



**Written Testimony  
of  
Eloy Ortiz Oakley  
Superintendent-President, Long Beach City College  
Long Beach, California**

**Before the  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions**

**Strengthening Minority Serving Institutions:  
Best Practices and Innovations for Student Success**

**March 13, 2014**

**U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions**

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Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Alexander, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss two important topics that have significant impact on our nation: strengthening Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and best practices and innovations for student success.

My name is Eloy Ortiz Oakley and I serve as the Superintendent-President of Long Beach City College, in Long Beach California. I am honored to be here today in support of the very important policy work of this Committee. Your work will shape the future of America and I am grateful that you have an interest in learning more about how we serve students in Long Beach. I testify before you today as a veteran of the U.S. military, a Latino American and a first generation college student who transferred from a California community college to a University of California campus. The issue of strengthening MSIs to increase the number of under-represented and first generation students who obtain a quality college credential is an issue that drives my presidency at Long Beach City College and is a major economic imperative for our nation.

As you are aware, community colleges and in particular MSIs are the gateway to higher education credentials for millions of Americans and are critical to meet the nation's need to prepare a globally competitive workforce in the 21st Century and beyond.

According to the U.S. Department of Education data, Latinos represented 14 percent of the total Fall 2012 enrollment at degree-granting institutions. In Fall 2012, 57 percent of Latinos attended 2-year public institutions and 43 percent attended 4-year public institutions. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, Latinos are significantly less likely to complete their education—, about 11 percent of 22-24 year old Latinos have attained at least a bachelor's degree, half of the national average for this cohort (22 percent). This gap, which fortunately is closing, has major economic and policy implications and should be addressed in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA).

Long Beach City College (LBCC), like many urban community colleges, serves a diverse student population in terms of ethnic and racial demographics, economic status, native language and college preparation. More than 83 percent of our students are from minority ethnic groups and LBCC has held the Department of Education's Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designation for the past 17 years. As you can see, LBCC exemplifies the face of America's future.

Latino students are our largest student cohort and represent more than 52 percent of our student body. Latino enrollment at LBCC has risen substantially in the last decade, from 28 percent in 2002, and is expected to continue to increase given enrollment demographics of our largest local K-12 system, in which 84 percent of the students in the 2013-14 school year represent ethnic minority groups and 55 percent are Hispanic. LBCC also serves large numbers of African American (18 percent) and Asian/Pacific Islander (14 percent) students.

LBCC also serves a student population with significant financial need. 41 percent of our students received Pell grants and more than 70 percent received need-based state aid in the form of Board of Governors enrollment fee waivers in the 2012-2013 academic year. In addition, 62% of our students are first-generation college students.

LBCC has implemented several key interventions and programs that have significantly increased student success, which I will discuss in more detail later. Even as the college has seen improvements in the number of students completing key academic milestones, stubborn achievement gaps persist. According to the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) Student Success Scorecard data for the 2007-2008 6-year cohort, Latinos demonstrated an overall completion rate of 36 percent versus 48.5 percent for Whites. Closing this and other achievement gaps and increasing the number of students receiving a community college credential or becoming transfer ready are the primary goals of LBCC and should be incentivized through the HEA.

### **Scalable Interventions: Long Beach College Promise & Promise Pathways**

LBCC has implemented several key interventions and programs that have significantly increased college access and success for our exceptionally diverse student body. The foundation of these

efforts is the Long Beach College Promise – a partnership between Long Beach Unified School District, Long Beach City College and California State University, Long Beach.

Through the College Promise, our local public education institutions forged a partnership to improve preparation, access and success for our local students and specifically to address the barriers that first-generation students face in matriculating to and succeeding in higher education.

Together, we have built a holistic system that begins in elementary school and extends through college completion. At its core, the College Promise guarantees students from the Long Beach Unified School District the opportunity to pursue a college education locally. Students and families know what steps are required and in return receive access to preferential admission consideration at Long Beach State and financial assistance if they decide to attend Long Beach City College.

Here are just a few statistics to show what this partnership has accomplished in the six years since the inception of the College Promise:

- More than 31,000 fourth-graders have attended day-long field trips to LBCC, and 31,000 fifth-graders have attended field trips to CSULB;
- More than 57,000 middle school students and their parents have completed and signed Long Beach College Promise Pledges, which commits parent and student to satisfactorily completing college and career preparatory courses;
- More than 5,600 students have had a free first semester at LBCC, intended to mitigate financial barriers to attending college;
- There has been 43 percent increase in LBUSD students enrolling at California State University, Long Beach despite significant increases in overall selectivity.

California’s Little Hoover Commission cited the College Promise as a model that should be replicated throughout California saying: “Regional partnerships such as the Long Beach College Promise not only get high school students to think of themselves as college-bound, but to prepare themselves so they are in a better position to succeed once they are there.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [A New Plan for a New Economy: Reimagining Higher Education](#), Little Hoover Commission 2013; p. 35

Through the College Promise, we have been able to reduce financial and structural barriers which too often prevent students from pursuing college.

Our partnership also provided an opportunity to address one of the most significant barriers to increasing college completions, especially for underrepresented students: placement into remedial (developmental) courses.

Placement into remedial education is a significant barrier to completion. A recent report from the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University (CCRC) found that only 28 percent of community college students who take a developmental education course go on to earn a degree within eight years, and many students assigned to developmental courses drop out before completing their sequence and enrolling in college-level courses. These numbers are particularly chilling since national figures show that 68 percent of community college students enroll in at least one remedial course.<sup>2</sup> These numbers are significantly higher for Latino and African American students.<sup>3</sup>

At Long Beach City College, 90 percent of incoming students were being placed into remedial courses in English, math or reading. Despite all of our work to align curricula and to improve preparation, Long Beach Unified graduates were only doing slightly better.

Our close relationship with Long Beach Unified provided both the opportunity and the impetus to seek a new approach. Long Beach City College research staff examined five years of data from incoming freshmen from Long Beach Unified high schools to identify the best predictors for success in college courses. The research showed that high school grades were the best predictors of success in college level courses and yet LBCC, like most colleges, relied primarily upon standardized test scores to place incoming students.

The impact of this disproportionate emphasis on standardized test scores has been profound: many students who would likely succeed in transfer level English and math were being diverted into remediation – often multiple semesters in each subject. This misalignment between high school

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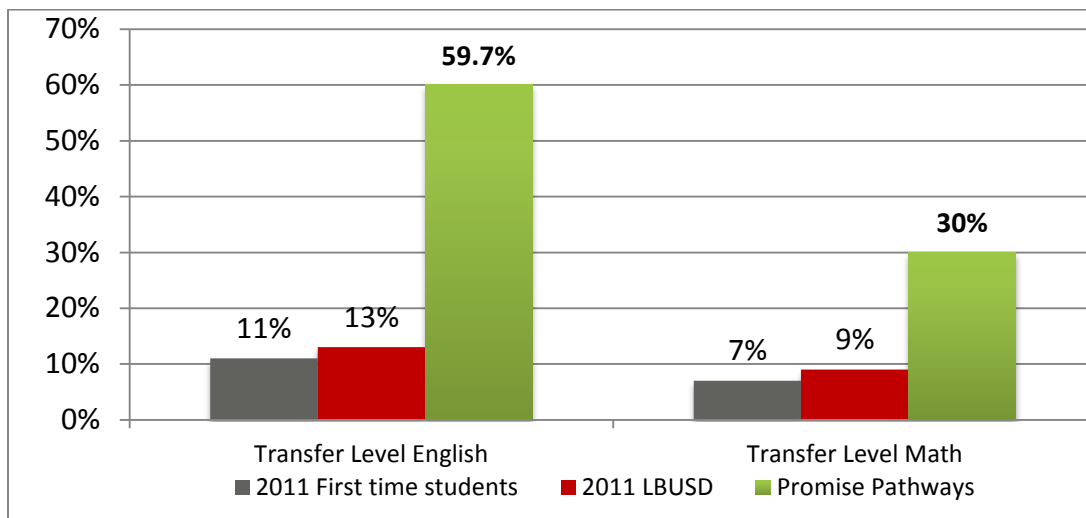
<sup>2</sup> [What We Know About Developmental Education Outcomes](#), Community College Research Center; January 2014

<sup>3</sup> [Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere](#), Complete College America, 2012

preparation and college placement was causing unnecessary remedial placements, slowing and too often halting altogether, momentum toward a degree or transfer, and disproportionately affected students of color.

Based on the opportunity this research presented and other best practices, Long Beach City College developed the Promise Pathways initiative, which launched in the fall of 2012. The initial cohort of freshman consisted of 976 diverse students and the results they achieved are impressive. LBCC used predictive analytics to assess and place these students into English and math courses based on their high school achievement, instead of standardized assessment tests. Assessment into college-level English increased from barely 10 percent using traditional assessment in the previous cohort to almost 60 percent using multiple measures assessment. Assessment into college-level math increased from less than 10 percent to over 30 percent.

**Percentage of students assessed into transfer-level in English and Math by cohort.**

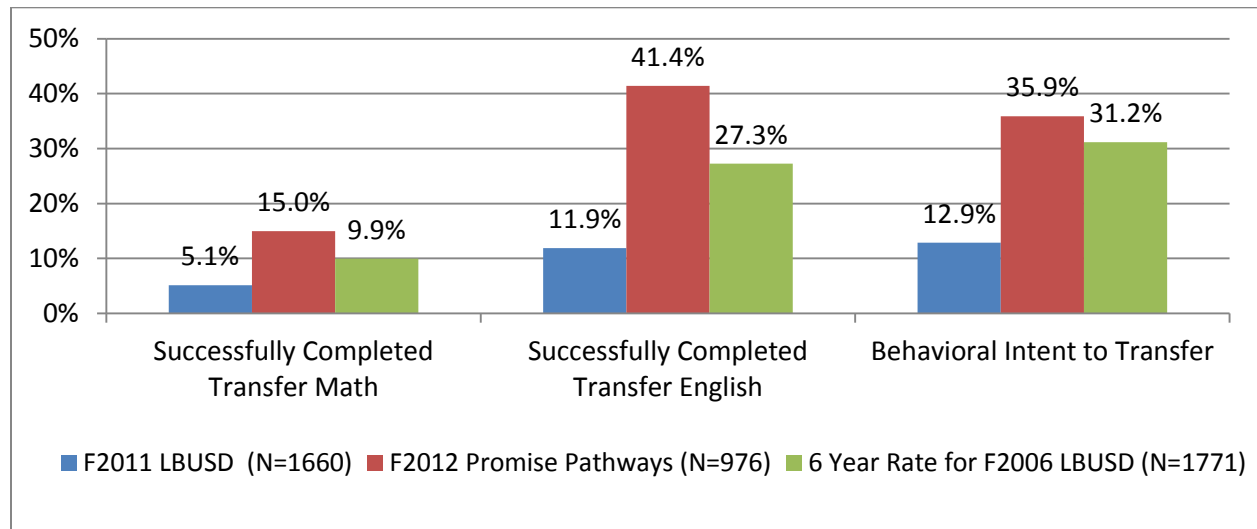


LBCC also provided these students with clear first-semester education plans and registration priority to ensure that students enrolled in these foundational courses upon entry into college. Students were also encouraged to enroll full-time and 85 percent of the cohort did.

As a result of these changes, first time students in Promise Pathways were much more likely than students in previous cohorts to successfully complete transfer-level English and math and to achieve key early milestones in their first year. Successful completion rates of transfer-level English in the

first year jumped from 12 percent in the previous year to 41 percent. For transfer-level math, successful completion in the first year increased from 5 percent to 15 percent. (See graph.)

**F2012 Promise Pathways achievement in first year vs. 6-year rates of achievement for most recent (F2006) six-year cohort from LBUSD available.**



Importantly, despite dramatically expanding placement directly into college-level coursework, those students succeeded at the same rates as students who had received multiple semesters of developmental instruction and had persisted through multiple years at the college (both typically predictors of higher rates of success), and outperformed other first-time students who tested in via the assessment, providing powerful validation of the initiative.

Access to, entry into and, most importantly, completion of transfer-level courses increased for all demographic groups. Rates of achievement of these milestones increased for every demographic group with some of the largest relative gains made by Latino and African American students. In fact, the rates of achievement of these milestones by students of color in the Promise Pathways in 2012 outpaced those of white students in 2011 in nearly every case.<sup>4</sup>

The 2013 Promise Pathways cohort of more than 1,300 students and comprised of students from three school districts showed similar gains mid-year and demonstrates that the positive effects of using multiple measure based placement is not limited to a single school district.

<sup>4</sup> [Overview and disaggregation of the impact of the Fall 2012 Promise Pathways on key educational milestones](#), LBCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness; 2013

The implications of our initial efforts are clear: basing assessment and course placement upon a blunt instrument like a placement test needlessly impeded many of our students who already had the tools to succeed by putting them in remedial courses that they didn't need and that often failed to improve student outcomes.

Tremendous gains were made by adjusting in how we placed students to align with evidence of their previous achievement. But what is most promising and important for this committee to know is that these findings are not unique to Long Beach City College. The potential reach of this extends throughout California and the US.

LBCC's award-winning Predictive Placement model<sup>5</sup> has been tested at other community colleges in California, and according to a recent report from the RP Group, our efforts "helped catalyze ... a growing network of colleges reproducing and refining this approach and using its results to inform local use of multiple measures in placement."<sup>6</sup> The California Community College Chancellor's Office is developing a statewide multiple measures database, based on the methods developed at Long Beach City College, to enable expanded use of high school grades to place students.<sup>7</sup>

Several studies from the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University strongly support the use of multiple measures using high school achievement in assessment of students' readiness for college-level work.<sup>8</sup> Findings from one large scale study found that "one in four test-takers in math and one in three test-takers in English are severely mis-assigned under current test-based policies, with mis-assignments to remediation much more common ... [and u]sing high school transcript information—either instead of or in addition to test scores—could significantly reduce the prevalence of assignment errors."<sup>9</sup>

National organizations like the American Association of Community Colleges<sup>10</sup> and Complete College America<sup>11</sup> are calling for community colleges to shift assessment and placement away from

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<sup>5</sup> President Oakley accepted [the 2014 James Irvine Leadership Award](#) in recognition of the Promise Pathways initiative. LBCC's research received the 2014 [Mertes Award for Excellence in Community College Research](#) & the 2012 [RP Group Excellence in College Research Award](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Stepping Up: Progression in English and Math from High School to College](#), Willet & Karandjeff, RP Group; 2014

<sup>7</sup> [Multiple Measures Assessment Project](#), RP Group; 2014

<sup>8</sup> [Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?](#), Scoot- Clayton, CCRC; 2012 & [Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts](#), Belfield & Crosta, CCRC; 2012

<sup>9</sup> [Improving the Targeting of Treatment: Evidence from College Remediation](#), Scott-Clayton, Crosta & Belfield, CCRC; 2012

<sup>10</sup> [Empowering America's Community Colleges to Build the Future: Implementation Guide](#), AACC; 2014 p. 18



primary reliance upon traditional standardized placement tests. Several states, most notably Florida and North Carolina, have recently implemented significant changes to assessment and placement practices in their community colleges.<sup>12</sup>

While improving assessment and placement alone will not solve our completion challenges, it clearly is one of the most effective steps that can be taken and will produce savings for taxpayers and students by not forcing students to retake coursework they had already successfully completed but also will help more students earn degrees and certificates by removing barriers and help them do so more quickly. The saved opportunity costs of 1-2 additional years of college being replaced with 1-2 additional years of adult earning potential for thousands of students at LBCC alone are tremendous. At the national level, adding 1-2 years of earning potential back to the productive adult lives of millions of citizens would be a significant boost to our nation's economy. When combined with other efforts to improve remediation, create clear pathways for students and to target resources toward completion, evidence-based placement is an essential ingredient to meeting our goal for having 60 percent of adults earn a post-secondary credential.

We believe that LBCC is on the path to continued success. There are many ways in which the federal government can assist these and other efforts to increase success of underrepresented students. These recommendations follow.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICY**

### **Expand Support for MSIs through Title III & V:**

- As our nation and its colleges and universities become more diverse, the need for programs to support completions of minority students is increasing. Unfortunately, current program and funding levels are not keeping pace with the increased demand. Competition for HSI, PBI and AANAPISI is intense and many deserving institutions and students are not funded under the HEA currently. While we understand that funding remains a challenge, we do believe that increased support is a solid investment in our nation's future productivity.
- Competitive grants are currently available to colleges designated as an AANAPISI, HSI, and PBI. Colleges are precluded from applying for more than one competitive grant even when

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<sup>11</sup> [Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education: A Joint Statement](#), Complete College America; 2012 pp.3-4

<sup>12</sup> ["Reimagining Remediation,"](#) *Community College Week*, Paul Bradley; Jan. 6, 2014

they qualify for more than one designation. Colleges that qualify for multiple MSI designations – like LBCC in which 83 percent of our students are minority students – should be allowed to apply for Title III & V competitive grants in more than one of the designations. Multiple MSI grants will enable colleges with large minority populations to scale interventions to meet all students’ needs and encourage more innovation in interventions resulting in improved outcomes for more under-represented students. Because these grants are targeted to specific populations at a given college, there is no reason why the current limitation should be retained.

### **Support Use of Student Data for Placement**

- Too often, federal policies like Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) inhibit efforts like LBCC’s Promise Pathways program, which uses grades to help students. The sharing of student data can improve transition between K-12 and college, lead to improved assessment and placement, create opportunities for personalized interventions, and assist colleges in preparing student plans at the time of enrollment. LEAs and higher education institutions should be further permitted to use data to help students so long as student privacy is protected. And even though promising steps are being taken in California, data sharing agreements between the California Department of Education and the Chancellor’s Office continue to be cumbersome and difficult to deploy. We also believe that earnings information should be made available on all undergraduate students, assuming, again, that privacy is maintained.

### **Promote College Readiness:**

- Institutions should be given incentives, including funding, to work with their local secondary schools to engage in practices that ensure students receive adequate preparation for higher education. Enhanced counseling, dual enrollment offerings, and early college assessment (leading to better choices in high school curriculum) have been found effective in increasing student preparation. Creating incentives will encourage more K-20 partnerships such as the Long Beach College Promise. This proposal is also supported by the national community college association (American Association of Community Colleges).

### **Restore & Expand Pell Grant Program:**

- The year-round Pell Grant, which is so critical to older, working students, needs to be restored, as does eligibility for ability-to-benefit (ATB) students. Year-round Pell Grants will allow more students to take courses that lead to degrees and transfer preparation during the summer and winter intersessions, which will decrease time to degree and increase awards. Given the current lifetime limit on Pell Grants, there is no logical reason not to reinstate the year-round Pell Grant. California was disproportionately impacted by the loss of ATB eligibility and we believe that this was a short-sighted policy, particularly given that the state bears the primary cost of educating these students, and believes that they merit support by the Federal government as well.
- Higher education should be viewed as an investment both in the U.S. economy as well as the attainment of greater equity for individuals. Adequate funding for this foundational program must be retained. In particular, the base appropriated grant of \$4,860 must be sustained so that automatic inflation-adjusted increases are implemented. More than 3.3 million community college students – about 34 percent -- received a Pell Grant last year.

**Simplify Filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):**

- Currently, too many community college students fail to file the FAFSA. There are a variety of reasons for this, including cultural barriers, a reluctance to become enmeshed with the federal government, a lack of awareness of the true cost of the education, and the complexity (and steps involved) in the application process. Students cannot access student financial if they don't first apply for it, and further action in this area is needed. This includes continued simplification of the aid application as well as greater early awareness efforts, perhaps through the tax-filing process.

**Use Financial Aid to Create Incentives for Student Success:**

- Community colleges always have and always will emphasize the “open door” that is a central part of their heritage. However, new incentives for students to come ready for higher education and to persist in it are appropriate in a changing environment. Some studies show that “aid like a paycheck” and financial incentives for completion may play a helpful role in persistence. The student aid programs may need to allow for new types of programs, particularly shorter term offerings, to be eligible for student aid. We also urge Congress to

avoid negative sanctions such as creating more stringent standards of satisfactory academic progress or limiting access to aid for relatively less well-prepared students.

### **Promote Innovations that Accelerate Student Progress to Quality Credentials and**

#### **Outcomes:**

- As described above in LBCC's case, much effective innovation is occurring at the local and state level. The federal government could leverage these developments through a number of approaches. These could include providing incentives for innovation and for the expansion of evidence-based models through FIPSE, community college innovation programs, Higher Education Race to the Top, or other initiatives that provide states and institutions with the resources and flexibility needed to test, develop, and take successful strategies to scale.

#### **Transfer:**

- Substantial benefits accrue to many students who complete degree and certificate programs at community colleges. However, for many students, attainment of the baccalaureate degree is necessary for economic success and a family sustaining job. The increasing premium being placed on the baccalaureate degree merits deliberate policies focused on helping more community college students continue through to receive the Bachelor's Degree (B.A.). For this reason, more reliable and efficient pathways to the B.A. degree for community college students need to be generated while also insuring that more students achieve Associate Degrees and/or certificates on the way. Incentivizing state policies such as California's Associate Degree for Transfer (SB 1440) programs that improve the transfer process between community colleges and state universities through streamlined transfer pathways and the elimination of excess credit units will increase the number of minority students transferring to a four-year college,, improve the diversity of universities and increase the number of minority students obtaining a B.A.

#### **Align Federal Laws and Regulations:**

- The Committee should act to align federal laws related to higher education and workforce preparation—HEA, ESEA, Perkins, WIA—so that requirements (e.g. eligibility, reporting requirements, performance metrics) do not add unnecessary compliance costs for institutions and allow for greater transparency in programs performance, while promoting

system-level student success innovations. The current set of overlapping and conflicting requirements is a serious drag on the higher education system. We strongly support the ongoing effort by members of this committee to reduce federal regulations on higher education institutions.