

Abstract Title Page

Title:

Researcher-Practitioner Collaboration Supporting the Florida College and Career Readiness Initiative

Authors and Affiliations:

Christine Mokher, Ph.D. - CNA

Louis Jacobson, Ph.D. – New Horizons Economic Research

Abstract Body

Background / Context:

There is a nationwide concern that too many students leave high school unprepared for college-level coursework and the lack of student awareness of their level of preparation. Greene and Forster (2003) estimate that only 32 percent of U.S. high school graduates are academically ready to study at a four-year college. Bailey (2009) estimates that approximately 60 percent of community college students take at least one remedial course. The Florida College System (2012) estimates that 63.6 percent of first-time degree seeking students at two-year state colleges tested below college-ready in at least one subject and were required to enroll in remedial education.

Florida enacted Senate Bill 1908 creating a statewide program, the Florida College and Career Readiness Initiative (FCCRI), to reduce the need for postsecondary remediation. The FCCRI consists of testing 11th-graders statewide to determine their college readiness and requiring those not college ready to take one or more of five college readiness and success (CRS) courses in grade 12.

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

This presentation will describe practitioner feedback on program implementation over three years (SY 2012/13 to 2015/16); and how collaboration between researchers and practitioners improve the initiative's effectiveness. The theory of action behind the researcher-practitioner collaboration is that: (a) there are common problems across schools in implementing the FCCRI; (b) there are limited opportunities for high school, district, and community college educators to identify problems and ways to resolve them; (c) some common problems can be resolved with the collaboration of school district offices, community colleges, and researchers; and (d) further feedback will foster communication that could continue to improve key outcomes (Fullan, 1983; Holly and Hopkins, 1988).

Setting:

In the first year of the evaluation, we surveyed CRS teachers throughout Florida and then collected more detailed feedback through small group discussions with teachers. In order to understand how the initiative varied across the state, the discussion groups were held in Altamonte Springs, Fort Lauderdale, Gainesville, Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Panama City, and St. Petersburg.

In the second year of the evaluation, we re-surveyed teachers who participated in the year 1 survey and conducted a series of site visits in six counties. The site visits included two large, two medium-sized, and two small districts. In each district, researchers visited two high schools, the district office, and the local state community college. The selection of districts and high schools was limited to those that participated in the year 1 survey to compare baseline characteristics.

In the third year of the evaluation, professional development forums brought together researchers, community colleges, school districts, high schools, and FL-DOE in three districts that we have previously worked with. In each of these districts researchers and educators identified local needs and developed agendas based on local contexts.

Population / Participants / Subjects:

For all of the qualitative data collection activities, we used a stratified sample of Florida high schools. The characteristics used to define the strata were total high school enrollment in the district (size) and student test scores on the high school exit exam (performance). Our goal in selecting the strata was to place each high school into a group where outcomes and implementation problems were likely to be similar within the group, but different across groups.

In the first year of the evaluation, a series of small group discussions were held with 63 teachers of CRS courses from 39 schools. Participants were fairly similar to the larger sample from which they were drawn, although there were fewer participants from rural schools.

In year 1, we also surveyed 225 CRS course teachers in 113 high schools spread across 42 of Florida's 67 school districts. The same teachers were invited to take a second survey in year 2, but 29 were no longer at the same school and 37 were no longer teaching a CRS course, so they were not eligible to take the year 2 survey. Of the remaining 159 teachers, 109 completed the survey, a 69 percent response rate. The sample includes teachers from 89 schools and 33 districts. These respondents represent a similar distribution of district performance, small and large districts, teachers' highest degree, and of considerable importance, about the same ratings of the effectiveness of the FCCRI as in year 1.

In year 2, researchers also conducted site visits which included more than 100 interviews with respondents including CRS course teachers, counselors, and administrators within the 12 high schools; curriculum specialists and staff involved with professional development and outreach activities at the district level; and developmental education instructors, college advisers, and career center staff at community colleges located within the six counties.

In year 3, we conducted professional development forums in Miami, Tallahassee, and Jacksonville. The majority of forum attendees were K-12 educators, with additional attendees from community colleges. There were about 150 forum participants across the three locations.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

The theory of action for the FCCRI is that many students who barely pass the high school exit examine, which requires mastery of 10th grade topics erroneously believe that they are ready for college. Giving students the college entrance examine that requires mastery of 12th grade skills will raise students' awareness of where academic deficiencies exist and motivate them to acquire college-level skills. Figure 1 in Appendix B illustrates key components of the FCCRI as it is intended to be implemented.

Research Design:

We describe findings from a qualitative evaluation that includes small group discussions with CRS teachers (year 1), two statewide surveys of CRS teachers (years 1 and 2), site visits in six counties (year 2), and professional development forums for educators in three cities (year 3).

Data Collection and Analysis:

Small group discussions with teachers

Our data includes teachers' responses to a small group discussion questionnaire, as well as the written notes of comments made by participants. The first half of each small group discussion focused on the overall effectiveness of the FCCRI and the effectiveness of the CRS courses, what resources were made available to implement the FCCRI, and how the goals of the FCCRI compared with other priorities at the teachers' schools. The second half discussed more specific questions about the way the FCCRI was implemented and what could be done to improve its effectiveness. The questionnaire asked the teachers to list the things they liked best about the FCCRI, the things they liked least, and their recommendations for ways to improve the program.

Surveys

The statewide survey data include responses from teachers during the first and second years of the evaluation (Spring 2013 and Spring 2014, respectively). In the first year, we collected feedback on teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the FCCRI and impediments reducing its effectiveness. Questions related to collaboration focused on the frequency of CRS teachers' collaboration with others and whether CRS teachers recommended increasing collaboration with other teachers, school- and district-level staff, and instructors at community colleges. In year 2, the research team re-surveyed the CRS teachers in the year 1 sample to determine to what extent their expectations of further increases in the effectiveness of the FCCRI were realized, to what extent previously identified impediments have been ameliorated, and what impediments remain.

Site Visits

In year 2, the researcher team also conducted site visits to six districts to gain a more in-depth understanding of implementation of the FCCRI in different settings. For each high school, we requested to interview at least one person in the following roles: math CRS teacher, English CRS teacher, and high school guidance counselor. At each district office, we requested to interview at least one curriculum specialist; and at each local state college, we requested to interview at least one developmental math chair, one developmental reading chair, one developmental math instructor, one developmental reading instructor, and one academic advisor. Interview notes were analyzed to identify both examples of successful collaboration and barriers to collaboration.

Professional development forums

Activities in year 3 focused on a collaborative effort between the research team and educators that produced a series of professional development forums for K-12 and postsecondary educators. The Miami and Tallahassee forums were each half-day, standalone events designed explicitly around the research findings and as a result of researchers approaching the districts and colleges. Jacksonville already had planned a summer professional development event around college readiness, and the researchers were able to integrate sessions with that event. To gather additional information about the success of the forums and topics for future support, we administered a pre-survey and post-survey to forum attendees.

Findings / Results:

In this first year of the evaluation, we found teachers were supportive of FCCRI's goals, and they had positive views of its effectiveness, despite identifying two important impediments: (1) lack of information about the skills tested on the PERT, which makes it difficult to structure high school CRS courses to help students graduate college-ready and (2) lack of course prep and

instructional materials for those CRS courses (texts, exercises, practice tests, pacing guides), which makes it difficult to develop effective lesson plans.

The research team found that the materials existed but were not readily accessible to the teachers who needed them. Realizing this, and in cooperation with Florida state and college officials, the research team launched an “FCCRI group” for CRS teachers on the social media site Edmodo, loading the group page with links and downloadable documents collected by the research team. Now the group site contains information on the PERT from the Florida Department of Education and PERT test preparation materials from the state’s colleges; it also provides instructional resources from state college developmental education and gateway courses, which the high school teachers can use in preparing their CRS courses. The site also offers a virtual community for CRS teachers to collaborate with one another. Within a month of making the FCCRI group site available, more than 300 educators in districts across Florida had joined the Edmodo group. Nearly three-quarters of the state’s 67 county-based districts have at least one teacher who has joined. The rapid growth of the Edmodo group indicates a strong demand for instructional resources for CRS courses (see Figure 2). It also suggests that social media can be an effective medium for reaching out to teachers, which state and local policymakers overseeing educational initiatives elsewhere may want to consider.

In year two, we collected additional feedback about continuing needs, which led to collaboration between researchers and practitioners that resulted in a series of professional development forums for K-12 and postsecondary educators. Presentations and activities addressed several topics at these forums, including: an overview of FCCRI and recent legislative changes, bridging the high school-college transition through collaboration, strategies for helping students plan for college, college pathways and programs, student skills needed for success in specific college courses, and student support services at community colleges.

Several educators indicated that as a result of hearing about various career pathways and occupational statistics, they now intend to emphasize college for all students. Previously, many of these educators had emphasized college primarily for students who were most academically prepared or most interested in college, especially 4-year universities. Other attendees also said they plan to incorporate more information about colleges and college planning into their courses, rather than focusing solely on academic content.

Attendees also identified several topics about which additional information would be beneficial. Attendees expressed the most interest in learning about: costs and financing options for college, programs from additional schools and universities, increasing parental involvement in college planning, and curriculum issues.

Conclusions:

This session represents the culmination of three years of research on program implementation of the FCCRI. The findings provide lessons learned about researcher-practitioner partnerships that can inform practice, and also provide additional information that can help states and districts in determining how to structure supports for similar programs.

Appendices

Appendix A. References

- Bailey, T. (2009). Challenge and opportunity: Rethinking the role and function of developmental education in community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 145, 11–30.
- Florida College System. (2012). Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) Frequently asked questions.
- Fullan, M. (1983). Evaluating program implementation: What can be learned from follow through. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 13, 215-227.
- Greene, J. and Forster, G. (2003). Public high school graduation and college readiness rates in the United States. Working paper. New York, NY: Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.
- Holly, P. and Hopkins, D. (1988). Evaluation and school improvement. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 18 (2): 221-245.

Appendix B. Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Logic model for the theory of action of the FCCRI

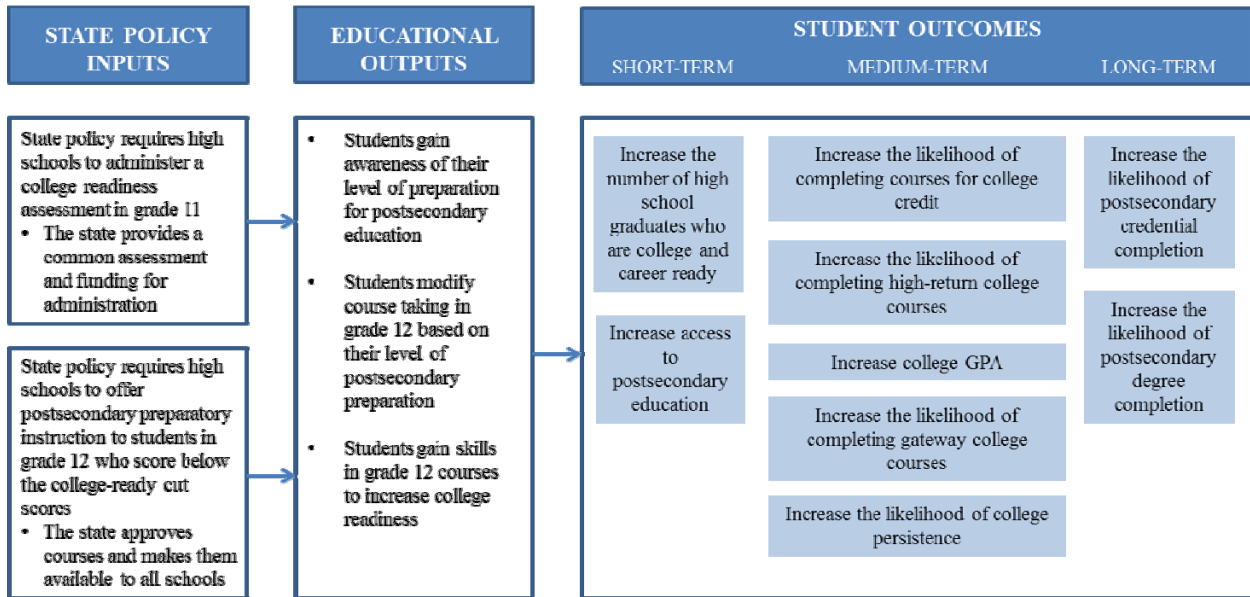


Figure 2. Geographic distribution of schools with at least one teacher who joined the Edmodo FCCRI group

