



From Policy to Practice: Tracing the Development and  
Implementation of Placement and Diagnostic Assessments across  
States, Systems, and Community Colleges

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*Analysis of Policy Reforms in Five States – Phase I Report*

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Prepared by Research for Action

March 14, 2013

## **About Research for Action**

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved students. Our work is designed to strengthen public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners and the public at the local, state and national levels; and enrich the civic and community dialogue about public education. For more information, please visit our website at [www.researchforaction.org](http://www.researchforaction.org).

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# Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i> .....	i
Introduction.....	1
I. Catalysts of Reform .....	2
External influences have been central. ....	2
Internal influences—such as strong leadership and careful planning—also drive change.....	2
The role of legislation and regulatory change varies in different contexts.....	3
II. Developmental Education Curriculum Redesign .....	4
Approaches in Math .....	4
Approaches in English .....	5
III. Frameworks for Reform .....	5
College Readiness Standards-Driven Assessment Design.....	5
Developmental Education Curriculum-Driven Assessment Design.....	6
IV. Status and Characteristics of Assessments .....	6
Characteristics of System-wide Assessments across Study States.....	7
V. Alignment across Assessments.....	8
Change Takes Time: A Timeline of Reform in the Study States .....	10
VI. Role of Faculty.....	12
Faculty Play a Central Role in Developmental Education and Assessment Reform .....	12
VII. Vendors Support for Assessment Implementation .....	13
Vendors will provide training, technical support, and practice tests to all four states. ....	13
VIII. Reporting Assessment Data .....	14
Assessment Reporting Strategies Vary Across States and Systems.....	14
IX. Lessons Learned for other Systems and States.....	15
X. Conclusion and Next Steps in the Research.....	16
Appendix A. Methodology .....	17
Appendix B. Diagnostic Assessment Project State and System Level Interview Protocols .....	18
Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: California .....	20
Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: Florida.....	29
Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: North Carolina .....	37
Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: Texas .....	46
Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: Virginia .....	55



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## Introduction and Summary of Findings

Nationwide, postsecondary policymakers and administrators are responding to emerging research on whether placement exams are reliable gauges of students' readiness for credit-bearing coursework. Specifically, the widespread use of placement tests may belie their effectiveness in accurately identifying skill deficits and guiding students to the appropriate course sequence. Nearly 40 percent of community college students enrolled in developmental education fail to progress to credit-bearing coursework, let alone earn a degree or credential.<sup>1</sup> Implications are especially pronounced for students performing near the cut score, which exaggerates the distinction between students who are ready for college, and those in need of developmental supports.

Given the barrier that developmental education can present in students' progress to degree completion, Research for Action (RFA) examined assessment and placement reforms across five states—California, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia—that together educate approximately 40 percent of the nation's community college students.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this study is two-fold:

- **First, we document efforts by states moving quickly to reform assessment and placement policies to reveal lessons learned for the benefit of states *beginning* work in these areas.** For example, reviewing plans and requests for proposals (RFPs) of test vendors reveals important themes and approaches across states. Sharing these criteria broadly may assist states, postsecondary systems, and individual colleges in planning reforms, identifying partners with specific competencies, and leveraging opportunities for economies of scale.
- **Second, our close study of state-level policy and planning provides important context for understanding how broader reforms are implemented at the college level.** Examination of state plans, coupled with interviews with postsecondary system leaders, will inform a second phase of research around whether, and how, these reforms influence instructional practice and student impressions.

Based on a thorough review of state RFPs, other document analysis, and interviews with state postsecondary leaders between September 2012 and January 2013,<sup>3</sup> this report summarizes state-level findings from these sites and sets the stage for the institution-level research. Our analysis identified several key factors across our study sites including those outlined in Table ES-1, below:

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<sup>1</sup> Complete College America (2012).

<sup>2</sup> The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac of Higher Education 2012 at <http://chronicle.com/article/Almanac-2012-States/133771/>

<sup>3</sup> A description of our methodology can be found in Appendix A.

Table ES-1: Factors, Frameworks, and Findings in the State Reform Process

FRAMEWORKS	FINDINGS
<b>FACTOR: Catalysts for Reform</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External to the State</li> </ul>	National or out-of-state influences have been central to reforms by helping postsecondary leaders: identify developmental education as an area in need of change, analyze data to make the case for new approaches, and see tangible examples of successful practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal to the State</li> </ul>	Strong leadership, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement also drive change.
<b>FACTOR: Common Developmental Education Curriculum Redesign Strategies</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modularization</li> </ul>	Three of the study states – Florida, North Carolina and Virginia – broke developmental education content into discrete modules.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple Pathways</li> </ul>	Texas and Virginia determine the sequence of developmental education courses in math based partly on a student’s program of study.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integration</li> </ul>	North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia have combined subjects such as reading and writing instruction in developmental English.
<b>FACTOR: Frameworks for Reform</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College readiness standards-driven design</li> </ul>	Florida and Texas have made college readiness standards the driving force behind development of the diagnostic assessments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developmental education curriculum-driven design</li> </ul>	In North Carolina and Virginia, the developmental education curriculum redesign has been the driving force behind the development of the new assessment systems.
<b>FACTOR: Status and Characteristics of Assessments</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Web-based and Adaptive Assessments</li> </ul>	All study states have developed assessments that are web-based and include an adaptive format so that questions change for each student based on performance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessible for Students with Special Needs</li> </ul>	Four of the state systems required that the test be accessible to students with special needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ESL Version</li> </ul>	Only California planned for an ESL version.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mandatory or Optional Assessment</li> </ul>	The tests will be mandatory in all states but Florida.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment use outside of community college placement</li> </ul>	Three study states use the assessments outside the community college placement process (e.g., at secondary level).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test length</li> </ul>	Varies from 2.5 to 4 hours.
<b>FACTOR: Alignment of Assessments across States</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aligned with Common Core State Standards</li> </ul>	California, Florida and North Carolina require that the assessments be aligned with the Common Core State Standards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aligned with State-Specific Standards</li> </ul>	Florida and Texas require that the assessments be aligned with state-specific standards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aligned with Developmental Education Curriculum</li> </ul>	North Carolina, Texas and Virginia align their assessments with the developmental education curriculum.
<b>FACTOR: Reporting Assessment Data*</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linking Data</li> </ul>	Three of the states – Florida, North Carolina and Virginia - plan to will link testing data to a state or system network.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reporting Level</li> </ul>	There is wide variation across states as to the whether assessment reporting is required at the state, system, institution and student levels.

FRAMEWORKS	FINDINGS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to Data</li> </ul>	Only Florida does not require the vendor to provide access to both institutions and the system at-large.
<b>FACTOR: Role of Faculty*</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum Development</li> <li>• Development of Test Items</li> <li>• Setting Performance Standards</li> </ul>	All states required faculty involvement in the reform process.
<b>FACTOR: Vendor Support*</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Technical Support</li> <li>• Practice Tests</li> </ul>	Vendor support for assessment implementation was also required across states.

\*California is not reflected in this section of the table as the state had only released a Request for Information (RFI) at the time of our research and had not determined the reporting, faculty and vendor requirements.

As RFA’s research moves from the state and system to the campus level in Phase 2 of the research, we will have an opportunity to understand how these state plans comport with institutional realities.

**The following reform successes were identified by state policymakers:**

- *Using data to inform the work:* State and system officials in multiple states identified developmental education student performance data as a tool in making the case for system-wide reform. Using the data to educate policymakers and other stakeholders about the need for developmental education reform is an essential first step in developing the political will to move forward.
- *Including faculty in the process:* Engaging faculty in every part of the work has been central to the successes experienced to date. Faculty members are not only experts in the content being assessed, but also in the how the curriculum is being implemented. At the same time, faculty buy-in is needed for successful implementation of both the assessment and curriculum in college classrooms.
- *Communicating across system colleges:* Both informing the field about the work that is taking place and allowing for continuous improvement through feedback from the field are important steps in the process. College administrators and faculty members need to be kept abreast of the reforms that are being planned and included in the thinking about implementation.

**Reform challenges have also been a part of the policymaking process:**

- *Scaling reform within a decentralized governance structure:* In states such as California where the system is decentralized and decisions are often made at the local college level, it can be a challenge to change policy at the system level. In cases such as these, campus level buy-in and consensus building is especially important to successful reform.
- *Overcoming funding constraints:* Lack of funding can be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. Without consistent funding to move the work forward, community college systems may need to look for external funding sources and internal shifts in budget priorities to fund the development of new assessments and developmental education curriculum reforms.

- *Communicating with all relevant campus staff:* Communicating about these reforms across an entire system in effective ways can be difficult; even states that found success in this area acknowledged that it was a challenge. While faculty members were often involved in the reform efforts, student services staff are not always included in the discussions, despite the central nature of their work in developmental education and onboarding students.
- *Gaining consensus and support from faculty:* While states were largely successful in engaging faculty, they also indicated that it can be challenging to gather representatives from across the system and achieve consensus with a large number of participants. Nevertheless, this is a critical step for such reforms to succeed.
- *Alignment of Assessments across States:* While states are developing assessments with similar characteristics, they are aligned to standards and developmental education curricula that differ from state to state. Moreover, assessments are created for varied purposes. For these reasons, it is unlikely that assessments are well-aligned across states.





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Based on a thorough review of state RFPs, other document analysis, and interviews with state postsecondary leaders between September 2012 and January 2013,<sup>6</sup> this report summarizes state-level findings from these sites and is organized into sections that address key factors in the reform process. As RFA's research moves from the state and system to the campus level in Phase 2 of the research, we will have an opportunity to understand how these state plans comport with institutional realities.

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<sup>4</sup> Complete College America (2012).

<sup>5</sup> The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac of Higher Education 2012 at <http://chronicle.com/article/Almanac-2012-States/133771/>

<sup>6</sup> A description of our methodology can be found in Appendix A.

## I. Catalysts of Reform

Reform of policy and practice does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, leaders and organizations bring their experiences, perspectives, and influence to bear in driving reform. In discussing the influences on assessment reform, it is crucial to distinguish between state-level factors that may be idiosyncratic to place and time, and external forces that may move multiple states in similar ways. Initial findings by *type* of influence follow.

### **External influences have been central.**

External influences played a significant role in the reform process in all five study states. Indeed, organizations outside the states helped community college systems: 1) identify developmental education as an area in need of change; 2) analyze data to make the case for change to stakeholders in the state; and 3) provide concrete examples of reform in practice. Roles include:

- **Identifying developmental education as an area in need of change:** Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia cited initiatives sponsored by Jobs for the Future (JFF) as catalysts for reform, specifically Achieving the Dream (ATD) and the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI). Florida has been involved with ATD since 2004, with three community colleges taking part. The North Carolina Community College System Office and several of its colleges became involved with ATD in 2005. That same year, five Virginia community colleges joined ATD; the commonwealth is now involved in the initiative's Postsecondary State Policy Network. These four states also became involved in DEI in 2009. Respondents from Texas identified the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and Complete College America (CCA) as external influences.
- **Analyzing data to make the case for change:** In both North Carolina and Virginia, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University provided the states with data showing how few developmental education students were successfully completing gateway courses. CCRC helped identify math as the first area of focus in the states' developmental education curriculum redesign. According to one respondent, the use of data "*changed the vocabulary*" around developmental education among state postsecondary leaders.
- **States as colleagues:** Stakeholders from North Carolina and Virginia also shared a great deal with one another about how to advance reforms; the similarity in policy and curricular changes between the two states reflects this collaboration. In addition, Florida provided an example of a system-wide diagnostic assessment that Virginia used as a model.

### **Internal influences—such as strong leadership and careful planning—also drive change.**

Home-grown support is also a key change lever. While existing policy can provide a foundation for reform, state policymakers we interviewed did not mention these as primary catalysts for change. Specifically, three state characteristics were commonly identified as central to reforms: 1) strong state and/or system leadership; 2) strategic planning as a framework for reform; and 3) the development of a group of stakeholders who can guide and advocate for the work. Examples include the following:

- **Strong state and/or system leadership:** Document review and interviews revealed North Carolina and Virginia to be especially strong examples of how system offices can move reform. Since becoming the North Carolina Community College System Chancellor in 2008, Scott Ralls has focused on the need to improve developmental education, calling it "the Bermuda Triangle of college aspirations." In Virginia, both the State Board for Community Colleges and Chancellor Glenn DuBois have been champions of developmental education reform from the outset, working jointly to develop the first

VCCS strategic plan, *Dateline 2009*, and later, *Achieve 2015*. The Advisory Council of Presidents is also at the center of approving new VCCS policies, including developmental education initiatives.

- **Strategic planning as a framework for reform:** While all five states developed strategic plans, respondents from California, North Carolina, and Virginia were especially vocal in citing these frameworks as central drivers of reform (see Table 1, below). In California, the Chancellor’s Office published a strategic plan “to develop methods to more effectively assess student preparedness levels and to place students in appropriate courses.” More recently, the state’s Student Success Task Force advanced recommendations that included plans for a diagnostic assessment that all 112 colleges would be required to use. In North Carolina, *SuccessNC* was launched in 2010 to support the goal of increasing the percentage of students completing a credential or degree. Virginia has had a series of strategic plans that addressed completion more generally while *The Turning Point* (2009) specifically focused on the system’s developmental education policies.
- **Stakeholders to guide the work:** Most of the states developed advisory committees or task forces that included some of the states’ leading postsecondary policymakers. California’s CCCAssess Advisory Committee was formed to provide overarching support for the development of a common assessment model. *Go Higher, Florida!* was created to strengthen the state’s secondary-postsecondary pipeline, and released recommendations that included the adoption of a state-level definition of college and career readiness and the development of high school and postsecondary tests to assess readiness. The North Carolina Developmental Education Initiative State Policy Team approved principles for redesigning courses and moving to diagnostic assessments. Virginia’s Developmental Education Task Force reviewed the system’s policies in this area.

### The role of legislation and regulatory change varies in different contexts.

The process for developing the policy context necessary to create reform is different in each state based on a number of factors, such as existing laws and regulations and the political climate. Table 1 outlines the policy steps taken by the study states to allow for and support system-wide reforms.

Table 1: Policy Changes in Support of Developmental Education and Assessment Reforms

Legislation, Regulation, and Planning	CA	FL	NC	TX	VA
• Has the state/system established standards for developmental education content or college-level coursework readiness?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Has the state passed legislation around developmental education curricular reform?	N	Y	N	Y	N
• Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved policy around developmental education curricular reform?	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Has the state passed legislation around a single placement/diagnostic assessment?	Y	Y	N	Y	N
• Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved a policy around a single placement/diagnostic assessment?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
• Has the state/system developed a strategic plan or initiative around developmental education and/or assessment?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Y YES N NO

Especially in centralized systems such as North Carolina and Virginia, statutory change is not an imperative for reform. Legislation appears to play a larger role in more decentralized systems (e.g., Texas, California), with

more colleges spread across multiple areas. Florida provides a contrast; despite a largely centralized system, enabling legislation and regulation have been passed across all areas of developmental education and assessment.

## II. Developmental Education Curriculum Redesign

Along with system-wide assessment reform, study states are also redesigning developmental education curricula to increase the percentage of students moving into credit-bearing coursework. In this section, we categorize states based on common developmental education curricular reform models. Four of the study states (California is excluded as it is not as far along in the development of a new curriculum) adopted at least one of the following three strategies in implementing developmental education reforms:

- **Modularization:** Used in both math and English to reduce the number of developmental education courses necessary to enroll in credit-bearing courses; content is broken into discrete modules with clear learning objectives.
- **Multiple Pathways:** Establishes distinct remedial tracks for students majoring in different academic degree fields.
- **Integration:** Integrates reading and writing curriculum to winnow pathways to gatekeeper courses.

Table 2: Summary of Developmental Education Curricular Reform Strategies in Study States

	MATH		ENGLISH	
	Modularization	Multiple Pathways	Modularization	Integration
<b>CA</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>FL</b>	X		X	
<b>NC</b>	X			X
<b>TX</b>		X		X
<b>VA</b>	X	X		X

### Approaches in Math

As evident in Table 2, all four states involved in math developmental education curricular redesign included modularization or multiple pathways:

- **Modularization:** Both North Carolina and Virginia designed a new math developmental education curriculum based on modules for each set of skills to be learned before taking credit-bearing courses. In North Carolina, the modules are designed so students are not required to complete more objectives than the subsequent course requires. In Virginia, nine one-unit modules on math skills and concepts to be covered in developmental education were created, but the module(s) students take depend on their long-term academic goals and assessment results.
- **Multiple Pathways:** Both Texas and Virginia determine the sequence of developmental education courses in math based, in part, on the student’s program of study. For example, the New Mathways Project (Texas) uses a year-long curricular sequence along with student supports based on the declared pathway of study (*e.g.*, quantitative literacy, statistics pathway, traditional college algebra). In Virginia, liberal arts students are only required to prove mastery in modules 1 through 5; science and math students, however, are required to successfully complete all nine.

## Approaches in English

North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia have **integrated instruction** across subjects in English. North Carolina, for example, is replacing its existing sequence with three eight-week courses of integrated English and reading. Virginia is implementing an integrated reading and writing system with a comprehensive set of learning outcomes that have three direct pathways to a credit-bearing English course. Florida, however, is using the modular approach in both English (*e.g.*, reading and writing) and math. Students are required to complete only those modules where they need additional preparation.

### III. Frameworks for Reform

We observed two main approaches to developing requirements for diagnostic assessments: **college readiness standards-driven assessment design** and **curriculum-driven assessment design**; see Table 3.

- **College readiness standards-driven assessment design** is focused on aligning with, and measuring student achievement against, college readiness standards that specify what a student should know and be able to do; while
- **Developmental education curriculum-driven assessment design** is focused on aligning with instruction in the revised developmental education curriculum used for college classroom instruction.

Table 3: Framework of Assessment Design

	Status of Assessment Implementation	College Readiness Standards Driven Assessment Design	Developmental Education Curriculum Driven Assessment Design	Timeline of Math and English Reform
<b>CA</b>	Not implemented	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
<b>FL</b>	Implemented	X		Concurrent
<b>NC</b>	In process		X	Separate
<b>TX</b>	In process	X		Concurrent
<b>VA</b>	Implemented		X	Separate

#### College Readiness Standards-Driven Assessment Design

Both Florida and Texas have made college readiness standards the driving force behind development of the diagnostic assessments; the developmental education curriculum in these states is not as clearly developed as in North Carolina and Virginia. In Florida and Texas, the college readiness standards were created first, followed by the assessment to measure achievement against the standards in both math and English concurrently:

- The *Go Higher, Florida!* Task Force called for a statewide definition of college and career readiness in 2008, which led to the development of the Postsecondary Readiness Competencies (PRCs) that were first aligned with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and revised in 2010 to align with the Common Core, which became the focus of the RFPs for the P.E.R.T.
- In 2006, Texas passed House Bill 1, which required the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the THECB to establish teams to develop the TxCCRS and a single statewide assessment aligned to them.

## Developmental Education Curriculum-Driven Assessment Design

In both North Carolina and Virginia, the developmental education curriculum redesign has been the driving force behind the development of the assessment, with specific student learning outcomes tied to each of the modules in the developmental education curriculum as opposed to a separate set of college readiness expectations. In both cases, the developmental education redesign plan and curriculum in math has been addressed first, with English following. More specifically:

- North Carolina developed its curriculum just before the assessment. The State Policy Team authored a set of guiding principles that were included in the charge to faculty to develop a new curriculum aligned with a customized diagnostic assessment, ensuring the two reforms were strongly coupled from the outset.
- Virginia’s plans included both curricular change and an assessment system with results based on the curriculum and student learning outcomes; this allows assessment results to inform placement of students within the developmental education curriculum.

## IV. Status and Characteristics of Assessments

As part of this larger developmental education redesign, four of the five states have released RFPs for the creation of new, system-wide placement and diagnostic assessments; selected vendors; and implemented, or are in the process of implementing, new diagnostic assessments. California is not as far along, and has only released a Request for Information (see Table 4, below).

Both Florida and Virginia have contracted with McCann Associates to develop assessments based on the College Success platform; North Carolina and Texas selected the College Board’s Accuplacer platform. Both platforms address similar skill sets: reading comprehension, sentence skills and writing, arithmetic, Algebra and English language proficiency. But despite sharing vendors, each of the states has, or will, implement separate assessments that include state-specific characteristics. Our analysis of the status of state diagnostic assessment redesign is summarized below.

Table 4: State of the States: Diagnostic Assessment Redesign

	RFP/RFI issue date	Response Deadline	Vendor selected	New Assessment System	Date of statewide adoption	Two-Year System Office
<b>CA</b>	November 2, 2010	November 30, 2010	Not yet selected	TBD	TBD	California Community College System
<b>FL</b>	March 9, 2009	August 4, 2009	McCann Associates	Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.)	2012	Florida Department of Education
<b>NC</b>	August 16, 2011	September 1, 2011	College Board	NC Diagnostic Assessment & Placement Test (NC DAP)	2013	North Carolina Community College System
<b>TX</b>	February 1, 2012	February 28, 2012	College Board	Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Assessment	2013	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
<b>VA</b>	August 18, 2010	September 15, 2010	McCann Associates	Virginia Placement Test for Mathematics (VPT-Math) Virginia Placement Test for English (VPT-English)	Math: 2011 English: 2012	Virginia Community College System

- Florida’s Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.)

The P.E.R.T. Placement test includes three, 25-item, computer-adaptive components in reading, writing, and mathematics. P.E.R.T. Diagnostic is another component of the assessment system that identifies skill deficiencies for students who do not meet the college-ready cut score; this component—which is voluntary for the state’s community colleges—has been developed to align with Florida’s Developmental Education Competencies. Unlike the placement assessment, the diagnostic tests are not computer-adaptive: every student answers questions on the same content, regardless of previous answers. There are six, 50-item tests: one for each subject (reading, writing, and math) at both (upper and lower) competency levels.

- Virginia Placement Test (VPT) for Math and English
  - **VPT in Math** has two, interwoven components: 1) computer-adaptive placement to determine whether a student has mastered the content in a given module, and is therefore ready for credit-bearing courses; and 2) non-computer-adaptive for students not yet ready for credit-bearing courses. This second component determines the areas in which a student requires additional instruction and the corresponding module(s) to which a student should be directed. Despite this framework, the components are seamless; students are unaware when one component ends and the next begins.
  - **VPT in English** likewise consists of two parts: 1) essay; and 2) computer-adaptive placement addressing reading and writing. Reading selections are followed by multiple choice questions to evaluate comprehension.
- Accuplacer Platform in North Carolina and Texas

North Carolina’s Community College System and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board both selected the Accuplacer platform as the basis for placement and diagnostic assessments. The tests will serve two purposes: 1) identify students as college-ready based on a single, statewide cut-score; and 2) create a diagnostic profile, highlighting the student’s strengths and weaknesses. Specific items for the North Carolina Diagnostic Assessment & Placement Test (NC DAP) and Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Assessment will be developed to more closely reflect both states’ individual standards and developmental education curriculum.

### **Characteristics of System-wide Assessments across Study States**

Our analysis of the assessments includes a number of key characteristics: 1) web-based and adaptive format; 2) accessibility for special needs students; 3) inclusion of an ESL version; 4) use outside the community college setting; and 5) mandatory implementation (see Table 5).

Table 5: Characteristics of System-wide Assessments across Study States

	Web-based and Adaptive	Accessibility to Special Needs Students Required	ESL Version Required	Use outside Community Colleges	Mandatory implementation of the Assessment
<b>CA</b> (planned)	X	X	X		<b>TBD</b>
<b>FL</b>	X	X		X	
<b>NC</b>	X	X			X
<b>TX</b>	X	X		X	X
<b>VA</b>	X			X	X

- **States emphasize web-based and adaptive assessments:** With the exception of Florida’s voluntary diagnostic test, state assessments are both web-based and adaptive; California’s plans include these same provisions. An adaptive assessment does not test all students based on the same items; instead, questions change for each student based on their performance on previous questions. If a student answers a series of questions correctly, the next questions will be more difficult. If a student answers a series of questions incorrectly, the next set of questions will be less difficult.
- **In most cases, states require that tests be accessible to students with special needs:** Four systems speak to this provision directly. While Virginia did not make it a requirement in its RFP, the VPT was made ADA-compliant with the release of modifications in November 2012.
- **The development of an ESL test version has been overlooked:** Only California would require an ESL version, though three of the five states have large ESL populations.<sup>7</sup> Even before the state released an RFI to explore the development of a new test, colleges typically used the ESL versions of the Compass and Accuplacer, as well as the Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA).
- **States vary in the use of the assessments outside the community college system:** Florida, Texas, and Virginia have used, or intend to use, the new assessments beyond the community college system. In Florida, P.E.R.T. is administered in high schools as a result of Senate Bill 1908, which expanded college/career readiness testing to 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. In Texas, all public institutions of higher education are required to follow state statute regarding the Texas Success Initiative (TSI). In Virginia, the VPT has been used in high schools to determine student eligibility for dual enrollment.
- **Diagnostic and placement assessments are not always coupled or mandatory:** As mentioned previously, Florida’s P.E.R.T. Diagnostic is administered separately from the placement test. While the P.E.R.T. placement test is described as “preferred” in the state, neither the placement nor diagnostic tests are mandatory. In North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia the placement and diagnostic assessments are combined and both will be or are mandatory for students who do not meet cut scores for college readiness. California’s approach is yet to be determined.

## V. Alignment across Assessments

There are important differences among the tests in terms of purpose and alignment as outlined in the RFPs for each state (see Table 6).

<sup>7</sup> >25% spoke a language other than English at home in California, Florida, and Texas according to the 2007 U.S. Census.



Table 6: Focus of Alignment for Assessments in RFP

	Aligned with Common Core State Standards	Aligned with State-Specific Standards	Aligned with Developmental Education Curriculum	Degree of RFP Specificity and Examples
CA	X			<b>Low.</b> “The test must include non-fiction and fiction passages from multiple genres.”
FL	X	X		<b>High.</b> Appendix includes Postsecondary Readiness Competencies in all three subject areas, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math: “Use the symbols of mathematics correctly and precisely;” and</li> <li>• ELA: “Demonstrate control of standard English through the use of grammar, punctuation, capitalization and spelling.”</li> </ul>
NC	X		X	<b>High.</b> Attachments include course competencies and student learning outcomes, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course Competency: “Visually represent an integer and its opposite on the number line.”</li> <li>• Conceptual Learning Outcome: “Demonstrate an understating of the concept of integers within contextual application problems.”</li> </ul>
TX		X	X	<b>High.</b> Detailed sets of standards (i.e., TxCCRS, TEKS, and NRS EFLD) are listed in the RFP, with a link to the standards themselves.
VA			X	<b>Low.</b> Test must be “fully customized” to VCCS curriculum and outcomes.

- **States require the assessment be aligned with standards and/or curricula:** With the exception of Virginia, states made provisions that assessments be aligned with either the Common Core or state-level K-12 standards. North Carolina and Texas further require that the assessment inform the developmental education curriculum; Virginia makes this same provision. Of the five states, Texas goes furthest by itemizing all state standards to which the assessment should be aligned, including the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (TxCCRS), CCRS Performance Expectations that support state end-of-course assessments, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (which were altered based on the CCRS), and Adult Basic Education Skills.
- **Differing approaches to alignment make it unlikely that tests cover the same content:** While RFPs in four of the states require alignment to K-12 standards, those standards differ. Texas and Virginia have not adopted the CCSS, and instead require alignment with either a set of state-specific standards (Texas) or the developmental education curriculum (Virginia). Florida and North Carolina have adopted the CCSS, and specify the need for alignment, but each requires a degree of customization. Similar to Virginia, North Carolina is developing a test to measure student performance on the content covered in the developmental education modules, while the driving focus of Florida’s P.E.R.T. are the state college and career readiness standards. California has not begun test design. Moreover, even in states that adopted the CCSS, the variability in when the states let RFPs—including prior, simultaneous to, and following the release of the CCSS—likely reduces the degree to which the tests would align.

- **The degree of alignment specificity varied across state RFPs:** In three of the states (Florida, North Carolina and Texas), the RFP included specific standards or student learning outcomes that the assessments were required to address. In California and Virginia, the RFI and RFP, respectively, were not as specific, providing only general guidelines for what the assessment content should include, such as “non-fiction and fiction passages from multiple genres” (California) and community college system “curriculum and outcomes” (Virginia).

The content and format of the tests themselves also vary. Based on the requirements included in each of the RFPs, Table 7 identifies the subjects tested and length limitations.

Table 7: Content, Length, and Format Requirements of Assessments Outlined in RFP

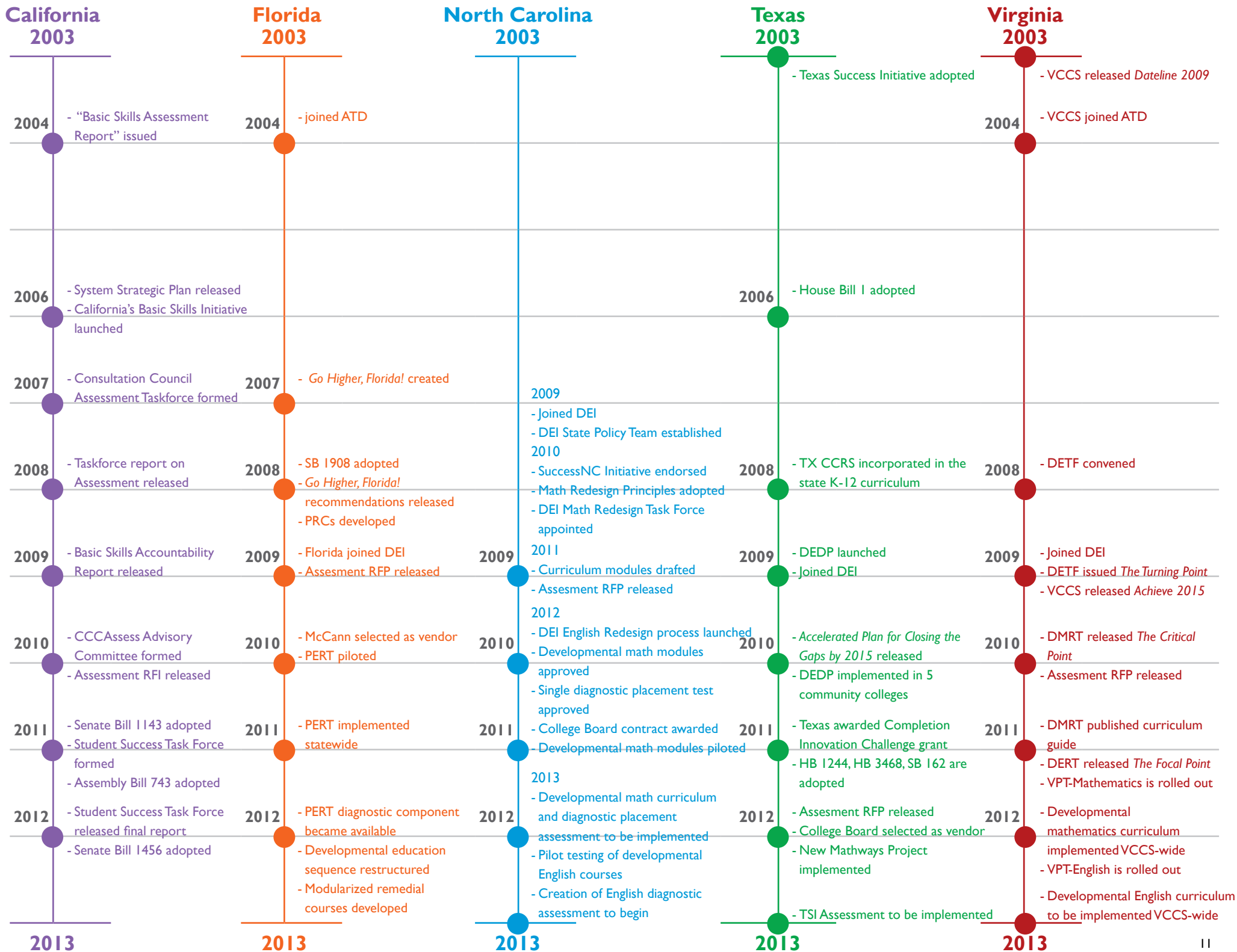
	Reading and Writing	Mathematics	Writing sample required in RFP	Length Limit
<b>CA</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>2.5 hours</b>
<b>FL</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>3 hours</b>
<b>NC</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>4 hours</b>
<b>TX</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>4 hours</b>
<b>VA</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Not specified</b>

- **Similarities and differences exist in test content across states:** While all states specified the inclusion of reading, writing, and math components in the RFPs, Florida did not require a writing sample.
- **Test length varies considerably:** From 2.5 hours (California) to 4 hours (North Carolina and Texas). Florida fell in the middle. Virginia did not specify requirements in its RFP.

All five states are developing system-wide placement and diagnostic assessments with similar characteristics and design processes. However, the tests are aligned to different standards and developmental education curricula and created for varied purposes; for these reasons, the tests are likely not aligned to each other to any great degree.

### Change Takes Time: A Timeline of Reform in the Study States

The study states included in our research have been involved in this work over a series of years, with important challenges remaining. In the case of Virginia, the work began a decade ago, while in North Carolina, changes have come more quickly. The following timeline provides an overview of the steps states have taken to create the policy environment necessary to drive reform, build a system-wide assessment, and design developmental education curricula. As depicted in Figure 1, states engaged in standards-driven reform (Florida and Texas) developed their postsecondary readiness standards first, and then crafted assessment to align to those standards. North Carolina and Virginia first created the developmental education redesign plan; the assessment RFP came soon after to align with the curriculum.



## VI. Role of Faculty

### Faculty Play a Central Role in Developmental Education and Assessment Reform

Despite the role of vendors in the creation of the new assessment systems, state and system level policymakers stressed the importance of including faculty in all aspects of the reform process. Postsecondary officials from the four states that have selected assessment vendors all reported faculty involvement at each step in the process, as can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Role of Faculty in Developmental Education and Assessment Reform

Involvement of Faculty in Curriculum and Assessment Design	CA	FL	NC	TX	VA
<b>Faculty members were or will be:</b>					
• Involved in curriculum development?	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Involved in the development of test items?	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Involved in the review of test items?	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Involved in setting performance standards	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y

Y YES N NO

Below, we highlight key findings regarding faculty involvement in each element of reform efforts.

- Curriculum Development:** Faculty members have and will continue to play a central role in the creation of developmental education curriculum and learning outcomes. In Virginia, curriculum redesign teams included representatives from all community colleges; teams made recommendations for the new curriculum and then developed the curriculum itself, along with corresponding student learning outcomes. In Florida, faculty worked to develop statewide developmental sequences in math, writing, and reading. North Carolina faculty led the curriculum reform effort, piloted curriculum, and trained colleagues on implementation. One community college system official remarked: “we trusted the faculty and they trusted the process.” While Texas is not as far along, the THECB plans to partner with community college faculty as they develop integrated reading and writing courses and non-conventional intervention models.
- Assessment Development:** All study states have or will include faculty in the development and/or review of test items. Florida faculty came together in 2009 to develop exemplar test items for each PRC. When McCann was awarded the contract, faculty reviewed the entire bank of items for alignment with the standards and made suggestions for adjustments. The North Carolina RFP specified that test content be developed in consultation with faculty. Further, the College Board brought faculty together to provide feedback regarding the accuracy and validity of new items. As stated in the Texas RFP, faculty members from the Developmental Education Advisory Committee and TSI Assessment Team will score demonstrations of the new assessment. In January 2013, faculty members took part in a meeting to review a sample of test items as well.
- Performance Standards:** All of the states have or plan to include faculty in setting performance standards. In Florida, this work will begin in spring 2013. In February 2013, faculty from every

community college in North Carolina came together to work with the College Board on setting performance standards. The process for determining cut scores in Virginia included a small team of faculty who were subject matter experts and worked with the vendor and VCCS on reviewing sample test items, establishing blueprints for the test, and recommending cut scores.

## VII. Vendors Support for Assessment Implementation

### Vendors will provide training, technical support, and practice tests to all four states.

While higher education policy is developed at the state and system levels, the central test is successful implementation on college campuses. With this in mind, all of the states currently redesigning placement tests expect to receive a combination of training and technical support from the vendors. The vendors will also provide practice tests to students (see Table 9).

Table 9: Involvement of Vendors in Assessment Training and Support

Vendor Activities	CA	FL	NC	TX	VA
• Vendor will provide training	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Vendor will provide regular technical support	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y
• Vendor will provide practice tests to students	N/A	Y	Y	Y	Y

Y YES N NO

Key findings regarding the involvement of vendors are summarized below.

- **Training:** All four states implementing a new diagnostic test have required either the College Board or McCann Associates to provide training. In every case, test administrators will be trained on how to deliver the assessment. Virginia, for example, requires that vice presidents, deans, and student service representatives receive training along with test administrators.
- **Technical Support:** Four states reported that technical support would be provided by the vendor; the duration of that support is unknown, however. Texas and Virginia required their contractor to provide a helpline to handle problems in real-time. Virginia went so far as to stipulate that inquiries should be answered “within an hour” during the business day. Neither Florida nor North Carolina provided any specificity on technical support requirements in the RFPs, but state respondents reported that such assistance would be provided on a regular basis.
- **Practice Tests:** Each vendor will provide practice tests to aid students in preparation. While Texas required the practice test to align to the TxCCRS, North Carolina will utilize its current item pool for practice questions instead of developing customized test items. In addition to practice tests, California expects vendors to provide a web-based tutorial to familiarize students with the assessment. In addition to providing sample items, Virginia offers extensive online resources for their students.

## VIII. Reporting Assessment Data

### Assessment Reporting Strategies Vary Across States and Systems

As institutions adopt new developmental education practices, stakeholders at multiple levels of postsecondary education governance will have access to data from new assessments. The five study states differ, however, on linking data to student information systems, reporting requirements from the vendor, and provisions for access to the testing data (see Table 10).

Table 10: Placement and Diagnostic Assessment Reporting

Reporting Requirements	CA	FL	NC	TX	VA
• Link to state/system data networks	N/A				
• Level receiving reports	N/A				
• State	-				
• System	-				
• Institution	-				
• Student					
• Access to results for systems & colleges	N/A				

YES NO

Notable findings for each reporting category are detailed below.

- **Linking data:** Most of the states will link testing data to a state or system network. Texas plans for the College Board to create a central data warehouse for administrators to access. As for the type of data, Florida community colleges and their developmental education outcomes will be captured through an interactive online platform with the goal of making “data more manageable and visually compelling to different audiences.”<sup>8</sup> Virginia plans to include the placement recommendation in the student information system as well.
- **Reporting Level:** In its RFP, Texas required reporting for the “student, institutional, and state levels” and stipulates that the THECB must receive “an annual report of the number of unduplicated examinees tested and the number of assessments administered statewide and by gender, ethnicity, testing accommodation, and institution.” In contrast, North Carolina institutions will retrieve testing data from the central student information system. Florida does not require uniform student-level reporting, perhaps in part because the diagnostic assessment is not mandatory system-wide.
- **Access to data:** Only Florida does not require the vendor to provide access to both institutions and the system at-large. The State Department of Education, which houses the higher education system board, is the intended recipient. Both California and Texas will utilize the data beyond diagnostic and placement purposes. For example, the data will link to California’s State Chancellor’s Office longitudinal research system, while the Texas Education Agency may utilize the data to create ‘report cards’ to help

<sup>8</sup> Collins, Michael Lawrence. (April 2011). Driving Innovation: How Six States Are Organizing to Improve Outcomes in Developmental Education. Boston: Jobs for the Future at [http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI\\_DrivingInnovation\\_041211.pdf](http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI_DrivingInnovation_041211.pdf).

identify how effective school districts are in preparing students to meet college and career readiness standards.

## **IX. Lessons Learned for other Systems and States**

A number of common successes and challenges have been identified across the study states that may be useful to other states embarking on similar reforms.

### **The following reform successes were identified by state policymakers:**

- *Using data to inform the work:* State and system officials in multiple states identified developmental education student performance data as a tool in making the case for system-wide reform. Using the data to educate policymakers and other stakeholders about the need for developmental education reform is an essential first step in developing the political will to move forward.
- *Including faculty in the process:* Engaging faculty in every part of the work has been central to the successes experienced to date. Faculty members are not only experts in the content being assessed, but also in the how the curriculum is being implemented. At the same time, faculty buy-in is needed for successful implementation of both the assessment and curriculum in college classrooms.
- *Communicating across system colleges:* Both informing the field about the work that is taking place and allowing for continuous improvement through feedback from the field are important steps in the process. College administrators and faculty members need to be kept abreast of the reforms that are being planned and included in the thinking about implementation.

### **Reform challenges have also been a part of the policymaking process:**

- *Scaling reform within a decentralized governance structure:* In states such as California where the system is decentralized and decisions are often made at the local college level, it can be a challenge to change policy at the system level. In cases such as these, campus level buy-in and consensus building is especially important to successful reform.
- *Overcoming funding constraints:* Lack of funding can be a significant challenge in the current economic climate. Without consistent funding to move the work forward, community college systems may need to look for external funding sources and internal shifts in budget priorities to fund the development of new assessments and developmental education curriculum reforms.
- *Communicating with all relevant campus staff:* Communicating about these reforms across an entire system in effective ways can be difficult; even states that found success in this area acknowledged that it was a challenge. While faculty members were often involved in the reform efforts, student services staff are not always included in the discussions, despite the central nature of their work in developmental education and onboarding students.
- *Gaining consensus and support from faculty:* While states were largely successful in engaging faculty, they also indicated that it can be challenging to gather representatives from across the system and achieve consensus with a large number of participants. Nevertheless, this is a critical step for such reforms to succeed.

## X. Conclusion and Next Steps in the Research

RFA's research into the efforts of states on the leading edge of reforming diagnostic assessment and related policies reveals important commonalities across sites—both in terms of catalyzing events and approaches taken. In most states, the influence of national initiatives and strong state-level leadership, such as innovative postsecondary system administrators, came together to spark reform. In a majority of states, there was significant overlap in terms of broad themes in assessment design: new tests are to be tied to established academic standards and developmental education curricula, online delivery and adaptive design are emphasized, and accommodations for special needs students are envisioned.

The study states also correspond in terms of involving faculty in assessment redesign and implementation; in requesting ongoing technical support and training from the successful vendor; and in the broad strategies associated with complementary developmental education reform, with modularization, multiple pathways, and integration of reading and writing content into one course playing especially prominent roles.

Variance was observed in areas such as requirements of vendors for reporting assessment results to the postsecondary system, campus, and student levels; provision for the use of the diagnostic assessment outside the community college system (*e.g.*, at the high school level to determine college readiness); the role of legislation, regulation and planning; and requirements for an ESL version of the assessment, with only California requesting information on this count. Overall, while the assessments have a number of common characteristics, the tests are unlikely to be closely aligned with one another due to variation in purpose, use, standards and curricular alignment and length, among other components.

As RFA's research moves to the campus level, we will have an opportunity to understand how these state plans comport with institutional realities. In particular, interviews with administrators, faculty, and students will seek to bring successes and challenges identified during the first phase of research into specific relief. Given that communications and coordination were considered key challenges in articulating and managing such ambitious reforms, our next steps will yield important perspectives on how state-level change is understood and integrated at scale.



## Appendix A. Methodology

In looking across five sample states (California, Florida, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia) to understand their reform process in the areas of diagnostic assessment and developmental education in community college systems, we used multiple sources of data to develop a picture of these reforms:

- Review of state requests for proposals (RFPs);
- Document analysis; and
- Interviews with state postsecondary leaders.

**Review of state requests for proposals (RFPs):** The first step in RFA’s analysis was the review of state RFPs for diagnostic assessment redesign. Each of the five study states issued these comprehensive plans, which ask vendors and other organizations to itemize qualifications for test development, faculty and student supports, and data quality and reporting. These documents set out long-term priorities for postsecondary reform, and itemize commitments for both the system and the vendor—making the RFPs especially salient markers for gauging state plans. Based on an initial review of these documents and subsequent consultation with Foundation staff, RFA identified elements across six broad categories established to correspond with strategic Foundation priorities in the area of diagnostic assessment reform.

**Document analysis:** Analysis of the state RFPs was augmented by review of additional sources including state/postsecondary agency websites, reports by state commissions and task forces dedicated to diagnostic assessment and developmental education issues, state codes, and minutes and reports from proceedings by government agencies. These materials were used to develop a comprehensive history of state postsecondary reforms over the past decade. State histories were attentive to matters such as external and internal catalysts in reform efforts, passage of relevant policies, the sequence of implementation of new policies, and the various stakeholders engaged in the process. Timelines were developed to parallel the narrative histories and depict the evolution of reform efforts.

**Interviews with state postsecondary leaders:** RFA staff conducted a series of telephone interviews with state postsecondary agency leaders to confirm findings from our document analysis, reveal accomplishments and challenges in the wake of milestones delineated in the source materials, and develop our understanding of the agency’s role in coordinating reform efforts. RFA staff spoke with a total of 11 policymakers, such as system vice chancellors, across the five study states.

From this data, RFA drafted state profiles on each of the states that addressed the following areas:

1. catalysts for reform;
2. policy developments;
3. developmental education and system-wide assessment reforms;
4. faculty and vendor involvement;
5. reporting assessment data; and
6. lessons learned and a timeline of the reforms.

Profiles were reviewed by our state interview respondents who provided feedback to Research for Action to ensure accuracy and clarity of the state data. Based on these profiles, a cross-state analysis was then conducted to provide a picture of similar trends across the five states in policy and implementation, as well as lessons learned from the process of reform. The profiles for each of the five states are included as part of this report after the cross-state analysis.

## Appendix B. Diagnostic Assessment Project State and System Level Interview Protocols

State:

Respondent:

Position and System/Agency:

Interviewer:

Date:

Initial reflections post interview:

1. From your vantage point, what was the main catalyst(s) for the state to become involved in developmental education reform, specifically the development of a single placement/diagnostic assessment (e.g. legislation, task force, publication of report)? Probe:
  - Were there multiple events over time or one primary impetus in this area?
  - What was the resulting policy (e.g., legislation, regulation, task force)?
2. What have been the main barriers to improvements in developmental education policy and development of a single placement/diagnostic assessment? Probe:
  - Buy-in from faculty or local institutions;
  - Budget cuts;
  - Lobbying from established test providers;
  - Technical limitations
3. What individuals or organizations have been the main players in introducing the idea of this reform effort? Probe:
  - From outside the state
  - From inside the state
4. What has been the role of faculty in the creation/review of developmental education standards and assessment items? Probe on:
  - Do faculty members provide advice on policy or have policy-making authority?
  - What types of faculty are involved?
  - How were faculty selected to become involved?
5. Have other/neighboring states influenced the work in your state (e.g. North Carolina modeled Virginia's reforms and learned from the work there)?
6. What are the current plans for utilizing the system among four-year institutions, and in aligning K-12 and postsecondary expectations? Was the K-12 state education agency involved in this process, and if so, how? Is there any connection with the assessment consortia tests built to align with the Common Core?

7. Our understanding is that the assessment system has been developed (*either in conjunction with or separate from as appropriate to the state*) changes to the developmental education curriculum. In your estimation, how well has that approach worked? What were the most significant challenges and benefits to this approach?
8. Our understanding is that the assessments in math and English were developed (*either at the same time or in stages as appropriate to the state*). In your estimation, how well has that approach worked? What were the most significant challenges and benefits to this approach?
9. How does the assessment that has been implemented compare with the specifications in the original RFP (in states where the assessment has been implemented)? Probe:
  - Are *all of the components* of the assessment system implemented/being implemented (if not, what aspects have yet to be implemented)?
  - Are *all of the diagnostic features* of the assessment system being implemented?
  - Is the diagnostic component *mandatory or voluntary* for colleges?
10. How would you characterize the state's/system's capacity to support developmental education reforms and related diagnostic assessments?
11. What are the current data reporting requirements for the assessment system? Probe:
  - From the vendor to institutions
  - From the vendor to the system or state agency

How have these requirements changed as a result of the new assessment?

12. What academic interventions are required as a result of diagnostic assessment results (e.g. remedial courses, instructional modules, student support services)?
13. Outside of diagnostic and placement purposes, are there other uses for the data generated from the assessments (e.g. high school level reporting)? If yes, what do they include? Probe at the state, system and institutional levels.
14. Does the state require student accommodations and ESL student testing as part of the assessment system? If so, how?
15. Is there funding to continue and sustain the implementation of these new developmental education and assessment policies?
16. What are the main successes of the reform so far, and what could other states and systems learn from the work you have done?

## Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: California

Through online research and document reviews, state- and system-level interviews, and analysis of recent Requests for Proposals (RFP), the following profile has been developed to outline the policy context and implementation of developmental education and diagnostic assessment reform in California, especially as they pertain to the community college level. The profile was verified by state interview respondents; data included in the profile offers a stand-alone summary and will be used for cross-state analysis. The profile addresses six areas: 1) catalysts for reform, 2) policy developments, 3) developmental education and system-wide assessment reforms 4) faculty and vendor involvement, 5) reporting assessment data and 6) lessons learned, and then concludes with a timeline of the reforms.

Table I. Fast Facts

<b>State Community College System</b>	California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO)
<b>Number of Colleges/Campuses</b>	112
<b>Number of Students Served</b>	1,582,109 <sup>i</sup>
<b>Current or Previous Placement Assessment(s)</b>	The three most widely used assessments for each subject are listed below and vary by institution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>English</u>: Accuplacer, Compass, College Test for English Placement (CTEP)</li> <li>• <u>Math</u>: Accuplacer, Compass, Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project (MDTP)</li> <li>• <u>ESL</u>: Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA), Compass, Accuplacer</li> </ul>
<b>New System-Wide Diagnostic Placement Assessment System and Vendor Selected</b>	In process: Request for Information (RFI) was released in November 2010

Developmental education curriculum and placement assessments—including the sequence and number of developmental writing, reading and mathematics courses—vary across California's community colleges.<sup>ii</sup> For this reason, colleges validate the use of placement tests to fit their local curriculum. However, the cost and inefficiency associated with this variance has been recognized as significant and support for a common system-wide placement and diagnostic assessment system has increased.<sup>iii</sup>

### I. Catalysts for Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reform

When describing influential factors for a common system-wide assessment, interview respondents didn't point to a single impetus, but rather a chain of events that built upon one another. Due to the large size of the state and the community college system, external influences seem to play a smaller role here than internal initiatives and stakeholder groups.

## External influences

- **College level initiatives sponsored by national organizations:** Many colleges in the state engage in one or more cross-state initiatives (*i.e.* Achieving the Dream) but as one respondent explained: “it’s rare for all colleges to be part of an effort collectively as a state.”<sup>iv</sup>
- **Research and Planning Group:** This nonprofit research group functions as a liaison between California’s effort towards a centralized assessment and a number of external funders.<sup>v</sup>

## Internal influences

- **System Strategic Plan:** In 2006, the CCCCO published a strategic plan “to develop methods to more effectively assess student preparedness levels and to place students in appropriate courses.”<sup>vi</sup>
- **CCCAssess Advisory Committee:** In 2010, this centralized body was formed to provide overarching support and guidance. Membership included representatives from the Academic Senate; Matriculation, Assessment, Institutional Research, the Legislative Analyst’s Office, the state Department of Education, the California State University, and the CCCCO.
- **Student Success Task Force Recommendations:** These 22 recommendations, released this year, included plans for a centralized diagnostic assessment all 112 colleges would be required to use.<sup>vii</sup>

## 2. Policy Developments

State legislation helped accelerate efforts toward a common diagnostic placement test (see Table 2). As one respondent stated, “the whole movement towards a common assessment was already in place...the legislation was capitalizing on the fact that there was already interest...on that issue.”<sup>viii</sup>



Key for Table 2 through Table 6	
 YES	 NO

Table 2. Policy in Support of Developmental Education and Assessment Reforms

Has the state/system established standards for developmental education content or college level coursework readiness?	
Has the state passed legislation around developmental education curricular reform?	
Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved a policy around a developmental education curricular reform?	
Has the state passed legislation around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?	
Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved a policy around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?	
Has the state developed a strategic plan or initiative around developmental education and/or assessment?	

- **Standards:** Since 2006, the CCCCO funded the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) to increase minimum graduation requirements in English and mathematics across all community colleges.<sup>ix</sup>
- **Legislation:** Since 2010, three bills have passed regarding a common assessment system:

- **SB 1143:** Required the Board of Governors of the CCCCO to establish the Student Success Task Force to examine best practices and models for student success, and develop and present recommendations.
- **AB 743:** Required the Board of Governors to “*establish a common assessment system with specified objectives, including selection of an existing commercially-available and centrally-delivered system of student assessment, to be used as one of multiple measures.*”<sup>x</sup>
- **SB 1456 (Student Success Act of 2012):** Required the community college system to: 1) target existing student services resources to support orientation, assessment, and education planning; 2) utilize a statewide system of common assessment once available; and 3) post a student success scorecard to report progress in improving completion rates.<sup>xi</sup> However, unlike AB 743, in order for colleges to receive funding, they must use the common assessment instrument authorized by the Board of Governors.
- **Regulation:** The California Community College’s Board of Governors has been very supportive of assessment reform, directing the Chancellor to begin exploring the implementation of a common assessment in 2007 and then adopting recommendations from the Student Success Task Force to develop "diagnostic" assessments for use across the system in 2012.
- **Strategic Planning:** The Student Success Task Force Final Report currently guides the System in its developmental education/assessment reform. The Report presented 22 recommendations that are premised on defining college-readiness and increasing completion rates, developing and implementing a common diagnostic assessment tool, aligning local district and college goals with the education and workforce needs of California, and structuring pathways to help students identify a program of study.

### 3. Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reforms

With 72 districts and 112 colleges, California has a particularly decentralized governance structure. The power to adopt and implement curriculum and assessment lies in each district’s local senate and curriculum committees; therefore, the CCCCO’s authority is somewhat limited at the system level.

Table 3. Developmental Education and Assessment Reform Status<sup>xii</sup>

<b>When was the response deadline for the assessment RFP?</b>	Nov. 30, 2010 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Is the test format required to be both web-based and adaptive?</b>	Y
<b>Is the diagnostic assessment component mandatory?</b>	Y
<b>Has the state developed new developmental education curriculum tools in math and English?</b>	N
<b>Is the new assessment system required to be accessible to special needs students?</b>	Y
<b>Is an ESL version of the assessment required?</b>	Y <sup>2</sup>
<b>Were the curriculum and assessment designed concurrently or separately?</b>	N/A
<b>Have reforms in the developmental education curriculum in math and English taken place concurrently or separately?</b>	N/A
<b>Is the assessment system used outside of community colleges?</b>	N/A

<sup>1</sup> California issued a Request for Information; without soliciting a specific proposal, the document asked vendors to provide detail to support the state’s exploration of the feasibility of a statewide assessment system.

<sup>2</sup> While the test has not yet been developed, ESL placement tests are currently used and will be required as part of the new assessment system.

## Math and English Curriculum Redesign

Though California made strides toward a common statewide assessment in math, English, and ESL through the aforementioned legislation and reports, the implications for assessment reform, as well as broader developmental education strategies, remain uncertain.

## Placement and Diagnostic Assessment

According to the RFI, the new assessment system will have diagnostic capabilities and students will have access to the results; thus, vendors were asked to specify their diagnostic capabilities. Other expectations in the RFI accounted for the local control inherent in California's community college system:

- The RFI specified that vendors should consider multiple measures in the assessment platform, such that authorized college staff can individually determine the weight of each measure. The RFI defined 'multiple measures' as "any combination of the following: assessment test scores, a series of background questions, transcript information, K-12 test scores."
- One of the test administration requirements was the "ability to set locally determined cut scores."

## Diagnostic Assessment Development Process

While legislation and regulation have called for a system-wide assessment, broader developmental education curriculum redesign has not moved forward. However, the passage of the Student Success Act of 2012 (S.B. 1456) is likely to spur greater alignment among K-12, the community college system, and the California State University 4-year system. Respondents speculated that the centralized assessment will eventually improve developmental education curriculum.

- **Curriculum and Assessment Development:** Though the Basic Skills Initiative outlines general criteria by which colleges should structure curriculum, each college still determines cut scores, course numbering, and other requirements. According to one respondent: "assessment reform will eventually spur a conversation around common cut score and developmental education reform at large."<sup>xiii</sup> This approach aligns with California's decentralized community college governance structure. Another respondent expressed: "Really, the work that's been done so far is not towards a mandated common assessment, it's the idea of developing a common assessment that would be so good that everyone would want to use it."<sup>xiv</sup>
- **Reforms in both Math and English:** The state's RFI and legislation has called for the development of both math and English assessments, but the timeline has not yet been determined.

## Assessment Alignment and Content

California's request for information (RFI) specified that the new assessment system align with the requirements of the CCCAssess project, which includes implementation of the Common Core State Standards, but otherwise listed only general content areas. The assessment is to include a writing sample and the length of the assessment was limited to 2.5 hours (see Table 4).

Table 4: Alignment, Content and Length Requirements of Assessments Outlined in RFI

<b>Is the assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to state-specific-standards?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to the developmental education curriculum?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include reading, writing and math content?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include a writing sample?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>What is the length limitation for the assessment?</b>	2.5 hours

#### 4. Faculty and Vendor Involvement in Curriculum and Assessment Implementation

##### Faculty

Local control and site-based governance makes faculty buy-in crucial. Table 5 details elements with respect to faculty engagement in assessment design and implementation. However, because an assessment vendor has yet to be selected and a curriculum redesign determined, the data points are not applicable to the state.

Table 5. Involvement of Faculty in Curriculum and Assessment Design<sup>xv</sup>

<b>Faculty were/will be involved in curriculum development.</b>	N/A
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the development of test items.</b>	N/A
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the review of test items.</b>	N/A
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in setting performance standards.</b>	N/A

- **Curriculum Development:** The system-wide direction of developmental education curriculum redesign is yet to be determined; curriculum is currently determined at the campus level.
- **Assessment Development:** The RFI did not specify faculty involvement in test item creation, but interview respondents identified faculty involvement in reviewing assessment items as critical to both the quality of the reforms and the buy-in needed to implement them.<sup>xvi</sup>
- **Setting Performance Standards:** With the common assessment development at a standstill, cut scores have yet to be determined. However, the state has a history of including faculty in this type of work. Since 2006, the Basic Skills Initiative has included rubrics for reporting and coding student progress, developed by teams with faculty and administrative members.<sup>xvii</sup>

##### Vendor

Table 6 specifies elements regarding the role of the vendor in the implementation of an assessment system. While the state will expect vendors to provide a web-based tutorial and offer sample questions for prospective students according to the original RFI, training and regular technical assistance were not included in the specifications, and the RFP with final requirements has yet to be released and a vendor selected.



Table 6. Vendor Involvement in Assessment Training and Support

<b>Vendor will provide training</b>	N/A
<b>Vendor will provide regular technical support</b>	N/A
<b>Vendor will provide practice tests to students</b>	N/A

## 5. Reporting Assessment Data

A main goal of a new assessment system as described in the RFI is to provide a hub where data can both be centrally managed by the CCCCO as well as accessible to individual colleges. The RFI therefore specified that a new assessment would “provide a mechanism for the delivery of assessment data to the State Chancellor's Office longitudinal research systems” and further required that “state and college staff [be able to] access testing information.” The “ability to interface with and transfer information to the college’s student information systems and a centralized data warehouse” was also specified (see Table 7). However, final reporting requirements will not be determined until an RFP is released and a vendor selected.

Table 7. Reporting Requirements for the Vendor<sup>xviii</sup>

<b>Link to state/system data networks</b>	N/A
<b>Provide reports to the system</b>	N/A
<b>Provide reports to the state</b>	N/A
<b>Provide reports to the institution</b>	N/A
<b>Students will receive customized reports</b>	N/A
<b>Access for institutions and system to test results</b>	N/A

## 6. Lessons Learned

A number of successes were identified by interview respondents regarding the process of developing a centralized assessment system:

- **Faculty input:** Engaging faculty “is critical in any kind of reform in assessment or developmental education” according to one respondent, in terms of both the design of the curriculum and the test items as well as the development of buy-in. Indeed, faculty played an integral role throughout, as part of the committees and taskforces dedicated to the effort, as well as by contributing in many influential reports.
- **Realization of the importance of basic skills:** In an open access system, coming to a “common place, common understanding, and common awareness” of basic skills was a significant accomplishment.
- **Consistency in funding:** The funding to focus work on Basic Skills has been sustained over the last six years. One respondent stated that “the money has allowed for a fair amount of innovation at colleges.” For example, the 2012-13 Fiscal Year Budget bill states funding for basic skills courses must be consistent whether or not revenue increases as projected.<sup>xix</sup>

The state also faces a number of challenges in moving forward with this work:

- **Budget constraints:** Though funding for the basic skills has been fairly consistent over the years, state appropriation for higher education has been on a steep decline. All respondents cited lack of funding as a chief constraint. Without consistent central funding to move the work forward, the System is looking at philanthropic funds and a one-time allocation of \$500,000 from the Legislature to fund the work which has stymied the development of a common assessment.<sup>xx</sup> One respondent said, “if stars align and we receive the funding in order to develop the centralized assessment for the system, then we would likely have 112 colleges adopt it.”
- **Ensuring local control:** Providing faculty members control in selecting a test was identified as a challenge. Specifically, garnering consensus around what a common assessment would look like is difficult.
- **Decentralized governance structure:** The System lacks coherence in course numbering, developmental education sequence and cut scores. One respondent noted that the system “prohibits the use of an integrated diagnostic and curriculum management system.” Another explained: “This is not a centrally coordinated system; it’s all local boards and local district and trustees and local campuses making their own local decisions.”

# California Developmental Education and Assessment Timeline

**2003**

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**2004**

- Academic Senate for California Community Colleges issued “Basic Skills Assessment Report” recommending a common definition of “college-level” work.

**2006**

- California Community College System published the System Strategic Plan, a comprehensive road map for improving student access and success.
- The California’s Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) was launched to focus on developmental education and define the “basic skills” needed to succeed in college-level work.

**2007**

- The Consultation Council Assessment Taskforce was formed to examine the issue of a uniform, common, mandatory assessment.

**2008**

- The Consultation Council Assessment Taskforce report on Assessment was released.

**2009**

- CCC System released the state’s first Basic Skills Accountability Report – a system-wide measurement of developmental education and placement outcomes.

**2010**

- The CCCAssess Advisory Committee was formed to provide input into the feasibility study process and to advise the implementation of a centralized assessment system.
- CCCAssess released an RFI to gather information on the feasibility of a common diagnostic and placement assessment.

**2011**

- Senate Bill 1143 passed
- Student Success Task Force was formed.
- Assembly Bill 743 passed requiring the Board of Governors to develop a common assessment system for reading, writing, mathematics and ESL.

**2012**

- Student Success Task Force released their final report recommending the development of a common diagnostic assessment.
- Senate Bill 1456 (Student Success Act of 2012) passed, requiring the development of a common diagnostic assessment system-wide.

**2013**

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## California Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Enrollment data includes both full and part time students and is from the U.S. Department of Education (Fall 2010) as reported by the Almanac of Higher Education 2012: California State Profile. The Chronicle of Higher Education at <http://chronicle.com/article/California-Almanac-2012/133876/>
- <sup>ii</sup> Ed Source Report (2010) Something's Got to Give. Retrieved from: <http://www.edsource.org/pub10-somethings-got-to-give.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> Venezia, A., Bracco, K. R., & Nodine, T. (2010). One-shot deal? Students' perceptions of assessment and course placement in California's community colleges. San Francisco: WestEd retrieved from: [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/OneShotDeal.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/OneShotDeal.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.
- <sup>v</sup> <http://css.rpgroup.org>
- <sup>vi</sup> California Community College System Strategic Plan Steering Committee (2006) California Community Colleges System Strategic Plan. Prepared for The California Community Colleges Board of Governors.
- <sup>vii</sup> Student Success Task Force Final Report (2012) Advancing Student Success in the California Community Colleges: Recommendations of the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force.
- <sup>viii</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.
- <sup>ix</sup> Basic Skills Initiative was a grant funded initiative from the CCCCO which began in 2006 as part of the strategic planning process. Basic Skills is defined as "foundation skills in reading, writing, mathematics, learning skills, and English as a Second Language which are necessary for students to succeed in college-level work. The entire publication can be found at <http://www.cccbsi.org/publications>.
- <sup>x</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.
- <sup>xi</sup> Based on the press release by the CCCCO on SB 1456 dated September 27, 2012. Retrieved from: [http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/DocDownloads/PressReleases/SEP2012/PRESS\\_RELEASE\\_SB1456StudentSuccessActSigned\\_FINAL\\_092712.pdf](http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/DocDownloads/PressReleases/SEP2012/PRESS_RELEASE_SB1456StudentSuccessActSigned_FINAL_092712.pdf)
- <sup>xii</sup> Information in this table was drawn from the State of California: Request for Information: CCCAssess Centralized Assessment for California Community Colleges, Released November 2010.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.
- <sup>xv</sup> Information in this table was drawn from the RFI. It is not indicative of how the actual RFP will be structured.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Interview with State Respondents, November 2012.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ed Source Report (2010) Something's Got to Give. Retrieved from: <http://www.edsource.org/pub10-somethings-got-to-give.html>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Information in this table was drawn from the State of California: Request for Information: CCCAssess Centralized Assessment for California Community Colleges, Released November 2010.
- <sup>xix</sup> 2012-13 Budget Act: [http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2012/bud/spending\\_plan/spending-plan-091312.aspx#highered](http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2012/bud/spending_plan/spending-plan-091312.aspx#highered)
- <sup>xx</sup> From an email correspondence with one of the interview respondents

## Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: Florida

Through online research and document reviews, state- and system-level interviews, and analysis of recent Requests for Proposals (RFP), the following profile has been developed to outline the policy context and implementation of developmental education and diagnostic assessment reform in Florida, especially as they pertain to the community college level. The profile was verified by state interview respondents; data included in the profile offers a stand-alone summary and will be used for cross-state analysis. The profile addresses six areas: 1) catalysts for reform, 2) policy developments, 3) developmental education and system-wide assessment reforms, 4) faculty and vendor involvement, 5) reporting assessment data and 6) lessons learned, and then concludes with a timeline of the reforms in the state.

Table I. Fast Facts

<b>State Community College System</b>	Florida College System
<b>Number of Colleges/Campuses</b>	28
<b>Number of Students Served</b>	903,846 <sup>i</sup>
<b>Current or Previous Placement Assessment(s)</b>	Accuplacer (College Placement Test (CPT))
<b>New System-Wide Diagnostic Placement Assessment System and Vendor Selected</b>	Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.), McCann Associates

### I. Catalysts for Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reform

Florida has been involved in a number of initiatives sponsored by organizations from outside the state that have influenced their reforms in developmental education and assessment:

#### External Influences

- **American Diploma Project (ADP) Network:** The ADP Network works with states across the country to develop college and career readiness standards, and supported Florida, beginning in 2008, in the development of the Postsecondary Readiness Competencies or PRCs.<sup>ii</sup>
- **Achieving the Dream (ATD) and the Developmental Education Initiative:** The state has been involved with ATD since 2004 and DEI since 2009, with three community colleges involved in ATD and six participating in DEI. In addition, seven colleges received mini-grants from the Division of Florida Colleges using DEI funds to create modules for their developmental education courses.<sup>iii</sup>

## Internal Influences

- **Go Higher, Florida! Task Force:** Comprised of K-12 principals and superintendents, as well as college presidents, the task force was created to strengthen the secondary-postsecondary pipeline. In 2008, the task force released five recommendations that included the adoption of a definition of college and career readiness and the development of high school and postsecondary tests to assess that readiness.<sup>iv</sup>

## 2. Policy Developments









Key for Table 2 through Table 6	
 YES	 NO

Table 2. Policy in Support of Developmental Education and Assessment Reforms

<b>Has the state/system established standards for developmental education content or college level coursework readiness?</b>	
<b>Has the state passed legislation around developmental education curricular reform?</b>	
<b>Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved policy around developmental education curricular reform?</b>	
<b>Has the state passed legislation around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?</b>	
<b>Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved a policy around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?</b>	
<b>Has the state/system developed a strategic plan or initiative around developmental education and/or assessment?</b>	

- **Standards:** In 2008, the *Go Higher, Florida!* Task Force called for a statewide definition of college and career readiness; this work led to the PRCs. PRCs were first aligned with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and were revised in 2010 to align with the Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards.<sup>v</sup> They became the focus of the RFPs for the P.E.R.T.
- **Legislation:** In 1993, Florida’s legislature directed the State Board of Education to develop and implement a common placement testing program to assess the basic computation and communication skills of students who intend to enter a degree program at any public community college or state university.<sup>vi</sup> While state law does not specify the type of curriculum, it requires that it encompass Florida’s Postsecondary Readiness Competencies.<sup>vii</sup>
- **Regulation:** The requirement for a common placement testing program was implemented by the State Board through Rule 6A-10.0315. The resulting testing program became known as the Florida College Entry-Level Placement Test (FCELPT), and had also been called the Common Placement Test (CPT) or the College Board Accuplacer —the predecessor of the P.E.R.T. State law directed the State Board to identify in rule the curriculum to be used in alignment with the Postsecondary Readiness Competencies.<sup>viii</sup>
- **Strategic Planning:** In 2008, *Go Higher, Florida!* released five recommendations which provided the foundation for the developmental reform aligned with the ADP goals.

### 3. Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reforms

Florida has been a leader in developing a common placement assessment in both math and English, but did not address curriculum until after the P.E.R.T. had been developed (see Table 3).

Table 3. Developmental Education and Assessment Reform Status

• <b>When was the response deadline for the assessment RFP?</b>	August 4, 2009
• <b>Is the test format web based and adaptive?</b>	Y
• <b>Is the diagnostic assessment component mandatory?</b>	N
• <b>Has the state/system developed a new developmental education curriculum tools in math and English?</b>	Y
• <b>Is the new assessment system required to be accessible to students requiring accommodations?</b>	Y
• <b>Is an ESL version of the assessment required?</b>	N <sup>1</sup>
• <b>Were the curriculum and assessment designed concurrently or separately?</b>	Separately
• <b>Have reforms in the developmental education curriculum in math and English taken place concurrently or separately?</b>	Concurrently
• <b>Is the assessment system used outside of community colleges?</b>	Y

#### Math and English Curriculum Redesign

In May 2012, it was announced that the Division of Florida Colleges had developed a structure for the delivery of course “modules” for developmental education in reading, writing, and math. Modules were designed to assist students scoring in the higher level of developmental education make quick progress to credit-bearing courses. Student can enroll in 1 to 2 credit-hour, self-paced course modules specific to the identified developmental education competencies and designed by the FCS institution.<sup>ix</sup> Colleges opting to use these modules will be required to implement both the P.E.R.T. Placement and Diagnostic assessments. It is expected, however, that all Florida College System (FCS) institutions will continue to offer the traditional developmental education two-course sequences for those students who are in need of more intensive instruction.<sup>x</sup> Additional reforms in this area would require legislation.

#### Placement and Diagnostic Assessment

The Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.) was developed as Florida’s new common placement test to measure student skills upon entry to the Florida College System. The test—implemented in 2010 as the “preferred” placement assessment —was developed by McCann Associates and includes three 25-item, computer-adaptive components in reading, writing, and mathematics. The P.E.R.T. Diagnostic is another component of the assessment system. While the placement test determines appropriate course assignments, P.E.R.T. Diagnostic identifies, by competency, where skill deficiencies exist to help faculty target instruction and support. The P.E.R.T. Diagnostic test has been developed to align with the Developmental Education Competencies that are the basis for developmental education courses offered at all System institutions; competencies have been similarly divided into upper and lower levels.<sup>xi</sup> The diagnostic tests are voluntary for Florida colleges and are not computer adaptive, so that all students are assessed on the same content.<sup>xii</sup>

Senate Bill 1908, passed in 2008, expanded postsecondary readiness assessments to high school students as well.<sup>xiii</sup> The legislation called for the expansion of college/career readiness testing of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students who

<sup>1</sup> At the college level, ESL students can take the Compass ESL version.

express postsecondary interest and collaborative efforts to make postsecondary remediation available to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who demonstrate a need or interest. Other important goals of this law were to:

- Increase the number and percentage of students who graduate from high school college- and career-ready;
- Communicate with 11<sup>th</sup> grade students and parents the requirements and opportunities for enrollment in college-credit courses without need for remediation, and;
- Provide students whose scores indicate gaps an opportunity to attain needed competencies in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

During the 2011 legislative session, House Bill 1255 amended existing statute and expanded college placement testing by requiring administration to high school students scoring within specified ranges on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT. The legislation also required all students whose test results indicate they are not prepared for college-level work to take the appropriate college readiness courses.<sup>xiv</sup>

#### Diagnostic Assessment Development Process

- **Curriculum and Assessment Development:** The P.E.R.T. assessments were developed before the curricular modules and therefore, implemented separately. The *Go Higher, Florida!* Task Force called for a statewide definition of college and career readiness in 2008, which led to the development of the Postsecondary Readiness Competencies (PRCs) which became the focus of the RFPs for the P.E.R.T, making the process standards-driven.
- **Reforms in both Math and English:** The P.E.R.T. assessments in English and math, as well as the subsequent curriculum modules, have been designed and implemented together.

#### Assessment Alignment and Content

Florida required that the P.E.R.T. be aligned to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) before the Common Core State Standards were released; the NGSSS have since been revised to more closely align. The state does not require the P.E.R.T. to align with the developmental education curricular reforms or include a writing sample, based on the RFP. The length of the assessment was limited to 3 hours (see Table 4).

Table 4: Alignment, Content and Length Requirements of Assessments Outlined in RFP

<b>Is the assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to state-specific-standards?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to the developmental education curriculum?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include reading, writing and math content?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include a writing sample?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>What is the length limitation for the assessment?</b>	<b>3 hours</b>

The RFP was specific related to assessment alignment and content; the Postsecondary Readiness Competencies in all three subject areas were included in the appendix. Examples of the language in the RFP include the following:



- “Use of symbols of mathematics correctly and precisely”;
- “Demonstrate control of standard English through the use of grammar, punctuation, capitalization and spelling”; and
- “Recognize nuances in the meaning of words.”

#### 4. Faculty and Vendor Involvement in Curriculum and Assessment Implementation

Postsecondary faculty members proved to be constructive, critical partners and were described by a state respondent as “a family of committed faculty.” Faculty developed and vetted items, and brought their colleagues and institutions along (see Table 5).

Table 5. Involvement of Faculty in Curriculum and Assessment Design

<b>Faculty were/will be involved in curriculum development</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the development of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the review of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in setting performance standards</b>	<b>Y</b>

- **Curriculum Development:** College faculty worked together to develop statewide developmental sequences in math, writing, and reading—each with two levels: upper and lower.<sup>xv</sup>
- **Assessment Development:** Faculty came together in 2009 to develop exemplar test items for each PRC; many were also involved in the identification of the PRCs. These exemplars were included in the RFP and vendors were required to submit test items aligned to them. Once proposals were submitted, faculty again served on the Content Review Committee. When McCann was awarded the contract, faculty reviewed the entire bank of test items for alignment with the standards and made suggestions for adjustments.<sup>xvi</sup>
- **Performance Standards:** The Department of Education and McCann developed cut scores to be used until enough data are available to set final cut scores; faculty were not involved in this process. Cut scores were determined by matching scores of the previous college placement test and student distribution in courses based on those scores.<sup>xvii</sup>
- **Vendor:** Florida’s RFP addressed but left as optional the requirement for vendors to provide ongoing training of test administrators. The vendor was expected to offer a non-secure practice test in reading, writing, and mathematics (see Table 5 below).

Table 6. Vendor Involvement in Assessment Training and Support

<b>Vendor will provide training</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide regular technical support</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide practice tests to students</b>	<b>Y</b>

#### 5. Reporting Assessment Data

Florida has invested in the development of an interactive online platform for working with, and reporting on, community college data, including developmental education outcomes.<sup>xviii</sup> P.E.R.T. placement and diagnostic data are linked to other data networks. Weekly data reports are provided on test results; however, individual

colleges are responsible for developing systems for providing diagnostic results to faculty.<sup>xix</sup> According to one state respondent, while the system has considerable data, system officials are still in the process of determining the best ways to utilize the data.<sup>xx</sup>

Table 7. Reporting Requirements for the Vendor<sup>xxi</sup>

<b>Link to state/system data networks</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Provide reports to the system</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Provide reports to the state</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Provide reports to the institution</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Students will receive customized reports</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Access for institutions and systems to test results</b>	<b>N</b>

## 6. Lessons Learned

State interview respondents identified a number of successes in their process of reform:

- **Engaging faculty in the process:** Including faculty in test development and review was critical to the design and implementation of the P.E.R.T.
- **Connecting the assessment to college readiness standards:** The P.E.R.T. assessments were developed as a way to measure the PRCs and in collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary faculty.
- **Inclusion of testing at the high school level:** Florida has been able to strengthen the K-16 pipeline by situating the P.E.R.T. assessments in both community college and high schools, where results can serve as early warnings of academic gaps.

There have also been challenges worth considering as other states work through similar reforms:

- **Ensuring improvement compared to past assessment systems:** In developing the exams, the state has experienced logistical challenges in creating a new assessment from scratch—challenges that may have been ameliorated through the use of an “off-the-shelf” test.
- **Length of the assessment:** Florida initially planned for one test that would determine student placement and diagnose strengths and weaknesses, but found the assessment to be too long. The state therefore broke the test into two separate assessments, and made the diagnostic component optional.<sup>xxii</sup>
- **High school administration:** The state has begun administering the exam in high schools and experienced resistance around issues of scheduling and testing protocols in a state with a K-12 assessment and accountability system that is already high stakes.

# Florida Developmental Education and Assessment Timeline

**2003**

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**2004**

- Florida chosen to participate in *Achieving the Dream* (ATD)

**2007**

- *Go Higher, Florida!* created to strengthen the secondary-postsecondary pipeline.

**2008**

- SB 1908 signed into law
- *Go Higher, Florida!* released recommendations as a foundation for reform
- The Performance Readiness Competencies (PRCs) were developed

**2009**

- Florida joined the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI)
- Invitation to negotiate (RFP) for the college and career readiness placement test was released

**2010**

- McCann Associates selected as test vendor
- PRCs updated to align with the Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards
- Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) piloted

**2011**

- Computer-adaptive format of the PERT math, reading and writing assessment became available
- PERT was implemented by every college statewide

**2012**

- PERT diagnostic component became available
- Developmental education sequence restructured
- Division of Florida Colleges developed modularized remedial courses

**2013**

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## Florida Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Enrollment data includes both full and part time students and is from the Report for the Florida College System Fact Book, Florida Department of Education, Division of Accountability, Research, and Measurement (2012)
- <sup>ii</sup> Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.): Frequently Asked Questions at <http://www.fldoe.org/cc/pdf/P.E.R.T.faq.pdf>
- <sup>iii</sup> Collins, Michael Lawrence. (April 2011). Driving Innovation: How Six States Are Organizing to Improve Outcomes in Developmental Education. Boston: Jobs for the Future at [http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI\\_DrivingInnovation\\_041211.pdf](http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI_DrivingInnovation_041211.pdf).
- <sup>iv</sup> Go Higher, Florida! Final Task Force Recommendations at [http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2008\\_02\\_19/Item%203%20Final%20Recs.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2008_02_19/Item%203%20Final%20Recs.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> Go Higher, Florida! Final Task Force Recommendations at [http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2008\\_02\\_19/Item%203%20Final%20Recs.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2008_02_19/Item%203%20Final%20Recs.pdf)
- <sup>vi</sup> Florida Department of Education at <http://www.fldoe.org/asp/fcelpt/?style=print>
- <sup>vii</sup> Florida Statutes 1008.30 (2012) at [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1008/Sections/1008.30.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1008/Sections/1008.30.html)
- <sup>viii</sup> Florida Statutes 1008.30 (2012) at [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1008/Sections/1008.30.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1008/Sections/1008.30.html)
- <sup>ix</sup> Florida Department of Education Memorandum dated May 25, 2012 from Julie Alexander, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs, Division of Florida Colleges and Matthew Bouck, Director, Office of Articulation, Department of Education on Developmental Education Redesign and Modularization at <http://www.fldoe.org/cc/OSAS/Correspondence/pdf/05-12Modularization.pdf> and [Interview with State Respondent, November 2012](#).
- <sup>x</sup> Florida Department of Education Memorandum dated May 25, 2012 from Julie Alexander, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs, Division of Florida Colleges and Matthew Bouck, Director, Office of Articulation, Department of Education on Developmental Education Redesign and Modularization at <http://www.fldoe.org/cc/OSAS/Correspondence/pdf/05-12Modularization.pdf>
- <sup>xi</sup> Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.): Frequently Asked Questions at <http://www.fldoe.org/cc/pdf/P.E.R.T.faq.pdf>
- <sup>xii</sup> Diagnostic Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities for the California Community Colleges. (June 2012). EdSource at [http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW\\_Brief\\_Diagnostic\\_f.pdf](http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW_Brief_Diagnostic_f.pdf).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.): Frequently Asked Questions at <http://www.fldoe.org/cc/pdf/P.E.R.T.faq.pdf>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Southern Regional Education Board at [http://www.sreb.org/page/1517/college\\_and\\_career\\_readiness\\_in\\_florida.html](http://www.sreb.org/page/1517/college_and_career_readiness_in_florida.html)
- <sup>xv</sup> Diagnostic Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities for the California Community Colleges. (June 2012). EdSource at [http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW\\_Brief\\_Diagnostic\\_f.pdf](http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW_Brief_Diagnostic_f.pdf).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Zoom: Florida's Postsecondary Education Readiness Test, Edition 2010-03 (November 2010). The Florida College System.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.): Frequently Asked Questions at <http://www.fldoe.org/cc/pdf/P.E.R.T.faq.pdf>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Collins, Michael Lawrence. (April 2011). Driving Innovation: How Six States Are Organizing to Improve Outcomes in Developmental Education. Boston: Jobs for the Future at [http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI\\_DrivingInnovation\\_041211.pdf](http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI_DrivingInnovation_041211.pdf).
- <sup>xix</sup> Diagnostic Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities for the California Community Colleges. (June 2012). EdSource at [http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW\\_Brief\\_Diagnostic\\_f.pdf](http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW_Brief_Diagnostic_f.pdf).
- <sup>xx</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Florida Department of Education: Invitation to Negotiate - College and Career Readiness Placement Test. Bid Number: ITN 2010-01.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Diagnostic Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities for the California Community Colleges. (June 2012). EdSource at [http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW\\_Brief\\_Diagnostic\\_f.pdf](http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW_Brief_Diagnostic_f.pdf).

## Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: North Carolina

Through online research and document reviews, state- and system-level interviews, and analysis of recent Requests for Proposals (RFP), the following profile has been developed to outline the policy context and implementation of developmental education and diagnostic assessment reform in North Carolina, especially as they pertain to the community college level. The profile was verified by state interview respondents; data included in the profile offers a stand-alone summary and will be used for cross-state analysis. The profile addresses six areas: 1) catalysts for reform, 2) policy developments, 3) developmental education and system-wide assessment reforms, 4) faculty and vendor involvement, 5) reporting assessment data and 6) lessons learned, and then concludes with a timeline of the reforms in the state.

Table I. Fast Facts

<b>State Community College System</b>	North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS)
<b>Number of Colleges/Campuses</b>	58
<b>Number of Students Served</b>	253,871
<b>Current or Previous Placement Assessment(s)</b>	Accuplacer, Asset, Compass: Varies by institution
<b>New System-Wide Diagnostic Placement Assessment System and Vendor Selected</b>	NC Diagnostic Assessment and Placement Test (NC DAP) with Accuplacer platform, College Board

### I. Catalysts for Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reform

A number of organizations and individuals, both external and internal to the state, supported North Carolina’s focus on improving developmental education and creating a system-wide placement and diagnostic assessment.

#### External Influences

- **Achieving the Dream (ATD):** North Carolina has been exploring reforms in the area of developmental education since 2005 when several community colleges and the state System Office became involved with this initiative.
- **Community College Research Center (CCRC):** Based on data collected by Achieving the Dream, the CCRC provided the state with an analysis showing how few developmental education students were successfully completing gateway courses; this information became a “clarion call” on the need for reform.<sup>i</sup>
- **Developmental Education Initiative:** In 2009, the NCCCS joined the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), a driving force in the state’s redesign.
- **Virginia’s example:** Lessons learned from a neighboring state have been described as “critical” to the reforms in North Carolina; one respondent stated: “I cannot overemphasize how helpful that was to our

process.” State policymakers met together through convenings organized by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and visited their counterparts from Virginia to further the dialogue.<sup>ii</sup>

### Internal Influences

- **Leadership of NCCS President Scott Ralls:** Since taking the position in 2008, Ralls has focused on the need to improve developmental education, calling it a “Bermuda Triangle to college aspirations.”<sup>iii</sup>
- **SuccessNC:** Launched in 2010, the State Board of Community Colleges endorsed this strategic planning framework to support the goal of increasing the percentage of students who transfer, complete credentials or remain continuously enrolled from a six-year baseline of 45 percent for the fall 2004 cohort to a six-year success rate of 59 percent for the fall 2014 cohort.<sup>iv</sup>
- **DEI State Policy Team:** The team includes state board members, chief academic officers, faculty, community college presidents, the North Carolina Education Cabinet Chair, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction; it was established by Ralls in 2009. The team approved principles for redesigning developmental courses and moving to diagnostic assessments.<sup>v</sup>

## 2. Policy Developments

North Carolina has been able to advance reforms without enacting legislative or regulatory changes. However, actions by the State Board of Community Colleges and the development of the SuccessNC strategic plan have been important milestones to success (see Table 2 below).






Key for Table 2 through Table 6	
 YES	 NO

Table 2. Policy in Support of Developmental Education and Assessment Reforms

Has the state/system established standards for developmental education content or college level coursework readiness?	
Has the state passed legislation around developmental education curricular reform?	
Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved policy around developmental education curricular reform?	
Has the state passed legislation around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?	
Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved a policy around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?	
Has the state/system developed a strategic plan or initiative around developmental education and/or assessment?	

- **Standards:** In designing a new modular developmental education curriculum, student learning outcomes were crafted and attached to each module when included in the combined course library. The diagnostic assessments are tied to those learning outcomes and have been designed to reflect them in each module.
- **Legislation:** The State Board of Community Colleges has authority to establish admissions, placement, and curriculum policies for the NCCCS. Therefore, legislative action was not required.

- **Regulation:** In February 2012, the State Board of Community Colleges adopted a policy to approve a new single diagnostic placement test for all community colleges. The State Board regulates curriculum standards and courses; authority to approve new courses is delegated to a Curriculum Review Committee.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Strategic Planning:** Through SuccessNC’s development of a strategic plan, the NCCCS facilitated the creation of guiding goals that have been a driving force for reform:
  - **Improve Student Success:** Increase the number of students leaving with job-ready credentials that can lead to successful employment in the global economy and continued educational attainment.
  - **Increase Student Access:** Develop policies and practices that provide increased opportunities for students to enter and proceed successfully through postsecondary education and training.
  - **Ensure Program Excellence:** Examine and continually improve rigor, relevance, and quality in all academic and training opportunities to ensure that successful completion equates to a competitive position in the workforce or in the attainment of higher educational goals.<sup>vii</sup>

### 3. Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reforms

North Carolina has made significant changes to the developmental education curriculum in both math and English, as well as the placement and diagnostic assessment systems aligned to the new curriculum. The new curriculum and assessment will be mandatory within the NCCCS. There are no current plans for use outside the NCCCS. While the curriculum and assessments were developed concurrently, reforms in math and English have been designed separately (see Table 3).

Table 3. Developmental Education and Assessment Reform Status<sup>viii</sup>

<b>When was the response deadline for the assessment RFP?</b>	September 1, 2011
<b>Is the test format web based and adaptive?</b>	Y
<b>Is the diagnostic assessment component mandatory?</b>	Y
<b>Has the state/system developed a new developmental education curriculum tools in math and English?</b>	Y
<b>Is the new assessment system required to be accessible to students requiring accommodations?</b>	Y
<b>Is an ESL version of the assessment required?</b>	N
<b>Were the curriculum and assessment designed concurrently or separately?</b>	Concurrently
<b>Have reforms in the developmental education curriculum in math and English taken place concurrently or separately?</b>	Separately
<b>Is the assessment system used outside of community colleges?</b>	N

#### Math Curriculum Redesign

The NCCCS started with math developmental education curriculum redesign. Redesign principles were adopted in October 2010, and included the following requirements, among others:

- mathematical competencies be restructured into a modular format that will allow students to take appropriate content based on the results of diagnostic testing;
- curriculum will focus on conceptual understanding, promote the use of appropriate technology, and be flexible to allow students to progress at different rates;
- assessment and placement tools will offer valid, reliable, and holistic approaches to understanding and applying multiple factors that affect a student’s preparedness for college-level math; and

- tools will be implemented that allow a student’s specific learning needs to be more finely determined.<sup>ix</sup>

Draft math curriculum modules were completed in 2011 and approved by the System Office-appointed Curriculum Review Committee for NCCCS in February 2012. The Developmental Math Redesign Task Force, which comprised 18 faculty members, determined which learning objectives to include in each module and grouped objectives to eliminate redundancy. The modules are designed so that students are not required to complete more objectives than the subsequent course actually requires; this will reduce the amount of developmental math necessary to enroll in credit-bearing courses.<sup>x</sup> The modules were piloted at eight colleges during the spring of 2012; implementation began during the 2012-13 school year. All colleges will implement the new curriculum and diagnostic placement assessment by August 2013.<sup>xi</sup>

### English Curriculum Redesign

Redesign principles similar to those in math were adopted for English in May 2011. The English and Reading Task Force comprised 18 faculty members from across the state. The task force met between January and June of 2012 and recommended replacing the existing sequence with three “mini-mesters” (8 week, 3 credit hour) courses that integrate both reading and English content. For students scoring close to the college-ready level, colleges will have the option to co-requisite the highest developmental reading and English course with a credit bearing course. The new curriculum was approved for piloting in October 2012. The new curriculum will be pilot tested in January 2013 and is anticipated to be approved for statewide use starting Fall 2013 with required implementation no later than fall 2014. An English/Reading diagnostic assessment will also be developed once the redesigned curriculum has received final approval.<sup>xii</sup>

### Placement and Diagnostic Assessment

North Carolina issued an RFP in August 2011 to build a new assessment system in both math and English that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. The primary purpose of the new assessment will be to collect the information that colleges need to place students into appropriate course modules, without more broadly estimating a student’s level of preparation.<sup>xiii</sup> The new diagnostic assessment system, called the NC Diagnostic Assessment and Placement Test (NC DAP) is customized to the NCCCS modules/courses to support student placement into the new developmental curricula.

### Diagnostic Assessment Development Process

- **Curriculum and Assessment Development:** The development of a new curriculum was the first step and therefore the driving force behind the new assessment system. The State Board approved a contract with the College Board to create diagnostic assessments to accompany the developmental education redesign. The DEI State Policy Team adopted a set of guiding principles that were included in the charge to faculty to develop a new curriculum that would be aligned with a custom diagnostic assessment, so the two reforms have always been coupled. One respondent explained: “you could not have done one without the other.”
- **Reforms in both Math and English:** Respondents noted that having the math team move through the process first allowed the English/reading team to learn from the work. Math was also seen as a priority given data showing a higher percentage of developmental students unable to complete a gateway course in the subject.<sup>xiv</sup>

### Assessment Alignment and Content

North Carolina required that the new assessment system be aligned to the Common Core State Standards and the new developmental education curriculum. The length of the assessment was limited to 4 hours (see Table 4).

Table 4: Alignment, Content and Length Requirements of Assessments Outlined in RFP



<b>Is the assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to state-specific-standards?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to the developmental education curriculum?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include reading, writing and math content?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include a writing sample?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>What is the length limitation for the assessment?</b>	<b>4 hours</b>

The RFP was specific related to assessment alignment and content included the assessment. Course competencies and student learning outcomes for the development education curriculum were included as an attachment. Examples of the language in the RFP include the following:

- Course Competency: “Visually represent an integer and its opposite on the number line.”
- Student Learning Outcome: “Demonstrate an understanding of the concept of integers within contextual application programs.”

#### 4. Faculty and Vendor Involvement in Curriculum and Assessment Implementation

##### Faculty

Involvement of faculty in the development of both the curriculum and assessment items was identified as critical to both the quality of the reforms and the buy-in needed to implement them. In the RFP, the state specified that “the test should provide content (test items) developed in consultation with NCCCS faculty acting as subject matter experts” (see Table 5).<sup>xv</sup>

Table 5. Involvement of Faculty in Curriculum and Assessment Design

<b>Faculty were/will be involved in curriculum development</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the development of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the review of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in setting performance standards</b>	<b>Y</b>

- **Curriculum Development:** Both the English and math curricular teams were comprised of faculty members from across the state; indeed, faculty members have led the curriculum reform effort. Colleges were asked to nominate representatives for the teams who have worked to design the curriculum, pilot it and train colleagues on how to implement it in the classroom. One respondent remarked: “we trusted the faculty and they trusted the process.”
- **Assessment Development:** The College Board brought together faculty to provide feedback regarding the accuracy and validity of new test items in June 2012; determinations were made based on alignment of the items with the student learning outcomes.
- **Setting Performance Standards:** In February 2013, faculty will again be brought together from every community college to work with the College Board on setting performance standards.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Vendor

The College Board will provide training to administrators on implementing the new assessment system. This effort included regional meetings in December 2012 to help colleges prepare for the new math assessment.<sup>xvii</sup> The vendor will also provide practice tests for students (but test items will be drawn from the existing item pool as opposed to the more customized items developed for North Carolina). Technical support as the assessments are implemented will also be provided (see Table 6).<sup>xviii</sup>

Table 6. Vendor Involvement in Assessment Training and Support

<b>Vendor will provide training</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide regular technical support</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide practice tests to students</b>	<b>Y</b>

## 5. Reporting Assessment Data

### Reporting Assessment Data

The state's RFP was not specific around the reporting systems that would be developed for the new assessment. Respondents, however, reported that the NCCCS will have access to real-time statewide test results for the new assessment. Colleges will have access to the results for their own students and it will be uploaded into college student information systems (Ellucian). Due to existing reporting systems, new reporting formats are not anticipated with the new assessment system and the vendor will not be providing reports (see Table 7).

Table 7. Reporting Requirements for the Vendor

<b>Link to state/system data networks</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Provide reports to the system</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Provide reports to the state</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Provide reports to the institution</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Students will receive customized reports</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Access for institutions and systems to test results</b>	<b>Y</b>

## 6. Lessons Learned

Successes identified by respondents regarding the process included:

- **Data usage:** The analysis provided by CCRC based on ATD data was central in making the case for developmental education reform.
- **Including faculty:** Engaging faculty “makes all the difference in the world,” according to one respondent, in terms of both the design of the curriculum and assessment, as well as securing buy-in from colleagues.
- **Communicating broadly:** Respondents emphasized the need to communicate in a variety of ways so that colleges statewide are aware of, and prepared for, reforms.

- **Learning from neighbors:** Using Virginia as a model for the reforms gave policymakers “confidence that we were moving in the right direction.”<sup>xix</sup>

Challenges also existed with the redesign of curriculum and assessment:

- **Communicating with colleges:** Reaching all 58 colleges was seen both a success and an area for growth.
- **Including student services staff:** While faculty were involved in the reform efforts, student services staff were late in coming to the table, despite the central nature of their work to developmental education. This created some resistance to the changes because the modular math structure, in particular, significantly impacts registration and financial aid processes at colleges.<sup>xx</sup>

# North Carolina Developmental Education and Assessment Timeline

**2009**

**2009**

- North Carolina joined DEI
- DEI State Policy Team established

**2010**

- State Board of Community Colleges endorsed the SuccessNC Initiative
- NCCCS implemented a system-wide listening tour to identify barriers to innovation
- DEI State Policy Team adopted Math Redesign Principles
- DEI Math Redesign Task Force appointed

**2011**

- New math and curriculum modules drafted
- RFP released to create a custom diagnostic placement test for math and English/reading

**2012**

- DEI English/Reading Redesign Task Force appointed
- Curriculum Review Committee approved eight new developmental math modules
- State Board of Community Colleges approved the creation of a new single diagnostic placement test and awarded College Board the contract to craft the new assessment.
- Pilot testing and early implementation of the developmental math modules

**2013**

- System-wide implementation of the new developmental math curriculum and diagnostic placement assessment
- Pilot testing and early implementation of new developmental reading and English courses
- Creation of the developmental reading and English diagnostic assessment begins with implementation anticipated in 2014

**2013**

## North Carolina Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.

<sup>ii</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.

<sup>iii</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.

<sup>iv</sup> Success NC at <http://www.successnc.org/about-successnc>.

<sup>v</sup> North Carol Ina: A State Policy Profile for Completion By Design (December 2011) at [http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/ATD\\_CBD\\_NC\\_Profile\\_011112\\_o.pdf](http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/ATD_CBD_NC_Profile_011112_o.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Diagnostic Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities for the California Community Colleges. (June 2012). EdSource at [http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW\\_Brief\\_Diagnostic\\_f.pdf](http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW_Brief_Diagnostic_f.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> SuccessNC: A Collaborative Initiative between the North Carolina Community College System and the University Of North Carolina: Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, December 1, 2010 at [http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/State\\_Board/SBCC%20Agendas%20&%20Attachments/2010/NOV%202010/PLAN%204.pdf](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/State_Board/SBCC%20Agendas%20&%20Attachments/2010/NOV%202010/PLAN%204.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> Information in this table were drawn from the State of North Carolina: Request for proposals. RFP # NCCCS-081611: NCCCS Diagnostic Placement Testing System and the Developmental Education Initiative Update: Rethinking Developmental Math in North Carolina, February 2011 at [http://successnc.org/sites/default/files/dei\\_update\\_2011.pdf](http://successnc.org/sites/default/files/dei_update_2011.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> Design Principals for NCCCS Developmental Math Redesign, included in the Developmental Education Initiative Update: Rethinking Developmental Math in North Carolina, February 2011 at [http://successnc.org/sites/default/files/dei\\_update\\_2011.pdf](http://successnc.org/sites/default/files/dei_update_2011.pdf)

<sup>x</sup> North Carolina Community College System: Developmental Math Modular Curriculum Module Outlines and Notes - BETA TEST VERSION – August 2011 at <http://ncmatyc.matyc.org/wp-content/uploads/file/BetaVersionDevelopmental%20Math%20Modules%20-%20NCCCS%5B1%5D.pdf>

<sup>xi</sup> State Board Of Community Colleges: Service Agreement for System-wide Diagnostic Assessment System at

[http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/State\\_Board/SBCC%20Agendas%20&%20Attachments/2012/MAR%202012/FC%202.pdf](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/State_Board/SBCC%20Agendas%20&%20Attachments/2012/MAR%202012/FC%202.pdf)

<sup>xii</sup> SuccessNC: Developmental Education Initiative at <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/developmental-education-initiative>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Diagnostic Assessment: Challenges and Opportunities for the California Community Colleges. (June 2012). EdSource at [http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW\\_Brief\\_Diagnostic\\_f.pdf](http://www.learningworksca.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/LW_Brief_Diagnostic_f.pdf)

<sup>xiv</sup> SuccessNC: Developmental Education Initiative at <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/developmental-education-initiative>

<sup>xv</sup> State of North Carolina: Request for proposals. RFP # NCCCS-081611: NCCCS Diagnostic Placement Testing System.

<sup>xvi</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.

<sup>xvii</sup> SuccessNC: Developmental Education Initiative at <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/developmental-education-initiative>.

<sup>xviii</sup> State of North Carolina: Request for proposals. RFP # NCCCS-081611: NCCCS Diagnostic Placement Testing System.

<sup>xix</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.

<sup>xx</sup> Interview with State Respondent, November 2012.

## Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: Texas

Through online research and document reviews, state- and system-level interviews and analysis of recent Requests for Proposals (RFP), the following profile has been developed to outline the policy context and implementation of developmental education and diagnostic assessment reform in Texas, especially as they pertain to the community college level. The profile was verified by state interview respondents; data included in the profile offers a stand-alone summary and will be used for cross-state analysis. The profile addresses six areas: 1) catalysts for reform, 2) policy developments, 3) developmental education and system-wide assessment reforms, 4) faculty and vendor involvement, 5) reporting assessment data and 6) lessons learned, and then concludes with a timeline of the reforms.

Table I. Fast Facts

<b>State Community College System</b>	State Community and Technical Colleges
<b>Number of Colleges/Campuses</b>	50 public two-year college districts; 4 technical colleges
<b>Number of Students Served</b>	710,864 <sup>i</sup>
<b>Current or Previous Placement Assessment(s)</b>	Accuplacer, ASSET, Compass, Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA): Varies by institution
<b>New System-Wide Diagnostic Placement Assessment System and Vendor Selected</b>	Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Assessment, College Board

### I. Catalysts for Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reform

While several organizations and individuals, both external and internal, supported Texas' developmental education initiatives and the creation of a single placement and diagnostic assessment, an alignment study by the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) appears to have been a main catalyst for the new assessment.

#### External Influences

- **Southern Regional Education Board (SREB):** In 2008, Texas was the first state to engage in SREB's initiative to accelerate progress in college and career readiness: *Strengthening Statewide College/Career Readiness Initiative (SSCRI)*.
- **Complete College America (CCA):** Texas was awarded a Completion Innovation Challenge grant from CCA to improve developmental math education through implementation of the FOCUS Program (Fundamentals of Conceptual Understanding & Success).<sup>ii</sup>
- **Jobs for the Future (JFF):** At both individual institutions and statewide, JFF has supported multiple initiatives to increase college completions rates and improve adult and developmental education programs.

## Internal Influences

- **Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC):** *Texas Test Alignment Project*, a report by EPIC’s Conley and Seburn (2010), found that none of the four existing placement tests aligned to the newly-created College and Career Readiness Standards. The report encouraged legislators to mandate the creation of a new assessment.
- **State Legislature:** The legislature passed several bills targeting developmental education and assessment reform, most notably mandating the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to develop College and Career Readiness Standards and a single statewide assessment aligned to the new standards.
- **Developmental Education Demonstration Projects (DEDPs):** The THECB administered and the state funded a developmental education initiative in 2010 to identify and scale new reforms at the community college level; data on best practices from these DEDPs will be presented to the legislature in 2013.

## 2. Policy Developments

Starting with adoption of the Texas Success Initiative, legislation has addressed college and career readiness standards, placement and diagnostic tools, and test and curricular alignment (see Table 2).<sup>iiiiv</sup> The THECB, in response to legislation, created a 2012-2017 Statewide Developmental Education Plan that outlines best practices based on a number of different developmental education initiatives in the state and regulations have been amended to expand reform options to institutions in these areas.




Key for Table 2 through Table 6	
 YES	 NO

Table 2. Policy in Support of Developmental Education and Assessment Reforms

<b>Has the state/system established standards for developmental education content or college level coursework readiness?</b>	
<b>Has the state passed legislation around developmental education curricular reform?</b>	
<b>Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved policy around developmental education curricular reform?</b>	
<b>Has the state passed legislation around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?</b>	
<b>Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved a policy around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?</b>	
<b>Has the state/system developed a strategic plan or initiative around developmental education and/or assessment?</b>	





- **Standards:** In 2006, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1, “Advancement of College Readiness in Curriculum” which required the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to establish Vertical Teams (VTs) to develop the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (TxCCRS). These teams were composed of secondary and postsecondary faculty.

In 2007, the VTs developed standards that were approved in 2008 and incorporated into the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).<sup>1</sup>

- **Legislation:** In 2011, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature passed three key bills regarding developmental education reform:<sup>v</sup>
  - **HB 1244:** Assessment of student readiness under the Texas Success Initiative mandated the creation of a new system-wide single diagnostic placement test.
  - **HB 3468:** Early college readiness assessments, adult education assessment, and developmental education required a study of best practices, costs and effectiveness of various interventions models.
  - **SB 162:** As a result of this legislation, the Coordinating Board developed the state’s second statewide developmental education plan based on lessons learned from previously funded projects (see description below under Strategic Planning).<sup>vi</sup>
- **Regulation:** In early 2012, the THECB amended developmental regulations to include options such as course-pairing, non-course-based, modular, and other interventions.
- **Strategic Planning:** The 2012-17 Statewide Developmental Education Plan builds on the 2009 plan by identifying promising practices identified as important to improving developmental education, including:<sup>vii</sup>
  - **Accelerated Instructional Strategies:** Colleges will be required to implement integrated reading/writing, non-course competency-based, concurrent enrollment models, modular courses, and intensive bridge/college programs. Colleges will still have some discretion, however, regarding placement practices and intervention levels.
  - **Individualized Advising/Interventions:** Using the diagnostic profile from the new assessment, along with considering prior academic coursework and non-cognitive factors (*e.g.*, family life issues, motivation, and self-efficacy), advisors would use a “holistic” student profile to place students in appropriate interventions.<sup>viii ix</sup>
  - **Staff/Faculty Supports:** Professional development for faculty and advisors associated with the new developmental education reforms (*e.g.*, integrated reading and writing, utilization of student data).

### 3. Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reforms

In both assessment and curriculum design, Texas took steps to build on the new college and career readiness standards. Learning outcomes for the new developmental education curriculum for math, English, and ESL were created in late 2012. Implementation of courses based on those learning outcomes will be staggered, leading with English due to ongoing projects for new math curriculum interventions (see Table 3).

<b>When was the response deadline for the assessment RFP?</b>	February 28, 2012
<b>Is the test format web based and adaptive?</b>	
<b>Is the diagnostic assessment component mandatory?</b>	
<b>Has the state/system developed a new developmental education curriculum tools in math and English?</b>	In Process
<b>Is the new assessment system required to be accessible to students requiring accommodations?</b>	
<b>Is an ESL version of the assessment required?</b>	
<b>Were the curriculum and assessment designed concurrently or separately?</b>	Separately
<b>Have reforms in the developmental education curriculum in math and English taken place concurrently or separately?</b>	Concurrently

<sup>1</sup> Texas College and Career Readiness Standards at <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/files/dmfile/CCRS081009FINALUTRevisions.pdf>



Through the 2009 Statewide Developmental Education Plan, considerable funds have been provided by the state to support various types of developmental education initiatives in math and English, such as the developmental education demonstration projects (DEDPs), bridging programs, accelerated developmental education projects, the Community College Developmental Education Initiative, and the FOCUS Program. The state is in the process of determining best practices and the overall direction of the state in the area of developmental education.

### Math Curriculum Redesign

Statewide learning outcomes for the basic developmental education math and Student Success courses will be developed in spring 2013. Following the completion of the CCA Challenge Grant and the New Mathways Project, next steps with those initiatives will be determined:

- **Focus Program:** In 2011, Texas received a Completion Innovation Challenge grant from Complete College America (CCA) to improve developmental math education in the state through the FOCUS Program. Stemming from Dr. Selena Mireles' work at Texas State University, San Marcos, the intervention uses a career-based orientation for the instruction of developmental mathematics skills aligned with the TxCCRS and the THEA mathematics assessment.<sup>x</sup>
- **New Mathways Project:** In partnership with the Texas Association of Community College and the University of Texas Dana Center, this initiative mirrors Dr. Mireles' work but uses a year-long sequence along with student supports based on the declared pathway of study (i.e. quantitative literacy, statistics pathway or traditional college algebra).<sup>xi</sup>

### English Curriculum Redesign

By spring 2014, it is expected that all public institutions of higher education will use an integrated model that allows reading and writing skills to be taught in one course. The curriculum for the course will be aligned with TxCCRS and are also based on learning outcomes in both reading and writing developed by faculty content experts.<sup>xii</sup>

### Placement and Diagnostic Assessment

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved the awarding of a contract to the College Board for the development of the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Assessment, using the Accuplacer platform.<sup>xiii</sup> It will be aligned to the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards and National Reporting System's Educational Functioning Level Descriptors for Adult Education.<sup>2</sup> The test is meant to serve three purposes:

1. Identify students as college-ready based on a single, statewide cut-score,
2. Create a diagnostic profile strengths and weaknesses for students who are identified as not college ready, and
3. Determine appropriate placements for non-college ready students into developmental or adult education levels.<sup>xiv</sup>

The new assessment is scheduled to be implemented by the fall of 2013 and tests reading, writing (including a writing sample) and mathematics skills. The test will provide data for a diagnostic profile to determine differentiated placement. In addition, institutions will be required to assess students holistically using multiple factors such as prior academic coursework, non-cognitive elements such as motivation and self-efficacy, and family-life issues.

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<sup>2</sup> These descriptors include Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and ESL.

## Diagnostic Assessment Development Process

- **Curriculum and Assessment Development:** Texas began developing its new assessment system in early 2012, separately from curricular reforms. While reforms in both assessment and curriculum have been developed along a similar timeline, they have not been designed to necessarily inform one another. Instead, assessment and curriculum reforms have been driven by the TxCCRS.
- **Reforms in both Math and English:** The learning outcomes for both developmental education subjects were created concurrently, along with reform initiatives in both areas. These outcomes will also be aligned to the TxCCRS. Timelines for implementation in math and English may be different but the system has supported initiatives in both subjects at the same time.

## Assessment Alignment and Content

Texas has not adopted the Common Core State Standards, but specifies that the assessment system align with standards of the TxCCRS and “critical TEKS and CCRS performance expectations that support reading, writing and Algebra end of course exams used in Texas public high schools to determine college readiness, and the basic skills as identified under the NRS EFLD” (Educational Functioning Level Descriptors). The length of the assessment was limited to 4 hours (see Table 4).

Table 4: Alignment, Content and Length Requirements of Assessments Outlined in RFP

<b>Is the assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to state-specific-standards?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to the developmental education curriculum?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include reading, writing and math content?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include a writing sample?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>What is the length limitation for the assessment?</b>	<b>4 hours</b>

## 4. Faculty and Vendor Involvement in Curriculum and Assessment Implementation

### Faculty

Throughout the developmental education reform process, faculty have played a variety of roles, from helping create the TxCCRS, to reviewing test items, to reformatting learning objectives for developmental education courses. Currently, the THECB is recruiting faculty to review sample items and work on standard setting<sup>xv</sup> (see Table 5).

Table 5. Involvement of Faculty in Curriculum and Assessment Design

<b>Faculty were/will be involved in curriculum development</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the development of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the review of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in setting performance standards</b>	<b>Y</b>

- **Curriculum Development:** Faculty members have been working on the Academic Course Guide Manual and recently, new learning outcomes for the developmental education courses were created. Moving forward, the THECB will work with community college faculty as they develop integrated reading and writing courses and new non-conventional intervention models.<sup>xvi</sup>
- **Assessment Development:** As stated in the RFP, faculty members from the Developmental Education Advisory Committee and TSI Assessment Team members evaluated demonstrations of the new assessment system. In January 2013, faculty members will review test items and set standards.<sup>xvii</sup>
- **Performance Standards:** Currently, the THECB sets a minimum cut score while providing institutions with the autonomy to raise their score. Alongside the development of a single assessment, the THECB is also implementing a single cut score for all institutions which cannot be modified by institutions.

#### Vendor

The College Board will provide training to test administrators in the state’s community and technical colleges and maintain a dedicated helpline to respond to real-time problems. Students will be able to access online practice tests aligned to the CCRS.<sup>xviii</sup> The College Board has also been active in communicating with Texas’ higher education community, taking part in several conferences statewide (see Table 6).<sup>xix</sup>

Table 6. Vendor Involvement in Assessment Training and Support

<b>Vendor will provide training</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide regular technical support</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide practice tests to students</b>	<b>Y</b>

## 5. Reporting Assessment Data

Texas’ RFP required reporting for the student, institutional, and state levels and the THECB will receive “an annual report of the number of unduplicated examinees tested and the number of assessments administered statewide and by gender, ethnicity, testing accommodation, and institution.”<sup>xx</sup>

Table 7. Reporting Requirements for the Vendor

<b>Link to state/system data networks</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Provide reports to the system</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Provide reports to the state</b>	<b>Y</b>

<b>Provide reports to the institution</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Students will receive customized reports</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Access for institutions and systems to test results</b>	<b>Y</b>

The Texas RFP requires reporting for the “student, institutional, and state levels” and stipulates that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board must receive “an annual report of the number of unduplicated examinees tested and the number of assessments administered statewide and by gender, ethnicity, testing accommodation, and institution.” While there is no link to a system data network at this time, a respondent explained that the College Board is working on institutional access to a data warehouse while adhering to FERPA regulations that will allow identified administrators to access student testing information. The THECB will train advisors and institutional staff to utilize data to better address each student’s unique needs. Beyond placing students, diagnostic reports will be created for students classified as not college ready or at the adult basic education level. Further, a state respondent explained that the data could be used for ‘report cards’ to help the Texas Education Agency and K12 districts identify how effective they are in preparing students to meet college and career readiness standards.<sup>xxi</sup>

## 6. Lessons Learned

Respondents identified a number of successes regarding the process of developing a new developmental education curriculum and state assessment system:

- **Uniform standards and assessment:** The ability to have consistent assessments and cut scores across the state based on the CCRS was identified as a strength. One respondent commented: “you have to really look to the standards first; then you have to develop your instruction and...interventions.”
- **Engaging faculty in the process:** It is important to have faculty participation to create buy-in and ensure alignment to the standards. Ultimately, faculty will be implementing the reforms in the classroom, so they need to understand and support the initiatives.
- **Including non-cognitive measures:** Students are to be assessed and advised “holistically” using multiple measures such as prior academic coursework, non-cognitive elements such as motivation and self-efficacy, and family-life issues
- **Buy-in:** There appears to be a solid commitment from key stakeholders throughout the state: legislators, Coordinating Board, institution leaders, and faculty have come together to work towards reform.<sup>xxii</sup>

Stakeholders have also experienced challenges in the work:

- **Communicating with colleges:** System administrators had difficulty getting the information to the individuals who needed it, and tried to address this issue by using different methods of communicating (*e.g.*, memos, conferences, professional development, and trainings). Currently, they are in the process of identifying one person at each institution to serve as the main contact.
- **Long-term funding:** Given economic challenges in state government, implementation and maintenance of these reforms could be complicated over the long run.<sup>xxiii</sup>

# Texas Developmental Education and Assessment Timeline

**2003**

**2003**

- Legislature adopted the Texas Success Initiative (TSI)

**2006**

- House Bill 1 passed requiring the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to develop the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (TX CCRS)

**2008**

- TX CCRS adopted and incorporated in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

**2009**

- Coordinating Board administered the Developmental Education Program Survey (DEPS) and required all public two- and four-year institutions to participate
- Legislature appropriated \$5 million to THECB for the Developmental Education Demonstration Project (DEDP)
- THECB released an RFP for community and technical colleges to become DEDP sites
- Texas chosen to participate in DEI

**2010**

- THECB released the *Accelerated Plan for Closing the Gaps by 2015*
- DEDP launched at five community colleges

**2011**

- Texas awarded Completion Innovation Challenge grant
- Three bills related to Developmental Education pass: HB 1244, HB 3468, SB 162

**2012**

- THECB issued an RFP to develop a single college readiness assessment system
- College Board selected to develop the TSI Assessment
- Statewide implementation of New Mathways Project (NMP)

**2013**

- TSI assessment will be aligned with the TX CCRS
- Full scale implementation of the TSI Assessment with approved standards

**2013**

## Texas Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Enrollment data includes both full and part time students and is from the U.S. Department of Education (Fall 2010) as reported by the Almanac of Higher Education 2012: Texas State Profile. The Chronicle of Higher Education at <http://chronicle.com/article/Texas-Almanac-2012/133876/>
- <sup>ii</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>iii</sup> <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=158085DA-AC07-66AC-1759FB255CA09DoF>
- <sup>iv</sup> Progress Report on P-16 College Readiness and Success Strategic Plan: Submitted to the 82nd Texas Legislature, Legislative Budget Board, and Governor's Office in compliance with Texas Education Code, Section 61.0761(d) Texas Education Agency and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (December 1, 2010) at <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=7FD77659-E087-B26F-8E8508CBC054642D>
- <sup>v</sup> <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/files/dmfile/LegislativeSummaryReport82ndFINALRevised729.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> Developmental Education Best Practices: A Report to the Texas Legislature in Response to Rider 52, General Appropriations Act, 82nd Texas Legislature from Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (January 1, 2013).
- <sup>vii</sup> <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3>
- <sup>viii</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>ix</sup> <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=233A17D9-F3D3-BFAD-D5A76CDD8AADD1E3>
- <sup>x</sup> Accelerated Plan for Closing the Gaps by 2015 (April 29, 2010), Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board at <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/2005.PDF?CFID=31031906&CFTOKEN=83357092>
- <sup>xi</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>xii</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>xiii</sup> College Board. Press Release: Texas to Develop New Statewide Diagnostic and Placement System for Institutions of Higher Education at <http://press.collegeboard.org/releases/2012/texas-develop-new-statewide-diagnostic-and-placement-system-institutions-higher-education>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Texas RFP
- <sup>xv</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Texas RFP
- <sup>xviii</sup> Texas RFP
- <sup>xix</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>xx</sup> Texas RFP
- <sup>xxi</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Interview with State Respondent November, 2012.

## Developmental Education and Diagnostic Assessment Reform State Profile: Virginia

Through online research and document reviews, state- and system-level interviews, and analysis of recent Requests for Proposals (RFP), the following profile has been developed to outline the policy context and implementation of developmental education and diagnostic assessment reform in Virginia, especially as they pertain to the community college level. The profile was verified by state interview respondents; data included in the profile offers a stand-alone summary and will be used for cross-state analysis. The profile addresses six areas: 1) catalysts for reform, 2) policy developments, 3) developmental education and system-wide assessment reforms, 4) faculty and vendor involvement, 5) reporting assessment data and 6) lessons learned, and then concludes with a timeline of the reforms in the state.

Table I. Fast Facts

<b>State Community College System</b>	Virginia Community College System (VCCS)
<b>Number of Colleges/Campuses</b>	23 colleges, 40 campuses
<b>Number of Students Served</b>	197,004 <sup>i</sup>
<b>Current or Previous Placement Assessment(s)</b>	Compass or Accuplacer: Varied by institution
<b>New System-Wide Diagnostic Placement Assessment System and Vendor Selected</b>	Virginia Placement Tests (VPT) in Math and English, McCann Associates

### I. Catalysts for Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reform

A number of factors have influenced Virginia’s work around both developmental education reform broadly and the VPT more specifically:

#### External Influences

- **Achieving the Dream (ATD):** In 2004, five Virginia community colleges joined the ATD initiative and began analyzing student outcome data as a means for informing developmental education reform; a sixth community college joined later.<sup>ii</sup> This initiative “changed the vocabulary” among state postsecondary leaders in terms of data-driven decision making. The state is now involved in the ATD State Policy Network as well.<sup>iii</sup>
- **Community College Research Center (CCRC):** Virginia commissioned a report from the CCRC that helped the state to identify developmental math as critical to improving student completion rates.<sup>iv</sup>
- **Developmental Education Initiative (DEI):** Virginia is one of six states involved with the DEI since 2009; the DEI’s state strategy includes data driven improvement, state-level investment and policy supports.<sup>v</sup>
- **Florida and North Carolina:** Virginia policymakers have consulted with colleagues from both states who have undertaken similar work.

## Internal Influences

- **State Board for Community Colleges and Chancellor Glenn DuBois:** Both have been champions of developmental education reform from the outset, working jointly to develop the first VCCS strategic plan, *Dateline 2009*, and later *Achieve 2015*. The chancellor sponsors a week-long professional development series for developmental education faculty.
- **College presidents:** In Virginia, the Advisory Council of Presidents is at the center of approving new VCCS policies, such as common placement scores, and has likewise helped lead and scale developmental education initiatives.
- **VCCS Reengineering Task Force:** Redesign of the developmental education curriculum and creation of the new diagnostic assessments have been part of an overall reengineering of the system.
- **Developmental Education Task Force (DETF):** The VCCS Academic and Student Affairs Council convened the DETF in 2008 to review the system’s developmental education policies and increase student progress through courses and towards graduation; the initiative was supported by DEI.<sup>vi</sup> The DETF presented its recommendations in the report, *The Turning Point* (2009).

## 2. Policy Developments

Broadly speaking, Virginia has not required legislative and regulatory changes to support or advance initiatives (see Table 2).



Key for Table 2 through Table 6	
 YES	 NO

Table 2. Policy in Support of Developmental Education and Assessment Reforms

<b>Has the state/system established standards for developmental education content or college level coursework readiness?</b>	
<b>Has the state passed legislation around developmental education curricular reform?</b>	
<b>Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved policy around developmental education curricular reform?</b>	
<b>Has the state passed legislation around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?</b>	
<b>Has the state board responsible for community colleges approved a policy around a single placement and/or diagnostic assessment?</b>	
<b>Has the state/system developed a strategic plan or initiative around developmental education and/or assessment?</b>	

- **Standards:** Student learning outcomes and entry-level competencies were determined for each of the courses that make up the new curriculum in math and English. College readiness expectations have not been created.
- **Legislation:** The state legislature has not passed laws related to developmental education or assessment.
- **Regulation:** While relevant regulatory packages pass through the state board, community college presidents and ultimately the chancellor have been afforded broad decision-making authority in this area.



- **Strategic Planning:** The system reengineering plan and strategic plans (Dateline 2009 and Achieve 2015) have driven many of the state’s reforms.

### 3. Developmental Education and System-wide Assessment Reforms

Virginia has been involved in reforming developmental education curriculum for almost a decade, and the “comprehensive nature of the redesign has included a new placement and diagnostic assessment as an essential part of the plan” (see Table 3).<sup>vii</sup>

Table 3. Developmental Education and Assessment Reform Status<sup>viii</sup>

<b>When was the response deadline for the assessment RFP?</b>	September 15, 2010
<b>Is the test format required to be web based and adaptive?</b>	Y
<b>Is the diagnostic assessment component mandatory?</b>	Y
<b>Has the state/system developed a new developmental education curriculum tools in math and English?</b>	Y
<b>Is the new assessment system required to be accessible to students requiring accommodations?</b>	N <sup>1</sup>
<b>Is an ESL version of the assessment required?</b>	N
<b>Were the curriculum and assessment designed concurrently or separately?</b>	Concurrently
<b>Have reforms in the developmental education curriculum in math and English taken place concurrently or separately?</b>	Separately
<b>Is the assessment system used outside of community colleges?</b>	Y

#### Math Curriculum Redesign

In 2010, the Developmental Mathematics Redesign Team (DMRT) released *The Critical Point*, providing specific recommendations for developmental mathematics courses across the VCCS. Recommendations included:

- revising the content of the developmental mathematics curriculum with three different pathways contingent on a student’s program of study;
- organizing the content into nine pre-college units of study; and
- developing new placement and diagnostic instruments.

The DMRT also recommended that the VCCS search for a testing vendor that would provide:

- an adaptive placement instrument, reflecting the revised developmental curriculum;
- customized diagnostic instruments based on each pre-college unit;
- an item-level analysis of test results; and
- web-based access from any computer through secure log-ins.<sup>ix</sup>

In 2011, faculty, college leaders, and administrators released the math curriculum guide, providing nine one-unit modules that focus on math skills and concepts to be covered in developmental education, along with a basic skills module for those who need Adult Basic Education services. The module(s) a student takes depends on their academic goals and assessment results. For instance, liberal arts students are only required to prove mastery in modules 1-5, while science and math students are required to complete 6-9 successfully as well.

<sup>1</sup> The VPT tests have been made ADA-compliant, with release of those modifications in November 2012.

## English Curriculum Redesign

The Developmental English Redesign Team (DERT) issued *The Focal Point* in 2011 with recommendations centering on:

- restructuring developmental English as an integrated reading and writing system, with three direct pathways<sup>2</sup> to English 111 determined by a student's placement test score and performance against specific learning outcomes; and
- implementing a reading and writing placement instrument that aligns with the integrated course structure and includes a comprehensive academic support system.

Guidelines for reading and writing followed. In English, the curriculum will not be module-based; rather, reading and writing will be taught together based on eight learning outcomes. The corresponding English curriculum is scheduled to be in place by spring 2013.

### Placement and Diagnostic Assessment

- **VPT in Math:** The VCCS piloted the test items in spring 2011 and rolled out new mathematics instruments that guide student placement decisions starting November 2011. The new math assessment has two interwoven components:
  - *computer-adaptive placement* to determine whether a student has mastered the content included in the modules, and is therefore ready for credit-bearing courses; and
  - *non-computer-adaptive* for students not yet ready for credit-bearing courses; this component determines the modules to which a student should be directed for extra support.<sup>x</sup>

Based on assessment results, students will be placed in a particular math unit—or referred to Adult Basic Education.

- **VPT in English:** In August 2012, the VCCS finalized the Virginia Placement Test for English after field testing items in March 2012; the assessment came on line in October for students enrolling in the spring 2013 semester. The VPT English test consists of two parts:
  - *essay*; and
  - *computer-adaptive placement addressing reading and writing*.

The writing section is scored based on paragraph and sentence organization and structure, the quality of content, overall unity, coherence, thesis statement, topic sentences, spelling, and grammar. Reading selections are followed by multiple choice questions to evaluate comprehension.

In addition to placement for incoming college students, community colleges have used the assessments with high school students to determine eligibility for dual enrollment courses.

### Diagnostic Assessment Development Process

- **Curriculum and Assessment Development:** The developmental education curriculum has been the driving force in the development of the assessments. Plans for the reform included both curricular

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<sup>2</sup> Pathways include:

- Bridge Course: Students who score just below the cut-score on the new assessment will take English 111 while simultaneously taking a two-credit course for extra support;
- Moderate Support: Students who score somewhat lower on the assessment will enroll in a four-unit developmental education course from which they can move into English 111 or a bridge course; and
- Extensive Support: Students who score at the lowest level take an eight-unit developmental education course from which they can move into English 111 or the bridge course.

change and an assessment system with results based on the curriculum and student learning outcomes, so that results inform the placement of a student within the developmental education curriculum.

- **Reforms in both Math and English:** Development and implementation of the math and English curriculum and assessment occurred separately, with math first based on the findings by the CCRC. Working through the subject areas separately allowed stakeholders involved to learn from the math process in order to inform and streamline the work in English.

### Assessment Alignment and Content

Virginia’s RFP required that the V.P.T. only be aligned to the new developmental education curriculum; the state has not adopted the Common Core State Standards. The length of the assessment was also not specified (see Table 4).

Table 4: Alignment, Content and Length Requirements of Assessments Outlined in RFP

<b>Is the assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to state-specific-standards?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Is the assessment aligned to the developmental education curriculum?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include reading, writing and math content?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Is the assessment required to include a writing sample?</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>What is the length limitation for the assessment?</b>	Not specified

The RFP was vague related to assessment alignment and content; while the assessment is required to align with the VCCS curriculum and student learning outcomes, specifics of the outcomes and curriculum were not provided.

## 4. Faculty and Vendor Involvement in Curriculum and Assessment Implementation

### Faculty

In both math and English, faculty representatives from each of the 23 colleges have been involved in the reforms. “They (faculty) did the heavy lifting” explained one respondent.<sup>xi</sup>

Table 5. Involvement of Faculty in Curriculum and Assessment Design

<b>Faculty were/will be involved in curriculum development</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the development of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in the review of test items</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Faculty were/will be involved in setting performance standards</b>	<b>Y</b>

- **Curriculum Development:** Curriculum development teams included representatives from all 23 community colleges, along with policymakers and other stakeholders. Teams made recommendations for the new developmental education curriculum, and then developed the curriculum itself, along with corresponding student learning outcomes.
- **Assessment Development:** Placement Test Teams have included ten faculty and two assessment coordinators serving as subject matter experts and assisting the vendor, including in the formulation of cut score recommendations.<sup>xii</sup>
- **Performance Standards:** The process for determining cut scores included a small team of faculty who were subject matter experts and worked with the vendor and VCCS on reviewing sample test items, establishing blueprints for the test and recommending cut scores.<sup>xiii</sup>

#### Vendor

The RFP specified that “the vendor will provide training to VCCS colleges on ways to optimize the functionality of all components of the placement system” and ensure that there is adequate and timely technical support. In response to those requirements (see Table 6):

- Training has been conducted for test administrators, vice presidents, deans, and student services representatives;
- The McCann Help desk provides a resource for colleges as questions arise; and
- VPT Practice Tests have been provided, along with extensive online resources students can use in preparation for the assessment.<sup>xiv</sup>

Table 6. Vendor Involvement in Assessment Training and Support

<b>Vendor will provide training</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide regular technical support</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Vendor will provide practice tests to students</b>	<b>Y</b>

## 5. Reporting Assessment Data

Along with requiring that “student scores and remediation recommendations...be automatically exported into the student information system upon completion of any instrument,” Virginia requested reports for the VCCS, each institution, and customized reports that will “provide students with scores along with a report that includes item analysis and customized remediation recommendations.” According to interview respondents, the vendor has indeed been providing data to the system office that is linked to the system’s Student Information System and has been analyzed by VCCS staff.

Table 7. Reporting Requirements for the Vendor as Outlined in the RFP

<b>Link to state/system data networks</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Provide reports to the system</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Provide reports to the state</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Provide reports to the institution</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Students will receive customized reports</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Access for institutions and systems to test results</b>	<b>Y</b>

## 6. Lessons Learned

Virginia is seen as a leader in developmental education reform, and has found successes in a number of areas:

- **Using data to inform the work:** One interview respondent said that “getting grounded in the data” was essential to making the case for system-wide reform.<sup>xv</sup>
- **Including faculty in the process:** Engaging faculty in every part of the work has been central to the success experienced to date; faculty members have received training and support, and have been included in the decision-making process.
- **Communicating broadly:** “Communicate, communicate, communicate” stated one interview respondent. Allow for continuous improvement through feedback from the field.<sup>xvi</sup>

One challenge was also identified as part of the process:

- **Engaging faculty from across the system:** While engagement with faculty was seen as a success, it can also be challenging to gather representatives from across the system and achieve consensus with a large number of participants.

# Virginia Developmental Education and Assessment Timeline

**2003**

**2003**

- VCCS released *Dateline 2009*, a system-wide six-year plan

**2004**

- VCCS joined *Achieving the Dream*

**2008**

- VCCS convened the Developmental Education Task Force (DETF)

**2009**

- Virginia joined the *Developmental Education Initiative*
- DETF issued *The Turning Point*, which included developmental education redesign
- VCCS released *Achieve 2015*, a six year plan building on *Dateline 2009*

**2010**

- Developmental Mathematics Redesign Team released *The Critical Point*
- RFP is released for a new web-based placement and diagnostic system

**2011**

- Mathematics Redesign Team published curriculum guide
- First Developmental Education Annual Report is published
- English Redesign Team released *The Focal Point*
- Virginia Placement Test for Mathematics (VPT-Mathematics) is rolled out

**2012**

- New developmental mathematics curriculum and courses are implemented VCCS-wide
- Virginia Placement Test for English (VPT-English) is rolled out

**2013**

- Implementation VCCS-wide of new developmental English curriculum and courses

**2013**

## Virginia Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Enrollment data includes both full and part time students and is from the U.S. Department of Education (Fall 2010) as reported by the Almanac of Higher Education 2012: Virginia State Profile. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* at <http://chronicle.com/article/Virginia-Almanac-2012/133856/>
- <sup>ii</sup> In 2007 ATD released Accelerating remedial math education: How institutional innovation and state policy interact, a policy brief that focused on developmental education at three institutions, including Virginia's Mountain Empire Community College [http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/RemedialMath\\_3.pdf](http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/RemedialMath_3.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012; Achieving the Dream at [http://www.achievingthedream.org/news/achieving\\_the\\_dream\\_to\\_help\\_states\\_reform\\_higher\\_ed](http://www.achievingthedream.org/news/achieving_the_dream_to_help_states_reform_higher_ed)
- <sup>iv</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012.
- <sup>v</sup> Jobs for the Future. The Developmental Education Initiative: State Policy Framework & Strategy at [http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI\\_State\\_Policy\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/DEI_State_Policy_Framework.pdf)
- <sup>vi</sup> The Turning Point Report (September 2009), pages 4-5 at [https://www.vccs.edu/Portals/o/ContentAreas/AcademicServices/The\\_Turning\\_Point\\_DETF\\_Report\\_200909.pdf](https://www.vccs.edu/Portals/o/ContentAreas/AcademicServices/The_Turning_Point_DETF_Report_200909.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012.
- <sup>viii</sup> Information in this table were drawn from the Virginia Request for Proposals (RFP# VCCS-ASR-11-001) and interviews with State Respondents, December 2012.
- <sup>ix</sup> The Critical Point: Redesigning Developmental Mathematics in Virginia's Community Colleges. Report of the Developmental Mathematics Redesign Team, August 2010 at [http://www.vccs.edu/Portals/o/ContentAreas/AcademicServices/The\\_Critical\\_Point-DMRT\\_Report\\_082010\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.vccs.edu/Portals/o/ContentAreas/AcademicServices/The_Critical_Point-DMRT_Report_082010_pdf.pdf)
- <sup>x</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012.
- <sup>xi</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012.
- <sup>xii</sup> Rethink: Reengineering Virginia's Community College's (VCCS) at: <http://rethink.vccs.edu/progress/redesign-developmental-education/>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Rethink: Reengineering Virginia's Community College's (VCCS) at: <http://rethink.vccs.edu/progress/redesign-developmental-education/>
- <sup>xv</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Interview with State Respondent, December 2012.