Core to College Evaluation

SUSTAINING CORE STRENGTH

How Core to College states continue alignment efforts between K–12 and higher education

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March 2016

WestEd
WestEd.org

Suggested citation: Klarin, B., & Le Fevre, L. (2016). *Sustaining core strength: How Core to College states continue alignment efforts between K–12 and higher education.* San Francisco: WestEd.

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WestEd's Evaluation of the Core to College Initiative

Core to College: Preparing Students for College Readiness and Success was a three-year initiative funded by the Lumina Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors served as the fiscal sponsor.

Core to College's mission was "to facilitate greater coordination between K–12 and postsecondary education systems around implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and aligned assessments." The initiative aimed to foster shared ownership of college readiness by the K–12 and postsecondary sectors, including use of the CCSS-aligned assessments to determine a student's readiness for credit-bearing postsecondary courses. Core to College grants were awarded to teams in Colorado, Florida, Hawai'i, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington.

Each of these state teams designated an Alignment Director (AD) who was tasked with leading the Core to College work in the state. Through the consulting company Education First, Core to College offered one-on-one and cross-state technical assistance to these ADs. Together, the ADs made up the grant's Learning Network, which provided facilitated peer-to-peer support, information sharing, and multi-state technical assistance to grantee states.

WestEd provided evaluation services over the course of the initiative. The evaluation plan was designed to synthesize the progress of the initiative and its participating states over the grant period, with a focus on the initiative's primary goals: creating statewide definitions of college and career readiness, using the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments to inform decisions about student placement into credit-bearing college courses, and aligning K–12 and postsecondary policies to the CCSS.

As part of its evaluation effort, WestEd evaluated the initiative based on five action areas involved in changing policy and practices around the implementation of the CCSS and aligned assessments for improving college readiness. These action areas encompassed the policy, practices, and people dimensions of the Core to College effort; they centered around how the policy and practices involved in implementing the CCSS and the alignment of state assessment practices could improve students' readiness for college change over time. The five action areas are strategic planning, infrastructure, stakeholder engagement, policy and governance, and data and analysis.

Cross-state, multi-method, qualitative reports anchored the evaluation, which systematically chronicled the progress of the initiative. Reports focused on topics of interest to the funders; the Learning Network; and Education First. These studies were intended to illuminate promising strategies and to document challenges.

The WestEd evaluation team understands that each state has approached standards implementation with its own set of parameters and context: differing stakeholders, funding concerns, size and scope, timelines, and internal priorities. The evaluation activities have been intended to recognize that variation and highlight how the field can learn from it.

Introduction

While many states across the country have adopted common (or similar) standards as a result of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), each state has implemented its standards in its own unique way, based on the state's particular context and education system. When planning for and implementing these standards, the state leaders typically considered numerous factors, including how to define college and career readiness, integrate new assessments, and align their K–12 and higher education systems to better prepare high school students for college and career.

The Core to College Initiative provides a lens into how several states worked to foster greater coordination between K–12 and postsecondary education systems as these states implemented the CCSS (or other new standards) and aligned assessments. Specifically, the Core to College states aimed to better align their education systems to provide students a clearer and more efficient pathway to taking entry-level, credit-bearing coursework in college.

Over the past few years, the evaluation team at WestEd looked closely at how state leadership across the Core to College states carried out a variety of efforts: engaging colleagues and stakeholders; addressing course sequencing across K–12 and higher education systems; determining how students get placed into credit-bearing coursework; reforming developmental education; and employing networks to create systemic change. While the initiative is officially over, the work is not. It continues to evolve and affect change in real time, in real systems, and with real people. As such, we revisited some of the Core to College states to explore what pieces of the initiative's work continue to flourish, specifically with regard to continued buy-in from higher education — with regard to how the K–12 and higher education systems have collaborated to better align their systems — and possible shifts in how students are being placed into credit-bearing coursework. We also examined the lessons these states learned about sustaining their efforts.

Methodology

The evaluation team collected general data on states' Common Core efforts by reviewing recent news articles, journals, online documents, and systems-change literature. Using this knowledge base, the team drafted driving research questions for this final report that focused on exploring how states' higher education systems are involved in standards efforts today, including aligning course sequences, updating placement policies, and supporting faculty awareness of college readiness standards. These research questions informed an interview protocol through which the team engaged several Core to College states in semi-structured conversations.

The WestEd team spoke by phone with key Core to College contacts from seven of the Core to College states: Colorado, Hawai'i, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington. These individuals (many held the title of Alignment Director under the grant) had

been part of the Core to College work and, for the most part, are still involved in work that has evolved from the initiative. The other four states involved in the initiative did not have applicable staff for the team to speak with.

This report uses a case-study approach to describe how three of the Core to College states — Washington, Hawai'i, and Louisiana — continue their Core to College–initiated efforts of aligning K–12 and postsecondary education systems to better prepare students for college. The case studies include details about key components of each state's respective Core to College work, including the state's history with systems-change efforts in education; key staff and organizations that "championed" the Core to College efforts and promoted cross-system collaboration; specific strategies used to align the state's K–12 and higher education systems; the state's approach to standardized assessments and course-placement policies; and key outcomes of the Core to College-related efforts.

Driving *Questions*

- How is higher education supporting the standards today? How are the K–12 and higher education systems collaborating on the ongoing standards efforts?
- Have there been any changes to how students are being placed into entry-level college coursework? Specifically, are institutions in your state using or considering using 11th grade assessment results as part of this process?

Literature Review: Systems Change

Systems change is at the heart of the Core to College initiative and its sustained efforts. Accordingly, to offer relevant background and context about the type of statewide changes being planned and implemented by the Core to College states, the WestEd evaluation team conducted a brief literature review on the nature of systems change, particularly as it relates to education.

Scholars note that an interest in "large scale social change" has resulted in a variety of researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders turning their focus to systems-change efforts and their results (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 2; Abercrombie, Harries, & Wharton, 2015). While researchers note that many definitions exist, systems change can be seen as an "intentional process" that "purposefully" drives long-term results (Abercrombie, Harries, & Wharton, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, interventions seeking to change systems do so by focusing on altering the systems' "dynamics, structures, and conditions" (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 5). For the Core to College initiative, the systems-change strategies included fostering greater coordination between K–12 and postsecondary education systems as states implemented the CCSS (or other new standards) and aligned assessments.

Multiple frameworks and principles for systems-change efforts exist. For example, the Build Initiative (BI) uses a framework that focuses on working with state leaders from

the public and private sectors to help states develop systems to support early childhood development. BI was developed to help states lead efforts at coordinating program, policy, and service systems that respond to family needs, carefully use private and public resources, and prepare children for school readiness (Bruner, 2004). It also sponsored a symposium on evaluating systems change and found that systems-change initiatives target one or more "focus areas" for "systems-level impact": context, components, connections, infrastructure, and/or scale (Coffman, 2007, pp. 5–6). In another example offering a guide on systems change, Abercrombie et al. underscored six key principles to keep in mind when implementing systems-change efforts: "understand needs and assets, engage multiple actors, map the systems, do it together, distribute leadership, [and] foster a learning culture" (2015, p. 27).

The Collective Impact (CI) Framework is among the most widely known frameworks on systems change today. CI focuses on large-scale systems-change efforts that involve multiple cross-sector stakeholders working together to move beyond isolated instances of change toward greater impact (Garringer & Nagel, 2014; Kania & Kramer, 2011). The approach emphasizes having five pillars, or success factors, that guide systems-change efforts and stakeholders collaborating in the process: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone organization (Garringer & Nagel, 2014; Kania & Kramer, 2011).

While the Core to College initiative did not adopt a specific systems-change framework, there are certain elements in the Core to College states' approaches that are similar to those emphasized in BI and CI efforts such as collaboration, common agendas, and shared measurement. More specifically, in implementing their work, many of the Core to College states had "champions" and networks that led collaboration efforts (Bracco et al., 2014a); used shared data and had aligned systems for assessment, college course placement, and course sequencing (Bracco et al., 2014b; Finkelstein et al., 2013); and implemented strategies that led to innovation and outgrowths of Core to College efforts.

Case Studies: Aligning States' K–12 and Postsecondary Education Systems

All of our Core to College contacts offered information about the successes and challenges in their ongoing efforts to better align their K–12 and postsecondary education systems to support students' postsecondary success. Our contacts continue to strategize about how to collaborate across multiple education systems, convene networks for concentrated planning efforts, and focus on long-term solutions that yield clear pathways for student success in college. To illustrate the range of work that has grown out of their Core to College-supported efforts, we spotlight three of the Core to College states: Washington, Hawai'i, and Louisiana.

Washington

K–12 and postsecondary collaboration and alignment strategies

The main strategies for Washington's efforts to align the K–12 and postsecondary education systems currently revolve around addressing assessment scores and placement policies, and implementing senior-year transition courses in math and English (called *Bridge to College* courses). Building trust and collaborative partnerships between postsecondary faculty and K–12 teachers has been critical in achieving stakeholder buy-in to the placement policies that have been endorsed by all public higher education institutions in the state.

The teachers offering the Bridge to College transition courses are being supported through communities of practice that bring together regional teams of teachers, peer team leaders, and higher education faculty "partners." They focus on instructional approaches in the courses; review student work; and discuss grading procedures, including clarifying what "B" work looks like (which is particularly important, as a grade of B or better qualifies students for automatic placement in college-level courses for the community and technical college system).

Bill Moore, Washington's former Core to College Alignment Director and current Director of K–12 Partnerships for the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, notes that the professional learning structure for the transition courses has been working well, with three-day summer training for all teachers as well as periodic regional/local team meetings supported by regional course trainers and led by peer team leaders. He also notes that this structured support system would have been impossible without significant grant support from College Spark Washington, which provided funds that built on and extended the foundation of work laid by the Core to College project. The first full year of implementation for the

transition courses was 2015/16, with 210 teachers in 114 high schools teaching just under 4,000 students. Recruitment for a new cohort of schools interested in offering one or both of the courses is currently underway, with funding available for an additional 300 teachers in 2016/17.

Assessment and course-placement policies

In May 2014, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges agreed to a policy using the Smarter Balanced high school career and college readiness assessment scores for placement in community and technical college courses. Moore confirms that establishing this policy required substantial amounts of on-the-ground networking, planning, time, and teamwork (see Bracco et al., 2014a). Not only was the state board open to accepting Smarter Balanced assessment scores for incoming community and technical college students' placement, but it was willing to establish a systemwide policy that would apply across all of its institutions (see Table 1). The statewide policy outlines students' math and English placement options based on their Smarter Balanced assessment scores and specifically defines the type of math courses students can take if they scored a 2 or 3. In addition, the policy sets up guidelines for using multiple measures — such as high school GPA or a "B" or better in one of the Bridge to College courses (the newly developed high school transition courses) — for students scoring 2 and 1 on the Smarter Balanced assessment.

Moore said that statewide efforts toward more aligned assessment and placement processes began as early as 2008. The alignment process made significant additional progress through the state's recent focus on determining how Smarter Balanced assessment scores and transcript-based measures could be integrated (this focus was due, in large part, to Moore's Core to College work). Moore diligently and thoughtfully created a network to create awareness and engagement around aligning pathways across high school and postsecondary (see Figure 1). He used a multi-pronged approach to do this through engaging with leadership in meetings, presentations, and a cross-sector steering committee; conducting higher education outreach; convening faculty work groups; and providing regional partnerships resources for context-specific alignment work (Bracco et al., 2014a).

Table 1. Agreement on the use of the Smarter Balanced assessments in Washington community and technical colleges

Smarter Balanced high school assessment score level	Mathematics placement options based on score	English placement options based on score
4	**Any entry college-level** math course through Pre-Calculus I	An **entry college-level** English course (including but not limited to English Composition or its equivalent)
3	• **Math& 107** (Math in Society), **Math& 146** (Statistics), or their equivalents • **Pre-Calculus** contingent on a B or better in a calculus pathway class* as a high school senior	An **entry college-level** English course (including but not limited to English Composition or its equivalent)
2	**Math& 107** (Math in Society), **Math& 146** (Statistics), or their equivalents, contingent on a B or better in the statewide *Bridge to College Math* course or through local institutional processes (transcript, high school GPA, additional testing, etc.)	An **entry college-level** English course (including but not limited to English Composition or its equivalent), contingent on a B or better in a statewide *Bridge to College English* course or through local institutional processes (transcript, high school GPA, additional testing, etc.)
1	Additional placement information, determined by local institutional processes (transcript, high school GPA, additional testing, etc.) needed for all entry-level courses	Additional placement information, determined by local institutional processes (transcript, high school GPA, additional testing, etc.) needed for all entry-level courses

*Any algebra-based courses in the high school math course sequence (with Algebra 2 as a formal or informal prerequisite) qualify as "calculus pathway."

Notes:

For all levels in math, placement into more advanced courses than designated in the agreement will depend on additional local institutional placement processes (transcript, high school GPA, additional testing, etc.).

For math, colleges may require additional placement information for initial entry into college-level math courses beginning in the winter term of the entry year following high school graduation.

For English, colleges may require additional placement information for initial entry into college-level courses beginning in the summer term following the first academic year after high school graduation.

For both math and English, individual colleges may also extend the time period for honoring the scores for placement.

The *Bridge to College* course materials in math and English were pilot tested in 2014/15 and are being offered at roughly 125 high schools across the state in 2015/16. An additional cohort of high schools will be added in 2016/17.

Source: Agreement on the use of the Smarter Balanced high school vcareer and college readiness assessment for placement in Washington community & technical colleges (Updated, revised, and approved by system in June–July 2015).

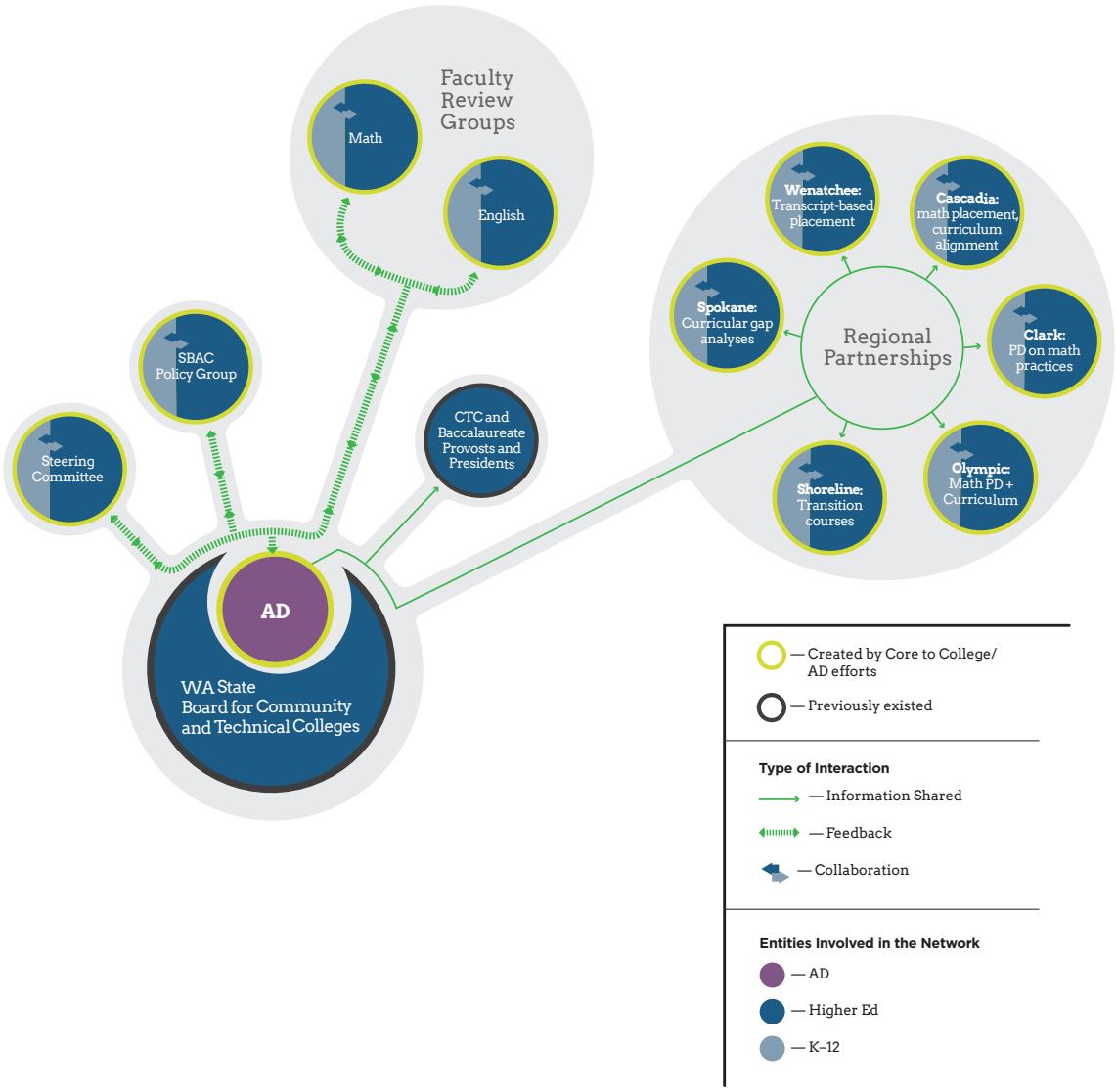
Washington

Figure 1. Examples of Core to College Networks. Washington: Cultivating Cross-Sector Partnerships

Priority goal: Laying the groundwork for use of CCSS-aligned assessments.

Network model/approach: The AD used a multi-pronged approach to building cross-sector awareness and engagement around Washington's priority goal: engaging with leadership via meetings, presentations, and a cross-sector steering committee; developing Smarter Balanced–focused faculty work groups; and funding regional partnerships between K–12 and higher education..

AD role: The AD acted as a cultivator for the Core to College work: paving the way for change by getting stakeholder buy-in across sectors; seeding the work by convening faculty to address CCSS assessment and curriculum; and providing resources to regional partnerships for context-specific alignment work.



Source: This figure originally appeared in a November 2014 Core to College evaluation report (Bracco et al., 2014a).

According to Moore, Smarter Balanced has become "part of the landscape" today. Moore also notes that in recent years, Washington higher education institutions, and the community and technical colleges in particular, have moved significantly toward a "multiple measures" approach to placement. The Smarter Balanced assessment is the "first option" and "opportunity" for students going straight from high school to college to place directly into entry-level college courses without remediation. However, if that does not work for them or they choose not to use the scores, other alternatives (like placement based on high school course-taking and grades, or directed self-placement) are increasingly available. The state's baccalaureate institutions have also developed a similar placement agreement, but are somewhat less specific about the courses available to students who score at levels 3 and 4 on the Smarter Balanced. All of the public baccalaureates (and 9 of the 10 major independent institutions) guarantee those students automatic placement to a college-level course, but, in some cases, they reserve the right to do additional student placement testing to determine which specific course(s) the student should enroll into.

Next steps

A direct outgrowth of the Core to College efforts in Washington is the *Bridge to College Project*, which as noted above, offers students transition courses in high school that are co-designed by higher education faculty (both two- and four-year), high school teachers, and curriculum experts. These courses represent a pathway to college readiness while still in high school for students scoring in level 2 (below college-ready) on the Smarter Balanced high school assessment, helping students avoid remediation and additional testing when entering college. Currently the courses are only part of the agreement for the community and technical system and Eastern Washington University; the goal for 2016/17 is to have the other public baccalaureates include the Bridge to College courses in their agreements. Work is also underway to extend the influence of these transition courses and further improve curricular alignment between K–12 and entry-level college math and English courses by adapting the courses to the community and technical college setting and offering versions of the courses more widely across the state in 2-year college developmental ("pre-college") programs and Basic Education for Adults (BEdA) programs.

Hawai'i

A history of cross-system collaboration

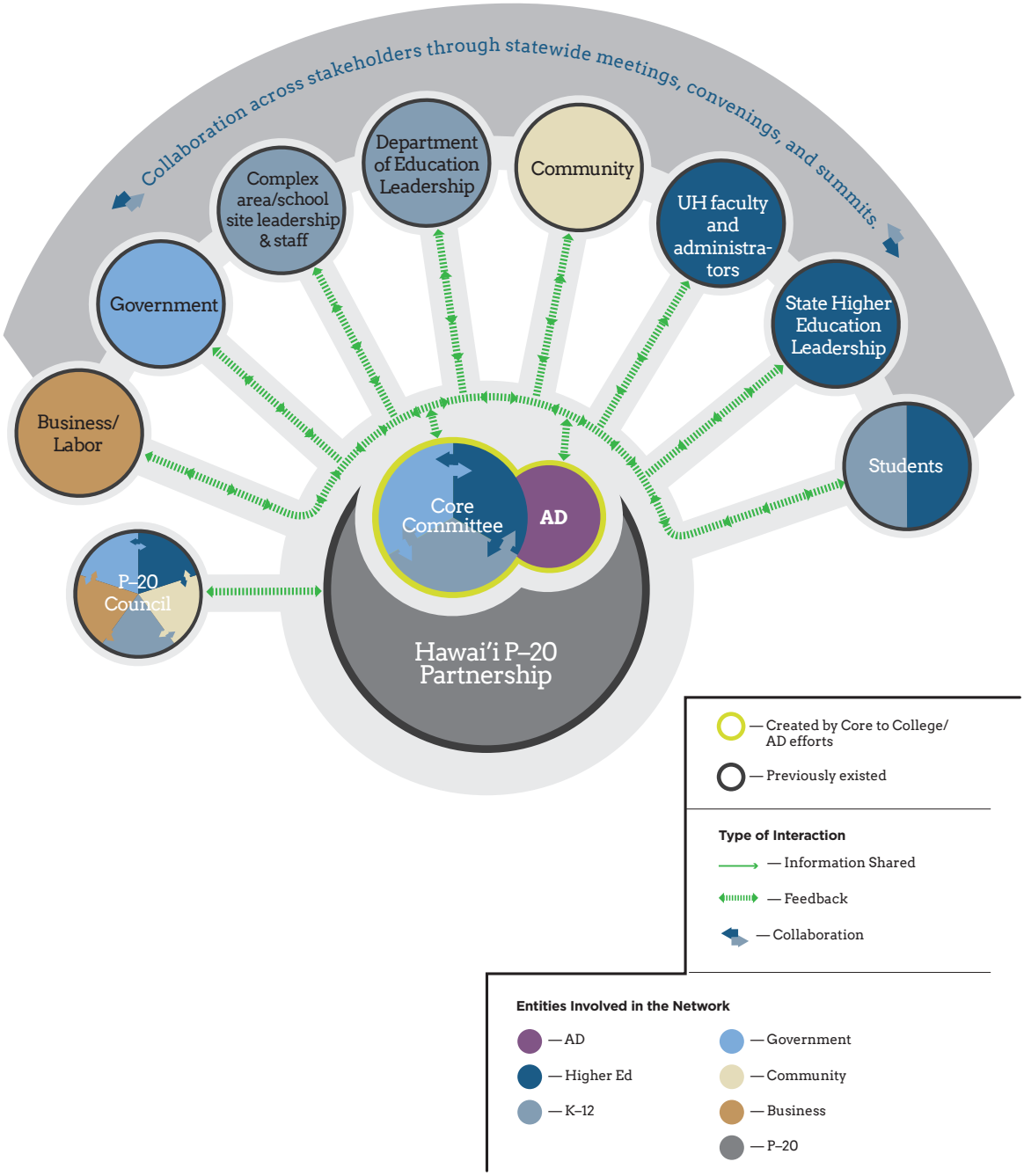
As a small state, Hawai'i's alignment efforts began before the Core to College initiative started, through a history of established relationships between key people and systems. Karen Lee, Associate Vice President and Executive Director of Hawai'i's P–20 Partnerships for Education, noted the importance of cultivating cross-system relationships and emphasized that Hawai'i carefully works to maintain relationships, promises, and connections that have helped alignment efforts between the state's K–12 and postsecondary education systems (see Figure 2 for a graphic of Hawai'i's Core to College network). Both Lee and Daniel Doerger, who was Hawai'i's Core to College Alignment

Figure 2. Examples of Core to College Networks. Hawai'i: Soliciting Feedback from Multiple Sectors

Priority goal: Developing a definition of college readiness.

Network model/approach: Hawai'i's approach involved soliciting and integrating continuous feedback. A statewide committee drafted an initial definition of college readiness, gathered feedback from a variety of constituents, and refined the definition accordingly. The P–20 council ultimately adopted the definition, which was then used by schools and colleges working on alignment activities.

AD role: The AD was a central part of this statewide committee, helping to "cross-pollinate" ideas to craft the definition, personally conveying information about the definition to various stakeholders, and using feedback to help refine the definition.



Source: This figure originally appeared in a November 2014 Core to College evaluation report (Bracco et al., 2014a).

Director, note that the history between education systems and stakeholders has been key in their Core to College work.

The state's college readiness work began prior to Core to College and specifically focused on curriculum alignment. Due to the grant's momentum, this work expanded its reach to include a common definition of college, career, and community readiness; statewide outreach across K–12 and postsecondary education systems on the Smarter Balanced grade 11 student assessment; and revised, common course placement policies across the public higher education system. Lee noted that being part of the initiative helped the state's college readiness efforts move forward on an accelerated timeline. And even with so much happening in such a short period of time, stakeholders from across the state have eagerly incorporated this work into their long-term plans, making it feel like the Core to College work on college readiness and aligning systems has been in place for "10 to 15 years" rather than having increased the motivation for this work just over the past few years. She further credited success to the Core to College networking opportunities, convenings, the partnerships created by the initiative, and the benefits of collaborative learning and support.

Establishing a definition of college readiness was one of Hawai'i's most important Core to College goals. In Hawai'i, this definition not only means being ready for college, but it also means being ready for career and community. Lee noted that the state's definition of "College, Career, and Community Readiness" became a "hat to hang" the Core to College initiative on. Developing and finalizing the definition involved convening community partners and employers to work "hand-in-hand," bringing people together through "College Access Network Summits," and sharing draft definitions and examples of summit work in various public forums. Doerger stated that "the community piece is so critical" because it allowed the public to address and integrate the diversity of Hawai'i's various populations and their perspectives into the final definition.

Alignment strategies

Collaboration among multiple systems and stakeholders has been at the heart of Hawai'i's various alignment efforts, such as course sequencing, professional development for CCSS alignment, and aligning data systems. A common denominator for all these efforts involved bringing people together in "summits," "roadshows," and other types of group meetings in ways that spurred innovation.

- **Course Sequencing.** Efforts at course alignment and sequencing between K–12 and higher education systems first began with a math accelerated workgroup made up of specialists from the Department of Education and Hawai'i's community colleges. Excited about an opportunity to bridge a math course, a postsecondary member in this group was able to leverage relationships she had with high schools to pilot a grade 12 math transition course for students who were identified in grade 11 as not being college and/or career ready. While the pilot began on a small scale, it has evolved, and Doerger reports that next year there will be 13 schools offering the course. In addition, several of the participating schools are offering the course on a block schedule, which allows grade 12 students to complete the transition course in one semester. This, in turn, provides them

the opportunity to enroll in early college math courses during the second semester of their senior year. This innovation reportedly excited school principals who recognized that it would be possible for a student to score a 2 on the Smarter Balanced assessment in grade 11, but still graduate from high school with 3 college math credits.

- **Professional Development.** Hawai'i also initiated opportunities for K–12 and higher education professionals to come together and focus on aligning standards with curriculum as well as professional growth. For example, the Core to College work was launched with a summit that introduced higher education faculty and staff to the CCSS. The summit brought in regional higher education leaders, had K–12 panels and break-out sessions, and made introductions between them. The Core to College initiative also sponsored math and English summits that resulted in K–12 teachers working with college faculty interested in remedial education and Smarter Balanced item development. As a result of these interactions, several college faculty reviewed Smarter Balanced test items and served on the in-person item development panels in Dallas, Texas. There were higher education faculty who, in collaboration with high school teachers, developed high school curriculum, helped with outreach and conducting standards-specific professional development, and attended meetings about the college readiness definitions. Finally, mini-grants were offered to higher education faculty to work with high schools to align their curriculum to the Common Core standards.
- **Data System.** Hawai'i has an integrated data system that allows data to be tracked across its K–12 and higher education systems, allowing it to follow a significant number of students across K–12 and postsecondary systems. Also, Hawai'i participated in the American Diploma Project, which has similar goals to Core to College and through which Hawai'i previously conducted validity studies to inform how the state follows students who took the Smarter Balanced assessment in grade 11 and who are matriculating into college in fall 2016.

Next steps

In late 2014, the University of Hawai'i (UH) agreed on a pilot adoption of using the Smarter Balanced assessment to place students into credit-bearing coursework in all two- and four-year institutions across the UH system. Similar to Washington, this policy permits students to be placed directly into credit-bearing coursework based on their Smarter Balanced assessment score and, if needed, their grade 12 coursework (see Table 2).

Creating the policy, and working to communicate about it and refine it across the state's education systems, required large amounts of planning and feedback. When Hawai'i P–20 conducted outreach and information sharing on the proposed policy, it learned that the policy, as drafted, was difficult for most people — outside of the higher education system — to understand. As a result, Hawai'i P–20 worked to simplify the policy communication materials for administrators, teachers, and families. For example, it created a poster to hang up at schools and a letter sent to families explaining the new policy. Another piece of the planning puzzle for the alignment of Hawai'i's K–12 and postsecondary systems included clarifying when students were required to enroll in grade-12 transition courses, specifically if a student's intended college major would be in a STEM field.

Table 2. University of Hawai'i system's grade 11 Smarter Balanced assessment placement policy

Smarter Balanced assessment grade 11 achievement level	Mathematics placement options		English language arts (ELA) placement options
4	Any of the following entry college-level math courses: 100, 103, 104F (UH Hilo only), 110 (HawCC only), 111 (except at UH Hilo), 134, 135, or Intro to Statistics *(A higher level or dual-credit math course is strongly recommended in grade 12 for those pursuing a STEM major.)*		English 100 *(A dual credit ELA course is strongly recommended in grade 12.)*
3	**Non-STEM major**— Any entry college-level terminal math course not on the calculus pathway: i.e., Math 100, 111 (except at UH Hilo), or Intro to Statistics *(A higher level or dual-credit math course is strongly recommended in grade 12.)*	**STEM major**— Any entry college-level calculus pathway math course: 103, 110 (at HawCC only), 134, 135, 104F (UH Hilo only), *contingent on* enrollment (and expected completion) in a calculus pathway, year-long course in grade 12 (including a combination of algebra III, trigonometry, analytic geometry, pre-calculus, AP/IB calculus)	English 100, *contingent on* a grade of B or better in either of the following: • A semester-long ELA course taken in the fall semester of grade 12 • The fall semester of a year-long ELA course taken in grade 12
2	Any entry, college-level terminal math course not on the calculus pathway: i.e., Math 100, 111 (except at UH Hilo), or Intro to Statistics, *contingent on* a first semester grade of B or better in the grade-12 transition course, Introduction to College Math		Determined by UH campus-specific placement process, which may include ACT Compass scores, GPA, etc.
1	Determined by UH campus-specific placement process, which may include ACT Compass scores, GPA, etc.		

UH is University of Hawai'i. HawCC is Hawai'i Community College.

Notes:

This placement policy is valid for a three-year pilot period (for the high school graduating classes of 2016, 2017, and 2018). Smarter Balanced assessment scores will be valid for placement purposes for 24 months. University of Hawai'i campuses use Smarter Balanced assessment scores for placement purposes only.

Students wishing to place beyond entry-level courses in math and English language arts are encouraged to take advantage of the UH campus-specific placement procedures already established.

Source: Smarter Balanced test scores and UH placement policy from Hawai'i P–20 (2015).

This pilot policy has resulted in a new grade-12 math transition course. Originally, the transition course was intended for students who scored a 2 on the Smarter Balanced assessment, but for various reasons, students who scored a 1 or a 3 were also placed into the class. While data about the success of this course will not be available until the students complete the gateway math course at the university level, Lee and Doerger shared that these students have self-reported benefits of the transition course.

While it is only a year-old pilot at this point, both Doerger and Lee noted that the Smarter Balanced assessment agreement has become a model by which community colleges look to when grappling with different modes of assessment for placement. Hawai'i P–20 will continue to support this pilot work, including ongoing data analysis, policy refinement, the addition of an English language arts transition course, and — should the results be positive — plans to make this policy permanent.

Louisiana

Collaborating with the higher education system on alignment strategies

In Louisiana, Jeanne Burns, the associate commissioner for teacher and leadership initiatives for the Louisiana Board of Regents, directed the state's Core to College work. Her visibility and access enabled her to become a "champion" for Core to College and to foster collaboration within and across the state's postsecondary institutions. Burns confirmed that intentional strategizing to align the state's K–12 and postsecondary systems and to engage higher education professionals from the beginning of the Core to College initiative resulted in strong support from stakeholders across higher education. This alignment and engagement strategy involved identifying and informing higher education stakeholders of the core knowledge that high school students needed to succeed at the college level; examining what might be new information (e.g., information about how the revised high school standards differ from the previous ones or information about standards setting for the grade 11 college readiness assesments) to the higher education community (including postsecondary faculty); and exploring expectations for what college readiness meant across campuses and the state.

Burns said that the Core to College funding played an integral part in supporting ongoing networking and collaboration across the state to support K–12 and higher education alignment efforts (see Figure 3 for a graphic of Louisiana's Core to College Network). It allowed her to regularly bring higher education professionals together toward common efforts, such as with the campus leadership teams. These campus leadership teams had steering committee meetings between four higher education representatives and the Core to College Alignment Director to facilitate communication and feedback on the changing standards and to solicit recommendations for alignment and course-placement policies. While the state is still finalizing its K–12 standards, Burns notes that Core to College work has led to deeper discussions on alignment of college-to-career curriculum and continued dialogue on the state's college- and career-readiness standards.

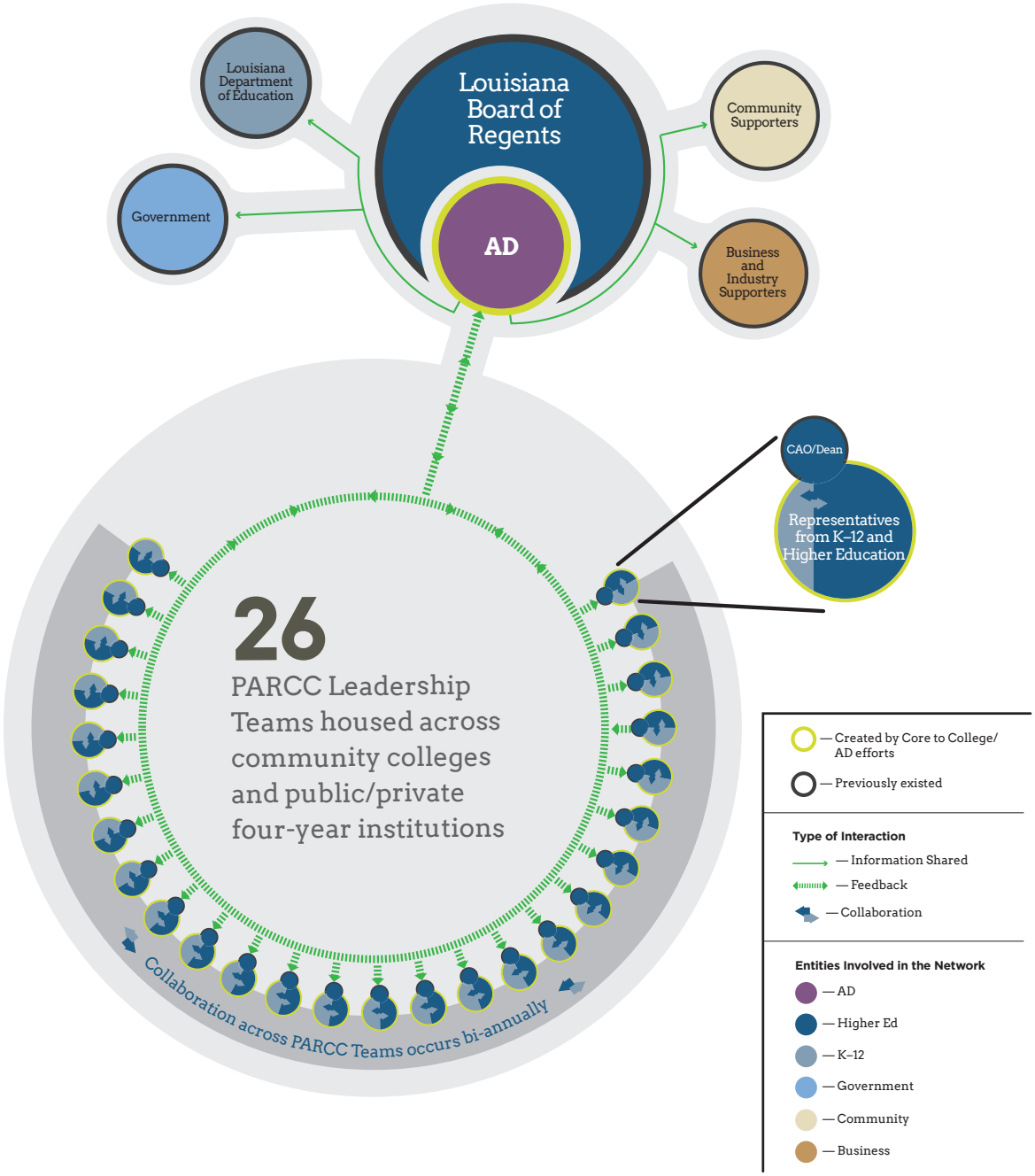
Louisiana

Figure 3. Examples of Core to College Networks. Louisiana: Creating a Network of Campus-Based Leadership Teams

Priority goal: Curriculum alignment across K–12 and postsecondary systems.

Network model/approach: Louisiana's AD created a model with campus-based leadership teams that focused on aligning K–12 and higher education efforts around CCSS implementation. These teams provided feedback (individually and collectively) to the AD and the Board of Regents, and conducted outreach and knowledge-sharing on their own campuses.

AD's role: Within this model, the AD served as the hub—connecting the campus teams directly to the Board of Regents and state PARCC efforts, and indirectly to other state entities like the Department of Education and workforce/community leaders.



Source: This figure originally appeared in a November 2014 Core to College evaluation report (Bracco et al., 2014a).

Assessment and course-placement policies

Currently, Louisiana is developing a hybrid summative assessment for grades 3–8 for 2015/16, which will include some PARCC items. Decisions about future assessments have not yet been determined. Grade 11 testing policy currently dictates the use of ACT, SAT, or, in certain cases, a combination of multiple measures to determine a student's readiness for college-level work. While Louisiana did not adopt the PARCC assessment at the high school level, there are continuing discussions about accepting PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessment scores for out-of-state students matriculating into the state's colleges.

Next steps

Outcomes from Louisiana's Core to College efforts have included agreement on what students need to be ready for entry-level college algebra courses and the creation of course profiles, which create standard course content across the different college and university campuses. Core to College work has also resulted in informing postsecondary syllabus and curriculum planning; forming collaborative teams of college math representatives that share standards-related information and provide guidance and feedback to the Board of Regents; and creating education leadership teams to prepare new principals as they work with teachers in high schools.

Today, Burns' work centers on continued support for increasing alignment across the K–12 and higher education systems, including fostering a better understanding of the math and English language arts standards, and what college readiness means. Burns indicates that there are also more focused efforts to convene teachers to help them implement the state's evolving college and career readiness standards. One issue that she thinks might be a topic for next steps in the future, is determining what rigor means for postsecondary courses and how postsecondary course sequencing could be improved.

Lessons Learned

The work of the Core to College states provides useful insights into various ways that states' K–12 and postsecondary education systems can work together to provide students a clearer and more efficient pathway to taking entry-level credit-bearing coursework in college. Many of our state contacts concurred that several factors played a role in the success of their Core to College work:

Environments that foster collaboration and innovation. As noted earlier, the Core to College work across Washington, Hawai'i, and Louisiana varied, as did their state systems. But in each of these states, the state education systems' environments — including their history, policies, and priorities — laid the foundation for potential success with initiatives such as refining placement policies, revising teacher preparation efforts, and authoring new definitions of college and career readiness. Creating an atmosphere of collaboration and innovation encourages strong partnerships and networks, and also allows room to build upon past success or revise policies that can better support student success.

People and organizations that are well-positioned to facilitate collaboration. Individual people can lift only so much on their own. In Hawai'i, the P–20 Council staff managed the Core to College work. Being an already-established entity with the vision to achieve further alignment across the state's education systems, it was perfectly positioned to integrate Core to College work into its mission of strengthening cross-system partnerships so that a greater number of students can achieve college and career success. Initiatives like Core to College may see greater success if well-positioned champions lead the work. Who these champions are, including their background, reach, authority, and where their position is situated, contributes to how new initiatives gain traction and become embedded in greater systems change.

Strong cross-system networks. While the champions may lead the work, durable networks that span multiple education systems, institutions, and stakeholder groups propel initiatives like Core to College ahead. In Washington, Hawai'i, and Louisiana, stakeholders from across each state regularly worked together to create and sustain networks and information-sharing practices. Similar to the people involved, the networks, too, drive and sustain this work. Key factors that contribute to successful networks include who is involved, which organizations are supporting the efforts, how information is shared and feedback is gathered, and how responsibilities are delegated.

Time, money, resources, and sustainability. Systems change takes time, and this is no different when Core to College states are working on systemwide changes such as revamping course pathways across high school and postsecondary, drafting new policies (such as definitions of college readiness), or investigating new placement practices. All interviewees recognized that this sort of work does not happen quickly or carelessly. A three-year grant may provide the impetus for shifts in how systems or agencies work

together, but it requires incredible amounts of time, resources, patience, flexibility, and planning to implement and sustain changes in statewide systems.

Strategy and long-term planning. Shifting large systems steeped in history does not happen overnight. Leaders must prioritize flexible, yet targeted strategies that not only support the immediate needs of current teachers and students, but also address long-term planning through ongoing cooperation, collaboration, and evaluation to improve alignment across education systems that traditionally have operated autonomously.

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