

DesignForScale: FLORIDA

BUILDING EFFECTIVE STUDENT PATHWAYS BY LEVERAGING LEGISLATION

The DesignForScale Series encourages the field to develop a more strategic and cohesive approach to scaling student success reforms at and across community colleges. The series affirms that it is time to be more systematic, serious, and organized about designing visionary, integrated reforms to be implemented at scale, while maintaining appreciation for questions, new evidence, and college context. The series highlights innovative state efforts to scale structured pathways reforms across the community colleges in their states; other states seeking to scale reforms will find these approaches instructive.

TURNING LEGISLATIVE POLICY INTO PRACTICE

Scaling up efforts to increase student success at community colleges often begins with new state laws that mandate reform. But legislation rarely determines the details or logistics required to implement change. In order to maximize the number of students who complete postsecondary credentials that can launch family-supporting careers, it is critical to consider state capacity for helping colleges plan and execute such a transformation.

All of Florida's public colleges, including Miami Dade College, which is participating in [Completion by Design](#), are in the process of implementing a sweeping redesign of developmental education. The reforms were part of controversial legislation enacted in the spring of 2013 to begin no later than the fall of 2014. Originally conceived to eliminate remedial courses, the proposal was modified to require colleges to offer developmental education only in an accelerated format, intended to increase student success in credit-bearing work. Another aspect of the law that requires many policy and program changes is that Florida high school graduates who entered ninth grade in 2003-04 or later and earned a standard diploma are exempt from the common placement test, which traditionally determined college readiness, and from developmental education requirements.

Facing budget cuts and hiring freezes, the state's higher education capacity was hardly at its peak. But the Florida College System, which is composed of 28 postsecondary institutions, had several valuable assets in place:

- > A small but knowledgeable and committed team of staff to lead the charge.
- > Lessons learned from Completion by Design's work to improve student achievement at Miami Dade, the largest and most diverse college in the United States.

Postsecondary
State Policy



- > Other colleges with an interest in exploring multiple measures of college readiness and direct entry into college-level courses for students scoring near the college-ready score on the common placement test.

The tight time frame—less than a year—between the introduction of the developmental education reform bill to the Legislature and the new law’s deadline for submitting implementation plans spurred quick action:

- > The college system informed legislators about how the bill could build on effective Completion by Design policies already in place and gained key changes the colleges supported.
- > The system team immediately started planning how to modify the many facets of developmental education—instruction, assessment, placement, advising, and student supports—to help colleges meet the new law’s requirements. Because the new law now reflected some alignment with CBD principles, these efforts helped to spread Completion by Design lessons across the state.
- > The system team worked with Jobs for the Future, CBD’s national partner for state policy, to show colleges how the legislation aligned with best practices to increase student success.

ALIGNING LEGISLATION WITH PROVEN PRINCIPLES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

The goal of Florida’s developmental education reform law (Senate Bill 1720) is to minimize the time it takes students to enter a coherent program of study, a major milestone on the road to completing a credential. Early conversations about eliminating developmental education programs and funding altogether evolved into discussions of greater flexibility for placing students directly into college-credit coursework and redesigning developmental education instruction.

COMPLETION BY DESIGN

Completion by Design works with community colleges and their state partners to significantly increase credential completion and graduation rates for low-income students. The initiative, funded by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), takes a new approach to an old problem, aiming at comprehensive institutional transformation to create permanent improvement. CBD collaborates with faculty and staff at a group of colleges to make systemic changes in policies, programs, and practices that strengthen pathways to completion while maintaining access and quality without increasing cost. The initiative also aligns state policy to support the colleges’ work, and builds knowledge about how to succeed in this work at a large scale, with the goal of spreading Completion by Design principles to other colleges in the state.

FLORIDA CADRE

The Florida CBD cadre consists of the eight campuses of Miami Dade College, the largest and most diverse college in the United States with 174,000 students. The College serves the 2.4 million residents of Miami-Dade County, one of the nation’s lowest per-capita income areas. Students of color comprise the vast majority of enrollment: 69 percent are Hispanic, 19 percent are black. Half of all students speak a native language other than English; 29 percent are resident aliens, refugees, or asylum seekers. Some 74 percent of students begin college academically underprepared, and 51 percent are first-generation college students. The cadre is focusing on improving orientation for new students, accelerating developmental education and English language learning, speeding entry into academic programs of study, and intensive academic and career advising. [North Carolina](#) and [Ohio](#) also participate in Completion by Design.

Concerns about widespread poor performance in remedial classes are addressed through accountability provisions and reporting metrics in the new law. For example, each institution must submit a developmental education plan for system approval and provide data on common measures of success. The system will report on developmental education performance to the legislature.

The college system has provided support for implementation in multiple ways—legislative overview sessions for faculty, advisors, admissions officers, and other stakeholders; implementation guidelines; templates for developmental education plans; and models of common metrics. In addition, the Florida College System’s participation in JFF’s Postsecondary State Policy Network—a network of 13 states focused on improving student success in the community college—provides them access to models of relevant reforms from around the country, and key contacts in other states also implementing similar policies such as accelerated developmental education models and multiple measures placement policies.

HOW POLICIES ARE SCALING STRUCTURED PATHWAYS STATEWIDE

The redesign principles embraced by the Completion by Design colleges are based in strong evidence, including that most students:

- > Perform better in accelerated developmental education
- > Meet with better outcomes when connected with a program early in their academic careers
- > Need access to far more structured academic programs that lead to completion
- > Benefit from wraparound student services that provide strong guidance

PARTNERS IN FLORIDA

- > **The Division of Florida Colleges**, within the Florida Department of Education, is Completion by Design’s state policy lead. Policy partners include:
 - » Association of Florida Colleges
 - » State Board of Education
 - » University System Board of Governors
 - » Higher Education Coordinating Council
 - » Florida Department of Education’s Articulation Coordinating Committee
 - » Florida College System’s Council of Presidents, Council on Instructional Affairs, and Council of Student Affairs
- > **Miami Dade College** is CBD’s managing partner in Florida. The CBD cadre comprises the eight campuses of Hialeah, Homestead, InterAmerican, Kendall, Medical Center, North, West, and Wolfson.
- > **Jobs for the Future** is CBD’s national partner for state policy, providing support for design, content, and implementation.

Those principles are both evidence-based and deeply intuitive to colleges, researchers and state policymakers. Though the CBD colleges are still early in their work, initial results are promising and there is strong agreement that they will produce improved student outcomes.

New policies stemming from SB1720 scale structured pathways and many other elements of CBD's redesign principles to every college in the state, including:

- > Establishing "meta-majors"—academic pathways for the purposes of advising degree-seeking students of the gateway courses that are aligned with their intended academic and career goals within a broad discipline, such as health sciences, business, or education—to guide students on early course taking and speed entry into programs of study.
- > Limiting developmental education to four accelerated models—co-requisite, compressed, modular, and contextualized—designed to minimize the time needed to prepare for college-level work and enroll in gateway courses.
- > Creating the co-requisite developmental education model, which embeds academic supports within a college-level course, rather than offering the supports as a pre-requisite.
- > Requiring each college to develop a comprehensive advising plan for students whose common placement test scores do not qualify them for immediate college-level work.
- > Requiring each college to develop a plan for tracking student outcomes.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As Florida colleges prepare for thousands of students to try out new developmental education options in the fall of 2014, the Florida College System is monitoring implementation activities and making additional plans. For example, the system must determine how to best address accountability requirements, by identifying data sources and measures and providing support for sharing information across institutions.

Evaluations of Completion by Design will also help the field to better understand the impact of the redesign principles. Jobs for the Future will continually monitor the latest research and field experiences, and help other states to learn from Florida's story.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about Completion by Design in Florida, or about scaling reforms through similar strategies, please contact:

"PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SENATE BILL 1720 LEGISLATION REQUIRES THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN PRESCRIPTION AND FLEXIBILITY. COLLEGES NEED THE FLEXIBILITY TO TRY NEW THINGS, BUT AT THE SAME TIME ENOUGH STANDARDIZATION IS NEEDED TO ALLOW PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT ACROSS SIMILAR STRATEGIES."

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—Julie Alexander, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Services