



## **Student Achievement Initiative**

July, 2009

### **Purpose of the Initiative**

In 2006, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges adopted a System Direction with an overall goal to “raise the knowledge and skills of the state’s residents” by increasing educational attainment across the state.

This goal is a substantial challenge for all of higher education, especially for community and technical colleges. Washington’s community and technical colleges serve a wide spectrum of learning needs from adult literacy for immigrants and K12 drop outs through advanced high school students taking college credit classes. Our colleges serve a predominantly working class and low income student population. The median age of our students is 26, 35% are students of color (compared to the state population at 24% people of color), over half are working full or part time, one third are parents, and over half attend college part-time.

The Student Achievement Initiative is a new performance funding system for community and technical colleges. Its purposes are to both improve public accountability by more accurately describing what students achieve from enrolling in our colleges each year, and to provide incentives through financial rewards to colleges for increasing the levels of achievement attained by their students. It represents a shift from funding entirely for enrollment inputs to also funding meaningful outcomes.

### **Achievement Measures**

Through a partnership with the Community College Research Center at Columbia University, the college system has been able to identify key academic benchmarks that students must meet to successfully complete degrees and certificates. These Achievement points are meaningful for all students across demographic characteristics (race, age, income, employment status), academic program or entering skill levels (basic skills, remedial, workforce education, academic transfer), intensity of enrollment (part-time or full-time enrollment), and type of institution attended (urban, rural, large, small, community college, technical college). Rigorous data analysis has identified Achievement points that once accomplished, substantially improve students’ chances of completing degrees and certificates.

There are four categories of Achievement measures:

1. Building towards college level skills (basic skills gains, passing precollege writing or math)
2. First year retention (earning 15 then 30 college level credits)
3. Completing college level math (passing math courses required for either technical or academic associate degrees)
4. Completions (degrees, certificates, apprenticeship training)

These measures focus students and institutions on shorter term, intermediate outcomes that provide meaningful momentum towards degree and certificate completion for all students no matter where they start. Colleges can track student progress towards these Achievement points each quarter, providing immediate feedback and opportunities for intervention strategies.

### **Funding**

The college system used 2007-08 as a Learning Year, to understand the measures, analyze their data, and identify types of students and areas of curricula for focused attention. Each college received \$52,000 added to their base allocation as seed money for new or expanded student success strategies. The current year, 2008-09, is the first performance year and will serve as the basis of the first round of financial rewards to be distributed to colleges in Fall 2009. There are no targets; colleges compete with themselves rather than each other. Colleges will earn a set increment of reward for each Achievement point achieved above their 2006-07 baseline in any the four categories described above. Once earned, the reward will be added to the college's base budget.

The Board decided to scale up the incentive rewards over time, and had set aside \$500,000 for the first Student Achievement rewards, an average of \$15,000 per college. The Board included a proposal for \$7 million in the system's 2009-11 budget request to the Governor and State Legislature, to carry forward and provide larger rewards over the next two years. The Governor recommended and the Legislature adopted a \$3.5 million proviso for Student Achievement in the final 2009-11 operating budget. In addition, grant proposals are pending with several private foundations to add new funds to the Student Achievement rewards.

We believe that this initiative will create momentum for both students and colleges. As colleges gain a better understanding of where students get stuck and successfully move them through those hurdles, they will receive financial rewards. The investment of those dollars into expansion of proven strategies will yield additional rewards that can be invested in additional strategies.

Because this performance funding system uses a different system of rewards and different measures from those tried in other states, the Community College Research Center is conducting an evaluation of the Student Achievement Initiative over the next three years. We intend to consider their findings and recommendations for future adjustments to this initiative.

### **Early Results**

The college system is already showing gains in Student Achievement. Between 2006-07 and 2007-08, the colleges served the same number of students but increased student achievement by 4.6%, with the greatest gains occurring in basic skills gains (10.1% increase) and college readiness (6.7% increase). This means a larger cohort of students is ready for college level work and likely to earn college credits leading to certificates and degrees. Estimates for 2008-09 show an acceleration of achievement gains. Overall student achievement increased 15%, with the greatest gains occurring in basic skills (18%), earning 15 college credits (15%) and completing degrees and certificates (24%). Half of this increase is due to more students served and half is due to improved outcomes. These results are early indications of the system level momentum we are hoping to build towards greater student achievement and overall student success.

## Achievement Measures Points That Build Momentum

YEAR	Students	Increase Basic Skills	Become College Ready	Earn 1st 15 College Credits	Earn 1st 30 College Credits	Earn 5 College Credits in Math	Complete Degrees Certificates Apprentice	Total Points
<b>2006-07 Baseline</b>	467,809	70,950	61,581	60,422	45,385	33,989	22,932	295,259
<b>2007-08 Learning Year</b>	467,874	78,106	65,718	61,087	46,165	34,277	23,447	308,800
<b>% Change</b>	0%	10%	7%	1%	2%	1%	2%	5%
<b>2009 Projected</b>	485,000	92,461	74,508	69,963	52,014	37,036	28,994	354,086
<b>% Change</b>	4%	18%	13%	15%	13%	8%	24%	15%

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