POLICY BULLETIN

MOVING FORWARD
STRENGTHENING YOUR STATE'S CAPACITY TO BRING INNOVATION TO SCALE

A JOBS FOR THE FUTURE POLICY BULLETIN
BY M. COLLEEN CLANCY

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ACHIEVING THE DREAM is a national nonprofit leading the nation's most comprehensive non-governmental reform network for student success in higher education history. The Achieving the Dream National Reform Network, including nearly 200 institutions, more than 100 coaches and advisors, and 15 state policy teams—working throughout 32 states and the District of Columbia—helps 3.75 million community college students have a better chance of realizing greater economic opportunity and achieving their dreams.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evidence-based innovations developed locally can have a powerful and broad impact on a state's student success agenda, but only when a system is in place for accelerating the diffusion of innovation across institutional lines. State leadership is key to bringing effective practices to scale. That is what is happening in North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, which are using both existing and new resources to support and build on the efforts of their colleges.

All three states participate in Jobs for the Future's Postsecondary State Policy Network, which includes 11 states that are focused on improving student success, in conjunction with the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network. These states receive technical and policy assistance, with support from Achieving the Dream, Completion by Design, and the Student Success Center initiative.

A SYSTEMATIC WAY TO ACCELERATE CHANGE

Moving Forward describes how the three states have improved their capacity to accelerate change and pursue a student success agenda, presenting a systematic way to assess the strengths of the existing state infrastructure and determine what needs to be done to enhance, diffuse, and sustain it.

STEP 1: FILL THE LEADERSHIP ROLE
ONE OR MORE ORGANIZATIONS STEP UP TO LEAD THE EFFORT.

All states can point to community colleges that are finding innovative ways to improve student outcomes, and all states have organizations that support such efforts. North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia have something more: In each case, state organizations have taken on the express mission of organizing and extending community college reforms. These lead organizations are connected not only to the community colleges but also to influential executive and legislative policymakers. They bring vision, structure, and relationships to the mission of improving student outcomes.

STEP 2: MAP CRITICAL ALLIES
THE LEAD ORGANIZATIONS IDENTIFY AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDERS.

To accelerate the work of improving student outcomes, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia have strategically mapped the existing educational infrastructure, and they use the result to ensure that information and action flow throughout the community college system. The goal is to identify key allies and bring them into a communication network so that all partners can prepare an effective advocacy strategy. Visualizing community colleges and educational organizations as places on a map, the lead organization builds communication "roads" that connect them.

STEP 3: BUILD MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE
THE LEAD ORGANIZATIONS AND ALLIES USE AN INFORMATION NETWORK THAT PROMOTES WIDESPREAD ENGAGEMENT.

In Step 2, the lead organizations and allies have "connected the dots" by and between stakeholders in the work of innovation. Dialog within this informed network leads to a shared agenda. Strategic conversations deploy existing and new communications resources to:

- Accelerate the pace of innovation by sharing practices and results;

- Inform participants about the work of other organizations in the network;

- Share state and local data to help frame issues;

- Share recommendations on proposals for change;

- Build consensus on moving effective practices to scale; and

- Report on progress in the reform process.

STEP 4: SUSTAIN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
THE LEAD ORGANIZATIONS AND ALLIES REPORT ON, DIFFUSE, AND ACCELERATE EVIDENCE-BASED INNOVATION.

States increasingly seek ways to create a cycle of continuous improvement in and expansion of the work as they gain experience with the process of innovation, and as data on the extent of the problem to be addressed and the impact of reforms become ever more convincing. With an ongoing system of data collection and reporting, the lead organizations and allies promote continuous improvement in student outcomes throughout the state. This represents a culture shift, a recognition that reform is a developmental process that has to be evaluated and adjusted as implementation progresses.

States in the forefront of community college reform are also in the forefront of creating the infrastructure to sustain and extend their innovations. Texas, Virginia, and North Carolina provide examples of how states are building this capacity:

- In Texas, leadership teams, composed of college faculty and administrators, are the hub of a network to review program developments, assess results, and recommend improvements.

- In Virginia, a statewide team of faculty and administrators visited all 23 community colleges to identify outcomes, lessons, and challenges in the implementation of the developmental math redesign.

- North Carolina's State Board of Community Colleges endorsed SuccessNC, a planning initiative to foster policies and practices that improve student success that coordinates and aligns the state's student improvement initiatives.

TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

Texas, North Carolina, and Virginia, along with their peers in the Postsecondary State Policy Network, are moving innovation beyond local efforts by enhancing the state capacity to promote statewide engagement, disseminate knowledge, and engage in collaborative problem solving. The three states have different governing systems and are exploring options tailored to their community college systems. Nevertheless, their efforts to build consensus share strategies that outline a model for promoting systemic change.

These states have learned the importance of building connections with and among all community college stakeholders to arrive at consensus solutions. They have organized the work strategically to maximize and diffuse success. They are taking advantage of the resources available in their states and working with national partners to connect their efforts to cross-state initiatives. As innovation matures, effective, proven solutions are emerging to transform the way community colleges improve student completion rates, and states are beginning to transform the way that colleges and other stakeholders talk to one another in that effort.

THE STUDENT SUCCESS AGENDA

Community colleges have an historic commitment to serve local needs, fueling a deeply embedded tradition of academic independence. However, that tradition now must be reconciled with the growing emphasis on improving student outcomes, which highlights areas of concern that affect all colleges and that call for responses on a broad scale. Evidence-based innovation developed at the local level can have a powerful impact on the student success agenda, but only when a system is in place for accelerating the diffusion of innovation across institutional lines. State leadership is key to bringing effective practices to scale.

Moving Forward looks at three states that are tackling the problem of bringing innovation to scale, using both existing and new resources to support and build on the efforts of their colleges:

- Using a strategy of broad engagement, Texas is reinventing developmental math.

- Under the umbrella of SuccessNC, North Carolina has organized its ambitious reform agenda for the community college system.

- Virginia's colleges are collaborating to both design and implement a new statewide system of developmental education.

All three states participate in Jobs for the Future's Postsecondary State Policy Network, which includes 11 states that are focused on improving student success, in conjunction with the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network. These states receive technical and policy assistance, with support from Achieving the Dream, Completion by Design, and the Student Success Center initiative.

Texas, North Carolina, and Virginia, along with their peers in the Postsecondary State Policy Network, are moving innovation beyond local efforts by enhancing their states' capacity to promote statewide engagement, disseminate knowledge, and engage in collaborative problem solving. The three states have different governing systems and are exploring options tailored to their community college systems. Nevertheless, their efforts to build consensus share strategies that outline a model for promoting systemic change.

Moving Forward describes how the three states have improved their capacity to accelerate change and pursue a student success agenda:

- **Step 1**
  Fill the Leadership Role: One or more organizations step up to lead the effort.

- **Step 2**
  Map Critical Allies: The lead organizations identify and build relationships with important stakeholders to accelerate the work of improving student outcomes.

- **Step 3**
  Build Momentum for Change: The lead organizations and allies deploy existing and new communications resources to build an information network that promotes widespread engagement in the work of innovation.

- **Step 4**
  Sustain Continuous Improvement: The lead organizations and allies establish an ongoing system to report on, diffuse, and accelerate evidence-based innovation throughout the state.

THINKING BIG

Moving Forward is designed to help states create a policy climate ready for change. It describes four basic steps a state needs to consider as it prepares to spread innovative ideas across all its community colleges. For a deeper treatment of the entire scaling-up process, Jobs for the Future's forthcoming publication, *Thinking Big: Scaling Up Innovation in State Community College Systems*, covers a wide variety of issues that arise in the scaling-up process, from defining the problem to financing and sustaining successful initiatives.

Moving Forward discusses those strategies as sequential steps, although the work to accelerate change does not always proceed in the highly organized fashion that would suggest. Most states engaged in community college reforms will already be working with existing assets, including institutional relationships and communications resources, and they also will have basic practices in place to coordinate efforts across their college systems. The analysis presented here offers a systematic way to assess the strengths of the existing state infrastructure and determine what needs to be done to enhance, diffuse, and sustain it.

The general nature of the analysis also makes it useful for adapting the state's network to new issues that arise. For example, a strategic process to promote developmental education reform is likely to share some elements with one to promote innovation in student services. Analyzing the needs of the process according to the steps described here can lead to adaptations appropriate to the particular issues under review.

Of course, the development of a comprehensive infrastructure to support change is a creative process. Opportunities that are not apparent at the outset continually arise as the process moves forward. Taking advantage of such opportunities can enhance current efforts and produce a better structure to support the college's efforts. And while the work to bring innovation to scale will vary from state to state, any state can use the processes and examples described here as a guide to advancing a community college reform agenda.

STEP 1: FILLING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE

All states can point to community colleges that are working on innovative solutions to improve student outcomes, and all states have organizations that support these efforts. North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia have something more: In each, one or more state organizations have stepped forward to take on the express mission of organizing and extending community college reform efforts. These lead organizations are connected not only to the community colleges but also to influential executive and legislative policymakers. They bring vision, structure, and relationships to the mission of improving student outcomes.

To transform innovative effort into systemic change, these lead organizations:

- Define an agenda, with specific goals and targets;

- Develop and implement action plans to achieve those targets;

- Realign the organizations' internal processes and priorities to create an effective team to lead the effort;

- Build communication networks with and among the stakeholders;

- Draw on the resources of state and national partners to bring funding and other resources to the state; and

- Organize and staff processes to study, report on, and implement systemic changes.

In most states, the choice of lead organizations flows naturally from the community college governance system. In states with a centralized system, such as Virginia, the work may be directed or facilitated by the state governing authority. In states where governance is more decentralized, the statewide community college association, a state higher education coordinating board, or a collaborative effort of similar agencies might spearhead reform.

The table on page 4 illustrates the authority and resources that state lead organizations in North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia bring to the work of reform. The organizations listed here are deeply connected to community college systems, but some have regulatory authority and others represent the colleges' collective interests. Although it would seem to be easier to reform a highly centralized system, all three states have developed collaborative processes for reform. The reason is clear: *It takes a strong state effort to adopt consistent but flexible solutions to the problems of student completion—and it takes a strong commitment from the colleges to implement those solutions at the local level.*

DESIGNATED STATE LEAD ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES PROFILED IN *MOVING FORWARD*

ORGANIZATION	FUNCTION	OPERATING STRUCTURE
NORTH CAROLINA		
System Office, State Board of Community Colleges	Administers the state community college system	• Lead agency for state efforts for Achieving the Dream, the Developmental Education Initiative, and Completion by Design • Reports directly to state board • Works with local boards and presidents; works with independent associations of administrators and faculty
TEXAS		
Texas Association of Community Colleges	Advocates for funding and other issues affecting community colleges; supports student success initiatives	• Lead agency for state efforts for Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative • Composed of college chancellors and presidents • Can effect change by agreement
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	Coordinates the work of legislature and two-year and four-year colleges	• Partnered on the Developmental Education Initiative with Memorandum of Understanding • Recommends and reports to legislature • Some regulatory authority over colleges • Significant authority retained by locally elected boards of trustees
VIRGINIA		
Chancellor's Office, Virginia Community College System Office	Represents the chief executive of system and secretary of State Board of Community Colleges	• Lead agency for state efforts for Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative • Centralized governance over colleges in the system • Standing advisory councils and committees

STEP 2: MAPPING CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

A state's community college infrastructure is made up of the educational institutions themselves as well as the governmental agencies and nonprofit groups that support the goals of education. Although these organizations work on common problems, it is rare for a state to have a system in place that encourages and supports regular coordination by and among its educational stakeholders. North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia have taken on the challenge of strategically mapping and using the existing educational infrastructure to create a network in which information and action flow throughout the community college system.

The goal of mapping a state's education infrastructure is to identify key allies and bring them into a communication network so that partners can better prepare an effective advocacy strategy. (The process also identifies potential opponents.) The term "mapping" is apt here. If the state's community colleges and educational organizations are visualized as places on a map, the lead organization builds the communication "roads" that connect them. In the words of Cynthia Ferrell, Texas director of the Developmental Education Initiative and associate director of Student Success Initiatives at The University of Texas at Austin, the job of creating a network is to "build a straighter and stronger line between all of the existing organizations."

The result of this process is unique to each state, but the initial inquiry is the same: Who needs to be at the table to move the student success agenda forward? Answering a series of questions can help lead organizations identify these key participants.

WHO MAKES THE CRITICAL DECISIONS AT THE STATE LEVEL?

At its most inclusive, the task of improving student outcomes at scale means taking statewide action. Usually, the specific issue and the nature of the state's governance system will determine who makes the decision to take that action. Prominent decision makers include:

- Key legislators, including members of the higher education committees, who enact statutory and funding changes;

- The agency that sets the strategic direction and adopts regulatory changes to the system, generally a higher education coordinating body or state board for community colleges; and

- State community college associations, which effect change through agreement.

In Texas, the reform of developmental education involves all three types of decision makers. **The legislature** enacts statutory requirements for future programs, and it has

funded innovation projects to test new strategies. **The Higher Education Coordinating Board** implements the legislative mandates and manages the innovation projects. And the chancellors and presidents of the **Texas Association of Community Colleges** are overseeing a statewide redesign of developmental math, in partnership with Educate Texas and the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin.

WHICH ORGANIZATIONS INFLUENCE DECISIONS AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL?

Identifying the key players at the college level requires a careful mapping of councils and professional organizations to identify those that influence decisions and direct college-level implementation. In most states, a council of college leaders—chancellors and presidents—has significant influence on decisions that affect the colleges, whether it makes the ultimate decision or not. Yet these leadership councils do not make their decisions in a vacuum. They depend upon the recommendations of other key administrative and faculty councils and other bodies. These may be part of a state's formal organizational structure, or they may be independent professional associations.

Understanding the mission and influence of each organization is key to the mapping process. For example, in Virginia, where governance is highly centralized, the state policy manual specifies a hierarchy of advisory councils and committees and defines the process for implementing policy changes. Many of the councils make recommendations directly to the chancellor, who forwards them to the Council of Presidents for review. Some of these councils and committees are critical to the student success agenda. For example, the Academic and Student Affairs Council, which advises the system on matters related to instruction and student services, is an essential ally to systemic change in these areas.

In Texas, where governance is less centralized, many independent professional associations, across a wide range of constituencies, are important sources of information

and support. The state's Developmental Education Initiative Policy Team met regularly with both statewide organizations (e.g., the Texas Community College Instructional Administrators) and local or regional organizations (e.g., the Achieving the Dream Gulf Coast Consortium). The relationships and information the policy team developed by networking with these organizations convinced the college chancellors and presidents to agree to develop a statewide approach to developmental math.

Whatever the governance structure, strong relationships with faculty associations are critical to improving student completion rates. The key organizations may be part of the state structure, such as the chancellor's faculty advisory committee in Virginia, but more often they are independent associations that support professional development or address faculty work conditions. For example, the North Carolina System Office regularly collaborates with the state faculty association, which looks at a broad range of educational issues, including workload and pedagogy. When an issue calls for it, the System Office brings in representatives of specific professional associations. "We try to involve the right groups early and often," says Sharon Morrissey, executive vice president and chief academic officer for North Carolina Community Colleges. In the case of developmental education reform, this included the president of the state math association and members of the state developmental education association.

WHO WILL DO THE WORK OF REFORM?

At the outset of the reform process, lead organizations begin drawing on the expertise, influence, and communication networks of the state- and college-level professionals who will implement changes on the ground. "The real work

happens when the colleges agree to engage in it," explains Byron McClenney, national director of leadership coaching for Achieving the Dream and director of student success at the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.

The contributions of each individual depend on the issue, of course, which places a premium on bringing in players who will be most affected by the proposed changes. A few suggestions:

- For classroom-level changes, start with faculty. Subject-area instructors are essential partners for changes to their curricula or pedagogy, but other faculty members may also be affected—for example, when a professional program incorporates classes from the math curriculum.

- Engage the state and college institutional researchers who will be critical to changing the data collection system.

- Solicit input from student service professionals on support services for new programs.

- Consult with financial aid officers on the effect of changing the aid system.

- Ask representatives from smaller colleges, with fewer resources, how changes will affect their operations.

- Interdisciplinary committees, with representatives from a wide range of affected professionals, are particularly helpful when proposing systemic changes.

It may not be immediately apparent how changes will affect all parts of the system; a wider perspective can bring these implications to light—for example, changes in support services or data collection may affect work in the classroom. Including the right professionals in the change process will make it possible to consider these impacts early and pave the way for acceptance of the changes when it is time to implement them.

TO BRING REFORM TO SCALE, THE IMPLEMENTERS MUST "OWN" THE PROCESS.

"When we began, the faculty thought this was the next central [office] takeover, but I let them take over. Now they know I'm not blaming them; I'm looking to them for solutions."[1]

—Glenn DuBois, Chancellor, Virginia Community College System

WHICH STATE ORGANIZATIONS WILL THE PROCESS AFFECT?

Instituting major changes to all the community colleges in a state system requires collaboration with a number of affected agencies and organizations. Among the common student success reforms that cross departmental lines are:

- Aligning curricula of K-12 coursework with college-readiness standards;

- Changing developmental education and transfer-level coursework recognized by four-year colleges; and

- Redesigning professional-technical programs supported by the state's workforce development agency.

An existing relationship will make it easier to collaborate when the opportunity for change arises. Thus, advocates seeking state-level change should foster relations with cross-agency stakeholders through regularly scheduled meetings and not wait until an issue surfaces. The North Carolina Community College System Office does this by meeting quarterly with University of North Carolina administrators to collaborate on initiatives.

It is also common for statewide organizations to act as partners in formal processes to effect change. This is often the case in Texas, where the Higher Education Coordinating Board and the commissioner of public education work together on issues of college and career readiness spanning prekindergarten through college undergraduate and graduate programs.

WHO CAN BRING RESOURCES TO THE CHANGE PROCESS?

A wide range of stakeholders outside the two-year system can bring key resources to the change process. Nonprofits that advocate for education improvement can add influence and institutional relationships to the effort. Foundations can bring attention, funding, and professional resources. Four-year institutions can add influence and expertise.

Business organizations that hire graduates can be particularly persuasive partners. These organizations are interested in highly trained graduates who have both soft skills for business and technical know-how, and they are often willing to take their concerns directly to the colleges and the legislature. Moreover, employer organizations and their members may offer funding or internships to support the changes they value.

The following groups are among the statewide organizations partnering in the reform efforts highlighted here:

- **Educate Texas**, an educational advocacy network, works to align the efforts of educational policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropic organizations.

- **The Hunt Institute** for Education Leadership and Policy, an agency of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, informs the legislature about policy issues affecting education reform.

- The **North Carolina Chamber of Commerce** adds its influence on matters affecting the business community.

- The **Dana Center** at The University of Texas provides the state with expertise as a national leader in innovative math instruction.

- A **Virginia Department of Education** representative has served as a core member of the Virginia Community College System's state policy team for Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative, and the department has been a key collaborator on both data analysis and ongoing discussions around reform efforts.

- The **State Council of Higher Education** in Virginia collaborated with the VCCS in early data analysis that helped the system determine the direction of its reform efforts.

National partners are also valuable allies in diffusing innovation and stimulating change at scale. States in the forefront of innovation are part of Achieving the Dream, the Developmental Education Initiative, Completion by Design, Complete College America, and other national reform efforts that bring both funding and expertise to the process.

Without the contributions of prominent national foundations, these and similar systemic efforts to reform community colleges could not make substantial progress. The funders do far more than write checks to stimulate change. In a very tangible sense, the decision of several foundations to focus on community colleges initiated the current national conversation on the importance of these institutions for providing avenues to economic success for low-income students. As participants in the initiatives receiving support from these foundations, states become part of a large and growing national peer network of colleges and organizations striving to identify and bring to scale evidence-based practices that improve our students' prospects.

THE POWER OF NATIONAL ALLIES

"Become very active in pursuing grant opportunities to bring these organizations into the state. Developing these relationships and understanding the expertise that the consultants bring to the table help carry the conversations forward. We're all in this together. It is very reassuring that these groups don't come in as though they have all the answers."

−Sharon Morrissey, Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, North Carolina Community College System

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STEP 3: BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE

The discussion in Step 1 emphasizes the importance of lead organizations in defining goals that effect change through the support of an informed network of stakeholders. The primary purpose of creating this network is to stimulate dialog that leads to a shared agenda to achieve these goals— to "connect the dots" by and between stakeholders. These strategic conversations can:

- Accelerate the pace of innovation by sharing practices and results;
- Inform participants about the work of other organizations in the network;
- Share state and local data to help frame issues;
- Share recommendations on proposals for change;
- Build consensus on moving effective practices to scale; and
- Report on progress in the reform process.

States use a variety of means to connect stakeholders to one another and to decision makers, and they take advantage of many existing resources and create new opportunities.

CONDUCT A LISTENING TOUR

In the context of the student success agenda, a listening tour is just what its name implies: A team made up of key stakeholders travels around the state to hear what leaders, faculty, and others at the colleges have to say about the problem and ways to address it. A listening tour is a powerful tool for sharing perspectives with and hearing from the people whose work the change will affect most deeply—as well as for ensuring that they are informed about work going on throughout the state. A state may launch a campaign with a listening tour to community colleges, as both Texas and North Carolina did to develop the foundation for their student success strategic plans. Tours are also an effective

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LISTENING TOURS ARE MORE THAN WINDOW DRESSING.

"The best experts in terms of student success, we fundamentally believe, are on each of our campuses, so . . . the first thing we had to do was very in-depth listening [to develop the state's long-range strategic plan]."[3]

−Scott Ralls, President, North Carolina Community College System

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tool for getting feedback during the implementation phase of the process, enabling the state to adjust the plan as it evolves.[2]

GETTING ON KEY ORGANIZATIONS' AGENDAS

The most effective way to reach members of key organizations is to appear regularly on their meeting agendas. As reform efforts evolve, relationships develop with enthusiastic or influential individuals within those organizations, and informal conversations move the process along. In Texas, the Developmental Education Initiative Policy Team, with direct connections to the state's chancellors and presidents, built enthusiasm by carrying the message of these leaders' interest in, and support for, math reform.

BUILDING A CONSENSUS ON MATH REFORM

"It was amazing when I went to the first meeting of the Texas Community College Instructional Administrators and told them what was going on with the Developmental Education Initiative. The members were very happy to come to [the] meeting to hear what the presidents were collectively talking about. . . .I would come to their meeting, pull out my notebook and tell them what the other groups were doing. Then I would say, 'Now it's your turn. What would you recommend?' We were building a shared agenda together."

–Cynthia Ferrell, Texas Director, Developmental Education Initiative and Associate Director, Student Success Initiatives, The University of Texas at Austin

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SHAPING THE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

States that promote innovation strategically use a variety of conferences as venues to inform participants of key developments, diffuse innovation, and encourage conversations on systemic change. In most states, major convenings offer an opportunity to present a focused agenda

to representatives from colleges throughout the state. In North Carolina, the biannual system conference highlights the most important current issues. In 2012, the state focused on SuccessNC, the system's strategic plan, and incorporated themes from Completion by Design about building structured pathways to completion; it invited colleges to share their activities to move that agenda forward.[4]

In many states, a variety of smaller conferences enable reform advocates to reach targeted audiences. Texas has used these gatherings effectively to reach audiences with shared interests—for example, the deans and mid-level administrators who attend the annual "Leading from the Middle" conference of the Texas Community College Teachers Association.

The ultimate opportunity to shape a conference agenda is for the lead organization and its allies to plan their own conference. The Texas Developmental Education Initiative Policy Team brought together math faculty from across the state to talk about math reform (*see the Texas profile in Step 4, page 11*). Educate Texas also provided support for the conference, confirming the value of casting a broad net to bring in influential stakeholders.

SUPPORTING THE MESSAGE

States are becoming increasingly sophisticated at supporting their reform agendas with communications tools that create a powerful impact. For example, several times a year, Virginia publishes online Student Success Snapshots to present system-level and college-specific data on student retention.[5] A North Carolina video presentation uses data to emphasize the experiences of the state's college students.[6] The System Office presented the video to college audiences during a listening tour conducted before it wrote the state's strategic plan. In Texas, Cynthia Ferrell emphasized storytelling as she went from point to point carrying the message of reform. She supported her stories with well-designed PowerPoint presentations that built on Texas' history as part of the Wild West.[7]

Increasingly, states use webinars and online videos to inform stakeholders of developments. North Carolina taps into

state and national resources to present entire programs of professional development opportunities via webinars, along with updates on student success initiatives.[8]

Organizational websites are critical for getting messages out. The lead organizations in all three states use their websites to share videos, PowerPoint presentations, and other information widely. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's website is a vehicle for providing resources on developmental education reform.[9] These resources connect to a wide range of state and national projects, such as the Dana Center's New Mathways Project to reform Texas developmental math.[10]

North Carolina's SuccessNC website, a comprehensive tool for informing constituents about reform efforts, promotes and supports the state's student success efforts.[11] It provides access to the overall student success strategic plan, college-specific work in support of the plan, and descriptions of each of the state's initiatives within that plan, as well as contact information of initiative leaders, monthly progress reports,

and other information. The state and individual colleges post news to the website. Colleges post news of the innovations they are working on, and they can review the work of other colleges through a searchable database. A key section of the website features observations from the SuccessNC listening tour on barriers that limit student success and updates readers on the actions the System Office is taking to address the concerns. An extensive array of webinars offers professional development opportunities, and videos of presentations update college constituents on important issues in the system.

In addition to websites, lead organizations use various types of technology to reach out to and engage stakeholders. For example, in Texas, where geography makes face-to-face meetings especially expensive, fewer are needed with the use of virtual meetings and online bulletin boards. Virginia created two online bulletin boards to support its developmental education redesign work. One was available to the public; the other was private, for the exclusive use of the redesign teams.[12]

DATA ILLUSTRATE THE NEED FOR CHANGE.

Some of the most powerful visual supports for making the case for educational reforms emphasize student data on the limits and failures of the status quo. These data also form a baseline for the work that lies ahead. "Information can be shocking when you first see it," says North Carolina's Sharon Morrissey. "Jobs for the Future helped us navigate through the data and helped us contract with the Community College Research Center at Columbia University to do some further research based on North Carolina data. They helped to guide our conversation to the place where we were ready to begin the redesign."

STEP 4: SUSTAINING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As momentum for change builds, the time comes to set up a decision-making process. Traditionally, this means appointing an ad hoc task force to study the issue and make recommendations to the appropriate governing board. These traditional task forces usually dissolve after submitting their recommendations, often without leaving behind a clear process for implementing and sustaining their recommended changes.

The initiatives described here are more deliberate, and they aim at deeper, wider impact. As states gain experience with the process of innovation, and as data on the extent of both the problem to be addressed and the success of reforms become ever more convincing, they increasingly seek ways to create a cycle of continuous improvement in and expansion of the work, leading to continuous improvement in student outcomes. This shift recognizes that reform is a developmental process that has to be evaluated and adjusted as implementation progresses. States in the forefront

of community college reform are also in the forefront of creating the infrastructure to sustain and extend their innovations. Texas, Virginia, and North Carolina provide good examples of how states are building this capacity.

TEXAS: LEADERSHIP TEAMS AND PHASED IMPLEMENTATION

In even the best-planned initiatives, the process of achieving change at scale is neither fully predetermined nor linear. One powerful service of a focused lead organization is to recognize opportunities as they arise and incorporate them into the process. The Texas Developmental Education Initiative Policy Team, made up of representatives from the Texas Association of Community Colleges and the Higher Education Coordinating Board, has taken advantage of several opportunities to support a process of continuous improvement in the redesign of the state's math curriculum. Two key elements have made this possible.

Leadership teams, composed of college faculty and administrators, act as the hub of a network to review developments, assess results and recommend improvements to the program. These teams grew directly from the work of the Developmental Education Initiative Policy Team, which led to a consensus that math instruction needed reform.

The policy team initiated the math reform process by asking all of the state's community college chancellors and presidents to send their math department chairs to a planning conference. The conference organizers hoped that at least 50 faculty members would show up; instead, 148 math instructors attended, coming from all over the state. When most of these faculty leaders volunteered to serve on

the reform task force, the organizers of the conference made a quick decision for inclusion and helped the group establish five Texas leadership teams, each addressing a different aspect of reform. Shortly after the meeting, at the request of state developmental reading and writing faculty, the initiative added a sixth team to work on innovation in these areas.

The leadership teams began working on the issues involved in redesigning developmental education and, in the process, became a vehicle for diffusing innovation throughout the state. Their enthusiasm for shared conversations and agendas led to a decision to continue their work by "embedding the process into how Texas does business," according to Cynthia Ferrell.

The second element is rooted in the work of the curricular leadership team. After examining and discussing a range of options, its members quickly 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. Partnering with 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.

Implementation and evaluation of the new curriculum was a consideration at the outset of the process, and each college district in the state has agreed to take on a specific role. Nine districts work directly with the center as "co-development partners," and the remaining districts will phase in implementation as "active learner" or "capacity building" sites. Ongoing review and program adjustment are part of this implementation process.

TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP TO SUPPORT SUSTAINED REFORM

Texas' approach to reforming developmental education "represents a dramatic change in the way that community colleges will be doing business with the legislature and in the way that we view ourselves and talk about ourselves. It is a reinvention of our association and the way we work together."[13]

−Reynaldo Garcia, President, Texas Association of Community Colleges

The Texas Association of Community Colleges oversees the work of the Texas leadership teams and the colleges' participation with the Dana Center. Conceived and managed as a lobbying force for the colleges, TACC has been transformed by its work in support of the Developmental Education Initiative into an organization dedicated to student success.

VIRGINIA: AN INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION

Beginning in the spring semester of 2012, all 23 of Virginia's community colleges redesigned their delivery of developmental math. The colleges replaced traditional semester-long remedial math courses with a series of nine, single-unit modules. Students take only those modules they need, based upon their performance on a diagnostic assessment.

To support such intensive college work, the Virginia Community College System created the Developmental Math Implementation Support Team. Throughout spring 2012, DMIST visited all twenty-three colleges, with four main goals: learn about how individual colleges are implementing the developmental education math redesign; identify challenges that the colleges are facing; learn about promising practices and processes that have potential to be scaled across all Virginia community colleges; and uncover ways that VCCS can help to encourage continuous improvement as the redesign progresses.

"The redesign is a big change and a big challenge for all the colleges," noted Implementation Support Initiative lead Jane Serbousek. "VCCS didn't want to say, go do this, and walk away. It wanted to provide the support necessary to help colleges be successful."[14]

During their visits, the DMIST members observed classes and labs, hosted student focus groups, and interviewed representatives from various departments across the campuses. Their qualitative research was supported and informed by the Community College Research Center.

To spread their learning from the tours, the team launched DMIST Discoveries, a publication series that describes innovations at the colleges, points to solutions to common problems, and provides contact information for inquiries. A "Did You Know" section highlights noteworthy practices uncovered during the tours: For example, some colleges have begun offering credit classes during the last twelve weeks of a semester so that students who complete their developmental education requirements during the first four weeks can start college-level classes mid-semester.[15]

The team also developed a report for each college, as well as a report to the system to identify areas where VCCS may need to provide further resources and supports. This systemwide effort, designed with all 23 colleges in mind, emphasizes good communication, keeping momentum alive, and sustaining and supporting reform efforts.

SUCCESSNC

North Carolina, long a leader in the effort to raise completion rates for community college students, has taken a comprehensive approach to coordinating its student improvement initiatives by placing them under a single umbrella that supports student success. In 2010, the state board of community colleges endorsed SuccessNC, a planning initiative to foster policies and practices that improve student success.

SuccessNC is an initiative and it is also an organizing tool. Built on the *Preventing Loss, Creating Momentum Framework* developed by Completion by Design, which identifies the

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MAPPING CRITICAL ALLIES AT EACH STEP

VCCS paid careful attention to the make-up of the Developmental Math Implementation Support Team, seeking to cultivate "a richness in the diversity of its members, which added a special touch and broadened the learning opportunity."[16]

—Susan Wood, Vice Chancellor of Academic Services and Research, Virginia Community College System

critical junctures at which many college students drop out, SuccessNC places North Carolina's student success initiatives in one of four categories: connection, entry, progress, and completion (*see Figure 1. Student Success Framework*).[17] As many states involved in reform can attest, managing competing initiatives can be daunting. SuccessNC is helping the System Office to align the many goals, priorities, and deadlines of its various initiatives, while maximizing the system's focus on student success.
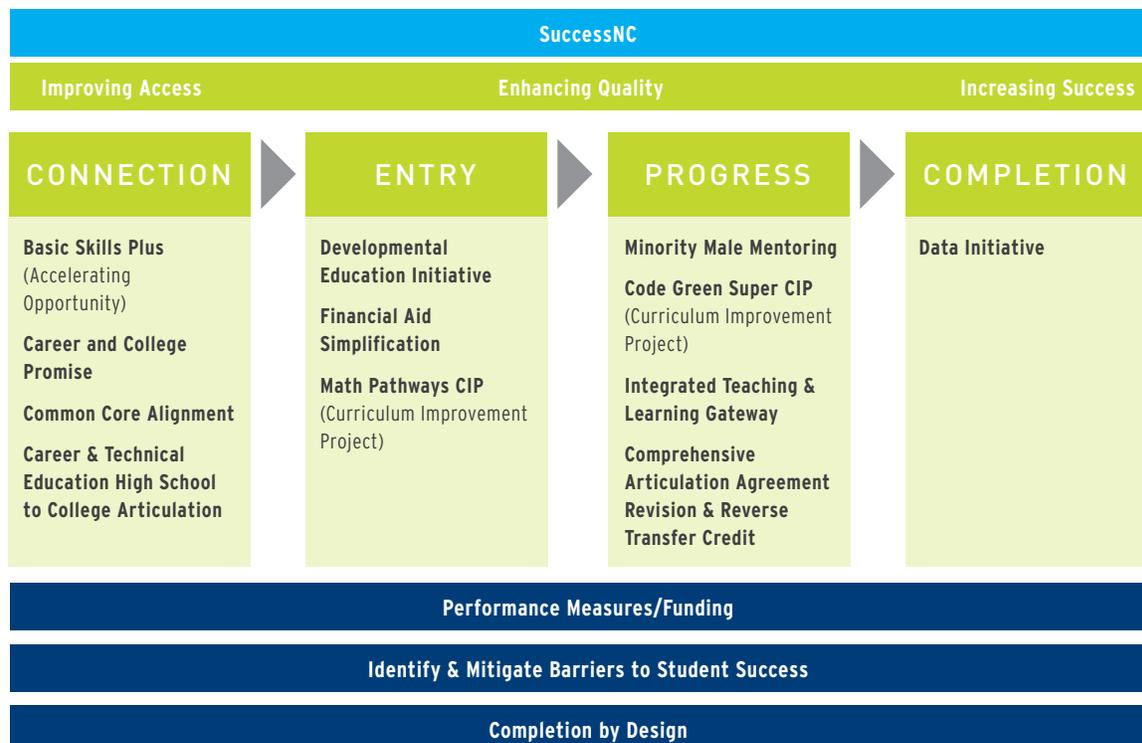
Individual state board staff members take responsibility for priority initiatives, and they set timelines, manage the process, and submit monthly progress reports. As noted earlier, SuccessNC is supported by a robust website full of updates, videos, and other resources stemming from the many student success initiatives it captures.

Two committees, led by college presidents, provided broad support to SuccessNC initiatives. The Innovative Ideas committee accelerated change and enhanced system operations by creating policy incentives for and removing

barriers to institutional innovation. The Performance Measures committee developed statewide measures aligned with student success, which were adopted by the General Assembly in 2012. The 2013 legislative session will determine how those measures will be connected to performance funding. As SuccessNC moves forward, the work of adopting new policies and practices (and eliminating those that serve as barriers to student success) will be validated using the performance-based student success measures developed under the SuccessNC umbrella.

In many ways, SuccessNC operationalizes the steps outlined in this brief. It helps the lead organization to map out its partners, communicate across initiatives, align competing demands, and sustain the momentum needed for reform. SuccessNC's organizing framework, emphasis on success throughout a student's academic experience, and attention to details such as funding and performance measures, are helping the state take an unprecedented, systemic approach to improving student success.

FIGURE 1.
STUDENT SUCCESS FRAMEWORK

SuccessNC			
Improving Access	**Enhancing Quality**		**Increasing Success**
CONNECTION ▶	**ENTRY** ▶	**PROGRESS** ▶	**COMPLETION**
Basic Skills Plus (Accelerating Opportunity) **Career and College Promise** **Common Core Alignment** **Career & Technical Education High School to College Articulation**	**Developmental Education Initiative** **Financial Aid Simplification** **Math Pathways CIP** (Curriculum Improvement Project)	**Minority Male Mentoring** **Code Green Super CIP** (Curriculum Improvement Project) **Integrated Teaching & Learning Gateway** **Comprehensive Articulation Agreement Revision & Reverse Transfer Credit**	**Data Initiative**

Performance Measures/Funding
Identify & Mitigate Barriers to Student Success
Completion by Design

TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

In its earlier stages, the work of improving community college completion was characterized by many small-scale pilot projects. Some of these demonstrated promise, but their reach was too narrow to "move the needle" on dramatically improving student success. Many other efforts, conducted in isolation, went unrecognized. Still others duplicated one another in the absence of efficient ways to learn about efforts at other colleges.

As innovation moves forward, it is critical to develop mechanisms that strengthen and align institutional reform efforts, diffuse knowledge about what works (and what does not), and derive recommendations that promote state action at scale. Only by organizing a process to test, implement, and assess the effectiveness of strategies that accelerate the rate of improvement can we reach the ambitious postsecondary attainment goals set by the public, the colleges, and the major policymakers and funders working in this arena.

The states represented in this brief have learned the importance of building connections with and among all community college stakeholders to arrive at consensus solutions. They have organized the work strategically to maximize and diffuse success. They are taking advantage of the resources available in their states and working with national partners to connect their efforts to cross-state initiatives.

Yet the challenges to dramatically improve student outcomes, and doing so on a broad scale, are many, and the process is a long one. Accepting leadership responsibilities is a major organizational commitment, and developing an informed and connected network takes time and effort. Still, as innovation matures, effective, proven solutions are emerging to transform the way community colleges improve student completion rates, and states are beginning to transform the way that colleges and other stakeholders talk to one another in that effort.

STEP 1

Fill the Leadership Role: One or more organizations step up to lead the effort.

STEP 2

Map Critical Allies: The lead organizations identify and build relationships with important stakeholders to accelerate the work of improving student outcomes.

STEP 3

Build Momentum for Change: The lead organizations and allies deploy existing and new communications resources to build an information network that promotes widespread engagement in the work of innovation.

STEP 4

Sustain Continuous Improvement: The lead organizations and allies establish an ongoing system to report on, diffuse, and accelerate evidence-based innovation throughout the state.

ENDNOTES

[1] As quoted in Rose Asera. 2011. *Innovation at Scale: How Virginia Community Colleges Are Collaborating to Improve Developmental Education and Increase Student Success.* Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

[2] See Asera (2011) for a discussion of how Virginia used listening tours.

[3] From President Ralls' video overview on North Carolina's organizational work to promote its student success agenda. See: www.successnc.org/webinars/successnc-overview

[4] See: www.ncsu.edu/mckimmon/cpe/opd/NCCCS/

[5] See: www.vccs.edu/Academics/StudentSuccess/tabid/622/Default.aspx

[6] See: www.successnc.org/content/successnc-listening-tour

[7] See: "Taking Developmental Mathematics By the Horns," www.nisod.org/conference/tools/2012_ferrell.pptx

[8] See: www.successnc.org/webinars

[9] See: www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3

[10] See: www.utdanacenter.org/mathways

[11] See: www.successnc.org

[12] See Asera (2011).

[13] See the Texas Association of Community Colleges presentation to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, July 26, 2012: www.thecb.state.tx.us/apps/Events/VideoFetch.cfm?ID=317

[14] As quoted in "Data-Driven Improvement: Virginia Conducts Developmental Education Redesign Listening Tour." *Achieving Success.* June 2012, Issue 19.

[15] See: www.vccs.edu/Academics/DevelopmentalEd.aspx

[16] As quoted in "Data-Driven Improvement: Virginia Conducts Developmental Education Redesign Listening Tour." *Achieving Success.* June 2012, Issue 19.

[17] See: completionbydesign.org/about-us/our-approach-and-tools