Abstract

The North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges began collecting and analyzing educational data from the state's 58 community colleges in 1993. Student Success Performance Measures affecting NC basic skills education came into effect beginning in 2013. Since 2013, NC basic skills programs are evaluated on the two performance measures of Basic Skills Student Progress and GED Diploma Passing Rate. All North Carolina community colleges are mandated by the state legislature to offer basic skills programming to citizens of the State. For the citizens of North Carolina, basic skills education is an important part of educational services offered by NC community colleges. During the 2008-2009 school year 19,148 North Carolina public high-school students dropped out of school while NC community colleges enrolled 16,403 public high school dropouts (86%) that same school year into a community college basic skills program.

For the 2015 school year, 14 of the 58 (24.1%) NC community colleges met or exceeded the Basic Skills Student Progress performance measure, while 22 of 58 (37.9%) NC community colleges met or exceeded the goal for the GED Diploma Pass Rate performance measure. Conversely, and perhaps more importantly, 44 of the 58 (75.8%) NC community colleges did not meet the goal for the Basic Skills Student Progress performance measure and 36 of the 58 colleges (62%) of the colleges did not meet the goal for the GED Diploma Pass Rate performance measure. US Department of Education projections for 2020 community college enrollment nationwide is 8.02 million students total, with 2.8 - 3 million students (34.9% - 37.4%) needing Adult Basic Skills Education course-work. Since their inception, a principal purpose of community colleges has been their assistance in educating underprepared, underrepresented, and non-traditional students in gaining the basic skills necessary for success in college level studies and workforce-training. Since basic skills education is seen as essential in order to ensure at-risk, underserved, marginalized, and non-traditional students’ continued access to post-secondary education, it is relevant to describe the successes and challenges of North Carolina basic skills educational programming. The research question that guides this qualitative study is: To what do basic skills directors, at high and low performing NC community colleges, attribute the performance of their programs?

The purpose of this study is to describe the successes and challenges of North Carolina community college basic skills educational programming, through interview data gathered from North Carolina community college basic skills directors, and to discover to what basic skills directors at high and low performing NC community colleges attribute the performance of their programs.