THE EFFECTS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?
**What Are “Learning Communities”?**

1) **Co-Enrollment**: Groups of about 25 students are co-enrolled in two or more courses.

2) **Instructor Collaboration**: Instructors collaborate on curriculum and helping students.

3) **Curricular Integration**: Courses are thematically linked and include joint syllabi and assignments.

4) **Additional Supports**: Students get enhanced academic support and/or counseling.
THEORY OF CHANGE

- Students form stronger relationships with each other and instructors
- Students become more engaged through inter-disciplinary learning
- Students benefit from extra support
SIX PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Queensborough Community College: Linked developmental math with a college-level course

Merced College: Linked developmental English and a variety of courses

Houston Community College: Linked developmental math with a student success course

Kingsborough Community College: Linked English with a college-level course and a student success course

Community College of Baltimore County: Linked developmental English, a college-level course, and seminar

Hillsborough Community College: Linked developmental reading with a student success course
Random Assignment Used to Estimate Program Effects

- Recruited students in need of developmental English or math
- Randomly assigned over 1,000 students at each college
- Followed up students for three semesters at most sites
- Conducted implementation study and cost analysis
IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS

- Program components were implemented with reasonable fidelity, but with considerable variation in how tightly courses were integrated.
  - Variation within colleges more than variation between colleges

- Programs operated at a fairly large scale:
  - Over 170 learning communities in the study
  - Nearly 7,000 students participated in the study

- Average cost of learning communities about $500 per program group member, above base costs.
Average Impacts Across the Six Colleges

Single-semester learning communities led to:

- A gain of half a credit on number of credits earned in the targeted subject area (English or math)
- A gain of half a credit on number of total credits earned
- No impact on persistence
Cumulative Credits Earned in the Targeted Subject (Math or English)
TOTAL CREDITS EARNED
(CUMULATIVE)

Cumulative Credits Earned

- Semester 1
- Semester 2
- Semester 3

Program Group
Control Group

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ENROLLMENT IN PROGRAM AND POST-PROGRAM SEMESTERS (PERSISTENCE)
Six years after entering the study, compared to the control group, students in learning communities:

- Earned 4.0 more credits; and
- Were more likely to earn a degree (an impact of 4.6 percentage points)
Cumulative Credits Earned by Kingsborough Opening Doors Students
WHAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE KINGSBOROUGH PROGRAM?

- Created early momentum in accumulating credits from 3-course links and inter-sessions
- Included students in college-level as well as developmental English
- Built in strong academic and counseling support
- Gave out book vouchers
- Received strong support of college leaders
CONCLUSIONS

- Learning communities – as typically operated – are not likely to produce large or sustained effects on persistence or credit accumulation.

- The Kingsborough findings suggest ways learning communities could be strengthened:
  - Offer LCs to “college-ready” students too
  - Encourage continuous enrollment
  - Offer more credits in the link
  - Enhance student services
  - Foster strong support from college leaders
Download event materials and learn more at

www.PostsecondaryResearch.org

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