

# TYCA White Paper on Developmental Education Reforms

The TYCA Executive Committee approved this White Paper at its March 2014 meeting at the CCCC Convention.

## Executive Summary

Reform movements aimed at improving success and completion rates of underprepared students at America's two-year colleges are sweeping the country. Legislatures from Florida to Washington, from Connecticut to Colorado, are mandating reform. The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) offers this white paper to provide an overview of this current reform movement, highlight some of the potential problems, and offer recommendations. Overall, TYCA expresses reservations about legislative imperatives to reform developmental reading and writing instruction in postsecondary education, particularly those efforts that exclude two-year college faculty from the public discourse and ignore the academic and material realities of two-year college students' lives.

## Current reform movements

Current reform movements revolve around several interconnected areas: admissions to four-year colleges, placement in developmental or college-level courses, curriculum and program design, and support programs. In some states, four-year state colleges are no longer allowed to offer developmental coursework, which pushes students into already overburdened two-year colleges. Placement into degree-credit courses is also being mandated. In some states, a single test is being implemented across all colleges, regardless of best practices. In other states, more welcome reforms are offered, such as multiple measures of placement, including high-school GPA. At the same time, certain category-based exemptions from readiness assessment—high-school diploma holders, veterans—raise serious questions. Curricula and program designs are also being legislatively mandated, too often without attention to local context and without appropriate faculty training and input.

## Concerns

Two-year college faculty are frequently charged with implementing these initiatives and asked to make decisions about program redesign with little time for study and without training or compensation. Moreover, legislative reforms routinely overlook the varying institutional structures that reflect deep divides in training, pedagogy,

and theoretical perspective among faculty and different disciplines. All or any of these may seriously undermine the effectiveness of reform efforts.

TYCA also raises questions that the reform movement too often misses. For example, what constitutes success at a two-year college? It may well be different from what constitutes success at most colleges and universities. Similarly, is high school graduation indicative of college readiness? And what does “college-level literacy” really mean and how is it measured? Perhaps most importantly, if these reforms lead to closing off postsecondary access to some groups of students, will we be engaging in class- and race-based “tracking” that perpetuates occupational and professional segregation?

## Recommendations

English faculty at two- and four-year campuses, administrators at these colleges, and the legislative bodies involved in reform share common goals: preparing students to be successful in college, supporting students’ efforts to fulfill their own educational goals, and helping institutions more effectively achieve their missions. To that end, TYCA offers these recommendations for administrators and legislators:

1. Involve developmental education instructors, including contingent faculty, in reform design and implementation;
2. Initiate localized research-based pilot programs rather than statewide changes;
3. Prioritize evidence from local assessments and research on student success;
4. Use multiple pieces of evidence, including student writing, to assess student needs and abilities;
5. Replace multiple-choice exit exams with local assessment of student work;
6. Fund and develop strong academic support systems for students;
7. Support ongoing professional development for all developmental educators;
8. Support two-year college English faculty partnerships with area high school teachers.

TYCA offers these recommendations for national disciplinary organizations:

1. Establish a standing developmental education advocacy group or task force that can represent the organization’s expertise;
2. Encourage more Research I and PhD-granting universities to provide graduate preparation for two-year college teacher-scholars who are equipped to engage these issues at institutional, state, and national levels.

## Introduction and Purpose

Many people are aware of President Obama’s “ambitious completion agenda.” To further this agenda, the president has set a new national goal: by 2020, America will “once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world” (White House). Responding to the reality that college education is increasingly important for economic stability and mobility, more and more high school graduates are electing to pursue postsecondary education, and growing numbers are choosing

to begin that education at a two-year college. However, as recent data from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) show, just one-third of students who start at a community college earn a credential within six years (Community College Research Center). Compared with overall graduation rates of 50–80% at selective four-year and research institutions (the average six-year graduation rate at four-year public colleges is 58.1%), the completion rates at community colleges certainly seem dismal (“College Completion”). Concerns about these statistics—often framed as an issue of return on public investment—are driving state-level postsecondary education reform initiatives across the country, many of which focus on developmental/remedial education.

One assumption underlying these reform movements is that the community college “completion problem” is caused in large part by underprepared students and institutions’ ineffectiveness at moving such students through degree programs efficiently. In order to help underprepared students become ready for credit-bearing courses more quickly, many two-year colleges have been redesigning their developmental education programs, and many others are feeling mounting pressure to do so. Faculty are frequently charged with expediting such reform and are often asked to make decisions about program redesign with little time for study and reflection. Complicating this issue are the varying institutional structures for delivering remediation. In some two-year colleges, developmental reading and writing courses are taught within the English department, and English faculty routinely teach both developmental and college-level writing courses; at other colleges, developmental reading and writing are housed within a separate developmental education unit, and these courses are taught by an entirely separate faculty (see Perin and Charon). Within such organizational structures, “developmental” and “college-level” faculty may have disparate disciplinary identities, professionalization experiences, and pedagogical orientations. Regardless of their institutional structures, two-year college faculty who are charged with implementing reforms are often asked to do so without additional resources for faculty development or compensation for increased workload. Substantial research suggests that greater student-faculty interaction increases student success and retention (Glau, “Stretch Program” 82).

The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) expresses reservations about legislative imperatives to reform developmental reading and writing instruction in postsecondary education, especially those efforts that exclude two-year college faculty from the public discourse and ignore the academic and material realities of two-year college students’ lives. In “Measuring ‘Success’ at Open Admissions Institutions: Thinking Carefully about This Complex Question,” Patrick Sullivan questions graduation rates as a “standard benchmark for success at most institutions of higher learning” (618). Sullivan points out that many students at open-admission campuses require academic remediation and experience a host of extra-academic factors that make their transition to higher education more difficult than “repeat-generation” students and students from socially affluent backgrounds (628). In light of these realities, Sullivan asserts that it is worth re-examining what constitutes “success” for such institutions, stating, “We must develop a definition

of ‘success’ that acknowledges the unique complexities, challenges, and material conditions that typically come into play for students who attend open admissions institutions” (629). As professionals with unique expertise regarding these student populations and their learning needs, two-year college faculty should play a key role in defining “success” at such institutions beyond simplistic measures of completion.

Legislative mandates regarding completion, and particularly developmental education reform, raise important questions about how such changes might limit students’ opportunities in higher education:

- > Is every high school graduate in America ready for the reading and writing demands of college?
- > What are the goals and objectives of college-level literacy instruction, and how is students’ “success” in these areas being measured?
- > What might students who do not earn credentials be gaining from their accumulated credits and learning experiences?
- > If we close off postsecondary access to some groups of unprepared students, are we essentially engaging in class- and race-based “tracking” that perpetuates occupational and professional segregation?

These questions reflect our concern that policymakers often misunderstand community colleges and the diversity of students who attend open admissions institutions. Many policymakers routinely compare the completion rates of open-admissions institutions with those of traditional selective admissions institutions without considering the distinctions between their missions and student populations.

Given these diverse contexts and questions, then, the purpose of this white paper is manifold. We aim to provide an overview of the issues surrounding developmental education reform and to provide an overview of the range of programmatic options currently being implemented to shorten the amount of time students spend in developmental courses and prepare students for credit-bearing coursework. To achieve these purposes, we look at a case study of faculty in Florida who have responded to legislative interventions regarding developmental education. We then offer an overview of some of the current legislative interventions into developmental education that are affecting two-year college faculty and students, followed by a national snapshot of alternative approaches to developmental literacy programming that have emerged in response to reform movements. Lastly, we offer recommendations on behalf of the professional organization for faculty, administrators, and legislative bodies who share common goals: preparing students to be successful in college; supporting students’ efforts to fulfill their own educational goals (whether that be additional education, skills, or attainment of a two- or four-year credential); and helping institutions more effectively achieve their missions.

### **Case Study: Florida’s Senate Bill 1720**

When legislators institute broad statewide reforms to developmental education, it is often two-year college faculty who are responsible for determining how to implement such mandates at the institution level. An illustrative example is Florida’s

Senate Bill 1720, passed in 2013, which exempts recent Florida high school graduates and active-duty military personnel from mandatory placement testing and developmental education and requires all public postsecondary institutions to offer incoming students at least two remediation options other than traditional sixteen-week developmental courses. Individual colleges have been charged with developing advising procedures for exempt students and devising multiple developmental support options that students can complete concurrently with college-level courses.

During the 2013–2014 academic year, faculty across the state scrambled to put in place more extensive advising and first-week diagnostic assessments that would help them identify and counsel exempt students who were likely to need additional writing support (Cherry et al.). Likewise, although they had relatively little time for research or reflection, colleges quickly developed and implemented a variety of remediation options to meet the needs of their student populations within their given institutional contexts. These options included a range of alternative models that have emerged or gained traction in the context of developmental reform movements: intensive “boot camp” or “bridge” programs prior to the start of the semester (in which students take compressed “refresher” courses); accelerated learning courses based on Baltimore Community College’s model (Adams et al.); contextualized learning courses that paired writing instruction with required courses in the social and behavioral sciences; and modularized courses targeting specific literacy-related learning needs (for more on these models, see “Snapshot of Current Practices” below). Campus learning centers also began facilitating supplemental writing instruction using online products like Pearson’s MySkillsLab and MyCompLab. In their classrooms, Florida faculty are preparing to respond to greater variation in student preparation levels without a reduction in class sizes or teaching load (Cherry et al.), counter to recommendations by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (Horning).

Although faculty in Florida colleges have been responding to SB 1720 in thoughtful and innovative ways—often with few or no additional resources—many have expressed concerns about how the law is affecting students. Faculty worry that some students’ needs are not being met, particularly those who are working and/or have families and make their decisions about support options in the context of competing demands on their schedules and finances. For some of these students, the most expedient options may not meet their actual learning needs, leaving them underprepared for the kinds of writing they are expected to undertake in credit-bearing courses. Faculty are particularly concerned about students’ opportunities to prepare for college reading under these program reforms, as well as the integrity of the credit-bearing composition curriculum as the range of student preparation in these courses widens (Cherry et al.).

Florida faculty members are also concerned about how SB 1720 will affect working conditions in their colleges. In addition to the uncompensated labor involved in mandated program redesign and the added challenges of meeting a wider range of student preparation levels in the course sections, faculty worry that changes to the structure of developmental education may disproportionately affect adjunct

faculty, who teach the majority of developmental reading and writing courses. As part-time instructors, these faculty have few or no administrative responsibilities, and are therefore the least involved in departmental and institutional decisions about how to address the legislature's mandates. Adjunct faculty also have little job security, and reductions in the number of developmental courses may leave some of these instructors out of work (Cherry et al.).

Finally, SB 1720 threatens to undermine the professional status of two-year college faculty, highlighting the need for support from disciplinary professional organizations. Many faculty feel frustrated and powerless in the face of a legislature that makes decisions about higher education with little regard for their professional expertise but, at least in some instructors' view, appears quite responsive to lobbying by for-profit colleges and other corporate interests (Cherry et al.). Several college writing programs in Florida have been sharing resources and institutional responses to SB 1720 through professional organizations like the Florida English Association (FEA) and TYCA Southeast. However, presenters at the 2014 TYCA Southeast conference report little overlap in the membership of FEA and the Florida Developmental Education Association, the other major state-level professional organization representing two-year college developmental faculty (Cherry et al.). The current reform movement provides an opportunity for professionals in different organizations to collaborate for students' best interest.

## **Legislative Interventions and Program Responses**

While Florida's SB 1720 is a particularly dramatic case study, legislative interventions have been made across the country in several areas of developmental education: admissions, initial placement of students into courses, and program design and curriculum. In this section, we provide an overview and illustrations of the types of state-mandated reforms for which many two-year colleges have become responsible.

### **Admissions**

Two-year colleges are traditionally open-admission institutions; however, as developmental education is being scaled back or eliminated at many public four-year institutions, two-year colleges are feeling pressure to reform their programs, resulting in questions not only about *how* they will serve students, but also about *which* students they should serve at all. In California, the Early Start initiative requires students who need developmental education to begin their pre-college-level studies at a two-year college before enrolling at a California State University; these students are not required to complete their developmental education prior to enrollment but must remain co-enrolled until they have reached college level (California Department of Developmental Services). Similarly, students in Louisiana must "cross-enroll" in two-year colleges to take required developmental education courses. Joining Louisiana and California, the states of Ohio, Missouri, and Colorado have eliminated or drastically reduced or redesigned developmental education on their four-year college campuses. The result is a rethinking of the very purpose of

developmental education at two-year colleges and the mission of two-year colleges in general. For example, two-year college faculty in Missouri are responding to a state bill requiring “best practices” in developmental education by considering whether they can or should continue to serve all students who seek enrollment. Should they admit students whose reading assessments place them so far below college level that they have virtually no chance of ever reaching credit-bearing courses? If not, where should these students go? Ultimately, the very existence of the open-admissions two-year college is thrown into question by state-mandated developmental education reform initiatives.

## Placement

One of the fundamental functions of a writing program is administering locally appropriate placement procedures. Who is better equipped to determine which students are most likely to succeed in which classes than the faculty who teach those classes and students, provided those faculty are informed and have time to examine the local context in a larger frame of understanding? Placement is complex, and reform is needed: while some of the state-mandated reforms are welcome, others are more troubling because they are not derived from theoretically and empirically grounded practices or supported with necessary resources and faculty training.

Many English educators support placement processes that move beyond single test scores and support legislation that responds to mounting evidence that standardized placement tests do not provide accurate placement for students. Shanna Smith Jaggars and Michelle Hodara, for example, have shown that standardized placement tests “are only weakly predictive of student success and do not provide a diagnosis of each student’s particular strengths and weaknesses” (7). Clive Belfield and Peter M. Crosta have shown that standardized placement tests like ACCUPLACER and Compass have “severe error rates,” misplacing approximately 3 out of every 10 students (39; see also Hodara, Jaggars, and Karp). In fact, a student’s high school GPA appears to be a better predictor of college success than standardized placement test scores (Belfield and Crosta 17–18).

However, some state legislatures bypass faculty input and appear to engage in political rather than research-based decision making. Florida’s changed placement procedures in SB 1720 offer a case in point. By signing the bill into law, the Florida governor mandated what might be considered a version of directed self-placement, declaring some students exempt from mandatory placement assessment and giving most students who are assessed as needing developmental instruction multiple remediation options (see “Case Study” above). The law also radically redefines “college ready” by decreeing that a Florida high school diploma for anyone who has been enrolled since the ninth grade earns automatic placement into college-level courses, regardless of other indicators. Finally, Florida is implementing a single placement test with a single cutoff score established by the state board, which ignores differences in student populations in different parts of the state and the varying curricular and institutional programs at different colleges (Florida Senate). All of

these state-mandated reforms ignore local faculty expertise and well-documented best practices in writing placement assessment (“Writing Assessment”).

Other legislatures are also considering or have implemented state-mandated placement processes that do not necessarily reflect disciplinary knowledge of best practices. In Washington (as well as many other states), a student’s score on the assessment associated with the Common Core State Standards, put together by the Smarter Balanced consortium, will be used to place students into college-level courses; though the test itself has not yet been implemented, cutoff scores for placement into college-level writing have already been established by policymakers. The Virginia Placement Test (VPT), which places students into a class without offering faculty a test score or any diagnostic information, has been implemented statewide. The results differ from college to college: some are seeing more students than before placed into developmental courses while others are seeing more students placed directly into first-year writing. In the latter colleges, the success rate in first-year writing has dropped significantly (Spiegel). However, these changes are not consistent with national position statements that assert the importance of writing assessment that is based on multiple pieces of evidence from student writers.

Some legislative mandates, however, have drawn from best practices outlined in the position statements and disciplinary best practices. For example, Connecticut’s Public Act 12-40, a legislative bill passed in 2012 commonly referred to as PA 12-40, mandated a placement procedure using “multiple measures.” All state colleges are required by Board of Regents policy to use multiple measures for placement, including ACCUPLACER. North Carolina has mandated multiple placement measures, most notably using high school GPA to place students into classes. State colleges in Connecticut—including the twelve community colleges in the system—are now experimenting with or piloting additional multiple measures for placement.

## **Program Design and Curriculum**

Some state legislatures are also dictating changes to program design (for in-depth descriptions of many of these alternative program types, see “Snapshot of Program Design Options” below). Connecticut has mandated “accelerated” courses and embedded support while limiting developmental education for students to one semester. Moreover, Connecticut has mandated that state colleges and universities build remedial education into credit-bearing courses, requiring “just-in-time” support, possibly including tutoring. In legislation related to but not included in PA 12-40, the Connecticut legislature also established a “floor” for developmental students. This legislation sought to remand students who test at or below the eighth-grade level in reading or math starting in the fall 2014 semester to “regional remediation centers.” After considerable public outcry, this idea has been dropped, and regional “transition strategies” are currently being developed for Connecticut’s most underprepared college students (Connecticut Association for Human Services).

Other states, such as Indiana and Washington, are requiring high schools to identify those students who may need developmental education and offer them



remedial work in the twelfth grade. In Washington, that determination will be made in the eleventh grade after the student has taken the Smarter Balanced test one time (it is unclear whether test preparation will be part of that “remedial” work). In Colorado, the state government has authorized public universities and colleges to offer developmental education on their own campuses, reversing a trend that began when California relegated all developmental education to the community college system. Colorado colleges and universities are now reforming their programs to include small-group study classes as co-requisites to first-year writing courses and stretch-model first-year writing courses as an alternative for some students (Parker). Similar alternatives are required in Florida (see “Case Study” above).

One consequence of state-mandated program redesign is the impact on faculty. In some colleges, for instance in Florida and Virginia, developmental English faculty, particularly adjunct and part-time, have been laid off and others reassigned due to the redesign of their programs. Beyond the professional cost to individual faculty, the loss of trained, seasoned instructors deprives developmental students of opportunities for personal contact with expert, caring practitioners that Gregory R. Glau sees as instrumental to their retention and success (Glau, “Stretch Program”).

Finally, state governments are also dictating curricula. North Carolina has mandated that integrated developmental reading and writing be designed and offered statewide. This legislation requires faculty training but does not offer additional funding. Elsewhere, such as in Colorado, accelerated learning models and studio models are being required (see “Snapshot of Program Design Options” below). While these are proven approaches to developmental education, they have been mandated without providing additional support for faculty development.

These interventions demonstrate that state legislatures are willing and able to involve themselves in developmental policy and program design, often with little or no input from two-year college faculty. Furthermore, the events in Florida and Connecticut show that such legislation can leave faculty with the task of overhauling their programs on short notice and with few or no additional resources. Even when state legislatures are not directly involved, two-year college faculty are increasingly faced with institutional or system-wide pressures to reform their developmental programs to address concerns about student completion. As the practice of legislative intervention expands, TYCA hopes to a) develop a national voice for faculty who are charged with implementing changes and b) provide resources and recommendations for program reform. In the following section, we offer an overview of the alternative developmental program design options that have emerged in response to reform movements over the last two decades, including the available evidence for and against each model.

## **Snapshot of Program Design Options**

The goal of most developmental education reform is to *accelerate* students’ movement through developmental coursework and/or place students into college-level writing courses sooner. These two goals are not always one and the same, as some

acceleration programs do away with separate developmental courses altogether. Nikki Edgecombe of the CCRC writes that the term *acceleration* can still mean two different things to college administration and faculty: either rethinking both content and time devoted to courses and sequences, or the reorganization of curriculum and instruction so that students are required to meet the same number of contact hours but in a less traditional sequenced course delivery. There are six major programmatic alternatives to traditional developmental courses that two-year colleges have been adopting in the context of developmental education reform: mainstreaming, studio courses, compression, integration/contextualization, stretch courses, and modularization. As the Florida case study demonstrates, colleges often adopt multiple models in an effort to meet a range of student needs.

*Mainstreaming:* In “mainstreaming” options, cohorts of students who have been identified as needing additional writing support enroll in first-year college-level composition with other nondevelopmental students but also attend a mandatory supplemental companion class or lab, sometimes on the same day or days, with the same instructor. Baltimore County Community College, led by Peter Adams, is perhaps the best known of these accelerated-learning program (ALP) models. One of the primary benefits of acceleration via mainstreaming is increased persistence: students complete college composition for college credit sooner than those on a traditional developmental course path. The most obvious drawback at the community college level is that not all students are ready to be placed in an ALP course even with the additional support (i.e., a supplemental class or lab) or to balance multiple college courses with their other responsibilities, as is the case for many part-time students and returning adult students. In “Re-Modeling Basic Writing,” Rachel Rigolino and Penny Freel at the State University of New York at New Paltz describe their Supplemental Writing Workshop (SWW) Program for basic writing students, developed in response to public pressure to discontinue non-degree credit writing courses at baccalaureate institutions. The SWW alternative offers students additional hours of support with integrating first-year writing and tutoring sessions, and students earn degree credit over the course of the year for the two-semester writing sequence (51). For institutions that are facing administrative or economic pressure to eliminate basic writing and/or non-degree writing courses, the SWW model may provide an alternative.

*Studio Courses:* Another approach to acceleration is “studio” courses, often modeled on the work of Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson at the University of South Carolina. In the studio model, all first-year students enroll in freshman composition, and in the first week of the course students engage in writing exercises, including a writing self-assessment. These texts are used to identify which students might benefit from studio support; participating students sign up for small peer groups that meet weekly with an experienced writing instructor to support their work in the writing course (Grego and Thompson 63–64). Such models provide intensive, individualized writing instruction designed to help students develop as writers and succeed in the composition course.

*Compression:* In “compressed” courses, the content of an existing course or courses in a sequence is condensed into fewer weeks while maintaining the same number of instructional/contact hours. For example, a traditional sixteen-week course might be compressed into an eight-week course that meets for four rather than two hours per week. This enables a student to move through a two-course sequence in a single semester. The compressed developmental sequence in Community College of Denver’s FastStart Program, for instance, has resulted in higher completion rates for both the developmental course and college composition (Edgecome et al.).

*Integration or Contextualization:* Integration (sometimes called *contextualization*) provides developmental content in the context of other general education, technical, or vocational courses, often through team co-teaching. Integration can include “paired” courses: the Washington State Community College’s I-BEST program (sometimes referred to as “bucket” courses) is one well-known example. John Wachen, Davis Jenkins, and Michelle Van Noy found that the advantages of integration with contextualization included institutional and student cost savings, higher pass rates, and increased credit-earning potential (26). Reading and writing integration is also at the heart of the California Acceleration Project (CAP), developed at Chabot College by Katie Hern, which offers a one-semester compressed course that combines the two-semester, pre-college-level English course into a single semester (see Hern, “Accelerated English” and “Exponential Attrition”). Integrated reading, writing, and reasoning curricula are part of all developmental and degree-credit English courses in CAP.

*Stretch Courses:* Devised at four-year institutions tasked with dismantling stand-alone basic/developmental writing, stretch courses expand the first college-level writing course from one to two semesters. Students who would otherwise be placed into a traditional developmental writing course enter directly into the first college-level writing course but complete the composition requirement with more time and support (Glau, “*Stretch* at 10,” “Stretch Program”). Describing Boise State University’s “stretch” course, Thomas Peele states, “The most successful aspect . . . may be the simple fact that it allows students and faculty to spend more time together by pairing students with the same instructor for a full year . . . provid[ing] faculty with additional time to identify and address individual student needs” (51).

*Module Courses:* Module courses divide specific “skills” into units or modules rather than integrating them into courses, a structure that advocates claim allows students to focus on only those areas in which they have specific weaknesses. Thad Nodine et al. report that most modularization has taken place in developmental math, and that few studies have been done to really show if students receiving modularized support have enough context to apply what they learn, whether they persist in modularized programs, or if the process actually accelerates student progress (Edgecombe 11). Sullivan’s “Just-in-Time” model (“Just-in-Time”) offers a version of modularization in which advanced developmental students engage in flexible and clearly delineated assessments tied to key competencies in the first-year

writing course, allowing them to earn degree credit while still technically enrolled in developmental courses (123).

Researchers and program administrators in writing studies have devoted significant intellectual effort and institutional resources to developing innovative ways to equip underprepared students for college-level work and to assessing the effectiveness of the programs they devise (see Glau, “Stretch Courses”). However, the flurry of legislative interest in the failures of existing programs and demands for new models speaks to the political and social dissatisfaction with the results of our current effort—as well as the challenges two-year college faculty face in helping students from diverse backgrounds develop the academic skills and social capital required to navigate the complex cultural system that is higher education.

While policymakers are enacting developmental education reform in order to serve the public interest, they typically have little awareness of our field’s rich theorizations of language, literacy, and learning, which are essential to designing effective programs. Likewise, policymakers have consistently failed to recognize the professional expertise and authority of the two-year college English faculty who will be tasked with implementing such legislation. With a rich disciplinary and scholarly foundation of research, evidence-based recommendations, and position statements available through the National Council of Teachers of English, the Two-Year College Association, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication, educators in postsecondary writing have a robust body of resources to draw from in making this disciplinary knowledge available to policymakers and administrators.

## **Recommendations and Paths Forward**

Most two-year colleges are institutions of access that serve an extraordinarily broad range of learners. Nearly all two-year college English instructors work on a daily basis with students who are underprepared for college-level reading and writing in their first semester and who often require ongoing academic support throughout their college experience. Developmental education courses and placement processes play an important role in determining student success across all English courses in the two-year college curriculum. For this reason, institutional, state, and national policies that shape developmental education can have a profound effect on the working lives of all two-year college English faculty, regardless of whether they themselves teach developmental reading and writing. More importantly, such radical changes to developmental education do not fully consider the impact on our most vulnerable student populations, including potentially closing off access to higher education altogether.

It is essential, then, that two-year college English educators take part in public and institutional conversations about how to define college readiness, provide academic support to students who are underprepared for college reading and writing, and preserve the access that has traditionally been a hallmark of most two-year colleges’ missions. TYCA, then, offers recommendations for both disciplinary

groups and for educators and administrators at institutions who are re-examining their developmental education programs.

## **Recommendations for Institutional Administrators and Educators**

Two-year college administrators and educators can join national, state, and institutional conversations about developmental education by advocating for the following practices:

1. *Include developmental education instructors*—including contingent faculty and part-time instructors—in decision-making processes that affect policies, programs, and funding for developmental education at two-year colleges.
2. *Initiate improvement to developmental education programs and courses through research-based pilot programs that include rigorous assessments of student outcomes* rather than mandating large-scale statewide or institutional changes. Make developmental education policy decisions based on systematically collected data about the academic needs of the student populations that a college serves in relation to its institutional mission. Identify what is and is not working in developmental education by thoroughly assessing the effectiveness of practices and programs for specific student populations within locally situated contexts.
3. *Prioritize evidence from local assessments and research on student success.* Avoid drawing conclusions about effective strategies for developmental education based solely on research at institutions with different student populations, admissions standards, institutional missions, funding structures, academic support services, and/or working conditions for instructors. Support research based in open-admissions institutions with at-risk and underprepared students, research that will build a stronger body of empirical and theoretical work for basic/developmental writing instructors.
4. *Assess students' need for developmental education and readiness for credit-bearing courses based on multiple pieces of evidence, including student writing.* Eliminate the practice of using standardized tests as stand-alone measures for assessing students' readiness for college-level learning and determining placement in developmental English courses. Where at all possible, encourage directed self-placement, rather than undirected self-placement, as a part of the placement process.
5. *Eliminate developmental education exit tests that determine readiness for credit-bearing courses based on multiple-choice exams.* Instead use instructor or departmental assessments of the work that students complete for their developmental courses to provide students with multiple opportunities to develop and then demonstrate the academic literacy skills required for first-year college courses.
6. *Fund and develop strong academic support systems to help students make a successful transition* from developmental to credit-bearing courses and to provide them with continued support throughout their college careers, including tutoring centers, supplemental instruction, and studio courses.

7. *Support ongoing professional development for developmental educators*, especially for contingent faculty and part-time instructors who often have the most contact with underprepared and at-risk student populations.
8. *Support English departments at two-year colleges to establish partnerships with area high schools* in order to facilitate articulation and alignment across institutional boundaries and smooth the transition to college for more students.

## Recommendations for National Disciplinary Organizations

- > *Establish a standing developmental education advocacy group or task force*—a group of two-year college professionals who can join committees, be consulted by legislatures and government agencies, and bring a deep knowledge of current research to discussions of developmental education reform. Such a committee may participate in a national agenda in multiple ways: visit campuses, for example, and provide professional development opportunities), advocate for thoughtful and research-based decision making (like the Community College Research Center), serve as a political action committee, created at least in part to help guide future legislative action (on the state and federal level) and resist any action that might be ill-advised.
- > *Provide support, encouragement, and incentive* for more Research I and PhD-granting universities (as the places resourced to produce and disseminate research as well as tasked with preparing future faculty) to provide appropriate graduate preparation, professionalization, and ongoing professional development opportunities for two-year college teacher-scholars (across English studies) who are equipped to engage these issues at institutional, state, and national levels; such educators will be better able to assert their professional authority and advocate for students.

Educational policymaking, as well as institutional and individual faculty responses to mandates around developmental education, will affect the quality of life and the quality of our democracy for decades to come. Let us do the work of reforming developmental education with great resourcefulness, care, and thoughtfulness and with a fuller understanding about how much is at stake.

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Respectfully submitted,

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