

BEST PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE BUDGETING

DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO CLOSE THE GAPS

3A – Research Proven Policies and Practices

SUMMARY

Key Points:

- To close the gap between its current and desired state, a college should review practices that researchers have proven effective in improving college performance to determine if these practices are appropriate for their own plan and budget.
- For example, over half of high school students entering community college are already behind in their readiness for college-level coursework. A college may want to explore ways to help students plan, initiate, and sustain success. It may use proven strategies such as orientation to help prepare students for the college environment and first-year programs to build relationships with other students, faculty, and staff. A college may also explore strategies to support students struggling to complete the program.
- After adopting the proven strategies, it is important for a college to provide resources for faculty to meet regularly to examine course and program outcomes and to refine the programs and strategies as necessary. In addition, a college should provide faculty and staff with professional development opportunities that reinforce efforts that help to close achievement gaps and improve overall student success.

Related Award Program Criterion:

- Criterion 3.A.1: Institutional Priorities (Mandatory). The Applicant has developed a set of institutional priorities as demonstrated by the presentation of the institutional priorities in the Supplementary Materials. The Applicant can provide research citations and/or other references of research in support of the development of the institutional priorities in the Supplemental Materials. Note that the Applicant does not necessarily have to use the term "institutional priorities" in its budget process or document – any term is acceptable as long as the underlying concept is met.

INTRODUCTION

After a community college has developed a set of SMARTER goals, identified gaps between the desired goal state and the college's current condition, and performed root cause analysis on those gaps, it must find ways to close those gaps. Many of those goals and gaps will relate directly to improving student achievement. Hence, the starting point is to research policies and practices that have effectively improved student achievement elsewhere.

This Best Practice document provides an overview of the policies and practices that have been shown to be effective for improving student learning in community colleges.

I. PROVEN POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Background. A college's budgeting process must identify potentially effective policies and practices to improve student achievement so that these practices can be supported by action planning and budget allocations. This begins by starting the budgeting and planning process early enough to allow time to perform research and consider new methods of working. Research into new and effective policies and practices must also be rooted in an understanding of where the college has not met its desired goals and the root causes for that condition. This helps focus research and consideration of new policies and practices on the areas that matter most.

Recommendation. This document describes a number of policies and practices that have been proven effective by professional researchers. Readers are encouraged to consult the endnotes for citations. The GFOA recommends that colleges reflect on these practices and determine the role that they might play in the college's own plan and budget for improving student achievement.

Finding Other Practices

It is likely that a college will need to identify other new policies and practices besides those documented here. For example, a new scheduling practice or new sources of revenue may be needed. Colleges are encouraged to network with peers, consult professional journals and associations, and take other steps to find solid ideas as necessary.¹

HELPING STUDENTS TO PLAN FOR SUCCESS

In the United States, 60 percent of recent high school graduates enter community college already behind in their readiness for college-level coursework.² This suggests that community colleges should make a concerted effort to help students plan to be successful in college.³ Specific practices colleges should consider include:

- **New approaches to placement.** Research suggests that traditional approaches to placement tests produce sub-optimal accuracy rates.⁴ Accurate assessment is critical because students who enroll in needed developmental education courses during the first term are more likely to complete their developmental sequence.⁵ Colleges can take a variety of approaches to refining their approaches to placement, including taking high school grades into account, expanding the grounds for waiving placement exams (e.g., sufficient high school GPA), better aligning placement exams with the college curricula so that it is a more accurate predictor of success, enhancing the diagnostic value and use of the test in order to justify the investment in a more precise testing instrument, and better preparing students to take the tests.⁶
- **Orientation.** Research shows that mandatory student orientations lead to higher student satisfaction, greater use of student support services, and improved retention of at-risk students.⁷ Common components of orientation are information about and/or use of the college's personal/social support services; information about and/or use of the college's academic support network; and use of information resources (e.g., library, finding and evaluating sources).⁸
- **Academic goal setting and planning.** This encompasses course selection, but also identification of long-term goals with students. Colleges should help students set long-term goals, identify the plan to achieve the goal, and help them to update the plan and goals as circumstances suggest.⁹

INITIATING SUCCESS

After planning for success, community colleges should invest resources in helping students to start college successfully.¹⁰ Specific practices colleges should consider include:

- **Accelerating developmental education.** Research suggests that accelerated developmental education models lead to improved outcomes for developmental students.¹¹ Examples of methods to accelerate developmental education include mainstreaming higher-level developmental students and teaching developmental materials in the context of the student's chosen field of study (e.g., basic math for nursing).
- **First-year experience programs.** These programs help first-year students build relationships with other students, faculty, and staff. Common components of these programs are time management

Learning More about What Works

Community colleges should consult the websites for the following organizations to learn more about effective practices for improving student learning:

- Achieving the Dream
- The Community College Research Center
- Completion by Design

skill training and provision of information on academic and non-academic support services.¹² Participating students demonstrate better relations with faculty, better time management skills, and greater awareness of support resources.¹³

- **College success course.** Colleges can offer courses on college skills such as note-taking, time management, and study skills. Students who complete these courses are more likely to complete other courses, earn better grades, and obtain degrees.¹⁴
- **Learning community.** Learning communities are small groups of students taking two or more linked classes together. Ideally, the instructors coordinate the content of the courses and jointly review student progress. Learning communities may contribute to higher grades, credit accumulation, and greater learning satisfaction.¹⁵

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Colleges should work to sustain the success of their students through to terminal completion.¹⁶ In particular, effective colleges provide targeted support for struggling students, especially where there are systematic gaps between different segments of students.¹⁷ Sustaining success can take a variety of forms including:

- **Tutoring.** Research suggests that participation in tutoring is associated with higher GPAs and pass rates.¹⁸ Tutoring is often conducted one-on-one, but could be done in small groups or online.
- **Supplemental instruction.** Supplemental instruction is a regular, supplemental class for a portion of students enrolled in a larger course section. Research suggests that students participating in supplemental instruction earn higher grades than non-participating students.¹⁹
- **Encouraging class attendance.** Colleges should consider steps to encourage regular attendance at classes, as attendance has been shown to be powerful predictor of academic performance.²⁰ For example, colleges that use an alert system that flags students who miss more than three class periods have higher completion rates.
- **Proactive identification and referral.** Colleges should proactively identify struggling students in their courses and refer to them to assistance.²¹ Research suggests that when colleges alert students to their academic difficulties, students are more likely to successfully complete the course and to persist in their program of study.²²
- **Experiential learning beyond the classroom.** Internships, apprenticeships, clinical assignments, and other “hands-on” experiences enhance students’ skills and help them develop professional networks.²³

ONGOING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Community colleges should provide resources for faculty to meet regularly to examine course and program outcomes for addressing achievement gaps and improving student success, and to assess programs and teaching strategies from the perspective of current research on effective practice.²⁴

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS ALIGNED WITH STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS

Colleges should provide faculty and staff with professional development opportunities that reinforce efforts that help to close achievement gaps and improve overall student success. In particular, colleges should provide training to faculty and staff on using data and research to improve programs and services.²⁵

Endnotes

¹ William D. Eggers and Shalabh Kumar Singh, *The Public Innovator’s Playbook* (Harvard Kennedy School / Deloitte, 2009).

² T. Bailey, “Challenge and opportunity: Rethinking the role and function of developmental education in community colleges,” *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 145 (2009): 11–30.

³ The grouping of practices suggested by the work of the Center for Community College Student Engagement in “A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success (A First Look)” (Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program, 2012).

⁴ These two studies suggest large numbers of “severe errors” in placement. See J. Scott-Clayton, “Do high-stakes placement exams predict college success?”, CCRC Working Paper No. 41 (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center, 2012) and C. Belfield and P.M. Crosta, “Predicting success in college: The importance of placement tests and high school transcripts,” CCRC Working Paper No. 42 (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center, 2012).

⁵ “A Matter of Degrees” by the Center for Community College Student Engagement cites J. Weissman, C. Bulakowski, and M.K. Jumisko, “Using research to evaluate developmental education programs and policies,” in *Implementing effective policies for remedial and developmental education: New directions for community colleges*, ed. J. M. Ignash (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 100, 73–80.

⁶ Pamela Burdman, “Where to begin? The evolving role of placement exams for students starting college” (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2012).

⁷ "A Matter of Degrees" by the Center for Community College Student Engagement cites H. Boylan and D. Saxon, "What works in remediation: Lessons from 30 years of research" (2002). Prepared for the League for Innovation in the Community College. Retrieved from <http://inpathways.net/Boylan--What%20Works.pdf>.

⁸ Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees."

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The grouping of a practices suggested by the work of Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees."

¹¹ S.W. Cho, E. Kopko, and D. Jenkins, "New evidence of success for community college remedial English students: Tracking the outcomes of students in the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)" (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center, 2012).

¹² Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees."

¹³ Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees" cites J.E. Brownell, and L.E. Swaner, "Five high-impact practices: Research on learning outcomes, completion, and quality" (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010).

¹⁴ Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees" cites C. Moore and N. Shulock, "Student progress toward degree completion: Lessons from the research literature." (2009). Retrieved from http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Student_Progress_Toward_Degree_Completion.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Category of solutions suggested by the work of Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees."

¹⁷ Davis Jenkins, "Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success: A Study of High- and Low-Impact Community Colleges" (New York: Community College Research Center, 2007).

¹⁸ Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees" cites H. Boylan, L. Bliss, and B. Bonham, "Program components and their relationship to student success," *Journal of Developmental Education* 20, no. 3 (1997): 2–4, 6, 8.

¹⁹ Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees" cites E.T. Pascarella and P.T. Terenzini, "How college affects students: A third decade of research," vol. 2 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

²⁰ Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees" cites M. Crede, S.G. Roch, and U.M. Kieszczynka, "Class attendance in college: A metaanalytic review of the relationship of class attendance with grades and student characteristics," *Review of Educational Research* 80, no. 2 (June 2010): 272–295. However, the CCCSE also notes that there is little research on the effectiveness of community college attendance policies as means to improve attendance.

²¹ Jenkins, "Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success."

²² "Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Success" cites C. Bourdon and R. Carducci, "What works in the community colleges: A synthesis of literature on best practices" (Los Angeles: UCLA Graduate School of Education, 2002) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED471397).

²³ Center for Community College Student Engagement, "A Matter of Degrees."

²⁴ "Field Guide for Improving Student Success," Achieving the Dream.

²⁵ Ibid.