

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements..... 2

Task Force Members..... 3

Executive Summary 4

Developmental Education in Context 7

The Case for Change..... 10

The Turning Point 13

Recommendations..... 14

Next Steps 18

References..... 19

Acknowledgements

The Virginia Community Colleges' Developmental Education Task Force included representatives from both the colleges and the K-12 community who devoted a considerable amount of time and effort researching, discussing, and compiling information related to student success in developmental education. The focus throughout the process was on how Virginia's Community Colleges can have a greater impact on the success of those students needing developmental coursework upon enrollment at our institutions.

The members of the task force held town hall sessions at various colleges, presented at VCCS conferences and meetings, and created a blog to solicit input from administrators, faculty, staff, and students. This report represents the work of VCCS stakeholders from across the Commonwealth who convened in large and small groups and collaborated electronically over the past twelve months.

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Executive Summary

Virginia's Community Colleges (VCCS) are engaged in a strategic planning process to develop a plan for 2010-2015 that builds upon the successful *Dateline 2009* system-wide plan. The central focus of the new strategic plan is improving student success at all 23 colleges in the VCCS by increasing the number of credentials completed in the next six years by 50%. In order to accomplish this goal, the academic and student affairs leadership at the colleges recognizes that more students have to enter the community colleges prepared for college-level work and more students have to successfully complete their developmental education coursework in a timely manner. Community colleges have a unique mission help under-prepared students to be successful in college work. As the primary source of developmental education, it is incumbent upon community colleges to eliminate barriers and to create structures that support students in achieving their academic goals.

VCCS's internal research highlights a significant barrier to student success associated with developmental education. When tracking the fall 2004 first-time-in-college, program-placed students, the findings were:

- Over half (52%) of entering, program-placed students enrolled in at least one developmental course; of those, two out of five (43%) took more than one developmental course.
- Of those beginning in developmental mathematics, only 36% of transfer curricular students enrolled in a gatekeeper, college-level mathematics course within four years, as compared to 62% enrolling a gate-keeper, college-level English course.
- Those starting in lower-level developmental mathematics have more barriers to overcome and are less likely to be successful than their counterparts who began in upper-level mathematics.
- Non-developmental education students are almost twice as successful in completing an award as those requiring developmental education.

In September 2008, the Academic and Student Affairs Council created the Developmental Education Task Force (DETF) and charged the group to review developmental education practices throughout the VCCS and make recommendations on what steps the system should take to become the premier purveyor of developmental education, in more streamlined and efficient ways, resulting

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

in greater rates of student success. The recommendations from the DETF will be developed into an action plan for the system with different groups, some existing and some new, responsible for leading the implementation for the recommendations. This must be a systemic, collaborative effort if significant measurable change is to be achieved.

Three umbrella goals guided the work of the task force. The VCCS is committed to:

- reducing the overall need for developmental education in the Commonwealth
- designing developmental education in a way that reduces the time to complete developmental reading, writing, and mathematics requirements for most VCCS students to one academic year
- increasing the number of developmental education students graduating or transferring in four years from 1 in 4 students (25%) to 1 in 3 students (33%).

Based on a comprehensive review of national research in developmental education, a review of current best practices in the VCCS and a review of student success data from the Virginia community colleges, the DETF reached consensus on the recommendations that follow:

Virginia's Community Colleges must:

- redesign English, Mathematics and Reading developmental education
- collaborate with its K-12 partners to reduce the need for developmental education.
- provide and require academic and student support services that cultivate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains for developmental education students.
- collect comprehensive and accurate placement data for all first-time-in-college (FTIC) program-placed students.
- develop mechanisms and methodologies to hold colleges accountable for the success of developmental education.
- provide adequate support to ensure that developmental education faculty are highly effective in achieving the goals for developmental education.
- build the administrative infrastructure to improve accountability and communication.
- conduct a comprehensive review of policies that directly or indirectly affect developmental education success.

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

Implementing the recommendations of the task force will be critical if Virginia's Community Colleges are going to meet the student success goal outlined in the 2009-2015 strategic plan. Increasing educational attainment is an economic development issue for the Commonwealth. Community colleges serve as a workforce engine for their communities, providing pathways to high-skill, high-wage occupations. Community colleges also serve as a major pathway for students to attain a baccalaureate degree. It is imperative that community colleges and other higher education institutions in the Commonwealth significantly increase their degree production in the coming decade if Virginia is to remain a competitive force in the global economy and if its citizens are going to have capacity for advancement. Increasing the rate of students attending college must be accompanied by a corresponding focus on helping students complete their college degree. Success in developmental education is essential to positively impact degree completion rates.

Developmental Education in Context

In order to meet current and future demands for a more educated, credentialed workforce, Virginia's Community Colleges must expand access to and improve success in higher education for the communities they serve. The global economy of the 21st century requires greater numbers of people and a significantly higher percentage of the population to obtain substantial post-secondary education if they are to contribute to and benefit from the new economic order (Lumina, 2009). The United States, unlike other developed nations, is on a path where the rising generation, aged 19-34, will earn fewer college degrees per capita than both of the two preceding generations. Virginia's rate of degree attainment reflects this troubling national pattern. There is an increased pressure on institutions of higher education to get more degrees into the economy, both from legislative leaders as well as from workforce leaders. In a period when Virginia's Community Colleges, as well as other institutions of higher learning, are experiencing tremendous growth in enrollments, it is not seeing a corresponding increase in award attainment. In 2008-09, enrollment in Virginia's Community Colleges was at an all time high of over 262,000 students, representing an increase of 30,000 in the last 5 years.

Many of those pursuing higher education, including unfortunately many recent high school graduates, are not yet ready for the demands of collegiate coursework. Developmental education courses bridge the gap in students' preparation. According to an analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88), close to 60% of community college students took at least one developmental education course; and 44% took more than one.

Colleges have achieved marginal results in moving students placed into developmental education to completion of a degree or certificate. Less than one-quarter of the developmental students in the NELS sample above earned a credential after eight years. In comparison, almost 40 percent of the non-developmental education community college students in the NELS sample successfully completed a degree or credential.

Developmental education students face significant barriers in achieving academic success. It is incumbent upon the VCCS to increase the number of Virginians who enroll in higher education, persist through developmental and college-level studies, and attain academic credentials. Recognizing that the success of developmental education students is essential to meet the VCCS's

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

goal to produce more credentials for the Commonwealth, the VCCS Developmental Education Task Force (DETF) was formed in fall 2008 to develop recommendations that, when implemented, will result in fewer students needing developmental education, more effective paths through developmental education, and more students achieving success by completing their program of study.

Charge to the VCCS Developmental Education Task Force

The DETF was charged to review developmental education practices throughout the VCCS and make recommendations on what steps the system should take to become the premier purveyor of developmental education in more streamlined and efficient ways, resulting in greater rates of student success.

Through data and research in structure and policy, the DETF examined holistically the role that developmental education plays in overall VCCS student success. As part of its work, the DETF:

- Reviewed and clarified the purpose of developmental education and analyzed implications for policy and practice resulting from a clarified purpose.
- Reviewed the current system policies related to developmental education and proposed revisions that would promote greater student success in alignment with sound academic principles and practice.
- Investigated and analyzed measures of success, data reports, and studies on success of developmental education students.
- Examined structures for developmental education, highlighting innovative and successful strategies, improving the student experience, and identifying barriers to success.
- On the basis of the comprehensive review, recommended broad strategies and specific initiatives related to developmental education that should be pursued by Virginia's Community Colleges, leading to enhanced outcomes for student learning and success.

Background

At a turning point, the VCCS is at the confluence of several forces and initiatives that have led to critical self-reflection and the acknowledgement that developmental education must be re-conceptualized and restructured. For the past five years, the VCCS has been immersed in a systemic

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

student success focus, working in tandem with partner states, foundations and organizations, and national experts to improve student success. Roots of this widespread focus to improve student success are found in the VCCS's participation in the *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* (AtD) initiative. There is recognition that what was acceptable in the past is not sufficient for the challenges currently faced by the system. Many colleges, responding to concerns about student success and completion rates, have already embarked on innovative developmental education pilot programs. Colleges have looked to national research for successful innovations and across the system the various models are being tested, to include: modularization, learning communities, cooperative instruction, fast track, early alert and intrusive advising. Data are being gathered on the success of these innovations as to inform future discussions about expanding successful pilots to scale across the system.

The VCCS realizes its role in providing knowledge and skills to a Virginia workforce that is and will be competitive on an international scale, and the VCCS is currently developing the next strategic vision and plan that will build upon the strong foundation of *Dateline 2009*. The cornerstone of the next strategic vision will be student success.

At this time of dwindling state resources and record enrollments, Virginia's Community Colleges are being asked to continue to carry out their mission. However, with this increased overall enrollment, the number of students coming to community colleges under-prepared has also increased. Colleges are investigating new and innovative ways to provide the academic and student support services that students need in order to be successful in the current challenging environment.

On another front, the VCCS's increased research capacity has led to a more in-depth knowledge base and a better understanding of students' academic behaviors, along with a greater demand for data to inform decision-making. Studies such as the NGA report on college readiness of high school students and research on factors leading to success have encouraged the system to increase efforts to make more non-college-ready students college-ready. National research indicates that "business as usual" will not lead to success and will not produce the knowledge and skills that Virginia's workforce needs. In supporting underprepared students to attain their goals, Virginia's Community Colleges have a unique niche and mission to fulfill. The VCCS is indeed at a turning point.

The Case for Change

The single greatest challenge facing the Commonwealth today is to develop and sustain an educated and skilled workforce that allows Virginia to be competitive on the international economic playing field. The foundation of a robust economy hinges on the knowledge and skill of its people. According to *Measuring Up 2008: The National Report Card on Higher Education* published by the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, when compared internationally, Virginia is surpassed by many countries in the proportion of students who complete certificates or degrees. With 16 out of 100 students completing certificates or degrees, Virginia's completion rate is only 63% of the rate in Australia, the top-performing nation on this measure, where 26 out of 100 students complete certificates or degrees. Virginia also lags Japan, Switzerland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, France, Iceland, Denmark, Canada, the Czech Republic, Portugal, Korea, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Spain. The result is a generation of Virginians that for the first time in history faces the prospect of a future with less education than the generation that preceded it. Community colleges serve as a workforce engine for their communities, providing pathways to high-skill, high-wage occupations as well as an on-ramp to the baccalaureate. It is imperative that community colleges and other higher education institutions in the Commonwealth significantly increase their degree production in the coming decade if Virginia is to remain a competitive force in the global economy. It is imperative that community colleges and other higher education institutions in the Commonwealth significantly increase their degree production in the coming decade if Virginia is to remain a competitive force in the global economy. Institutions must respond to this national call for more degrees without sacrificing the academic integrity of the college experience. The economic needs of our nation must be met through educating and training successful learners who have completed postsecondary credentials.

More students are coming to the VCCS unprepared to do college work. Since their inception, community colleges in Virginia and across the nation have provided broad access to postsecondary education for those individuals who otherwise may not have had the opportunity to earn a degree or a credential. As compared to traditional four-year institutions, community colleges also serve a higher percentage of under-represented populations, including first-generation, low-income, and ethnic and racial minority students. In order to increase educational attainment rates,

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

community colleges must increase the success rate of those students who begin their community college career in developmental coursework. The majority of students who enroll in community colleges, up to 80% in some states and over 50% at Virginia's Community Colleges, come unprepared for college-level work. Last fall, 30,000 students enrolled in developmental courses throughout the VCCS. Many of those students do not complete their developmental coursework and consequently do not move forward in their college careers.

VCCS's internal research highlights a significant barrier to student success associated with developmental education. When tracking the fall 2004 first-time-in-college, program-placed students, the findings were:

- Over half (52%) of entering, program-placed students enrolled in at least one developmental course; of those, two out of five (43%) took more than one developmental course.
- Of those beginning in developmental mathematics, only 36% of transfer curricular students enrolled in a gatekeeper, college-level mathematics course within four years, as compared to 62% enrolling a gate-keeper, college-level English course.
- Those starting in lower-level developmental mathematics have more barriers to overcome and are less likely to be successful than their counterparts who began in upper-level mathematics.
- Non-developmental education students are almost twice as successful in completing an award as those requiring developmental education.

Developmental education courses were designed to serve as a means to provide the academic preparation students need in order to be successful in their subsequent college-level courses. Ironically, developmental education has increasingly become a significant barrier for many underprepared students, often preventing them from progressing in their academic careers. Community colleges have a unique mission to prepare developmental education students to be successful in college work. As the primary source of developmental education, it is incumbent upon community colleges to eliminate barriers and to create structures that support students in achieving their academic goals.

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

Moving Forward

During 2007-08 and 2008-09, Virginia's Community Colleges brought a number of national experts in student success to Virginia to present at various convenings of the academic and student support leadership and the State Board on ways to increase the number of students that successfully complete degrees and credentials at the community college. Throughout the presentations, common themes and issues emerged as needing attention. In response, three task forces were commissioned: the first to examine placement policies and practices in the VCCS and their impact on student success; the second to make recommendations for effective use of the student development course to present college survival skills and promote student engagement; and the third, the DETF, to re-conceptualize developmental education, placing an emphasis on the timely progression of students through developmental education into gatekeeper college-level courses and eventual graduation. The work and recommendations from the placement and student development task forces informed the DETF's efforts.

The purpose of developmental education is to prepare students for college-level work. Outcomes of developmental education are not at acceptable levels and have severe implications for the system's ability to increase the number of credentials produced for Virginia's economy. In response, the DETF developed a set of bold recommendations to serve as a foundation for a system-wide restructuring of developmental education.

The Turning Point

The DETF, throughout its research and deliberations, recognized that developmental education offers great promise to the people of Virginia, yet developmental education requires urgent and coordinated strategies for improvement. The recommendations in this report mark a turning point in VCCS developmental education efforts. It is no longer just about opening doors and providing access, but it is also about improving the educational experiences and success of VCCS students. The VCCS is re-conceptualizing its developmental education mission to place emphasis on the timely progression of students to enrollment in and successful completion of college-level coursework, and ultimately to achievement of higher education credentials. By improving outcomes for students, the VCCS advances the general welfare of the Commonwealth and of the nation.

Three Overarching Goals

What is needed to support students in reaching their higher education goals? Three overarching goals provide the framework for the DETF's recommendations. The VCCS is committed to:

- reducing the overall need for developmental education in the Commonwealth
- designing developmental education in a way that reduces the time to complete developmental reading, writing, and mathematics requirements for most VCCS students to one academic year
- increasing the number of developmental education students graduating or transferring in four years from 1 in 4 students (25%) to at least 1 in 3 students (33%).

Recommendations

In order to meet the principles outlined above, the VCCS Developmental Education Task Force puts forth the following recommendations:

1. The VCCS must redesign English, Mathematics and Reading developmental education.

The VCCS must consider the following as part of the redesign:

- Overall content that students need in the developmental education courses
- Overall content that students need in the developmental education course sequence
- Overall content that students need in the gatekeeper course
- Specific content necessary for students based upon diagnostic results
- Alternative structures for delivering developmental education
- Methods to integrate technology creatively into developmental education delivery
- Student-support action plans for motivated but still developmentally-placed students to be able to mainstream directly into gatekeeper courses
- Strategies to ensure that most students are able to complete successfully all reading, writing, and mathematics developmental education requirements within a year

2. Virginia's Community Colleges must collaborate with its K-12 partners to reduce the need for developmental education. Using a systemic definition of college readiness, the partners will align their curricula, and share essential data on program outcomes. K-12 and community college partners will work to create a data infrastructure that monitors student progression from high school through post-secondary that includes the following:

- Development of a plan for increasing the number of students that come to the community college ready for college-level courses
- Development of acceptable data sharing agreements
- Transmission of electronic transcripts from the high schools to the community colleges
- Transmission of SOL test scores and type of diploma earned to the community colleges
- Development of a process for collecting early placement data
- Development of joint strategies for students to receive needed remediation prior to high school graduation.

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

3. **Virginia's Community Colleges must provide and require academic and student support services that cultivate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains for developmental education students.** The VCCS and the colleges will work in tandem to develop comprehensive support services for developmental education students by implementing the following:
 - Colleges will create a student development course targeted specifically to students placed in developmental courses with a curriculum that focuses not just on cognitive needs but on the affective and behavioral dimensions that hinder or promote success.
 - The VCCS will implement a policy requiring this course be taken in a developmental student's first semester.
 - Following registration and within the first six weeks of class, developmental education students will be required to participate in at least three academic support interactions, including but not limited to tutoring, mentoring, coaching, career counseling and advising.
 - Colleges will be responsible for tracking and reporting developmental education student participation in student support services.
 - The VCCS will develop financial aid strategies that encourage students to change their enrollment status from part-time to full-time.
4. **Virginia's Community Colleges must collect comprehensive and accurate placement data for all first-time-in-college (FTIC) program-placed students.** In order to make accurate conclusions about student progression and success, the VCCS needs to have accurate placement data for its students. By spring 2010, all colleges should report placement data on its first-time in college cohort, including reasons that students were exempt from the placement examination.
5. **The VCCS must develop mechanisms and methodologies to hold colleges accountable for the success of developmental education.** For purposes of program review and accountability, clear policies and methodologies must be developed to ensure common definitions for collecting and expressing relevant data regarding student success in developmental education. The following reporting structure will be developed:
 - A system-wide annual report tracking the progress in reaching the three overarching goals of the task force will be developed and implemented by July 2010.

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

- Each college will also develop and administer an internal program review of developmental education that contains both qualitative and quantitative assessment measures.
6. **Virginia's Community Colleges must provide adequate support to ensure that developmental education faculty are highly effective in achieving goals for developmental education.** Each college will document orientation, professional development, and assessment for both part-time and full-time developmental education faculty.
- Orientation: Colleges will provide part-time and full-time developmental education faculty with orientation to the VCCS, the college, developmental education, the student population, and research-supported developmental education pedagogies.
 - Professional Development: The VCCS Office of Professional Development, in collaboration with the faculty peer groups and faculty professional organizations, will offer relevant professional development opportunities to part-time and full-time developmental education faculty and document these opportunities in its yearly reporting. Each college will offer and/or support relevant professional development opportunities for developmental education faculty.
 - Assessment: Colleges will provide part-time and full-time developmental education faculty with longitudinal developmental student outcome data. Part-time and full-time faculty should continue to document, as part of their employment record, their participation in professional development activities.
 - Documentation: Colleges will document orientation, professional development, and assessment for part-time and full-time developmental education faculty in its reporting to the VCCS.
7. **The VCCS and its colleges must build the administrative infrastructure to improve accountability and communication.**
- Colleges will identify an institutional officer with the responsibilities and appropriate authority for coordinating the college's developmental program and representing the college in system-wide meetings and projects related to developmental education.
 - The system office will designate a point person to convene and coordinate periodic meetings of designated developmental education leadership.

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

- A cross-sector council will be established to address issues related to college and workplace readiness, student preparation, progress through developmental education, and successful transfer or job placement. This council should include members from the following sectors: VCCS academic and student services, VCCS workforce, Adult Basic Education, Virginia Department of Education, the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, VCCS college representatives, and workforce representatives.
8. **The VCCS must conduct a comprehensive review of policies that directly or indirectly affect developmental education success.** The designated developmental education officers will review current policy language to create a more structured, directed pathway for developmental education students. As part of that review, the committee will consider, but not be limited to, the following policy changes:
- Requiring students placed in developmental education to enroll in developmental coursework during the first semester
 - Requiring students placed in developmental education to stay in sequence with their developmental education requirements
 - Motivating students placed in developmental education to enroll in the appropriate gatekeeper courses following the completion of the developmental education requirements
 - Identifying the college-level courses appropriate for developmental education students
 - Preventing students from enrolling after the first day of class
 - Setting a floor for placement scores and referring those students to Adult Basic Education programs.
 - Placing SIS blocks on registration to ensure that developmental education students meet with an advisor prior to registration
 - Limiting the number of college-level credits that a developmental education student may take prior to the completion of their developmental education requirements

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

Next Steps

The Academic and Student Affairs Council, in partnership with the Academic Services and Research area in the VCCS system office, must establish a process for implementing the recommendations of the Developmental Education Task Force. Accountability for achieving the recommendations must be facilitated and monitored by the vice chancellor for Academic Services and Research. This process will include the development of an action plan and the delegation of recommendations to new and existing groups for implementation. A progress report on the recommendations will be presented to the Academic and Student Affairs Council at its business meetings.

The Turning Point: Developmental Education in Virginia's Community Colleges

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