

Washington State Student Completion Initiative

Project Overview

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) proposes a partnership between the Washington State Community and Technical College System (CTC) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to improve access to and completion of higher education for low income young adults in Washington State. This project directly impacts the strategic goals of the State Board to strengthen the economy by providing an educated and skilled workforce, increase educational attainment for Washington residents and apply technology and innovation to the improvement of student success.

The SBCTC requests \$5.295 million to implement the Washington State Student Completion Initiative (WSSC). This initiative includes four multi-college student completion projects that will yield long term results by breaking down key barriers to completion throughout the Washington community and technical college system. The four foci of the WSSC include expanding access and success in high enrollment gatekeeper courses, reforming developmental mathematics, and building new integrated career programs (I-BEST) and providing institutional incentives to increase completion via the Washington Student Achievement Initiative. The Washington Student Achievement Initiative is co-founded with the Ford Foundation for Education with their investment of \$800,000 and the Washington State Legislature.

Project Description

The four components of the Washington State Student Completion Initiative are:

1. Online Course Access and Success:

- a. **Goal:** Redesign 80 high enrollment, gatekeeper and pre-college courses for online and blended delivery to improve course completion rates, lower textbook, time, and travel costs for students, and increase content sharing across colleges. This redesign will be accomplished using open source materials that will reduce textbook costs for students.
- b. **Rationale:** Student success in gatekeeper courses (first year college academic courses) falls below the rate of success for other higher level college courses. Instructional materials in these courses are expensive and limit students' ability to afford college. For students to get the courses they need, when they need them, at an affordable price, these disparities need to be eliminated.
- c. **Strategy:** This project will research the disparity in completion rates, create instructional improvement teams to redesign courses using open source materials, and will disseminate these improved courses

throughout Washington community and technical colleges and with the rest of the world using creative commons licensing.

2. Developmental Math Reform:

- a. **Goal:** Improve developmental mathematics outcomes that scale within and across institutions through curriculum reform by community college math faculty departments
- b. **Rationale:** Of the 13,000 full-time-equivalent students in developmental education, over 9,000 FTE are enrolled in developmental math and that enrollment has grown by 4% over the last 5 years. Mathematics continues to be the major hurdle for students' completion of certificate and degree programs.
- c. **Strategy:** This project will develop and support a coalition of community and technical colleges working collaboratively to implement substantive changes in core educational practices in developmental math. A key feature of this collaborative effort is the commitment from entire math faculty departments rather than individual faculty members. This re-design will be built on the success of Washington's Transition Math Project, national reform efforts such as Carnegie's Strengthening Pre-collegiate Education in Community Colleges (SPECC) and the course redesign work by the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) and others.

3. I-BEST:

- a. **Goal:** Extend educational career pathways for low income, underprepared students by expanding Integrated Basic Skills & Training (I-BEST) programs into associate degree programs for a full-range of students without college-ready skills.
- b. **Rationale:** Begun in 2003, the I-BEST program provides an integrated, cohort model for accelerated preparation in career programs for students with low academic skills (ABE). The program has shown positive results for a population with significant barriers and has grown 122% since 2006. While effective for students in one-year certificate programs, the students do not have the I-BEST model support in higher level programs e.g. Associate of Applied Science, that would produce higher salaries. The program is also not accessible for students above the ABE skill level but who still need for substantial remediation.
- c. **Strategy:** This proposal would expand the I-BEST model within 10 colleges initially and expand to 17 in year three, and all Washington colleges within four years. Colleges would redesign both years of associate degree programs in critical workforce areas and would expand the access for those programs to all students with academic skill deficits.

4. Washington Student Achievement Initiative:

- a. **Goal:** Fully implement the Washington Student Achievement Initiative that provides financial incentives for institutions based on increases in student achievement.
- b. **Rationale:** The Washington Student Achievement Initiative is built on the study of Momentum Points completed by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University. The momentum points study has shown that students who reach key stages of completion (basic skills gains, completion of pre-college level English and math courses, completion of 15 credits and 30 credits, completion of college-level math) are more likely to be retained and earn certificates and degrees. The Washington Student Achievement Initiative provides financial incentives for colleges who see higher numbers of students who reach these key completion points.
- c. **Strategy:** While supported strongly by the Washington State Legislature, at the level of \$3.5 million, that amount will not allow full implementation at a level that will impact institutional outcomes. It is proposed that the Ford Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation jointly fund an additional \$1.6 million to allow the program both the reach and multi-year stability necessary to see the impact of the incentives.

Both I-BEST and Washington Student Achievement Initiative have broken new ground as national models for student completion and this project will expand and deepen the innovation and impact of higher education reform in Washington State.

All four projects include curriculum or service delivery redesign that will impact thousands of students beyond the life of the funding period, aim at systemic change rather than individual faculty or college innovation, and focus on lowering costs and improving success for low income students.

Overall Outcomes of the Washington State Student Completion Initiative

- Create broader and more extensive pathways for low skill students to move beyond the Tipping Point to degrees.
- Research and improve 80 high enrollment classes, especially math classes, to increase the number of low-income students who are successful in college and achieve the Tipping Point.
- Test an innovative performance funding system that focuses attention and rewards on overcoming the early hurdles students face that cause them to leave before completing even a year of college.