



Student Achievement Initiative

Fall 2011

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

2010-11, is the most recent full performance year and will serve as the basis of the third round of financial rewards to be distributed to colleges in Fall 2011. The Board is using a \$1,148,360 million state appropriation to fund 2011 rewards. 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 2010-11 point gain in any the four categories described above. Once earned, the reward will be added to the college's base budget.

The framework for Student Achievement is that as more students increase their basic skills and college readiness, gain momentum from first year college success and finish college math they will complete in greater numbers. 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 and Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy are conducting an evaluation of the Student Achievement Initiative over three years. We intend to consider their findings and recommendations for future adjustments to this initiative.

Performance Results

The college system showed gains in Student Achievement starting in the first performance year. Between the 2006-07 baseline year and 2008-09, the first performance year, the colleges served 4 percent more students but increased student achievement by 19% with gains in all categories, including the largest increases in gaining college ready skills.

In 2009-10, points again increased in all categories. For the second year, achievement gains grew at a much faster rate than the number of students enrolled. Total achievement increased by 12 percent or 40,716 total points compared to student population growth of 1 percent. The ratio of point gains to students means that nearly all of the growth was due to more achievement per student. These results demonstrate the system level momentum we are hoping to build towards greater student achievement and overall student success.

In 2010-11, the effects of budget cuts began to take hold. Fewer students (headcount) were served. Basic skills cuts resulted in fewer basic skills points than the year before. Prior to 2011, basic skills were the single largest area for point gain. First year college level points also declined as fewer students meant fewer new students at the beginning of the pipeline. However, following the framework, more continuing students moved beyond first year points advancing to completion. Completions increased by 17 percent over one year prior. College math points were the second highest increase (5 percent), a result of more attention being paid to both math and pre-college math.

**Student Achievement Measures
Points that Build Momentum**

	Total Headcount	Basic Skills	College Readiness	1 st 15 Credits	1 st 30 Credits	Quantitative/ Computation	Certificate, Degree, Apprentices	Total Points
2006-07 Baseline	467,809	70,950	61,581	60,422	45,385	33,989	22,932	295,259
2008-09	486,927	94,796	73,652	70,127	52,300	36,000	25,544	352,419
% Change from Baseline	4%	34%	20%	16%	15%	6%	11%	19%
2009-10	489,932	108,219	86,888	73,824	57,128	39,332	27,952	393,343
1 Year % Change	1%	14%	19%	5%	9%	10%	9%	12%
2010-11	486,223	97,640	89,861	70,625	55,713	41,411	32,671	387,921
1 Year % Change	-1%	-10%	3%	-4%	-2%	5%	17%	-1%
Total % Change from Baseline	4%	38%	46%	17%	23%	22%	42%	31%