second semester; and

> To redesign developmental education for the highest need students.

**North Carolina**

The North Carolina Community College System has mounted a full-scale redesign of its developmental math sequence. This responds to data indicating that the traditional semester-based sequence can take more than a year to complete for students who are multiple levels below college proficiency.

To address the low completion rates for the traditional developmental education sequence and propose alternatives, the state’s DEI policy team established a statewide Math Redesign Taskforce of 18 math faculty members. This task force recommended a modular alternative to the traditional semester-based delivery model. NCCCS plans to roll out the new sequence statewide in fall 2012.

**POLICY SUPPORTS**

States are implementing policy supports that provide overarching assistance for underprepared students and facilitate the implementation and scale up of promising models and practices designed to improve outcomes for low-income and underprepared students.

**Florida**

Florida is revamping its student assessment and placement system to increase the probability that colleges place students in the interventions that provide each student with the best chance of earning a degree or other postsecondary credential. The Division of Florida Colleges has developed the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test—PERT—fully aligned with K-12, state college, and state university standards, including the new Common Core State Standards.

The division is building a diagnostic component to the PERT exam to identify the competencies that students have mastered or still need to master to succeed in college-level courses, enabling the colleges to customize instruction. Ultimately, high school students who appear at risk for needing remedial education in college will take the PERT and receive feedback on whether they need additional academic preparation before enrolling in college. Florida now requires young people with remedial needs to complete college preparation courses before graduating from high school. The goal is to drastically reduce the proportion of recent high school graduates needing remedial courses when they get to college.

**Ohio**

Ohio is in the early stages of implementing a performance funding system. Colleges will receive incentive funding based on earning “success points.” Informed by Washington State’s Student Achievement Initiative, this approach rewards colleges for getting students to and through a set of both intermediate and final outcome measures.

The Ohio Legislature has approved the performance funding approach, and the Ohio Board of Regents and the Ohio Association of Community Colleges have collaborated to determine the new structure. OACC recommended that the Chancellor of the Board of Regents:

> Allocate 5 percent of state funding for Fiscal Year 2011 based on performance; and

> Increase the percentage of base funding to be allocated according to performance by 5 percent a year until the proportion reaches 20 percent.
POLICY PRIORITIES REQUIRING MORE ATTENTION

The Self-Assessment Tool demonstrates that the DEI states have worked hard to change policies, but it also reveals areas that require more attention for the future. Some of the priorities that states continue to develop include:

- Providing incentives for colleges to provide orientation and academic advising for students entering developmental education;
- Requiring students who cannot succeed without additional academic supports to address their academic weaknesses early in their college experience, preferably within the first year;
- Making placement/assessment tests available in advance to students who want to familiarize themselves and prepare for test taking; and
- Creating financial aid programs that reward student progress and completion.

Assessment and Placement is the policy lever for which state teams reported the fewest policy changes, perhaps underscoring the difficulty and complexity of fixing assessment and placement processes. While formal policy changes have yet to be made, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia expect to modify their placement and assessment policies to include diagnostic capabilities that will better pinpoint students’ academic strengths and weaknesses. This is an area in which significant policy change should be expected over the next few years.

NO MORE TWEAKING AT THE MARGINS: 2012 IS ABOUT SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Priorities for 2012 demonstrate that DEI states are pursuing activities that will help scale up and sustain institutional innovations to improve developmental education student success. For example, all six states have targeted the following priorities for 2012:

- Creating a plan for sustaining research-proven innovations;
- Supporting professional development activities that help faculty transition to new curricula, structures, and delivery models; and
- Collecting and analyzing data on student outcomes for new in-state programs, practices, or strategies.
Additionally, five of the six states are targeting:

> Moving away from systems based on traditional, semester-length courses, to allow for proficiency-based innovations (e.g., self-paced options, modularized developmental education courses);

> Continuing the process of setting and promoting the adoption of clear targets and completion goals for students in developmental education; and

> Disaggregating developmental education outcomes even further by subgroups, and reporting them annually or even more often.

These trends suggest that the six DEI states have placed a high priority on creating strong foundations for innovations. They are working toward systemic changes that support college-level innovations, leverage data for planning and reporting, and ensure that faculty are better prepared for the future.

**CONCLUSION**

The first year of the Developmental Education Initiative has been productive. The initiative provides a variety of benefits for participating states, ranging from research and advice on promising policies, to cross-state learning and friendly competition. The DEI states appear to be capitalizing wisely on those resources. Data from the *DEI Self-Assessment Tool* reveal that states are embracing the state policy framework, actively pursuing policy change, and preparing their states and colleges for continuous improvement.

**ENDNOTES**

1 The Developmental Education Initiative began in 2009. All six states also participated in Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count before joining DEI.
