

The Impact of Accountability on Florida's Community College System
Prepared for the
National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education
State Higher Education Executive Officers

Prepared by the
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Background

Components of the Florida community colleges and workforce education system have been under some type of accountability program since 1994. The initial process emphasized traditional college credit and transfers, and included such topics as graduation, success and information on how well students performed on the rising junior test known as the CLAST¹. However, from the beginning there has been a recognition of the important part workforce education plays in both the general economic development of the State and individual lives. An outline of the different programs and their associated measures is provided below.

- **College Credit**
 - **Accountability System began in 1994**
 - **No funds attached**
 - **Five measures**
 - **Enrollment and Graduation**
 - **Follow-up of AA transfers to the SUS**
 - **Placement**
 - **College Preparatory (Remedial)**
 - **CLAST**
 - **Performance Based Program Budgeting**
 - **Since 1997**
 - **Originally both credit and workforce – now just credit**
 - **Between \$7.4 and \$12 million dollars distributed in a given year**
 - **Gives points for desired outcomes**
- **Workforce**
 - **Performance Based Incentive Funding (PBIF) in 1994**

¹ CLAST stands for College Level Academic Skills Test. When the program was initiated in 1982 all students seeking an Associate in Arts (AA) or entering the upper division in the State University System (SUS) were expected to take the test. Now the program includes alternatives and only about one-third of community college students are actually tested.

- Leverage state and federal funds
- Distributed about \$40 million
- Completers and placements from postsecondary career and technical education programs
- Performance Based Funding since 1997
 - 15% of funds at risk
 - Reviewed program offerings
 - Two measures
 - Completions
 - Placement
- Revised Perkins and Adult Literacy
 - Included outcomes

Resources

The state has invested millions of dollars in creating centralized student based data systems for K-12, community colleges, technical centers and universities. In addition, the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) collects information on employment and earnings from unemployment compensation records and other state and federal administrative data resources. By utilizing these various data bases, a student can be tracked longitudinally across sectors and into the State's workforce.

Results

Due to the ability to create both cross-sectional and longitudinal views of student activities, the State has been able to create a picture of how well students are performing at different points in their academic careers. For example, the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education (DCCWE) provides each of the twenty-eight public community colleges in the system with information on how many students need remedial coursework upon entry, how well they do in those courses, graduation rates, transfer rates to the State University System (SUS), and employment. In addition, the Department is able to investigate dual enrollment and other acceleration programs.

Annual reports such as the Articulation Report compare former community college students to students who started at a university in terms of upper division results such as Grade Point Average, graduation ratios, hours taken per term and total hours earned at the time of graduation. In addition to providing information, policy emphasis on selected populations has resulted in increased attention and positive outcomes for various sub-populations such as African-American males, ESL, and economically disadvantaged students.

More dramatic results have occurred in those programs that had funds attached than in those that merely provided information. The original college credit program that began in 1994 had both individual and system level goals. However, there were no consequences and the program developed into an exercise that provided useful information for re-accreditation purposes, but not necessarily dramatic change. When funds were attached via Performance Based Program Budgeting, institutions began reviewing their procedures and processes to ensure student were able to graduate without unnecessary roadblocks. This resulted in more degrees without a loss of academic rigor.

Similar results were seen with the workforce education programs. Once funds were attached to desired outcomes, those programs were given priority and many others were reviewed and deleted where necessary. This lead to over 500 institutional programs being closed and 300 new ones opened. This change in program mix has enabled the state to better match the current needs of employers.

Concerns

The major concern of any data driven program is the reliability and validity of the underlying information. The Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education has been working with each institution over the past decade and a half in an attempt to develop consistent data definitions and methods of reporting. Unfortunately, the more the data elements are used for accountability and/or funding purposes the more evident it has become that differences remain.

The second concern is that what is measured in this type program becomes the focus of attention. Thus, the measures need to be closely tied to institutional or system missions and accurately represent desired outcomes and/or areas of emphasis. The program needs to present the most complete picture of the system possible so that the audience receiving the information understands the population served and that there can be a variety of positive outcomes, especially for community college students.

Future Steps

The State is in the process of developing a new accountability program. Proposed system level measures for the community colleges included graduation rates for both the entire population and various under-served populations, grade 14 assessment, and placement and earnings information. Similar measures would be included for workforce education and universities. The State has been involved in this process for over a year. Some lessons learned to date include:

1. Legislative authority with key time frames provided a necessary context and framework for the process.

2. Establishing a K-20 education performance accountability task force broadly representatives of the affected education entities ensured that all entities would feel represented from the beginning.
3. State level staff should not impose an agenda on the task force, rather they should be allowed to work toward a sector-level consensus.
4. All parties should be informed during the process by presenting data that defines the K-20 delivery system and student flows.
5. The task force should establish a few high level system goals.
6. The task force should establish guiding principles and stick to them. These guiding principles should be
 - a. Simple/actionable
 - b. Focus on outputs
 - c. Incorporate existing requirements and capability where possible
7. The following data issues must be addressed:
 - a. Timing
 - b. Definitions
 - c. Compatibility
 - d. Numerators and denominators
8. Standards and performance expectations should be based on data
9. Policy makers in both the school districts and postsecondary institutions should be kept informed regarding measures and expectations
10. Consequences should be dealt with last by being phased in as appropriate

By working within a collaborative process and including all parties from the beginning, the new K-20 Accountability process for Florida has resulted in a small set of high level measures that will begin to tell the story of education in the state. The intention is to augment these main measures with additional sector indicators that will provide a complete picture of how each sector is contributing to the overall educational attainment level of our citizens.

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