



The University of Texas at Austin
Educational Leadership and Policy
College of Education

POSTSECONDARY SYSTEMS CHANGE THROUGH EARLY COLLEGE REFORM: A GRID AND GROUP ANALYSIS OF TWO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this comparative case study is to examine systems change at two community colleges in Texas associated with the implementation of Early College (EC).

Problem Statement

- EC is one of fastest growing reform models in the nation (Villarreal et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2021)
- EC is an effective policy tool for addressing postsecondary completion gaps for underrepresented minorities (AIR, 2020; Haxton et al., 2016; Lauen et al., 2017; Song and Zeiser, 2019)
- Emerging research on systems change focuses on what is happening *outside* of college (Allen & Roberts, 2017; Alvarado & Vargas, 2019a, 2019b; Belfield et al., 2019; Chapman, 2019; Edmunds, Klopfenstein et al., 2018; Edmunds, Lewis et al., 2018; Hooker, 2018a, 2018b; Martinez et al, 2018; Nodine, 2012; Vargas, 2019)
- It is important to examine systems change *within* the college
 - 5 components of systems change (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019b; Greiff et al., 2003)

Research Questions

For colleges at the forefront of EC, this study examines:

RQ1: What is the cultural manifestation of values, beliefs, and the organizational behaviors of the EC program within each college, based on grid and group analysis?

RQ2: How does each community college create systems change based on the values, beliefs, and behaviors of those habituating the EC environment?



LITERATURE REVIEW

Dual Enrollment (DE) Programs

- Vast majority of public IHEs offer DE (Marken, Gray, and Lewis, 2013) and 1/3 of HS students take dual credit (U.S. Department of Education, 2018)
- Credit accumulation is an effective strategy for increasing degree completion (Karp, 2015) and reducing time to degree (Blankenberger, Lichtenberger, Witt, & Franklin, 2017)
- State-level DE policies target the *most* academically prepared by design (Karp, 2015, Vargas 2019) and create barriers to access (Thomas, Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013)
- School districts with greater populations of students of color and income disparity suffer from the widest gaps in access to DE (Xu, Fink, & Solanki, 2019)
- DE disproportionately impacts white students (Blankenberger et al., 2017; Southern Regional Education Board, 2020), affluent students (Villarreal, Montoya, Duncan, & Gergen, 2018), and those whose parents have more education (Southern Regional Education Board, 2020)
- DE alone is insufficient to address equity challenge (Blankenberger et al., 2017)

The Early College (EC) Model

- Early College High School Initiative launched in 2002 (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010)
- "Equity-oriented, social justice policy intervention" to increase degree completion for underrepresented minority students (Locke & McKenzie, 2016, p. 157)
- Commitment to prepare *all* students (Edmunds, Bernstein, Unlu, Glennie, Willse, Smith & Arshavsky, 2012; Haxton et al., 2016; Hooker, 2018a; Song & Zeiser, 2019)
- Reengineers and accelerates the education pathway (Haxton et al., 2016, p. 426); Systems are blended together (Berger et al., 2010; Edmunds et al., 2012; Edmunds, Lewis, Hutchins, & Klopfenstein, 2018; Haxton et al., 2016)
- Comprehensive approach to reform (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019a; Arshavsky, Edmunds, Miller, & Corritore, 2014; Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010; Vargas, 2019)
- Increased rigor and academic expectations motivating to students who might not otherwise consider or attend college (Berger et al., 2010; Edmunds et al., 2012); Success in rigor through academic and emotional support systems provided by leveraging partnerships (Berger et al., 2010)

Systems Change

- Anchor colleges provide *proactive* partnership (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019a, 2019b; Birch, Perry, & Taylor, 2013; Equal Measure & Harder+Company, 2017; Hooker, 2018a; Kronick et al., 2013a; Taylor & Luter, 2013; Vargas, 2019)
- Adoption of EC into institutional mission (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019b; Kronick, Lester, & Luter, 2013a; Vargas, 2019) to develop a broader regional vision (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019a; Hooker, 2018b)
- 5 Components of systems change (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019b; Greiff, Proscio, & Wilkins, 2003)
 - New modes of culturally responsive and collaborative leadership (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019a, 2019b; Chapman, 2019; Martinez, Valle, Cortez, Ponjuan, & Sáenz, 2018)
 - New ways of working together (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019b; Hooker, 2018a)
 - Data Use (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019a, 2019b; Edmunds, Klopfenstein, et al., 2018; Edmunds, Lewis, et al., 2018; Vargas, 2019)
 - Purposeful braiding and alignment of funding streams (Allen & Roberts, 2017; Alvarado & Vargas, 2019a, 2019b; Edmunds, Klopfenstein, et al., 2018; Edmunds, Lewis, et al., 2018)
 - Transformation of beliefs and values (Alvarado & Vargas, 2019b; Vargas, 2019)

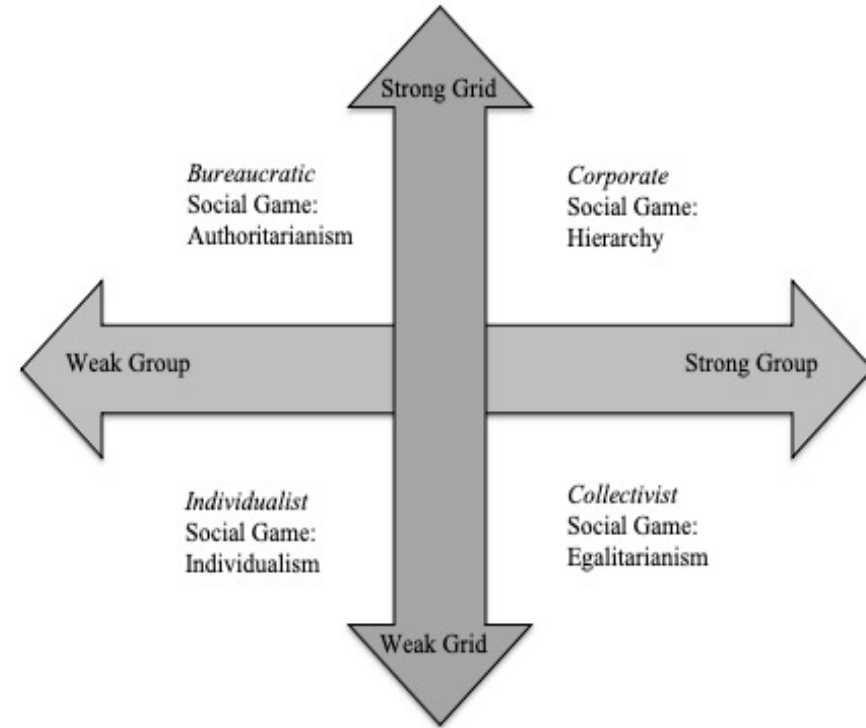
Impact of Early College

- College-going culture of ECHS and instructor supports (Haxton et al., 2016) play an important role in future college course enrollment (Song & Zeiser, 2019), and reduces tracking by academic ability (Edmunds et al., 2012)
- College credit accumulation (Berger et al., 2010; Garcia, Jones, Chaloo, Munday, & Isaacson, 2018; Haxton et al., 2016; Song & Zeiser, 2019) enables EC students to complete postsecondary credentials (Song & Zeiser, 2019)
- Impact of EC is most notable on associate degree completion and transfer success (Song & Zeiser, 2019)
- EC is particularly impactful for Black (Haxton et al., 2016; Lauen, Fuller, Barrett, & Janda, 2017), first-generation and low-income students (Edmunds et al., 2012)

Theoretical Framework

Institutional Theory of Culture

- Institution may be systematically classified (Douglas, 1973, 1982); Grid & group analysis (Douglas, 1973, 1982; Harris, 1995, 2005, 2015)
- 4 world views inform how members approach contemporary problem-solving (Hargreaves, 1995)
- Change in social structures is tightly intertwined with change in institutional culture (Douglas, 1988; Hargreaves, 1995; and Chapman, 2019)
- Change is a dynamic process (Douglas, 1973)



RESEARCH METHODS

Positionality

- Insider Status
 - TEA (2.5 years); Director for Texas CCRSM Initiative
 - 10 years of professional experience in systems change
- Researcher Bias
 - Identify as first-generation student
 - Advocate for expansion of EC
 - Assumption: Effective colleges build effective EC programs => influencing nature of partnership



Methodology

- Comparative case study (Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2016)
 - Bounded system of EC program at two sites (Stake, 1995)
 - Social constructivism emphasizes local context (Creswell & Poth, 2018)
 - Provides a "thick" description of systems change (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 212)
- Selection Criteria
 - Scale of EC: # of Texas College and Career Readiness School Models (CCRSM) campuses
 - Effectiveness: Degree completion rates
 - Commitment: Serving underrepresented minority students

St. Philip's College

- Founded in 1897; HBCU/HSI
- Mission: *To empower our diverse student population through educational achievement and career readiness*
- Students:
 - 13,000 students; 78% non-white
 - 1/2 over 22 years
 - 26.5% dual credit
- Technical programs; continuing education
- 17 CCRSM Programs



Palo Alto College

- Founded in 1985; HSI
- Mission: *To inspire, empower, and educate our community for leadership and success*
- Students:
 - 10,763 students; 86% non-white
 - 2/3 under 22
 - 24.9% dual credit
- Academic programs => transfer
- 14 CCRSM Programs



Research Procedures

Research Question	Data Source
RQ1: What is the cultural manifestation of values, beliefs and the organizational behaviors of the EC program within each college, based on grid and group analysis?	Grid and Group Assessment Tool
RQ2: How does each community college create systems change based on the values, beliefs, and behaviors of those habituating the EC environment?	Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

RESULTS

RQ1: What is the cultural manifestation of values, beliefs and the organizational behaviors of the EC program within each college, based on grid and group analysis?

Theme 1:
Colleges are
Inherently
Hierarchical

RQ2: How does each community college create systems change based on the values, beliefs, and behaviors of those habituating the EC environment?

Theme 2:
The President
Drives EC
Expansion

Theme 3:
Bridging Cultures
and Shifting
Mindsets

Theme 4:
Structural
Change &
Student
Experience

Theme 5:
Immersive Data
Use for
Continuous
Improvement

Theme 6:
Strategic
Investment for
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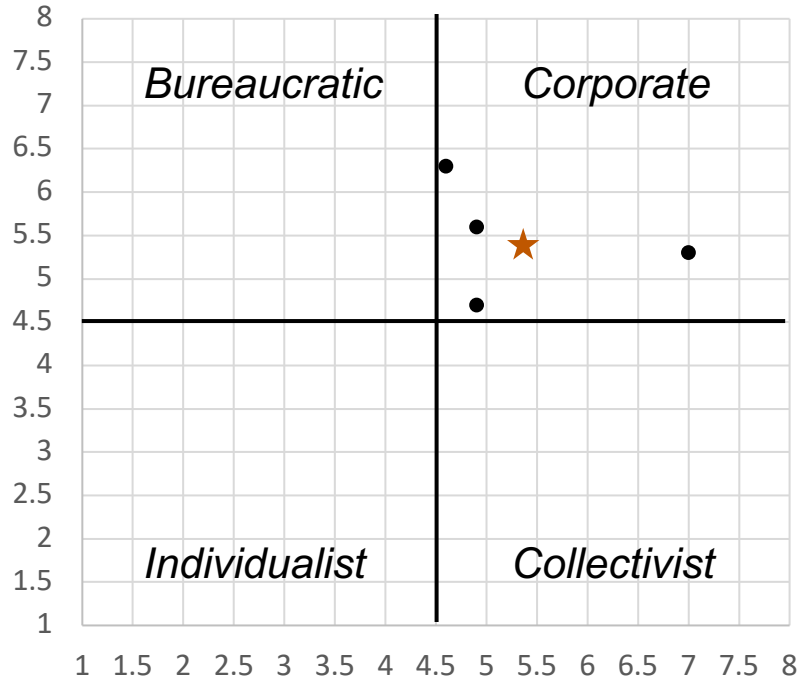
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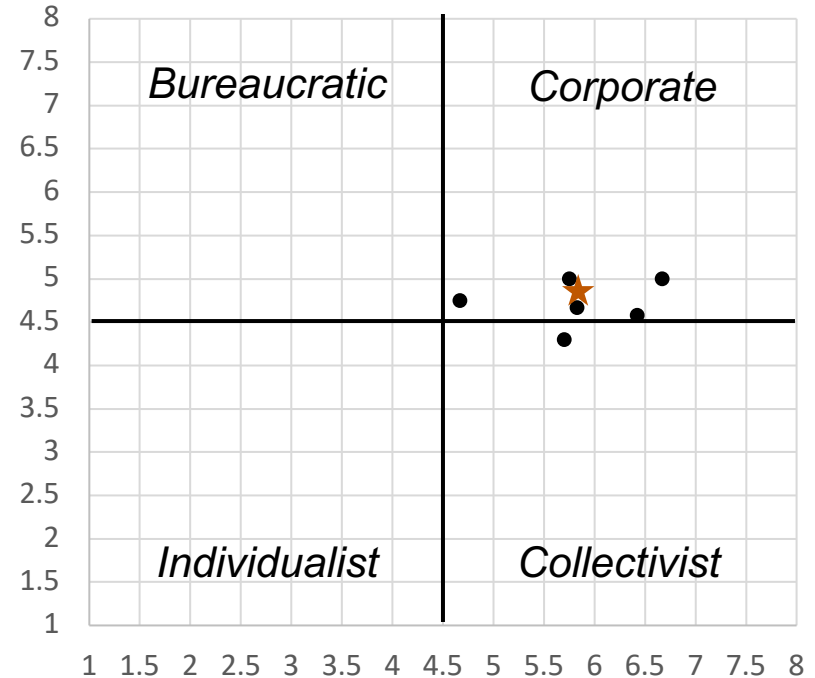
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Theme 1: Colleges are Inherently Hierarchical

St. Philip's College



Palo Alto College



Theme 1: Colleges are Inherently Hierarchical

Strong Grid

- Rules and procedures relating to EC are numerous/explicit
- Authority structures are centralized/hierarchical

Strong Group

- Curricular goals are generated collaboratively
- Members work collaboratively toward goals and objectives

*"There's tension there. And we don't want them to fail. But at the same time, we're supposed to have a college-level-- For our own **accreditation** . . . It's a balance that I think has **shifted and changed** . . . the way that **St. Philip's approaches course design and curriculum.**"*

– Staff, St. Philip's College

*"A great deal of our **purpose and function** has been turned over to supporting that, to **accommodate what the high schools need** . . . they're very different from us."*

– Staff, Palo Alto College

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Theme 2: The President Drives EC Expansion

- President drives EC expansion
- Aligned priorities to end poverty
- Leadership along hierarchy important for EC sustainability
- Intentional hiring practices

*“The **moonshot is to end poverty** in San Antonio, and you're not going to end poverty if you don't provide job opportunities for students and if you don't **provide that opportunity at a youngest age as possible.**”*

– Administrator, St. Philip's College

*“I'm looking for people that want to make a difference. I want somebody who cares about people. And I want people that want to make **transformational impact** in our community, and that's really a big deal.”*

– Administrator, Palo Alto College

Theme 3: Bridging Cultures and Shifting Mindsets

- EC *"enhanced"* college's mission
- Common beliefs that students can be successful learners
- Culture change takes time
- Translators bridged culture gaps
- Redesigned policies and processes

"It serves our mission for access, it's an early confirmation of college readiness for those who might have hesitated to see themselves as college-going."

– Administrator, Palo Alto College

*"What made it change? To understand the system, to understand processes, and language, and **understanding the rules and regulations on both sides.**"*

– Staff, St. Philip's College

Theme 4: Structural Change & Student Experience

- Alignment of rule systems
- EC placement focused institutional priorities
- Complex network to support internal & external collaboration
- Interpersonal relationships led to student-centric solutions
- Technology standardized how student engaged with learning

*"They have a rule system, I have a rule system, **they're not designed to join**. So how do we create that ability to connect? That must be the essential system change. Everyone's had to **bend their rules and expectations**, and students have benefited from the integration."*

– Administrator, Palo Alto College

*"People are **making adjustments at the margins** to make it work. So that's a big thing. . . . It is more **student-centric** in a way that wouldn't normally exist in a college-level course."*

– Staff, St. Philip's College

Theme 5: Data Use for Continuous Improvement

- Key data elements *"drivers"* of change
- Data disaggregation to promote equitable outcomes
- Data sharing for programmatic improvement
- Pandemic accelerated *"aggressive"* use of data

*"Those indicators like enrollment, and persistence in the classroom fall-to-fall, and graduation, and gaining certificates and things of that nature. And going down to the individual class. **Why [are] these students struggling in this classroom?**"*

– Staff, St. Philip's College

*"We disaggregate the data in that way [by race, ethnicity, gender, and income] for all students, **trying to detect any pockets of inequity.** Disaggregation is truly an art form; What is the division that will [best] produce the information you're trying to find?"*

– Administrator, Palo Alto College

Theme 6: Strategic Investment for EC Growth

- Resource allocation to grow EC
 - Investment in college coordinators
 - Re-allocation of space; investment in labs, equipment
- Dual credit faculty scarcity limits EC growth
- Cost-sharing model
- TEA investment in K-12 is a *“driving force”* for reallocation
- Anchor college: *“make community change”*

*“It’s about **space and lab and equipment**. And so they’re scaling up in that sense, knowing that that [i.e., students and course enrollment] is coming.”*

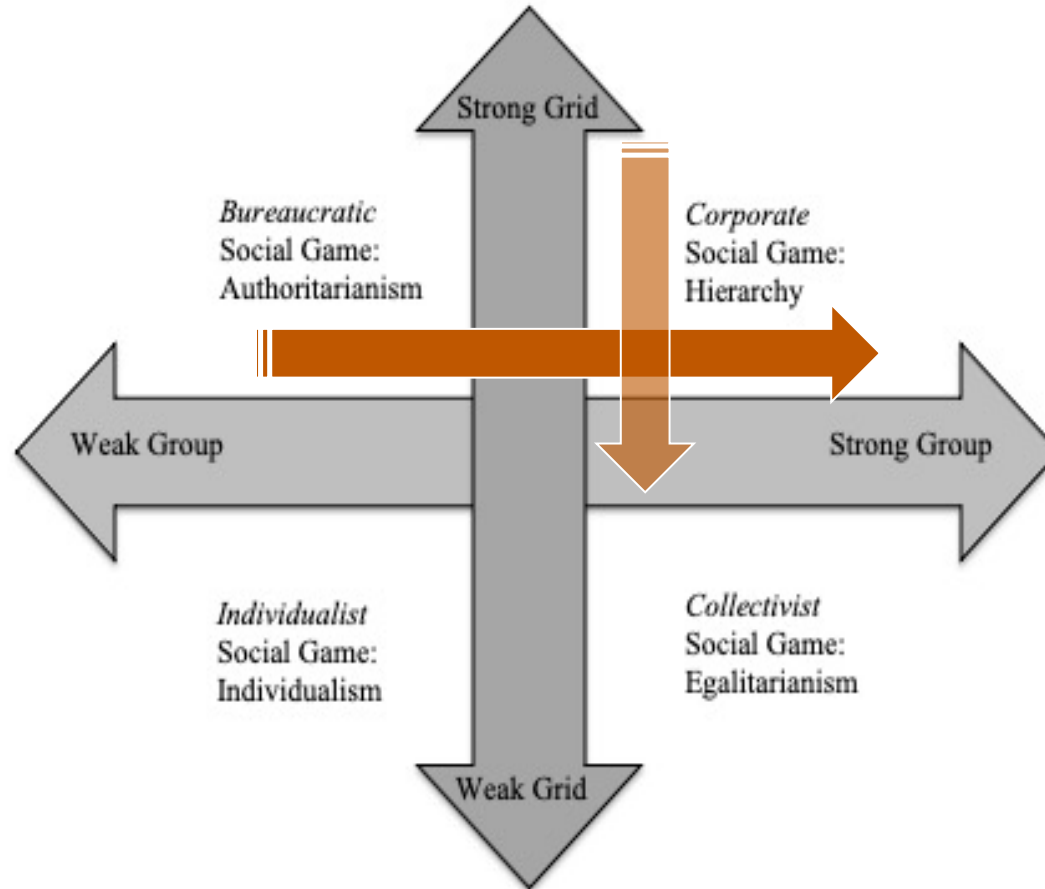
– Staff, St. Philip’s College

*“So, the **pricing model** really changed the way in how we put the sections together, how we hired adjunct faculty, that kind of thing. Also, how we managed the schools as well.”*

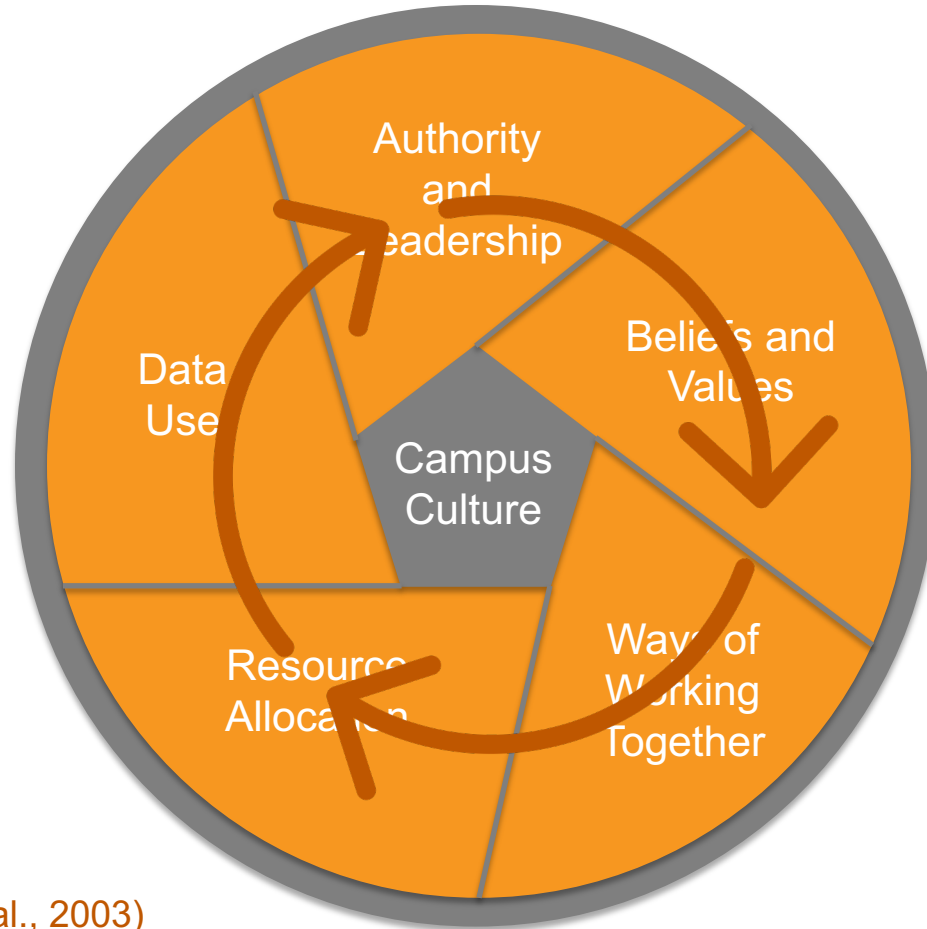
– Administrator, Palo Alto College

DISCUSSION

Culture Change



Systems Change



(Alvarado & Vargas, 2019b; Greiff et al., 2003)

IMPLICATIONS

Implications of the Study

Recommendations for College Leaders:

1. Purposeful placement of EC
2. Create readiness for culture change
3. Create readiness for systems change
4. Build political will for change
5. Define EC success and Tell the Story
6. Position college as anchor institution

Practice



Recommendations for Agency Leaders:

1. Articulate state goals for dual credit/EC
2. Increase state investment in EC
3. Align funding and accountability systems to improve college readiness
4. Grow dual credit faculty

State Policy



QUESTIONS

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THANK YOU