

# FROM INNOVATION TO TRANSFORMATION TEXAS MOVES TO REFORM DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

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DEVELOPMENTAL  
EDUCATION  
INITIATIVE  
Accelerating Achievement



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.

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