



## Westmoreland County Community College

# ATD *Info Brief*

May 2014

### **Achieving the Dream**

This issue of the ATD InfoBrief focuses on the placement process in determining students' readiness for college-level courses.

Responding to the national trend at community colleges to seek ways to accelerate the developmental education process, institutions have been taking a look at their practices for determining individual learners' readiness for college-level course work. For decades it has not been uncommon for schools to rely on a single placement test such as the Accuplacer or the Compass test to determine which, if any, developmental courses a student needed to take in order to be prepared for her or his first college-level course. The publishers of these tests themselves tell institutions that relying only on their particular test is not good practice because there will be error in the measurement of ability and people will be incorrectly placed.

Unfortunately, given the desire for efficiency and speed in the placement process, most schools decided that the tests alone met their needs. With more than 60% of all incoming college students being required to take at least one developmental class in math, reading or writing, the outcome of the placement test can make the difference between achievement of educational goals or not for a lot of people. Thus, it has become imperative that we revise policy and include multiple measures of proficiency to help with placement decisions and thereby improve the accuracy of the process. With improved accuracy, it is believed that more students will start a step or two closer to their goal than they might have if we continued to rely just on their placement test score.



## Changes in Developmental Education & Placement Testing in State Systems

To provide a little context before describing the new process at WCCC, it should be noted that some state systems have taken sweeping measures regarding developmental education and placement testing. For example, the legislature of Florida has made placement testing and developmental education optional at all community colleges in the state. The North Carolina Community College System has adopted the policy of doing away with required placement testing for students who can present a recent (within the last five years) high school transcript that shows a high school GPA of 2.6 or better. It is hard to say if these moves indicate a trend, but in the case of WCCC, a different approach was taken.

## Placement & Assessment at WCCC

Effective April 1, 2014, and thanks to the efforts of a working group comprised of Student Services Support Assistants and Counselors, WCCC's revised placement process takes a "multiple measures" approach to give students different ways to demonstrate college-readiness. WCCC will now take into account:

- High school GPA or GED scores
- SAT and/or ACT scores

On the basis of this new approach, rather than test every new full-time student across the board when they apply, we now have to option to review SAT or ACT scores and, if the scores are high enough, a student can be exempted from taking the placement test and start right away with college-level classes. If a student hasn't taken the SAT or ACT or hasn't scored high enough, then the college is able to review high school transcripts and add points to a student's Accuplacer score depending on her or his overall GPA. This will allow the college to recognize past academic achievement for students whose test scores are near the cutoff and potentially exempt them from some or all of the developmental courses they might otherwise have had to take. The college will also take into consideration GED scores for the same purpose.

As with any new initiative, this one will be monitored and assessed at various stages to make sure it is having the desired impact. The details of the revised placement policy are available through the office of Academic Support Services at extension 6893. If you have questions about this or any other Achieving the Dream initiative at WCCC, please feel free to contact Andrew Barnette at [barnettea@wccc.edu](mailto:barnettea@wccc.edu) or 724-925-4047.

