

By Alisha Hyslop

Pilot Innovative Approaches to Funding

THIS ARTICLE IS PART OF A YEARLONG SERIES THAT WILL MORE CLOSELY EXAMINE THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN ACTE'S POSTSECONDARY REFORM POSITION STATEMENT AND HIGHLIGHT BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING EACH OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS. TO ACCESS THE COMPLETE POSITION STATEMENT, VISIT WWW.ACTEONLINE.ORG/POLICY/LEGISLATIVE_ISSUES/POSTSECONDARY.CFM.

THE SEVENTH RECOMMENDATION IN ACTE'S POSTSECONDARY REFORM POSITION STATEMENT IS

to pilot innovative approaches to funding. Public postsecondary providers are expected to fulfill a number of educational missions linked to separate funding streams, such as academic coursework, workforce education and training, distance education and research. These diverse missions host a variety of outcome expectations that can challenge those involved in directing the institution. Thoughtful consideration of how postsecondary finance policy can be improved across programs is necessary.

As education and policy leaders around the country examine demographic trends, learn more about the "skills gap" and strive to prepare students for the 21st century economy, postsecondary funding strategies are being examined as a tool for helping more students earn critical postsecondary credentials.

These innovative funding approaches include efforts to cover noncredit courses in full-time equivalent (FTE) reim-

bursement to reduce the burden on institutions and students; to integrate categorical funding to enhance institutional ability to effectively deliver career-related credentials and meet diverse educational missions; to provide incentive funding based on course or program completion instead of enrollment; and to create performance expectations for students moving along the P-16 continuum.



Integrating Programs to Better Serve Students

One pilot program related to postsecondary funding is the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program in Washington state. This program, developed by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges and launched in the spring of 2004, was designed "to provide educational access and support for adult basic education (ABE)/English as a Second Language (ESL) students to progress further and faster along career pathways." It helps often-underserved populations gain the skills necessary to earn a livable wage.

The program pairs ESL or ABE instructors with career and technical education (CTE) instructors in the classroom, so that they can provide students with basic education and high-demand workforce skills concurrently. This challenges the historical notion that students must progress through basic education before entering technical certificate or degree programs.

Instructors must collaborate to design a fully integrated curriculum covering basic skills and technical competencies. The instructor from the basic skills area and the instructor from the CTE program must then jointly instruct in the same classroom at least 50 percent of the time during the program.

To eliminate disincentives to this type of collaboration, the state uses a weighted funding model of 1.75 FTE per I-BEST student. This weighted funding is the result of the combination of funding streams for traditional for-credit coursework and for basic education programs. Before a program can be approved for weighted funding, local

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and regional labor market demand in the industry must be verified, and there must have been active involvement by employers and community partners in its development. These business and industry partners are expected to provide ongoing support for approved programs. Courses in I-BEST programs count toward future certificate and degree options, with no duplication of coursework required within the career pathway.

As of February 2008, there were 95 I-BEST programs offered at community and technical colleges around Washington. These programs were offered in diverse career areas, such as health care, technology, business, education and skilled trades. For example, at Spokane Community College, students can enroll in a two-quarter, six-month program that provides ESL or GED instruction along with manufacturing trades training. The Integrated Trades program provides students with 25 college credits and a manufacturing certificate through practical training in one of three areas: welding, HPAT Heavy Equipment Hydraulics or computer numeric-control machining. Upon completion of this program, students are eligible to enroll in more advanced certificate and degree programs.

At Highline Community College students can participate in a nursing assistant I-BEST program, among many others. Completers of this one-quarter program earn 11 college credits and their Certified Nursing Assistant certificate. Credits apply to associate degrees in nursing and human services and prepare students to fill openings in the large nursing facilities that surround the college. Basic skill-building for entry into health care, English language competence for workplace communication, and cultural awareness are incorporated into the practical nursing curriculum.

Highline Nursing Assistant student Delores Morales explains how the program helped her to be successful and could help others in the community. “This is a program where you could come and feel confident about yourself because everyone is just like you—they are first entering a college setting.”

Results of the I-BEST program have



been remarkable. An early study on pilot sites found that “I-BEST students earned five times more college credits on average and were 15 times more likely to complete workforce training than were traditional ESL students during the same amount of time.” The students also made similar language skill gains through the integrated ESL instruction as did comparison students.

Give Incentives for Student Progress

While funding mechanisms based on specific benchmarks for higher education are often controversial (in large part due to the diverse missions of institutions and students), a number of states are beginning to look at this approach. Washington is following up on the success of its I-BEST program with a new Student Achievement

Initiative designed to reward community and technical colleges for improving student achievement. The incentive system was developed in response to the state board’s 10-year system direction—“Achieve increased educational attainment for all residents across the state.”

The new initiative, announced in the fall of 2007, doesn’t just reward degree completion, which is not always the appropriate measure of success for community and technical college students, but instead ties incentives to key research-based benchmarks along an educational pathway. It was developed by a statewide taskforce involving the state board and college trustees, presidents and faculty using an inclusive design that sought buy-in from all 34 community

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and technical colleges in the state.

The incentive points include students earning the first 15 and 30 college credits; earning five credits of college-level math; passing a pre-college writing or math course; making significant gains in certain basic skills tests; and completing apprenticeship training and earning a GED, associate degree or certificate.

Institutions will have to improve on these benchmarks over the previous academic year to be eligible for a share of the \$500,000 that has been set aside by the state for the first year of programming. During the 2007-2008 academic year, schools are setting benchmarks and collecting data to begin the process, with incentives to be awarded at the end of the 2008-2009 year. The planning year will allow institutions to develop strategies specifically targeted to help keep students moving forward along the education continuum. Startup funding has been provided by the state board to allow colleges to implement the specific new measures and share and test promising strategies. Meetings have been scheduled with institutional leaders throughout the year to develop a better understanding of the new measurement approach.

By rewarding postsecondary institutions

for helping students progress, regardless of their point of entry or original skill level, this program comes much closer to really measuring the goals of community and technical colleges. Each incentive step provides a foundation for a student's future educational success.

A Model Program

George Boggs, president and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges, and Marlene Seltzer, president and CEO of Jobs for the Future, expressed support for the Washington program. "More states should implement similar programs, altering incentives in ways that will compel colleges to action," they stated. "With so many students in community colleges and so many of today's jobs requiring higher-level skills, it just makes sense."

More states are following suit. In Texas, state leaders have appointed a Task Force on Higher Education Incentive Funding that will make recommendations in July 2008. The recommendations will focus on structuring higher education funding to reward student and institutional outcomes aligned with state and regional priorities, such as graduating students in critical fields; using the \$100 million in incentive funding appropriated by the 80th legisla-

ture; and establishing a system of incentive funding for all public institutions of higher education, for consideration by the Texas legislature.

"Establishing an innovative incentive-based performance funding system is essential to furthering Texas' goal of having institutions of higher education prepare students for the demands and opportunities of the 21st century marketplace," said Texas Governor Rick Perry. "We must change the paradigm from funding institutions solely based on students enrolled to funding based more on the quality of students produced."

While large-scale incentive-funding programs are too new to offer measurable results, the attention on student success is a positive step toward expanding opportunities for all students and preparing the workforce necessary in the 21st century. As these ideas are implemented and refined, all community and technical college programs can learn from the results. **I**

ACTE is very interested to learn about other CTE-related initiatives that work toward achieving ACTE's postsecondary reform recommendations. If you are involved in such a program, please send information to Alisha Hyslop at ahyslop@acteonline.org.