

NextDev Challenge: Student Supports

The following brief is based on an online event hosted by the Education Commission of the States' Getting Past Go remedial education project, which is funded by Lumina Foundation. The [NextDev Challenge](#) solicited a wide range of program ideas that could improve student outcomes in developmental education. This brief is one of four produced as part of the NextDev Challenge and is intended to highlight approaches to support services that aim to improve student outcomes.

The growing number of underprepared students entering postsecondary education presents significant challenges for institutions hoping to increase completion rates. Many of these students will need two or more remedial classes before they can progress to college-level work, decreasing the odds of a successful and timely outcome. Any redesign of developmental education programs should give ample consideration to student support initiatives, which can bolster the effectiveness of remediation, help students adapt to campus life, and accelerate time-to-degree.

Program Outcomes

Institutions have begun to incorporate more intentional versions of traditional student support services, such as advising and tutoring programs, as well as newer approaches like comprehensive learning communities. Several programs submitted to the NextDev Challenge have adopted these and other approaches to increase student engagement and success. So far, the data are encouraging:

- ✦ The **GetREAL Center program** at Massachusetts' Berkshire Community College has helped 94.5% of participating students pass their developmental English courses and 66.7% of students pass their developmental math courses. This is compared to baseline course completion rates of 78% and 39% respectively.
- ✦ **Project DEgree**, created by the Gateway to College National Network in Oregon, reports that the program has increased second-term persistence by 9% and retention to a second year by 7%. Additionally, 10% more students who enrolled in the program completed 20 credits their first year and 29% more earned summer credits.
- ✦ The **Intensive College Math Program** at Texas A&M University offers students a comprehensive set of supports, helping participants test into higher levels of coursework. Officials report that post-test gains average about 30 points, helping 38% of students to move up one level, 25% up two levels, and 15% up three levels.



Program Types

Student support initiatives vary by institution but can include a combination of resource centers, advising and tutoring programs, and learning communities. Empirical evidence supports a link between targeted supports such as advising with successful outcomes in developmental education.¹ The Community College Research Center examined the effects of enrollment in student success courses, which provide assistance with academic and career planning, study habits, and personal life skills. The study found that students who were referred to remedial education were “more likely to earn college-level credits within the first year if they enrolled in a student success course in their first term.”²

Strong advising programs use a variety of data to determine the particular interventions and services that are necessary to keep individual students on a path to degree completion. Learning communities are another effective support strategy to help students feel more connected to college life. A learning community often consists of a cohort that shares a curriculum, projects, and assessments under the guidance of a group mentor. Proponents say that learning communities can improve student outcomes by helping them form social and academic support networks that can lead to deeper levels of engagement. A study of learning communities conducted at three colleges showed evidence of helping students progress through the developmental math sequence more quickly at two of the colleges.³

A more recent study of six community colleges, however, found that learning communities had a more modest impact on student success. The study results did suggest that learning community programs with more comprehensive student support services could lead to greater credit accumulation.⁴

Advising and Tutoring Programs

✦ **GetREAL: GetResources for Education and Learning**

The GetREAL Center Program at Berkshire Community College was designed to improve student performance by increasing their knowledge of available resources and by supporting engagement with faculty and other students. Advisors offer first-year developmental education students academic guidance and help them manage the personal and social demands of college. The campus offers the advising as a free three-credit course to encourage students to use the service. Students meet with their advisor 10 or more times during the semester.

✦ **The SOAR Institute: Student Opportunities for Achievement and Resources**

The SOAR Institute at Alabama’s Shelton State Community College is a multi-faceted initiative designed to improve outcomes for developmental education students. The program consists of three central components: tutoring, intrusive advising, and professional development for remedial education instructors. The primary component of the program is advising, facilitated by SOAR Navigators. The trained navigators provide detailed action plans for students enrolled in two or more developmental courses and serve as their regular point of contact. Though the college still is collecting data, program leaders report that the passing rates of students assigned to navigators are higher than the three-year average of the general population in the same courses.

✦ **Academic Peer Instruction (API) and EDUCO Online Learning System**

New York’s LaGuardia Community College has adopted the nationally known Academic Peer Instruction (API) to encourage remedial education students to spend more time studying through the EDUCO online learning system. The ultimate goal is to improve student performance in developmental and college-level math courses. The EDUCO system, which is used in all remedial Elementary Algebra courses, includes tutorials, homework, and quizzes. The API tutors provide regularly scheduled group sessions for all students in the targeted math courses. The preliminary results indicate higher developmental education course pass rates, grades, and final exam scores.

Learning Communities

✦ **Project DEgree**

Project DEgree, a program developed by the Gateway to College National Network, offers individualized support within a learning community framework. Students who require two or more developmental courses are grouped into cohorts of 20-25 students, under the guidance of a resource specialist. During the first year, the student groups enroll in college success and study skills courses and receive supplemental tutoring to accelerate mastery of basic skills. The resource specialists also work intensively with each student. In year two, the students have progressed into college-level work and are guided to degree completion by a special advisor. When viewed against a comparison group, the network reports that students enrolled in Project DEgree saw higher rates of achievement in critical indicators of completion success (see results data on page 1). The program has been replicated at more than 30 colleges in 20 states.

✦ **Intentional Connections Program**

Texas' San Jacinto College North campus developed the Intentional Connections program for students placed in the lower levels of developmental education. Program mentors coach and advise students who participate in learning communities, exposing them to content, faculty, and experts in their desired course of study. Mentors meet with instructors who teach learning community courses to discuss students' performance and help students set education and career goals. The Intentional Connections program has shown positive, early results and has been expanded to two other San Jacinto campuses.

✦ **Link Students and Connect**

The Link Students and Connect Program at Massachusetts' Bunker Hill Community College is a less formal version of the learning community strategy. This model uses relationship building, accountability, and enforcement to improve student performance. At the beginning of each semester, classmates and instructors are required to share all personal contact information with each other. Students verbally commit to helping each other complete the course and contacting students who are absent from class. Policies regarding absence and assignment due dates are rigorously enforced. These strategies help students forge the vital personal and academic support networks that aid momentum. According to the faculty member who submitted the program, completion rates have increased by about 25% since implementation. The program is a good example of a low-investment strategy yielding effective results.

Issues to Consider

The barriers to successfully implementing student supports are similar for most programs. Major costs include establishing a resource center, computers and software, and the hiring and training of professional advisors. In fact, officials from the Gateway to College National Network suggest that it is essential to build student support services into the college staffing plan to develop a sustainable and effective model. Buy-in from administration and developmental education faculty is critical in ensuring adequate support for students. A program like Link Students and Connect at Bunker Hill Community College, for example, relies on the commitment of faculty instructors to succeed. Berkshire Community College recommends strong program leadership and ongoing assessment efforts to maintain the quality and integrity of student services.

Conclusion

While improving remedial instructional delivery is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own to address students' expectations, needs, and apprehensions. The student support element is critical, especially for those who are at-risk of not completing a degree or certificate because of academic, social, or economic constraints. Emerging research and results from innovative practices are demonstrating the need to integrate comprehensive and effective student support services into institutional, postsecondary system, and state strategies to redesign developmental education.

Background:

Catch the Next (CTN) Puente Project is a multifaceted student success program that aims to transition primarily Hispanic students from developmental education into college-level courses in one academic year. The program, which is based on a successful model from the California Community College system, was scaled up in 2009 to include other states with significant populations of underserved students. The program combines an accelerated curriculum with targeted student supports.

Program Elements:

- ✦ Accelerated English reading and writing program
- ✦ Personal development course
- ✦ Intensive counseling and academic advising
- ✦ Individual mentoring from community members
- ✦ Cohort groups.

Students are guided through issues specific to first-generation, underserved students, and the curriculum focuses on Latino and multicultural literature. Students prepare detailed academic plans and receive leadership mentoring from local professionals.

Results:

Though Catch the Next is just beginning to gather data in Texas, recent results from the California program show that the Puente Project improves student outcomes. In 2009 the one-year persistence rate for project participants was more than 81%, compared to 69% for the general population. In 2009, the rates of Puente students who transferred to four-year colleges was 55%, compared to 44% for the general population and 34% for disadvantaged students. The four-year graduation rate for Puente transfer students at the California State University is 68.7%, compared to 62.9% for the general population.

Implementation issues and costs:

- ✦ Extensive professional development is necessary to sustain an effective CTN program
- ✦ Close collaboration is required between faculty, counselors, and administration, which is not a common practice at many colleges. In particular, the faculty teaching developmental education and credit-bearing courses should have a strong, collaborative relationship.
- ✦ The students enrolled in the CTN programs often face unstable financial situations, which can interfere with their studies.

For more information about Catch the Next, please see their website: <http://www.puente.net/experience.html>.

Endnotes

- 1 Hunter R. Boylan, "Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students (T.I.D.E.S.)," *Journal of Developmental Education* Volume, 32, Issue 3, (Spring 2009, pp. 14-23, Published by Appalachian State University, National Center for Developmental Education, Boone, NC), http://www.elcentrocollege.edu/Campus_Info/TitleV/docs/Targeted%20Intervention%20for%20Developmental%20ed.pdf.
- 2 Sung-Woo Cho and Melinda Mechur Karp, *Student Success Courses and Educational Outcomes at Virginia Community Colleges* (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, February 2012), <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/student-success-virginia.pdf>, (accessed May 20, 2013, p. 7).
- 3 Michael J. Weiss, Mary Visher, and Evan Weissman, *Learning Communities for Developmental Education Students: Early Results from Randomized Experiments at Three Community Colleges* (Evanston, IL: Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2011), <https://www.sree.org/conferences/2011/program/downloads/abstracts/155.pdf>, (accessed May 20, 2013, p. 4).
- 4 Mary Visher, Michael J. Weiss, Evan Weissman, Timothy Rudd, and Heather Wathington, *The Effects of Learning Communities for Students in Developmental Education: A Synthesis of Findings from Six Community Colleges* (New York: MDRC, July 2012), <http://www.mdrc.org/effects-learning-communities-students-developmental-education> , (accessed May 20, 2013, p. 33).

Please check out the NextDev Challenge website to review the summaries and evidence for the programs highlighted in this brief. Select Read and then search on the program title or institution. <http://gettingpastgo.edthemes.org/>

Authors

Linda McTiernan, Associate and Iris Palmer, Senior Associate, HCM Strategists
Mary Fulton, Policy Analyst, Education Commission of the States

Getting Past Go is an initiative of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), funded by Lumina Foundation, that works with state and postsecondary education leaders to increase the success of college students who are placed in remedial education.