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“Now Let Us Shift”: A Case Study of Developmental Education Reform in a Hispanic Serving Community College

Abstract

Background: Latina/o/x students who persist to college are likely to enter through community college (Contreras & Contreras, 2018) and until the enactment of California Assembly Bill 705, would have been susceptible to placement in developmental education courses (Rodriguez, Cuellar Mejia, & Johnson, 2018). The implementation of AB 705 shifted the requirements for new student placement in all 115 California Community Colleges. With compliance mandated by Fall 2019, the law required colleges to "maximize the probability" that entering students enroll and complete transfer-level English or mathematics within a one-year timeframe and within a three-year timeframe for students enrolled in English as a Second Language courses (A. B. 705, 2017, para. 2).

Purpose: This study examined organizational changes related to developmental education reform, AB 705, at a Hispanic Serving Community College.

Methodology: This instrumental case study, at a Hispanic Serving Community College, employed various data collection methods including semi-structured interviews, document collection and analysis, physical artifact collection, and observations. Primarily, the enquiry focused on learning from eleven participants (faculty, staff, and administration) who were strategically involved in reform efforts.

Conclusions: The findings identified structural and procedural changes to the placement process as well as existing supplemental supports and curriculum at the research site. Barriers and supports for faculty, staff, and administration influenced the change process and the perceived implications for equitable student outcomes of students. As all community colleges throughout the state are required to comply with AB 705, this study may be of interest to those invested in similar change processes.

Author Statement

Audrey Baca, Ed.D. Dr. Baca is a 2019 graduate of the CSUSB, Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program and is currently a Program Specialist and Holmes Program Coordinator for the Ed.D. program. Her work was supervised by Dr. Nancy Acevedo, Dr. Edna Martinez, and Dr. Carmen Carrasquillo Jay.

"Now Let Us Shift": A Case Study of Developmental Education Reform in a Hispanic Serving Community College

Audrey Baca, Ed. D.

Objective

More than 2.1 million students are enrolled in the California Community College (CCC) system, which is predominately Hispanic-serving. The CCC system is the largest system of higher education in the United States. Latina/o/x students who persist in higher education are more likely to enter through community college.

Prior to the enactment of California Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705), Latina/o/x students, and other historically underserved students, would have been susceptible to placement in developmental education courses. Literature in the field has found that developmental education is identified as an obstacle to transfer and completion, particularly for students of color.

California Assembly Bill 705 required all 115 California Community Colleges to "maximize the probability" that entering students enroll and complete transfer-level English or mathematics within a one-year timeframe and within a three-year timeframe for students enrolled in English as a Second Language courses by Fall semester 2019 (A. B. 705, 2017, para. 2).

The purpose for this study was to explore the organizational changes that occurred in response to AB 705 at a Hispanic Serving Community College through the following research questions:

1. What organizational changes have occurred and continue to develop at a Hispanic Serving California Community College in response to recent developmental education legislation (AB 705)?
2. What are the supports and barriers for faculty, staff, and administration as they implement changes?
3. What are the perceived implications for equitable outcomes of students based on organizational changes?

Methods

This project utilized an instrumental case study research design. The theoretical framework was based on organizational change theory, also drawing from work that re-imagines

organizational theories from a critical paradigm. Data sources included semi-structured interviews, document review, participant observation, and collection of physical artifacts.

The inquiry primarily focused on learning from eleven participants (faculty, staff, and administration) who were strategically involved in reform efforts. Document collection included the campus equity plan, organizational websites, committee agendas and minutes, and professional development proposals. All documents provided insight into organizational changes related to the implementation of AB 705. Observation occurred at an Equity Committee meeting as well as general campus observations to help answer research questions regarding structural and procedural changes. Physical artifacts, such as brochures, flyers, and pictures of the site setting, provided insight to the change processes and the campus culture. Artifacts such as student newspapers, the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 Class Schedules, and the 2018-19 Course Catalog reinforced participant accounts and substantiated findings.

All data was coded to develop themes using eclectic coding, which utilizes a purposeful combination of coding methods, including process coding and in vivo coding. Pattern coding was used to construct categories which was used to identify major themes from the data.

Results

The findings to research question one identified structural and procedural changes to the placement process as well as existing supplemental supports and curriculum at the research site. Results demonstrated that the research site was at the implementation stage of its change process. While certain departments and staff had embraced AB 705 compliance, others resisted or delayed implementation for various reasons.

Findings for research question two further demonstrated a series of barriers and supports for faculty, staff, and administration which influenced the change process at the research site. In summary, participants referenced barriers which warranted more time,

guidance and clarification, and inclusion in reform efforts. Findings confirmed a need for further professional learning related to AB 705 and the importance of administrative support in implementing change processes.

For the third research question, findings indicated that the campus mission statement evolved to be more inclusive, and the campus equity plan was a foundation for reform efforts as it aligned with intent of AB 705. Ultimately, the results demonstrated threats to equitable outcomes for students which included fixed mindsets, unequitable practices, and deficit perspectives. Moreover, findings indicated that acts of sabotage, implicit biases, and race-neutral and color-blind approaches to understanding equity were also perceived threats to equitable student outcomes. Findings for this question illustrated the role legislative changes play in promoting equitable reforms while also bringing to light inequitable practices and deficit mindsets that persist in higher education.

Conclusions

Additional qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies are needed on the implementation of developmental reform efforts, such as AB 705 and Guided Pathways, to better understand the implications for equity for historically underserved students. As the CCC system is a majority Hispanic-Serving System, the statewide implementation of AB 705 lays the foundation for breaking down some of the systemic barriers that have long existed for Latina/o/x students and other historically underserved student populations.

This study highlights several model practices of equitable structures and strategies for the implementation of AB 705; alternatively, it also revealed how change efforts can be impeded by fear of change, race-neutral practices, and color-blind ideologies.

The following recommendations for change agents can be enacted to further progress reform efforts for California Assembly Bill 705, creating a more promising culture for implementing equity-focused change efforts.

Recommendations for Change Agents

System Level:

1. Improve alignment of CCC initiatives
2. Increase messaging at the grassroots level for available professional development, stipends, and incentives
3. Earmark funding to hire additional equity-minded personnel
4. Prioritize messaging and guidance for ESL departments
5. Incorporate ESL pedagogies into transfer-level English and math

Organizational Level:

1. Allow time for sensemaking
2. Institute collaboration and learning as a campus norm
3. Prioritize responsibility for student success
4. Inform students of their rights

References

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