The South Carolina Course Alignment Project

A series of activities and programs designed to improve curriculum alignment between high schools and colleges throughout the state

Project Summary

In 2008, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, in partnership with the South Carolina Technical College System and the South Carolina Department of Education, initiated a series of activities and programs designed to improve curriculum alignment between high schools and colleges. In support of the Education and Economic Development Act of 2005, these initiatives were undertaken to advance South Carolina’s educational system to meet the demands of the state’s changing economy.

The South Carolina Course Alignment Project (SC CAP) is the first statewide collaborative effort in the nation that brings together high school and college faculty from two- and four-year institutions to create greater continuity between high school exit-level courses and entry-level college courses in English, mathematics, and science. In 2009, expert faculty in South Carolina designed paired courses that are now offered in participating high schools and colleges. Faculty members work closely with colleagues in their geographic regions to build partnerships, share teaching strategies, work with each other’s students, and lecture as guest faculty at participating institutions. The results obtained from these local partnerships continue to inform statewide policy decisions designed to improve the overall alignment of the state’s public education system.

Technical and organizational support for the project is provided by the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), a national leader in standards and curricular alignment issues. EPIC’s chief executive officer, Dr. David Conley, has written extensively on the topic of system alignment and EPIC works closely with a number of states to improve the transition from high school to college.
Project Goals

1. Improve institutional alignment to reduce curricular redundancy and prepare all students for a successful transition between high school and postsecondary education, training, and the workplace.

2. Use a statewide framework to support local solutions.

3. Strengthen faculty resources by creating regional networks of professional educators who share ideas, collaborate, and modify current policies and practices as they learn how to prepare all students for postsecondary success.

4. Increase the number of high school graduates, the number of high school graduates who immediately enter college, and the number of students who place into credit-bearing courses in SC colleges and universities.

Importantly, components of the SC CAP place targeted emphasis on the state’s economically disadvantaged students, first generation college-going students, students of color, and students for whom English is a second language. The state’s population contains a larger than average proportion of such students who need an educational system that is carefully attuned to their specific needs and the challenges they face. One of the key elements for success in such a system is a high degree of careful alignment between high school and college so that students know what is expected and can prepare accordingly. When the two education systems are not well-aligned, students must take remedial courses for which they pay college tuition prices for high school content and receive no college credit. In a 2009 article by Thomas Bailey, he concluded that more than two-thirds of community college students place into at least one remedial course, and less than a quarter who enroll in remedial education are able to complete community college degrees or certificates within eight years of entering college.

The dynamically changing nature of South Carolina’s economy demonstrates that the demand for students with postsecondary education will continue to increase rapidly. Increased college participation and completion are key for the future of the state’s economy. The state is taking significant steps to address this challenge by improving academic standards, assessment, and accountability to prepare all students for success in postsecondary education, the workplace, and society.

Extending the SC Course Alignment Project statewide can help substantially improve the successful transition of all public high school students from high school to college and the workplace. The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education continues to work with its partners and stakeholders to implement the project statewide and use the results obtained to inform statewide policy decisions in order to improve overall secondary-to-postsecondary system alignment.

For more information about the South Carolina Course Alignment Project, please visit the project website: http://www.epiconline.org/south_carolina