

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.***

STUDENT SUCCESSES

CENTERS

Long Beach City College

Long Beach City College (LBCC) Success Centers are places that offer students a variety of services and resources to help them succeed in their classes. The Success Centers offer supplemental learning activities designed to help students with the most challenging aspects of some of the courses at LBCC. The Success Centers were launched in 2008 in response to the large number (90%) of students assessing into pre-college level Math and English. LBCC has Success Centers in the areas of Math, Reading and Writing, Career Technical Education, and two that are multidisciplinary, covering a wider range of subjects. The goal of the Success Centers is to increase persistence, retention, and success rates of underprepared students.

CORE ELEMENTS

- All students testing into developmental Math or English must visit the Success Centers three to four times during the semester. All services at the Success Centers are free.
- Students can participate in learning activities via the following formats:
 - Workshops – larger groups taught by Instructional Specialists
 - Directed Study Groups – smaller groups taught by tutors
 - Directed Learning Activities – individual activities concluding with a follow up session with a Center staff member.
- The Success Centers provide students with tools to complete their classroom assignments including computers, printers, software, internet access, and other specialized materials.
- A research unit tracks the effectiveness of the centers and measures the impact they have on student success.
- The position of Dean of Student Success was created. The Dean leads all success efforts at LBCC, including co-chairing the Student Success Committee which is charged with scaling the Success Centers, gleaning faculty support in other disciplines where students often struggle academically (e.g., nursing and science), and aligning the pace of the Success Center curricula with instructors' teaching.

The Success Centers budgets are funded by a blend of District, Basic Skills Initiative, VTEA, and Lottery funds. The total budget for the Centers is \$2.6 million, which includes faculty, staffing, software, supplies, and all operational costs. The Centers are staffed by nearly 100 student workers and student tutors, 75 part-time, five full-time faculty members, and 20 classified staff.

SUCCESS

- Scale: LBCC's Success Centers replaced various learning labs which served 2,000 students annually whereas in 2010-11, over 24,000 students accessed supplemental learning via the Success Centers.
- Persistence and Retention: Students required to access the Success Centers had a success rate that was 43% higher, and a retention rate 34% higher than students who did not participate.
- Moving Students into College Level Work: Between 2008-09, when the Success Centers opened, and 2010-11, the success rate of students in below college-level courses increased 5%.
- Closing the Achievement Gap: The course success rate for African American students required to access the Success Centers was 70.5% compared to only 30% for those who did not access the Centers. The course success rate for female students accessing the Success Centers was 46% higher than those who did not access them.



For more information on Long Beach City College Student Success Centers, please contact:

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P r o m i s e P a t h W a y s

Predictive Placement Pilot

Long Beach City College

California, like the rest of the nation, has been said to have an “epidemic of the under-prepared,” that is, an unusually high number of students entering college unprepared for college level work. A 2010 EdSource study found that half of all first-time students at a California Community College were enrolled in a remedial course and many of them in more than one subject area. The truth, however, is that many colleges have significantly more than half of their students assessing into pre-college level work.

The lynchpin of the current system is the standardized placement test. Students’ performance on a math, English, or ESL placement test determines, to a significant degree, their educational futures. These high stakes tests determine when or if a student will ever be able to get to college level math or English and, at many colleges, it also determines whether or not a student can enroll in other courses on campus.

When a student assesses into pre-college level coursework, they will likely spend several semesters in courses that don’t count toward transfer or an associate degree before ever reaching college level work. In some scenarios, a student may have to take up to eight courses of pre-college level math before reaching their first college level course. Research has shown that students assessed as underprepared for college level courses and placed into pre-college level English or math face a disproportionately difficult challenge at ever successfully completing a certificate, degree, or transfer pathway.

Unfortunately for students, standardized placement tests may not be the best predictors of student capacity. Studies from the Community College Research Center have found that community colleges across the country unnecessarily place tens of thousands of entering students in remedial classes and that their placement decisions would be just as good if the campus relied on high school grade point averages instead of the tests.

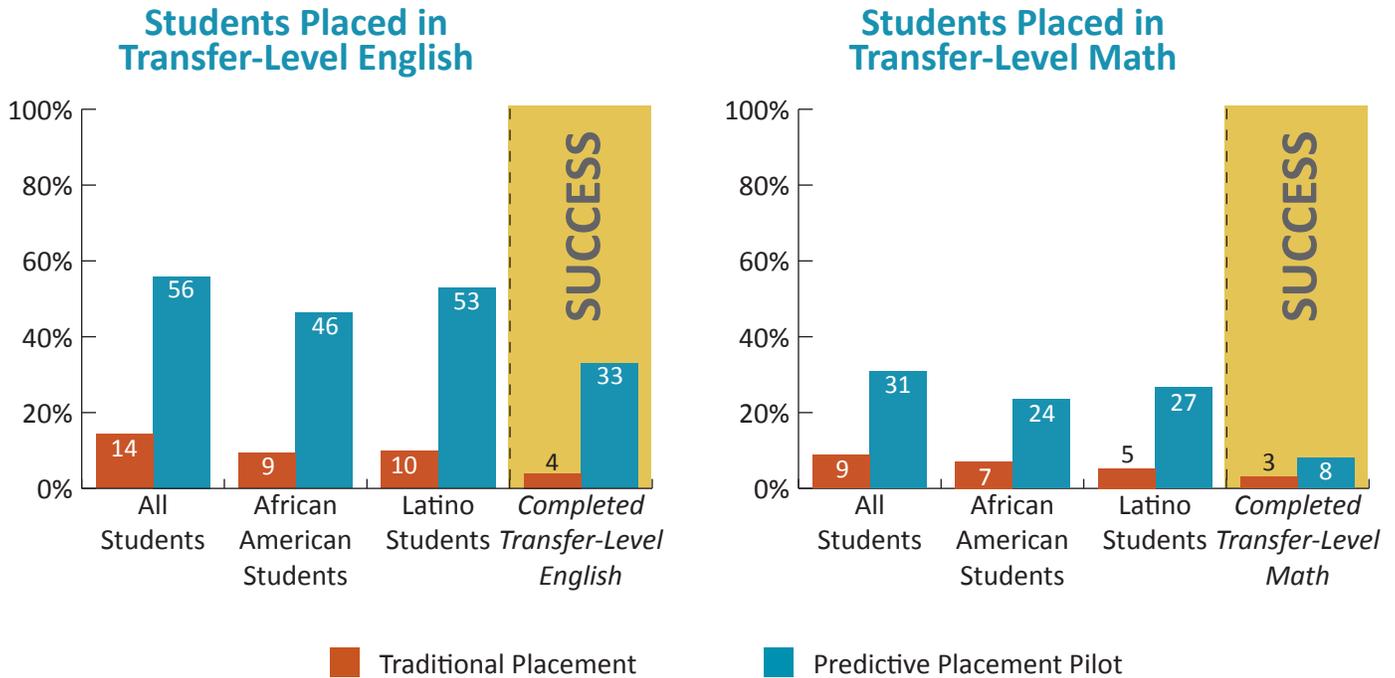
Taking into account the challenges with placement tests and the large number of students deemed “unprepared” by the test, Long Beach City College (LBCC) launched a Predictive Placement Pilot. The Predictive Placement Pilot is part of the Promise Pathways initiative, an ongoing collaboration between LBCC and Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) that focuses on preparation for college-level coursework, progression towards academic goals, and completion of certificates, degrees and/or transfer for students in the region. The premise of the Predictive Placement Pilot is to use student performance in high school (through GPA, grades, and standardized test scores) to predict college academic success and place students in college level courses. LBCC believes the more data they can use to place students, the more precise the placement will be, which will lead to greater student success. The stakes are high: when relying primarily upon standardized tests, over 90% of first-time college students assess into pre-college level English or math at Long Beach City College (LBCC). Initial results indicate that significant increases in college placement and successful course completions are possible using a new placement model based on students’ performance in high school.

CORE ELEMENTS

- High school grades, GPA, and standardized test scores are used to determine a student’s placement into college level English and math instead of relying primarily upon standardized placement tests.
- All first-time college students at LBCC from LBUSD (1,600) were offered an option to participate in the Predictive Placement Pilot; 976 LBUSD graduates agreed to participate in the LBCC Predictive Placement pilot.

SUCCESS

The Predictive Placement Pilot has shown some significant success in its first year. Overall, more students are attempting college-level work directly out of high school using the pilot model and a greater number of students were successful at completing a transfer level math or English course.



PROCESS & COST

- LBUSD provides all the data on student performance to LBCC at no cost.
- The LBCC Institutional Research Office created a program to integrate all of the LBUSD data to produce individual student placements in English and Math. Existing resources within the Institutional Research Office covered the workload to create the program.

Implementing the Predictive Placement Pilot requires no additional time for LBCC staff. In fact, LBCC believes in the long run, the new method will save students time in terms of test taking and administrators' time because they won't have to proctor exams.

"The success of the Promise Pathways initiative is impressive and has already produced tangible results for hundreds of local students," said LBCC President Eloy Ortiz Oakley. "Rethinking the way we place students is an essential part of meeting our nation's completion goals and the model we developed at LBCC provides clear evidence that significant gains in student achievement are possible at similar community colleges in California and across the nation."

LBCC is looking to expand the Predictive Placement Pilot to include other local school districts next year as well as include students who start in the Spring semester.

For more information on Promise Pathways and the Predictive Placement Pilot, please contact:
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