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IN THIS ISSUE:

The Imperative	1
Curricula Redesign	2
Placement Measures	2
Multiple Measures	
Placement Policy	2
North Carolina Diagnostic	
Assessment and Placement Test	3
Preliminary Results	3

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Transforming Developmental Education in North Carolina’s Community Colleges

by Elizabeth Grovenstein, Senior Education Policy Analyst

The Imperative

The State of Community College Developmental Education		
	National ¹	North Carolina, 2012
Remediation Rate	58%	65%
Placement Exam Error Rate	33%	30%
Developmental Students Who Complete a Credential (note 1)	28%	22%
Developmental Students Not Completing a Credential (note 2)	72%	64%
Annual Cost	\$4 billion	\$125 million

NOTE 1: National data is within 8.5 years, NC data is within 6 years.

NOTE 2: An additional 13% of NC developmental students transferred to a 4-year college.

With more than 60 percent of entering community college students in need of at least one developmental course, and only about one-fourth of these students successfully earning a degree or certificate, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) created the *Developmental Education Initiative* (DEI) in 2010 to transform the condition of developmental education for its students. Key goals of DEI include:

- Reducing unnecessary enrollment in developmental coursework;
- Accelerating student completion; and
- Increasing the number of students who successfully complete developmental education and enroll in college-level courses.

In order to accomplish these goals, the DEI implemented three major transformations:

- Redesign the NCCCS developmental education curricula;
- Implement appropriate placement measures; and
- Establish new diagnostic assessments, aligned to the curricula.

Curricula Redesign

As mathematics is the greatest obstacle to student success,² and has substantial student enrollment, the DEI Math Task Force first focused on developmental mathematics and found that the existing sequence of 16-week semester courses did not meet student needs. Students who only needed to improve specific math skills were not able to move forward quickly, and students testing at very low levels needed additional assistance and options. With the expertise of college faculty from across the state, the DEI streamlined content, reduced redundant curricula, and ensured alignment with K-12 and college-level courses, resulting in eight new developmental mathematics modules implemented in Fall 2013.

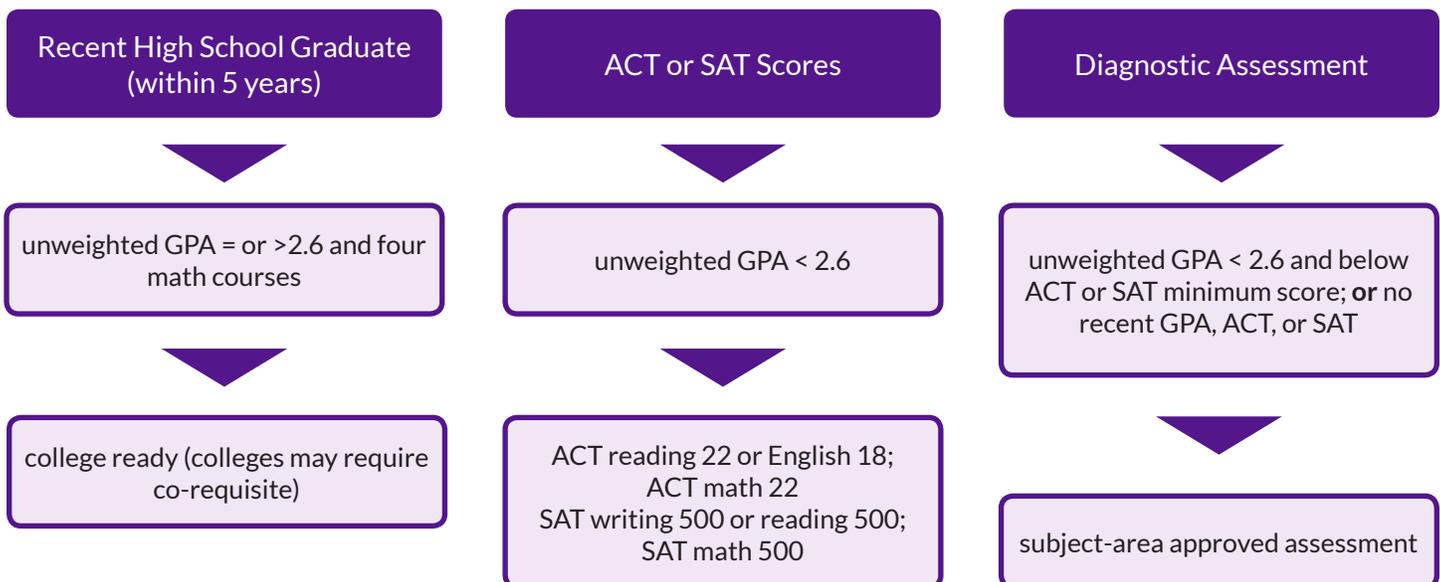
Building upon the success of the mathematics redesign, the DEI English and Reading Task Force recommended replacement of the existing separate English and reading semester-long courses with three eight-week, three credit hour courses of integrated English and reading. For students who are near college-ready, colleges may co-requisite the highest developmental course with a college course. The three new developmental courses were implemented in Fall 2014.

Placement Measures

At the request of NCCCS, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University's Teacher College conducted a study that found a student's high school grade point average (GPA) was significantly more predictive of a student's college success than existing placement tests, and would cut in half the number of students misplaced from 30 percent to 15 percent.³ The resulting Multiple Measures for Placement Policy - in effect Fall 2013 and required for use by Fall 2015 -^{*} establishes new placement requirements using a hierarchy of measures as a result of CCRC research.

** At the March 2015 meeting the State Board of Community Colleges will consider delaying the requirement to Fall 2016.*

Multiple Measures Placement Policy



North Carolina Diagnostic Assessment and Placement Test

As a result of the new placement policy, students who previously would have been required to take an “off the shelf” placement test may now be placed directly in college-level coursework, dramatically increasing the likelihood of college success. For those students now required to be assessed, NCCCS has created a new diagnostic placement test to custom

fit the developmental curricula. By identifying specific weaknesses and aligning the test items with the developmental curricula, the North Carolina Diagnostic Assessment and Placement test (NC DAP) will result in reduced time enrolled in developmental courses.

Preliminary Results

Data shows that students are already benefiting from this three-pronged approach. Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments in developmental education have declined by more than 53 percent since 2009-10, with a 70 percent decline in mathematics and a 35 percent decline in reading/English full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment.

Developmental Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Enrollment					
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Total Dev FTE:	26,007	26,651	25,477	22,679	13,880
Math	14,663	15,010	14,049	11,850	6,325
Reading/English	11,345	11,641	11,428	10,828	7,556

With this decline in remedial enrollment, the annual cost has been significantly reduced – a reduction that has saved both students in lower tuition and in time, and the state budget in reduced need for appropriation to fund developmental coursework.

Annual Cost of Developmental Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Enrollment					
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Requirements	129,884,158	127,636,238	124,719,128	109,692,787	68,112,166
Tuition Receipts	33,775,368	40,877,411	44,403,316	39,899,790	25,166,396
State Appropriation	\$96,108,789	\$86,758,827	\$80,315,811	\$69,792,996	\$42,945,770

In the 2014 session, the NC General Assembly was able to maximize these savings by redirecting \$15 million to create a fourth tier of higher funding for health care and technical education programs in priority occupations that have documented skills gaps and pay higher wages.

The NCCCS is continuing to evaluate the success of the DEI. The remediation rate has already declined from the 65 percent reported in 2012 to 52 percent for incoming high school graduates in the 2013-14 academic year. A North Carolina community college research team, who will be developing an assessment process for evaluating the success of the strategies, has recently been established. Results from the statewide DEI, and from additional reform strategies implemented at the local level, will be measured and reported in the coming years.

References

¹ <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>

² <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/developmental-education-initiative>

³ Belfield, Clive R. and Peter M. Crosta. Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. (2012) Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts.

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