



Student Achievement Initiative

November 2010

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, \$1.6 million in grants were received from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Ford Foundation 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 and Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy are 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.

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.

**Student Achievement Measures
Points that Build Momentum**

	Total Headcount	Basic Skills	College Readiness	1st 15 Credits	1st 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	87,713	73,846	57,132	39,486	27,949	394,345
1 Year % Change	1%	14%	19%	5%	9%	10%	9%	12%