



HOW ILLINOIS' COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS (CCR) PILOT SITES ADDRESS FIVE KEY GOALS

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Introduction

Despite the growth in college attendance that has resulted in enrollment at an all time high in the U.S., the percentage of students earning college degrees has remained relatively unchanged over the past 25 years (Conley, 2005). As Lederman (2009) points out, the United States is "sliding down the list of countries in the proportion of young adults with college credentials" (p. 1) because other countries' college completion rates are rising. To address this problem, in July 2009 President Obama unveiled the American Graduation Initiative proposal to provide a 10-year, \$12 billion investment in community colleges to boost college enrollment and graduation. An important goal of the new initiative is to use community colleges as a way to prepare a competent workforce and strengthen the nation's lagging economy. The President expressed confidence in the contribution community colleges can make to the economy by stating that, "We will not fill those jobs, or keep those jobs on our shores, without the training offered by community colleges" (as cited in Lothian, 2009, p.1).

One reason college completion is not keeping pace with enrollment is that many students graduate from high school inadequately prepared for college-level work. Students who enter colleges and universities, including community colleges, and who lack competencies in math, reading and writing are required to take remedial coursework. The number of remedial courses they are required to take depends on the extent to which they demonstrate competency on college placement tests in math, reading and writing. ACT (2009), for example, purports that less than a quarter of graduating high school seniors are college ready, based on their analysis of ACT test data. Nationally, Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) found that of all students attending community colleges, 58% enrolled in at least one remedial course, and this percentage is much higher than other types of higher education institutions.

Just over 30% of students attending non-selective four-year institutions, 2% attending selective four-year institutions, and less than 1% attending highly selective institutions enroll in remedial coursework. Results of Atwell et al.'s research confirmed that community colleges are the higher education institution of choice for remedial education in the U.S.

One important reason that remediation, or the lack of college readiness, is especially prevalent to U.S. community colleges is that these higher education institutions are open access, resulting in their enrolling a substantial number of college-goers who are underprepared and underrepresented beyond the Pre-K-12 level. In 2006-07, approximately 6.2 million or 35% of all U.S. higher education students attended community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008), accounting for nearly half of all undergraduate students enrolled in higher education in the U.S. With so many students entering community colleges, including students in need of remedial coursework, the strategic locus of concern for college readiness is necessarily on the community college.

The College and Career Readiness Pilot Act

In 2007, the Illinois General Assembly passed Public Act 095-0694, *The College and Career Readiness Pilot Act*, in an effort to reduce remediation within Illinois' community colleges. An important objective of this legislation was to better prepare students to be successful in transitioning from high school to college. Public Act 095-0694 offered the following rationale for the statute:

The General Assembly finds that there is a direct and significant link between students being academically prepared for college and success in postsecondary education. Many students enter college unprepared for the academic rigors

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of college and require noncredit remedial courses to attain skills and knowledge needed for regular, credit coursework. Remediation lengthens time to degree, imposes additional costs on students and colleges, and uses student financial aid for courses that will not count toward a degree. All high school juniors take the Prairie State Achievement Examination, which contains the ACT college assessment exam. ACT test elements and scores can be correlated to specific course placements in community colleges. Customized ACT test results can be used in collaboration with high schools to assist high schools students [to] identify areas for improvement and help them close skill gaps during their senior year. Greater college and career readiness will reduce the need for remediation, lower educational costs, shorten time to degree, and increase the overall success rate of Illinois college students. (PL 095-0694, Section 5 of the Public Community College Act, Sec. 2.24)

According to the grant guidelines developed by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), recipients of the CCR pilot funds were expected to engage in activities to assist the Board in meeting the five elements of the Act, including the:

1. Diagnosis of college readiness by developing a system to align ACT scores to specific community college courses in developmental and freshman curriculums;
2. Reduction of remediation by decreasing the need for remedial coursework in mathematics, reading, and writing at the college level;
3. Alignment of high school and college curriculums;
4. Provision of resources and academic support to students to enrich the senior year of high school through remedial or advanced coursework and other interventions; and,
5. Development of an appropriate evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of readiness intervention strategies.

An external evaluation was funded by the ICCB to determine the impact of pilot programs funded by the CCR Act. Evidence of student outcomes, including student transition to the community college with reduced remedial courses were seen as measures that would help to determine the success of CCR; however, before student outcomes could be measured, it was important to understand how the pilot sites were implementing the CCR programs. What changes were community colleges and their high school partners making? What programs and services were they offering to improve students' math, reading and writing competencies?

Evaluation Goals

Beginning with program implementation during the 2007-08 year, the state's evaluation of the CCR pilot programs has documented the evolving partnerships between community colleges and local high schools and provided quantitative and qualitative evidence of the how CCR programs and services are being implemented. The evaluation used a mixed-method approach to assess college preparatory (pre-college remediation) programs involving

five community colleges and their many high school partners. In 2008-09, the second year of the evaluation, the evaluators also sought to identify promising practices and develop a model of college and career readiness, drawing on the work of David Conley (2005, 2010). Results of this evaluation have informed state staff of administrative agencies, especially the ICCB staff who administer the program; members of the Illinois General Assembly; educators employed by the state's community colleges and high schools who have been engaged in project; and other educators and stakeholders who have shown an interest in improving college and career readiness in schools and colleges throughout the state. A brief on year one of the CCR evaluation project authored by Baber, Barrientos, Bragg, Castro and Kahn (2009) was distributed by OCCRL's listserv and website at <http://occrillinois.edu> to provide initial results to educators and others throughout the state.

Evaluation Methods

Five community colleges were involved in the first and second year of the CCR evaluation (2007-08 and 2008-09): John A. Logan College, Moraine Valley Community College, Shawnee Community College, South Suburban College, and Southwestern Illinois College. (During the third year of the project, College of Lake County and Kankakee Community College were added to the project, but results discussed in this brief are limited to the first two years of the project and the original five community colleges.) Similar to the first year, the five community colleges that operated grants during year two used their funds in a variety of ways, including delivering various types of remedial courses, hiring personnel to fulfill different roles to facilitate student transition to college, purchasing instructional materials and equipment for high school classrooms, and providing student incentives. Each pilot site was encouraged to develop its approach to CCR, designing its own interventions to improve students' college readiness.

During years one and two, OCCRL's evaluation team conducted site visits to the five pilot sites. A number of data collection methods were used in conjunction with the site visits, including personal interviews (one-on-one and small group), focus groups with students, and classroom observations to gain an understanding of the programs. Our evaluation team also asked students to complete a paper-pencil survey about their high school educational experiences, their perceptions of college and their readiness to make the transition from high school to college, and their background characteristics. Following each site visit, a brief report was produced and shared with each CCR program coordinator, and, in turn, these individuals were encouraged to share these reports with other local CCR program participants and stakeholders. Local review and feedback on the reports to our evaluation team provided a means of verifying the accuracy of our understanding and interpretations of the programs. These pilot site reports laid the foundation for two CCR evaluation reports that have been distributed to the pilot sites and the ICCB. Both reports are available on the OCCRL website at:

<http://occrillinois.edu/publications/projects/ccr>

Results

Goal 1: Diagnose College Readiness

The first goal of the CCR Act states that community colleges should “diagnose college readiness by developing a system to align ACT scores.” Gaining access to student ACT scores was a challenge for all pilot sites. Therefore, the sites implemented their own tests to diagnose college readiness and to provide pre- and post-test program data. For most sites, the COMPASS or ASSET test, or a combination of the two, was used because of the difficulty of high schools sharing ACT test scores with community colleges. Due to a lack of data sharing agreements between high schools and community colleges, several community colleges were unable to obtain individual ACT test scores unless students agreed to share them with the community college or they elected to supply them to the community college on their own. Despite the challenges with the sharing of test scores, four of the five pilot sites offered some form of college placement testing to high school students to provide a diagnosis of their college readiness before finishing high school. Frustration with their inability to share ACT and other test score data was evident at both the high school and community college levels. Administrators remarked that having access to student-level ACT data would help high schools recommend students for the CCR program and also help them monitor student progress. Having access to test score data could save valuable time and resources for community college and high school partners who have to create alternative ways to identify student participants and streamline the transition process for students.

The CCR programs offered by John A. Logan College and Shawnee Community College provide an example of how college placement tests have been used by CCR sites to assess potential student participants. At both of these colleges, ASSET was used to diagnose college readiness, due in part to the lack of computer access and technological capabilities in high schools in the southern part of the state. The ASSET was chosen because it is a college placement test that uses paper-pencil format and does not require computers or bandwidth. In addition, in year two of the grant, John A. Logan targeted high school seniors graduating May 2009 who were registering for Math 052 (Basic Algebra) or Math 062 (Intermediate Algebra) in the fall 2009. Despite the challenges with testing, all of the pilot sites were working with more high schools in year two than year one. For example, Shawnee Community College tested students at seven high schools in year two, an increase from four high schools in AY08. John A. Logan College also increased the number of its partner high schools in year two, offering ASSET testing to students at seven high schools, an increase of three partner high schools.

Moraine Valley Community College and Southwestern Illinois College used the COMPASS test (a computer-adaptive college placement test similar to the ASSET) to diagnose college readiness. Moraine Valley tested interested students at two partner high schools and tried to administer the COMPASS at a third high school, but encountered technical difficulties. Southwestern Illinois College has offered COMPASS testing to students in a large

and growing number of high schools over the past several years (beginning prior to the CCR grant). Southwestern Illinois’ initiative involves high school administrators, teachers and counselors in helping students to understand results of their exams and helping them to understand how their tests scores relate to their readiness for college.

Goal 2: Reduce Remediation

The second goal of the CCR Act is to “reduce remediation by decreasing the need for remedial coursework in Math, Reading, and Writing.” Three of the pilot sites offered coursework in all three areas. Specifically, John A. Logan, Shawnee and South Suburban offered remedial courses in math and English (Reading and Writing). Demonstrating the range of CCR programs offered at these three sites, at the Shawnee, an 8-week Summer Enrichment Program was offered that included Algebra and a combined Developmental English I and II course. South Suburban’s Academic Intervention for Matriculation (AIM) program, offered during summer school, provided remedial coursework in math and English, however students had to choose to participate in math or English, not both. By comparison, John A. Logan’s Smart Move to College Readiness program was offered in both math and English during summer school, but for a 10-day period only.

One reason administrators of the CCR pilot sites gave for prioritizing math is the high incidence of incoming community college students needing math remediation (Illinois Community College Board, 2008). The ICCB’s Transition Report confirms that at least one remedial course is often required among incoming students, particularly in math. In addition, a second reason given for focusing on math more than English is that the ACT (and other standardized tests) does not provide results that are useful in placing students into remedial English courses at the community college level. Addressing this issue, at one CCR pilot site, South Suburban College, used an internal diagnostic essay developed by English faculty to diagnose students’ reading and writing competency. This essay was given on the first day of the CCR course, and the faculty used an in-house rubric to grade the essays and assign students to what was determined to be the appropriate level of remedial English courses.

Goal 3: Align Curriculum

The third goal of the CCR Act centers on aligning curricula between community colleges and local high schools. Due to the complexity of measuring curriculum alignment, it is difficult to know whether curricula are better aligned but it is possible to document activities that engaged educators across levels of the system to share information about course offerings and student performance and communicate about ways to enhance program offerings and student outcomes. In this regard, most pilot sites offered opportunities for instructors from the community college and high schools to engage in meetings to review course syllabi and discuss grading rubrics. High schools having longer and more well-established relationships with the community college had greater involvement of their faculty than those with minimal

past engagement. Some pilot sites had difficulty generating involvement in curriculum alignment among partner high schools where communication had been modest or strained with the community college in the past, pointing to the importance of building long-term relationships across the P-20 education levels.

Curriculum alignment discussions facilitated by Shawnee included both English and math instructors, as did those offered by John A. Logan and Southwestern Illinois. Though limited to one high school (Eisenhower High School), Moraine Valley facilitated curricular alignment discussions that were reportedly well-received by the faculty. Community college faculty in particular said they gained a greater understanding of high school students' learning experiences. Another pilot site, Southwestern Illinois, has a long track record of working with high school faculty, starting their curriculum alignment efforts in math and later adding English, resulting in some of the most extensive curriculum alignment activities of any of Illinois' CCR pilot sites. Curriculum alignment at Southwestern Illinois helped community college faculty to network with high school faculty and to review course syllabi, participate in grading exercises, and visit classrooms. These meetings also provided the opportunity for math faculty to discuss the process of college placement, particularly focusing on the COM-PASS, and to compare similarities and differences in the ways math is taught at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Curriculum alignment meetings at several sites produced notebooks and binders consisting of supporting materials selected by the high school and community college faculty. Many of the faculty who were involved in these meetings plan to use the materials to better prepare their juniors and seniors for college placement exams. The majority of faculty at all of the pilot sites recognized the benefits of these activities, but they also commented on how time consuming they can be. Recommendations were made by high school teachers to vary meeting dates and times so that they wouldn't have to miss the same classes on multiple weeks, and these scheduling adjustments were being considered for future meetings.

An important element of curriculum alignment goes beyond educational partners to include other stakeholders, especially parents. In this regard, administrators at Moraine Valley identified parents as key to attracting students to their CCR program, so they sent letters to the parents of eligible seniors written in both English and Spanish. Most other pilot sites invited parents to meetings introducing CCR and providing an opportunity for dialogue concerning the goals and intended outcomes of the program. Universally, when parents were engaged, they were seen as an enthusiastic ally of the CCR programs.

Goal 4: Provide Resources and Academic Support to Enrich the Senior Year

The fourth goal of the CCR Act focuses on enriching students' senior year of high school. Besides offering students educational activities to reduce remediation, mentioned previously, several of the pilot sites offered workshops introducing students to various aspects of college, including information on a wide range of topics such as academic programs and majors, financial aid and other

student support services, intramural and extramural activities, etc. Illustrating this idea, Moraine Valley offered students a 1-credit hour course at no charge to assess students' study strategies, to help them set college and career goals, to encourage them to examine their values and decision making skills, and to assist them in developing an appreciation for the diversity of people, ideas, and perspectives they will encounter at the community college.

In addition, John A. Logan provided students with adult mentors called "CCR Guides" who offered their students various forms of academic support and provided them with advice. Students participating in the program at John A Logan identified the CCR Guides as an important aspect of their experience in the CCR program. At another pilot site, South Suburban College designed a work-study option for 30 students so that they did not have to choose between summer employment and their CCR program. In addition, a few sites that were offering ACT prep workshops to juniors extended these workshops to seniors to assist them to prepare to re-take the ACT test in the fall. The goal of these workshops was to help the seniors improve their scores before applying to college in late fall or spring.

Goal 5: Develop an Appropriate Evaluation

The final goal of the CCR Act, and integral to the sustainability of CCR programs, is to create a local evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of the program. In this regard, all of the pilot sites conducted pre- and post-testing to measure student academic outcomes. Many also distributed a student survey soliciting specific information about their programs to help inform future efforts. For example, Moraine Valley used results from internal evaluation from year one to make program changes in year two, including integrating students into regular sections of remedial math. Most sites also distributed surveys to faculty and staff participants involved in curriculum alignment to better understand their experiences with and expectations of the CCR program. All of the sites kept detailed records of student attendance and program completion.

Despite these qualitative evaluation accomplishments, most sites had not developed student tracking systems for numerous reasons, including needing support from institutional research offices that are already stretched thin with on-going data reporting requirements. Despite the challenges of limited resources, Moraine Valley and South Suburban produced partial results for their CCR participants. During the current year, all pilot sites, including the two new pilot sites, are tracking students who are participating in CCR to enable the ICCB to report on program completion, student progress toward reducing remediation, and other measures associated with successful transition to college.

Summary

Much has been learned from the programs and initiatives provided by the pilot sites in years one and two of the CCR initiative. (Table 1 summarizes activities implemented by Illinois' CCR pilot sites to demonstrate their alignment with five key goals

mentioned in the Illinois College and Career Readiness Act.) Increasing the number and quality of conversations between faculty at the community colleges and local partner high schools has been a major accomplishment, showing that the CCR grant can be a conduit to enhanced collaboration between different levels of the P-20 system. As the goal of preparing every student for the demands of college and career moves to the forefront of state and possibly also federal legislation, strong partnerships between community colleges and local high schools are integral to successful student transition. In the first year of the CCR grant, the pilot sites focused on creating partnerships, and in the second year, they worked on extending their outreach and strengthening their relationships. A common theme among all of the pilot sites as they headed into year two was expansion to new high school partners, including more efforts to align the course content offered by the community colleges and the high schools.

Our evaluation shows the pilot sites are making recommended changes in response to lessons learned about program implementation in year one, and they are likely to continue to do so as they participate in subsequent years with the CCR initiative.

Documenting promising practices is the focus of our evaluation as the sites mature, including soliciting feedback from students, faculty, administrators and other program participants. As the programs develop and grow, there is much to be learned and shared throughout the state, and even beyond, since Illinois is being looked to for leadership on the college and career readiness issue nationally. As the work continues, the state is drawing on David Conley’s (2005, 2007, 2010) work on developing the concept of “college knowledge” and his framework for college and career readiness to guide the pilot sites in helping to develop a comprehensive model for college and career readiness that can be adopted state-wide. The pilot sites are using Conley’s four interactional dimensions of college and career readiness (key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness) to guide their programs and our evaluation team is also using this framework to guide our data collection. As policymakers, educators and stakeholders learn more about CCR, including addressing the challenge of defining and measuring college and career readiness, the state is better positioned to prepare students to transition successfully.

Table 1. Alignment of College and Career Readiness (CCR) Pilot Site Activities with Five Goals of the CCR Act

CCR Site	Diagnose College Readiness	Reduce Remediation	Align Curriculum	Enrich the Senior Year	Develop Appropriate Evaluation
John A Logan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASSET testing in high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school spring workshops High school summer interventions in English and math JALC summer intervention in English and math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alliance for College Readiness – meetings with district high school faculty Meetings involving JALC and high school math and English faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several short-term interventions College Guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- and post-testing using ASSET Creating database with CCR students
Moraine Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT math sub-scores from high schools COMPASS testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Experience Program in math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings involving high school representatives and Moraine developmental education and math faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a primary focus in years 1 and 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- and post-testing using COMPASS Internal evaluation using surveys and focus groups
Shawnee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASSET testing in high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school interventions Summer Enrichment Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops and meetings involving Shawnee and high school English, math and science faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT prep classes offered in high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- and post-testing using ASSET Some limited tracking of students
South Suburban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-ACT and enrollment in Algebra II COMPASS, ALEKS and Townsend testing Faculty developed and scored essay for English/reading placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8-week summer program in math or English/Reading, including Structured Learning Assistance (SLA) Guidance counseling conducted in groups Work study employment opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a primary focus in years 1 and 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a primary focus in years 1 and 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- and post-testing using COMPASS Plan to track CCR students
Southwestern Illinois	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COMPASS testing in high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Success Initiative (CSI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High School Writing and Math Projects – Faculty discussions Faculty workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Workshops High School Writing project High School Senior Math project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- and post-testing using COMPASS Local data collection using surveys and course performance data

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