

Executive Summary

Student success matters and many community colleges are innovating and leading the way in finding solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing students. This report provides five examples of what is working now. These leaders are not waiting for brighter budget times or “better students.” They are delivering high quality programs and services now, and they are demonstrating success.

With a student body of 2.5 million and 112 colleges in almost every region of the state, California Community Colleges are the world’s largest system of higher education. Indeed, over 70 percent of California’s postsecondary students are enrolled in community college. However, recent studies have revealed an enormous gap between the enrollment and completion rates among community college students. In *Divided We Fail: Improving College Completion and Closing the Racial Gap in California’s Community Colleges*,¹ researchers found that 70 percent of students did not earn a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year university after six years. This mismatch between access and success is a serious concern to the welfare of California where the economic recovery will largely depend on a more educated workforce and the ability of community colleges to significantly increase student success. With a projected shortage of one million bachelor degrees by the year 2025,² California policymakers and college leaders must take up the issue of completion in a more serious and focused way and we believe the practices in this report can help the dialogue move forward.

We recognize that California’s colleges and universities are struggling with decreased state funding and we must continue to demand adequate support. We also believe that the practices highlighted in this report, and all other efforts to improve college completion rates, are good for students, good for future state revenues, and in some cases actually save the state money through innovation and efficiency. Practices such as utilizing data to target academic interventions, prioritizing enrollment for students with a goal of degree, transfer, or vocational certificate, requiring students to complete an educational plan, streamlining the assessments for English and math across the system, and accelerating progress for students through basic skills or remedial courses, are just a few proven innovations that can get significantly more students across the finish line.

None of these programs asked to be recognized or spotlighted, but each of them are deserving of our recognition and our efforts to shine praise and attention on them. More importantly, they should compel us to ask, how can we support expanding what works to every community college in California? And what are the consequences if we do not?

1 Moore, Colleen and Shulock, Nancy. *Divided We Fail: Improving Completion and Closing Racial Gaps in California’s Community Colleges*. Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, California State University, Sacramento. October 2010.

2 Johnson, Hans and Sengupta, Ria. *Closing the Gap: Meeting California’s Need for College Graduates*. Public Policy Institute of California. 2009.

While every example is unique and addressing different challenges, several commonalities quickly emerged and we believe they provide a critical framework for any effort to improve student success:

INFORMATION MATTERS

Every program began with researching student data to help college faculty and leaders understand and contextualize the challenges they faced and what solutions were needed.

WORKING TOGETHER

In each of these efforts, the barriers that were preventing colleagues from talking to one another were taken down. The consensus was that cross-campus collaboration, planning, and executing could improve student success. They acknowledged that students do not reside in one or two departments, and that support across different departments and disciplines breaks down silos and improves efficiency in an environment of scarce resources.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Beyond improving curriculum and working with faculty on instruction, the practices acknowledge the opportunities beyond the classroom that contribute toward success including: access to tutoring labs, counseling, and orientation.

COLLEGE LEADERS ARE KEY

Executive leaders play the important role of setting priorities for their respective campuses. Colleges with leaders who embrace innovation and a focus on using data, working collaboratively, and supporting student services to improve student success are essential.

Californians want to see their tax dollars spent in the most productive way possible and colleges must be good stewards of the limited resources they have while balancing the needs the students they have. Indeed, producing graduates capable of contributing their savvy and skills in the workforce is a great return on investment for the state of California and a positive personal payoff for the graduate. With this in mind, the state budget and public policies that promote student success and foster—not hinder—the innovation and expansion of the efforts highlighted in the report are essential to California’s ability to produce the educated workforce our economy requires.

If we do not take the opportunity to scale programs that are working now, California’s downward spiral of low college completion rates will set the stage for producing a generation of young adults less educated than previous ones. California’s ability to remain a beacon of innovation and prosperity is inextricably tied to the future success of our community colleges. Further research, task force committees, commissions are not required. ***We know what works now; if we embrace it, we can imagine a strong economic future for California because more community college students will reach their goals and succeed more often than not.***



City College of San Francisco in partnership with San Francisco State University

Metro Academies are “schools within schools” at both City College of San Francisco and San Francisco State that give students a personalized educational home during the first two years of college—the critical time when large numbers of underserved students drop out. Outreach is focused on students who are **first-generation, low-income, and/or underrepresented**. The goal is to increase college graduation with both two-year and four-year degrees, and to dramatically increase transfer from community colleges to the Cal State University system. The program is unusual because it provides students a nearly identical, parallel program—regardless of whether they are attending a community college or the Cal State University system.

Each Metro Academy has a career theme. Together, City College of San Francisco and San Francisco State currently have five Metro Academies in progress: two academies focused on health sciences, two focused on early childhood education, and a fifth in the area of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). Each Metro Academy has the capacity to serve 140 students.

CORE ELEMENTS

- Studying in a **long duration learning community**, Metro students in a given Academy take eight classes together over four semesters, forming close bonds among peers, faculty, and counselors.
- **Student services are embedded** in core classes: academic advising, tutoring, access to financial aid advising, and early intervention if a student starts falling behind.
- Students develop individual **education plans** with a dedicated academic counselor who follows each student over time.
- One hundred percent of Metro classes are general education courses that **count for graduation** with an associate degree, for university transfer, and for graduation with a bachelor’s in all 241 majors in the Cal State University system.
- Faculty participate in a **faculty learning community** which gives instructors 45 hours of professional development in tested “high impact educational practices.”

Metro’s demonstration and evaluation was funded by The James Irvine Foundation, the US Department of Education, the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, and others. Main support for Metro’s ongoing operation comes from the home institutions. Metro is sustainable because it is based primarily on re-configuring services that are already institutionalized—including general education courses, academic counseling, and tutoring. Metro re-focuses these resources around students in learning communities, creating a much more personalized experience.

SUCCESS

- Two-year Graduation and Transfer Preparation: Compared to other students who place at the same level, Metro students at City College are nine percent more likely to reach sixty units, the number of units necessary to graduate with an associate degree and to transfer to a university.
- Persistence: At San Francisco State, usually only six out of ten underserved students persist into the fifth semester. In contrast, more than eight out of ten Metro students make it into their junior year—with many measures showing that they are significantly more engaged and self-confident.
- Efficiency: At both City College and SF State, Metro produces significant savings per graduate by helping students progress more rapidly and by curtailing ‘excess units’—students taking courses that do not count toward graduation. This has real cost-saving implications for students and the colleges themselves. It also frees up seats for students waiting in line for high demand courses.



For more information on the Metro Academies at City College and SF State, please contact:

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