

Colleges track progress to inform continuous improvement

The CBD initiative believes that to reach its goals, all stakeholders must share the following: 1) a common understanding of where the work is starting (baseline data), 2) a common understanding of where the work is heading (improvement targets), 3) and a systematic method to track progress at regular intervals.

Measuring and describing the success of CBD for students is critical—in order both to communicate CBD’s impact to the field and to inform the cadres’ continuous improvement. The initiative’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) represent the best thinking from the cadres and the Foundation about how progress along the completion pathway could be represented from a quantitative perspective. Because movement along these measures will take time, the Foundation is also developing other indicators to highlight institutional and cultural changes that are precursors to observed changes in student outcomes.

Colleges used key performance indicators to set realistic targets

During summer and fall 2012, the colleges began to identify KPIs and improvement targets designed to build the shared expectations noted above. They took the following steps:

- 1. Define common, initiative-wide KPIs.** The Foundation identified eleven leading indicators that would capture student progress longitudinally (see text box). These indicators draw on experience from previous student success initiatives, research, and thorough discussion with cadre representatives and field-level research experts from the CBD Data and Evaluation advisory group.
- 2. Collect baseline data.** The colleges worked with institutional research staff and the initiative’s technical assistance team to collect existing data related to each KPI.
- 3. Map college strategies to each KPI; document evidence for each strategy; and model improvement scenarios.** In an effort to set realistic expectations for change, CBD leadership teams at each college mapped their implementation strategies to each KPI. This approach also helped the colleges prioritize the most promising ideas suggested by the research. Lastly, members of the initiative’s technical assistance team provided model improvement scenarios—estimates of the magnitude of changes in completion outcomes based on the strategies—to help determine realistic targets.
- 4. Discuss and agree upon targets.** Armed with the data accumulated in Step 3 above, the colleges consulted with the technical assistance team and then met to settle on final targets. The Foundation reassured colleges that it understood that the targets could only be educated estimates, not guarantees.

This process of attempting to add some “science”—by basing targets on a combination of evidence, data, and practitioner insight—to the usually political and/or aspirational nature of setting targets for foundation grants was largely considered a success.

Completion by Design’s Key Performance Indicators

1. Percentage of students coming directly from high school who place below college level
2. Accumulated Credits:
 - A. Percentage distribution of students by first term credential-bearing credit accumulation, and first term credential-bearing plus developmental education credit accumulation
 - B. Average number of credential-bearing credits accumulated during the first term, and credential-bearing and developmental education credits accumulated during the first term
3. Percentage of attempted credential-bearing credits completed during student’s first term, and attempted developmental education credits completed during student’s first term
4. Percentage of students persisting from first term to second term
5. Percentage of students who start below college level and complete recommended remediation within one year
6. Percentage of students who pass required entry-level math and English within one year and two years on first attempt
7. Percentage of students persisting fall to fall term
8. Percentage of students earning 12 college credits in one year, 24 in two years
9. Percentage of students who enter a program of study (POS, concentrate) within one year and two years
10. Percentage of students who receive a credential within five years
11. Excess Credits:
 - A. Percentage of students earning excess college credits beyond two-year degree requirements
 - B. Average number of excess credits

