PROGRESS IN THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

An Evaluation of Achieving the Dream Colleges in Washington State

Executive Summary

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December 2012

Achieving the Dream™
Community Colleges Count

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CCRC Community College Research Center
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Overview

In 2004, Lumina Foundation for Education launched an innovative national reform initiative, Achieving the Dream (ATD), with the purpose of increasing the persistence and completion rates of community college students, especially low-income students and students of color, through evidence-based institutional change. Originally consisting of 26 partner colleges in five states, today more than 150 colleges in 30 states and the District of Columbia participate in ATD, which in 2010 became a national nonprofit organization.

This report examines six community and technical colleges in Washington State that joined the initiative in 2006 ("Round 3") and were provided with grant funding from College Spark Washington and the services of a leadership coach and data coach to facilitate their ATD efforts. The report (1) describes the progress each college made in implementing ATD's "culture of evidence" principles for institutional improvement; (2) examines strategies implemented by the colleges to improve student outcomes, comparing them to interventions developed by the 26 "Round 1" colleges that joined ATD in 2004; and (3) charts trends in student outcomes in the period before and after the Washington colleges joined the initiative.

Key findings for the six Washington ATD colleges are:

- **Progress toward building a culture of evidence.** All but one of the colleges made at least some progress. Two colleges made substantial progress, moving from a low level of implementation to a high level over the five years of their ATD involvement. Specifically, they strengthened student success goals and strategies, increased their institutional research capacities, created institutional effectiveness committees, and strengthened their program review processes.

- **Development of student success strategies.** Several of the colleges — those further along in implementing the ATD culture of evidence principles — made significant systemic changes to programs and services. Compared with the Round 1 ATD colleges, the Washington colleges were more likely to have implemented changes in instruction as opposed to student support services and were more successful in operating improvement strategies at scale.

- **Student outcome trends after ATD implementation.** The average student outcomes across the six colleges appear largely unchanged, as do the racial and economic achievement gaps. The colleges that succeeded in implementing improvement strategies at scale did so only later in the

period under study. It may be too early to see their impact. On the other hand, most of the reforms implemented by the Washington colleges were at the "front end," in that they involved changes to orientation and intake advising as well as to developmental instruction. Improving student completion rates may also require systemic changes to the design of academic programs to ensure that they are well structured and aligned with the requirements for success in further education and, for career-technical programs, success in the labor market.

The report also examines lessons from the experiences of the Washington ATD colleges for other colleges seeking to improve student outcomes.

This study was conducted during a period of both rapid enrollment growth and sharp cuts in state funding. Making systemic changes in practice in ways that the Washington ATD colleges have begun to do and in the other ways recommended in this report requires resources — resources for new and strengthened information systems, for professional development and training, and for coordination. The Washington colleges have shown that even during a period of dramatic cuts in funding, they have been willing to make major changes in practice. The fact that they have reallocated scarce resources toward practices that have the potential to be more effective illustrates their commitment to greater student success.

Preface

Open-access, low-cost community colleges are increasingly understood as a critical resource for millions of adults who might otherwise be unable to access higher education. Community college degrees and certificates are instrumental for many low-income students seeking jobs that pay a living wage. Yet it is also true that the majority of students who enroll in a community college do not graduate or earn a credential; indeed, many students drop out even before completing developmental coursework that is designed to prepare them for the academic challenges of college-level courses.

Nearly a decade ago, Lumina Foundation for Education launched a bold initiative — Achieving the Dream — to help more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in college and earn a certificate or degree. The initiative calls upon colleges to use data on their own students to evaluate institutional programs and services, thus providing a way for faculty and administrators to engage in thoughtful self-assessment, reflection, and decision making that leads to the implementation and evaluation of strategies aimed at increased student success. Achieving the Dream has grown dramatically since its founding in 2004 — more than 150 colleges in 30 states now participate in the initiative.

Since Achieving the Dream began, the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, and MDRC have been examining the ways in which participation in the initiative has affected community colleges and their students. One analysis (Rutschow et al., 2011) covered the 26 institutions that joined the initiative initially in 2004. Another study (Jenkins, Ellwein, Wachen, Kerrigan, & Cho, 2009) reviewed the early Achieving the Dream experiences of 13 colleges — seven in Pennsylvania and six in Washington State — that joined the initiative in 2006.

The study reported on here evaluates the changes to date in the six Washington colleges. It compares their progress after five years of participation in Achieving the Dream with, first, a baseline examination of their progress (Jenkins et al., 2009), and, second, with findings on the progress of the 26 original Achieving the Dream colleges (Rutschow et al., 2011). The study shows that most of the Washington colleges made great progress in building a culture and an infrastructure for evidence-based improvement. Several of the Washington colleges have made significant changes to their programs and services, especially in intake advising and developmental education. Colleges that succeeded in implemented innovations at scale did so rather late in the study period, so it may be too early to see their effects.

One clear implication of the study is that no single intervention that a college undertakes will likely lead to a large increase in college-wide persistence or completion rates.

Rather, the redesign of major programs and functions throughout a college must be considered in order to achieve substantial gains in student success.

Thomas Bailey
Director, Community College Research Center

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This study was conducted through a partnership of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University, and MDRC. CCRC and MDRC researchers collaborated in developing the protocols for the fieldwork and in carrying out the site visits. The authors wish to thank Thomas Brock, Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow, and John Hutchins at MDRC and Thomas Bailey of CCRC for reviewing drafts on which this report is based. We are also grateful to the representatives from the Washington Achieving the Dream colleges and State Board for Community and Technical Colleges who met with us in Seattle in October 2012 to discuss the findings and their implications for improving practice. Thanks to Amy Mazzariello and Wendy Schwartz for their expert editing and formatting of the manuscript, to Donna Chan for her work processing the data, and to Doug Slater for managing the publication process. Finally, we want to thank the Washington community and technical college faculty, staff, and administrators who participated in the various aspects of the study. Their clear dedication to improving outcomes for their students is an inspiration.

The Authors

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the work on Achieving the Dream (ATD) of the first six Washington State community and technical colleges to participate in the initiative. ATD is a national community college reform movement dedicated to increasing the number of students, particularly low-income students and students of color, who earn postsecondary credentials with marketplace value. Currently over 150 institutions in 30 states and the District of Columbia take part in ATD. The six Washington colleges examined in this report joined the initiative in 2006. These colleges, which in the body of the report are not identified by name in order to optimize learning from their experiences, are Big Bend Community College, Highline Community College, Renton Technical College, Seattle Central Community College, Tacoma Community College, and Yakima Valley Community College.

This report is part of a larger evaluation of ATD being conducted by MDRC and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) with funding from Lumina Foundation for Education. The purpose of the Washington State study, also underwritten in part by College Spark Washington, was to examine the progress made by the Washington ATD colleges in implementing the ATD "culture of evidence" principles for institutional improvement and in improving student outcomes. This report on the Washington ATD colleges examines the following research questions:

- Have the colleges made progress in building a culture of evidence by implementing the ATD principles of institutional improvement?
- What student success strategies did the colleges implement under ATD, and which of these are being implemented at scale?
- Has involvement in ATD changed the way that faculty, staff, and administrators use data? If so, in what ways?
- What have been the trends in student achievement among the Washington ATD colleges? Is there evidence that student progression and outcomes improved during the period after the Washington State colleges joined ATD?

Lumina Foundation and other ATD funders are especially interested to see if the Washington State colleges, which joined the initiative in the third round when it was more fully developed, progressed faster than colleges that joined in the first round. Hence, another focus of this report is to compare the progress of the Washington colleges over the first five years of their involvement in the initiative with that of the "Round 1" ATD colleges.

We collected data for this evaluation through a review of the Achieving the Dream internal reports, field research at all six colleges, a survey of data use by faculty and administrators, and student data shared by the colleges. The study was conducted in two waves: a "baseline" examination of the initial work and early progress of the Washington ATD colleges conducted in 2008, and follow-on research conducted in 2011, the fifth and final year of the colleges' initial implementation work on ATD. To assess the progress made by the Washington colleges, this report compares the findings from the second wave of research in Washington with that of the first wave, which were examined in a 2009 report by CCRC and MDRC (Jenkins, Ellwein, Wachen, Kerrigan, & Cho, 2009). It also compares the progress of the Washington colleges after their first five years in ATD with that of the first round of colleges to join the initiative, which was explored in a 2011 MDRC–CCRC report (Rutschow et al., 2011).

It is important to point out that this study was conducted during a period of both rapid enrollment growth and sharp cuts in state funding. Thus, the Washington ATD colleges were faced with the challenge of making systemic changes to practice in a time of scarce resources.

Progress Building a Culture of Evidence

Table ES.1 shows the progress made by the Washington ATD colleges in implementing practices that reflect the four Achieving the Dream "culture of evidence" principles: (1) leadership committed to improving student outcomes and equity, (2) use of evidence to improve student success, (3) broad engagement of stakeholders in the improvement process, and (4) continuous improvement. The ratings are based on a protocol and rubric the research team used to evaluate how much each college had implemented the ATD principles. For each dimension, the college received a rating from 1 (little or none) to 5 (high level/a lot).

All but one of the colleges made at least some progress toward building a culture of evidence according to the ATD principles. Two colleges made substantial progress, moving from a low level of implementation to a high level over the first five years of their involvement with the initiative.

Table ES.1

Level of Implementation of ATD Culture of Evidence Principles at the Washington Colleges: A Comparison of Spring 2008 and Spring 2011

College	Spring 2008	Spring 2011	Increase in Levels
WA-A	High	Very high	+1
WA-B	Medium	High	+1
WA-C	Low	High	+2
WA-D	Low	High	+2
WA-E	Very low	Low	+1
WA-F	Very low	Very low	0

NOTE: In this report, we do not name colleges but rather use aliases to optimize learning from their experiences.

While it is difficult to compare the six Washington ATD colleges with the 26 Round 1 ATD colleges, it does seem that the Washington colleges, as a group, went at least as far in building a culture of evidence as did the Round 1 colleges. Five years after they joined ATD, we rated four of the six Washington colleges as having implemented the ATD principles at a high level. This means that the college leadership had made strong commitment to improving student outcomes (not just enrollments), that the colleges were actively engaging faculty and staff and using student records and other data to assess the effectiveness of student services, and that they strengthened strategic planning and other infrastructure for continuous improvement. In comparison, only 11 of the 26 Round 1 colleges (or 42 percent) implemented most of the practices associated with a strong culture of evidence by the end of their five-year ATD implementation period.

Bringing about changes in organizational practice is not easy. All of the Washington colleges faced barriers to implementing practices that reflect the ATD principles. At the college that made the least progress in building a culture of evidence, turnover among the college's top leadership made it difficult to sustain a focus on student success. All six colleges initially had trouble accessing the data needed to conduct the longitudinal cohort tracking recommended by ATD because all of the colleges in the state were dependent on an antiquated statewide "legacy" student information system. Three of the colleges built data warehouses to facilitate longitudinal analysis of data, although the others continued to go through the cumbersome process of downloading data from the state system each time they conducted new analyses.

It is also true that bringing about systemic change requires resources. Although the Washington ATD colleges received some funding to support ATD activities (about $100,000 per year during the implementation year), the period under study was one in which per-student

revenues declined due to a sharp increase in student enrollments and sharp cuts in state funding in the wake of the Great Recession. One area essential to change efforts in which some colleges were forced to cut was professional development for faculty and staff. For example, one college eliminated a full-time faculty development staff person whom faculty interviewees praised for helping to support efforts to improve instruction. The alternative, according to the college's administrators, was to reduce resources for instruction.

Despite these challenges, all of the colleges made at least some changes to organizational practice as a result of their participation in Achieving the Dream. Table ES.2 summarizes these changes.

Achieving the Dream Colleges in Washington State

Table ES.2

Major Changes in Organizational Practice Among the Washington Colleges During the First Five Years of ATD

Changes in Organizational Practice	Number of Colleges
Strengthened goals/measures for student success	6
Increased IR staff and capacity	4
Strengthened student success strategy development process	4
Built data warehouse and added programmer	3
Created institutional effectiveness committees	3
Strengthened program review process	2

All six colleges developed goals for student success using measures that were similar to and in some cases adapted from the ATD performance measures. One college went a step further by asking each department to establish student success goals and measures tied to institutional goals. Another strengthened its program review process, with performance measures defined in collaboration with faculty.

Three of the colleges added institutional research (IR) staff who built data warehouses, improved procedures for requesting information, provided data support to student success committees and others, and trained faculty and staff in the use of data. The report includes a case study of one of these colleges that had struggled for years to produce data that college faculty and other stakeholders could trust. The college was successful in building a home-grown institutional effectiveness office, choosing a well-regarded faculty member to head the new office, which sent the message to the faculty that research would focus on instruction. In these

three colleges and one other, the efforts of the IR staff to increase access to data and research was enhanced by "data teams" comprised of faculty, staff, and administrators who helped to "democratize" the use of data at the college, promoting data use among their colleagues and also providing guidance on how to do so.

The three colleges that added IR staff also created standing bodies that were responsible for overseeing efforts to improve student outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Such a committee already existed at another one of the colleges prior to its joining ATD. In some cases the ATD data teams were integrated into these committees; in others, the data teams were separate. In all cases, IR staff worked closely with committee members to help ensure that the decisions they made were based on evidence. All four colleges with such committees also created or strengthened processes for identifying opportunities to improve student success and to develop strategies for doing so.

As part of its strategic planning and improvement process, one college worked with each department to set measurable goals for improving student learning and success. Another college formalized and strengthened its program review process to include a focus on student retention and completion, not just enrollment. The college used this process to decide which programs to eliminate in response to sharp cuts in state funding that occurred during this period. The administration worked with the faculty to develop the metrics to be used. Faculty and department chairs that were interviewed said that the administration was trying to be more transparent and fair in its decisions. The college's strengthened IR capacity and program review process and measures helped to make this possible.

Student Success Strategies

A spring 2011 report by MDRC and CCRC on the progress of the 26 Round 1 ATD colleges yielded three main findings regarding the implementation of strategies for improving student success (Rutschow et al., 2011). First, only one-fourth of all direct student interventions in the Round 1 colleges were designed to change classroom instruction; most of the interventions involved either student support services or academic assistance designed to support instruction in the classroom. Second, across the Round 1 colleges there was a trade-off between the scale and intensity of implemented ATD strategies. Low-intensity strategies, which tended to be support services such as orientation and advising programs, were more likely to be implemented at scale than were high-intensity strategies such as curricular reforms, supplemental instruction, and learning communities, which generally "touched" relatively small numbers of students. Third, while some of the colleges did implement strategies that touched large numbers of students, the majority of all direct interventions at the Round 1 colleges remained small in scale. These findings show the difficulty of implementing interventions on a scale sufficient to reach substantial numbers of students. Yet, as MDRC and CCRC pointed out

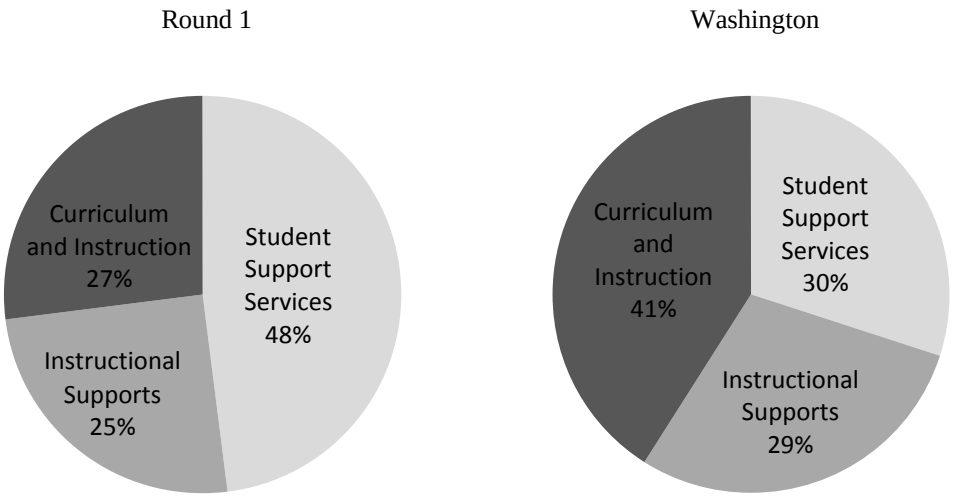
in the 2011 report on the Round 1 institutions, unless colleges can implement high-intensity instructional reforms at scale, they are unlikely to be able to increase completion and success rates for substantial numbers of students.

The Round 1 colleges and the Washington State colleges targeted similar student populations for the majority of their improvement strategies. Both groups of colleges focused on developmental education for the majority of their interventions. At the Round 1 colleges, nearly half of all strategies involved work on this area, and at the Washington colleges the proportion was even higher (56 percent). Furthermore, in both groups, strategies targeting first-year students were the second most common after developmental education.

However, one notable difference between the Round 1 and Washington colleges was that the Washington colleges focused their ATD activities on instruction to a greater extent than did the Round 1 colleges. Among the Round 1 colleges, instructional changes (including both reforms to curriculum and instruction and to instructional supports) made up 52 percent of all direct student success strategies. In Washington, instructional changes accounted for 70 percent of all direct strategies (see Figure ES.1). In this, the Washington colleges may have benefited

Figure ES.1

Proportion of Student Success Strategies by Type Used at Round 1 and Washington ATD Colleges

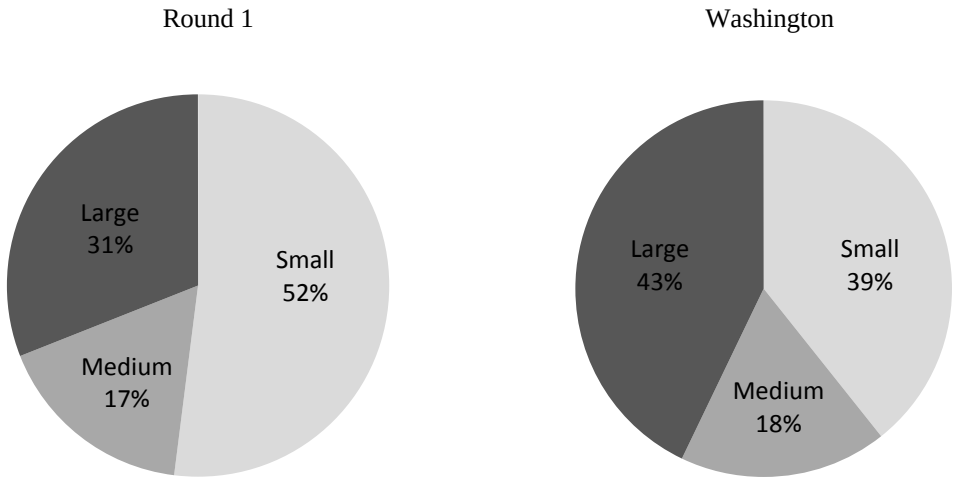


from the experiences of the Round 1 colleges and learned about successful approaches for changing instructional practices.

Another difference between the Round 1 and Washington colleges was the scale of student interventions. Figure ES.2 shows that 31 percent of strategies implemented by the Round 1 colleges were operating at scale (defined as affecting at least 25 percent of the target student population), compared with 43 percent of strategies at the Washington colleges. And in contrast to the Round 1 colleges, the large-scale strategies at Washington colleges were not mostly limited to student services. Over half of the strategies that had reached a substantial number of students in Washington involved changes to instructional practices.

Figure ES.2

Proportion of Strategies Operating at Small, Medium, or Large Scale at Round 1 and Washington ATD Colleges



The research literature on organizational effectiveness suggests that no one innovative practice or even set of discrete practices is sufficient to improve organizational performance. For community colleges, the implication is that to achieve substantial improvements in student outcomes, they will need to make systemic changes in programs and services. From this

perspective, rather than test and scale up discrete interventions, colleges need to redesign major programs and functions at scale.

While we saw some cases among the Round 1 colleges of institutions making systemic changes to programs and services, this was more prevalent among the Washington colleges. For example, one college developed a comprehensive approach to helping first-year students navigate from matriculation to the declaration of a program of study, with the goal of helping them obtain 30 credits by the end of the first year. The multi-pronged approach included early assessment, mandatory orientation, a redesigned student success course, and intrusive advising for students, along with a locally developed software application for tracking student progression and improving advising. As a result of integrating interventions into a more comprehensive model that supports students along a pathway from intake to the accumulation of 30 college credits, the college has seen some initial success in improving the experience of first-year students.

On the instructional front, one college transformed its developmental math sequence to make the math curriculum more relevant to students' academic pathways. In addition to the curricular reform, the strategy reduced the length of the developmental math sequence from three terms to two terms for students not pursuing STEM programs of study. Administrators reported that because the entire developmental math structure had changed, faculty became engaged in deeper conversations about math content and placement procedures more generally. At two other colleges, faculty led efforts to spread effective teaching methods across academic programs.

These cases suggest that the engagement of faculty in the knowledge-building and ownership of reform efforts is an important component of implementing changes in classroom practice at scale. They also suggest that without the active support of administrators to facilitate communication and spread reform efforts, broad faculty engagement and scaling up efforts are likely to be more difficult to achieve (as we saw in at least one of the other colleges). The Washington colleges that were most likely to make systemic changes by redesigning programs and services and by supporting the diffusion of instructional innovations were those that we found to be further along in implementing the ATD culture of evidence principles. This finding supports the idea, central to the Achieving the Dream theory of change, that building a culture of evidence creates the organizational conditions for reforming academics and student services to better serve students.

The approach taken by these colleges was essentially to innovate at scale rather than to scale innovations. Although they did experiment with different approaches, the colleges tended to redesign programs and services college-wide. Such innovations are easier for colleges to sustain since they become part of the way colleges operate. We hypothesize that the colleges

that were able to innovate at scale are those that will see the greatest improvements in performance.

Data Use by Faculty, Administrators, and Staff

We conducted surveys of the use of data by faculty and administrators at the Washington colleges in two waves, one in 2007–08, when the colleges first began to implement their ATD work, and one in 2011, near the end of the five-year implementation phase. Based on the surveys, we found some positive changes in the extent of use of data over time by faculty for teaching-related purposes, particularly at three of the colleges. We observed no changes, however, in the frequency with which faculty used data on academic achievement gaps between students of different races/ethnicities and income levels.

Faculty at three of the colleges perceived an increase in the use of data by their academic departments, particularly for curricular decisions and identifying courses with high failure rates. Yet use of data by administrative departments at the colleges declined between the two waves of the survey. This suggests that use of data for planning purposes waned following the first year or two of participation in Achieving the Dream, when colleges were strongly encouraged and were given help to analyze data on student success.

These findings suggest that some positive changes in attitudes toward and use of data took place during the initial implementation phase of the first six Washington ATD colleges. Moreover, the colleges that made the most progress in implementing practices that reflect the ATD culture of evidence principles were more likely to show evidence of increased data use. However, there were perhaps not as many improvements as we expected at the outset of this initiative, which has among its core principles the creation of a culture of evidence to improve student outcomes. Although we are encouraged by the generally positive changes that occurred, these patterns of improved data use varied across colleges and within colleges between faculty and administrators.

Student Outcome Trends

Using student-level data from the entering fall cohorts of 2003 through 2009, we examined average initiative-wide outcomes across the six Washington colleges on five key ATD performance indicators, measured two years after the students entered college: (1) attempting and completing developmental education (remedial) courses in English and mathematics, (2) attempting and completing the first college-level course (gatekeeper) in English and mathematics, (3) attempting and completing credits, (4) persisting fall-to-fall and year-to-year, and (5) earning certificates or degrees. Each cohort was followed for a two-year

period. For example, the 2009 cohort was tracked through the 2009–10 and 2010–11 academic years.

The main findings from the student outcomes analysis are:

- The average student outcomes across the six colleges appear largely unchanged after the colleges began implementing Achieving the Dream.
- The initiative does not appear to have reduced the achievement gap along racial or economic lines. The gap between students who received Pell grants (a measure of low-income status) and those who did not does appear to decrease over students' academic careers, but this was also true prior to implementation of Achieving the Dream.
- There do not appear to be greater gains associated with Achieving the Dream for some colleges compared with others.

These findings should be interpreted cautiously. The colleges implemented a wide variety of student success strategies, and their strategies seem to be reaching more students than in earlier rounds of the initiative. In this sense, the colleges appear to have built on the experiences of previous rounds of Achieving the Dream, and in recent years, they have been moving closer to affecting large portions of their student populations. With respect to the 2007 through 2009 cohorts included in this analysis, however, the Washington colleges were still reaching relatively small proportions of students through their new strategies. Moreover, few of the colleges reached scale with a comprehensive set of strategies that touch students across the full range of their experiences, even in more targeted areas of the student experience such as intake and remediation, where most of the ATD strategies were focused. It may be that the colleges positively affected students on a smaller scale than these analyses could detect, or that they positively impacted larger numbers of students in subsequent years.

Benefits of Participating in ATD

We asked those we interviewed at the colleges what they saw as the main benefits of participating in ATD. Five of the six colleges indicated that they benefited in substantial ways from participating in the initiative. Table ES.3 lists the main benefits and indicates the number of colleges mentioning each.

Table ES.3

Perceived Benefits of ATD for Organizational Practice at the Washington Colleges

Type of Benefit	Specific Benefit	Number of Colleges
Institutional Research and Data Use	• Greater access to data and stronger capacity to use data in decision-making processes	5
	• Increased use of data to improve college programs and policies	4
	• Use of data for greater transparency in resource allocations/budget decisions	2
	• Strengthened grant writing capacity	2
Student Success Strategies	• Systematic approach to developing strategies based on student outcomes data	4
	• Impetus to develop/expand strategies	2
Initiative Alignment	• Synergy with new accreditation process and with WA Student Achievement Initiative	6

Respondents at five of the six colleges indicated that their organization has benefited from an increased access to and use of data and research on student outcomes. Three colleges mentioned that one benefit of increased IR capacity was a strengthened capacity to pursue grant funding.

Three of the colleges credited their participation in ATD with strengthening the process by which they identify ways to improve programs and services, specifically by improving the quality of data for making decisions about what to improve and how. All six colleges said that ATD helped them better align efforts to improve student completion, particularly those related to meeting the new accreditation standards.

Most of the colleges found their ATD coaches (a leadership coach and a data coach) to be helpful. There was broad agreement among those we interviewed at one college that the both the leadership coach and the data coach challenged the college to improve and, as one respondent said, "kept us accountable." In the last couple years, both coaches at the college have sought to focus college leaders on figuring how to sustain both successful strategies and the overall work on improving outcomes after the initial five years in ATD. Respondents at another college said that their data coach in particular helped to frame the data analyses by asking the right questions and facilitating the process of inquiry and discussions of data by the team. Leaders at a third college said that they would only continue to participate in ATD beyond the initial period if they could have the same leadership coach and data coach.

Lessons for Other Colleges

Based on our in-depth analysis of the experience of the six original Washington State ATD colleges during their first five years in the initiative, we highlight several lessons for the new Washington ATD colleges and others elsewhere seeking to implement similar reforms.

Redesign Programs and Supports at Scale

To achieve substantial improvements in student outcomes, colleges need to make systemic changes in programs and services — no single innovation or even set of interventions will be sufficient to "move the needle" on student completion. From this perspective, rather than test and scale up discrete interventions, colleges should redesign major programs and functions at scale. Rather than try to bring to scale discrete interventions, research on high performance organizations both in and outside of education indicates that improving organizational performance generally requires systemic changes in practice.

Some of the Washington colleges did seek to move beyond implementing discrete interventions to make systemic changes in programs and practices, and several of the colleges succeeded in this. Some of these same colleges also succeeded in promoting diffusion of instructional innovations. In those cases, the colleges seemed to provide a balance between empowering faculty and leaving them alone to try out innovations while at the same time providing support for professional development.

The Washington colleges that were most likely to make systemic changes by redesigning programs and services and supporting the diffusion of instructional innovations were those that we found to be further along in implementing the ATD culture of evidence principles. This finding supports the idea, central to the Achieving the Dream theory of change, that building a culture of evidence creates the organizational conditions for reforming academics and student services to better serve students.

Involve Faculty From the Start in Leading Efforts to Rethink Curriculum and Instruction

Community colleges are unlikely to see substantial improvements in student completion and learning unless there are major changes in classroom practice. Classroom practices are not going to change unless the faculty are convinced of the need to do so and are supported to explore and implement changes. It is critical, therefore, that colleges seeking to improve programs and instruction involve faculty from the start in leading such reforms.

Two or three of the Washington colleges succeeded in making major changes in instructional practice. Faculty at one college revamped its entire developmental mathematics

curriculum; at another, a group of faculty spearheaded widespread adoption across departments of a tested methodology for improving students' comprehension of texts. Colleges that want to engage faculty in reforms should do so early on, being clear about the desired goals but empowering them to decide, in conjunction with their student support services colleagues, how best to achieve them. Colleges should also support the spread of innovative practices by providing the infrastructure and opportunities for faculty and staff across the institution to share their knowledge and experience.

Strengthen Pathways Into and Through Programs of Study

The efforts by the Washington colleges to redesign programs and services were mostly confined to the intake process and developmental education. Over time, as these colleges succeed in implementing these reforms at scale, we hypothesize that these changes will lead to improved success in developmental courses and progression to college-level gatekeeper courses. Most of these reforms were implemented at scale after 2009, so their effects are not likely to be reflected in the data we have on student progression, which only go up to the 2009 first-time fall cohort. In the longer term, however, without systemic changes to colleges' academic programs, we do not see how "front-end" reforms of the sort mainly implemented by the Washington colleges alone can substantially increase student completion and success.

Research suggests that a similar systemic reform may also need to be applied to college-level programs to ensure that they are well structured and aligned with requirements for success in further education and, for career-technical education programs, employment. With a handful of exceptions, the focus of instructional reforms in the Washington colleges was on improving student success in developmental education and introductory college-level math and English. Far less attention was paid to improving student readiness and success in other introductory college courses that serve as gatekeepers to programs in other fields, such as social and behavioral sciences, biological and physical sciences, and business. Taking steps to strengthen programs of study in these fields would also have the effect of broadening involvement by faculty in areas other than English, math, and (in colleges where it is a separate department) developmental education. Colleges also need to strengthen mechanisms to help students choose from among the many programs offered. The work by one college (WA-C) to restructure the intake and advising functions to help students choose a program and earn college credits in it as soon as possible offers a promising model.

Use a Common Set of Performance Measures to Focus Strategy Development and Promote Sharing

Each of the Washington colleges has developed clear goals for student success with accompanying metrics, spurred in part by the new accreditation standards of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities that emphasize the use of metrics and evidence in planning and improvement. Each college has developed its own set of goals and measures. While some of the colleges have borrowed from ATD performance measures, none have adopted them as a set.

While it makes sense for colleges to adopt their own performance measures, from the standpoint of ATD it is problematic that there is not a common set of metrics that colleges across the initiative recognize and pay attention to. Unless colleges focus their reforms on particular metrics, it is unlikely that they will develop innovations that will improve their performance on those metrics. Also, without shared performance measures across colleges, it is difficult for the initiative and colleges participating in it to identify colleges that do improve their performance.

Therefore, we recommend that Achieving the Dream encourage colleges across the initiative to adopt a common set of performance measures for use in developing and examining the effectiveness over time of their own strategies and in comparing colleges on particular measures for the purpose of identifying colleges that have improved their performance over time.

Looking Ahead

Making systemic changes in practice in the ways that most of the original Washington State ATD colleges already have begun to do and in the other ways recommended here requires resources — resources for new and strengthened information systems, for professional development and training, and for coordination. The Washington ATD colleges have shown that even during a period of rising enrollments and dramatic cuts in funding, they have been willing to make major changes in practice. They have done so by reallocating their scarce resources from practices that are not effective to those that are thought to be so. The strong commitment to student success of these colleges, combined both with the interest of other colleges in the state in joining ATD and the willingness of College Spark and Lumina Foundation to support them, makes us optimistic that Washington's community and technical colleges, along with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, will find ways in this difficult economic climate to make changes that are necessary to improve student outcomes.

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