



HEAVY LIFTING

THE STATE CAPACITIES REQUIRED FOR SCALED DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION REFORM

By Michael Lawrence Collins | FEBRUARY 2015

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.



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Completion By Design is a five-year community college redesign effort focused on raising community college completion rates for large numbers of low-income students under 26 while containing costs, maintaining open access, and ensuring the quality of community college programs and credentials. Completion by Design is an initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Postsecondary Success Strategy.

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FOREWORD

Redesigning developmental education is a significant undertaking. The commitment of staff time and resources to “get it right” is a big state commitment. This isn’t a reform that should be viewed as a way to remediate shrinking budgets. It’s a reform that can significantly increase the number of students who have access to college course work and who have the opportunity for certificate and degree completion through access to college. Capacity for reform is in aligning priorities and initiatives and requires a strong faculty commitment and a commitment from college leadership at all levels.

This piece illustrates that reform has traditionally focused on institutional level change. There are some faculty and colleges nationally doing some really incredible innovation projects. But to see real reform we have to find a way to scale those efforts. How do we expand pilot programs in scale, cost, and scope to make them generalizable to the greatest number of students rather than as boutique programs that serve a lucky few?

Michael highlights the need for multiple aligned strategies to push a system reform effort—to design, implement, and sustain reform. Detailed examples are provided of four states that have scaled developmental education reform. The capacity that is common across these states points out that the antecedents to the reform efforts are different in each case. But in all cases some leader has identified reform as a priority. The reform is comprehensive, not just looking at a single piece of the developmental education puzzle but an integrated examination of state policies that impact the environment for student learning.

As the reform has gotten underway five key themes were identified in each state as important for the success of the reform efforts.

1. **Strategic planning** including examining capacity with current policies or policy analysis. Current performance and data outcomes. Build capacity to understand which reforms are effective, cost-effective, and scalable.
2. **Engagement** involving diverse stakeholder groups in the reform. Efforts should be largely faculty led but engage broader constituency groups to consider capacity and implications of proposed reforms. Need for authentic engagement and to include more than just the “usual suspects”. I cannot overstate the need for this engagement for successful reform. Bringing people to the table early and giving them the opportunity to learn and hear from each other is essential in the reform process.
3. **Communication** throughout the process. Before and after policy changes communication with state, campus level, department, and faculty.
4. **Implementation** organization, coordination, structure for reforms to occur. Technical assistance, tools and templates, document barriers and try to remove those are all components to successful implementation.
5. **Evaluation** identify intended outcomes and how those will be assessed. Tie evaluation to program goals.

I can’t emphasize enough the critical importance of engaging faculty in the entire redesign process. In Colorado, our faculty wrote short pieces to describe their engagement with our state-wide developmental education redesign, www.cccs.edu/voices. The Colorado voices point to each of the five themes in this article and help illustrate more concrete ways faculty can engage in the redesign of developmental education.

—Casey Sachs, Colorado Community College System

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of developmental education is to boost the skills of students who enter college not yet ready for college-level work. Unfortunately, as traditionally delivered, it has become the quicksand of our nation's higher education system. The vast majority of students who require remediation eventually sink in the sequence of required classes, never advancing to credit-bearing college courses.¹ This is a particularly difficult problem at community colleges, where the open admission tradition attracts a disproportionate share of the nation's underrepresented and underprepared youth and adults—the populations of focus for Jobs for the Future. Now that earning a postsecondary credential has become crucial for finding family-supporting work, the demand to dramatically improve developmental education—and eliminate it as a hurdle to college completion—has been growing fast. Diverse groups including state lawmakers, higher education systems, private organizations, and the federal government are calling for reform, introducing a variety of changes in policy and practice intended to help people master the academic skills needed to successfully complete English and math gateway courses without long delays in prerequisite remedial courses.

Much of the developmental education reform efforts over the past decade have focused at the institutional level without the benefit of state-level action to create a policy environment that accelerates colleges' efforts to implement reforms at scale. Only a few community college systems and state higher education agencies with authority over community colleges so far have taken on the challenge of trying to transform developmental education across an entire state. Establishing pilot programs at a small group of institutions is common, but most states have not expanded pilots in part because success outcomes are often not generalizable to larger student populations,

and the cost to scale pilots to broader, more diverse student populations can be prohibitive. Unfortunately, pilots have therefore not produced hoped-for improvements in student outcomes.

In order to significantly increase the success of the millions of students who begin college in developmental education, systemic statewide change is essential. However, it is not easy, whether imposed by the legislature, supported by a private group, or initiated by the higher education system itself. States need significant capacity—in policy expertise, data analysis, stakeholder engagement, professional development, communications strategy, evidence-based curriculum and instruction, and administrative management—in order to design, implement, and sustain reform.

What Does “State” Mean? What Does “Policy” Mean?

Jobs for the Future’s Postsecondary State Policy team works primarily with state-level intermediaries focused on improving community college student completion, such as state- or district-level community college systems (e.g., the Virginia Community College System), Student Success Centers (e.g., the Arkansas Center for Student Success), and boards/departments of higher education (e.g., the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education).

Local governance and context dictate what various state actors can do. Jobs for the Future’s Postsecondary State Policy team defines policy broadly—what some refer to as “little ‘p’ policy”—to include state-level activities that can be leveraged to encourage changes in behavior, including convening power, choices about resource allocation, innovation funding, dissemination of research and evidence, and policy or statutes when appropriate. Some will encourage colleges to make changes via board policy or incentives, others by statute, still others by spreading ideas and evidence through convenings and communications. Local context determines what a state intermediary can do, but all of those actions can be equally effective at encouraging colleges across a state to take action.

Given the urgency to increase college completion rates across the country, states—specifically state-level entities with authority over community colleges—should plan and prepare with a combination of intentionality, thoughtfulness, and speed. Postsecondary systems can take many steps to position themselves to make the most of reform efforts.

This brief draws on the experiences of four states that are engaged in system-wide developmental education reform—Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia—to highlight what all states can consider to ensure that changes are well designed, effectively implemented, and squarely aimed at the goal of helping more students earn postsecondary credentials of value in today’s labor market. Each of these states participates in Jobs for the Future’s Postsecondary State Policy Network, which advocates for policy conditions that accelerate colleges’ efforts to implement structured pathways that accelerate students through developmental education, academic and career and technical programs of study, and on to graduation, transfer to a four-year

institution, or employment. The states began collaborating with Jobs for the Future on state policy implementation in 2004 through participating in the Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiatives (2009-2012), in which Jobs for the Future served as the policy lead. Florida and North Carolina also participate in Completion by Design (2012-present). The states have progressed from implementing discrete interventions, such as student success courses or modules, that produce marginal results for small numbers of students, to the conviction that student success requires a series of integrated interventions, with developmental education reform positioned as an accelerated on-ramp to a pathway that leads students to completion. While Florida and Connecticut recently faced radical proposals by legislators to eliminate developmental education and were forced to act fast to help shape new laws, the state community college systems of North Carolina and Virginia decided years ago to design their own plans. The states' experiences in the policy change process—good and bad—point toward key state capacities that are necessary to design, implement, and scale developmental education reform.

Jobs for the Future's DesignForScale

College leaders embracing scaled reforms are signaling a willingness to commit to transformational change. Colleges are undertaking these reforms embedded in state policy environments that are often outdated, driven by the wrong incentives, or incompatible with colleges' efforts. States need to redouble their efforts to modernize policies, and develop more effective approaches that support campuses and build capacity to strengthen implementation. To support and sustain colleges that are improving student outcomes, state policymakers need to DesignForScale.

DesignForScale is Jobs for the Future's approach to helping state policymakers create a visionary policy environment: an environment that encourages and supports colleges to implement integrated, evidence-based student success reforms at scale. We call first for states to undertake a deep analysis of their existing policies, and then to prioritize the implementation of policies that support colleges building structured or guided pathways. We also outline a series of other structures states need to build, such as deep and engaging professional development for faculty and staff, creation of advisory boards that draw in key stakeholders, and support for colleges undertaking a deep and consequential analysis of their own institutional policies and practices. Altogether, DesignForScale will enhance the breadth and integration of reform efforts.

To learn more about the DesignForScale Toolkit and approach, please see <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/postsecondary-state-policy/designforscale-initiative-resources-and-services>

DESIGN FOR SCALE: INTEGRATED STRATEGIES TO SCALE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REFORM, AND THE CORE STATE CAPACITIES THAT MAKE THEM HAPPEN

The four states' developmental education reform efforts—whether legislatively mandated or system-led—are formidable undertakings that include a hard look not just at remedial courses, but also assessment and placement, advising, counseling, student support services, development of delivery models, financial aid, and other components that are critical to college completion. Indeed, the passage of a new policy is just a first step. High-quality implementation of a policy cannot be taken for granted and is, ultimately, far more important than the mere existence of a policy. The comprehensive and integrative nature of full-scale developmental education reform requires an immense amount of staff attention and effort and consumes prodigious levels of time and resources. This has major implications for how such reform efforts are supported and sustained in a way that increases the chances that the reforms will have impact.

The state agencies in charge of community colleges played somewhat different roles in the different states, depending on the origins of the reforms. This brief examines their experiences with developmental education reform through the vantage point of hindsight, a luxury these pioneering states did not have. The states' experiences—both what they did well and what they might have done differently—provide insight into core state capacities that are needed to scale developmental education reform. Core capacities for both legislatively mandated and system-initiated developmental education reform include:

- 1. Strategic planning:** Assess and establish a baseline of state- and system-level policy conditions, current student and institutional performance in developmental education, and the effectiveness of the most common models for improvement.
- 2. Engagement:** Authentically engage a broader and more diverse set of stakeholders impacted by developmental education redesign, including high school faculty and administrators, community college faculty and administrators, state officials, employers, and students and their parents to meaningfully inform the reform process.
- 3. Communication:** Regularly and systematically inform key stakeholders about the reasons for and status of the redesign to increase awareness and understanding of the need for change.
- 4. Implementation:** Figure out how to change assessment, curriculum, instruction, student support, and administrative functions efficiently and do so effectively.
- 5. Evaluation:** Measure the impact of reforms and systematically use lessons learned for continuous improvement.

This brief describes how state higher education agencies with responsibility for community colleges should develop the core capacities that support the reform process to increase the probability that changes to developmental education systems will produce improved student outcomes. We summarize the experiences of the four states and use examples throughout the paper to illustrate what can go wrong—and what can go right. The ultimate lesson is that in order to reform developmental education at scale, states need to begin the policy change process with the end—scale—in mind. Put plainly, states must design for scale. We conclude with suggestions about what states can do to increase their capacity for ensuring the success of change at scale. *Hint: They can't do it alone.*

Settling the Debate: State Policies to Boost Student Success

Debates over the effectiveness of developmental education and how to improve it have been playing out in state legislatures, faculty meetings, higher education board rooms, and dueling op-eds online. Fortunately, new research is increasing our understanding of the most effective strategies for improving the college success of underprepared students (Charles A. Dana Center et al., 2012).

Evidence shows that developmental education as typically designed and implemented does not work for most students, especially those from groups traditionally underserved in postsecondary education. The most common approach is a sequence of semester-long remedial courses in reading and/or math—for which students must pay (or use limited financial aid) and are required to pass—before they can enroll in credit-bearing college-level work. Too many students get bogged down in their developmental education requirements, run out of money or motivation, and quit school without earning a single college credit.

The growing consensus is that developmental education must function as an on-ramp into academic and career-related programs of study. Both emerging research and promising practice point to strategies that help students move more quickly into for-credit “gateway” courses that lead to a program of study and a valued credential. For example, many students may benefit from bypassing traditional remedial classes and enrolling immediately in gateway courses with embedded academic supports. Those with lower reading and math skills may need separate courses taught in new ways, such as contextualizing instruction with occupational training to help students see the relevance of the material to careers they may want to pursue. These students may also benefit from intensive non-course-based skills development experiences, such as tutoring, career counseling, and internships that accelerate their progress.

Since 2011, Jobs for the Future has collaborated with Completion by Design, a five-year national initiative to substantially increase community college graduation rates for low-income students in three states. Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, groups of community colleges in Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio are aiming to fundamentally change developmental education and strengthen pathways to completion, while maintaining access and quality without increasing cost. JFF focuses on helping each state develop policies to advance these goals and recently developed an evidence-based policy framework to guide these pathways-focused institutional reforms.

Settling the Debate: State Policies to Boost Student Success (continued)

JFF's "[Policy Meets Pathways](#)" framework (December 2014) outlines 7 high-leverage state policies that smooth the way for the creation of coherent academic and career pathways that speed students to their education and career goals. Key state policies that facilitate reform include (but are not limited to):

1. Create a framework encouraging colleges to streamline program requirements and create clearly structured programs of study.
2. Encourage colleges to redesign developmental education into accelerated on-ramps to programs of study.
3. Support colleges in developing and implementing a suite of research-based wrap-around student support services that propel students through to completion.
4. Ensure that structured pathways lead to credentials and durable competencies that allow students to build on their skill sets, continuously adapt to thrive in the fast-paced and constantly evolving global economy, and access robust career opportunities.
5. Support colleges' strategic use of data, with a particular focus on creating statewide data systems that track students through their postsecondary educational experiences and into the labor market, extending the data use of colleges with limited institutional research capacity, and expanding the use of real-time labor market information.
6. Create financial incentives to encourage both institutional and student behaviors that increase student persistence and completion.
7. Invest professional development dollars in statewide structures that create intensive, authentic faculty engagement and move efforts to increase college completion toward a deeper focus on teaching and learning.

States that do not have these and other optimal policy conditions highlighted in the framework in place before reform efforts begin face a more difficult path to improving student outcomes.

Figure 1. Policies To Support Structured Pathways



STATE STORIES

There is no simple way to transform a state's developmental education system, as the recent experiences of Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia illustrate. In Connecticut and Florida, influential legislators from opposite ends of the political spectrum led the charge to get rid of all remedial programs because of their poor results. In North Carolina and Virginia, similarly dismal outcomes prompted community college system leaders to spearhead strategic planning efforts to increase student success by redesigning developmental education.

CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut Community College System enhanced its ability to measure student performance in developmental education by upgrading its system-level data capacity while participating in Achieving the Dream.² Subsequently, in the Developmental Education Initiative, the system worked to align standards for high school graduation and college-level study and provided small grants to each of the community colleges to support local efforts to redesign developmental education. A 2012 bill by State Senator Beth Bye, a Democrat from West Hartford who had been a longtime advocate for increasing college access, proposed to effectively end remedial education in Connecticut public higher education and allow all students to start in college-level classes, with academic supports as needed.³ Co-chair of the legislature's joint Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, Bye wanted to help people avoid remedial courses because of her concerns about the overwhelming number of students across the state who took such courses but never completed a degree. Graduation rates in community

colleges were particularly low: less than 8 percent of students referred to remedial courses earned a credential in three years.⁴

A fierce policy battle ensued between advocates for developmental education, who argued that remedial courses are the only entry point to college for many low-income, first-generation students who are underrepresented in higher education, and those supporting major change in Connecticut and across the country. Eventually, the bill was modified and signed into law to allow for more developmental education options. Following a pilot period to evaluate programs and determine best practices, Connecticut implemented a new system in the fall of 2014 that uses multiple measures to assess student readiness and determine placement in one of three tiers:

- A one-semester, stand-alone *intensive* remediation program, intended to prepare students for *embedded* remediation
- An *embedded* “co-requisite” model for students who are nearly ready for college-level work and enroll in a gateway course offering tutoring, extra class time, and other supports
- A *transitional* model designed for students who are far from ready for college-level work and take two- or three-week “boot camps” to boost their English and math skills, along with test-taking strategies, to improve their performance on placement assessments

FLORIDA

As an active participant in national college completion initiatives, including Completion by Design, the Florida College System had already offered incentives for individual institutions to redesign developmental education. A new system policy allowed for developmental education to be offered in short modules, as well as in the traditional linear course sequence. And the system replaced its college placement test (a customized version of ACCUPLACER) with a new diagnostic assessment, the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT), which was aligned with the competencies identified by Florida faculty as necessary for success in entry-level college courses. But the pace of reform was not fast enough for some state legislators. In 2013, a powerful law maker surprised the colleges with a proposal for immediate, drastic change—elimination of funding for all stand alone remedial education.⁵ In its place, a new senate bill introduced a “co-requisite” model where academic supports are provided within a college-level course.

As in Connecticut, the debate in Florida was intense, sometimes emotional. College leaders strongly opposed the legislation, saying it would have a devastating impact on students. Most acknowledged the need for change, but questioned the efficacy of the drastic and immediate cut in funding and the restriction to the co-requisite model as a singular solution. The House substituted a more palatable version, but a conference committee resolving the differences negotiated into the final hours of the legislative session. In the end, Florida’s colleges were able to retain developmental education programs, but were given less than a year to implement a full-scale redesign that included a broad exemption for recent high school graduates. No one who earned a standard Florida diploma after 2007 could be required to take the state’s common

college placement test or to enroll in developmental education. Starting in the fall of 2014, non-exempt students have had four accelerated models from which to choose: modular, compressed, contextualized, and co-requisite. Traditional, semester-long remedial courses are no longer an option. The new law also established “meta-majors,” which are academic pathways that identify gateway courses aligned with broad disciplines, such as health sciences, business, or education, intended to guide students on early course selection and speed entry into programs of study.

NORTH CAROLINA

In contrast to Connecticut and Florida, there was no recent legislative outcry for developmental education reform in North Carolina. State community college officials have been alarmed by low completion rates for years and began a strategic planning initiative in 2010 to increase the number of students who earned postsecondary credentials or degrees and secured jobs that pay family-supporting wages. To explore the major barriers to completion and identify effective practices, North Carolina Community College System President Scott Ralls and other system leaders conducted a “listening tour” to the system’s 58 institutions. The investigation concluded that improving developmental education outcomes would be “ground zero” for increasing student success statewide. In a presentation to the State Board of Community Colleges at the end of the listening tour, community college expert Thomas Bailey, Director of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University, reported that only 8 percent of the students who placed three or more levels below college-level completed a college-level math course (student data was from the four North Carolina community colleges participating in Achieving the Dream).⁶

A founding state member of Achieving the Dream, North Carolina had just been selected in 2009 to participate in the Developmental Education Initiative to focus on state policies that could do the most to improve results. Following a system-wide redesign process led by faculty leaders across the system and the Developmental Education Initiative state policy team, the North Carolina Community College System and the State Board of Community Colleges adopted major changes to developmental education across North Carolina:

- A new remedial math curriculum replaced traditional 16-week courses with eight accelerated modules focused on refreshing specific skills, and as of fall 2013, students only take the modules they need.
- A redesign of developmental reading and English combined these previously separate courses into three intensive eight-week courses.⁷
- Students who are almost college ready but need limited remediation can enroll in college-level courses with supports, rather than traditional stand-alone remedial classes.
- The state now uses multiple measures to assess student readiness for college-level work, including high school grade point average, rather than just scores on a placement exam.

VIRGINIA

As in North Carolina, community college system leaders in Virginia were concerned about the large number of community college students who required remediation but never advanced to college-level courses. In 2009, a study analyzing cohort data from the Virginia Community College System found significant attrition among students who were referred to developmental education and low enrollment of those students in gatekeeper courses. Forty-seven percent did not enroll in any developmental math course. Forty-three percent enrolled but did not complete their full developmental education course sequence. Only 10 percent of the students that enrolled ended up completing the remedial math sequence (Roksa et al. 2009). The state created a developmental education task force to gather information from stakeholders across the system and figure out a way to address the problem. The task force presented its findings in a report called [The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges](#).

The result was a comprehensive redesign of the state's developmental math and English courses. Students now take a new common assessment that diagnoses specific academic weaknesses. For developmental math, instead of semester-length courses, students are placed into one-unit modules—as few as one, or as many as nine. Students only take the modules they need to close their academic gaps. The specific modules in which students enroll are related to their programs of study. Liberal arts students who test into developmental education, for example, take modules that are less algebra intensive whereas students who need remediation who are majoring in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) enroll in modules for the traditional algebra sequence. For developmental English, instead of offering reading and writing separately, the newly redesigned course integrates reading and writing, decreasing the total amount of time students must spend in developmental education.

CORE STATE CAPACITIES NEEDED TO SCALE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REFORM

There are some lessons from the states' experiences with developmental education reform—both what they did right and what they might have done differently—that shed light on some of the core capacities that states must have regardless of whether their reform efforts are legislatively mandated or initiated at the systems level.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The legislative proposals for eliminating all stand-alone developmental education in Connecticut and Florida sparked firestorms of demand for information. The Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education and the Florida College System were asked immediately to provide information and analysis on the impact of the proposed laws. While this type of request is routine, the political backdrop for developmental education reform in each state, and the lack of consensus across the colleges, created high interest and intense debate, which contributed to an unusually high volume of requests. The short timeframe, amount of information requested, and pressure of the legislative session made it difficult for higher education agencies to frame the debate. The frequency of requests and the expectation of almost instant turnaround strained staff capacity.

Strong strategic planning capacity can mitigate some of the challenges inherent in both legislative- and system-level debates on policy reform. There are three particular strategic planning capacities that have the potential to increase the turnaround time for information requests and eliminate unproductive debate. First, states need the capacity to assess their existing policy conditions and to develop common ground or at least common understanding of the ways that state, system, and institutional policies may be contributing to current success outcomes. Moreover, states also need capacity to convincingly illustrate the ways that existing policies help or hinder proposed reforms. Second, states need the capacity to assess student and institutional performance in developmental education. Multiple definitions of the purpose and goal of developmental education complicate the debate about its effectiveness. Third, and finally, states need the capacity to understand which developmental education models are effective for which student populations. Moreover, they need to understand which of the effective models are cost-effective and can be efficiently implemented at scale. States with these capacities can be proactive when it comes to developmental education reform by having answered key questions and settled key debates in advance of embarking on a system-led redesign effort or before finding themselves in a challenging legislative session.

POLICY CONDITIONS

States considering developmental education reform will need to consider the foundation on which new reforms will sit. The state-level policy environment will have considerable influence on whether or not the new reforms will take root. The ability to assess, understand, and communicate the state and systems policy landscape for developmental education and how existing policies might impact proposed reforms is necessary for states to effectively support developmental education reform at scale. States need not start from scratch in understanding the policy conditions that support developmental education. Jobs for the Future—in collaboration with states participating in Achieving the Dream, states in the Developmental Education Initiative, and nationally recognized research and policy experts such as Davis Jenkins from CCRC—developed a framework that identified the key policy levers states have at their disposal to support developmental education reform. The framework and an accompanying state policy self-assessment tool are available online.⁸ Recently updated, the assessment tool situates developmental education reform within the context of academic and career and technical pathways that reflect the most current evidence about completion.⁹

STUDENT AND INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

State agencies in the process of developmental education reform can expect to face questions about student and institutional performance. Such questions are not always easy to answer. Collecting and interpreting information on each state's current student success outcomes in developmental education is more complicated than it may seem, because the data can be misleading. For example, institutional developmental education course-level pass rates may look good in isolation because, in fact, most students enrolled in these classes do earn passing grades (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho 2012). Examining gateway course outcomes for students who began college in developmental education,

particularly those starting multiple levels below college ready, shows a radically different picture. Few succeed. Attrition between developmental education course levels and failure to enroll in subsequent courses in the sequence—not the individual courses themselves—are the primary reasons for the low completion rates (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho 2012). This dynamic can be confusing in developmental education redesign deliberations. In legislative committee hearings, for example, legislative testimony is often conflicting depending on who is answering the question and what metric that person is using for success. Similarly, in system-led redesign efforts, conflicting notions of student and institutional performance can contribute to unnecessary and unproductive debate. While it is certainly useful to understand what is in the denominator when measuring student and institutional performance in developmental education, it is more important to understand that the ultimate developmental education performance measure is college completion (Charles A. Dana Center et al., 2012). Put simply, states need to be prepared to answer what percentage of students who test into developmental education earn credentials and degrees with value in the labor market.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MOST COMMONLY USED DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT MODELS

States need the capacity to understand which developmental education improvement models are most effective—and for which student populations, under which conditions. Staying on top of new research, sorting research methodologies, and understanding implications for local context are a heavy lift, especially for most state system offices with limited staff capacity. Recent research by respected national organizations can help. MDRC’s study, [Unlocking the Gate: What We Know About Improving Developmental Education](#) and CCRC’s [Designing Meaningful Developmental Reform](#) provide evidence on effective models and guidance for successful implementation. States also should get a handle on the likely costs involved, as well as the returns on investment in improved developmental education. While few states have done this, CCRC’s [Resources and Reform: Thinking Through the Costs of a Developmental Math Redesign](#), which analyzes the cost of the Virginia Community College System’s developmental math redesign, is a useful starting point.

The newly established Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness, funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, will also be a helpful resource.¹⁰ The center, a collaboration between premier research organizations CCRC and MDRC, will conduct in-depth research on developmental education. A forthcoming study will assess the results of reforms states and colleges have adopted. The study will analyze developmental education programming at specific institutions as well as comprehensive redesign strategies being implemented across states. The findings from this new research will provide much needed information on the effectiveness of developmental education improvement models that are being implemented across the country.

ENGAGEMENT

States need capacity to engage the broad and diverse stakeholder groups affected by proposed developmental education reforms. Capacity to engage key constituencies is critical to supporting developmental education reform at scale, but few community

colleges systems have capacity in this area. Few, if any, of the developmental education reform initiatives now being implemented meet the criteria of what one of the nation's foremost authorities on engagement, the New York-based nonprofit organization Public Agenda, would characterize as "authentic engagement." In [Public Engagement: A Primer from Public Agenda](#), authentic engagement is described as an inclusive process in which diverse stakeholder groups are actively sought out and given the tools and support to engage in collective problem solving on public problems. Developmental education is a public problem, which dramatic legislative- and system-level policy activity has brought into sharp relief. Authentic engagement is a critical, but often missing ingredient in developing state policies that can support developmental education reform at scale.

Seldom is there time, capacity, or resources for comprehensive engagement strategies, so it is important to identify key areas in which states may concentrate their engagement efforts. First, because developmental education is primarily about teaching and learning, states need to engage developmental education faculty to draw out lessons from practice that may have implications for the proposed reforms. States will also need to consider professional development supports that may be needed for faculty to implement newly proposed models. Second, states need capacity to engage a broader set of stakeholders in developmental education redesign, including K-12 partners and faculty in academic and career and technical programs of study. Finally, states need capacity to grapple with formidable barriers to authentic engagement.

ENGAGE FACULTY AND STAFF

States that are considering developmental education reform need the capacity to engage faculty and staff in the redesign process. Authentic engagement of frontline faculty and staff in legislative- and system-initiated deliberations on developmental education reform can result in valuable information on policy barriers to implementing innovative practices that need to be removed and policies that need to be secured to increase the success of students who test into developmental education. Listening to and acknowledging faculty perspectives and concerns on proposed reforms, particularly policy changes that affect teaching and learning, can reveal important information on whether a proposed policy will be supported or opposed, which has implications for whether the policy will be effectively implemented and successful over the long term. For example, exclusive implementation of co-requisite models as proposed in Florida in some cases could result in loss of employment for developmental education faculty who lack the credentials to teach college-level courses. It should come as no surprise that such a group of individuals might have difficulty embracing this kind of policy.

In addition to the need for capacity to engage faculty on policy issues affecting teaching and learning, states need the capacity to provide robust professional development supports to assist developmental education faculty with adapting and adjusting to the newly mandated or system- or board-adopted redesigned models. Accelerated models require modernizing curriculum, which may mean eliminating content that is no longer current or relevant. It may also require the elimination of duplicative content and the integration of content that may have previously been taught separately, such as the integration of English and reading courses or reading and writing courses. Changing traditional semester-length, lecture-based instruction to a contextualized model, for example, requires intricate curriculum alignment between the developmental education

content and a specific academic or career and technical discipline. In some cases, a team teaching approach is necessary due to the lack of faculty with expertise in both the developmental education content and the discipline in which the remedial course is being contextualized. Such curriculum integration is rare and more often than not will require that the curriculum be developed. It is highly unlikely that faculty will be able to design contextualized curricula without academic release time, which has implications for both institutional teaching loads, course availability, and cost.

Frontline staff who provide direct and related services to developmental education students, such as staff who work in assessment centers, academic support, student services, and financial aid, are not typically engaged in policy development in an authentic and sustained manner. Yet engaging these audiences in a meaningful way could potentially yield valuable information on what systems and supports need to be in place for the proposed policies to be successful. Take assessment for example. What systems need to be in place to transition from almost exclusive use of cut scores on standardized tests to a multiple measures assessment policy? And what professional development might be needed to assist assessment staff to implement such new policies? What are the implications of multiple measures assessment for advising students into programs of study? A robust engagement strategy can go a long way in answering these questions and contribute to the development of policies that are implemented with fidelity because they are informed by practice.

CAPACITY TO REACH BEYOND THE “USUAL SUSPECTS”

The breadth of individuals and groups engaged in the process of developmental education reform is typically narrower than one might expect considering the multidimensional nature of developmental education and the range of stakeholders involved. Developmental education reform spans the K-12, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and employment sectors. But engagement of stakeholders who are not working directly in developmental education is rare. If developmental education is to be an on-ramp into academic and career and technical programs of study leading to credentials with labor market value, employment, and transfer, a more expansive set of groups and individuals—including K-12 partners, faculty teaching academic and career and technical pathways, employers, and students and their families—need to be engaged.

OBSTACLES TO AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

Authentic engagement is not possible in every circumstance, and there are significant obstacles that must be overcome to execute a strong engagement strategy to inform redesign efforts. There are challenges with both legislatively mandated and system-initiated reform. In legislatively mandated reform, the relatively short timeframes do not lend themselves to authentic engagement during legislative session. In the case of both Connecticut and Florida, two legislators moved aggressive plans for major developmental education reform that were initiated and completed within a few months. The brevity and pace of debate during legislative session suggest that authentic engagement of key stakeholders—high school teachers and counselors, community college assessment directors, student services, faculty, students, their families, and organizations that work on their behalf—must come in advance of session if it is to

be considered at all. While system-led initiatives can have more time, there are still challenges to authentic engagement. State systems must balance the desire to populate redesign task forces and committees with the “usual suspects”—for example, faculty and staff who are the “early adopters” predisposed to trying out new things—with the desire to include faculty and staff who may be skeptical of the new changes. Multiple and diverse perspectives are important to developing solutions and broad support for change.

COMMUNICATION

States and state systems must communicate their rationale for reform to multiple stakeholder groups before and after a new developmental education policy is established. States typically face considerable challenges in this area. When reforms are mandated by the legislature, state higher education agencies are typically tasked with interpreting and translating how the new bill will be implemented. This can be time-intensive and require broad engagement of diverse stakeholders, sometimes including the legislative sponsor. In system-led reform efforts, faculty and staff that participate on redesign teams and committees are tasked with communicating committee deliberations and decisions back to their colleagues on campus. While plans to communicate state-level redesign deliberations back to individual campuses are well intentioned, they are rarely executed well, if at all.

It is critical to note that fundamental shifts in the way developmental education is designed and delivered can raise prickly issues, stir emotions, and foment contentious debates. These are not easy conversations to manage. State higher education agencies have had to develop communications strategies to discuss the impact of proposed reforms with their constituencies. These communications challenges are a considerable strain on a state higher education agency’s capacity.

TRANSLATING REFORM

In the case of legislatively mandated reform, after interpreting the legislation and verifying its intent, higher education agencies typically engage the colleges to discuss what implementation would look like. This often includes some back and forth between the system and the colleges—and sometimes even the legislative sponsors—on what can and cannot be done under the new law. In Florida, for example, the vice chancellor for academic and student services for the Florida College System traveled extensively to engage stakeholders to share the system’s interpretation of the new law and learn from diverse groups about how the law as interpreted would impact local institutional practice. Meetings were held with college presidents, chief academic affairs officers, chief student affairs officers, registrars, disability coordinators, equity officers, and test administrators. The Florida College System used the information gathered during this process to create a document of frequently asked questions, providing written guidance on implementation the day the bill became state law. The Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education also provided written guidance to translate and broadly communicate how the new Connecticut law was to be implemented.

COMMUNICATING STATE-LEVEL REDESIGN DELIBERATIONS BACK TO INDIVIDUAL CAMPUSES

North Carolina and Virginia faced different, but still daunting, communications challenges. In the system-initiated reform efforts in North Carolina and Virginia, the remedial reforms were led by diverse faculty and staff committees working to meet a focused charge. The task force, committee, and working group structures the states employed to design and recommend reforms can only accommodate a certain number of participants before becoming unwieldy and unproductive. To reach a sizable number of constituents outside of those structures, it was necessary to launch a vigorous and sustained communications campaign. Critically, the communications plan called on the redesign teams to meet with colleagues at their respective campuses to communicate major issues and decisions. The effective communication of why the committees took the steps they took—and their explanation of the rationale underpinning their recommendations—were critical to securing buy-in from their colleagues, the vast majority of whom were not directly participating in the redesign process.

States also developed tools to foster ongoing communication during redesign work. North Carolina developed a process map that illustrated the timeline for each stage of the reform effort. The Virginia Community College System published and disseminated a series of reports—[The Turning Point](#), [The Critical Point](#), and [The Focal Point](#)—that described the rationale for and process of their redesign efforts.

Even with the best of intentions, communication can break down. Inevitably, systems must address complaints from individuals and groups about not being included or consulted in the decision-making process. In addition, the long duration of the redesign efforts—18 months for the North Carolina Community College System, for example—means that systems must continually remind stakeholder groups of the process and of decisions that have been made. When changes finally are implemented, the process can end up on hold because key stakeholders may not recall the rationale for earlier decisions and might question them.

COMMUNICATION TO MITIGATE THE “TELEPHONE GAME” EFFECT

Dramatic policy proposals to severely change or curtail developmental education command the attention of individuals and groups that care deeply about access to higher education. Especially in the case of policy proposals to “blow up” or “eliminate” developmental education—as some perceived the intent of the legislation in Connecticut and Florida—proposals can cause alarm, especially among people who earn their living from teaching developmental education. In Connecticut, faculty, staff, and college leaders persistently expressed concern that the new developmental education reform law would eliminate access to higher education for students who needed more than a semester of developmental education. This concern increased pressure on the Connecticut Board of Regents’ staff to provide a significant amount of information and frequent clarification.

The Board of Regents' staff convened town hall meetings across the state to provide accurate information about the proposed law. Participants were able to ask questions about the proposed reforms. A member of the Board of Regents' staff described the town hall meetings as "difficult, often emotional conversations." In addition to concerns about limiting access to postsecondary education for high-need student groups, there were concerns that the new law would eliminate jobs for developmental education faculty. Much of the reaction was in response to original versions of the bill, which were more stringent than the final version. Ironically, the bill sponsor's stated intent was to increase access to college-level courses for low-income students and students of color who were overrepresented in remedial courses. Connecticut's story is a telling lesson in both the perceptions and unintended consequences of legislation, and how both must be proactively managed.

Ultimately, the new law required the Board of Regents to collaborate with the state's P-20 Council to make recommendations for how to serve students testing below the ninth-grade level. Community colleges collaborated with adult education providers to provide support, and \$2 million in funding was allocated for this purpose. And additional funds were appropriated in the 2013 legislative session. But there were constituent groups, including the Black and Hispanic Legislative Caucus, that felt these efforts fell short of what was needed and did not quell all of the concerns—or eliminate persistent rumors—that the new law would severely curtail access. It fell to the Board of Regents to explain the law, and to emphasize the legislative intent to provide access to college, not deny it, but legitimate concerns persist to this day.

States and state systems need the capacity to implement an effective communication strategy to productively engage diverse stakeholder groups. College presidents and senior administrators, for example, will want to understand the financial impact of the proposed reforms. Developmental education faculty will be interested in what the proposed reforms mean for their employment, especially those who do not have the credentials to teach under the new, legislatively-required delivery models. Faculty in the academic disciplines and the unions that represent them will be interested in what the proposed reforms mean for standards, academic quality, and the role of the faculty, especially when proposed interventions such as enhanced advising do not fully align with traditional faculty teaching roles. Last, but critically important, students, their families, and their communities will be interested in what the proposed reforms mean for access to college and credential completion. Greater communication and transparency on model effectiveness and probability of success is needed to help diverse constituencies make evidence-based decisions about the developmental education options that give students the best chance of success.

IMPLEMENTATION

In both legislatively mandated and state-initiated reforms, state systems of higher education must help colleges implement the changes. System-level implementation support often includes a set of activities that organize, coordinate, and provide structure for the implementation of the newly established reforms. After translating the new law and interpreting what it means for individual institutions, the state systems provide technical assistance for implementation. This includes multiple activities to help colleges implement the new reforms as efficiently as possible. Common forms of technical assistance for implementation include:

- Convening the colleges (e.g., workshops and conferences) to provide policy updates, the most current evidence on remedial reform, and best practices from the state and national reform efforts
- Brokering of access to experts who can provide on-site technical assistance
- Creating tools and templates
- Documenting barriers to implementation of reforms

CONVENING THE COLLEGES

The Florida College System and the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education each held a series of meetings to help colleges, and other stakeholder and interested parties, understand the new laws. The Florida College System conducted legislative overviews via conference calls and webinars for diverse stakeholder groups that included testing administrators, instruction and student affairs officers, registrars and admission officers, and financial aid administrators. The Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education held regional meetings to convene the colleges and explain the new law. In addition, the presidents and chief academic officers met in order to ensure consistent messaging and communication. In North Carolina and Virginia, the state community college systems also convened the colleges to disseminate evidence-based practices. Jobs for the Future assisted both states in developing agendas and securing nationally recognized content experts to present in the meetings.

BROKERING OF ACCESS TO EXPERTS

States that are considering redesigning developmental education need capacity to secure access to the expertise that the colleges need to speed their innovation efforts. Determining needs for different types of expertise requires that states stay on top of the most recent evidence on developmental education reform. This requires an understanding of the different models being implemented across their respective states and the barriers colleges are experiencing as they attempt to implement new models so that states can determine which colleges might benefit from access to specific types of expertise. Keeping up with the colleges' implementation efforts and the volume of new evidence on issues related to developmental education completion can be challenging given states' current staff capacity. States can extend their capacity by tapping into both local and national experts who can provide technical assistance to the colleges.

States with centralized governance structures can leverage state-level venues to provide access to experts. Colleges in states without centralized governance systems may lack authority and infrastructure to connect the colleges to expertise in support of developmental education redesign, but entities that aggregate the interest of community colleges—such as community college associations and Student Success Centers—can step in to connect the colleges to the expertise they need to accelerate their efforts. States embarking on fully-scaled developmental education reform need to have an explicit strategy for how they will connect the colleges to the necessary expertise for colleges to redesign developmental education.

CREATING TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

In addition to publishing written guidelines answering general implementation questions, state systems produce implementation guides, such as timelines, implementation plans, and data reporting templates, to assist the colleges with organizing and managing the reform process. The Florida College System published an implementation timeline to highlight key dates and to make institutions and stakeholder groups aware of technical assistance in the form of conference calls, webinars, and workshops. The system also provided a common template for the colleges to help them address all required elements of the mandated reform. The template modeled the content that the developmental education plans should include. In addition, the system sent multiple memos to college stakeholder groups providing support for implementation.

DOCUMENTING BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORMS

State systems work with colleges to document barriers to colleges' efforts to implement newly established developmental education reforms. Redesign models that significantly reduce time in developmental education, such as co-requisite programs and other accelerated models, have implications for staffing, scheduling, and financing developmental education, which states and colleges must consider when implementing reform. State systems communicate with the colleges over the course of implementation to identify and develop solutions to barriers as colleges implement the new reforms.

The state systems covered in this brief have identified the following challenges to implementing developmental education reform:

Credentialing

Implementing the co-requisite model requires that the faculty be qualified to teach general education courses at the undergraduate level. For example, in Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia, faculty teaching college-level math and English must have a Master's degree with a concentration in the discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours). This means that developmental education faculty with Bachelor's degrees who were teaching remedial courses before the redesign are not qualified to teach the new co-requisite classes.

Scheduling

There are also implications for scheduling. Many of the new models do not follow traditional semester timelines. Instead of a common start at the beginning of a semester, many of the new models, with the exception of co-requisite classes, have alternative beginning and end dates, especially modular and self-paced interventions. The alternative start and stop times require creative scheduling and tracking. They also typically involve new programming of student information systems in order to schedule, track, and report student outcomes and information for institutional records and federal financial aid.

Financing

Reconfiguring developmental education into models that eliminate levels and courses has fiscal implications that states and colleges must also consider. Remedial strategies that decrease time spent in developmental education, such as modular, compressed, and co-requisite models, can result in decreased funding for colleges in the short term (though some argue that the colleges are very likely to reap revenue benefits from improved student persistence over the long term). In North Carolina, for example, semester credit hours for developmental education dropped by about one third, resulting in a \$16.8 million decrease in funding. This complicates the process of securing buy-in and support for the implementation of these models. North Carolina Community College System leaders requested that the money the colleges would lose under the redesign be reallocated back to the colleges to reward productivity. The governor and General Assembly agreed, and the funding was returned to the colleges.

Another financing hurdle that results from redesigning developmental education is that courses that do not follow traditional semester timelines bump up against federal financial aid seat time requirements, and require systems and colleges to develop burdensome, manual processes for awarding financial aid for these courses.

Aggressive timelines for implementation

The timelines of the mandated reforms in Florida and Connecticut presented challenges for implementation. In Florida, the new law went into effect July 1, 2013, and required rule changes to be completed within three months. By October 2013, the State Board of Education was required to establish new meta-majors. The colleges were required to submit their implementation plans to the chancellor by January 2014 for approval by March 2014. Colleges had roughly six months to create a plan to categorically redesign the way they deliver developmental education, with the changes to begin in September 2014.

The Connecticut law provided for a pilot phase in the summer of 2013, before full implementation in fall of 2014. The intent was for the pilots to provide information about each of the models that the colleges might implement. While the pilots no doubt provided a running start, only one to two semesters of outcomes data from the pilots is not a firm foundation on which to build new models.

The timelines for the mandated reforms also left little time for faculty and staff to receive professional development to prepare for changing from traditional developmental education delivery systems to the new delivery models.

Reform fatigue

In addition, the pace and frequency of change in some states has contributed to reform fatigue. States and colleges have been experimenting with different interventions, participating in multiple change initiatives, and adjusting to multiple policy changes over the last 10 years. Increasingly, both states and colleges are questioning the efficacy of constant change and advocating for time to see if new reforms work before establishing yet another set of reforms.

EVALUATION

In addition to having the capacity to design and implement developmental education reforms, states also need capacity to measure the impact of the reforms. If the high profile of developmental education debates in Florida and Connecticut exemplify the increased prominence of the issue of how underprepared students access postsecondary education, it follows that there is increased pressure for redesign efforts to show meaningful improvement. It is important to ensure that the reforms are contributing both to increased student completion and educational attainment and that public resources are being used efficiently. States also want to ensure that the colleges have the data and information they need to continuously improve and update interventions.

MEASUREMENT

The multidimensional nature of developmental education reform complicates effective measurement. Take multiple measures of assessment for student placement, for instance. Placement has typically been determined by student scores on an exam. The score could be tied to success in subsequent success indicators like course completion, graduation, and transfer. Now, with multiple indicators used to measure readiness, including students' high school background, it is more difficult to understand cause and effect. Similarly, there are new policies that blend advising, student supports, and developmental education reform policies creating the need for a considerably more sophisticated approach to capturing the effect of these new multidimensional policies. For example, some curricular innovations might merge two previously distinct strategies, which complicates measurement.¹¹ Despite their complexity, the new reforms present an unprecedented opportunity to develop new knowledge about effective developmental education.

Current state-level data and research capacity, however, is typically not sufficient to provide the research, analysis, and information needed to measure the impact of the new reforms. States participating in the Developmental Education Initiative and Completion by Design have advanced understanding of which metrics make a difference in measuring outcomes in developmental education. Thanks to CCRC's analysis of the Achieving the Dream data set (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho 2012), gatekeeper studies (North Carolina and Virginia), and study on the impact of early concentration in a program of study (Jenkins 2011), there is general consensus that it is not sufficient to simply measure developmental education completion rates. But states are far from using the data indicators in these seminal studies as a matter of routine.

States face considerable challenges in meeting the data support needs for their colleges, each of which may have dramatically different capacity to collect, analyze, and use data to inform remedial redesign at scale. States' technical and analytic capacity is often stretched thin as state-level personnel responsible for data attempt to provide information and analysis to the individual colleges while also meeting system, board, state, federal, and external demands, such as data requirements from grant-funded initiatives. Tracking developmental education pass rates and gatekeeper college-level course success rates is only part of what is needed to evaluate the success of reform at scale. There is also a need for methodologically rigorous research to determine the specific effect of developmental education interventions that are contributing to reforms. Most state systems outsource this type of research, as very few state systems have the capacity to provide it (see, *Leveraging external resources, below*).

Developmental education redesign exacerbates already strained capacity, even for states with robust data capability. Florida, for example, uses its strong data capacity to identify the employment status and earnings of students who have completed developmental education in comparison to their college-ready peers. This is useful information, but it does not provide insight on the institutional factors and variables that influence outcomes for students in developmental education. While there have been advances in how states think about student success in developmental education, there is a great need for data and information that states and colleges can use to inform redesign efforts in real time so that they are continuously considering key factors and variables and acting accordingly to improve student completion.

LEVERAGING EXTERNAL RESOURCES

To augment their data and research capacity, states have leveraged national completion initiatives like Achieving the Dream, the Developmental Education Initiative, and Completion by Design. They have also partnered with research organizations like CCRC and MDRC, sometimes through partnership in national initiatives, but also independently. National completion initiatives and external research partners have augmented state-level evaluation and research efforts focused on the impact of developmental education redesign efforts. Achieving the Dream, the Developmental Education Initiative, Statway and Quantway, and others have conducted evaluations on developmental education reforms.

The published findings from the evaluations of various initiatives are useful; however, for the most part, these evaluations are limited to a small number of colleges participating in the respective initiatives. While state systems and the colleges within those systems can benefit from the research findings of initiative-based studies—such as MDRC's [Turning the Tide](#), evaluating Achieving the Dream, and [Bringing Developmental Education to Scale](#), which evaluated the Developmental Education Initiative—states need additional capacity to better understand the factors and variables that influence student and institutional performance in developmental education.

Both the North Carolina and Virginia Community College Systems are now participating in a research project designed to shed light on the impact of the states' respective redesign efforts. The three-year project, [Analysis of Statewide Developmental Education Reform](#), led by CCRC, will study the implementation and early outcomes from both systems. This enhanced capacity for implementation research will add much-needed knowledge of institutional and policy barriers that prevent the efficient implementation of the redesign. Still, those states had the opportunity to participate due to external funder interest. While this study will be influential for the field, states and state systems undertaking major reform cannot count on external funders, and will need to plan for—and pay for—evaluation on their own.

CONCLUSION

Implementing remedial reform at scale is a labor- and time-intensive enterprise. Designing and implementing new developmental education models that replace traditional assessment, placement, advising, and credentialing policies and practices is a monumental undertaking. Despite the steep investment of staff time and effort required to redesign and implement developmental education at scale, the actual number of system staff assigned to carry out the reforms is usually surprisingly small. In the states covered in this brief, only one or two people from the system office had major responsibility for the redesign effort. And for all of them, the developmental education redesign work was just one part, in some cases a relatively small part, of their larger job responsibilities. For example, the vice chancellors for academic and student affairs in Florida and North Carolina, both of whom had executive responsibilities for their respective systems, led the developmental education redesign efforts in their states.

The small number of people attacking the huge challenge of developmental education redesign is in part a function of budget cuts that have resulted in reduction in force and hiring freezes in state government, including state higher education agencies and system offices. This has constrained state capacity to put robust systems and infrastructure in place to support developmental education reform. State spending on higher education has grown in recent years, but has not reached pre-recession levels. Thus, at least in the near term, it is unlikely that resources will be available for state higher education agencies and system offices to hire new employees to augment the state and system capacity to ensure that developmental education reforms are effectively implemented and that they take root and scale.

The heavy lift of developmental education redesign at scale, and the shortage of state and system capacity to support effective implementation, requires new thinking about how capacity might be strengthened given fiscal realities. The experiences of the states covered in this brief point to ways that state higher education agencies might augment their capacity to support developmental education reform. Each of the states described benefited from participation in privately-funded redesign initiatives. While exclusive reliance on philanthropy is not sustainable in the long term, leveraging private resources to augment existing state-level support can be a smart use of resources. States considering redesigning developmental education at scale should consider strategically engaging local and national funders to augment state-level redesign efforts.

The multidimensional nature of developmental education makes reform at scale a heavy lift. In his essay [Getting Ideas into Action: Building Networked Improvement Communities in Education](#) (2011), Anthony Bryk, renowned education scholar and President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, aptly describes the complexity that community colleges and state policy makers tackle to reform developmental education. “Multiple processes happen simultaneously, and multiple sub-systems within a community college are engaged around them. Each process has its own cause and effect logic, and these processes interact with one another over time to produce the overall outcomes we observe (p. 15).” State policy makers that seek to reform developmental education at scale must have the capacity that is needed to develop solutions to what Bryk characterizes as a “complex problem system” (p. 15).

The multidimensional nature of developmental education reform requires that states pay attention to multiple things simultaneously, which can be difficult to do without a systematic approach. This report concludes with a checklist that states can use to guide their efforts to develop the capacity to catalyze, design, implement, and support developmental education reform at scale. Before launching a major developmental education redesign, legislators, state policymakers, and systems-level staff should consider the following questions:

- What reform efforts are happening at colleges in the state now? How can those colleges’ experiences and results help others understand the called-for reform?
- Does the state’s policy environment support the called-for reforms? What changes are needed?
- What data does the state have on student outcomes? How can that data be used to help others understand the need for reform?
- What existing statewide committee structures/working groups can be leveraged for communicating and engaging with faculty across the state?
- What reforms are happening in peer states? Can their tools, templates, and other products be modified and put to good use in this state?
- What existing statewide convenings can be leveraged for communicating and engaging with faculty across the state?
- How much funding is allocated for evaluation of the called-for reform?
- With whom might the system partner for evaluation?
- Which funders are interested in improving student outcomes in this state?

ENDNOTES

¹ As many as 70 percent of community college students take at least one remedial course (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez 2012). Only about one-fourth of community college students who take a remedial course graduate within eight years (Bailey 2009). Most students who are referred to remedial education do not even complete the remedial sequence required for entering college-level courses (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho 2012).

² The Connecticut Community College System was the state lead organization in Achieving the Dream and the state lead in the early years of the Developmental Education Initiative (2009-2011). Connecticut's higher education governance was reorganized in 2011, and the newly reorganized Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education assumed leadership of the initiative.

³ See Connecticut Public Act 12-40, which took effect July 2012.

⁴ Connecticut submission to Complete College America, September 2011 cited in testimony by Dr. David Levinson, Board of Regents for Higher Education Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, Connecticut General Assembly February 16, 2012.

⁵ See Florida Senate Bill 1720, which took effect July 2013.

⁶ See: <http://www.successnc.org/SuccessNCFinalReport>

⁷ The combined developmental Reading and English sequence has three levels. Each eight-week course is 56 contact hours.

⁸ See: <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/DFS-State-Policy-Self-Assessment-Tool-031915.pdf>

⁹ In a July 16, 2014 presentation at Jobs for the Future's Postsecondary State Policy Summer Meeting, Dr. Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Director of Young Adult and Postsecondary Education at MDRC, reported that there is evidence that integration of multiple interventions may matter to completion as is seen in MDRC's evaluation of the City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which has had high success rates. Developmental education is integrated into the pathway leading to the Associate's degree.

¹⁰ For description of Center see: <http://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=1493>

¹¹ The evaluation challenge is not limited to developmental education reform. There are similar challenges in evaluating pathways reforms.

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