



Talking about developmental education

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Persuade key decisionmakers to support our improved developmental education methods to help thousands more students complete college.

- We must name the challenges that have hindered the effectiveness of conventional remedial education – and then demonstrate that we can address them through the innovations that the Developmental Education Initiative is scaling up.
- We must show how innovative, quality developmental education at community colleges benefits communities, states, and the United States economically and socially – in addition to transforming students’ lives.
- We must improve the image of and respect for programs and policies that meet the needs of underprepared students.

GENERAL ADVICE FOR TALKING ABOUT DEV ED AND DEI

Use **simple, conversational language** anyone can understand, avoiding proprietary jargon and acronyms. This guide models this way of speaking.

- Whenever possible, **speak in terms of specific, real students and how your work is improving their lives** rather than talking in a theoretical way. Tell student stories.
- Appeal to people’s **American values of fairness, opportunity and hard work**.
- **Tailor what you say** to the person you’re talking to. A legislator wants to hear about the economic benefits, while an administrator cares about graduation rates, for instance.

MAIN MESSAGES AND SUPPORTING POINTS

1 The problem: Half the new jobs created in the next 10 years will require some college education.

Yet right now, students who need a developmental course are much less likely to finish college than those who don’t need one. That’s not fair.

- This issue is not confined to community colleges. **Many four-year university students also require developmental (sometimes called remedial) courses** — one in five freshmen at public universities and one in eight at private universities.¹ At four-year colleges, 52 percent of students who take developmental courses finish bachelor’s degrees compared to 78 percent of students with no developmental coursework.²

¹ Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003)

² Paul Attewell, et al.



- As many as six in ten community college students need a developmental course, but fewer than half of them even finish their developmental education courses – and only a quarter of them graduate within 8.5 years, compared with 43 percent of students who never enroll in developmental education courses.¹
- Many community college students never advance beyond their developmental sequence: less than half complete developmental coursework in reading and less than a third do in math.²

2 The conventional one-size-fits-all approach to developmental education doesn't work for many students. We can do better, and we know how to do better. It's time to tear down the unfair barriers for these students.

- Students often don't realize they may need developmental courses – and colleges don't always stress to high schoolers the importance of preparing for placement exams. Secondary and higher education institutions must cooperate to prepare students for college success and to align high school standards with college expectations.
- For many community college students, developmental courses take too long to complete. Two-thirds of developmental students spend a year or more taking these courses, paying tuition but typically not earning college credit.³ Those with a family, those with a job, and those unemployed and in need of training can't afford so much time or money.
- Students lose interest in required developmental math and English classes because it isn't apparent how the skills are relevant to their career or job goals.
- Without adequate support services—including advising, tutoring, and career counseling—some students can become disconnected and academically adrift.

3 Developmental education can work for students who need it, and we've got the research to prove it. We're developing an array of techniques that help students complete their certificate or degree.

- Early assessments provide high school students the opportunity to take college-level placement exams in mathematics and English to determine if they need to upgrade their skills before entering college.
- A variety of proven, accelerated approaches speed students toward degree completion.
- New teaching methods and student-centered approaches, including active learning, project-based learning, and collaborative learning, make the material more relevant and engaging.

¹ Paul Attewell, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, Tania Levey, *New Evidence on College Remediation*, *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 77, No. 5, September/October 2006. Copyright 2006 by the Ohio State University

² Thomas Bailey, *Challenge and Opportunity: Rethinking the Role and Function of Developmental Education in Community College*, in *Policies and Practices to Improve Student Preparation and Success*, *New Directions for Community Colleges*, Spring 2009

³ *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000*



- Contextualized approaches make the material more relevant to students by placing developmental education in the context of academic subjects or careers.
- Learning communities, or cohort programs, bring students together for two or more courses to provide a shared learning experience and mutual support.
- Modularized approaches break down course material so students can progress at their own pace.
- Student supports, from tutoring and academic advising to career counseling and financial aid, deal with students' individual needs. In addition, student success courses help students learn study skills and other habits that promote success in college– and ultimately, the workplace.

4 It's just a matter of offering motivated Americans at all stages of life and from every background a fair chance at a good-paying career and a better future.

- Policymakers, community college administrators, and others have the opportunity to be part of the solution.
- By supporting us in this effort, you're helping working moms, students who are the first in their families to attend college, suburban and rural high school graduates, unemployed adults and adults returning to the workforce, and 18-year-olds who worked hard to graduate from high school but see that isn't enough for a good career.

SPECIAL MESSAGES FOR KEY AUDIENCES:

■ **Federal policymakers** (White House, members of Congress, Department of Labor)

Reinventing our approach to serving underprepared students should be a cornerstone for increasing the number of college-educated Americans, reviving the economy, and making the U.S. more globally competitive. Nearly half of job openings this year will require a college credential. We can reduce the need for expensive federal services like welfare.

■ **State policymakers** (legislators, workforce board members, university system officials)

Supporting innovations in developmental education and reducing the need for any kind of remediation will help more people in our state complete college – and do it more quickly. That'll give us a more robust workforce, help us attract business investment, and make our state more globally competitive.

■ **College professionals** (leaders, faculty and staffers)

Long, inflexible developmental education (or remedial) sequences discourage students and contribute to the decision to drop out. We're scaling up innovative developmental education practices to be more flexible and equip students to do college level work as quickly as possible. We also want to show students how developmental work moves them toward their long-term career goals. All of this is based on objective evidence of what works for students. These new techniques will improve our graduation rate.



A HALLWAY CONVERSATION

Here is how you might talk about DEI during the social hour of a professional conference or at a chance meeting with a legislator at a community event:

- “You know, my college is part of the Developmental Education Initiative, an \$18 million national effort that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation are backing to get students up to speed for college coursework. Each college has been experimenting with different strategies, and we want to roll out the best ones to all our students and then across the nation.”
- “The two most promising things we’ve tried at my college are ____ and _____. By 20XX, we are going to be doing these things with X portion of our dev ed students.”
- “Not only are my college and all these other colleges studying the best ways to help these students, we’ve got a policy team working with state legislatures to make it easier for us to do this work.”
- “I’m glad you’re interested. Give me your card, and I’ll email you a couple of handouts that’ll tell you a little bit more about it. I’d love your support of what we’re doing.”

HANDOUTS FOR YOU TO DISTRIBUTE

Go to www.deionline.org/resources and click on “Communications” to access PDF handouts to read and share with your contacts.

Developmental Education is Good for Business and the Economy

Winning Formula: Institutional innovations + State policy strides = Students succeeding in college

Examples of Promising Interventions at DEI Colleges