executive summary

High Challenge, High Support Classrooms for Underprepared Students

TOWARD A VISION OF **ACCELERATED** CURRICULUM & PEDAGOGY

BY **KATIE HERN** | Director, California Acceleration Project | English instructor, Chabot College
with **MYRA SNELL** | Math lead, California Acceleration Project | Professor of Mathematics, Los Medanos College

LearningWorks

Developmental education is under an uncomfortable microscope these days. President Obama has called for dramatic increases in completion of post-secondary credentials, and legislators and policy makers have zeroed in on remediation reform as essential to meeting this goal. Four national organizations have called for an overhaul of English and math remediation, including placing most students directly into credit-bearing college courses, tailoring math remediation to students' chosen pathways, eliminating multi-level remedial sequences, and offering co-requisite support and accelerated models for less prepared students.

The movement to reform remediation is spurred by three important trends in the national research on community colleges: 1) studies showing that that huge numbers of students disappear before making meaningful progress in college, and that the more layers of remedial coursework students must take, the lower their completion of college-level English and math; 2) studies questioning the accuracy of the standardized tests that sort students into different levels of remediation, and 3) studies showing significantly better outcomes among students enrolled in accelerated models of remediation.

While the research has clarified key problems in developmental education, and pointed toward promising directions for change, an important question is often missing from the conversation: What does instruction look like in an accelerated class? And how is it different from more traditional approaches to remediation?

LearningWorks commissioned the monograph "Toward a Vision of Accelerated Curriculum and Pedagogy" to address these important questions. Katie Hern and Myra Snell, leaders of the California Acceleration Project, draw upon their own classroom experience, and their work with community college faculty across the state, to articulate a set of core principles and practices for teaching accelerated English and math – in particular, how teachers can support students with widely varying backgrounds and skill levels to be successful in an accelerated environment.

Hern and Snell offer five core design principles for high-challenge, high-support accelerated classes:

- **Backward design from college-level courses**
  This design principle addresses the misalignment between traditional remediation and college-level coursework. In English, backward design holds that a developmental course should look and feel like a good college English course, with more support and guidance. In math, it asks which math students need

for their chosen pathway, then aligns remediation to those specific college-level requirements – more extensive algebra for students heading toward calculus, accelerated pre-requisite or co-requisite support for students taking statistics or liberal arts math.

- **Relevant, thinking-oriented curriculum**
  An alternative to remediation focused predominantly on correctness in written form or mathematical procedure, this kind of curriculum asks students to engage with issues that matter, wrestle with open-ended problems, and use resources from the class to reach and defend their own conclusions.

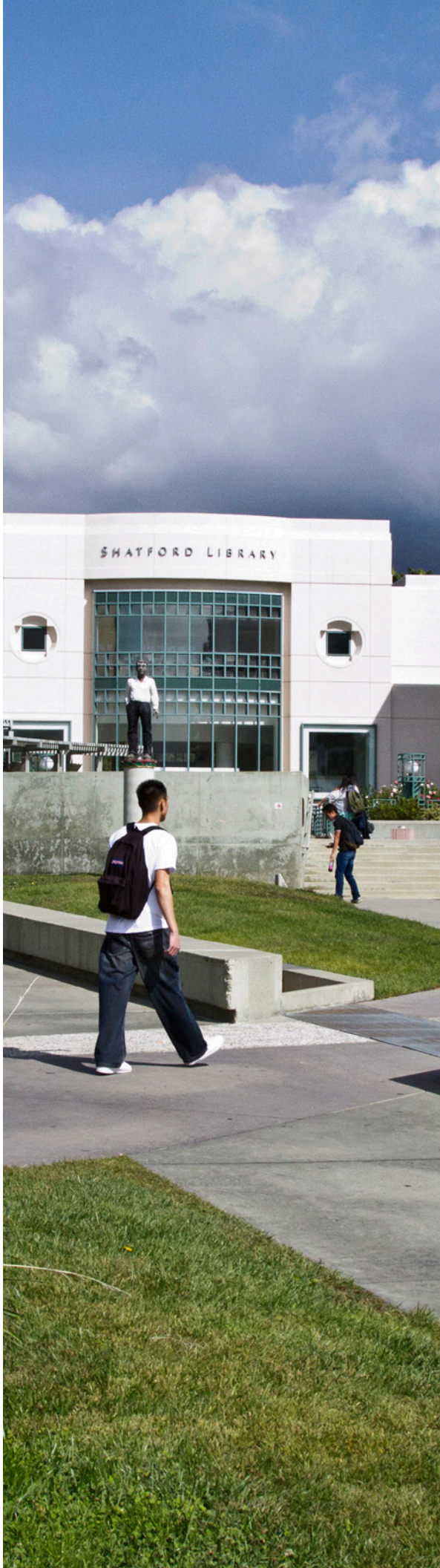
- **Just-in-time remediation**
  An alternative to separating out and teaching discrete sub-skills in advance, this approach provides only the support students specifically need to grapple with challenging college-level tasks; includes individualized grammar guidance on students' own writing and as-needed review of the arithmetic or algebra required to answer intellectually engaging questions with data.

- **Low-stakes, collaborative practice**
  In-class activities are designed to give students practice with the most high-priority skills and content needed for later, graded assessments.

- **Intentional support for students' affective needs**
  Pedagogical practices are employed to reduce students' fear, increase their willingness to engage with challenging tasks, and make them less likely to sabotage their own success in a class.

With extended illustrations of each principle, "Toward a Vision of Accelerated Curriculum and Pedagogy" serves as an essential resource for the larger effort to reform remediation, particularly for faculty needing support to move away from traditional, decelerated models of instruction.

The California Acceleration Project is funded by California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, through a professional development grant to 3CSN, the California Community Colleges' Success Network. Additional financial support has been provided through the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, LearningWorks, and the "Scaling Innovation" project of the Community College Research Center, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.



LearningWorks
linking knowledge, policy and practice

LearningWorks was founded by the Career Ladders Project for California Community Colleges, the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, and the California Community Colleges Success Network to facilitate, disseminate and fund practitioner-informed recommendations for changes at the community college system and classroom levels, infusing these strategies with statewide and national insights. LearningWorks seeks to strengthen the relationships that offer the greatest potential for accelerating action, including those between policy makers and practitioners, among overlapping initiatives, and across the 112 colleges. LearningWorks is supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation.

ADDRESS 678 13th Street, Suite 103 | Oakland, CA 94612
WEB www.LearningWorksCA.org

Printed on recycled paper by Bacchus Press, Inc., a Bay Area Green Certified Business