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The Perceptions and Experiences of Faculty Implementing Florida's Developmental Education Reform

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Abstract

Florida Senate Bill 1720 drastically changed developmental education, beginning in fall 2014. This paper considers affected faculty members' perceptions and experiences with the passage and implementation of reform, according to focus group data provided by 294 participants at 21 Florida College System institutions between 2014 and 2019. We found that faculty members experienced feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness—the two main components of policy alienation—related to the passage of SB 1720, with some reported opportunities for discretion and innovation at a local level. Despite feelings of alienation, faculty worked hard to facilitate student success through the changes.

Keywords

education reform, faculty, higher education, policy implementation, qualitative research

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Developmental education (DE), also known as remedial education, is a form of postsecondary curriculum and instruction designed to help academically underprepared students become college-ready in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. Despite its longstanding presence at community colleges, there is a growing body of literature that questions the overall effectiveness of traditional DE (e.g., Bailey et al., 2013; Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2015). To improve student outcomes, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1720, which tasked all 28 Florida College System (FCS) institutions with drastically reforming statewide DE beginning in the fall semester of 2014. Following the passage of SB 1720, placement testing and DE were made optional for most groups of students, namely students who entered a Florida public school in 2003/04 or later and completed a standard high school diploma, as well as activity duty military personnel. The legislation also increased advising and academic supports and created alternative delivery methods for DE course material, including modularized, compressed, contextualized, and co-requisite course structures.

In the time since 2014, these changes have significantly impacted the work of FCS campus personnel, including faculty. For one, DE faculty had to redesign their courses to align with one or more of the modalities required by SB 1720. In practice, this meant finding ways to combine multiple levels of DE into one course, revising syllabi in accordance with an accelerated timeline (e.g., an 8- rather than 16-week schedule), and learning to implement new instructional software (Hu et al., 2015). The legislation also affected the work of gateway faculty; many incorporated review content and revised instructional strategies within their gateway courses in response to diverse levels of student preparation (Brower et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2018).

Although the literature is clear about the initial and ongoing actions faculty took in implementing SB 1720, very little is known about how faculty felt about the passage and implementation of DE reform. The same is often true of research on other higher education policies, where faculty perceptions and experiences tend to be missing. Nevertheless, understanding faculty reactions is crucial, considering that perceptions and experiences can significantly influence the success of implementation, as well as the willingness of faculty to implement future legislation (Louis et al., 2005; Tummers et al., 2015; van Engen et al., 2019).

Accordingly, our study considered FCS faculty members' perceptions and experiences with SB 1720 and explored the implications for policy implementation more broadly. The questions guiding this research were: First, what were the perceptions and experiences of FCS faculty with the passage and implementation of statewide DE reform in 2014? And second, how did those perceptions of and experiences with SB 1720 influence how faculty supported their students in the 5 years that followed implementation?

Literature Review

Policy implementation first garnered the widespread attention of researchers in the 1970s (O'Toole, 2000). Implementation research is now plentiful, but there remains little consensus about the goals, methods, and theories surrounding the work (Heck, 2004; O'Toole, 2004). Part of the trouble is that scholars have historically disagreed on how best to view implementation, whether from a top-down or bottom-up perspective. Top-down theorists prioritize the role and importance of policymakers in the implementation process, while bottom-up theorists are more concerned with the local bureaucrats who are typically responsible for doing the daily work of implementation (see Pülzl & Treib, 2007 for a summary of this debate). It has also been difficult for scholars to reduce the number of variables used to explain successful policy implementation in any meaningful way. O'Toole (2004) surmised, "parsimonious general explanation has eluded theorists" (p. 315).

Teachers as Policy Implementers

Literature specifically about education policy naturally centers the experiences of teachers, particularly those in the K-12 system, since they are the individuals most responsible for implementation (Lochmiller & Hedges, 2017). Early research on this topic was preoccupied with the resistance of these public professionals when faced with policies they did not support or understand (Odden, 1991). However, the conversation has evolved to consider the possibility that behavior, which may outwardly appear resistant, is in fact sense-making at work (Spillane et al., 2002). From this perspective, teachers act as they do during the implementation process to translate policy mandates into decisions and behaviors that make sense in their classrooms. In other words, actions that seem resistant instead signify teachers' best efforts to understand and carry out policy mandates within their particular context.

Drawing on research about the standards-based movement of the 1980s and 1990s, accountability-based reforms of the 2000s, and the current era of alignment and accountability, scholars have come to several key conclusions about public, K-12 school teachers as policy implementers (Coburn et al., 2016). For one, it is important to understand how teachers interpret the problems and policy solutions set before them, as it has a direct impact on how they go about enacting change (Coburn, 2006). This interpretation can be shaped by several factors, including individual attributes like self-identified race/ethnicity (Bridwell-Mitchell & Sherer, 2017), pre-existing beliefs and practices (Coburn, 2004; Spillane, 1999), and school leadership (Coburn, 2001). Depending on these personal and environmental conditions, some teachers are more willing and able to implement new changes than others. Relatedly, reforms have been deemed more successful if teachers see value in the reform they are tasked with implementing and how it complements their current work (Datnow et al., 2003; Louis et al., 2005).

Research also demonstrates that teacher's social networks matter significantly for implementation as well. In the case of Spillane's (1999) examination of mathematics reform, teachers who made the most significant changes to their instructional practices were engaged in ongoing deliberations with colleagues about the reform, its goals, and how to best enact change. Scholars refer to this phenomenon as "collective sensemaking" (Coburn, 2001; Louis et al., 2005). Notably, schools vary in the extent to which they provide structured opportunities to engage in conversations about reform. For instance, the work of Porter et al. (2015) described the role of school-sponsored Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and collaborative teams in successful implementation of the Common Core Standards. Teachers and administrators both appreciated how groups encouraged "talking, looking at the [Common Core] standards, and unpacking together" (p. 125). In other cases of implementation, this kind of collaboration occurs more informally. When faced with reading reform, Coburn (2006) observed teachers chatting with one another over their lunch break. These organic conversations fostered important opportunities for teachers to process their thoughts about reform efforts and relate them to their own, particular circumstances.

While the experiences of K-12 teachers have been widely explored, very little is known about how those who work for colleges and universities experience the implementation of education policy. Considering its emphasis on curricular redesign, advising, and student choice, the work of implementing SB 1720 throughout the FCS fell primarily to faculty and advisors. As such, we expect that college faculty have their own, unique experiences worth studying because of the limited attention toward faculty in higher education policy research.

What we do know is that higher education professionals face a quickly changing implementation landscape that often requires campus professionals to "scramble" to meet legislative mandates (Nienhusser, 2018, p. 435). What is more, policy implementers at community colleges see themselves as facilitators of educational opportunity, as well as supporters and advocates of their students, even as they work to ensure compliance with state and federal rules and regulations. As a result, it is not uncommon for faculty members to go above and beyond their teaching role to also help students register for classes, fill out paperwork, and qualify for financial aid awards (Nienhusser, 2018).

With regards to studies that specifically focus on DE reform, there only exist a couple of studies, thus far, that consider faculty perceptions and experiences. One study examining DE reform within The City University of New York revealed that many faculty—particularly those with more teaching experience and higher degrees earned—believed reform had increased grade inflation and lowered academic standards (Lane et al., 2020). Another study, focusing on the acceleration of DE, acknowledged both the challenges and strengths of reform efforts. While some faculty grappled with managing the diverse level of academic preparation in their classroom following reform, others celebrated rising levels of student success and the formation of deep rapport with their students (Walker, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Throughout the literature reviewed here, "willingness" is commonly employed as a concept to describe the extent to which teachers make changes in response to new policies and procedures. Policy alienation is one framework that is useful in explaining public professionals' willingness, or lack thereof, to implement new policy. Although we went into the analysis of data without preconceived assumptions, this theoretical framework provided constructs that were highly pertinent to the themes that ultimately emerged. Thus, we reviewed the related literature here and used it as a way to organize and explain the findings from our study.

According to Tummers (2011), policy alienation has two important components—powerlessness and meaninglessness. Feelings of powerlessness emerge when individuals believe they do not have control over the creation, passage, and implementation of policy at a national, state-wide, and/or local level. *Strategic powerlessness*, in particular, describes situations in which public professions do not feel as if they had a voice in the drafting of legislation. *Tactical powerlessness* materializes in cases where public professionals felt they did not have a voice in determining exactly how policy was implemented at a particular organization. And finally, *operational powerlessness* occurs when public professionals perceive a lack of freedom in day-to-day decision-making during implementation.

The other primary component of alienation—meaninglessness—arises when implementers cannot see the value in the reform. Tummers (2011) explains, more specifically, that implementers feel *societal meaninglessness* when a given policy seems not to benefit society or appropriately address widespread social problems. *Client meaninglessness* results when the policy's actions appear to hold no value for the specific clients served by the new policy. In the case of SB 1720, these clients can be considered academically underprepared college students enrolled in the FCS.

When presenting his framework, Tummers (2013) identified several factors beyond powerlessness and meaninglessness that might contribute to feelings of alienation, like personality characteristics and organizational context. That being said, Tummers (2013) found the impact of powerlessness and meaninglessness dominate, even after controlling for rebellious personalities, negative colleagues, and other such factors.

To date, several scholars have employed policy alienation in examining teachers' responses to the implementation of new policies and procedures within the context of secondary education. Their findings contribute several key insights, which informed our research. For one, feelings of alienation vary from teacher to teacher and can change over time (Brooks et al., 2008). Also, feelings of policy alienation can lead public professionals to experience low levels of job satisfaction (Tummers, Steijn et al., 2012) and can decrease their willingness to implement new policies (Tummers et al., 2015; van Engen et al., 2019).

In the current study, we seek to understand the perceptions and experiences of faculty members in the FCS institutions during the implementation of the state's most recent DE reform. Given the fact that the reform had a lot to do with curricular and instructional redesign and academic advising, faculty members played an important role in the implementation of the reform. Findings from this study not only have implications for implementation of DE policies, but also provide a unique opportunity to examine whether faculty members in a postsecondary context experience alienation similar to that experienced by K-12 teachers in the existing literature.

The Florida College System

Considering the importance of context on implementation, we describe the FCS and its faculty members here. To begin, the FCS is a statewide system of twenty-eight 2- and 4-year postsecondary institutions. While the colleges share a common history as 2-year community colleges, most now offer a limited number of Bachelor's degrees in fields such as nursing, education, and technology (Bilsky et al., 2012). Despite this shift, the FCS still confers primarily 2-year degrees. In fact, during the 2015 to 2016 academic school year, more than 585,000 students were enrolled in programs traditionally associated with community colleges (i.e., Associate's degree, certificate, preparatory, and life-long learning programs) compared to 39,000 students enrolled in Bachelor's degree programs. To teach these programs, the FCS employs a sizable workforce, including more than 6,000 full-time instructors and 14,700 part-time instructors (Florida Department of Education, 2019).

SB 1720 is by no means the first major reform to impact faculty in the FCS. Over the past 20 years, there have been several influential initiatives and changes implemented throughout the FCS. One such reform was the aforementioned addition of baccalaureate degrees to the FCS curriculum in 2001. In 2010, the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test was introduced as a way to diagnose academic deficiencies and accurately place students into the appropriate mathematics and English courses (Bilsky, 2011). Of course, by 2014, this test was made voluntary for exempt students through the enactment of SB 1720. Florida is now in the process of redesigning math pathways, allowing students to bypass College Algebra and instead focus their efforts on statistics or other math courses that may be more applicable to specific majors (Florida Student Success Center, 2019).

Here, we leverage the opportunity of widespread DE reform—SB 1720—to explore how FCS faculty felt about the passage of SB 1720 and its impact on their ability to teach and support students. The goal of this work is neither to explore the alignment of SB 1720 with other policies, nor to determine its overall effectiveness, but rather to document the perceptions and experiences of affected faculty members and explore the implications for policy implementation.

The Study

The focus of this study is on the perceptions and experiences of college faculty who were tasked with redesigning DE course sequences, adjusting to new course modalities, and supporting the academically underprepared students who chose to enroll in college-level courses. To learn more about policy alienation amongst these faculty, we chose to conduct a single case study of faculty within the FCS in the years following the passage of SB 1720. According to Lochmiller and Hedges (2017), such qualitative research methods are widely accepted as the best way to explore education policy implementation, because contextual factors play an influential role in how implementation proceeds.

Data Collection

In the summer of 2014, we invited administrators at all 28 colleges via email to participate in our research efforts. Ultimately, 21 institutions agreed to host one or more site visits. The resulting sample is highly diverse, painting a representative picture of higher education within the state of Florida. In terms

Table 1. Summary Count of Participants.

	No. of site visits	No. of faculty	No. of focus groups
Year 1	10	120	22
Year 2	8	50	8
Year 3	9	61	8
Year 4	9	48	9
Year 5	9	57	9
Total	45	336	56

of size, the data reflects the perspectives of faculty employed by six large colleges, eleven medium colleges, and four small or very small colleges according to the 2018 Carnegie institutional classifications. These institutions award anywhere from fewer than 200 degrees to more than 100,000 degrees annually. Regarding degree of urbanization, the colleges included in the sample are located in eleven cities, five suburbs, and five towns or rural communities. Concerning student demographics, five of the colleges have the distinction of being Hispanic- and minority-serving institutions (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, n.d.). And, as of 2018, all of the colleges had a 4-year designation, although this was not the case during some of the data collection.

Between 2014 and 2019, researchers traveled across the state of Florida to facilitate 56 focus group sessions with developmental- and college-level faculty at these 21 colleges. In total, the research team spoke with 294 unique faculty participants. On subsequent visits, we followed-up with 39 faculty participants—representing 14 of the 21 colleges—one or more times to gauge how their perspectives may have changed over 5 years. We provide specific participant counts, organized by year, in Table 1.

Focus group sessions included anywhere from 3 to 14 people and typically lasted 1 hour. We digitally recorded focus group sessions with permission from all participants, transcribed them into Word documents, and analyzed them using NVivo 12. A semi-structured protocol guided the focus group sessions, where we asked questions including, but not limited to:

1. How did the curriculum at your institution change after SB1720? How did the bill directly influence this change?
2. Overall, how would you characterize early implementation of the redesign?
3. What have been the most successful parts of the redesign? What challenges or barriers have emerged?

4. Have any unintended consequences played out on your campus? If so, what do they include?
5. How has SB 1720 influenced your institution's ability to serve diverse student populations?

The protocol was flexible as we allowed discussions to follow tangential topics related to faculty members' interests and priorities to the extent possible. Because reform was an emotionally charged experience for many, faculty were eager to share their concerns and experiences with implementation. Fortunately, qualitative research allows for, and even encourages, such expressions of emotion (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The faculty members with whom we spoke came from diverse personal and professional backgrounds. The average length of time spent teaching at their institution was 12.5 years. Almost all taught reading, writing, mathematics, or student success courses (which are often connected with DE curriculum in Florida). However, a handful of faculty members from other departments—including psychology, history, philosophy, and computer science—participated, providing important insights into how the bill impacted students beyond their introductory coursework. Of those who disclosed their employment status, more than 90% were full-time faculty.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved a team of 12 researchers who contributed at different points during the 5-year duration of this project. In year one, we began the coding process with 157 a priori codes covering a wide variety of topics, including access, financial aid, advising, and emotional reactions to SB 1720. We tested these codes on several transcripts to identify their usefulness and identify gaps present in the initial coding framework. Researchers proposed emergent codes to fill these gaps and added them to the coding framework with team consensus. Select codes relevant to this project included: *need for reform*, *perspectives on the legislation*, and *workload for faculty.*

To ensure consistency in coding between team members and from year-to-year, we established intercoder reliability and agreement annually through regular coding meetings, the creation of an elaborate coding manual with definitions for all codes, and time spent discussing and revising unclear or contested codes. When faced with disagreement regarding the usage of codes, we worked toward precision by dropping or merging unreliable codes, clarifying coding definitions, modifying codes, and/or coding instructions, and repeating the reliability coding exercise over several weeks until an acceptable level of reliability was achieved (Hodson, 1999; Hruschka et al., 2004).

Once we solidified the coding structure and established reliability, the team worked collaboratively to code all the data and generate analytic memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Yin, 2013). Each year, this process repeated as new individuals joined the team.

We analyzed the data for this study in two cycles of coding (Saldaña, 2009). The first round of coding allowed the team of qualitative researchers to identify emotion and process codes related to faculty feeling ignored, frustrated, angry, concerned, or pleasantly surprised by SB 1720. In the second round of coding, we developed the conception of policy alienation by re-categorizing these smaller themes under the larger, guiding principles of powerlessness and meaninglessness as the themes emerged.

Each year, we shared main findings with participants in the forms of institution-specific reports and a statewide annual report. We allowed participants to respond to these reports with questions, concerns, or points of clarification. We also invited several colleagues, well informed about DE reform, to engage with our work as devil's advocates, or critical friends (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). In these ways, we attempted to confirm the accuracy of our interpretations. By employing a team strategy, individual subjective biases were also reduced (Carey & Gelaude, 2008).

Limitations

One limitation of our research design is the possible selection bias of participants. We cannot know whether the faculty that institutions invited to participate in our work were particularly optimistic or pessimistic compared with their peers who did not participate, either because they were not invited, declined the invitation, or had already left their teaching position for another job. That said, participants did not seem overly guarded in their answers. Indeed, many seemed excited to participate in the focus group sessions, rather than hesitant, because the opportunity provided a forum for faculty to share their previously unsolicited thoughts and feelings about reform.

We also cannot be certain about how personal characteristics of faculty participants (e.g., their individual attributes, primary content area, years of experience, full-time versus part-time status, or involvement with past reform efforts) may have influenced their perspectives of SB 1720. Previous literature emphasizes the importance of several of these characteristics and experiences on implementation behaviors (e.g., Bridwell-Mitchell & Sherer, 2017), and so we acknowledge this as both a limitation, as well as an opportunity for future research.

Findings

The findings that emerged from this research are organized thematically in the section that follows. We begin by presenting some initial reactions held by faculty to demonstrate the overall pattern of policy alienation experienced by FCS faculty members and then move to specific examples of policy alienation as indicated by a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness, while also exploring how these feelings directly impacted how faculty supported and taught their students.

Initial Reactions to SB 1720

When given the chance to share initial reactions to SB 1720 in 2014, many faculty participants recognized the shortcomings of traditional DE and admitted that reform was necessary. According to one participant, "There is no denying that there was room for improvement in developmental education." Another, citing years of experience, added: "We do realize that there needed to be some change. . . I have been in DE 14 years now, so I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly." However, faculty members generally felt that SB 1720 was not the ideal solution. To express their initial reactions about SB 1720, participants used the following words: *shock*, *disbelief*, *despair*, and *confusion*. They also widely described feelings that the bill was *unfair* and would lead to *absolute disaster*.

Notably, developmental- and college-level faculty alike expressed these perceptions. Developmental instructors were primarily worried about their students' wellbeing, accelerating traditional DE, and taking on new job responsibilities as enrollment shifted away from DE toward college-level courses. Those teaching Intermediate Algebra and English Composition expressed concern about the impact of SB 1720 on rigor, promotion and tenure, and the challenge of teaching a classroom of students with increasingly diverse levels of academic preparation.

While fear and concern were the most common reactions, a few faculty members expressed early optimism about the potential impact of SB 1720 on student success. One participant shared in the first year that, "I was initially kind of excited, like, okay, maybe, yeah, this will kind of jump start some change." Another reflected:

> My initial reaction was the same as most of you. My god, what happened here with all those DE courses? But then, I thought about it a little bit, and I said, "Wow, that might be a good idea, you know, to get rid of those DE courses because. . . [students] are spending a lot of money on those courses, and they're not being successful."

Other faculty members appreciated the opportunity to innovate. As one participant said, "I was excited about the opportunity to investigate some other approaches like the contextualized approach. . . I think we probably would have gotten there, at some point, and perhaps this made us get there quicker." That being said, negative emotions outnumbered positive ones, particularly in the first few years of implementation.

It is also important to acknowledge that many colleges were engaged with reform well before SB 1720 passed. As one faculty member shared, "we were already doing a lot" before 2014. At some colleges, these in-progress initiatives provided a fortunate head start in SB 1720 implementation efforts. At other colleges, in-progress initiatives occasionally did not align well with the mandates of SB 1720, meaning they had to abandon past work. A faculty member who had taught DE- and gateway-level mathematics courses at her institution for 10 years explained:

> I think that [SB 1720] sort of irritated a lot of us that had been involved in the redesign before the Senate Bill happened because we did recognize that we had a problem, obviously, in terms of how effective our programs were or were not. . . And we were trying to identify where the issues were – internal, external – what can we do to fix it. And we had done a lot of work on that. So from our perspective, it was sort of frustrating because some of the things that we spent so much time doing basically got thrown out the window because we couldn't do them anymore. . . And a lot of that work just ended up going nowhere.

Some faculty members, like this one, felt upset about their wasted efforts.

Powerlessness

Feelings of powerlessness—one of the two main components of alienation—generated many of the initial reactions to SB 1720 described here. As previously noted, three specific kinds of powerlessness exist: strategic, tactical, and operational (Tummers, 2011). The data revealed interesting distinctions between each for the faculty in our study.

Strategic powerlessness.

According to Tummers (2011), strategic powerlessness emerges when public professionals do not feel involved in the writing of policy itself. In the case of SB 1720, participants overwhelmingly expressed frustration that sweeping reform was passed by lawmakers without any regard for the opinions and institutional knowledge of key stakeholders, especially faculty "who were right here in the trenches." Illustrating this point, one faculty member criticized that "educators were not invited to the table . . . I understand they spoke to superintendents and college presidents. But the actual faculty members who teach developmental. . . I don't think that there was a really concerted effort to get those perspectives." Another faculty member agreed, saying, "I think SB 1720 is wrong. . . These are non-educators, not consulting the stakeholders, and it's wrong." A third reflected, "When I heard what was happening, and there was no one from education being consulted, that this was literally a legislative decision made in the vacuum seemingly to me, I thought this is a set-up for failure."

Interestingly, the data in our study suggest that feelings of strategic powerlessness are not isolated to this one instance of policy implementation. Several participants, who each taught a combination of DE- and college-level courses, shared that they have long felt ignored in the writing and passage of educational policy:

> *Participant 1*: It seems that our voice, regardless of what our voice is in public education, it's ignored. . .. Our voice, I feel like it doesn't matter. It's, "This is what we say. This is what you're going to do. Deal with it. And if you don't like it, go do something else."
>
> *Participant 2*: They don't want to listen to subject-area experts at all.
>
> *Participant 3*: The department chair of education at my college back in the 70s told us, "You know what the most dangerous time for any teacher is?" And we'd go, "What?" And he goes, "When the legislature is in session." And it has not changed in. . . almost 40 years now.

Considering research that highlights the importance of past alienation on current willingness to implement reform (van Engen et al., 2019), these negative experiences likely informed how faculty felt when faced, once again, with sweeping mandates from the Florida legislature.

Tactical discretion, rather than powerlessness. For Tummers (2011), *discretion* is considered the opposite of powerlessness. It is present in situations where public professionals can contribute to and shape the implementation process. In the case of SB 1720, we find that some discretion was available to faculty at the tactical—or college—level. Although many accused the Florida legislature of passing DE reform with limited educator input, SB 1720 was only a framework for action and offered individual colleges a good deal of autonomy to implement as they saw fit. This opportunity for faculty discretion at the local level helped mitigate feelings of tactical powerlessness. In the words of one faculty member, some colleges experienced a "sense of buy-in because it [SB 1720] was created at the local level within certain perimeters."

Tactical discretion was encouraged on some college campuses through the creation of committees and workgroups. According to one faculty member's experiences, "It was up to us to try to come up with something and fast. . . So we split in groups, and we started researching what other schools were doing to, you know, to approach developmental education in a different way." Splitting into groups allowed faculty to quickly gather best practices and produce recommendations for the college to then implement. At another college, a faculty member described implementation of SB 1720 in this way:

> There was the time of shock and awe that we all went through when this legislation came down. . . We are going to grumble about things that make us uncomfortable, but eventually we will come together as a team and do the best that we can to serve our students with the card that we were dealt by the state. So, from those conversations, the ad-hoc committee was formed at the institutional level. . ., and then from there we came to the department and there were several small workgroups that were formed, and in those small workgroups those of us who teach these developmental courses and ENC 1101 courses were invited to participate. . . We looked at the variety of options that were offered by the state and came up with the two that we really wanted, the modularized and compressed format, and from there we just got to work.

Again, committees and workgroups provided the opportunity for faculty to leverage their expertise in the local design of DE reform.

A third faculty member reported, "I was pleased [with SB 1720]." In explaining this feeling, she described playing an active part in the rollout of SB 1720 on her campus: "I felt very involved. And, they let me campaign for the corequisite class for composition, which was the thing I was really pulling for, and we have been able to implement that." Notably, faculty perceptions of the bill were more optimistic in the presence of this tactical discretion.

Operational powerlessness. In terms of powerlessness and discretion at the classroom-level, there are some interesting and complex findings. Although college-level faculty did not have any say in deciding which students were placed into their classrooms, they did have discretion in how to best help academically underprepared students once they arrived.

Faculty described two general approaches to managing increased academic under preparation in their college-level courses. The first response involved faculty informally embedding just-in-time remediation within course materials and lectures to ensure that academically underprepared students had the necessary foundation for success. Illustrating this point, one faculty member explained that, following SB 1720:

> There is extra stuff that we have to do. Like, I have to cover adding and subtracting fractions. . . because they didn't remember. . . So there were extra things I would have to do in the class, and make sure that they were prepared for [MAT] 1033 because I knew that if I just started teaching right at that course level, they wouldn't have made it.

The second response involved faculty providing one-on-one help to their students on evenings and weekends, well beyond the expectations of traditional office hours. According to one, long-time faculty member who had been at her institution 11 years, "Many times, I have intermediate students who are coming in that really needed to be at basic math or even Algebra I. I'm having to spend hours and hours with them outside of the classroom just to help them." Another instructor reported speaking with several students each weekend about course content, adding, "I don't mind giving them my phone number; I don't mind explaining it again, but I think I'm entitled to my weekends too." It is no surprise, then, that faculty across the FCS reported teaching as being far more tiring and exhausting than in the past.

While these may appear to be examples of discretion, faculty often did not perceive them as such. Notably, two of the three faculty represented here used some form of the phrase "have to" when describing how they increased academic supports, implying that this extra work was not entirely their choice. Instead, because of pay-for-performance initiatives, faculty felt they must maintain student success rates in their college-level courses, despite a changing student population, or face professional consequences. And so, in the case of one faculty member, student success has not suffered: "In terms of success rates. . . I have kept them stable, but that's been through doubling my workload." Yet, she and many of her colleagues "don't see that as being sustainable."

Having established how and when faculty experienced instances of discretion and powerlessness throughout the implementation of SB 1720, we now turn our examination to Tummers's (2011) second component of alienation: meaninglessness.

Meaninglessness

Perceived meaninglessness was also widespread amongst FCS faculty as they reacted to SB 1720. In fact, when describing frustration or concern with SB 1720, meaningless—particularly client meaningless—was the primary issue taken up by faculty, even more than powerlessness as indicated by the amount of data that we coded under each of the headings.

Client meaninglessness. Following Tummers's (2011) understanding of client meaningless, many faculty members did not consider SB 1720's testing- and DE-optional mandates to have added value for students. Rather, when speaking about the impact of reform on academically underprepared students, one faculty member framed the changes as "just throwing [students] to the wolves. . .." Explaining this concern further, another faculty member added:

> It's too bad because community college was the second chance for a lot of people and this eliminates the second chance. Because students that take 1033, fail. Take 1033 again, fail. They're like, 'You know what? I'm not going to finish my degree because I'm never going to pass this.'

While the exact words used to describe meaninglessness varied by participant, the sentiment was often the same; DE was previously a resource or "lifeline" for academically underprepared students, "an extremely valuable experience that we have robbed students of." When referencing specific issues with SB 1720, faculty identified acceleration, of both course material and course sequences, as a primary example of meaninglessness. Faculty also expressed that making placement tests optional was meaningless as well since students then had less, rather than more, information to make them important decision about whether to participate in optional DE courses.

Faculty's perceptions of meaninglessness did not stop at academically underprepared students but extended to the academic outcomes of well-prepared students as well. Over all 5 years, some faculty members reported that reform had not been beneficial for well-prepared students because academic rigor within gateway and college-level classes had declined. According to one instructor:

> It [SB 1720] really creates a bad situation for people who are in 1101 and are at the right level and should have a class that brings them forward, but they are not going to go forward. They are going to be on the treadmill with everybody else. That's the problem with all of the ed. reforms. It's turning high school into a treadmill where you can get out for doing nothing. It's turning college into that.

In other words, some faculty perceived implementation of SB 1720 to have generated pressure on faculty to pass students along in their coursework, whether or not they mastered the course material. Much like the findings of Lane et al. (2020), some faculty participants drew attention to the quality of courses following SB 1720 and the meaning they were able to contribute to students' educational journeys.

Societal meaninglessness. Although less universal than client meaninglessness, some faculty also perceived the bill to be meaningless for society at large by limiting the open access mission of the community college. In the words of one faculty member, SB 1720 “slams shut the open door policy at the. . . community and state colleges in the state of Florida and elsewhere.” Another reiterated this point, explaining how the bill undermined their college’s ability to serve students in the surrounding community by scaling back developmental-level coursework: “Our goal was to service our community, and our community was an arithmetic-level community. That’s where they started with them. Now, we can’t do that.” A third elaborated:

> Our population has [been] under-served [by the traditional] school system. . . You have people from a community that may have never left the community. Maybe they have never driven outside the Florida line. And you’re now saying to them, “We’re even going to cut your services to the bone and we’re going to expect you to achieve against the student who’s had all the benefits. . .” When we [community colleges] first came about, we were ‘come-as-you-are-and-we-will-move-you.’ And now, it’s changed [because of SB 1720]. . .

Notably, these faculty perceptions of meaningless are somewhat contradictory to the evidence gathered from research on student success and equity using student record data from the Florida K-20 Education Data Warehouse (Hu et al., 2019), a fact which will be elaborated upon in the discussion.

Reforming DE Despite Alienation

Policy alienation typically results in public professionals being unwilling to implement policy (Tummers, 2011). However, in the case of SB 1720, we find that faculty worked hard to carry out the mandates of SB 1720 as best they could despite widespread feelings of alienation. As one faculty member noted, “Has there been grumbling? Sure. . . but I really do think we’ve tried to invest ourselves and tried to make it work.” As previously mentioned, “making it work” involved putting in unpaid overtime during evenings, weekends, and summer breaks to redesign remedial courses and support student learning following implementation. Faculty framed this extra work and effort as a natural byproduct of their commitment to student success. In the words of one faculty member:

> Everybody sitting around this table, they are student friendly and they will go the extra mile to do whatever they need to do. . . Everyone here has been in education a long time. When they see a bad plan, they know it when they see it.

> But, the bottom line is at the end of the day, we are going to get on board and we're going to do whatever we need to do, not because of the law, but because of our students.

Ultimately, it appears that this extra work has been worthwhile, leading to improved student outcomes across the FCS. Although, as another faculty member pointed out, "Well, sure, we've had some success. Yippee. But what we did was we taught our butts off."

Unfortunately, these increased efforts make it difficult to disentangle the impact of reform initiatives from the additional support students received from dedicated instructors. In year two, one forward thinking faculty member anticipated this issue:

> Our passion as educators will work against us as the state looks at data, since here is what's happening. Folks who are involved in developmental ed. tend to be very, very passionate. So we go through all kinds of hoops to get students to be successful. So we get the few students that we're currently getting, and. . . we put mechanisms in place [to facilitate their learning and success]. And so ultimately, at the end of the day. . ., when we look at the quantitative data, it will look that—despite using accelerated models, or modules, or whatever it is we're doing—the success rate is essentially the same as it was prior to us doing what we do. So from a state level, as legislators look at data, they're going to say 'What are you guys complaining about?'

Discussion

In this study, we found that many faculty members were cognizant of DE's shortcomings and were willing to make improvements if they were not doing so already. However, most faculty were surprised by SB 1720's specific plan to overhaul DE and did not believe that it represented the best way to improve student outcomes. Because of this, the bill evoked feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness amongst faculty. Although faculty largely felt excluded from the legislative process that led to statewide DE reform, some discretion was evident at colleges that convened faculty committees and task forces to generate recommendations for implementation of SB 1720 at a local level. Discretion within individual classrooms was also possible, allowing faculty to choose how they would implement SB 1720 within their classrooms. Unfortunately, many felt constrained because of performance funding measures and pressure to maintain or improve student success rates in the new teaching environment. Despite feelings of alienation, faculty worked hard to redesign their courses and increase the support available to academically underprepared students.

In many ways, our findings align well with Tummers's (2011) policy alienation framework because faculty members felt alienated by the DE policy-making process. However, there does not seem to be strong evidence that such alienation has dampened their commitments toward policy implementation and student success. In fact, faculty members put forth strong efforts to implement the policy as best they could. Although faculty felt disappointed about being excluded from the drafting of SB1720, they leveraged their concern into efforts to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the bill, particularly on academically underprepared students.

Notably, SB 1720 has not affected student outcomes in the ways that faculty initially feared. Researchers using student record data from the Florida K-20 Education Data Warehouse found that Florida's DE reform stipulated by SB 1720 increased both the number of students enrolling directly in English Composition, Intermediate Algebra, and other gateway math courses, as well as passing rates in those courses on a cohort-by-cohort basis (Hu et al., 2019). In other words, SB 1720 resulted in more students enrolling directly in gateway courses and earning college credit, instead of being tested and placed into DE courses as before SB 1720.

Not only did passing rates in college-level and gateway courses increase on a cohort-by-cohort basis, but the reform also led to narrowing gaps in success by students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Black and Latinx students experienced larger increases in gateway course passing rates based on cohort-by-cohort comparison, when compared with their White counterparts. Using these metrics, SB 1720 has not limited the FCS's open access mission but rather provided increased access, particularly within racially minoritized communities.

These improved outcomes are interesting, considering the perspectives of faculty members presented here. It is also noteworthy that faculty held fairly pessimistic views of the reform throughout all 5 years of data collection, despite preliminary findings published during the same period to the contrary. It will be the role of future research to better understand what underlies this disconnect between quantitative student outcome data and the largely negative perceptions of faculty.

One explanation is that faculty perceptions were rooted in their personal experience, rather than state-level trends. Despite the overall increase in students attempting and earning college credit, there was not much increase, and sometimes even slight decreases, in the passing rates of individual gateway courses (Hu et al., 2019). In other words, many individual faculty witnessed, firsthand, declines in the success rates of their given classes following SB 1720. Where faculty were aware of consistent or improved student outcomes, they attributed it to "doubling my work load" and teaching "our butts off."

Considering this, it is understandable that faculty felt discouraged by what they saw and experienced, even as the number of students attempting and earning college credit system-wide increased.

Another explanation is that some faculty have a vested interest in the continuation of DE. Proposals to scale back DE threaten the employment and identity of these professionals. Taking a slightly different approach, Spillane et al. (2002) acknowledge that implementers commonly struggle to maintain self-image. Throughout the data, faculty shared numerous anecdotes about specific students—including themselves—whose lives were changed for the better because they participated in DE. And so, we wonder whether some faculty may have romanticized DE and its potential for expanding access to education, rather than fully acknowledging national trends that demonstrated DE was in dire need of reform before SB 1720.

A third explanation is that there are, perhaps, particular kinds of institutions or student groups who have not benefited equally from reform efforts. Either way, framing the bill as an unqualified success ignores an equally important story about the fear, worry, frustration, and overall alienation felt by many FCS faculty members during the implementation of reform.

Notably, Florida faculty are not the only ones navigating feelings of policy alienation due to DE reform. In 2017, Chancellor Timothy White of the California State University system eliminated non-credit remedial courses through an executive order. According to the Los Angeles Times, “White’s orders upset many faculty members, who said the chancellor failed to adequately consult them” (Watanabe, 2019, para. 8). In a plenary session at the annual convening of the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness, James Minor, the assistant vice chancellor and senior strategist at the California State University Office of the Chancellor noted, “We have built a small industry in developmental education courses” (Kerwin et al., 2019). Despite faculty concerns, which echo the sentiments of FCS faculty, California’s student outcome data show that scaling back this “industry” has increased passing rates for lower-division courses (Kerwin et al., 2019) and improved 4-year graduation rates (Watanabe, 2019).

The findings of this research have significance for faculty members, college administrators, and policymakers alike. Past research demonstrates that feelings of policy alienation can lead public professionals to experience low levels of job satisfaction (Tummers, Steijn et al., 2012) and can decrease their willingness to implement new policies (Tummers et al., 2015; van Engen et al., 2019). While we have little evidence of faculty actively resisting or subverting SB 1720, we do have ample evidence of how the bill generated negative emotions among faculty, particularly in the early years of implementation. To avoid these undesirable outcomes, it is essential that policymakers reduce the degree of policy alienation generated by future educational reform by finding better ways to involve public professionals in the design and implementation of new bills and initiatives.

The findings also allude to the importance of leadership and culture. How department chairs, deans, and other implementation team leaders structured reform at the local level seemed to impact how faculty responded to the required changes. According to the examples we provided, some faculty experienced opportunities for collaboration that fostered innovation, motivation, and buy-in. Unfortunately, we did not systemically ask questions about this topic until the last year of data collection and so our ability to draw conclusions remains limited. Even so, because education policy literature based on the K-12 school system provides evidence that principals influence implementation (Coburn, 2001, 2006; Stillman, 2011), we feel this topic of leadership and culture warrants further investigation at the postsecondary level.

Finally, our findings are significant in how they show that faculty are capable of rallying together to enact policy mandates successfully, even when they do not fully believe in the mandate itself. In the case of SB 1720, faculty took on an increased workload to ensure that the academically underprepared students, for whom they care so deeply, were well supported in college-level coursework. That being said, the additional work necessary to quickly and successfully implement SB 1720 was described as exhausting and unsustainable. Providing increased support and fair compensation for overtime put in over the summer or on weekends would go a long way toward resolving this challenge.

Conclusion

While there are some exceptions, specifically the creation and implementation of the PERT (Bilsky, 2011), exclusion of instructional staff from the drafting of policy is regrettably common. To this point, director of the National Center for Developmental Education Hunter Boylan was quoted by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* around the same time as the passage of SB 1720 as saying, “They’ve [reformers across the nation] absolutely ignored the professional community in developmental education” (Mangan, 2013, para. 25). The findings from our study indicate that policy alienation was present among faculty members in the FCS during DE reform. Although work on policy alienation has been done in related areas, like secondary education (Brooks et al., 2008; Tummers, Bekkers et al., 2012; van Engen et al., 2019), our research applies Tummers’s (2011) framework to a new group of implementers—college faculty members.

In researching how and why faculty experienced powerlessness and meaninglessness through the passage and implementation of SB 1720, we have identified several recommendations for improving future reform efforts. Our first recommendation relates to data sharing. In light of the meaninglessness felt by faculty, we think it is critical to regularly communicate the value and impact of reform to implementers at several points during the implementation process. Although initial research of SB 1720 revealed positive outcomes, most faculty were not aware of these findings and continued to hold some skepticism about the long-term effects of bypassing remediation. Presently, access to student outcome data is unevenly distributed throughout Florida College System institutions (Brower et al., 2020). If legislators and college administrators are explicit about the motivations behind reform, as well as positive and negative outcomes during the roll-out of reform efforts—particularly reform efforts which are highly contentious—morale can be increased and feelings of alienation, decreased. Moreover, we acknowledge that faculty felt acute powerlessness in this situation because they perceived policymakers to have no experience with higher education, whatsoever. To increase the receptivity of this message even more, we recommend allowing allies within DE to communicate the opportunities and successes of reform to their colleagues.

Our second recommendation pertains to increased collaboration. We encourage individual colleges tasked with policy implementation to consider how they might incorporate the opinions, expertise, and contributions of college faculty into reform efforts, even if they are not included at the state level. Doing so in Florida allowed positive feelings of tactical discretion to balance out negative feelings of strategic powerlessness. This recommendation is backed by similar findings within the health care industry. In research done by Tummers and Bekkers (2014), discretion mediated public professionals' feelings of client meaninglessness and led to increased willingness to implement policy. Also, collaboration at the K-12 level has proved useful in supporting teachers through successful reform efforts (Coburn, 2006; Louis et al., 2005; Porter et al., 2015; Spillane, 1999).

Finally, we think it important to acknowledge and celebrate the effort that faculty invested in maintaining and improving student outcomes during implementation of DE reform. Quantitative research shows that SB 1720 and similar mandates in states like California have benefited students and the colleges that serve them (Hu et al., 2019; Mokher et al., 2021; Park et al., 2018; Watanabe, 2019). These promising findings confirm that faculty have not purposely undermined reform efforts as a result of their alienation. Rather, we find that faculty seem to have coped with feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness through increased action on behalf of their students.

Author Note

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