

## Top-Performing Colleges Pay Close Attention to Curriculum Alignment

The success stories of many of the nation's best community colleges reveal the role curriculum alignment plays in delivering top results.

1. The Aspen Institute's Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence is the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among America's community colleges. The award recognizes institutions for exceptional student outcomes in four areas: student learning, certificate and degree completion, employment and earnings, and high levels of access and success for minority and low-income students.<sup>1</sup> The 2011 Prize winner, **Valencia College**<sup>2</sup> (Orlando, FL), the 2015 Rising Star winner, **Kennedy-King College**<sup>1</sup> (Chicago, IL), and Aspen's 2015 top 150 community colleges, **Rend Lake College**<sup>3</sup> (Ina, IL) are noted for their deep commitment to creating pathways and aligning curricula.
2. **Columbus State Community College** (Columbus, OH) is making national headlines with reform efforts centered in collaborative partnerships, including its **Central Ohio Compact**. One of the Compact's strategic principles involves providing "all students with the essential knowledge and skills needed for a successful transition into postsecondary learning" through alignment. Strategic actions include 1) "improv[ing] the alignment of high school and higher education courses" and 2) "substantially reduc[ing] the need for college remediation by urging all students to complete a rigorous, college-prep curriculum and by offering [in the high school senior year] developmental programs ... which are high school-college partnerships that involve placement testing and the delivery of pre-college math to prepare students for the college experience."<sup>4</sup> In October 2014, CSCC President, David Harrison, told the Atlantic Monthly, "We realized from a higher-ed standpoint that if we could get all of this aligned, it would be a real competitive advantage for our region."<sup>5</sup>
3. The Community College Research Center at Columbia University Teachers College has developed a three-part practitioner packet to support guided pathways to reform colleges.<sup>6</sup> Curriculum alignment is both foundational and the next frontier in the presentation of courses within highly structured, coherent pathways. The packet calls out alignment work at two **CUNY** institutions -- **Guttman Community College** and **Queensborough Community College** -- and includes a full case study on **Miami Dade College**'s work in this area.
4. An example of a successful local partnership is the **DirectConnect to UCF Consortium in Central Florida**, uniting local school districts, four feeder community colleges, and the **University of Central Florida (UCF)** to increase the educational attainment of students. This consortium has invested in curriculum and co-curriculum alignment and reports improved college readiness on the part of high school

---

<sup>1</sup> The Aspen Institute. (2015). Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. Retrieved from <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/college-excellence/overview>

<sup>2</sup> EPIC Case Study. (2015). Retrieved from [http://www.epiconline.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2015/06/Valencia-Case-Study.pdf](http://www.epiconline.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2015/06/Valencia-Case-Study.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> EPIC Case Study. (2015). Retrieved from [http://www.epiconline.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2015/06/Rend-Lake-Case-Study1.pdf](http://www.epiconline.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2015/06/Rend-Lake-Case-Study1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Page 18 in Central Ohio Compact. (2012). Retrieved from [http://www.csc.edu/about/summit/pdf/CST-016%20CentralOHCompactBoard\\_3\\_1.pdf](http://www.csc.edu/about/summit/pdf/CST-016%20CentralOHCompactBoard_3_1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/10/when-a-community-college-transforms-a-city/381941/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/what-we-know-about-guided-pathways-packet.html>

graduates, award-winning levels of community college student success, and the highest transfer rate in the nation for community college students to the upper division.<sup>7</sup>

## Why is Curriculum Alignment So Powerful?

In addition to nationally recognized colleges, researchers in higher education and major educational funding organizations have encouraged a focus on curriculum alignment. Here is what some experts say about curriculum alignment.

1. Achieving the Dream reports on findings and strategic policy priorities to reduce the need for developmental education through K-12 and postsecondary curricular alignment.<sup>8</sup>
2. Harold G. Levine & Michael W. Kirst: [Our concern] “stems from the historical disjuncture and lack of alignment between K-12 and higher education.”<sup>9</sup>
3. David T. Conley & Paul L. Gaston: “A coordinated strategy to prepare students to succeed in college would ... bridge an unfortunate and harmful cultural chasm between the K-12 world and that of higher education.”<sup>10</sup>
4. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Completion by Design initiative has identified eight principles<sup>11</sup> in a guide to redesigning community colleges for increases in student completion. Curriculum alignment is a foundational component for integrating these strategies into a comprehensive plan to increase student success and timely degree or certificate completion rates.
5. Michal Kurlaender & Jessica Howell at the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center: “Early information about college readiness and improved alignment between K–12 and higher education has been demonstrated to reduce remediation need.”<sup>12</sup>
6. Charis McGaughy and Andrea Venezia devote an entire chapter to the specific discussion of how local partnerships can collaborate to align curriculum in their book *Supporting the Dream: High School–College Partnerships for College and Career Readiness*.
  - a. “Local partnerships ... vertical teams [can] work to transcend boundaries, increase alignment, and narrow the gaps between the secondary and postsecondary systems.”<sup>13</sup>
  - b. “What needs to be emphasized ... is that this is a systems alignment issue; no group or institution is solely responsible for creating the problems, and no one group or educational entity can solve the problems individually.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> University of Central Florida. (2015). Regional Campuses works with state colleges to enhance DirectConnect. Retrieved from <http://today.ucf.edu/regional-campuses-works-state-colleges-enhance-directconnect/>

<sup>8</sup> The Developmental Education Initiative. (2010). State Policy Framework & Strategy. Achieving the Dream.

<sup>9</sup> Education Week Commentary, April 15, 2015 (April 13 is online pub date), title “Why Colleges Should Care About the Common Core” <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/04/15/why-colleges-should-care-about-the-common.html>

<sup>10</sup> Conley, D., & Gaston, P. (2013). *A path to alignment: Connecting K-12 and higher education via the Common Core and the Degree Qualifications Profile* (p. 1). Lumina. Retrieved from

[http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/DQP/A\\_path\\_to\\_alignment.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/DQP/A_path_to_alignment.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.completionbydesign.org/sites/default/files/site-uploads/main-site/pdf/pathway-principles\\_v2\\_0.pdf](http://www.completionbydesign.org/sites/default/files/site-uploads/main-site/pdf/pathway-principles_v2_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Kurlaender, Michal & Howell, Jessica. (2012). Collegiate Remediation: A Review of the Causes and Consequences. College Board Advocacy & Policy Center.

<sup>13</sup> McGaughy, C., & Venezia, A. (2015). *Supporting the Dream: High School–College Partnerships for College and Career Readiness*. (p. xii). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

<sup>14</sup> McGaughy, C., & Venezia, A. (2015). *Supporting the Dream: High School–College Partnerships for College and Career Readiness*. (p. 16). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.