

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.***

SUCCESS CENTERS

Chaffey College

Chaffey College's Success Centers were launched in 2000 in response to over half its students assessing as **underprepared for college level work**. Chaffey features a network of eight centers—four on campus, four off—that enhance the college learning experience for students. The centers are an **academic support** structure based on the philosophy that students: 1) in any discipline should have the opportunity to acquire learning tools and strategies that they need to succeed in any learning situation; 2) achieve a measure of confidence in their learning ability; 3) have material presented in their own learning styles; and, 4) develop the skills to become life-long learners. The centers function as an extension of the classroom, not ancillary support services. One-third of the courses at Chaffey require students to access the Success Centers at no additional cost. Students who do not have a course requirement can also access any Success Center for any learning need.



CORE ELEMENTS

- On-campus centers include: Writing Success Center, Language Success Center, Math Success Center, Multidisciplinary/Reading Success Center.
- Students can participate in Directed Learning Activities where subject-specific activities are completed independently and followed by a session with a Success Center tutor. All of these activities are designed by classroom faculty and engage the learning process rather than practice or drills.
- Students have access to one-on-one tutoring.
- Students can participate in workshops to access learning techniques and study skills or in learning groups with lessons focusing on collaborative learning.
- The Success Centers provide students with tools to complete their classroom assignments including computers, software, internet access, and other specialized materials.
- Each site is supported by a full-time instructional specialist, and the program is coordinated by a full-time faculty member
- Faculty participate in the Faculty Success Center where they can share and develop effective teaching strategies.

SUCCESS

- Scale: 16,000 students access a Success Center annually. This represents between 55-60% of Chaffey's total student population.
- Improved Rates of Transfer: Since the launch of the Success Centers in 2000, the transfer rates for students who originally assessed in pre-college level math and English increased from 6% to more than 30%.
- Success rates for students who access the Success Centers are approximately 20% higher than for students who do not access.
- Change in Student Behavior: Success Center access increased after students took a course with a Success Center requirement. Nearly 43% of students who had taken a previous course that required Success Center access sought out subsequent support through the Success Centers, suggesting an increase in students' self-directed help-seeking behavior.
- Impact on Degree Completion: Over 60% of Chaffey's degree-earners were required to access the Success Center during their academic career.
- The college has so embraced the philosophy of the Success Center that it has added a Faculty Success Center for faculty to improve the scholarship of teaching and learning and support innovative instructional practices.

For more information on Chaffey College's Success Centers, please contact:

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