

FROM INNOVATION TO TRANSFORMATION

TEXAS MOVES TO REFORM DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

BY M. COLLEEN CLANCY AND MICHAEL L. COLLINS

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MDC's mission is to help organizations and communities close the gaps that separate people from opportunity. It has been publishing research and developing programs in education, government policy, workforce development, and asset building for more than 40 years. MDC was the managing partner of Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count for six years and was responsible for its incubation as a national nonprofit. It is also the managing partner of the Developmental Education Initiative.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this era of intense community college innovation, no reform topic has received more attention than developmental education. Is it time to begin moving innovation to scale? Events in Texas suggest the answer is yes.

On first impression, almost everything about Texas indicates that it would be difficult to reform developmental education at its colleges. Fifty districts and more than 100 campuses are spread out across its vast landscape. With almost 750,000 students enrolling in credit courses each fall, the state's community colleges educate one of the nation's largest and most diverse student bodies.

Nevertheless, a confluence of state and national activities has helped bring about substantial reform. The efforts and interactions of five statewide bodies—the Texas Legislature, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Association of Community Colleges, the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, and Educate Texas—have created what the Coordinating Board has called a “unique opportunity to redesign developmental mathematics.” That opportunity is an unprecedented agreement by the presidents of all 50 community college districts to invest in a single math system being developed in collaboration with the Dana Center.

The steps Texas has taken to arrive at this juncture illustrate how a state with decentralized community college governance can move toward innovation at scale.

STEPPING UP TO LEAD

The effort to reinvent developmental education in Texas is remarkable for the breadth of involvement. An early and active participant in community college reforms, in 2004 Texas became one of the first states to participate in Achieving the Dream. This brought a focus on increasing college completion through evidence-based innovation and changed the way Texas colleges approach their work.

Since 2004, through Achieving the Dream and a number of other initiatives, a consensus emerged to make student success the driving agenda of the colleges and of the legislators, policymakers, and funders who support their work. By 2009, Texas had invested five years and millions of dollars in various strategies to improve developmental education outcomes. Many of the community colleges had participated in innovative pilots, and some were working locally to bring those pilots to scale.

Even so, there was no consensus on how to move forward with research-validated practices. Just as important, after five years of experimentation, only 8.4 percent of first-time, full-time students who began college in developmental education were graduating within three years.

At this juncture, two organizations, bringing very different resources to the table, took the lead. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board coordinates the efforts of the legislature and colleges to manage and improve public higher education. The Texas Association of Community Colleges, a nonprofit organization of all 50 community college districts, provides a collective voice through the leadership of the system's chancellors and presidents.

The work of the Coordinating Board and TACC converged in the Developmental Education initiative, a national effort to scale up promising policies and practices piloted in Achieving the Dream. Together, they formed the Texas Developmental Education Initiative Policy Team to focus and intensify the state's efforts to improve student outcomes.

SCALING UP SUCCESS

Two distinct processes shaped reform as the Coordinating Board and TACC moved forward to define priorities and set a direction for the state.

The legislature and the Coordinating Board establish an improvement plan: In 2012, the Coordinating Board presented a plan required by the legislature, articulating a vision, goals, and performance measures for improving student outcomes in developmental education by 2017. The plan is based on input from a wide group of stakeholders, as well as practices emerging from Texas' Developmental Education Demonstration Project, a \$5 million pilot program through which colleges conducted a comprehensive redesign of developmental education programming.

TACC brings the colleges on board to lead the way to scale: Beginning in 2010, Cynthia Ferrell, director of the Developmental Education Initiative in Texas, traveled throughout the state to convey what the colleges had learned through Achieving the Dream and what could be accomplished by creating a shared agenda for change. The transition to reform began in 2011 when math department faculty from each college district in the state agreed to form leadership teams to study and come up with recommendations for reform. After intensive collaboration and discussion, the leadership teams proposed to join the Dana Center's New Mathways Project, a national effort that seeks to accelerate the movement of students through both developmental and college-level math.

In response to the leadership teams' work, the chancellors and presidents committed to pay higher dues to begin a collaboration between the Dana Center and the leadership teams on the New Mathways Project. Nine "co-development partner" colleges are working with the center to develop the curriculum and will serve as first implementers in 2013, with implementation at other Texas colleges phased in later.

BUILDING POLICY SUPPORTS

To make it easier for community colleges to implement and continue innovation, two critical policy supports are high priorities for TACC and the Coordinating Board in the 2013 legislative session: improved student assessment and outcomes-based funding.

Improved assessment: Strong assessment and placement policies are critical to getting students into the courses or developmental interventions that give them the best chance of achieving their education and career goals. The Coordinating Board has recommended that Texas move to a single diagnostic assessment instrument, to be used by all colleges and aligned with Texas' College and Career Readiness standards. It has also recommended guidelines for the holistic assessment and placement of students using multiple measures such as prior academic performance, motivation, and life circumstances.

Outcomes-based funding: Outcomes-based funding can create incentives for colleges to get students into and through developmental interventions and courses that give them the best chance of completing their programs. TACC and the Coordinating Board have recommended a funding model that establishes accountability measures and allocates 10 percent of the general appropriation for distribution to colleges based on their performance on specific measures.

LESSONS LEARNED

Looking back, several pivotal points provide instructive examples of elements that move a state to widespread reform.

Persistent policy direction by the legislature and a major statewide body: The Coordinating Board first prioritized college completion in 2000 and consistently renewed and refined this commitment. In 2011, after nearly a decade of considering issues of student completion, the legislature clearly signaled that the time for broad reform had come when it mandated the creation of a statewide plan with specific practices to improve the delivery of developmental education.

Clearly defined standards for college readiness: Texas' College and Career Readiness Standards, adopted in 2008, set parameters and performance indicators for precollege achievement in English, math, science, social studies, and interdisciplinary skills and have provided an influential framework for succeeding efforts to improve developmental education.

Support for widespread innovation: Almost every Texas community college has participated in developmental education innovation. Legislative funding has been critical for promoting innovation and a remarkable statement of the commitment of the legislature and the Coordinating Board to improving student outcomes. Support and funding from other organizations, such as Complete College America and Educate Texas, have bolstered the colleges' work and increased the momentum toward broad reform. Involvement in Achieving the Dream brought rigor and transparency to the colleges' work of improving student outcomes. And the DEI policy team has been a vital intermediary for spreading conversations on reform to all of the stakeholders in the state, including the legislature, the Coordinating Board, and other institutions and foundations.



INTRODUCTION

IN THIS ERA OF INTENSE INNOVATION AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGES, NO REFORM TOPIC HAS RECEIVED MORE ATTENTION THAN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION. SINCE AT LEAST 2004, WHEN LUMINA FOUNDATION LAUNCHED THE ACHIEVING THE DREAM INITIATIVE, EDUCATORS, RESEARCHERS, AND POLICY ADVOCATES HAVE FOCUSED ON IMPROVING THE RATES OF RETENTION AND COMPLETION FOR STUDENTS WHO ENTER COLLEGE WITH LOW ACADEMIC SKILLS. ALTHOUGH MANY PROMISING PRACTICES AND POLICIES HAVE EMERGED AROUND THE COUNTRY, NO CONSENSUS HAS EMERGED ON WHICH OF THESE OFFER STUDENTS THE BEST CHANCE OF ACQUIRING THE SKILLS THEY NEED TO MOVE INTO COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSEWORK AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

Given this lack of consensus, is more research needed or is it time to begin moving innovation to scale? Events in Texas suggest the answer on both counts is yes. The efforts and interactions of five statewide bodies—the Texas Legislature, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Association of Community Colleges, the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, and Educate Texas—have resulted in multiple policy victories and created what the Coordinating Board has called a “unique opportunity to redesign developmental mathematics with all 50 Texas public community college districts.”¹

This “unique opportunity” is an unprecedented agreement by the presidents of all 50 community college districts in Texas to invest in a single math system: the New Mathways Project being developed through a collaboration of the colleges with the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin (see box, “The New Mathways Project,” on page 3). The system will be designed to help students earn college credit more quickly by aligning math requirements to their programs of study. Navigational supports, such as career counseling and intrusive advising, will help students select programs of study and create academic maps and degree plans to make the path to completion transparent.

The steps Texas has taken to arrive at this juncture illustrate how a state with decentralized community college governance can move toward reform. Significantly, this innovation did not come about as a result of a standalone decision-making process. That is to say, no single body selected the precise set of policies to enact and then drew up a plan to achieve those goals. Instead, a confluence of state and national activities and interactions among multiple organizations helped bring about substantial reform.

The Texas experience illustrates the multiple-streams policy model that John Kingdon wrote about in his groundbreaking book *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* almost three decades ago: timing, stakeholders, and the political-economic context are converging to create fertile conditions for reform.² This brief describes the complex set of conditions and interactions that led to a major policy innovation.



UNDERSTANDING TEXAS

On first impression, almost everything about Texas suggests that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to reform developmental education at its colleges. Fifty community college districts, with more than a hundred campuses, are spread out across its vast landscape. A higher education coordinating board makes funding formula recommendations, approves academic programs, and establishes assessment and placement policies, but it has limited regulatory authority over the colleges, which answer to locally elected boards of trustees. Historically, there has been little expectation that instruction or curricula will be coordinated among the college districts, and even colleges within the same district may have a high degree of autonomy from one another.

With almost 750,000 students enrolling in credit courses each fall, the state's community colleges educate one of the nation's largest and most diverse student bodies. More than half of all students are from ethnic minorities, primarily of Hispanic descent. Many of these students do not speak English as their first language.

A high proportion of students attending Texas community colleges will be challenged to complete a credential within three years. More than 70 percent of them attend college part time. Almost 55 percent of them need some degree of developmental education.³

THE NEW MATHWAYS PROJECT

The New Mathways Project (NMP) of the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin seeks to guide students through both developmental and college-level math in one year (or less) through three math pathways that are aligned to the math requirements of specific academic programs and careers.⁴ Students also take a research-validated student success course designed to teach them the skills they need to succeed in college, such as self-regulated learning.⁵

The NMP pathways are designed for students who have completed arithmetic or are placed in beginning algebra. Students start with a quantitative-literacy-based introductory course that prepares them for college-level math. At the same time, they take a required student success course. In the second semester, students move into one of three college-level math pathways:

- > **Statistics**, designed to be relevant to the education and career goals of students in the humanities or social sciences;
- > **Quantitative Literacy**, designed for students looking to build their quantitative literacy skills in ways that will support their professional, civic, and personal lives; or
- > **STEM**, designed for students pursuing degrees and careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

The Texas NMP curriculum is under development, as is the setting of goals for course outcomes.

The challenges of bringing change to a system this complex appear overwhelming, yet Texas was an early and active participant in community college reform efforts. In 2004, it became one of the first states to participate in Achieving the Dream and eight of its colleges were in the first cohort. In all, a total of 28 community college districts, including multiple campuses within those districts, have participated in Achieving the Dream's National Reform Network, testing interventions to support student success, strengthening their data and research capacity, advocating for policy supports, and participating in a nationwide learning community.

STATE POLICY ACTION BUILDS THE WILL FOR REFORM

When Texas was invited to participate in Achieving the Dream, the state had already taken steps that suggested that it would be a promising candidate for the initiative.

- > In 1987, the Texas Legislature enacted HB 2182, the Texas Academic Skills Program. TASP required that all students entering public institutions of higher education beginning in fall 1989 be assessed for college readiness in math, reading, and writing. It also required the creation of a new state-level assessment and the provision of developmental education courses and advising for students who tested below college proficiency.
- > In 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board adopted *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, a strategic plan that articulated a goal to increase college participation and student success.
- > In 2003, the legislature replaced the TASP with the Texas Success Initiative. The TSI maintained the TASP's major components but removed the requirement to place all students testing below proficiency into developmental education, and it provided greater institutional control and flexibility in responding to the individual academic needs of students.

Following the launch of Achieving the Dream in Texas, the state continued to lay policy groundwork to support student success.

- > In 2006, the legislature enacted sweeping college and career readiness legislation that mandated the creation of the *P-16 College-Readiness and Success Strategic Action Plan* to enable students to progress seamlessly from pre-kindergarten through college. In that same session, the legislature funded incentives to innovate and create bridge projects to support college readiness. Later that year, the Coordinating Board added new developmental education measures to the state's accountability system.
- > In 2008, the Coordinating Board and the commissioner of education implemented the P-16 Plan when they adopted the *Texas College and Career Readiness Standards*, which set parameters and performance indicators for precollege achievement in English, math, science, social studies, and interdisciplinary skills.⁶
- > In 2009 the Coordinating Board, at the direction of the legislature, developed its first statewide developmental education plan.⁷

By all accounts, the focus Achieving the Dream brought to improving rates of college completion through evidence-based innovation has changed the way Texas colleges approach their work—and it has changed the conversation about that work. Over the years of Achieving the Dream, a state consensus emerged to make student success the driving agenda of the colleges and also of the legislators, policymakers, and funders who support their work. It was clear from the outset of Achieving the Dream that eliminating the developmental education bottleneck would be a major factor in reaching the initiative’s ambitious completion goals. Every Texas college in the first Achieving the Dream cohort identified developmental education as a priority, and every college tested innovations to improve its outcomes.⁸

The Texas investment in student success was not limited to Achieving the Dream colleges. In 2006, the legislature enacted sweeping college- and career-readiness legislation to accelerate student readiness for, and progress through, developmental education. The results included the Texas Course Redesign Project, which offered incentives to colleges to redesign their developmental education curricula, and the Developmental Bridge Program, which engages low-skilled students in an intensive curriculum to prepare them to succeed in college-level coursework. In 2008, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board emphasized the importance of continuing this innovation when it articulated policies and strategies to achieve the goals of *Closing the Gaps by 2015*.⁹ Other national organizations and private foundations joined in, funding innovation projects at colleges throughout the state.

By 2009, Texas had invested five years and millions of dollars in strategies to improve developmental education outcomes. The state had a comprehensive college success strategy that included multiple interventions to accelerate readiness for college. Many of the community colleges had participated in innovative pilots, and some were working locally to bring those pilots to scale.

Yet there was no statewide consensus on how to move forward with research-validated practices. After five years of experimentation, only 8.4 percent of first-time, full-time students who began college in developmental education were graduating within three years.¹⁰

It was time to step up the pace.



STEPPING UP TO LEAD

The effort to reinvent developmental education in Texas is remarkable for the breadth of involvement (see box, “*Texas Organizations Partnering on Developmental Education Reform*,” below). By some estimates, virtually every community college has worked to improve its developmental outcomes and strengthen its capacity to conduct research on and test new interventions. Four-year colleges have also led research projects to test innovations. The legislature, P-16 agencies, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and national researchers and policy advocates have all added time and resources to solve the problem.

TEXAS ORGANIZATIONS PARTNERING ON DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REFORM

Texas Association of Community Colleges • www.tacc.org

The Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) is a nonprofit association that includes all 50 public community college districts in the state. The General Appropriations Bill and legislation affecting public community colleges in general have been and remain the principal concerns of TACC.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board • www.theccb.state.tx.us

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s mission is to work closely with policymakers and education stakeholders to develop and implement a higher education framework focused on initiatives to:

- > Dramatically increase the number of postsecondary completions;
- > Keep college affordable and accessible for all Texans; and
- > Align higher education outcomes with current and future workforce needs.

Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin • www.utdanacenter.org

The Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin works with our nation’s education systems to ensure that every student leaves school prepared for success in postsecondary education and the contemporary workplace. Our work, based on research and two decades of experience, focuses on K-16 mathematics and science education with an emphasis on strategies for improving student engagement, motivation, persistence, and achievement. We develop innovative curricula, tools, protocols, and instructional supports and deliver powerful instructional and leadership development.

Educate Texas • www.edtx.org

A leading catalyst for progress, Educate Texas, a public-private initiative of Communities Foundation of Texas, is an innovative alliance of public and private groups that share a common goal: improving the public education system so that every Texas student is prepared for success in school, in the workforce, and in life.

Even so, diverse efforts might have continued to swirl around innovation without developing momentum toward a wide-scale solution. Fortunately, as the era of innovation matured, two major organizations, bringing very different resources to the table, took the lead: the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Association of Community Colleges.

The Coordinating Board coordinates the efforts of the legislature and the colleges to manage and improve public higher education in the state. In the years following the 2000 adoption of *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, the board increasingly focused on developmental education as a pathway to reach the goals it had articulated in this strategic plan. In 2006, it worked with the legislature to secure funding for pilot projects to test innovative interventions. In 2008, with the publication of *Closing the Gaps by 2015: Texas' Strategies for Improving Student Participation and Success*, the board articulated a specific strategy of encouraging innovation in developmental education.¹¹ Two years later, in *Accelerated Plan for Closing the Gaps by 2015*, the board acknowledged the centrality of developmental education to its success goals. It laid out a detailed agenda to “improve the effectiveness of developmental education and develop long-term plans to reinvent developmental education at a systemic level.”¹²

The Texas Association of Community Colleges, a nonprofit organization of all 50 community college districts, provides its members with a collective voice through the leadership of the system's chancellors and presidents. Historically, TACC's mission has been to advocate for appropriations and legislation that affect the colleges, but it also promotes educational programs and services that benefit higher education. TACC affirmed its investment in the student success agenda in 2004 as the state policy lead organization for Achieving the Dream. As TACC worked with Achieving the Dream, and as its members dedicated themselves to improving developmental education, the organization itself increasingly focused on student success.

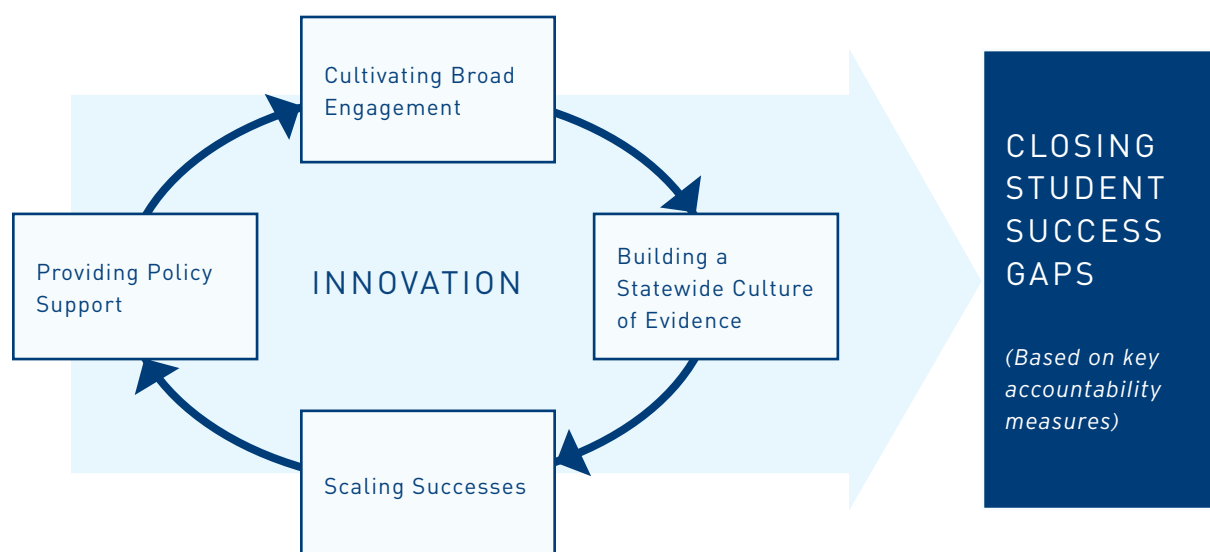
In 2009, TACC stepped up its role in developmental education reform when it became the state lead organization for the Developmental Education Initiative. The goal of this three-year effort, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation, was to scale up promising developmental education policies and practices piloted at selected Achieving the Dream colleges. As the state lead organization, TACC made express commitments to engage stakeholders in the task of reform and to advocate for state policies that support reform efforts.

The efforts of TACC and the Coordinating Board converged when they signed a memorandum of agreement to implement the Developmental Education Initiative's efforts “to dramatically improve the success of developmental education students in Texas community colleges in a manner consistent with legislative goals and the goals of the state's Closing the Gaps initiative.”¹³ Together, they formed the Texas Developmental Education Initiative Policy

DIVERSE EFFORTS MIGHT HAVE CONTINUED TO SWIRL AROUND INNOVATION WITHOUT DEVELOPING MOMENTUM TOWARD A WIDE-SCALE SOLUTION. FORTUNATELY, AS THE ERA OF INNOVATION MATURED, TWO MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS, BRINGING VERY DIFFERENT RESOURCES TO THE TABLE, TOOK THE LEAD. Team to “bring increased focus, ambition, and intensity to the state's efforts to improve developmental student outcomes by demonstrating the effectiveness of a state-level data-driven approach, identifying high-leverage public policies, and engaging and mobilizing key stakeholders.” The agreement designated TACC as the lead of the DEI Policy Team and charged it with overseeing the project. The Coordinating Board, as primary partner, agreed to implement DEI recommendations on the use of data on student outcomes and to collaborate with TACC in coordinating the board's extensive developmental reform agenda with the policy team's work in the Developmental Education Initiative.

DEI Director Cynthia Ferrell immediately embarked on a “listening tour” of 18 Achieving the Dream colleges to learn about their experiences and get their recommendations on state policy changes that would support their efforts. As a result of the tour, and in collaboration with the four Achieving the Dream colleges participating in the Developmental Education Initiative, the DEI Policy Team adopted a strategic plan for action. The new Texas Developmental Education Initiative State Policy Strategy placed the colleges’ promising innovations at the center of a statewide cycle of continuous improvement and policy planning aimed at closing student success gaps. The resulting plan has four core priorities: providing policy support, cultivating broad engagement, building a statewide culture of evidence, and scaling successes (*see Figure 1*).

FIGURE 1
PRIORITIES OF THE TEXAS DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE STATE POLICY STRATEGY



SOURCE: Texas Association of Community Colleges, Developmental Education State Policy Plan, 2009

INVESTING IN INNOVATION

Innovation lies at the center of the Texas model for moving to scale because the process of innovation, and the learning that comes from it, will continue to be central to Texas' efforts to improve its system of developmental education. Indeed, primary innovation projects continued to go on while the policy team worked to organize the reform effort. As participants in Achieving the Dream, many of the state's colleges were continuing to strengthen their data systems and to develop innovative solutions to improve student outcomes. The four Achieving the Dream institutions named as DEI colleges received new funding to test interventions that showed the most promise in improving outcomes in developmental education.

The state itself continued to support efforts to improve developmental education. In a recessionary era, with states hard pressed to balance budgets, the Texas legislature appropriated \$5 million for developmental education demonstration projects to catalyze systemic reform. The Coordinating Board targeted an additional \$4 million from the college-readiness initiative from the previous biennium (FY 2009-2010) to be used to improve developmental education outcomes. These state funds supported a major demonstration project (see box, "*Developmental Education Demonstration Project*," on page 10).

INNOVATION LIES
AT THE CENTER OF
THE TEXAS MODEL
FOR MOVING TO SCALE
BECAUSE THE PROCESS
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FROM IT, WILL CONTINUE
TO BE CENTRAL TO TEXAS'
EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ITS
SYSTEM OF DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION.

Nor were the board's efforts limited to state funding. In 2011, the board competed for and received a Complete College America Innovation Challenge Grant to pilot a "co-requisite" developmental math design that integrates remedial skills with career-based college algebra. The project, known as FOCUS (Fundamentals of Conceptual Understanding & Success) is being developed and led by Selina Vasquez at Texas State University.¹⁴

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT: AN EXISTENCE PROOF FOR INVESTMENT IN INNOVATION

The 81st Texas Legislature (2009-2010) charged the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board with creating a pilot program for students who were unprepared to succeed in college. In 2010, the board launched the Developmental Education Demonstration Project, which provided \$5 million in incentives to colleges to conduct a comprehensive redesign of developmental education programming. The project is testing innovations and determining the feasibility of scaling them up across the state. Five community colleges (and four other colleges) responded to the board's Request for Applications, which stipulated that grantees test promising, evidence-based interventions.

The demonstration project was designed to determine if structural and curricular innovation derived from evidence-based practices can improve completion outcomes for students who test into developmental education. The board required the demonstration project colleges to include in their efforts all of the components that might be expected for major developmental education redesign: assessment and placement; student support services; innovative curricular options (e.g., paired courses, modular, and non-course-based options); adult education transition; faculty access to and participation in professional development; and the collection and use of high-quality data.

The state structured the pilots according to the latest evidence in developmental education reform. This gave the state added control to shape the colleges' choices about which interventions were most effective. It also created an incentive for the most innovative and ambitious colleges to accept the innovation challenge, and successful applicants had to commit to required first-year activities, which included early intervention strategies (e.g., summer bridge programs, placement preparation workshops, accelerated delivery models). The state stipulated requirements for evaluation and for sharing successful practices to help it understand the strategies most appropriate for scaling.

An evaluation by the Public Policy Research Institute found broad variation in the success outcomes of the community colleges in the demonstration project. When comparing developmental education pass rates at the five community colleges from the year prior to the demonstration project, two showed an increase, two stayed roughly the same, and one reported a decrease. The evaluation also offered process recommendations and lessons in key areas of developmental education reform, and it addressed barriers the project faced.¹⁵

The Coordinating Board has used these lessons to develop a new competitive grants program: The Scaling and Sustaining Success Project (S3) will provide incentives for community colleges to scale up successful interventions.

CULTIVATING BROAD ENGAGEMENT

**"THE REAL WORK HAPPENS WHEN THE COLLEGES AGREE TO ENGAGE IN IT."
—BYRON MCCLENNEY, DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES,
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN¹⁶**

When the Texas Association of Community Colleges took on its responsibilities under the Developmental Education Initiative, the state's five years of work to improve developmental education outcomes had generated a high degree of awareness of the importance of the issue to student completion, but there had been only limited opportunities for broad conversations among the colleges. There was a clear need to coordinate the conversations to develop momentum for reform and, because reform is implemented in the classroom, the message had to move out to every corner of the state.

From the beginning, the DEI Policy Team was committed to building support for reform through existing organizations and venues for communication—to strengthening the existing network rather than building a new one. "We wanted to build a straighter and stronger line between all of the existing organizations," says Texas DEI project director Cynthia Ferrell:¹⁷

We made a very deliberate decision at the beginning of the DEI grant that we wanted to have convenings that are already established in the state of Texas, because we are so big. You know some states can just call five people and they all drive over and make decisions by that afternoon, but that doesn't happen in Texas at all. So we made a decision at the very beginning that if we wanted this to be sustainable, then we were going to have to engage in the ways that different levels of folks get together.

For much of the first 18 months of the Developmental Education Initiative, Ferrell did just that, traveling throughout the state to carry the message of what the colleges had learned through Achieving the Dream and what could be accomplished by creating a shared agenda for change.

No organization was too large or too small to be targeted. Ferrell referred to herself as "Johnetta Appleseed," planting seeds of reform with large statewide organizations such as the Texas Community College Instructional Administrators and the Texas Community College Teachers Association, as well as with smaller regional and local organizations. Statewide conferences, such as the annual Leading from the Middle gathering of college deans and upcoming leaders, were fertile ground for conveying the message of change.

The quest for broad engagement reached out to embrace state and national research and policy organizations that could bring resources to the process. Participation in Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative opened up the opportunity to gain assistance from Jobs for the Future, a national nonprofit that manages the state policy efforts for both. The work of the Community College Research Center proved instrumental in educating the legislature on developmental education outcomes, and CCRC went on to consult with faculty leadership teams to hone the approach to reform. Educate Texas, an organization with a broad strategy to improve education, joined forces with the DEI Policy Team to spread the reform message and to contribute funds to convene educators to develop reform plans.

SCALING UP SUCCESS

As momentum for reform built, two distinct processes emerged to shape that reform. Sometimes running parallel, sometimes converging, the Coordinating Board and the Texas Association of Community Colleges moved forward to define priorities and set a direction for the state.

THE LEGISLATURE AND THE COORDINATING BOARD ESTABLISH AN IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In 2011, after funding developmental education pilots for a number of years, the 82nd Legislature charged the Coordinating Board with creating a statewide developmental education plan that would include very specific elements once colleges implemented the plan. The developmental programs at every college would include such practices as technological enhancement, modular coursework, non-course-based interventions, and diagnostic assessments.

The Coordinating Board immediately established a Developmental Education Advisory Committee to help implement the legislative requirements, evaluate state developmental programs, and develop a new statewide assessment instrument. In December 2012, the Coordinating Board presented its plan to the legislature, along with recommendations for moving forward based on input from a wide group of stakeholders, as well as the practices emerging from the Developmental Education Demonstration Projects.¹⁸ The plan articulates a vision, goals, and performance measures for improving student outcomes in developmental education by 2017, and it provides the colleges with broad guidelines for achieving that goal. Ultimately, the purpose of the state's developmental education strategy is to identify and scale up promising interventions.

TACC BRINGS THE COLLEGES ON BOARD TO LEAD THE WAY TO SCALE

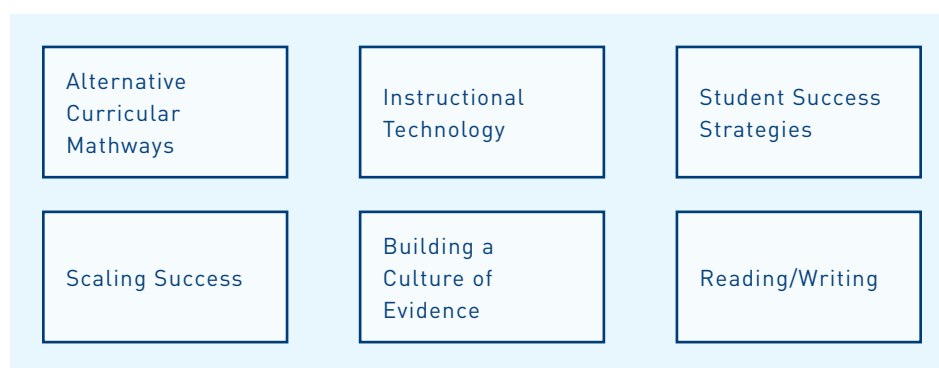
By 2011, after a year and a half of barnstorming the state, the DEI Policy Team had generated the momentum to move reform to the next level. After listening to a compelling argument by Uri Treisman, director of the Dana Center, at a February conference, the team opted to join his “joyful conspiracy” to reform math pathways in Texas community colleges.¹⁹

According to DEI director Ferrell, the policy team believed that the most effective process would be one led by faculty and supported by the presidents. Treisman accompanied the policy team to the TACC quarterly meeting in April to present a plan to involve the colleges in a movement to reform math instruction. The TACC chancellors and presidents agreed to begin the transition to reform by sending math department chairs from each college district to a planning conference in June.

With 50 community college districts in the state, the policy team expected no more than 50 faculty members to attend the conference. Instead, 148 math faculty walked in and went to work. They quickly focused on the three areas they felt were most important—curriculum, delivery, and student support—and formed leadership teams to carry the agenda forward.

The June conference has taken on the quality of legend in the Texas story of developmental education reform, and is a powerful illustration of the value of the policy team's work to lay the foundation for collaborative reform. At the conclusion of the meeting, the conveners asked for volunteers to serve on the three leadership teams; 138 of the 148 participants opted in. Making a quick decision in favor of inclusion, the group formed five leadership teams, each with its own focus. Within a month, developmental reading and writing instructors asked to be included in the process and a sixth team was added (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
THE TEXAS DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP TEAMS



Today, almost one hundred people serve on six leadership teams, representing every college and every major developmental education reform initiative in Texas. Membership has expanded to include administrators and data specialists from the colleges' institutional research departments. The colleges themselves, with assistance from the DEI Policy Team and Educate Texas, provided seed funds and in-kind assistance to convene the faculty and support the initial work of the leadership teams. (Securing continued funding is vital to sustaining the efforts of the leadership team.)

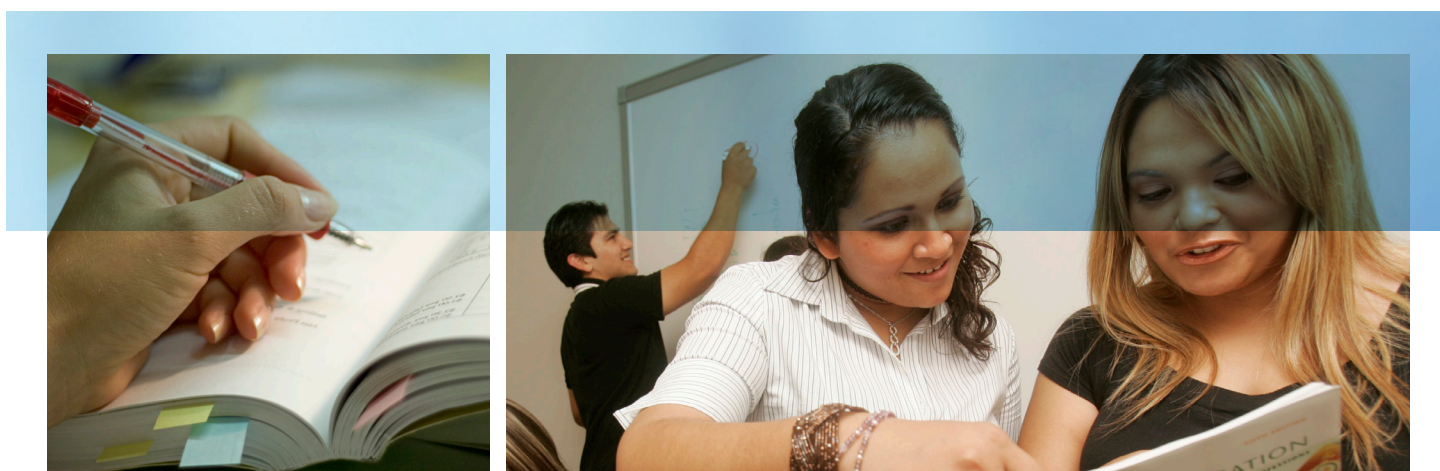
The teams immediately began examining the most promising innovations in their areas to see which were getting the “best bump” in student outcomes. After examining and discussing a range of options, the curricular leadership team soon reached a consensus on developing alternative math pathways for Texas colleges by building on the Dana Center's work on Statway and Quantway curricula for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, where Treisman was a senior partner.²⁰

With the Dana Center and the leadership teams collaborating, Treisman and the policy team returned to the chancellors and presidents who had attended TACC's summer 2011 meeting to ask them to support the project. Their endorsement was unanimous: all 50 college districts agreed to contract with the Dana Center to develop a model curriculum, with three math pathways designed by Texas faculty and aligned

with Texas college and career readiness standards. In a “tighten the belt” economy, the colleges voted to tax themselves, committing to pay higher dues to TACC so it could devote \$300,000 to the contract. TACC plans to ask the legislature for additional funding to continue the Dana Center’s work (see box, “*The New Mathways Project*,” on page 3).

Teamwork and stakeholder support will be critical to moving forward. The involvement of the college chancellors and presidents has invigorated the process of reform and provided a platform for moving the work to scale. TACC will keep the chancellors and presidents informed and coordinate its process with the Coordinating Board’s Developmental Education Advisory Team. Nine “co-development partner” colleges, selected in late 2012, will work directly with the Dana Center to develop the curriculum and serve as first implementers in fall 2013. Implementation at other Texas colleges will be phased in; each college in the state has selected its role in implementation. “Active learning sites” will begin the new program in the second wave of implementation. “Capacity building sites” will follow in the third phase of implementation to bring the tested curriculum to their colleges.

Educate Texas has increased its partnership with TACC and the Dana Center to support the work of the DEI leadership teams and to coordinate the DEI and activities of the New Mathways Project with the state’s broader student completion agenda. Educate Texas’ role in funding convenings and facilitating communications on high-leverage innovations and implementation strategies has been particularly important to maintain the momentum for reform.



BUILDING POLICY SUPPORTS

The reform of developmental education requires much more than curriculum redesign. Overarching policy supports that make it easier for community colleges to implement and continue innovation will be needed to sustain the reform process. Two critical supports are high priorities for TACC and the Coordinating Board in the 2013 legislative session: improved student assessment and outcomes-based funding.

IMPROVED ASSESSMENT

Strong assessment and placement policies are critical to getting students into the courses or developmental interventions that match their skill levels and give them the best chance of achieving their education and career goals. Moreover, statewide assessment and placement policies affect the colleges directly, which makes it imperative that the policies are in sync with and support the new models the colleges will be working with.

Texas was an early adopter of uniform assessment standards when, in 2003, the legislature enacted the Texas Success Initiative regulating which assessments the colleges could use, who took them, and the minimum scores for college readiness. In 2011, the legislature signaled that it would move further when it directed the Coordinating Board to “study, analyze and make recommendations concerning the currently used diagnostic assessments, including their reliability and their cost-effectiveness.”²¹

In December 2012, in its Developmental Education Plan, the Coordinating Board recommended to the legislature that Texas move to a single diagnostic assessment instrument, to be used by all colleges. The new assessment, built on the ACCUPLACER platform, will be called the Texas Success Initiative, like its predecessor. It is being developed with the College Board to align with Texas’ College and Career Readiness standards. The plan is to have the new TSI in place for the 2013-14 academic year. The new instrument will set the scores for college readiness, developmental education, and Adult Basic Education. A diagnostic profile for each student below college proficiency will be used to match students to interventions appropriate to their respective skill levels, including mainstreaming, competency-based, modular, and other accelerated models. Colleges will be required to offer students pre-assessment activities to prepare them for taking the TSI. Texas will also offer guidelines for the holistic assessment and placement of students using multiple measures such as prior academic performance, motivation, and life circumstances.²²

OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING

Outcomes-based funding is a high-leverage policy support that creates incentives for colleges to get students into and through developmental interventions and courses that give them the best chance of completing their programs. These incentives generate financial rewards to colleges when students reach “success points” along paths to completion. Outcomes-based funding in Texas, coupled with the recent developmental education innovations, creates a major opportunity to see if performance incentives can catalyze a dramatic improvement in completion outcomes for students who test into developmental education.²³

TACC and the Coordinating Board have recommended that the legislature adopt a funding model that establishes accountability measures and allocates 10 percent of the general appropriation to distribute to the colleges based on their performance on specific measures. The proposed system is closely aligned with the “momentum point” model developed in Washington State.²⁴



NEXT STEPS

Much remains to be done in reforming developmental education in Texas. The New Mathways Project is in the early stages of development, and its funding may depend on the actions of the legislature in 2013. Moreover, as the coordination of the math project with the Complete College America approach continues, it is not clear how these processes will merge. The Coordinating Board's 2012-2017 Developmental Education Plan anticipates that the period of innovation and review will continue before a consensus on best practices can lead to specific board directives.

The DEI Leadership Teams, formed to coordinate reform efforts among the colleges, have linked the colleges in an effective network to diffuse innovation throughout the system. They plan to continue embedding their work in the way Texas does business, and there are ongoing efforts to develop sustainable funding for them. Moreover, much remains to be done to implement new models, scale up those models, and retool them for the real world. A process of continuous evaluation and improvement will be important.



LESSONS LEARNED

Despite the work that remains to be done, the process of reform has already brought significant changes to the Texas community college landscape. After many years of laying the groundwork for transformation, an unplanned, nonlinear process has moved a state with decentralized governance to consensus on reform. Looking back, a number of pivotal points along the way provide instructive examples of elements that move a state to widespread reform.

PERSISTENT POLICY DIRECTION BY THE LEGISLATURE AND THE COORDINATING BOARD

The Coordinating Board prioritized college completion in 2000 with *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, which articulated the goal of “increase by 50 percent the number of degrees, certificates and other identifiable student successes from high quality programs.”

Although the board did not immediately single out developmental education as a target for achieving that goal, progress reports increasingly focused on it as a key element of student success.

The legislature also took an early and persistent interest in college completion by funding innovation and articulating clearer and more directive policies as the era of innovation matured. Indeed, the Texas legislature is unusual in the level of its commitment to improving student outcomes. By 2011, after nearly a decade of considering issues of student completion, it clearly signaled that the time for reform had come when it mandated a new statewide plan that articulates specific practices to improve the delivery of developmental education.

CLEARLY DEFINED STANDARDS FOR COLLEGE READINESS

There was little national discussion of uniform testing standards when the state adopted the Texas Success Initiative in 2003. This first work to define statewide expectations for college entry helped pave the way for further efforts, such as the P-16 College Readiness and Success Plan and College and Career Readiness Standards.

These developments gave everyone along the P-16 continuum the same target for preparing students to succeed. The College and Career Readiness Standards provided an influential framework for succeeding efforts to improve developmental education and continue this vital role today.²⁵

SUPPORT FOR WIDESPREAD INNOVATION

At this point, almost every Texas community college has participated in developmental education innovation projects. The legislative funding for innovation has been a critical tool for promoting innovation and a remarkable statement that the commitment of the legislature and the Coordinating Board to improving student outcomes goes well beyond

policy statements. Support and funding from other organizations, such as Complete College America and Educate Texas, have bolstered the colleges' innovation work and increased the momentum toward broad reform.

On the national level, Texas' involvement in Achieving the Dream brought rigor and transparency to the colleges' work of improving student outcomes. It stimulated discussions, teamwork, and a goal of continuous improvement. As Achieving the Dream moved forward, more Texas colleges came on board and the state continued its active engagement as a part of a larger national network seeking to better understand and improve student success.

After Texas was selected for the Developmental Education Initiative, the state's efforts to find collaborative solutions came into sharper focus. This state work was supported by national policy and research organizations, including Jobs for the Future and the Community College Research Center, and those organizations remain involved in the ongoing efforts to improve developmental outcomes at Texas community colleges. In early 2013, Texas is an active member of JFF's Postsecondary State Policy Network, a multistate collaboration committed to advancing state policies that accelerate community college student success and completion.

THE DEI POLICY TEAM'S CAMPAIGN TO ENGAGE THE COLLEGES

Until the DEI Policy Team, led by TACC, created a communication network to share information, colleges working on innovation projects had little opportunity to coordinate their activities. The policy team's efforts came at the right time and became the catalyst for coalescing the colleges' move from innovation to reform. The leadership teams' subsequent decision to collaborate with Treisman and the Dana Center gave a tangible, well-respected direction for the colleges' efforts and resulted in the unprecedented agreement by 50 college districts to take on the design of a collective approach to math education.

At the same time, the DEI Policy Team became a vital intermediary for spreading conversations on reform to all of the stakeholders in the state, including the legislature, the Coordinating Board, and other institutions and foundations.



A RETROSPECTIVE: TEXAS, THE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE, AND STATE POLICY

The Developmental Education Initiative featured a three-part strategy: data-driven improvement processes; investments in innovation; and policy supports. The underlying “theory of change” was that pursuing these elements simultaneously would create a state policy environment conducive to accelerating community college innovation for students who test into developmental education. The strategy assumed that each DEI state would select priority policy targets and goals and then create a plan to go about meeting them.

The states did select policy targets and goals and develop implementation workplans. But no workplan, no matter how well developed, can anticipate or encompass all of the opportunities that will surface, nor prevent changes in priorities and revisions in the policy environment and its opportunities. In Texas, the various strands of activities—TACC’s DEI leadership teams, the Coordinating Board’s demonstration projects, the Dana Center’s New Mathways Project, and Educate Texas’ support for convenings—coupled with close, ongoing interaction among these key groups, contributed to policy opportunities and outcomes that would be virtually impossible had the strands played out independently. The developments described here opened the door to a unified approach to innovation and created an environment that encouraged the colleges to move from a tradition of academic independence to a new model of collaboration.

In many ways, the highest-leverage outcome from DEI’s state policy work in Texas, the commitment to statewide implementation of the New Mathways Project, defies most assumptions about large-scale change. There was no mandate that all community colleges redesign developmental math, let alone commit to a uniform redesign. The unprecedented agreement of every community college in the state to implement New Mathways is a result of multiple developments.

First, the policy climate was pro-change. The state’s long commitment to completion is evident from its much-cited statewide strategic plan, *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, which includes numerical completion goals disaggregated by race and ethnicity. In addition, the legislature had been developing completion-related policies for over a decade (e.g., college readiness standards and assessments; developmental education legislation). And the Higher Education Coordinating Board translated the legislative intent of completion-related legislation into action: It convened advisory groups, wrote and revised rules, and designed and administered competitive grants programs in support of completion-related innovation.

Second, the state's demographic and socioeconomic profile made it attractive to privately funded initiatives, including Achieving the Dream, the Developmental Education Initiative, and Complete College America. This brought an influx of national research and policy organizations and resources into the state, each of which made the case for completion from a particular vantage point.

Third, the painfully low odds of completion for developmental math students, particularly those who are multiple levels below proficiency, influenced critical allies—TACC, the Dana Center, the Coordinating Board, Educate Texas, and JFF. The interaction of these organizations and agencies yielded a powerful unified message that big solutions were needed for the big problem of developmental math.

The messenger mattered, too. Treisman's professional credentials and national reputation no doubt played a substantial role in convincing the math faculty at the community colleges to accept a major change in the way they do business. It would have been difficult to rebut this renowned mathematician's evidence and his understanding of math and math education.

Policy development in real life differs considerably from textbook models that state a problem, offer a set of alternatives, and assume that a group of rational decision makers will choose among them wisely. The Developmental Education Initiative provided an umbrella for many partners to collaborate, but the opportunity for collaboration did not by itself structure the efforts of diverse organizations into a tightly focused agenda. The DEI platform facilitated the confluence of discrete but related organizational and state agendas to cohere in a way that supported and stimulated multiple strategies, all aligning in support of a bold approach to improving completion outcomes for Texas community college students who test into developmental education.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, “2012-2017 Statewide Developmental Education Plan,” <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3>.
- ² John W. Kingdon. 1984. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- ³ These data come from the 2011 Texas Public Higher Education 2011 Almanac, <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=184E20BE-CF29-E04C-196B6AAC34D4D9F0&flushcache=1&showdraft=1>. Texas has an excellent system for tracking and reporting student data.
- ⁴ New Mathways Project, Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, <http://www.utdanacenter.org/mathways/index.php>. Accessed December 18, 2012.
- ⁵ Charles A. Dana Center. 2012. *The New Mathways Project: Implementation Guide*. Version 1.2. University of Texas at Austin: Author.
- ⁶ See: *Texas College and Career Readiness Standards*, 2008, <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us>.
- ⁷ See the 2010-2011 Statewide Developmental Education Plan, <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3>.
- ⁸ Interview with Byron McClenney, national director of leadership coaching for Achieving the Dream and director of student success at The University of Texas, School of Education. Conducted by M. Colleen Clancy, July 2012.
- ⁹ *Closing the Gaps by 2015: Texas’ Strategies for Improving Student Participation and Success*, <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=858D2E7C-F5C8-97E9-OCDEB3037C1C2CA3>.
- ¹⁰ *Overview: Transforming Developmental Education*, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=7D014C29-BE66-0063-3E7B104B8BC5DF3E>.
- ¹¹ See: <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=858D2E7C-F5C8-97E9-OCDEB3037C1C2CA3>.
- ¹² See: <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=858D2E7C-F5C8-97E9-OCDEB3037C1C2CA3>.
- ¹³ The memorandum of agreement was signed by the Texas Community College Education Initiative, a nonprofit that TACC administers to carry out its programs to improve community college education. This report does not distinguish between TACC and its subsidiary organization. The quotations here come from the memorandum.

¹⁴ For more information, see: <http://www.math.txstate.edu/devmath/FOCUS.html>. The Mathways and Focus projects share a common purpose—to improve math outcomes—and they have many elements in common. The groups leading the projects meet regularly to articulate common principles. The Coordinating Board expects to report back to the legislature on best practices that emerge through this work and through ongoing innovation and continuous improvement.

¹⁵ See Public Policy Research Institute. 2012. *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Developmental Education Demonstration Project Evaluation: Final Report, Community Colleges*. College Station: Texas A & M University.

¹⁶ McClenney interview.

¹⁷ Interview with Cynthia Ferrell, conducted by M. Colleen Clancy, July 2012.

¹⁸ The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, “2012-2017 Statewide Developmental Education Plan,” <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3>.

¹⁹ Treisman has referred to math reform as a “joyful conspiracy” many times. See <http://vimeo.com/6491895> for an engaging presentation of his approach.

²⁰ For more information, see: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/quantway> and <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/statway>. For information on the Dana Center’s involvement in Statway and Quantway, see <http://www.utdanacenter.org/mathways/index.php>

²¹ HB 3468, 82nd Texas Legislature, 2011.

²² Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2012-2017 State Developmental Education Plan, Goal 7, page 16, <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3>.

²³ See David Altstadt, Eric Fingerhut & Richard Kazis. 2012. *Tying Funding to Community College Outcomes: Models, Tools, and Recommendations for States*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

²⁴ See http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx and *Tying Funding to Community College Outcomes*.

²⁵ See, for example, discussion of a framework for new uniform Texas assessments in Goal 7 of the board’s 2012-2017 Statewide Developmental Education Plan, <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3>.



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