

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.*

Equity Scorecard

Los Medanos College

Latino and African American students make up approximately 40% of the total student population at Los Medanos College. Based on a cohort study of new students ages 17-19 to the college, only 6% of African American students and 32% of Latino students become transfer ready within 5 years. In an effort to improve transfer ready rates for these students, in 2009, Los Medanos launched the use of the Equity Scorecard. The Equity Scorecard is a process that uses data, broken down by race and ethnicity, to identify campus-wide barriers to student success and to pinpoint areas for improvement. The initiative's first phase is currently focusing on improving the success of first-time students from pre-college level English into college-level English and the Matriculation process—those up-front services that support students in reaching their college goals including registration, orientation, assessment, counseling, and other services. A second phase has been added and will look at improving transfer rates to four-year universities.

CORE ELEMENT

- Convene and train an Evidence Team comprised of 17 administrators, faculty, and staff across various departments to conduct research and analyze data that will lead to recommendations and steps to improve campus outcomes.



Los Medanos has utilized an institutional researcher to support the collection and interpretation of robust data. The contract with the Center for Urban Education, based out of USC, to apply the Equity Scorecard has been funded both through state funding of the Basic Skills Initiative and a federal Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) grant.

SUCCESS

The Equity Scorecard is a new tool at Los Medanos but has already had a tremendous impact on the way the campus approaches new interventions to improve success. Campus leaders share that they now know how to ask equity-minded questions that allow them to make interventions that close the achievement gap. Although data is still pending on actual rates of improvement, numerous changes in campus practices are being employed and considered.

- When data showed that African American students were overrepresented in late registration, a new process was instituted that attempts to reach out to students earlier in high school about the importance of college planning, particularly first-generation students, and to encourage participation in the New Student Orientations. Students who participate in the orientations qualify for early registration dates.
- The student orientation was completely revamped into a full-day orientation, including improved counseling workshops, a bilingual parent track, and holistic student services workshops, with the goal of doubling the number of incoming students who participate in the orientations each spring by 2015.
- The assessment tools for math placement are under critical review and the campus is considering a more effective way of assessing its math students and the possibility of requiring assessment preparation.
- A new partnership with local high schools is being explored to improve the English and math assessment and placement process. A joint preparation system is being explored where students in high school can prepare for the assessment, take the assessment early and take higher levels of math in high school in order to place onto college-level courses in the first year.
- A transfer academy was created that strives to enroll students in English, mathematics, and a support class delivered through the AVID program. Students are encouraged to take 12 units in their first semester, putting them on track to be transfer-ready in a more timely fashion.

For more information on the Equity Scorecard at Los Medanos College, please contact:

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