

Basic Skills Self Assessment Pilot Project Overview

Background of the Pilot Project

As part of the state community college system strategic planning effort—and in support of recent legislative initiatives in relation to basic skills funding and improvement rates—the Center for Student Success (CSS) of the Research and Planning Group (RP Group) has developed a Basic Skills Self Assessment process (BSSA), meant to guide the improvement of basic skills programs at colleges across the state. At a recent Basic Skills Roundtable held at USC’s Rossier School of Education, CCS Director Bob Gabriner offered all nine colleges in our district the opportunity to join five other colleges across the state in a pilot of the BSSA process. Later this June, Bob hopes to hold focus groups with colleges that participate in the process to incorporate their suggestions for improvement.

Why Participate in the BSSA Pilot Project?

The primary reason for participating in the BSSA pilot is to improve our programs and help more of our students achieve readiness for genuine collegiate-level work. As State Vice Chancellor Patrick Perry recently put it: *“In essence, one of the missions of the community colleges is to ‘create students’ who come to us underprepared or who are simply exploring higher education.”* Basic skills preparation is becoming an increasingly important aspect of our mission, particularly in light of declining college readiness and declining college participation rates. Participation in the pilot project also offers our colleges a number of other benefits, including:

- A structured approach to assessing and improving basic skills instructional programs
- A clear focus for District-wide Student Success Initiative activities this spring
- A vehicle for mobilizing the entire college around the student success effort
- The chance to position our colleges on the “leading edge” of student success efforts statewide
- A source of valuable information for accreditation efforts
- The chance to influence what promises to become a statewide approach to basic skills funding and oversight

What are the Outcomes?

The BSSA is designed to produce the following concrete outcomes:

- Creation of a college-wide dialogue on “best practices” in basic skills
- A formal assessment of current college Basic Skills practices and programs
- Identification of institutional “barriers & limitations” to basic skills improvement
- Creation of a comprehensive plan for improving basic skills instruction, including a prioritized set of goals and action plans

How It Works

The BSSA offers a controlled framework for assessing current institutional strengths and weaknesses associated with current basic skills programs and for developing proposals for change. It should *not* be approached as a “compliance activity” or as a public relations tool.

The BSSA “kit” contains the following:

- The *Basic Skills Self Assessment Tool* (4 Sections)
- The *Literature Review* (26 “Best Practices”)
- The *Basic Skills Program Cost & Revenue Estimator* (Excel Spreadsheet)

The Basic Skills Self Assessment process should be carried out by a cross-functional committee (or multiple *committees* meeting in parallel) of those on campus who are most centrally involved in basic skills instruction. Over the course of several meetings, this group (or multiple groups) will work their way through the *BSSA Tool*, a document that guides their inquiry by asking them to assess current institutional performance in light of a series of “best practices.” This document contains the following parts:

- Definitions of Baseline Measures of Effectiveness
- Section 1: Organizational & Administrative Practices
- Section 2: Program Components
- Section 3: Staff Development
- Section 4: Instructional Practices

The Self Assessment committee(s) will meet to address each of the four sections covered in this document. As committee members prepare for each of their meetings, they read a corresponding set of “effective practices” in the *BSSA Literature Review* which provide the context for self-assessment. After they have identified institutional “barriers and limitations” and ideas for improvement for each section covered in the *BSSA Tool*, they will complete a “planning matrix” which outlines future goals, measures of success, timelines for implementation and responsible parties. Colleges that complete all four planning matrices are encouraged to experiment with the *BSSA Cost & Revenue Estimator*, which has been designed to help colleges project the budgets for future basic skills improvements. This document *may be required* by the state in the future—along with annual reports on basic skills benchmark measures and plans—as a condition for continued basic skills funding. However, it is not necessarily expected that colleges will have time to complete this section of the self assessment in during the pilot.

Suggested Timeline

Dr. Gabriner would like to complete the pilot by the end of spring so that the BSSA documents can be refined, if needed, over the summer before they are distributed statewide. Of course, it’s not expected that all the colleges will complete the entire BSSA process. There is absolutely no penalty if a college needs more time to do a good job with its self assessment. The following dates offer a recommended timeline for completion of the pilot by June 1st:

- February 28-March 14: BSSA Preparation
 - Data Collection
 - Committee(s) Formation
 - Reading *BSSA Literature Review & Self Assessment Tool*
- March 14-March 29: Section 1: *College Organization & Admin, Practices*
- April 2-April 27: Section 2: *Program Components*
- April 30-May 18: Section 3: *Staff Development*
- May 21-June 1: Section 4: *Instructional Practices*
- Week of June 6: Planning Matrices Forwarded to District & Focus Groups