

Student Success Center Network

New Jersey: Less Developmental Education, More Career Exploration

In 2010, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) called on the field to produce 50 percent more students with high-quality credentials by 2020.¹ New Jersey's community colleges are well on their way to this goal: As of 2016, the number of graduates in the state had already increased by 48 percent.

The colleges also are on target to meet New Jersey's own ambitious goal: By 2025, at least 65 percent of New Jersey residents will have employer-valued credentials. Currently, 52 percent of residents have a credential.

New Jersey's Center for Student Success is playing a pivotal role in the state's progress toward its goals. Since 2008, the Center has been tracking statewide and college-level data on graduates, and the Center is leading the development of initiatives that will help colleges—and their students—make progress toward the goals. Two elements of the Center's work have been instrumental in the state's improvement efforts: developmental education reform and increasing opportunities for meaningful career exploration.

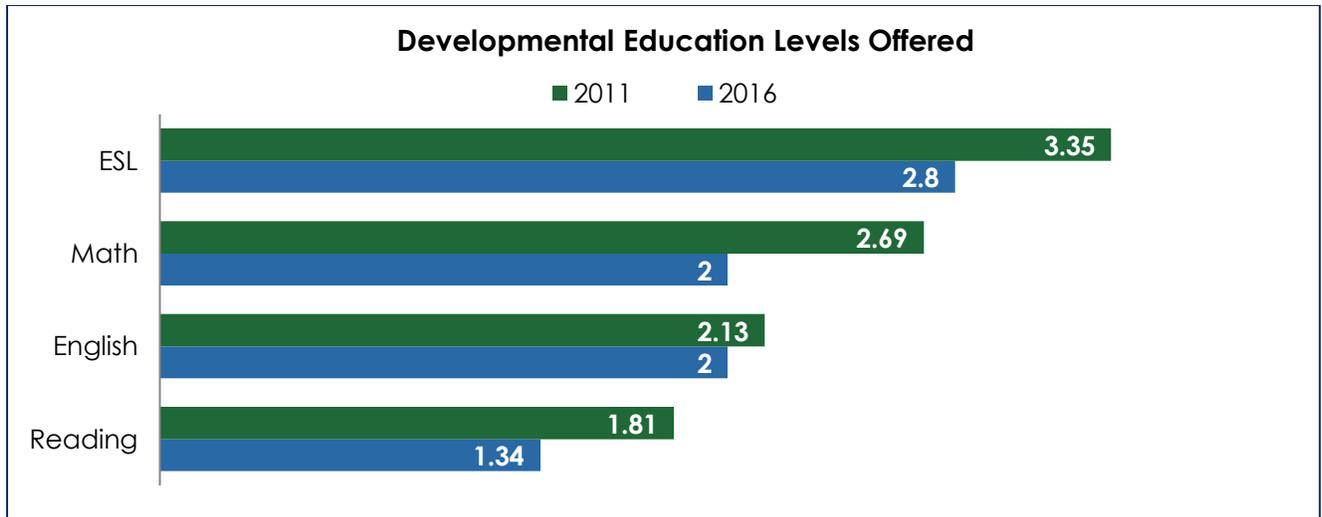
College readiness: Getting students to the finish line sooner

"We have made significant strides in college readiness and developmental education through partnerships with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the Department of Education," says Christine Harrington, executive director of the New Jersey Center for Student Success. "For example, using \$1 million in state funds, New Jersey community colleges have partnered with local high schools to offer college readiness programming so students are better prepared when they arrive on college campuses."

In addition, New Jersey community colleges have fewer levels of developmental education so students can get to college-level courses—and earn credentials—more quickly. Colleges also have expanded their use of innovative, evidence-based approaches.

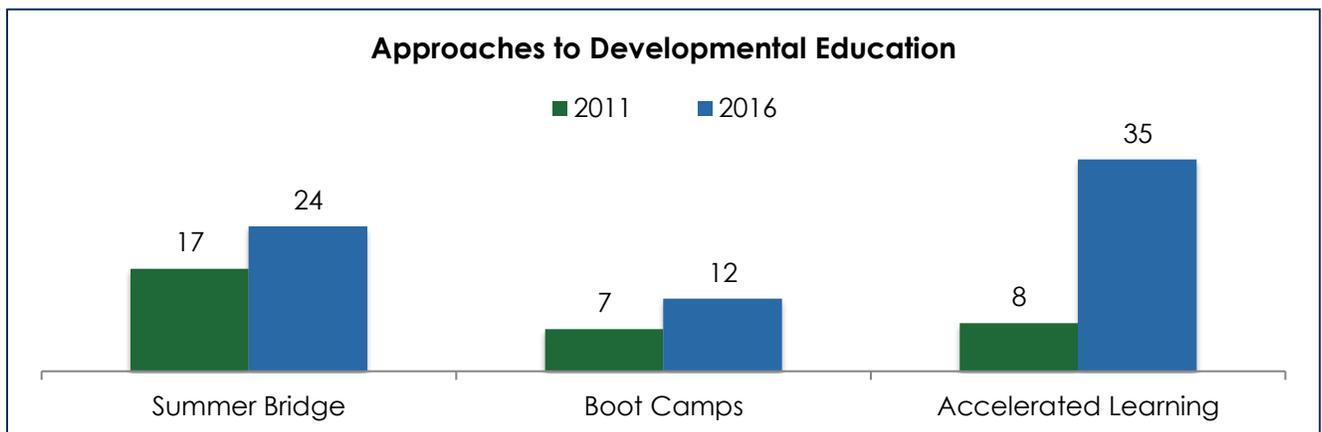
In 2011, on average, New Jersey community colleges offered 3.4 levels of developmental English as a Second Language (ESL). In 2016, they offered 2.8. During the same time period, the colleges, on average, dropped almost one full level from their developmental math offerings (2.7 levels to 2) and half a level from developmental reading (1.8 levels to 1.3).

¹ This call came through AACC's 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges.



Note: Based on self-reported data at the Developmental Education Summit on October 14, 2016 (n=15 with 14 responses for English and Reading and 11 for ESL).

At the same time, colleges increased their use of summer bridge programs, boot camps, and accelerated learning, with the number of accelerated learning programs across the state growing from eight to 35 in the five-year period. (Summer bridge programs and boot camps are intensive learning experiences that help underprepared students develop specific skills. New Jersey's accelerated learning programs typically are co-requisite models in which students concurrently enroll in developmental courses and college-level courses while receiving extra support.)



Note: Based on self-reported data at the Developmental Education Summit on October 14, 2016 (n=14). Totals include colleges using the approach in math, English, and reading.

The Center helped colleges make these changes by working closely with New Jersey's 19 community colleges, starting with the 19 college presidents. Together, the Center and the presidents identified developmental education reform as a key priority. Then the Center convened groups of faculty and administrators for Developmental Education Summits, brought in local and national experts to discuss reform approaches, and hosted webinars and in-person events to share findings and new information across the state.

"Through this coordinated effort, we helped people get together and learn together," Harrington says. "The results come from many colleges using multiple approaches, but together, they are finding the most success with accelerated learning programs so that is expanding across the state."

Department of Labor and Workforce Development partnership drives advising and career exploration

In addition to developmental education reform, the Center identified advising redesign, program maps, and professional development as key priority areas.

To address these priorities, the New Jersey Center developed a strong partnership with the state's Department of Labor and Workforce Development. That partnership is a critical part of the Center's guided pathways work and its focus on career exploration and advising.

One example of this focus is the Center's goal of redesigning student success courses to ensure that they include true career exploration and planning. Before this work began, student success programs varied across the state. Many were optional or required for only some students. Moreover, while every college said it included career decision making in the curriculum, career exploration tended to be minimal.

"The one area that wasn't highlighted enough was helping students explore career options before mapping out educational plans to make sure we get students on the right path, not just on a path," Harrington explains. "A one-time meeting with an advisor is not the same as a deep dive into career exploration."

So Harrington brought together all of the state's student success course coordinators, which had never been done before. "I asked them how we might use the lens of guided pathways to make student success courses a key place where career exploration happens."

As part of that work, Harrington wanted to design assignments that go beyond the typical approach of researching two careers and providing a summary. The resulting new assignments still assist students with finding career information—but they also require



students to participate in a deeper self-assessment and to develop and implement a networking plan.

“We are defining learning outcomes and assignments for student success courses,” she explains. “And then we are giving colleges tools they can use to elevate their student success courses so they require significant career exploration.”

In addition to helping colleges implement a key aspect of guided pathways, this work provided professional development opportunities to student services staff who do not typically receive a great deal of training.

The result: Students are (1) making informed choices about career pathways and (2) developing and following academic plans that will lead to the careers they seek.