Successful Remedial Education Reform Strategies:
Findings & Recommendations from CCRC’s Assessment of Evidence Series

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ECS National Forum on Education Policy
Post-Forum Workshop on Leveraging State Investments in Remedial Education
July 8, 2011
Assessment of Evidence Series

• Focused on:
  – Remedial/developmental education (assessment & placement, acceleration programs, contextualization of basic skills instruction, innovative math pedagogy)
  – Non-academic supports
  – Program & institutional structures
  – Online learning
  – Organizational improvement

• Impacts: Best-quality quantitative research
• Implications: Qualitative research, theoretical literature, practitioner input
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement Testing</td>
<td>Tests only weakly predictive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developmental Acceleration</td>
<td>Many promising models; for which students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contextualization &amp; Innovative Math Pedagogy</td>
<td>Very promising but not widely used. . . why not?</td>
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<td>Non-Academic Support</td>
<td>Mechanisms: creating social relationships, clarifying aspirations &amp; commitment, developing college know-how, and addressing conflicting life demands</td>
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<td>Program &amp; Inst. Structure</td>
<td>Institutional complexity may adversely affect student decision-making</td>
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<td>Online learning</td>
<td>Completion is lower (after controlling for just about everything)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Improvement</td>
<td>CCs tend to be weak in organizational practices that promote high performance</td>
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Four Broad Findings & Recommendations

• #1: Complexity & Structure
• #2: Faculty Engagement
• #3: Academic Alignment & Assessment
• #4: Continuous Improvement
Complexity & Structure

• *All* humans make bad choices in unduly complex environments.

• College can seem unduly complex to students, due to:
  – A bewildering array of options
  – Lack of information integration
  – Unnecessary bureaucracy
  – Tools convenient / inexpensive to the college
Complexity & Structure

• Recommendation: Simplify the structures and bureaucracies that students must navigate.
  – Re-examine larger policy and practice
  – Align developmental material, placement tests, & college-level curriculum
  – Streamline & contextualize developmental education with student’s program of choice (requires program-choice advisement)
  – Allow fast-track options
Faculty Engagement

- Substantial organizational improvement requires strong employee involvement.

- In CCs, student success goals can be hampered by:
  - lack of faculty/staff engagement
  - large part-time workforce
  - organizational silos
Faculty Engagement

• Organizations with strong employee involvement in reform:
  – Ensure employees have deep understanding of goals and methods of reform
  – *Empower* employees as part of reform
  – Encourage staff to work in cross-functional teams
  – Create challenging yet meaningful goals
  – Present evidence of successes
Faculty Engagement

• Previous attempts to broadly engage faculty have not always been successful

• Perhaps because reforms:
  – Often focus on student retention / completion (institutional effectiveness)
  – Not on student learning (instructional effectiveness)
Faculty Engagement

• Recommendation: Empower faculty to set challenging and meaningful student learning goals
  – Include content knowledge/skills, but *also*…
  – Cognitive strategies (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving)
  – Academic behaviors (e.g., study skills, self-monitoring, communication skills)
  – Decision-making and planning
Academic Alignment & Assessment

• In K-12, schools effective with disadvantaged students have “instructional program coherence”:
  – Well-coordinated, “rationalized” curriculum
  – Common instructional framework
  – Clearly defined learning outcomes
  – Integrated assessments & academic supports

• Colleges do not put strong emphasis on these.
Academic Alignment & Assessment

• Recommendation: Faculty work together to craft common learning outcomes.
• This process would:
  – Help faculty from different disciplines communicate and align expectations for reading, writing, & math
  – Help clarify college readiness standards
  – Help part-time instructors understand course goals
Continuous Improvement

• Practices of high-performance organizations:
  – Strong leadership
  – Customer focus
  – Functional alignment
  – Process improvement
  – Use of measurement for improvement
  – Employee involvement
  – Training and professional development
  – External linkages (e.g., K-12, 4-yrs, employers)
Continuous Improvement

• Recommendations:
  – Involve faculty & mid-level administrators in measuring outcomes, setting goals, identifying gaps, and making changes.
  – To support process, rethink committee structures, professional development strategies, and incentives.
What can state systems do?

• Convening & connecting role
  – Create high-quality state data systems
  – Facilitate discussion and connection across the system
  – Non-threatening context to discuss data and outcomes
  – Disseminate solid research evidence to member colleges
Series Reports & Briefs

http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?uid=845

- Edgecombe, N., Accelerating the academic achievement of students referred to developmental education: A review of the evidence.
- Hodara, M., Reforming mathematics classroom pedagogy: Evidence-based findings and recommendations for the developmental math classroom.
- Jaggars, S. S., Online learning: Does it help low-income and underprepared students?
- Jenkins, D., Redesigning community colleges for completion: Lessons from research on high-performance organizations.
- Karp, M. M., Toward a new understanding of non-academic student support: Four mechanisms encouraging positive student outcomes in the community college.
- Perin, D., Facilitating student achievement through contextualization.
- Scott-Clayton, J., The shapeless river: Does a lack of structure inhibit students’ progress at community colleges?
For more information:

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