

Student Achievement Initiative

What is it?

A statewide initiative within the community and technical college system aimed at measuring colleges and awarding funds for improvements in the significant steps students take toward higher achievement. Sharing promising practices that emerge from these efforts is an important part of the initiative, along with building a framework for assessing student retention.

How did it come about?

One of the three goals of the State Board's 10-year system direction is: Achieve increased educational attainment for all residents across the state. This is the system's response to addressing that goal.

How were the measures developed?

In September 2006, the State Board directed staff to develop an initiative to measure and reward colleges for improving student achievement. A task force comprised of board members, college presidents, college trustees, and faculty representation established a set of principles to frame and guide the initiative. It should measure incremental gains and progress that leads to improved college level achievement in all missions without favor. It should focus on student achievement improvements that can be influenced by colleges and allow colleges the maximum flexibility to improve according to the diverse needs and characteristics of their local communities and area residents. The measures should be straightforward, simple and readily understandable points in students' educational progress. The measures should be able to quantify each college's annual improvement and help each college to develop and share with other colleges the practices and strategies that are most effective in advancing student achievement.

The measures were designed over a series of meetings in which a system advisory committee assisted the data analysis. The Columbia University Community College Research Center assisted in empirically testing the measures. National experts on performance funding also weighed in via telephone interviews to further inform the group meetings and measures development.

What areas will be measured?

The new initiative sets forth six "momentum" points that represent critical steps in student progress. Two of the points directly measure 1st year college-level progress. They are gained for earning the 1st 15 and the 1st 30 college-level credits. Another point is earned for the 1st 5 college-level credits in a math class that meets the requirement for computation (applied degree) or quantitative reasoning (transfer degree). These points presume levels of college readiness.

However, not all students are college-ready. In fact, students who are less than or even far from college-ready may take longer to build momentum. Two momentum points are measured for advancing through adult basic education and English as a Second Language and completing pre-college English and math to become college-ready. The former is measured for pre and post test score gains on a standard test (CASAS). The latter is for every level of instruction with a grade that qualifies the student to advance to the next highest level. Both advancing through basic skills and becoming college ready are measured and counted for each level of instruction a

student completes and points can be garnered multiple times. The final momentum point is awarded for a certificate, degree or apprenticeship. Certificate awards are counted once a student has earned 45 college credits.

What does improvement mean?

Improvement is the growth in total momentum points in a college from one year to the next. The baseline year is 2006-07.

What is the "learning year"?

The system will implement a "learning year" in 2007-08 so each college can better understand their student make-up and their current level of success in tracking these measurements, and develop strategies. While the measurements appear simple and direct on the surface, there is much to figure out underneath. The State Board staff will work directly with the colleges through a series of interactive television meetings. Colleges will be sent their data. The ITVs will focus on using the data to understand what and who is being measured, find and share promising practices and select strategies.

How will the financial awards work?

"Start-up" funds will be allocated to the colleges in the first year. Incentive funding will be awarded after 2008-09 which is the first performance year. Total points garnered will be compared to the base year. Practices started and improvements made in 2007-08 will not be lost or wasted in a year that doesn't count. They can help a college garner even higher points in 2008-09 when it is compared to the baseline year.

How will we know if the initiative is succeeding in its goal?

A formal evaluation is planned to examine if the initiative is succeeding in increasing attainment and what role funding is playing?