Accelerating Student Success
How Credit-Based Transition Programs
Can Serve a Broad Range of Students

OVERVIEW

The U.S. Department of Education is undertaking a study of credit-based transition programs (CBTPs)[1] called the *Accelerating Student Success* project. The study is being carried out by the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University (CCRC); and DTI Associates, Inc. The purpose of the study is to investigate the ways in which CBTPs may support the transition of middle- to low-achieving students from secondary to postsecondary institutions. There are five primary components of the study:

- **Focus groups and interviews** to better understand the structure of programs that serve a broad range of students;

- **State policy analysis report** that explores state-level policies supporting or inhibiting CBTPs[2];

- **Case studies** of long-standing programs that highlight how they are structured and managed, with a focus on the academic preparation and social support services provided to students;

- **Cross-case analysis report** that identifies the characteristics of programs that support the participation of middle- and low-achieving students; and

- **Final report** that summarizes all the data collection for this project, including two national surveys, FRSS and PEQIS, being conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics.

This report summarizes the findings from the focus groups and individual interviews. Three focus groups and five telephone interviews were conducted between December 2003 and March 2004. Participants—selected according to specified criteria—included experienced instructors and administrators in long-standing comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive[3] credit-based transition programs. Additional information about the methodology, including the criteria for participant selection and the focus group protocol, can be found in the Appendix.

The purpose of the focus groups and interviews was to collect data concerning the characteristics of high-quality comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive credit-based transition programs (CBTPs), as well as the programmatic structures and practices through which CBTPs might serve a broad range of students. A final theme that was explored was the programs' means of measuring program outcomes.

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1 Credit-based transition programs allow high school students to take college-level classes and earn college credit while still in high school. These programs include Tech Prep, dual/concurrent enrollment, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate (IB) and middle college high schools.

2 The state policy analysis will be available by October 2004.

3 In a review of the literature, Bailey and Karp (2003) categorize CBTPs into three categories: singleton, comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive. The latter two types of programs are more intense than the first and the authors conclude that they may better meet the needs of middle- and low-achieving students than singleton programs, which consist of college-level coursework without additional support. Singleton programs assume that students have the requisite skills and attitudes for college success, while comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive programs work to develop these skills.

The key findings from the focus groups and interviews are summarized below. Given the small sample size, and the exploratory nature of this component of the project, the findings present themes on which there was general agreement among teachers and administrators across the different types of credit-based transition programs. These findings, while not meant to be conclusive, have been used to develop criteria for the selection of a sample of case study sites to be visited during the next phase of the project. The findings have also been valuable in the development of a research framework that guides the remainder of the study.

FINDINGS

The findings are organized into three sections: characteristics of high quality programs, how programs can support middle- and low-achieving students, and data collection for outcomes measurement.

The Characteristics of High Quality Credit-Based Transition Programs

As expected—and reflecting the literature on credit-based transition programs—the structures of participants' programs varied widely. Variation was found both between program types and among programs of the same type. Presented below are the participants' views on the characteristics essential to a high-quality program.

Outstanding faculty, and professional development for faculty

There was general agreement that good teachers are the key to a quality program. Participants spoke of teachers' knowledge and experience, yet also of dedication to the program and students. The ideal teacher, according to participants, would have both high school and college teaching experience. High school-based teachers should develop the depth and breadth of subject-

matter knowledge that college faculty have. Participants also emphasized that outstanding teachers in these credit-based transition programs understand how college courses are designed and taught, both in terms of the rigor of the academic content and climate of the classroom. In terms of teachers' dedication, participants pointed out that the role of teachers in credit-based transition programs encompasses much more than teaching; they may serve as mentors, counselors, student advocates, or coaches, in providing special supports to students. Thus they must be "proactive and energetic" and highly motivated. Finally, a strong leader, or a "champion" for the program, is also critical.

Professional development was said to be essential to having outstanding faculty, as described above. Types of professional development discussed ranged from structured sharing of program information to district-level discipline-based training to dissemination of best practices. Participants expressed that teachers need to understand the general goals of the program, the ways in which the multiple program components work together to create a coherent experience for students, as well as the day-to-day administrative processes. Professional development activities at the program, district, and national levels can provide this essential information to all faculty; without this information, teacher buy-in to the program might be a challenge.

A strong curriculum

Participants agreed that a strong curriculum is essential. There was not strong agreement on whether the curriculum should be developed by the high school or the college, or whether the curriculum should be specific to dual enrollment courses or the same as regular college courses. Instead, participants focused on the content of the curriculum and the importance of building students' basic skills as well as providing

intellectual challenge. Students who have not been academically successful in the past are not likely to be prepared for college-level work immediately upon entering a credit-based transition program. The strength of comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive CBTPs is that they are long-term, so time can be taken to prepare students for college-level academics. As such, the curriculum in these programs should be developmental or sequential, so that students develop the academic skills necessary for success in college credit courses.

Pre-college courses should seek to prepare students for the demands of college-level academics through the strengthening of basic skills. Such pre-college work will ensure that students can be successful in their credit-bearing courses, and may most effectively begin with younger students, such as ninth graders or even middle school students. Even though such courses are not for college credit, the coursework should be challenging to students and should provide them with the opportunity to "stretch" academically. Non-college-credit courses should also capture students' attention. Some programs do this by offering coursework that explores timely and relevant topic areas, as well as providing off-site learning experiences such as cultural events. Participants stated that such experiences, as well as the prospect of avoiding college remedial courses, serve to motivate students.

Participants emphasized that the integrity of college credit courses should be maintained. Such courses should use college-level textbooks and be created in conjunction with (if not explicitly by) college academic departments. Students should be expected to complete assignments similar to those as regularly matriculated college students and should be graded by the same standards. One coordinator

explained, "You can't really water it down. You've got to give them the real thing... So, a good curriculum is one that absolutely is freshman-level in all respects..." Regardless of the level of the course or program type, participants were adamant that writing be strongly emphasized. They stated that strong writing skills are essential to students' success in making the secondary-to-postsecondary transition.

An emphasis on non-academic factors

By definition, comprehensive credit-based transition programs focus on academic enrichment and rigor, while enhanced comprehensive programs provide academic preparation with an additional focus: social and psychological preparation for college. Enhancing social and personal skills as well as academic skills is a way of addressing all elements of the secondary-to-postsecondary transition. Even participants from comprehensive programs noted the need to prepare students for the social elements of postsecondary education. Examples of the non-academic support services provided are college visits, assistance with college applications, counseling, and mentoring. These activities can help students successfully apply to college and become comfortable on a college campus.

These non-academic support services are provided because many students who have not previously been successful in school are likely to need explicit lessons regarding the behavioral expectations of college-level study. Participants spoke of supporting students in their first weeks of a college course, to help them ease into the demands of the course. Regular one-on-one meetings are scheduled with students to assess progress and to problem-solve. One high school-based director of a dual enrollment program targeting very low-achieving students explained, "When kids go to college, many times, there are no support services at the school for these high

school kids. So, we create our own; and that seems to be very successful." For example, this director receives copies of college course syllabi and meets with the college professors so that she can closely oversee the students' progress.

At the same time, the provision of special support must be balanced with the development of students' independence because, as one participant remarked, "as of next September, they will be on their own, they will be college students." Instructors spoke of emphasizing to the students that they are responsible for seeking out their own extra help, doing their homework, taking class notes, or keeping track of their grades—and that the instructors will not always be checking students' progress. Though this information is not delivered through structured methods such as workshops, it can clearly be an important element, and CBTP staff members are conscious that they are teaching students new social skills. One instructor described this as helping students "learn how to learn."

Communication between the high school and the college

While the programs represented in the interviews had different models with regard to whether the secondary or postsecondary school was the lead partner in terms of program control and management, participants stated that ideally programs should be a "team effort." There must be collaboration between, and commitment and buy-in from, all the educational partners. A strong liaison between the two schools is essential. Only then can there be the necessary, constant sharing of information—regarding the curriculum, teaching practices, students, support services, and so on. Participants spoke of the importance of face-to-face meetings between high school and college staff. One teacher said, "We create a rapport with the people at the college on behalf of the kids."

Thorough dissemination of information about the program to students and parents

One consistent theme, which was raised in more than one program type, is that for a program to thrive, strong efforts need to be made at program marketing.

Participants emphasized that ongoing and innovative means of program promotion is necessary to attract students and reach those who might not identify themselves as candidates. As a participant commented about her program, they "root out the kids who might not think they're college-bound... and get them in the program so they can think of themselves as college-bound." Participants do wish to tap a larger and wider pool of students. But, as one middle college high school teacher said, "People just do not really quite understand what we do..." Some participants have tried cultural and ethnic events to reach out to students and parents who might feel uncomfortable in more formal informational meetings. Another technique used by program staff is to become allies with school-based counselors in order to get their assistance with identifying potential enrollees.

In addition to including more school staff in recruitment, and reaching out to students and parents, participants identified the need for developing clear and in-depth program marketing materials. They felt that including these materials was important to give prospective and enrolling students a complete understanding of the program's goals and demands. Participants also felt that students should have a one-on-one counseling session upon enrollment to ensure their commitment to the program.

Marketing and dissemination of information to parents was also raised as a critical element of a successful program. Participants agreed that parents are important partners in quality

programs. Family support is crucial due to the challenging nature of CBTPs. A program staff member should have "parent liaison" as part of his or her official job description. One teacher said, "Maintaining relations with the parents or guardians of the kids is also a huge piece, getting them back into the loop of their children's education." One program holds sessions for parents on college financial aid resources and another includes parents in the interviews for prospective enrollees, as well as including them in the program orientation.

How Credit-Based Transition Programs Support the Transition of Middle- and Low-Achieving Students

A significant theme examined in the focus groups and interviews was how credit-based transition programs could expand their student base. There was disagreement among participants with regard to the question of how accessible college credit-bearing courses should be. The participants cautioned that middle- and low-achieving students might not have the preparation necessary to succeed in college credit-bearing courses. Rather, a multi-year curriculum should be structured to provide any needed skill building before the introduction of college-level courses. According to the participants, the following elements are particularly essential to programs targeting middle- and low-achieving students:

A sequential, developmental curriculum

As one teacher said, middle- and low-achieving students should have "a combination of remediation and college prep." As noted in the previous section, not all students enter credit-based transition programs prepared for college-level coursework. Participants cautioned that placing such students in college courses is counter-productive in two ways: students are set up for failure and may become further alienated

from school; and the integrity of college-level courses is endangered when unprepared students are enrolled.

Thus, some students need strong academic preparation, which may last a year or more, before enrollment in college classes. Participants noted that interdisciplinary, project-based, or enrichment courses extending beyond the traditional high school curriculum (such as a course offered in New York City called "Weird Science") may reignite students' interest in school—particularly among programs targeting the most disengaged students.

While emphasizing the need to engage students with innovative and interdisciplinary classes, participants also felt that students should be able to see a structured, progressive pathway leading to college enrollment. This pathway may begin with high school exit examination preparation, and lead through college placement examinations and, if necessary, college remedial coursework, as well as enrichment activities. In all cases, students should understand how their preparation activities lead to college-level coursework. Students in technically oriented programs should also understand the ways that their activities prepare them for employment.

In addition to helping students already enrolled in CBTPs succeed in their college courses, the implementation of a pathway leading to college-level coursework may help CBTPs attract a wider range of students. Providing developmental or remedial coursework means that programs need not limit themselves to students who are already capable of doing college-level work. Giving students the building blocks for college academics enables programs to include students with a wide range of academic backgrounds and intellectual strengths. One coordinator admitted that, for programs that only provide college credit courses,

"...we have to be looking at students who can do the appropriate level of work. So right there we're cutting out a group of students that shouldn't be part of that." Creating a developmental curriculum may minimize this problem and encourage the participation of a wide range of students, such as English language learners or potential high school dropouts.

Individualized attention

Participants stated that, to effect the academic and personal changes needed for this population of students to succeed in postsecondary education, personalized services are needed. One teacher described her program, which enrolls at-risk students, as helping students "turn over a new leaf and start afresh." This requires a range of support services that meets the particular needs of the individual students.

How the program is individualized to accommodate students' needs may occur along a number of dimensions including academics, study or non-academic skills needed for college, and personal counseling supports or service coordination. First, academics may be customized to students' needs. Students' strengths should be played to, while their weaknesses should be addressed in a systematic manner. Participants emphasized that lower-achieving students need to feel a sense of success regarding academics in order to motivate them and give them the confidence to think of college as an option. As one participant emphasized "They've been told all their lives they can't learn, you can't be successful...All at once the lights go on and then when you tell them that they've earned college credit...a lot of time that's all it takes for students to know they can be successful, and they'll go on and be successful." Students' newfound recognition of their academic skills can increase their confidence and motivation to attend postsecondary school.

Students may also need individualized supports to help them acquire study, organizational, or other nonacademic skills necessary for college success. Programs may provide workshops, mentoring, or counseling to help students develop these skills. One program conducts an assessment and counseling session for each new student, and during that time the student and counselor develop a plan to best meet the student's needs.

Finally, students may need additional support services, such as crisis intervention. Frequently, teachers are expected to fill this role, but a number of participants indicated that, if money allowed, a full-time counselor or student advocate would be useful. Such a staff member could ensure that the problems that many middle- and low-achieving students bring with them to school are addressed in a timely, constructive manner, thereby minimizing their influence on students' education.

Participants emphasized that, because students' needs are highly variable, programs must be flexible and responsive in offering some or all of these types of services. Some students may be low-achieving because of a learning disability and will need different supports than low-achieving students who are disengaged from school because of family problems. Ideally, program staff will be able to know their students and provide appropriate, individualized services. Many participants indicated, however, that funding and staffing shortages make their efforts to provide such services difficult.

The provision of general information about college

Many credit-based transition programs assist middle- and low-achieving students in their transition to college by teaching them about their postsecondary options, as well as how to apply to college and steer their way once there. As one teacher said, "The goal is to get them into college and to increase their chances of success... and

also learn enough about the college system so that if they do not get the associates degree and they go into the work world, and they want to come back into the system, that they feel confident that they know the ropes..." Credit-based programs help students to understand college application and financial aid processes, as well as have experiences on college campuses. These activities are particularly important for first-generation college students.

Data Collection For Outcomes Measurement

While those that participated in the focus groups and interviews understand the importance of data collection, most participants reported that their efforts focused on the day-to-day challenges of supporting students while in the program. In addition, different programs had different goals and thus different indicators of success, which makes comparing outcomes across programs difficult. Participants also noted that with limited resources, there is little tracking of students once they leave the programs.

Program staff tend to focus on immediate indicators of success rather than long-term outcomes

When asked about their own measures of success for their programs, participants' responses focused on short-term outcomes such as high school graduation and program retention rates. Most of the participants did not focus on long-term outcomes such as postsecondary enrollment, retention and graduation, but were primarily concerned with retaining and graduating their students from high school and the program. One teacher said, "to see them actually attending... that's my first measurement that they want to be here." Others said they feel the program is a success if the students pass their high school exit examinations and graduate from high school; if the students complete one college-credit course and enroll in another one; and if

students can gain employment in the industry area of the course.

There is differentiation between program completion data and program outcomes data

Participants said that most of the data they collect are of the short-term variety, such as program completion, instead of more long-term, program outcomes data, such as their students' postsecondary enrollment and graduation rates. Programs do keep data on student attrition from, and completion of, the program itself. However, programs do not track students very far, if at all, into their postsecondary experiences. As one teacher said, "Once they graduate from high school, I do not think anybody keeps track of anything." In some cases, this is because teachers' primary goal is to prepare students for high school exit and college entrance exams, rather than college persistence. In other programs, poor follow-up stems from a lack of resources to track students longitudinally.

Data are not regularly or systematically collected

Participants emphasized that data collection on student outcomes during and after their completion of the program tends to be anecdotal and inconsistent. The data collection that does occur tends to be informal, for example, through email with students. As one teacher said, "We actually email a lot of them the year after and find out if they are doing what they said they were going to do, and we probably get an 80 percent response from that." Some programs conduct pre- and post-program student surveys to measure students' expectations for, and subsequent satisfaction with, the program. For the most part, however, program outcome information relies on informal and anecdotal data.

Participants understand the need for data collection

Although the participants said that outcomes data are not regularly collected, most noted that in an

ideal credit-based program, they would have the funding, resources, and time to gather this information. With funding tight for many of the programs, and a nationwide focus on accountability, respondents indicated the desire for more data collection and outcomes analyses. As one program coordinator said, "We don't track—we don't track at all. We don't have the means to. We should, and we want it. As coordinators, we want help in tracking. But we haven't gotten it, and we don't have funding for it, and we don't have manpower for it. We should have, because we don't know where these kids are going."

CONCLUSION

In summary, focus group and interview participants confirmed that the goals of credit-based transition programs—to prepare high school students for, and give them access to, college-credit-bearing coursework—can be met in a variety of ways. Despite the variation, it is clear that programs attempting to serve middle- and low-achieving students provide them with college preparation assistance that extends well beyond traditional academic interventions.

The findings presented in this brief summarize the views expressed by focus group and interview participants. Based on their experiences, as either instructors or program coordinators, these are the elements usually found in high quality programs. Further research is needed to verify if these or other program elements support the transition of low- to mid-achieving students. According to the participants, high quality credit-based transition programs contain multiple components that work together to support students' preparation for college. This is particularly the case when such programs enroll middle- and low-achieving students. Rather than merely provide high school students with the opportunity to enroll in a college course, high quality credit-based transition programs provide pre-college-credit academic preparation and enrichment activities to help students with the social aspects of college preparation. A key element in ensuring that these multiple program components work synergistically is a strong, dedicated staff committed to meeting the many needs of their students, and supported through multiple opportunities for professional development. Thus, while the focus groups and interviews found a great deal of variation, it is also the case that the programs share common elements that can be identified and studied. It is not yet clear which of these elements most contributes to student success, and further research aims to isolate the elements that are the most promising.

As with most credit-based transition programs, participants indicated that they collected very little outcomes data for their programs. Frequently, this was not because of a lack of interest, but because of a lack of staff time or funding. Credit-based transition program staff members often "wear many hats," and do not have the time to engage in data collection or analysis. Additional funding to provide for such outcomes research would be helpful to these practitioners.

Appendix

The appendix contains the following sections:

- Section I: Criteria used to identify individuals that participated in the focus groups and interviews;

- Section II: Protocol; and

- Section III: Methodology.

Section I: Criteria for Respondents

I. Individual Qualifications

Criterion One: Focus group participants will represent a diverse array of comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive CBTPs including: International Baccalaureate, Tech Prep, middle college high schools and dual enrollment or dual credit programs.

Criterion Two: Participants will represent either a secondary or postsecondary institution.

Criterion Three: Focus group participants from comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive CBTPs will represent two categories of practitioners: program administrators/coordinators and instructors. A *program administrator* is responsible for the coordination of program activities, such as scheduling, curriculum and professional development. An *instructor* is someone whose primary responsibility is classroom instruction.

Criterion Four:
Administrators shall meet the following qualifications:

1   At least three years as program coordinator;

or at least two years as program coordinator **and** at least two years teaching in the program they currently coordinate; and

2   Have program coordination as their primary job function.

Instructors shall meet the following qualifications:

1   At the secondary level instructors shall have:

- at least five years of teaching experience (within or outside program);

- at least three years of current teaching experience within a credit-based program; and

- meet the requirements of a highly qualified teacher (HQT) as specified in the *No Child Left Behind Act*. A HQT has obtained a full state certification or licensure, has a minimum of a bachelor's degree and has demonstrated competence in their subject area.

2   At the postsecondary level instructors shall have:

- a minimum of a bachelor's degree, preferably a master's degree and at minimum, adjunct faculty status;

- five years of teaching experience at the postsecondary level; and

- taught at least three courses for a dual credit program or courses that included students that were dually enrolled.

II. Programmatic Factors

Criterion Five: Focus group participants will represent programs that have a coherent, articulated sequence of courses that support the academic and social transition of students from high school to a postsecondary institution. Programs that provide these services are categorized as either comprehensive or enhanced comprehensive CBTPS.

Comprehensive programs – programs that encompass much of a student's educational experience, and require that students take many, if not all, of their courses, usually during the last year or two of high school, as part of the program.

Enhanced Comprehensive programs – programs that prepare students for college, not only through rigorous academic instruction, but also through additional activities including: counseling, assistance with applications, mentoring and general personal support.[4]

Criterion Six: Programs represented by focus group participants will have been in operation for at least four years and have graduated at least one cohort of students.

Criterion Seven: Focus group participants from comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive CBTPs will be selected from geographically diverse communities and states.

SECTION II: PROTOCOL

I. Introductory Remarks

Hello and welcome. My name is _____, and I will be the moderator for this focus group.

This focus group is being conducted as a part of an overall study of credit-based transition programs. The study, Accelerating Student Success Through Credit-Based Transition Programs, is looking at the characteristics of high-quality credit-based transition programs, and how these programs can serve a broad range of students. Credit-based programs include such programs as Tech Prep, dual enrollment, International Baccalaureate and middle college high schools.

II. Purpose

You were selected to participate in today's meeting because of your experience in either coordinating/teaching in a credit-based program. As experienced coordinators/teachers; we wanted your input on the characteristics of high-quality credit-based programs and most importantly how this programs can serve a broad range of students. Our discussion today will cover your program operations, student outcomes, program quality, student characteristics and more.

III. Ground Rules

First, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to come here today. Before we begin, I want to cover some ground rules:

- In order to ensure that there are no interruptions, please turn off your cell phones and beepers at this time.

- You have been asked here to share your opinions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings.

- Everyone's comments are important to hear.

- There are no right or wrong answers.

- We are not trying to gain consensus – it is okay to disagree with each other (but be considerate of others).[5]

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4 Bailey, T. & Karp, M.M. (2003). Promoting College Access and Success: A Review of Credit-Based Transition Programs. Washington D.C.: Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education.

5. The ground rules listed above will be posted on a flipchart for all participants to see and for the moderator to reference.

The focus group process is a method for collecting information where questions are posed to the whole group and everyone is asked to respond. I do want to emphasize that there is a note-taker, _____, in the room/in an adjacent room. He/she will not be asking questions, they will only be taking notes of our discussion.

Today's discussion will be audio-recorded to ensure that we have an accurate report of what was said. Although we will refer to each other by name during the discussion, your confidentiality is ensured. Your name will be removed from all transcripts of today's conversation, and you will not be identified by name in any reports or documents. Additionally, we ask that you respect your fellow participants and keep our conversation today confidential.

In a group discussion, it is important that everyone participates and gives their honest opinions. I am here to help guide the discussion, and ensure that everyone participates. Once again, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that I will ask.

Our session will last approximately 90 minutes.

Before we begin, please take a moment to read and sign the following consent form. [Hand out consent form.] It outlines the purpose of the study and your rights as a participant. If you feel uncomfortable with any aspect of the study, you may decline to participate in the study without penalty. You may also leave our conversation at any time. The top copy of the form is yours to keep; please sign and return the bottom copy. Do you have any questions before we continue?

Focus group moderator should:

- Pass out consent form

- Answer any questions

- Collect signed forms

IV. Introductions

I'd like to begin by going around the room and asking each of you to introduce yourself by name, the type of program (ex: IB, Tech Prep, dual credit, etc.), and which school you are representing.

V. Questions

For the next several minutes I am going to ask questions about your programs. We want to understand your programs in greater detail.

A. Questions Relating to your Program and School

- **Description of your program:**

  - Location: Where are courses taught?

    - At the high school?

    - At the postsecondary partner?

    - It depends on the course? Specify (for example, are vocational courses taught at the postsecondary level?)

  - Management: How is the program managed?

    - From the secondary and/or postsecondary partner(s)?

    - Who controls the program?

    - Who has responsibility for the program?

  - Credits: How do students earn credits?

    - Upon course completion?

- After enrolling in the postsecondary institution?
- It depends on the course? Specify

■ Finance: How is your program funded and what is usually covered?

- State sources?
- District sources?
- Foundation sources?
- Combination of sources?

■ Support Services:

- What types of academic support services do you provide for your students?
- Does your program offer non-academic support activities (SAT prep workshops, college visits or assistance with college applications)?

■ For administrators:

- Who is responsible for curriculum development?
- What is the process used to develop or select the curriculum?
- Who is responsible for professional development?
- How do you assess the needs of the staff?
- What types of professional development is offered to your programs' staff?

■ For instructors:

- What is the process used to develop or select the curriculum?
- What is your involvement in this process?

- Describe the pedagogy that you use most frequently?
- Why do you choose to use these approaches?

■ **Who participates in your program?**

- What are the admissions requirements for enrollment?
- Do you target a specific type of student?
- Which students do not usually participate in your programs? Why?

■ **What would be your measures of success for your program?**

- How do you tell that your program is successful? By demand for the program? By the percentage who remain in the program? who graduate from high school? who transition to college?

■ **What types of outcome data do you collect for your program?**

- Do you collect short-term outcome data? (retention and graduation rates)
- Do you collect long-term outcome data? (college attendance, college retention/graduation, remediation rates, credit transfer)
- If you do not collect outcome data, why not?

■ **Which elements of your program might increase students' access to and success in college?**

■ Academic elements?
■ Non-academic elements?
■ Why do you think your program is

successful in helping students make the transition from high school to college?

B. Questions Regarding Credit-Based Transition Programs

For the next few minutes we need your help in understanding how we would define and identify a quality credit-based transition program.

- **What are the one or two things essential to making a credit-based transition program run well?**

- **How would you describe a quality credit-based transition program?**
  What does a high quality credit-based transition program "look like," in terms of:

  - Structure? (definition: the sequence of courses and the support services; more or less structure)

  - Management? (the management team, those that administer the program and are in charge of policy development and implementation)

  - Staffing? (those that teach)

  - Curriculum?

  - Instruction?

  - Professional development?

  - Enrichment activities? (what are the characteristics?)

We're also interested in whether credit-based transition programs can be for all students, or whether there are some models more suited to some students.

- **Should your programs reach a broader range of students?**

- **Why or why not?**

- **How might your programs reach a broader range of students?**

  - What are the special needs of middle- or low-achieving students as they prepare for college?

  - How might credit-based transition programs meet their needs?

- **If you were going to design a program that attracts a broader range of students, for example the "average" student, what changes would you introduce to:**

  - Program structure?

  - Curriculum and instruction?

  - Enrichment and support?

  - Collaborative mechanisms?

- **If you were to reach-out to an even broader group, maybe those students that are currently not engaged or are having problems in school, what would that program look like:**

  - Program structure?

  - Curriculum and instruction?

  - Enrichment and support?

  - Collaborative mechanisms?

  - If you don't think the program would differ, why not?

VI. Concluding Remarks

We've come to the end of our focus group. Before we adjourn, does anyone have anything further they'd like to add?

Thank you so much for your time. If you have any questions about the study, I'd be happy to answer them now. We appreciate your willingness to help us with the study.

Section III: Methodology: Research Questions, Data Collection and Analysis

The project team developed a Focus Group Research Plan that posed the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of high-quality comprehensive and enhanced CBTPs?

- How can credit-based transition programs serve a broader range of students?

- What changes, if any, need to occur in the following programmatic areas in order to serve a broader range of students: curriculum, instruction, staffing, management and leadership, and financing?

- What outcomes should be collected as part of a comprehensive accountability system for credit-based programs?

The project team conducted three, one-hour long focus groups and five individual phone interviews in order to seek input from experienced practitioners and administrators on the research questions outlined above. The project team defined the composition of types of programs and instructors/coordinators for the focus groups and interviews in advance. Four groups were selected and recruited according to the following categories:

- Comprehensive program coordinators (IB, Tech Prep, dual credit)

- Comprehensive program instructors (IB, Tech Prep, dual credit)

- Enhanced comprehensive program coordinators (dual enrollment, middle college high schools)

- Enhanced comprehensive instructors (dual enrollment, middle college high schools).

CCRC and DTI held the three focus groups in Dallas (comprehensive program instructors), Minneapolis (comprehensive program coordinators) and New York City (enhanced comprehensive program coordinators). Five individual telephone interviews were also conducted to include enhanced comprehensive program instructors from geographically diverse programs in Boston, Massachusetts (2 participants); New York City, New York; Reno, Nevada; and San Mateo, California.

As specified above, in order to ensure that participants had experience in long-standing, stable CBTPs, and a strong background in the program, participants were screened according to pre-determined criteria. The criteria were developed by the project team and based on the available literature addressing credit-based transition programs. Also building on the literature, the project team developed a semi-structured interview protocol as the primary data collection instrument. This protocol was used for both the focus groups and the individual interviews. Additionally, the three focus groups were moderated by the same professionally trained moderator.

All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. A note-taker from either CCRC or DTI was present at the focus group sessions to record impressions and any non-verbal communication that might be relevant to the data analysis. A coding framework method was used to analyze the data collected from the focus groups. Key findings were then drawn from the coded data to respond to the research questions.