Achieving the Dream
Washington State Community & Technical Colleges
Phase II, 2011-15

Third Implementation Year, 2014-15
Summary Evaluation Report

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Introduction

Ten Washington community and technical colleges participated in Phase II of Achieving the Dream (AtD) in Washington State, with the goal of increasing student success and closing equity gaps. Phase II ran from 2011 through 2015 (one planning year and three implementation years) and was funded by a grant from College Spark Washington.

An independent, third party evaluation, also funded by College Spark Washington, was conducted to document and evaluate the impact of AtD on participating community and technical colleges, provide timely feedback to the colleges to help inform their efforts moving forward, and document lessons learned and their implications for policy, practice, and systems.

Questions guiding the evaluation were:

- Is AtD promoting institutional change?

- Are strategic interventions helping targeted students achieve key student outcomes or momentum points and progress on the pathway to obtaining certificates and degrees?

- Are colleges closing equity gaps?

This 2016 summary evaluation report explores these questions, as of the end of the third AtD implementation year of 2014-15; analyzes colleges' progress in improving student outcomes and closing equity gaps; and offers some lessons learned from AtD and their implications for efforts to increase student success and close equity gaps.

Data and information sources include college site visits and structured interviews; Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) data, provided by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; colleges' AtD Annual Reflections reports; and other documents and communications. It also draws on individual college updates covering their third AtD implementation year, produced as part of this evaluation.

A post-AtD study funded by College Spark Washington will explore some of these issues in greater depth, including institutional change and selected strategies for increasing student success and closing equity gaps (the latter including colleges from both Phase I and Phase II of AtD in Washington State). It will also analyze additional years' worth of SAI data, especially important given that it is likely to take some years for the colleges' AtD work to affect student success and equity gaps at the institutional level.

Institutional Change

AtD helped promote institutional change at almost all of the 10 colleges in Phase II of AtD in Washington State to varying degrees. Aspects of institutional change include committed leadership, institutional research capacity and a culture of evidence, faculty and staff engagement, and systemic institutional improvements, including strategic, broad based professional development opportunities.

At a very fundamental level, AtD helped promote increased attention to and work on student success and equity at all of the colleges. It also helped promote a rethinking of these issues. For example, for some colleges, particularly those with large transfer student populations, this meant a shift from a student's "right to fail," to colleges having a responsibility for helping ensure their success. For technical colleges, this meant a broadening of their definition of success from employment to include certificate and degree completion. And for many colleges, this meant a shift from a "rising tide lifts all boats" or "leveling the playing field" approach to equity to recognizing more targeted, direct action is required.

These shifts in perspective helped guide and shape colleges' AtD work. For example, one of the colleges where transfer predominates launched an initiative to reduce the number of courses on its high enrollment low completion course list that promoted pedagogical innovations to increase completion rates, including active teaching and learning strategies and embedded college success skills in content courses. One of the technical colleges is planning to move to an annual schedule and block scheduling of general education classes, as a way to help address the barrier general education requirements present to certificate and degree completion. And several colleges launched targeted, direct actions to address equity gaps (described in greater detail later in this report).

However, these shifts in perspective have yet to permeate colleges from top to bottom. And they have yet to fully guide and shape institutional policies, practices, and systems.

Committed leadership. Over the four years of Phase II of AtD, we have observed that the colleges most successful at pursuing broad institutional change are those with presidents and others in key leadership positions who are actively and aggressively committed to moving a student success agenda forward at multiple levels. The overt style of leadership can vary widely; it is the intense, attentive focus over time and the deliberate inclusion of key actors at all levels of the college that appear to make the difference.

For some, this takes the form of very public and visible leadership, with clear and frequent statements and actions that back up the statements. For others, it may be a more quiet, long-term strategic thinking and planning approach that deliberately builds the less-visible organizational underpinnings needed to move certain kinds of necessary change forward. Style notwithstanding, it is a necessary condition for a president to bring and articulate a passionate commitment to change in the pursuit of greater student success and achieving equity in student outcomes.

But a great presidential vision is not a sufficient condition to make change occur. The vision cannot be carried forward without the development of internal partnerships that cross not only functions but levels. We have seen a couple of colleges during this initiative where the presidential vision existed but progress remained limited in spite of the genuine desire of leadership to move it forward.

Additional leadership skills that help move a vision to action include using the college's organizational structure (chairs, deans, vice presidents) intentionally to spread change; implementing transparent and predictable decision-making processes; engaging—and adding—strategic allies at key junctures; and providing clear direction on key reforms without micromanaging, while ensuring that follow-up will take place. Faculty and staff need to have trust that they will be supported in their change efforts, and that snags are seen as opportunities for continuous improvement as reforms continue to go forward.

These multiple levels include faculty and staff doing the on-the-ground work—both the innovators and their partners in implementation; department chairs; deans; vice presidents and other executive team members such as directors of institutional effectiveness; and presidents. No organization will have all of these levels aligned and networked completely, but a concentrated effort to find, develop, and spread these cross-organization connections appears to be necessary for making real change occur at the institutional level. Those colleges that have attempted to lead primarily from the middle or top or bottom, without forging these multi-level structures, have found that over time they struggle to maintain forward momentum. Reform efforts remain small and begin to fade away, and innovators and change makers burn out or leave.

Most—but not all—of the Phase II colleges appeared to have developed some of these multi-level connections during their AtD implementation years. A couple have yet to develop and use them effectively even though they clearly have individual actors who believe in and want to implement the visions of student success and equity.

As the Phase II colleges finished their third and last AtD implementation year, they began to consider what they needed to do to support innovation and excitement over time. This appears to work best at those colleges that focus on a few key strategies that are led by people who are recognized as empowered and authorized to move the work forward, in concert with others. Often, some combination of release time, stipends, and other resources are necessary for these individuals to have the time and energy to do this. Most of the Phase II colleges appear to be finding ways to support continued work with such resources.

IR and culture of evidence. AtD helped almost all colleges build their institutional research (IR) capacity and create a culture of evidence. This included adding IR staff (with much of this capacity now sustained through college operational budgets), increasing the availability of data and their use for strategic planning, accreditation, budgeting, and decision making purposes; increasing the collaboration between IR and IT; and increasing the use of Student Achievement Initiative data for examining student success (rather than just budgetary purposes). Some colleges also positioned their IR offices not as separate data shops, but as part of institutional effectiveness, strategic planning, and assessment.

Along with increased capacity has come increased demands, including for greater analysis of the data. As a result, IR resources are spread thin at several colleges.

A couple of colleges made limited progress in building their IR capacity. Challenges included staff turnover and a continued lack of strong data systems and infrastructure (e.g., hardware, network capacity, IT support, data definitions and cleaning, etc.).

Documentation and evaluation as part of a learning agenda and continuous improvement is an area that needs improvement. Some positive examples of this occurring are Bellingham Technical College's use of faculty focus groups and interviews and student surveys to document the impact of its Reading Apprenticeship intervention; Lower Columbia College's use of faculty inquiry groups to assess the impact of its precollege math and English reforms and make improvements; and Spokane Falls Community College's self-assessment of its early alert intervention, which involved stepping back, assessing its impact, and reflecting on the implications for policy, practice, and systems.

Faculty and staff engagement. AtD also helped promote faculty and staff engagement in student success efforts. This took many forms, including use of AtD and its leadership, data, and intervention teams to promote engagement as well as expand leadership and support emerging leaders; exposure to promising practices at DREAM and through other AtD resources; planning, development and implementation of strategic interventions; participation in interventions (e.g., orientation and advising); and professional development and training opportunities.

At most colleges, this engagement was fairly broad based. At some, it primarily took the form of faculty or staff working on a specific strategic intervention. One challenge was active engagement at multiple levels.

Some of those engaged in AtD are now in strategic positions (e.g., college president, vice president of student services, associate dean of instruction, IR directors, etc.) to help continue to move this work forward.

Strategic, broad based professional development. About half of AtD colleges pursued large scale transformations in how they teach, with the goal of increasing faculty and student engagement and improving student learning outcomes. Incorporating changes at the classroom level is a particularly effective way to achieve scale and sustainability.

These colleges intentionally focused their large scale professional development efforts on active teaching and learning, college success skills, and Reading Apprenticeship. As a result, these approaches were being used by faculty in a wide range of courses, from precollege math and English courses and college success courses to college level courses such as biology, history, nursing, and diesel mechanics. And there were high levels of energy and enthusiasm among the faculty involved.

Examples of strategic, broad based faculty professional development include:

- Everett Community College's Innovations Academy, which is a week-long workshop that focuses on collaborative learning strategies, flipped classroom and active learning techniques, student and faculty engagement, and assessment. Follow up activities are incorporated, and participating faculty are provided stipends.

- Lower Columbia College's SCALE Institute training in active teaching and learning attended by about 90 faculty and staff (including 64 out of 65 full time faculty); and an On Course workshop on effective learning beliefs and behaviors attended by about 50 faculty and staff.

- Whatcom Community College's quarter-long teaching, learning, and assessment workshops that include activities, assignments, and reports. One workshop focuses on active teaching and learning techniques to improve student learning outcomes. Participating faculty receive a small increase on the salary schedule.

This work requires institutional commitment, dedicated staff, and resources (e.g., faculty stipends and release time). One challenge is ongoing support and follow up activities for those participating in training and workshops. Another is useful documentation and evaluation of the impact of these efforts on student outcomes. Continued work on these and similar challenges is important to help move this work forward.

Note that colleges' AtD efforts were influenced by other institutional factors such as leadership changes; structural/organizational changes; staff turnover; and declining enrollments and, as a result, budget cuts. Colleges' AtD efforts were also influenced by other related efforts (e.g., accreditation and its increased emphasis on student learning outcomes) and, in turn, helped influence other student success efforts (e.g., Title III grants, some of which are now being used to expand IR capacity, advising/coaching, and faculty professional development; Guided Pathways; etc.).

Strategic Interventions

AtD provided all 10 colleges the opportunity to plan, develop, and implement a range of strategic interventions aimed at increasing student success, including new student orientation, advising, college success courses, early alert, precollege math and English reforms, high enrollment low completion or gateway courses, Reading Apprenticeship, and supplemental instruction. Some interventions have been sustained and scaled up; others remain discrete, small scale efforts; and a few were dropped because of limited impact or challenges with scaling them up or sustaining them.

Note that it is not possible to attribute changes in student outcomes to one specific strategic intervention alone, given that they may also be affected by other efforts to improve student success at the college or other larger contextual or environmental factors. What can be said is that students who participated in the intervention had or did not have improved outcomes, compared to other students at the college (e.g., earlier cohorts or those who did not take part in the intervention); or, in some instances of interventions being scaled up, that college level student outcomes did or did not improve. There may be other factors at play, though. For those interventions that are not mandatory, self-selection bias may be a factor. In this section, overall patterns are analyzed by intervention type across the AtD colleges, in addition to presenting data from the individual colleges, as included in their AtD Annual Reflections reports.

New student orientation. Most AtD colleges had new student orientation interventions. Common features of new student orientation include information sessions on college programs, services, and resources; meetings with advisors; assessments of skills, interests, and strengths; opportunities to connect with other new students; and campus tours. New student orientations last from a couple of hours to a full day.

Edmonds Community College's Triton Jumpstart new student orientation is notable for its use of a strength based, participatory curriculum based on student development principles and practices.

Most colleges have sustained and scaled up their new student orientations or are in the process of doing so. Challenges to getting to scale include an institutional reluctance to make things mandatory, which is the case with a couple of AtD colleges; staffing; budget; and logistics (e.g., scheduling, space, etc.).

According to colleges' 2015 AtD Annual Reflections reports, students who participated in new student orientation tended to have higher first to second quarter retention rates. However, there was self-selection bias where orientation was not implemented as mandatory. The longer term impact on student success, as measured by SAI momentum point data, is not clear.

Advising. Most AtD colleges also had advising interventions, and they took a variety of approaches to the issue, including making it more intrusive and proactive; providing small group advising, as part of the onboarding process; strengthening faculty engagement in advising; and increasing the use of technology, so that advisors can spend more time working with students and less time on class scheduling.

Examples include:

- Bellingham Technical College's enhanced advising intervention, which uses a targeted, intrusive approach based on an integrated case management model, with advisors assigned a caseload of students based on their program of interest. Advisors proactively contact students, work with faculty to ensure students are on track, and visit classrooms. The system is supported by diagnostic tools (i.e., advisors use College Success Inventory results to identify students with immediate needs and tailor and target intrusive advising actions) and a student tracking database.

  BTC does extensive tracking of course success rates, GPA, retention, and similar short term outcome measures as well as qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of its enhanced advising approach. In its 2015 AtD Annual Reflections report, BTC reported reductions in no momentum status, higher completion rates of college math, and higher quarter to quarter retention rates for pre-program students who met with advisors.

  By the third AtD implementation year, a couple of other AtD colleges were experimenting with a more targeted, intrusive and proactive approach to advising.

- Spokane Falls Community College's academic consulting intervention, which focuses on working at the departmental level to increase faculty advising, with each department developing an advising model that works for them (e.g., a public campaign around advising, closing down classes for a two hour block to do group advising, and in-class advising), consistent with the system's overall vision and mission. Supporting this redesigned system are optional-use faculty training and online tools and resources, including access to relevant student information (e.g., program, credits, courses, grades, etc.).

  SFCC reported in its 2015 AtD Annual Reflections report an increase in the percentage of students who earned their first 30 college credits (students are required to meet with their advisors at least twice a quarter until they reach that milestone). It also reported that student surveys show greater satisfaction with advising. During evaluation site visits, faculty and staff had positive feedback on the system.

Most colleges have sustained their advising interventions and some have scaled them up. One challenge in getting to scale is an institutional reluctance to make things mandatory, which is the case for a couple of AtD colleges. Another challenge is funding. Some colleges are leveraging other resources (e.g., Title III grants) to expand advising, including intrusive, proactive advising.

According to colleges' 2015 AtD Annual Reflections reports, students participating in advising tended to have higher first to second quarter retention rates (however, self-selection bias is an issue at those colleges where advising is not mandatory) and, at a couple of colleges, increased achievement of SAI momentum points. The latter was true for those colleges that focused not just on entry advising, but also ongoing advising.

College success course. Most AtD colleges had college success course interventions, either as a stand-alone intervention or as part of a broader first year experience intervention. All of these colleges initially targeted their college success courses to new students placing into precollege math and/or

English. Several used On Course, which focuses on student self-knowledge, responsibility, self-motivation, and study skills.

In terms of student outcomes associated with college success courses, analyzing patterns across the AtD colleges is made difficult by colleges' multiple and different goals (e.g., increased quarter to quarter retention rates, increased precollege and/or college English and/or math completion, and increased SAI momentum) and their data reporting, as well as variable extents to which target populations were required in practice to take the course. A couple of colleges reported in their 2015 AtD annual reports that students taking the college success course had increased precollege English and/or math completion rates and, at at least one college, increased college English and/or math completion rates.

Most colleges have sustained their college success courses and some have scaled them up, with a couple making the course mandatory for all new students. For example, one college, after seeing significant improvements in its retention rate for precollege students, decided to make it mandatory for all new students.

Precollege math and English reforms. Most AtD colleges had interventions targeting precollege math and/or English. Reforms included changes in placement (e.g., new tests, adjusted cut-off scores, and multiple placement methods); curricular and instructional reforms (e.g., self-paced, modularized curriculum; reduction in the number of precollege levels; co-requisite; embedding of study skills; and alternative math pathways); test prep (e.g., math boot camps and brush up sessions); and in class tutoring and other instructional supports. Some interventions were comprehensive; others focused on one or two elements.

Colleges' goals for these interventions included reducing the number of students enrolling in precollege courses; increasing the success rate of those who do enroll in precollege courses; increasing their transition rate to college level courses as well as reducing the amount of time this takes; and increasing their success rate at the college level.

Examples of precollege reform interventions include:

- Lower Columbia College's precollege math intervention, which included new diagnostic testing; a move from four levels of precollege math to three; a self-paced, modularized curriculum; a math boot camp; the use of transcripts for placement of recent high school graduates; and development of a non-STEM math pathway.

  LCC reported in its 2015 AtD Annual Reflections report that overall success rates in precollege math have stayed fairly constant, despite eliminating a quarter of the curriculum; withdrawal rates have decreased; and success in college level math courses has gone up. Also, the proportion of recent high school graduates placing into precollege math has decreased.

- Whatcom Community College's precollege English reform, which focused on English 101 Plus, an accelerated, team taught course in which students enroll in English 101 and 95 simultaneously instead of the traditional English 95-100-101 sequence. Also part of the intervention: adjusted cut-off scores for placement, a study skills training module, and multiple placement methods, including directed self-placement.

WCC reported in its 2015 AtD Annual Reflections report high success rates for those taking English 101, which also means a reduction in the time to progress from a precollege placement to college English completion to one quarter.

Some colleges have sustained and scaled up or are in the process of scaling up their precollege math and English reforms. A couple of colleges' reform efforts have remained discrete, small scale efforts. Positive factors in scaling up and sustaining these reforms include high levels of faculty buy in and engagement, and institutional supports (e.g., faculty release time and training).

In their 2015 AtD Annual Reflections reports, some colleges with precollege reform interventions reported increases in precollege completion rates and a couple, increases in college level math and English completion rates.

Six of the nine Phase II colleges included some form of precollege math and/or English intervention as part of their AtD participation. In some cases, these interventions were combined with larger reform work in this area that was already underway. About half of the six reached scale or were close to doing so in their precollege changes. With respect to the SAI goals these colleges had identified for precollege interventions, two did not show positive change; for two, results were unclear because of variations in implementation and measurement; and two saw at least partial improvement.

Reading Apprenticeship. One AtD college had a Reading Apprenticeship (RA) intervention at the start of AtD; by the end of the third AtD implementation year, though, several other AtD colleges had faculty using RA in their classes. RA teaches students how to analyze and think about what they read and its meaning by incorporating social, personal, cognitive, and knowledge building elements into reading and writing. RA can be applied to any content area.

Bellingham Technical College made RA one of its AtD interventions. By the end of the third AtD implementation year, 55 faculty and staff had been RA trained, ranging from English and math to nursing and diesel mechanics. Between spring 2014 and winter 2015, over 1,000 students were enrolled in 35 courses using RA, according to BTC's AtD 2015 Annual Reflections report. BTC reported that courses where most or all faculty are RA-trained appeared to have higher success rates, but it also acknowledged the many challenges of evaluating RA impact with rigor.

BTC has also used qualitative approaches to assess the impact of RA, holding focus groups with faculty to explore its effects on classroom environment, student learning and development, and impact on faculty experience. Focus group observations included: increased faculty and student engagement in RA classes; more focus on real life content; more rigor and meaning in content and assessment; increased student ease with and comprehension of scientific material, research processes, problem solving, and critical thinking; and enhanced faculty interaction and sharing of best practices.

BTC is continuing to evaluate the impact of RA, using a combination of data analysis, focus groups with faculty and staff trained and using RA strategies in their classes, and student surveys.

RA has a strong research base as can be seen on WestEd's website: http://readingapprenticeship.org/research impact, which includes both case studies and randomized controlled research.

BTC has also actively promoted Reading Apprenticeship at the regional and state level. This includes co-sponsoring a regional RA workshop, participating in statewide RA efforts, and providing training at other colleges in the state. RA interest, training, and use continues to spread in Washington State, and it would be interesting to look at how this develops over time—including efforts to assess its impact.

Equity Gaps

At the start of Phase II of AtD in Washington State, most AtD colleges took a "rising tide lifts all boats" or "leveling the playing field" approach to addressing equity gaps. Examples of this approach include targeting issues such as precollege education that disproportionately affect students of color and low income students, and strengthening orientation and advising to help surface and address barriers and issues early on. During the course of Phase II, most colleges came to the conclusion that this alone was not enough to close equity gaps and began to develop more targeted, direct approaches to closing equity gaps.

An analysis of SAI data shows that equity gaps have narrowed slightly in some instances over the four years of Phase II of AtD, but, for the most part, gaps still exist, particularly for African American and Native American students, and to a lesser extent, Hispanic students (see the following section of this report for a complete analysis).

Examples of the AtD colleges' more targeted, direct efforts include:

- Everett Community College, which now has a chief diversity and equity officer who reports directly to the president and is responsible for community engagement and examination of institutional policies, procedures, and processes from an equity perspective. Short term priorities are student success, including equity driven initiatives such as improving services and supports for undocumented students; and hiring and retaining a diverse workforce. The college also has a diversity and equity center, the work of which includes student retention and support, outreach, information and resources, faculty and staff support, and student leadership development.

- Northwest Indian College, which incorporates a strong cultural component into instruction and student services. This includes defining student success consistent with tribal culture, values, and identity; incorporating cultural components into new student orientation to help build a sense of belonging and community; and integrating tribal identify, culture, language, and history into the curriculum.

- Skagit Valley College, which now has a part time special assistant reporting directly to the president who focuses on strengthening connections to the Latino and Native American communities and implementing the college's strategic and operational plans around equity. It also has staff and resources dedicated to the recruitment and retention of students of color, with a focus on Latino students. This includes bilingual/bicultural staff going to farms, churches, and other community gathering places, as part of outreach and recruitment. It also includes putting on cultural events at the college to bring potential students and their families to campus, and helping students move along pathways. The college also has active multicultural student services and clubs.

  SVC has added an instructional component to its equity efforts: faculty communities on inclusive pedagogy, which is an approach to teaching that incorporates multicultural content, diverse teaching and learning styles, varied mean of assessment, and attention to issues of equity, power, and privilege.

By the end of the third AtD implementation year, additional colleges had also started or were planning to take more targeted, direct action (e.g., outreach and recruitment targeting underserved communities of color, targeted academic and student services and supports, etc.). A couple of other colleges had reached the conclusion that there was the need for more targeted, direct action, but had yet to develop a clear path forward.

This work requires institutional commitment, dedicated staff, and resources.

Helping to lay the foundation for some of this work was colleges' disaggregation and analysis of student outcome data for students of color and other groups, and focus groups conducted with students for whom gaps were found to exist during the AtD planning year or early implementation years. For example, Edmonds Community College published its findings as a way to engage the college community in strategic conversations about equity gaps and strategies for closing them.

Progress Towards Improving Student Outcomes

As part of the AtD evaluation, colleges' Student Achievement Initiative (SAI) data are being analyzed to gauge their progress in improving student success and closing equity gaps.[1] SAI data tracks student progress on selected momentum measures that have been identified as key milestones along the way to completing a certificate or degree, including completing precollege math and/or English, 15, 30, and 45 credit milestones, college-level math or the equivalent (the quantitative point), and certificate/degree completion.

This report presents SAI data for nine of the 10 Phase II AtD colleges, for their baseline planning year of 2011-2012 and their three AtD implementation years, 2012-2013, 2013-14, and 2014-15. The tenth, Northwest Indian College, is an independent tribal college and does not participate in the state's Student Achievement Initiative.

AtD interventions take place amid a much larger universe of efforts to improve student success at the colleges, ranging from programs targeting specific populations to college-wide improvements in student services, teaching and assessment, and the like. It is difficult to disentangle the effects of interventions from each other. AtD emphasizes broad institutional change in addition to supporting specific interventions, and changes in college-wide outcomes are not likely to be attributable to specific interventions. And large scale changes in institutional behavior and outcomes are likely to require some years to take place.

Also, a variety of factors can have an impact on institution-level SAI data as well as improved college practices. These include trends in the local and regional economies, related student issues (personal, health, financial, etc.), system and policy issues (funding, restructuring of precollege education, financial aid regulations), and college specific issues. For example, in bad economic times, enrollments, student retention, and completion tend to increase.

Specific local conditions can also have an impact on outcomes data. Colleges in regions where there are multiple nearby competitors may experience more fluctuation in retention and completion than colleges with no convenient alternatives for students. A geographically isolated college in a depressed economic region may have higher retention and completion rates for similar reasons; that is, the higher rates may be due to factors other than college improvements. And for some colleges, the composition of their student populations and their consequent needs is changing considerably over time.

These nine colleges have very different populations, local conditions, certificate and degree program mixes, and levels of support for various initiatives and services. For these reasons, the SAI data is most valuable in comparing a college's progress against its earlier performance rather than comparing colleges with each other.

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[1] These data include students in workforce and transfer program, some of whom are college-ready, some of whom are starting with precollege work. Students starting at the basic skills level are not included in this report.

Making progress in the first year at college: are the "no momentum" groups getting smaller as a proportion of the cohort?

The SAI data can tell us what percent of students are not making any momentum by the end of their first year—a key first measure of how effectively colleges are helping new students move faster and farther through precollege and college towards completing certificates and degrees. This group may include students who dropped out as well as those who did return but accrued no momentum points. It may also vary from year to year in characteristics like college readiness, income, race/ethnicity, and the like.

Are later-starting cohorts faring better on making some momentum in their first years?

The charts below show, for each Phase II college, the proportion of students who have made no momentum after their first year for the 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 cohorts. The aim is to have more recent cohorts with lower no-momentum shares than the 2011 baseline cohort, with the ideal case showing successive reductions of no-momentum shares.

Proportion of students making no momentum in their first year: Reduction from 2011 baseline for four colleges
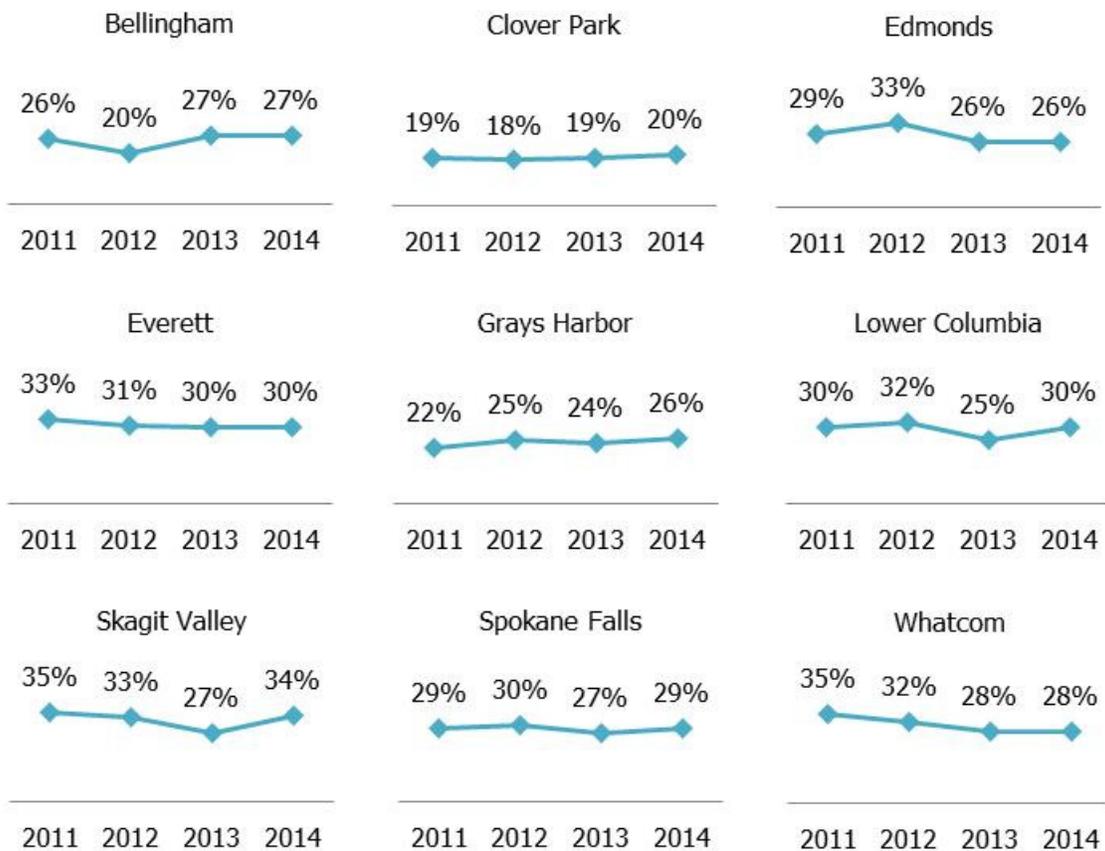
Five colleges showed reductions from the 2011 baseline for their 2012 cohorts, six for their 2013 cohorts, and four for their 2014 cohorts. A couple showed little to no meaningful changes on this

measure over the four years of AtD. After earlier reductions, four colleges had their shares go back up by several percentage points for 2014. One college, Whatcom, made successive reductions for its 2012 and 2013 cohorts and maintained the same level for cohort 2014.

It is not clear why the bump back up happened for some of these colleges, and the reasons are likely to differ from college to college. Possible factors include changes in the local and regional economies as well as in student body composition and needs. This finding reinforces the need to strengthen approaches to helping students make momentum in their first year in college. Even for colleges where progress has been made in reducing first-year no-momentum share, at most schools it is still a significant part of the cohort, ranging from 20 to 30 percent—and it does not go down very much with a second or third year.

No momentum by race/ethnicity: Do later-starting cohorts have smaller no-momentum groups?

Another way to look at changes in student momentum is by race and ethnicity, since one core value for AtD is the closing of equity gaps for students of color. Since many Washington State colleges have small numbers of students in these groups, we look at the aggregated data for all nine Phase II colleges that participate in SAI. The chart below shows the percentage in each subgroup across the nine colleges who made no momentum in their first year, for the 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 cohorts.

All nine Phase II colleges aggregated by race/ethnicity: Reductions from 2011 baseline for almost all subgroups; small 2014 bump-ups in most subgroups
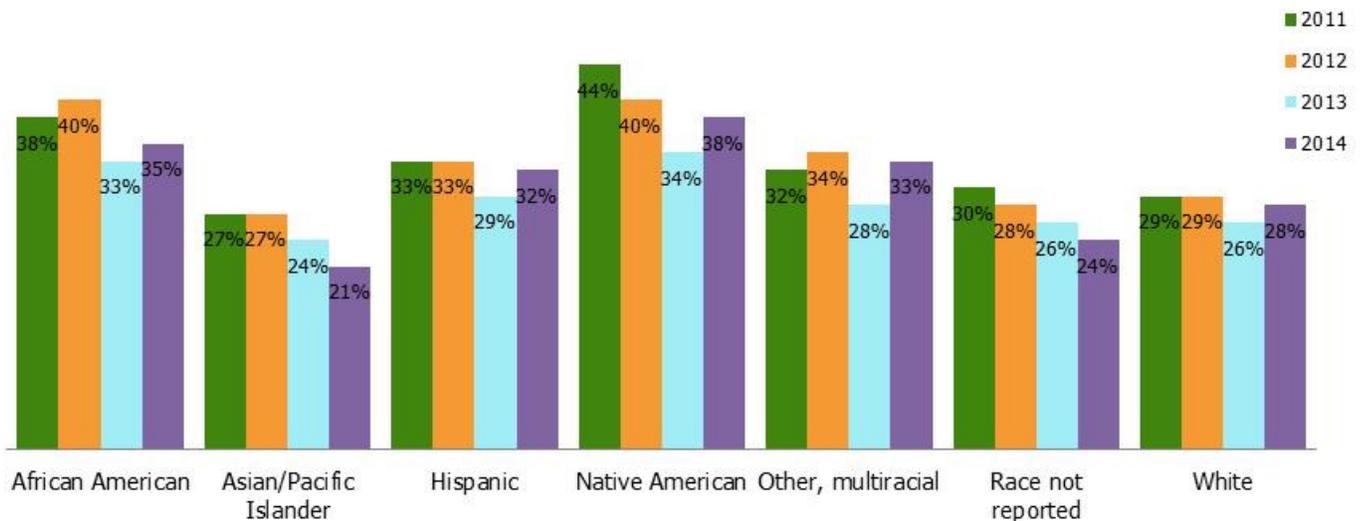
(We do not attempt to interpret data for the category Race not reported, since there is no way to know its composition.)

The hope here is to see the percentage of students making no momentum within each subgroup diminish with successive cohorts as colleges get better at helping first year students make more progress, and also that the higher no-momentum shares for some subgroups would start to shrink as a part of closing equity gaps.

While the 2012 cohort had some up-and-down variation, all racial/ethnic subgroups showed reductions between the 2011 baseline and the 2013 cohorts. These ranged from three percent for the Asian/Pacific

Islander subgroup to 10% for the Native American subgroup. Note that the bump back up in no-momentum share for the 2014 cohort mentioned in the previous section is also reflected here for all subgroups except Asian/Pacific Islander (and the undefinable Race Not Reported subgroup). However, all racial/ethnic subgroups in the 2014 cohort except Other/Multiracial had slightly smaller no-momentum shares than the baseline 2011 cohort. Equity gaps have narrowed slightly but still exist for underrepresented subgroups.

Note that SBCTC data now allows for the Asian/Pacific Islander subgroup to be disaggregated. The absolute numbers of Pacific Islander students across these nine colleges are small, thus presenting challenges to valid interpretation. Therefore, they will remain as one group for this report. However, an all-college look does show a meaningful difference between Asian and Pacific Islander subgroups on this measure, with the latter group showing higher no-momentum shares.

Are students of color faring better on this measure over time?

Another way to investigate this is to look at how the no-momentum proportions change over time for these subgroups. What happens with a second year? Do these gaps get smaller? In general, they do not. For the 2011 cohort, the no-momentum share for all of the racial/ethnic subgroups dropped by four to five percent; for the 2012 cohort, three to four percent; for the 2013 cohort, one to four percent. We also know by looking at individual college data that reductions in the share of no-momentum tail off after a second year and a third year produces little to no further change. This underscores again the urgent necessity of finding ways to help students make momentum early in their college participation.

Summary information on changes in momentum from individual college profiles

In the analyses we do on individual colleges, we are able to look at the continuum of highest momentum point achievement for each student cohort year, for the entire cohort and also, where numbers permit, disaggregated by race/ethnicity. For example, are there higher percentages of students in the later cohorts whose highest momentum points are 30 credits, 45 credits, college math, or completion, compared to the baseline 2011 cohort? Below, we summarize some findings on whether later-starting cohorts have been making higher momentum points in the first year, and whether the proportion making no momentum in that first year was shrinking.

Seven of the nine colleges showed increases in the proportion of students who earned 30+ credits for at least two out of their three implementation-year cohorts. Four of those colleges also had more students reaching the 45+ credit levels. These are encouraging findings: at most of these colleges, more of the students who are making momentum are getting further along the continuum in year one.

With respect to progress in closing the equity gaps on no-momentum shares, five of the nine colleges showed reductions on this measure for one or more underrepresented racial/ethnic subgroups. A couple of the colleges were close to having no gaps for their Hispanic subgroups—but no colleges have closed all of their equity gaps on this measure, and it is part of why we emphasize the importance of focusing resources and energy specifically on direct work that targets equity and closing gaps.

College level points per student: Are new-in-fall students earning more college level momentum points in their first year?

College level points per student (PPS) is a measure derived from dividing the total number of college level momentum points in a cohort year by the number of students in the cohort. This rate can be used to compare groups—for example, how are different racial/ethnic groups faring on this measure?—and to compare change over time. According to the State Board, PPS changes tend to be small. It is not yet known what constitutes a meaningful size of change, and it is affected by differences among cohorts with respect to entering levels of college readiness and other characteristics. It is a broad estimate of college level activity for a cohort.

An ideal goal for a new-in-fall student pursuing an associate degree (depending on entry college readiness), might be two to three college level points—the first 15 credits, first 30 credits, and either the quantitative point or perhaps their first 45 credits. Since many students enter needing precollege work in math and English, a more realistic expectation might be one to two college level points. The aim is for first-year college level points per student to increase as the system gets better at moving students faster through precollege to college level courses.

The charts below show college level points per student over the four years of AtD participation. Five colleges show higher PPS from the 2011 baseline, although none show steady increases over time.

First year college level points per student: Increases for five colleges from baseline

Bellingham				Clover Park				Edmonds			
1.74	2.07	1.70	1.98	2.09	2.18	1.98	1.77	1.47	1.39	1.36	1.39
2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014

Everett				Grays Harbor				Lower Columbia			
1.19	1.21	1.22	1.22	1.52	1.52	1.48	1.59	1.30	1.24	1.41	1.26
2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014

Skagit Valley				Spokane Falls				Whatcom			
1.21	1.36	1.41	1.30	1.32	1.29	1.37	1.33	1.21	1.20	1.26	1.21
2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014	2011	2012	2013	2014

To provide some broad current context, the PPS for the state's 34 colleges' 2014 cohorts had a median of about 1.41, and ranged from a low of 1.02 to a high of 2.85. It is likely that schools with a higher

proportion of professional-technical programs tend to have higher points per student because of their highly structured certificate and degree pathways.

Below, the Phase II colleges are combined to allow a look at PPS by race/ethnicity. All racial/ethnic subgroups showed an increase from baseline to their 2013 cohorts (except for Race not reported). Then, echoing the no-momentum findings discussed earlier, the 2014 cohorts show slight decreases, except for the Asian/Pacific Islander subgroup. Equity gaps continue to exist for students of color, particularly African American, Native American, and Hispanic students.

All nine Phase II colleges, aggregated by race/ethnicity: Small increases from baseline to 2013 cohort; equity gaps continue
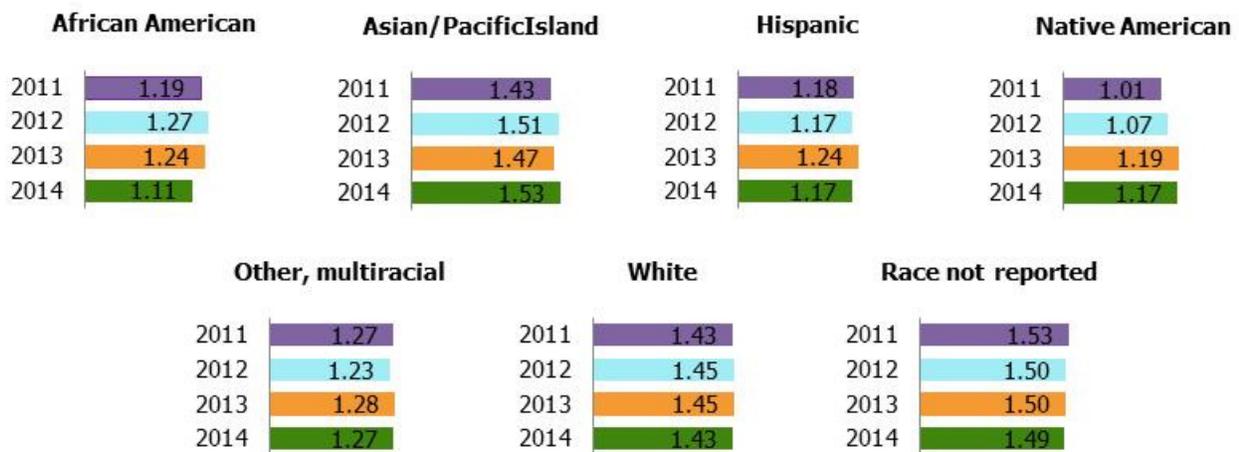
Second year measure: Are more students earning their quantitative point within two years?

The timely completion of gatekeeper courses in math and English is considered to be a key milestone towards completion of degrees and many certificates as well. College math in particular can serve as a major barrier towards completion for many community and technical college students, and the goal is to have this completed no later than the second year.

Improvements in overall completion rates and time to completion of college math have been goals for the community and technical college system in Washington State for some years, and a great deal of work has taken place in addition to Achieving the Dream-related interventions. Better coordination with K-12 assessment and curriculum, changes in precollege and college curriculum and instruction, alternative math pathways, etc., have all been part of this statewide effort, to varying degrees from college to college.

The charts below show three cohort years' worth of second-year quant point achievement for the nine Phase II colleges. Almost every college has made progress on this measure since the baseline cohort of 2011, some by a couple of percentage points and some by much more—an encouraging finding. It is interesting to note the range of quant point rates across this group of nine colleges. For example, for the

2013 cohort, there was a low of 25% to a high of 46%, with a median rate at 36%, and the rate spread was distributed throughout colleges with both academic transfer and professional-technical emphases.

Second-year quant point achievement by college: Gains from baseline for eight of the nine colleges
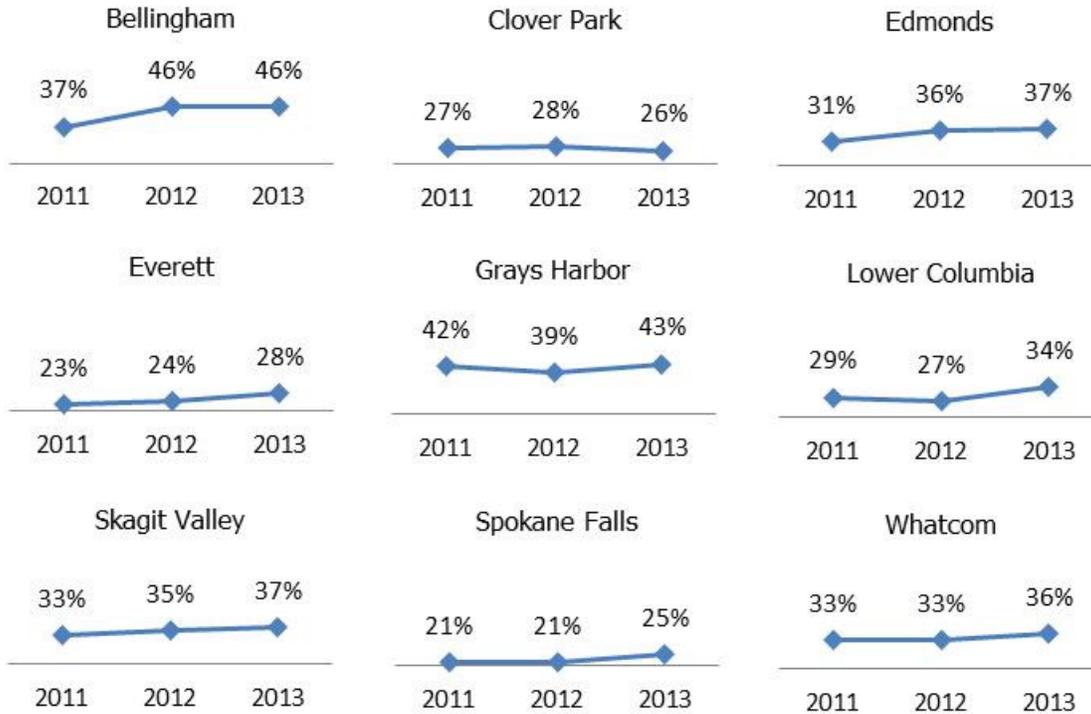
Second-year quant point achievement by race/ethnicity: Are later cohorts showing gains and are equity gaps getting smaller?

The chart below shows quant point achievement for cohorts 2011, 2012, and 2013 for the aggregated race/ethnicity subgroups of these nine Phase II colleges.

There are gains of varying sizes for all subgroups from the 2011 baseline cohort. Increases have been slightly larger for most of the underrepresented groups than for the White subgroup. For the African American and Native American subgroups, large equity gaps remain, while the Hispanic subgroup's previous gap may be closing. A few more years of data—both backwards or forwards—would be helpful in establishing whether a trend is developing.

Second-year quant point achievement for all nine Phase II colleges, aggregated by race/ethnicity: Gains for all subgroups; equity gaps remain for some subgroups
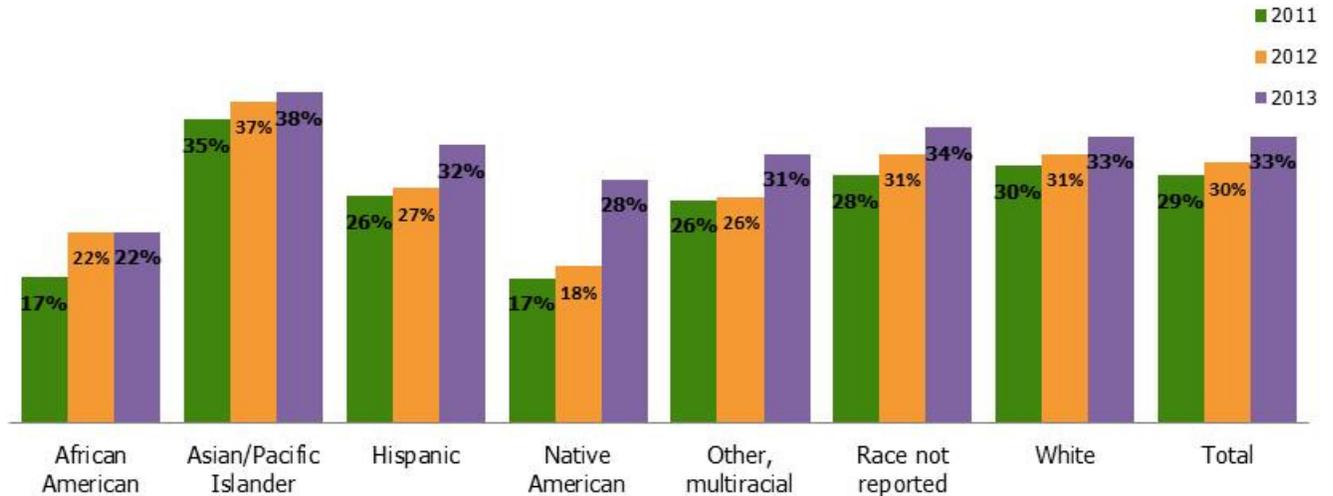
Disaggregated quant point data from our reports on the individual colleges provides some supplementary information. Five of the nine colleges have shown some progress in reducing the size of equity gaps on this measure, especially for their Hispanic subgroups. Large gaps remain at most colleges for their African American subgroups. And a few colleges have had variable quant point rates for their subgroups with no discernible pattern from cohort to cohort and no apparent changes in equity gaps.

Lessons Learned and Implications

This evaluation of Phase II of AtD in Washington State identifies some key lessons that can be applied to future efforts aimed at increasing student success and closing equity gaps. It also suggests some areas for further research and analysis. These include:

- **Institutional change.** Leadership for large scale change is most effective when it remains actively engaged and uses the college's organizational structure intentionally to put change into practice at multiple levels, from top to bottom and across functions and departments. This requires knowledge, skills, and perhaps assistance—during this initiative, people ranging from individual faculty and staff to department chairs and deans, to presidents, reported the need for help and training in how to lead and manage organizational change. The State Board, through its new Student Success Center, has already begun providing this help—a very promising and exciting development.

- **Equity gaps.** Equity gaps require explicit attention and targeted, direct action. The "rising tide lifts all boats" or "leveling the playing field" approach alone is not enough to close equity gaps. During Phase II of AtD, most of the colleges came to this conclusion and began developing more targeted strategies to close equity gaps, including outreach and recruitment targeting specific underserved communities of color; targeted academic and student services and supports for students of color once they are at the college, curricular and instructional changes (e.g., inclusive pedagogy), and the hiring and retention of a diverse workforce. This work requires institutional commitment, dedicated staff, and resources.

  There is a growing cadre of energetic, committed staff, faculty, and administrators at the AtD colleges involved in this work. During evaluation site visits, many expressed a real interest in learning more about current research in the field and effective practices. They also expressed interest in opportunities to get together with their colleagues as a way to promote cross college learning, hear about research and effective practices, and help advance policy and system change.

- **Precollege math and English reforms.** Although a lot of work has gone into helping students succeed at precollege and college level math and English and there have been some positive developments (e.g., multiple placement methods and multiple math pathways), these efforts have yet to pay off in significantly higher success rates. More work remains to be done.

  The Guided Pathways Initiative—involving selected community and technical colleges in the state and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and supported by College Spark Washington—may well help. Guided Pathways essential practices, as spelled out by the Community College Research Center, include:

  - Special supports are provided to help academically underprepared students to succeed in the "gateway" courses for the college's major program areas – not just in college level math and English.

  - Required math courses are appropriately aligned with the student's field of study.

- Intensive support is provided to help very poorly prepared students to succeed in college level courses as soon as possible.[2]

- **Advising.** Advising that is intrusive, proactive, and tied to specific program areas or majors shows promise. So does advising that involves faculty at the departmental level. The benefits of these approaches to advising include the building of ongoing relationships with students being advised; advising that incorporates knowledge of specific programs and their requirements; and collaboration between student services and instruction. For example, the intrusive, proactive approach to advising includes advisors visiting classrooms and working with program faculty to ensure students are on track.

  These approaches to advising have significant implications for faculty and staff. They require institutional supports such as online tools and resources (e.g., student tracking databases), training and professional development opportunities, and supportive policies such as mandatory advising.

- **Scale and sustainability.** Reforms need to be at scale and sustainable. Some of the interventions launched as part of AtD remained small scale, depending heavily upon a limited number of faculty and staff, serving relatively few students, and separate from broader policies, practices, and systems. As a result, their impact was limited. Other AtD interventions were scaled up or in the process of being scaled up at the end of the third AtD implementation year. These were more likely to have broad based buy in and engagement, dedicated staff and resources, some evidence of impact, and institutional policies supporting them.

  Most AtD interventions also focused on one specific element of reform such as new student orientation, advising, or precollege math and English.

  An alternative approach is to focus on overarching structural reform and to do this at scale at the outset, based on current best practice knowledge. Results are assessed on a regular basis and changes made along with way, as part of continuous improvement. The Guided Pathways Initiative mentioned above is an example of this kind of large-scale change effort.

- **First year.** It is critical to help students get off to a strong start, so that they reach key momentum points in their first year. Analysis of SAI data shows limited movement on some key momentum points after the first year, and very little after a second year. Relatively light touch approaches such as new student orientation may be necessary, but they are not sufficient to increase student success.

- **Teaching and learning.** Addressing what goes on in the classroom—teaching and learning— matters. Approaches such as active learning and Reading Apprenticeship help to increase faculty and student engagement, improve student learning outcomes, and increase scale and sustainability

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[2] Community College Research Center, "Guided Pathways Essential Practices: Scale of Adoption Self-Assessment" (February 2016).

of student success efforts. Improvements in teaching, learning, and assessment can also be part of an equity strategy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an example of this.

- **Strategic, broad based professional development.** Strategic, broad based professional development—such as Lower Columbia College's SCALE Institute training and On Course workshops, Everett Community College's Innovations Academy, and Whatcom's teaching, learning, and assessment workshops—is an important element of transformational change. This requires not just one time events, but ongoing activities and support. It also requires institutional commitment, dedicated staff, and resources.

- **Documentation and evaluation.** Having institutional researchers and others with data and/or evaluation skills involved from the outset helps with documentation and evaluation – an essential element of continuous improvement. This includes both quantitative and qualitative data (e.g., focus groups and structured interviews with faculty, staff, and students). Together, quantitative and qualitative data can help explore what's working, not working, why, and what the implications are moving forward.

Some of these issues will be explored in greater depth in the post-AtD study funded by College Spark Washington. This will include an assessment of overall progress on and lessons learned about creating lasting institutional change, as well as factors affecting progress (positive and negative); and a deeper look at key strategies that show real promise for increasing student success and closing equity gaps. It will also include an analysis of additional years' worth of SAI data, especially important given that it is likely to take some years for colleges' AtD work to affect student success and equity gaps at the institutional level. This work will entail reviewing AtD reports and materials, conducting site visits to selected AtD colleges (from both Phase I and Phase II of AtD) and structured interviews, conducting interviews with others in the field, conducting further data analysis, developing selected case studies, conducting a scan of related national research and effective practices, and producing a series of issue briefs.