

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in The Educational Forum on 22/05/2017, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131725.2017.1314573>.

## **Improving High School–College Alignment: A Sociological Reform and New Challenges**

***Jiffy Lansing***

University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois USA

***Caitlin Ahearn***

University of California, Los Angeles, California USA

***James Rosenbaum***

Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA

***Christine Mokher***

CNA Analysis & Solutions, Arlington, Virginia, USA

***Lou Jacobson***

New Horizons Economic Research, Chicago, Illinois, USA

### **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes teacher responses to a distinctive reform that sought to implement alignment between high schools and colleges. A survey of 225 teachers is used to examine teachers' perceptions of the reform's effectiveness, further resources needed, and how perceptions changed over time. The reform was perceived as effective for college-bound students, but not for non-college-bound students, magnifying the discrepant needs of these groups. Steps to improve the program are suggested.*

**Key words:** *alignment reform, college preparation, college readiness, high school–college alignment, implementation, testing.*

**Funding:** The Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, supported this research through Grant R305E120010 to CNA. This article does not represent the views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

For decades, policymakers blamed students for their poor college readiness, and many studies tried to identify effective college remedial programs to repair students' academic deficiencies. Most studies have found that remedial programs had little benefit, especially for students who scored far below the passing score on the entrance exam (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010 ; Mokher, Jacobson, Lalonde, & Rosenbaum, 2013 ; Mokher, Jacobson, Rosenbaum, & Lalonde, 2013 ).

Recently, reformers have attempted a more sociological approach. Sociologists have identified loose coupling and poor alignment as impediments to school effectiveness (Gamoran, Secada, & Marrett, 2011 ; Rosenbaum, Ahearn, & Rosenbaum, 2017 ). Adopting this perspective, some reforms have supported stronger alignment between high school and college standards. Rather than blaming students, these reforms blame the poor coordination between high school and college standards. Proponents of this method propose that aligned standards will help students meet college-ready standards by the time they arrive in college. One approach to achieve this is to test high school students before their senior year to identify academic achievement gaps, and then use the senior year to fill those gaps.

It is uncertain whether alignment reforms of this sort will be accepted in the United States, where education is highly decentralized and many people are deeply suspicious of efforts to unify the system. Moreover, there is a deep suspicion of testing, especially when the test is new and of uncertain validity. Teachers appreciate autonomy and professional discretion (Lortie, 1975), have their own ideas about what students should learn, and may not agree with standards imposed by standardized tests. Like many reforms, effective alignment requires teachers not only to comply with the standards, but also to create appropriate curricula for the senior year. It is uncertain whether teachers will take such actions.

This paper presents analyses of teacher responses to a Florida reform that sought to implement curricular alignment between high schools and colleges. We begin with a description of the reform and its strengths and weaknesses before examining teacher responses to the reform and whether and for whom they see it as effective.

### **Alignment of High School and College Standards**

Although many reforms focus on improving “college readiness,” they rarely address the poor alignment between high school and college standards. After passing a high school exit exam and completing graduation requirements, seniors often assume they are ready for college. Yet, three months later, when they arrive at community college, most students take a remedial placement test, which most fail (Kirst & Venezia, 2003; Rosenbaum, 2001). Students rarely get any warning about this placement test or its implications, and they do not understand that failure will likely land them in remedial math or English courses, which can lead to an additional one to four semesters that cost time and money but do not result in college credit (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). Informing students of this exam, its importance, and their own college readiness may improve the college enrollment process.

However, informing students about community college standards is not simple in the United States. Although students take many tests in high school, virtually no test is synchronized with community college placement tests, for a multitude of reasons. One reason is that, in most states, different colleges use different tests, which impose different standards. For example, various California colleges use more than 100 different tests (Brown & Niemi, 2007). Only seven states in the United States use the same placement test in all public two-year colleges in the state (Austin et al., 2013). Even when they use the same test, colleges sometimes choose different cutoff scores to signal college readiness. Decentralized testing practices exacerbate

alignment difficulties that stem from the separation of high schools and colleges.

Florida is one of the states with a single common placement test: the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT). The reform this paper examines, the Florida College and Career Readiness Initiative (FCCRI), aimed to take advantage of the common placement test to improve student preparation for the academic rigors of community college. The reform was intended to target students who were close to achieving college readiness standards. Starting in 2012, Florida mandated the PERT college test be given to all high school juniors who scored in the middle range of the high school exit exam (FCAT) as sophomores and required students to take College Readiness and Success (CRS) courses in 12th grade if they tested below college-ready on PERT. These courses were offered in math and English, and intended to help students pass the PERT when they enroll in college.

Students who passed the high school exit exam (scored 2 or higher), but did not score the highest grade (5) on the math FCAT, were required to take the math portion of the PERT in 11th grade, while students who scored a 2 or 3 on the FCAT reading test were required to take the PERT reading test. In theory, the reform was not supposed to reach the lowest-achieving students, but instead was aimed at improving the college readiness of mid-level students.

Ultimately, the FCCRI sought to create alignment by testing students early and addressing achievement gaps. Florida's reform is intended to increase students' college and career readiness by helping students to (a) know their college-ready status, (b) understand the importance of testing college-ready, (c) select 12th-grade courses, (d) develop realistic postsecondary plans, and (e) test college-ready.

This paper reports findings from a study of teacher responses to Florida's alignment reform. We examine whether CRS teachers felt the reform succeeded at meeting its goals, and

we examine teachers' views of the reform's shortcomings, additional actions they took to make it work, what more was required, and their views of what improved and what got worse in the second year. Analyses are based on a survey of teachers conducted in the spring of 2013 and again in the spring of 2014, the first and second years of the mandatory CRS offerings.

### **Prior Implementation Research**

This study examines how teachers responded to and implemented the reform in their classrooms. Prior research on implementation of reforms has described instances where teachers don't accept the reform, don't understand it, or take perfunctory if any actions to support it (Spillane, 2006). Research has found that some reforms pose more change than teachers realize (Desimone, 2002). Others have indicated that teachers' responses are limited because they need professional development (Little, 1993). This reform was implemented rapidly and without much structure or supports for teachers. It is easy, then, to imagine teacher dissatisfaction or difficulty with the CRS course requirements.

Prior work on curricular program implementation in high schools has also identified differences by subject. In particular, some studies suggest that English teachers have more difficulty than math teachers in implementing college-readiness reforms. A study of a Chicago reform to improve college preparation found that the English curriculum took longer to show achievement benefits than the math curriculum (Allensworth, Nomi, Montgomery, & Lee, 2009). We will examine whether this reform posed greater difficulties in English than in math.

Why should we care about teachers' views and actions? Teachers saw how this reform worked up close, so they understood its operation better than other actors. The reform provided important opportunities and its success depended on how teachers responded, so teachers were crucial to its effectiveness, especially because the reform did not provide curriculum and teachers

had to take additional actions. Teachers could have ignored the reform, taken only perfunctory actions, or embraced the reform and tried to make it effective.

College readiness is an increasingly important topic in the policy agenda of many states. Other states are likely to take actions to make alignment reforms like this one. Before they do, they should learn from Florida's experience about what is effective, what resources can be used, what more they need, and what aspects improve or get worse in the second year.

### **Why Study the FCCRI?**

While it sounds like an oxymoron, alignment reforms are often fragmented. They may target only one subject, use unrelated tests, use test scores that don't necessarily apply to students' intended college, give unclear messages about students' college readiness, and/or make the test or college-prep courses optional. Florida's reform is remarkable in avoiding these pitfalls. Florida's lawmakers were thorough in setting a single standard on a single statewide test in both math and English, mandating prep courses for those who did not pass the test in one or both subjects, and requiring participation of all students, not just those who identified as college-bound.

Although later studies will examine student outcomes, the present analysis examines the implementation of the FCCRI from the point of view of CRS teachers, who can provide insight into how the reform unfolded. Because Florida's reform gives autonomy to school districts, we do not have clear expectations of how this will work.

### **Prior Research on the FCCRI**

Prior FCCRI research found that key elements were implemented with fidelity. In 2012–2013, nearly 100% of schools administered PERT in 11th grade, and 100% of Florida districts

offered college readiness courses. However, only 71% of juniors required to take the math exam actually did, and only 67% for reading (Mokher, Jacobson, & Alexander, 2014). Some of these students may have been exempt from the course if they scored college-ready on another exam such as the ACT or SAT.

In focus groups, teachers felt generally positive about FCCRI goals, but they identified many impediments: poor PERT information, lack of teaching materials, and heterogeneous students in terms of academic preparation and college plans (Mokher & Jacobson, 2013).

### **Analytic Approach**

CRS teachers were surveyed in the first year of full implementation (Spring, 2013) and again in the second year (Spring, 2014). This paper examines four research questions relating to teachers' experiences with the FCCRI:

- To what extent do teachers perceive the initiative as effective on five goals?
- What resources did teachers use in preparing CRS courses?
- What resources did teachers feel might improve the initiative's effectiveness?
- How did teachers' perceptions of effectiveness and obstacles change in Year 2?

### **Data**

The Year 1 teacher survey was designed to capture teachers' views of FCCRI implementation, as well as classroom- and school-level contextual factors. Teachers were selected based on a random sample and stratified by district size and performance—two measures which were likely to affect implementation of the initiative. Of the 398 teachers who sent the survey, 225 responded (56% response rate). They came from 97 schools in 42 of 65 districts, drawn from the stratified random sample. The respondents represent schools from all possible combinations of district size (small, medium, and large) and performance (high-,

middle-, and low-performing). This is a broad and diverse sample, and although we cannot assess representativeness, the schools from which the teachers were sampled have student enrollment statistics, demographics, and academic performances similar to the original stratified sample, which was designed to be representative of the state. In addition, while individuals with stronger views might be expected to respond to a survey, teacher evaluations of the program follow a fairly normal distribution in our data. Although we cannot be certain, our data suggest that the sample consisted of teachers from various school demographics and with varying opinions on the FCCRI.

The Year 2 survey targeted respondents from Year 1 who continued to teach a CRS course. Of the 225 teachers who responded in year 1, only 111 responded in Year 2. Some Year 1 teachers were no longer teaching CRS courses; excluding those, we estimate that 69% of eligible teachers responded to the survey. While this may create selection bias, these respondents represent a similar distribution of highest degree earned, district performance, and small and large districts. However, Year 2 respondents were significantly more likely than Year 1 teachers to teach in medium-size districts, have community college experience, and have eight or more years of experience teaching at the high school level.

### **Survey**

We examine teachers' perceptions of the reform's implementation—the extent to which teachers used various resources, felt various resources might improve the initiative's effectiveness, believed the reform was effective in accomplishing its goals, and expected the reform to improve on those goals for Year 2. For most survey items, teachers were asked to focus on the college-prep course that they taught earliest in the week. All items were asked on Likert scales, although the ranges varied among topics. We supplemented quantitative variables

with responses to two open-ended questions: the first asked teachers for one suggestion to improve the effectiveness of the reform, and the other asked for more general comments about their experience and any impediments they faced that were not mentioned in the survey.

To analyze the implementation in Year 2, we first examined how teacher effectiveness ratings changed on the same goals to identify whether teachers perceived improvements in Year 2. Additionally, we analyzed the extent to which certain issues identified in Year 1 continue to be impediments, and whether any of these difficulties have been ameliorated or intensified. Because of potential differences identified in prior studies between math and English, all findings compare the responses by subject and analyze differences using Mann-Whitney tests. (For more information on the survey sampling, see Mokher et al., 2014, pp. 10–11 and Appendix A.)

### **Findings: Year 1**

We expected teachers might express skepticism about the program. Instead, teachers embraced the reform's goals and worked to implement them despite impediments.

### **Teachers Believed in the Reform and Made Efforts to Make It Work**

When asked about the effectiveness of the FCCRI, most teachers (59% English and 83% math) responded that it was at least moderately effective on all five goals listed in the survey. Interestingly, math teachers felt the initiative was more effective on every goal than English teachers (see Figure 1), a significance we will discuss later. However, about two-thirds of English teachers and about three-quarters of math teachers perceived the reform as effective on all five goals. These relatively high evaluations may be influenced in part by teachers' attitudes toward the reform; even if they did not see large results in Year 1, teachers believed the reform

could be effective.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Open-ended questions confirmed this finding. Many teachers (ranging between 59% and 83%) in both math and English expressed support for the initiative and its goals. Many teachers (between 59% and 79%) felt the goals of improving college readiness are worthwhile for students. Other teachers reinforced Mokher and Jacobson's (2013) finding that teachers enjoyed the freedom afforded by the CRS class. One teacher wrote: "I love the idea of having a curriculum based on my students' needs." Some clearly felt the course was appropriate, such as the teacher who said, "I have loved teaching the Prep courses. The students were like sponges trying to absorb as much math information as they could." Even a teacher who usually teaches more advanced students praised CRS. That teacher explained, "Although I teach the Advanced Placement Literature course, I enjoy teaching the college prep course work, equally. The students progressed in most of my classes and showed some increases [even] in my lowest performing classes." Few teachers said the CRS should not exist, but many discussed the lack of relevance to their many students who are not college-bound or are far behind academically. These teachers want the reform to be effective, but they think it can reach only certain students.

Our survey also indicated that teachers made efforts to implement the reform. Most teachers reported their efforts to find resources to improve their courses. When asked what resources they used to prepare for their CRS, nearly all (97% and 98%) relied on their past teaching experiences. However, 85% of teachers also reported moderate or greater use of at least one of the following out-of-school resources: community colleges, universities, teachers from other schools, Internet, or books. However, only 26% and 17% of teachers reported contacting community colleges, where remedial courses have long been offered.

Compared with math teachers, English teachers reported using more of nearly all resources except community colleges and universities. Although their resource usage may merely reflect a general resourcefulness on the part of English teachers, it also likely indicates the difficulty with implementing the reform in English courses (see the next section). Comparing results, we see that not only did English teachers see the reform as less effective, but they also were more likely to use external resources.

In the open-ended questions, most teachers reported that they sought out resources because the FCCRI did not provide any. However, teachers also discussed their extensive efforts and use of resources to address students' career goals. One math teacher said, "About halfway through our 3rd quarter, I switched from Test Prep to Financial Literacy" (to engage students who don't plan to go to college). This teacher and others reported devising their own curriculum to supplement the course, demonstrating a desire to make the college-readiness class beneficial to students who didn't plan for college. Another teacher, discerning a need to introduce students to college options, explained: "I presently have reps from the military come, as well as [from] Keiser [University], . . . [and take students on] a couple of field trips to Daytona State College and . . . [to] some local corporations that make airplane or auto parts." One teacher embraced the spirit of the initiative and "tried to implement materials, experiences, and conditions to my high school students that they will experience as college students." Each of these teachers explained how, instead of despairing at a poorly resourced reform, they took initiatives to devise programs that would appeal to all students. Yet it is evident that they have little time for these efforts, and the results are unsystematic and idiosyncratic.

Not only did teachers seem to believe in the purpose of the reform, but they also reported making efforts to develop a curriculum from scratch. Some may argue that these are unusually

conscientious teachers, and that is entirely possible. It is clear, however, that at least some teachers running the CRS courses were willing to make the efforts necessary to maximize the benefits of the course, even with minimal guidance, support, or time.

### **Teachers' Difficulty With Curriculum Development**

Despite the overall positive attitudes, efforts, and resourcefulness of CRS teachers, many reported serious problems with implementing the reform, in both survey items and open-ended responses. The Year 1 survey asked teachers the degree to which they believed specific changes (identified in prior focus groups) would make the reform more effective. Math and English teachers equally felt that heterogeneous students and lack of PERT information, textbook resources, and diagnostic tools impeded the initiative. Interestingly, those last three impediments were also the three most commonly reported, indicating that math and English teachers felt the most egregious resource deficiencies equally. Apart from improved diagnostic tools, the next most common impediments reported related to a lack of planning time or curricular supports. Diagnostic tools are correlated with both curricular supports and planning time ( $r = .38$  and  $.55$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that teachers who wanted diagnostic information about student skill deficiencies also wanted curriculum support. In the open-ended questions, teachers often mentioned having trouble developing course content because of a lack of time and resources.

English teachers were significantly more likely than math teachers ( $p < .05$ ) to report that the following supports would improve the initiative's effectiveness: (a) more time for the teacher to prepare the CRS course during the school year, (b) more time to prepare for the CRS course before the school year, (c) better description of course standards, (d) more help from college remedial instructors, (e) more help from other college staff, and (f) more help from district staff.

Each of the supports—more heavily emphasized by English teachers—related to difficulties in creating course content for the new CRS courses.

In sum, the reform demanded new and relatively undefined courses in both subjects; but in English, the CRS course conflicted with the usual senior year course. Clearer standards would likely have resolved this conflict and led to more uniformity and effectiveness across subjects. Yet it is important to remember that both math and English teachers noted a serious dearth of curriculum materials and information about the PERT standards.

Our findings may reflect, in part, some intrinsic difficulty in quickly changing English curriculum at the high school level. Similar findings were seen in a Chicago reform that mandated college prep curriculum for ninth-grade courses. Full implementation of the Chicago program took one year in algebra, but four years in English (Allensworth et al., 2009). California’s Early Assessment Program (EAP) showed the reverse pattern (more positive impact in English), which may indicate that the EAP’s new English curriculum and teacher training can overcome difficulty in this subject (Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky, 2010; Knudson, Zitzer-Comfort, Quirk, & Alexander, 2008). No Florida teachers received the same level of professional development, and no one received a specific curriculum.

### **Teachers Want to Collaborate With Colleges to Develop Curriculum for the CRS Course**

Prior research has suggested that high school–college collaborations often improve alignment and help teachers know how to prepare their students (Conley, 2007; Long & Riley, 2007; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). Besides helping teachers develop curriculum, this alignment might improve student outcomes, as in the New York program (ACH).

As noted, some Florida CRS teachers felt that working with colleges to prepare the CRS course would improve curricular alignment. In fact, some high school teachers had previously

taught at community colleges, and that experience gave them confidence that they knew what curriculum was appropriate. One explained, “I taught entry-level English at the local college and know exactly what the course should prepare the students to do.” This teacher could have shared such valuable information with his coworkers, but those contacts were not encouraged or facilitated.

### **Teachers Experienced Problems With Heterogeneity**

Teachers in the study believed effectiveness would improve with more academically homogeneous classes, especially in math. In their open-ended responses, teachers reported that their classes included students with different academic levels and different post-high school goals. Heterogeneity, especially academic differences, often resulted from systemic difficulties. Many schools, especially small schools, did not offer the full range of possible CRS options (two in math and three in English, of different levels; see Mokher et al., 2014), which increased heterogeneity. As a result, classes were more heterogeneous than intended. Students sometimes were placed in CRS courses even if they were already college-ready or far below college-ready. For example, one teacher said,

This year I had students who had taken AP classes all three years (but missed the PERT test day) in the same class as students who [failed] the FCAT (10th-grade level), who weren’t supposed to be in the program, but were because the school had limited course offerings.

One teacher explained that when students are separated correctly, “the class runs more smoothly as all students are at approximately the same level.”

Despite the reform’s “College and Career Readiness” title, many teachers reported that “work-bound students,” who plan jobs after high school, see no benefits of the course. Teachers said that most of their students are not college-bound, and these students see the CRS course as

irrelevant to their goals. Often heterogeneity and low desire for college plans complement one another. One teacher reported, “The range of students’ abilities in the class was too wide for students with serious college intentions to derive the maximum benefit from instruction.”

## **Year 2 Survey**

After a year of experience, some kinks in the reform may have been worked out, so improvements might be expected in the second year. In addition, after the first year, a new social media site, Edmodo, was started so teachers could share information and resources. Year 2 survey data allowed us to see whether the reform exceeded teachers’ expectations and how teacher perceptions of impediments might have changed.

Figure 2 shows to what extent teachers believed each impediment to be slightly or much worse, the same, or slightly or much better than in Year 1. Rather than look at average ratings, this analysis let us see both positive and negative changes on each item for the same individuals. We separated the impediments into four items indicating classroom-level difficulties (lower four rows) and five items indicating resource deficiencies (upper rows). Note that in addition to measuring academic heterogeneity, we examined engagement of college- and non-college-bound students separately.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Substantial proportions of teachers saw both improvements (19% to 35%) and declines (22% to 28%) in classroom-related impediments. Teachers most often reported improvements for college-bound student engagement, but were least likely (19%) to report improvements for engagement of non-college-bound students. This, along with the negative change for academic heterogeneity problems, indicates that teachers continued to struggle with student differences in their classrooms, especially for non-college-bound students. When the reform is working with its

target population—college-bound students of similar academic achievement—teachers have fewer difficulties. However, when the reform involves many non-college-bound students or heterogeneous achievement levels, teachers face serious impediments.

We now turn to resource deficiencies, shown on the top five rows of Figure 2. By Year 2, the program had made efforts to disseminate information about the PERT content. Many teachers (37%) reported improvements in receiving PERT information, but 17% still reported that a lack of PERT information had become more of a problem. The gain in PERT information may be due to the content-sharing website; reported use of the website is strongly correlated with improved PERT information ( $p = .24, p < .05$ ). Perhaps alerting more teachers to the website would further diminish this problem. While 20% of teachers felt that collaboration with colleges had improved, a similar percentage felt it had worsened. Despite having taught a CRS class in the prior year, the vast majority (82%) of teachers also reported that a lack of preparation time continued to cause problems. Three times as many teachers (24%) shared that guidance and teaching materials had improved than those who shared that it had gotten worse (8%). This is a positive sign considering how many teachers reported having insufficient curricular development help; but, unfortunately, most expressed that it had remained at the same, rather low, level.

Teachers also have conflicting perceptions of change for classroom and resource impediments. Although many felt that impediments worsened, a similarly high proportion felt these same impediments improved. This finding may indicate uneven effectiveness of the reform, which may work better in some schools than others.

Two items showed overwhelming improvement: engagement of college-bound students and information about PERT. However, it should be noted that, even here, the highest proportion of teachers fell into the “no change” category for each issue examined.

It isn't clear why teachers rate certain classroom and resource impediments as being more difficult to deal with in Year 2. Perhaps the novelty of the program engaged students more in Year 1 and wore off by Year 2. Perhaps teachers were more likely to blame their Year 1 difficulties on initial implementation problems, but by Year 2 realized the program might not be able to address those problems. Despite uncertainties about the Year 2 sample, these declines may indicate problem areas that remain in the reform.

### **Implications and Policy Recommendations**

What happens when this alignment reform is imposed on schools? The FCCRI accomplished many of the difficult goals of statewide alignment reform: It took advantage of a common statewide test, administered it in high schools to the right students, used it to identify students who needed additional college preparatory instruction, and created senior-year CRS courses aimed at improving the college readiness of those students. By giving the actual college placement test to all identified students, Florida did something that no other state had done, and teachers saw this reform as promising.

This study shows that the sociological approach to alignment can be done, and teachers perceived it to be effective with college-bound students. Most teachers evaluated the reform as moderately to extremely effective. Even the reform's failure to provide resources did not discourage teachers' efforts. Teachers found supportive resources, although they identified further types of support that would improve its effectiveness. While English teachers had more difficulty, rated effectiveness lower, and made more efforts to use outside resources than math teachers, both groups felt that the initiative was impeded by heterogeneous students and lack of PERT information, textbook resources, and diagnostic tools. The latter three seem susceptible to improvement, and many teachers felt PERT information and teaching resources improved in

Year 2.

However, heterogeneity remained an issue. College-bound students' engagement increased more than it decreased, while the opposite was true for non-college-bound students. Alignment reform made the preexisting inequality of these two groups even more pronounced. Even CRS instructors who also teach honors courses felt their non-college-bound students were neglected.

Despite its name, the Florida College and Career Readiness Initiative assumes that all students are motivated by a reform directed at college-bound goals. Teachers reported that this is not the case, and their non-college bound students did not engage. The program magnifies the discrepant needs of these two groups of students. It makes no effort to appeal to non-college-bound students or to show them why they should care about college.

To be true to its name, this reform could have offered career-related incentives to reach work-bound students, but it did not even try. It mistakenly assumed that college-ready equals career-ready, but students did not agree. Other researchers have made a strong case for creating career-related programs in high school that build academic skills, job skills, and soft skills (Stone & Lewis, 2012), and as we observed, some teachers made efforts to create career-related activities. Future initiatives might benefit from including such features.

The Florida reform presents important lessons for other states. First, it reveals shortcomings that are likely to occur in most states, which suggest policy changes that might address those shortcomings. Remedial placement tests are important in every state, and the lack of coordination across colleges in the same state poses the potential for serious discontinuities and confusion. Florida is one of the few states to use a single statewide test and pass level for all state colleges. As a practical matter, using a single statewide test and pass level should be easily

done and would likely save money, but the politics of getting such agreement may be difficult.

Second, the Florida reform is distinctive in requiring that nearly all high school juniors take the statewide placement test. In contrast, the California test and senior-year courses are optional. Moreover, the California test counts only for the middle-tier state colleges, not for community colleges or flagship universities, so students may see the test as not fitting their intended goals, even when it does. However, the Florida mandate raises concerns when parents think that students are already taking too many tests. This is a reasonable concern; but unlike other tests that evaluate schools and teachers, the PERT test is helpful to students themselves, so it might get greater support than many other tests now given.

Third, the Florida reform is also distinctive in requiring college prep courses in the senior year. This requirement potentially conflicts with other course requirements, but has obvious appeal. Indeed, Florida teachers found these new courses to be attractive, even though developing them meant more work for them. The specific form and content of this course will take time to develop, and Florida did not provide a clear curriculum; but remedial courses in state community colleges can provide suggestions for such courses.

Although the reform was easier to start in Florida than in other states, most states are deeply concerned about the high level of remedial course enrollments and aware of the need to align high school preparation with college demands. Florida provides an example that many other states can learn from, and perhaps many will be interested in emulating.

We should note that such a reform can be implemented at the local level. Rosenbaum, Ahearn, & Rosenbaum (2017) described a community college that works with its feeder high schools to administer the college's remedial placement exam in 11th grade, and to develop a high school curriculum that will prepare students to pass that exam. This reform has improved

students' pass-rates, which has bolstered enthusiasm for continuing the reform. However, implementing such reforms at the local level has major costs in staff time and resources, and statewide reform is likely less costly and more efficient.

Sociology suggests that improved alignment may improve school effectiveness. While it is too early to tell about program effects on students' later education or inequality, it is already apparent that this kind of reform can improve alignment, and that teachers should accept it along with this new test. However, social inequalities are magnified by the way the reform was designed. Unfortunately, this is a familiar theme that requires further efforts to solve.

## References

- Achieve, Inc. American Diploma Project Network. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/adp-network>
- Allensworth, E., Nomi, T., Montgomery, N., & Lee, V. (2009). College preparatory curriculum for all: Academic consequences of requiring algebra and English I for ninth-graders in Chicago. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 31*(4), 367–391.
- Austin, K., Bugler, D., Finkelstein, N. D., Klarin, B., Mundry, S., & Olson, M. (2013). *Core to college evaluation: Placing college students in courses for credit: Possible shifts in placement tests under the Common Core State Standards*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.
- Bailey, T., Jeong, D. W., & Cho, S.-W. (2010). Referral, enrollment, and completion in developmental education sequences in community colleges. *Economics of Education Review, 29*(2), 255–270.
- Brown, R. S., & Niemi, D. N. (2007). *Investigating the alignment of high school and community college assessments in California* (National Center Report No. 07-3). San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

- Desimone, L. (2002). How can comprehensive school reform models be successfully implemented? *Review of Educational Research*, 72(3), 433–479.
- Howell, J. S., Kurlaender, M., & Grodsky, E. (2010). Postsecondary preparation and remediation: Examining the effect of the early assessment program at California State University. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 29(4), 726–748.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.81.5.227-231>
- Kirst, M., & Venezia, A. (Eds.). (2004). *From high school to college: Improving opportunities for success in postsecondary education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Knudson, R. E., Zitzer-Comfort, C., Quirk, M., & Alexander, P. (2008). The California State University Early Assessment Program. *The Clearing House*, 81(5), 227–231.
- Little, J. W. (1993). Teachers' professional development in a climate of educational reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15(2), 129–151.
- Long, B. T., & Riley, E. K. (2007). Sending signals to students: The role of early placement testing in improving academic preparation. In N. Hoffman, J. Vargas, A. Venezia, & M. S. Miller (Eds.), *Minding the gap: Why integrating high school with college makes sense and how to do it* (pp.105–112), Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Mokher, C., Jacobson, L., & Alexander, J. (2014, April). *Florida college and career readiness initiative: Fidelity of implementation in the first four years*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, PA.
- Rosenbaum, J. (2001). *Beyond college-for-all: Career paths for the forgotten half*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Rosenbaum, J., Ahearn, C., & Rosenbaum, J. A. (2017). *New college options: Multiple pathways to college and career success*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

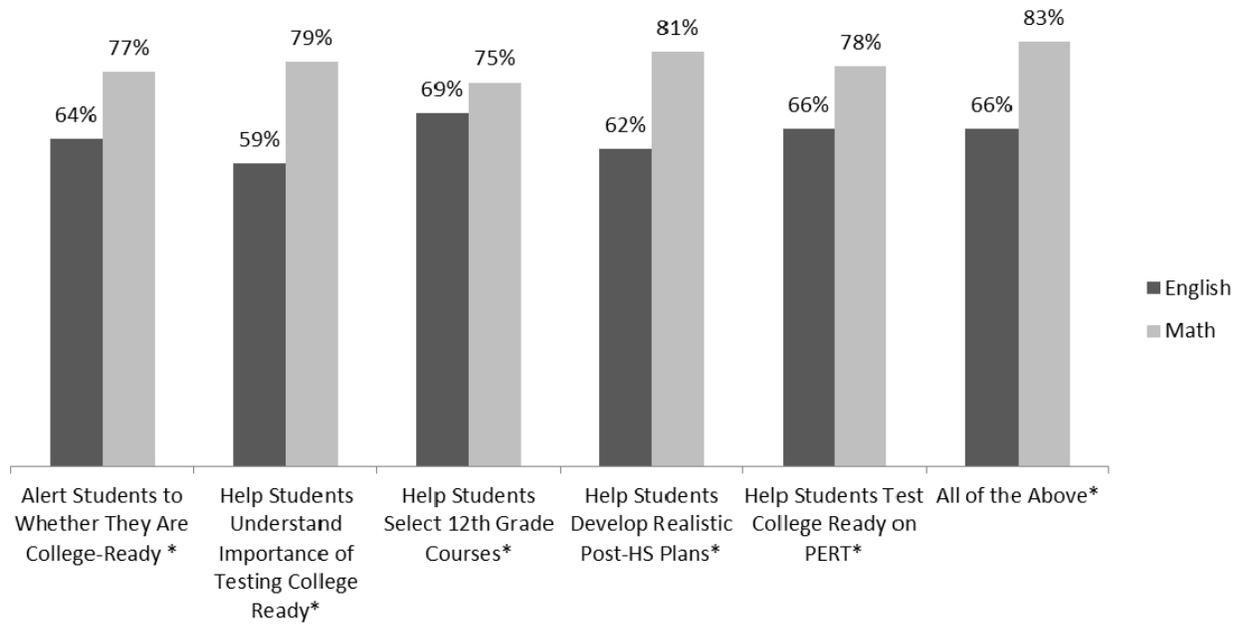
Spillane, J. (2006). *Standards deviation: How schools misunderstand education policy*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Stone, J. R., III, & Lewis, M. V. (2012). *College and career ready in the 21st century: Making*

*high school matter*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Figure 1: Percent of Teachers Evaluating FCCRI as Moderately (3) to Extremely (5) Effective, by Subject



\*Math and English are significantly different at the 5% level

Figure 2: Percent of Teachers who Felt that Various Difficulties Presented Worse, better or the Same Level of Impediments in Year 2 as Year 1

