



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE



**DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE**
Accelerating Achievement

**Promising Developments: The National Landscape for
Developmental Education Improvement**

**Testimony of Michael Collins
Program Director, Jobs for the Future**

Connecticut Higher Education Employment and Advancement Committee

College Remediation Informational Forum

Thursday, January 28, 2010

Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street, 8th Floor
Boston, MA 02110
Phone: 617.728.4446
Fax: 617.603.4475
www.jff.org



ACTIVITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN NORTH CAROLINA

WORKFORCE READINESS: These initiatives focus on developing career advancement opportunities for low-skilled adults.

Breaking Through

Timeframe: 2005 to present

Initiative Purpose: Breaking Through is a multiyear demonstration project to promote and strengthen the efforts of innovative community colleges across the country to help low-literacy adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs.

Funders: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, GlaxoSmithKline Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

JFF Role: Manages the initiative in partnership with the National Council for Workforce Education

Partner(s) in NC: Durham Technical Community College, Durham; Davidson County Community College, Lexington; Forsyth Technical Community College, Winston-Salem; South Piedmont Community College, Polkton; Pitt Community College, Winterville; and Pamlico Community College, Grantsboro

Ready for College

Timeframe: 2007 to 2009

Initiative Purpose: The Ready for College: Adult Education Transitions Program supported state and local efforts to increase the rate at which young adults successfully transition to postsecondary education.

Funders: U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education

JFF Role: Technical assistance provider

Partner(s) in NC: North Carolina Community College System

Outcomes and Next Steps: North Carolina's Breaking Through sites form a network of colleges that received funding from the U.S. Department of Education Ready for College initiative to demonstrate innovative strategies to advance out-of-school youth into college degree programs. In 2009, Breaking Through entered a new phase that combines documenting best practices, documenting evidence of outcomes for low-skilled adults, and scaling up the work in several sites. Durham Technical Community College, one of Breaking Through's seven leadership sites nationwide, has received a Scale Up grant to further increase student retention and achievement.

Introduction

Committee Chairs Handley and Willis, and distinguished members: Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement committee today on college remediation.

My name is Michael Collins, and I am a program director at Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based research, policy, and advocacy organization, where I co-direct the Achieving the Dream and Developmental Education Initiatives—two national initiatives designed to increase the success of students in our nation’s community colleges generously funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in partnership with 18 regional and national funders.

Achieving The Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative

Jobs for the Future leads the state policy effort in both of these initiatives. We support 16 states—including Connecticut—by working with community college system offices, departments of higher education, coordinating boards, and community college associations to inform the development of state-level policies that accelerate institutional efforts to improve success outcomes for students in community college.

The Achieving the Dream Initiative, launched in 2004, is focused on improving success in community college with a focus on student progression through developmental education, college-credit courses, and ultimately credentials and degrees. The Developmental Education Initiative, launched in 2009, is designed to grow and spread effective practices and policies from the demonstration phase (2004-2009) of Achieving the Dream. Both initiatives place an emphasis on students who are low-income, students of color, and student who are academically underprepared for success in higher education. Over 100 participating community colleges are each implementing innovative demonstrations and pilots to dramatically improve student outcomes.

Spotlight on Developmental Education as Lever for Community College Completion

In today’s economy, it is increasingly clear that a high school diploma isn’t enough to cross the threshold into the middle class. Some form of postsecondary training is required to have a reasonable chance at earning a family-supporting wage. As a result, growing numbers of people—many whom have not considered higher education in the past—are turning to higher education to improve their chances of success. More than two-thirds of Americans enroll in higher education or training after high school, but a much smaller percentage actually end up earning a degree. Community colleges are increasingly being viewed as a powerful lever to both improve individuals’ earning prospects and to increase our nation’s competitiveness.

There is broad consensus among the federal government, national funders, and the social policy community that better outcomes in developmental education can dramatically improve community college completion rates. Just last night in his State of the Union Address, President Obama acknowledged the unique role that the community college sector can play in improving educational

attainment and reiterated his support for the American Graduation Initiative, which is designed to provide the support community colleges need to innovate and graduate 5 million more Americans by 2020.

Developmental Education Enrollment Rates In Community College

While demand for credentials and degrees is high, many students' plans to earn credentials and degrees are upended early in their academic careers because they lack the academic preparation they need to be successful in college-level work. According to an analysis of the National Longitudinal Education Survey (NELS:88), nearly 60 percent of students in community college enrolled in at least one developmental education course. While these numbers are daunting, they actually underestimate the incidence of developmental education by not including older students. National experts estimate that as many as two thirds of all community college students have academic deficiencies in one or more core academic subject areas that appreciably decrease their chances of completion.

The Cost of Developmental Education

Developmental education is expensive in terms of actual cost and opportunity cost. The most recent estimates put the annual cost of developmental education between \$1.2 and \$ 2.3 billion at community colleges and \$500 million at public four-year colleges. Students also pay a substantial cost because of the time spent foregoing earnings and the increased time it takes to earn the credentials that would give them a leg up in the labor market. Further, students with substantial developmental education requirements can deplete their financial aid while taking courses that do not count towards the credentials and degrees for which they have enrolled.

Factors Influencing the Need for Developmental Education

The most frequently cited factor of developmental education is the weak academic preparation that many high school students have upon entry into higher education, largely due to the misalignment of high school exit and college entrance standards and expectations. But there are other factors: older students returning to college after being in the workforce and raising families, workers attempting to upgrade their skills, and people who had not considered college in the past but are compelled to acquire new skills to increase their labor market value. All of these factors contribute to large enrollments in developmental education. The challenge of upgrading skills among working adults will grow in the coming years. For the foreseeable future, regardless of how quickly we improve K-12 performance, developmental education will be critical to addressing the gap between high school and college expectations and to academic catch-up for returning adults.

Promising Strategies

Despite the weak evidence base and the complexity of developmental education, there are some promising developments and emerging evidence of strategies and approaches that make a difference:

Preventive Strategies

Across the nation, an increasing number of community college systems are playing an active role in reaching out to K-12 to close the gaps in standards and expectations between high school and postsecondary education. This work is informed by state-level college readiness initiatives and national efforts, such as the work many states are doing through Achieve, Inc. to develop college readiness standards. There are also a growing number of states that are reaching into the high schools to test if students are on track to be college ready upon graduation. States are also increasingly considering options for students to remediate academic deficiencies prior to enrolling in college. For instance, Florida recently passed legislation that allows high school students to be taught the top-level developmental education course curriculum while in high school. Finally, we are seeing increasing numbers of states identifying dual enrollment as a strategy to reduce the need for developmental education. A recent Community College Research Center analysis of success in gatekeeper courses in Virginia identified better outcomes for students who participated in dual enrollment. The Connecticut Community College system has been actively engaged in these preventive strategies through Achieving the Dream and is continuing this work through the Developmental Education Initiative.

Assessment and Placement Policy

There is general consensus in the field that the intake process for community college is critical to student success. Thus, states are increasingly revising their assessment and placement policies so that they are consistently applied from college to college. This can help ensure that students who have academic needs do not fall through the cracks and miss out on the help they need to be successful. While states and institutions have made progress in this regard, resource constraints prevent the optimal use of assessment instruments as enrollments continue to grow and institutional staffs are often too thin to consider multiple factors in a student's placement referral. This pressures institutions to rely on a single cut score for placement in spite of the fact that students with identical scores can have very different needs. Institutions need additional capacity and resources to capitalize on improvements in assessment and placement policy so that they have the time to consider all of the factors that influence students' chances of success and make informed choices about the interventions to which students are referred. Connecticut has made great strides in this area, recently setting standardized placement cut scores to insure consistency and coherence in placement decisions across the community college system.

Developmental Education Redesign

There is strong evidence that traditional delivery of developmental education does not work well for students who test just beneath the cut score and for students who test multiple levels below college proficiency. For the first group, the data reveal that students who have narrowly missed the cut score are as likely to be successful as students who tested just above the standard. Rather than being placed into developmental education, these students are better off entering directly into college-level courses with academic supports. For students who are multiple levels below college proficiency, very few ever complete their developmental education requirements, let alone enroll in a college or earn credentials or degrees. In the Achieving the Dream sample only 16% of the students who were

referred three levels below college-level finished their developmental education requirements. Promising strategies for this group of students include those that decrease the time students spend in developmental education. For example, strategies that combine multiple levels of developmental education, such as the Fast Start model at the Community College of Denver, where a Community College Research Center evaluation shows an increase in the rates at which students complete their developmental education requirements. Other promising strategies for which there is evidence of effectiveness include learning communities, which provide a cohort approach to learning; student success courses, which provide orientation and information on how to navigate college; and supplemental instruction featuring embedded tutors.

Data and Performance Measurement

One of the most promising developments in the effort to improve services to academically underprepared students is the work that states have done to improve their ability to track and analyze longitudinal data on student progression and outcomes. Connecticut and the other Developmental Education Initiative states are on the leading edge of this work. These states have collaborated to identify key performance indicators for developmental education that track both shorter-term and final measures. The states will use results on these indicators to identify, document, and disseminate the practices and policies that are most effective in improving outcomes in developmental education. This work is critically important because it can identify high performing institutions, which the rigorous statistical research mentioned earlier fails to do. Identifying institutions that are successful in serving students who test into developmental education is a key step in improving outcomes for students who test into developmental education.

Finance

There is emerging evidence that structuring financial aid for persistence rather than just access can make a difference for low-income students. Many students in developmental education are low-income and are juggling work, family, and school. Promising strategies in this area include incenting full-time attendance and performance-based scholarships. In the first area Connecticut is a leader, packaging financial aid to encourage students who are able to attend full-time to do so. In the second area, the Opening Doors performance-based scholarship demonstration evaluated by MDRC has shown positive results for credit accumulation and persistence. MDRC has launched a new study to further evaluate the effectiveness of performance-based scholarships to improve persistence for low-income students.

The fragile financial condition of low-income students who are struggling in developmental education warrants special attention. Completing their developmental education requirements and advancing to college-level courses, credentials, and degrees dramatically improves the quality of students' lives and puts them within striking distance of earning family supporting wages and contributing to our economic competitiveness. The data suggest that most students make a valiant attempt—most developmental education enrollments end in successful completion—but that these students often fail to go the distance. Many students successfully pass one or even two courses but then do not complete their requirements. In their recent survey *With their Whole Lives Ahead of Them*, Public Agenda cited the number one cause of students leaving college to be financial stress and the inability to juggle family, work, and school. Redesign efforts that minimize the time spent in developmental education and that help students go the distance to earn credentials and degrees will be critical to any robust strategy to improve outcomes.

Challenges to the National Momentum to Improve Outcomes in Developmental Education

The growing demands on community colleges today come at a time of severe fiscal constraints. During lean times, the core supports that developmental education students need to be successful—such as financial aid, advising and counseling, and other academic and student services supports—are often the first to be cut. The influx of traditional age students in community colleges who would have attended a four-year institution in better economic times adds additional stress to the system and runs the risk of weakening the colleges' ability to provide the complex supports that students need to persist and succeed in developmental education.

Even in this economy, however, there is room for optimism. There are examples of states that are investing in student success strategies to improve developmental education, including support for redesign and academic and student supports during the fiscal downturn. In its last legislative session, Texas set aside \$5 million for developmental education innovation in community colleges, and the Virginia community college system plans to provide colleges with seed funding for redesign of developmental math.

These and other states participating in the Developmental Education Initiative—including Connecticut—are working to leverage state, private, and potentially federal funds to re-imagine and re-engineer developmental education to reduce the time students spend in remedial courses and accelerate student progress. When they succeed, the benefit accrues both to individual's economic success and to the state's growth and competitiveness.

It is an honor to have had this opportunity to speak before the committee today. Thank you.