

# AHEAD OF THE CURVE STATE SUCCESS IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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DEVELOPMENTAL  
EDUCATION  
INITIATIVE  
Accelerating Achievement



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

Building on their work through Achieving the Dream, six states and 15 community colleges joined the Developmental Education Initiative in 2009 to take on one of higher education's most daunting challenges: improving the success of students who enter community college academically underprepared. The states and Jobs for the Future, which manages the state policy effort for both initiatives, developed the ambitious, evidence-based DEI State Policy Framework to guide large-scale, multifaceted reforms in how community colleges remediate the academic deficiencies of underprepared students.

Three years later, Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia have made significant progress in adopting the DEI policy recommendations, thereby augmenting, accelerating, and spreading developmental education systems change across their community colleges. The Developmental Education Initiative is winding down, yet these states will continue their policy efforts to improve student success through participation in the Postsecondary State Policy Network, which includes states in Achieving the Dream, Completion by Design, and the Student Success Center Network.

The DEI State Policy Framework targets five policy levers for state action: data and performance measurement; developmental education innovation and redesign; aligned expectations with K-12; assessment and placement; and finance. Within those five policy levers, JFF and the DEI states selected 55 distinct priorities, representing collective thinking on the most promising steps that states could take to improve college success for students placing into developmental education as of the outset of DEI. Additionally, a three-part strategy—data-driven improvement, commitment to innovation, and policy supports—establishes the intended goals of state action on the five policy levers.

Through an analysis of aggregated state responses on the DEI *Self-Assessment Tool*, *Ahead of the Curve* reports on which policy priorities have gained significant traction and which have lagged behind, documenting the degree and rate of policy change collectively accomplished by states from the start of Achieving the Dream to the end of the Developmental Education Initiative.

### CASE STUDIES

Six case studies in *Ahead of the Curve*—one for each state participating in the Developmental Education Initiative—highlight noteworthy state action across the DEI framework's policy levers.

### FINDINGS: OVERARCHING

**The DEI states have adopted or made progress on a significant share of policies since the start of Achieving the Dream, a**

moment when most of these states began focusing on student success in new, more deliberate ways. In 2004-05, states had adopted only one-third of the recommended policies; by 2011, they had adopted 57 percent of them, and another 24 percent were under consideration.

#### **Polymaking activity rose dramatically during the DEI years.**

Between 2009 and 2011, DEI states substantially increased their commitment to policy change, making steady progress in implementing some policies and actively considering others in spite of the economic downturn.

### OVERARCHING EXAMPLE

#### HOW NORTH CAROLINA'S SUCCESSNC FRAMEWORK IS DRIVING COMPREHENSIVE REFORM OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

The North Carolina Community College System launched SuccessNC in 2010 to provide an umbrella for its wide-ranging student success efforts.

### FINDINGS: DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

**All DEI states have enhanced their data capacity**, key to diagnosing barriers to success and developing effective solutions for developmental education students. States have built robust data systems; established appropriate metrics to gauge student success; conducted data analyses that compare performance across student populations, colleges, and states; and shared student success data with key stakeholders to facilitate continuous improvement.

## DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT CASE STUDY

### CONNECTICUT: HOW ANALYTIC TOOLS CAN HELP COLLEGES MAKE DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENTS

Connecticut has made significant strides in pulling together a vast array of educational and employment data and in building the capacity of community colleges to use this data to guide efforts to improve student success.

## FINDINGS: COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION

**DEI states have embarked on large-scale redesigns of developmental education.** In collaboration with their colleges, states are in the process of designing or implementing evidence-based reforms in the delivery and content of developmental courses.

## COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION CASE STUDIES

### TEXAS: HOW FUNDING AND CONSENSUS BUILDING CAN SEED COLLEGE INNOVATIONS

The Texas Association of Community Colleges embarked on an ambitious engagement process by conducting a campus listening tour and forming faculty leadership teams to recommend changes to developmental education, leading to all 50 community colleges signing on to the New Mathways initiative.

## VIRGINIA: HOW ENGAGING COLLEGE STAKEHOLDERS CAN PRODUCE SYSTEM-WIDE REFORM

Virginia brought together administrators and faculty to craft an overhaul of all developmental education courses offered at all 23 community colleges in the system.

## FINDINGS: POLICY SUPPORTS

**Several DEI states are pursuing financing strategies that reward institutions for persistence and completion.** Several states are considering changes to their state funding formulas to encourage institutions to focus on improving student performance, not just increasing enrollment.

**DEI states have taken steps to improve protocols for assessing college readiness and placing underprepared students in remedial courses.**

**DEI states have made significant strides in strengthening ties between K-12 and postsecondary systems** in an effort to reduce

the need for developmental education among recent high school graduates, spurred in part by the 2010 release of the Common Core State Standards.

## POLICY SUPPORTS CASE STUDIES

### OHIO: HOW FUNDING CAN DRIVE COLLEGES TO FOCUS ON STUDENT SUCCESS

In 2011, Ohio crafted a funding scheme that awards a small but growing portion of its funding to the community colleges based on the number of students who achieve "success points" as they progress and complete.

## FLORIDA: HOW STREAMLINING COLLEGE-READINESS STANDARDS AND PLACEMENT PRACTICES CAN IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS

Florida has developed a customized exam called the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.), which simultaneously helps high school students determine if they are college ready and helps colleges determine student placement.

## STAYING AHEAD OF THE CURVE

The DEI policy achievements are all the more noteworthy because they occurred during tough budgetary times and in the midst of significant research breakthroughs in community college best practices. As the nation fell into a deep recession, all six DEI states forged ahead with major reforms, while working tirelessly to sustain higher education service and quality.

Looking ahead, the DEI states have set priorities for further action even as the Developmental Education Initiative comes to a close. Strikingly, all six states have set their sights on further implementing and refining many of the same policies. Overall, these priorities target enhancing the use of important data about student outcomes, encouraging institutions to be innovative and test new strategies to improve student outcomes, and focusing on the sustainability of innovations through long-term planning and professional development for faculty.

There is a long road ahead for those focused on improving the success of underprepared students. Thanks in part to the resources, attention, and cross-state collaboration of the Developmental Education Initiative, however, colleges and systems in Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia are on an evidence-based, data-driven path toward achieving significant gains in student success rates.

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**Jobs for the Future** works with our partners to design and drive adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.



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