

INNOVATION AT SCALE

HOW VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE COLLABORATING TO IMPROVE DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION AND INCREASE STUDENT SUCCESS

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DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE
Accelerating Achievement



Ten years ago, Virginia's community colleges, like most community colleges, did not place student success high on their list of priorities.

Today, improving student success is the single most important goal of the Virginia Community College System:

- > The state aims at a 50 percent increase in the number of community college students who complete a degree, transfer to a four-year institution, or earn a workforce credential.
- > For students from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education, the target is a 75 percent increase.

Innovation at Scale describes Virginia's process of redesigning developmental education to increase college readiness—and student success—across the state's 23 community colleges and 40 campuses. This case study highlights the key roles of college leaders, faculty, staff, and, in particular, the chancellor and the system office as the state prepares to implement its ambitious plans.

DATA-DRIVEN, PARTICIPATORY, COMMITTED

Sweeping reform does not come about quickly. Before Virginia began redesigning developmental education, data from a variety of sources focused attention on student success in general, and on developmental education in particular. In 2004, Virginia joined Achieving the Dream and a growing movement of states taking a hard look at student outcomes data. It faced an inescapable truth: few students who enroll in community colleges are prepared for college-level academic work. And developmental education—its structures, content, and instruction—is not effective for most students.

Data analysis has helped Virginia not only identify specific problems but also pointed to potential solutions. After publishing powerful data that made the challenge visible to all, the system office organized a comprehensive, participatory process to propose how to make developmental education more effective and more efficient. And by 2009, when Virginia joined the Developmental Education Initiative, the planning for redesigning all developmental education classes at Virginia's community colleges was actively underway.

By spring 2013, the redesign will transform the way students learn and engage with their colleges. Developmental mathematics will be taught as a series of nine one-credit modules. Students will take only those modules needed, as determined by the placement test and the requirements of their academic fields. Developmental English, integrating academic reading and writing, will be taught as a tiered system. Students will place into a one-semester course of varying intensity or co-enroll in a developmental class linked to the first college-level English class.

At the heart of the work is a dramatic cultural shift. Across Virginia, community college administrators, faculty, and staff recognize that they cannot meet their improvement goals unless students who start in developmental education succeed. The state is turning its attention to helping more students prepare for college-level work.

Ultimately, Virginia's aggressive, systemwide overhaul of developmental education aims to:

- > Reduce the number of students who need developmental education.
- > Shorten the time spent in developmental education.
- > Increase the college completion rates of those required to take developmental education before starting credit-bearing courses.

LEARNING FROM VIRGINIA

Virginia has made a significant investment in redesigning developmental education systemwide. This is not a pilot. Every college, every teacher, every student involved in developmental education—all are part of this change. And from the very beginning, the system office has made a clear commitment to action. It actively supported the participatory process and organized communication with the broader field to ensure that faculty and administrators at all of its community colleges could have input into the process.

Data were vital to recognizing and addressing the problem of developmental education, and data will continue to be vital to tracking outcomes, assessing impact, and strengthening developmental education. The system office and those directly involved in the redesign are realistic: there will certainly be bumps in the road. But as long as Virginia is committed to honest data about outcomes and continues to learn from the process, this story is sure to be instructive for innovators in other states.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED FROM VIRGINIA

Lay the Groundwork

- > **Start with the evidence:** Before directly taking on a problem, make the problem visible.
- > **Foster the will to change:** Once it is clear that the status quo is not acceptable, facilitate open conversations about the depth of the problem, the need for change, and the options and solutions available.
- > **Position the problem as a system problem:** Top leaders can discuss the need for change for the greater good of the students, without blame or finger pointing.
- > **Commit to change:** Many reports and recommendations end up on the shelf; central leadership can make clear its intention to act on proposals.

Cast a Wide Net of Participation

- > **Bring multiple voices to the table:** Invite representation from those who will be directly involved in creating new solutions.

- > **Create agents of change:** Let everyone see how the change will affect them, and how they can contribute to the change.

Listen and Communicate

- > **Create a setting where all voices are heard:** Establish a basic set of ground rules that help participants feel that their perspectives are valued.
- > **Communicate—communicate—communicate:** Use a range of face-to-face and technological settings for internal deliberations and for communication with the field.
- > **Acknowledge that change at all levels can be hard:** For individuals, for institutions, for systems, change is difficult.

Implement and Follow Up

- > **Prepare for implementation at the system level and at colleges:** Clarify what the system is responsible for and which decisions are made by the colleges.
- > **Follow up with data:** Track outcomes, find out what works, and adjust what does not work.

Innovation at Scale is available at www.jff.org/publications.

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