Promising Practices:
I-BEST/Guided Pathways
Lake Washington Institute of Technology

Since its inception, I-BEST has been among the strongest programs on campus in terms of student outcomes. I-BEST made the move from ESL to college less intimidating and produced tangible positive student outcomes. The program began with the offering of short workforce-oriented certificates, and students completed these programs at an impressive rate. At this time, Lake Washing Institute of Technology offers fourteen I-BEST certificate and degree programs housed in nine of its ten schools, with the first offering in the School of Design slated for development in 2021-22. Additionally, the institution offers a developmental education I-BEST math course contextualized for students in the transportation programs as well as the Academic I-BEST, which leads students to complete transferable courses that meet English, Humanities, Social Science, and Science requirements.

Between 2015-20, I-BEST students took about one quarter longer to complete their award than did other college completers. However, they both earned more college credits per quarter and graduated at 2 to 3 times the rate of any student group, regardless of initial placement. The comparison of I-BEST student completion rates compared to those of any other student group has remained constant over each year we have evaluated the program, and they provide the clearest evidence we have of the program's effectiveness.

Name of Community College: Lake Washington Institute of Technology (https://www.lwtech.edu)

Title of Program: I-BEST/Guided Pathways (https://www.lwtech.edu/academics/i-best)

Type of Program: Workforce Training/Career Pathways.

Primary Division involved: Basic Education for Adults.

Key Partner: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Populations Served: Immigrants, undocumented students, refugee students.

Immigration status required: All are eligible regardless of immigration status, and English Language Learners (ELLs).

1. Need for Program:

Located just outside of Seattle, WA, Lake Washington Institute of Technology (LWTech) is the only public institute of technology in Washington State. Although the college's primary focus remains workforce education, it now has a significant transfer mission, offering many transferable associate degrees and ten applied bachelor's degrees.

Because the communities LWTech serves are home to a large number of basic education students, particularly English language learners, the college also offers a long-standing and popular English as a Second Language program. However, the ESL program was somewhat detached from the campus' career training programs, and very few of its students completed ESL classes and then transitioned into a college degree and certificate programs. This meant many potentially strong college students remained in ESL for long periods or cycled in and out of the program between low-wage jobs.

Washington State's tipping point research study, which found that students only attained a family stabilization wage after completing 45 or more college credits and earning a credential, provided objective support for our observation that our ESL program, as designed, was doing little to improve college and career opportunities for our students. This left our students, many of whom were highly skilled, with strong academic and professional backgrounds from their countries of origin, locked into low-wage employment with limited opportunity for advancement. For that reason, we began piloting Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) programs in the late 2000s, hoping that a program delivery model that delivered career training simultaneous to academic education would improve our students' success on a certificate or degree pathway to a new career.

2. Brief Description of Program:

LWTech found almost immediately that I-BEST made the move from ESL to college less intimidating and produced tangible positive student outcomes. Our I-BEST program began with the offering of short workforce-oriented certificates, and students completed these programs at an impressive rate. As the Center for Community College Student Engagement noted in a study conducted at LWTech in 2012 and published in *A Matter of Degrees in 2014*, LWTech "Professional-Technical I-BEST students have also been successful. Of the 154 Professional-Technical I-BEST students enrolled at LWTech, from 2005-2012, 70% earned a college or workforce credential." This completion rate was two to three times higher than that for students who had placed directly into college-level courses.

Because the initial I-BEST pilot projects were so successful, we attempted to scale the program whenever the opportunity arose, adding more professional-technical programs, precollege I-BEST programs in math, English, and then moving into academic transfer with the Academic I-BEST. Each of these added options relied on the I-BEST elements that had made the program successful from the start-team teaching, with two instructors actively working together within a given classroom; academic instruction contextualized to a professional-technical or academic discipline; and I-BEST students working alongside peers who placed directly into college while also being provided extra class time in a mandatory support class reserved for them.

Our most ambitious effort at developing our I-BEST program and creating student access to all of the career fields and academic transfer opportunities we offer came through our decision to align I-BEST with Washington State's Guided Pathways initiative. All of LWTech's 41 areas of study were organized into 10 schools, with each school including at least one I-BEST program. This model intended to allow students to enter any school immediately, starting on time with their cohorts rather than spending quarters or perhaps years in remediation.

3. Specific Population Served:

Many of the communities LWTech serves are home to large immigrant and refugee populations, within many cases one-third of a city's population having been born outside the United States. For this reason, English language learners currently make up the great majority of students in LWTech's basic education and I-BEST programs. However, because I-BEST has proven to be the most effective model we have for supporting students who enter with precollege-level skills through degree and certificate completion, we are now attempting to recruit native speakers who arrive on campus needing academic skill-building into the program.

Undocumented/DACA students are eligible for the program. Advising includes connecting students with other resources such as the financial aid office for assistance with the WASFA application and Workforce Development as appropriate.

4. Goals and Objectives:

We designed the I-BEST/Career Pathways program with four main goals in mind:

- Create at least one I-BEST program within each of our ten schools, giving students access to a wide array of potential career fields. Also, through models like the Academic I-BEST that provides students with transferable academic credits, we intended to give students access to both two-year and four-year degree programs rather than limiting them to completion of short workforce certificates.
- Increase transition rates and enrollment of students moving from basic education into college programs.
- Improve retention rates of students moving through pre-college to college sequences in math and English.
- Increase completion rates for students in college certificate and degree programs.

5. Outcomes:

Since its inception, I-BEST has been among the strongest programs on campus in terms of student outcomes. At this time, we offer fourteen I-BEST certificate and degree programs housed in nine of our ten schools, with our first offering in the School of Design slated for development in 2021-22. Additionally, we offer a developmental education I-BEST math course contextualized for students in the transportation programs as well as the Academic I-BEST, which leads students to complete transferable courses that meet English, Humanities, Social Science, and Science requirements.

Enrollment has doubled in the three years since we began intentionally linking I-BEST programs to the career pathways our schools represent, and retention/completion indicators remain perhaps the program's strongest selling point. Between 2015-20, I-BEST students took about one quarter longer to complete their award than did other college completers. However, they both earned more college credits per quarter and graduated at 2 to 3 times the rate of any student group, regardless of initial placement. The comparison with peers from basic education who attempt the transition to college courses without I-BEST support is even more illuminating. Over that same five-year period, I-BEST students compared to those in the I-BEST comparison group earned roughly twice as many credits per quarter (12.6/6.5) and took four quarters fewer

to complete their college awards (9.7/13.4). In terms of completion rates, using the Fall 2016 cohort as an example, 42.2% of I-BEST students have graduated compared to 2.5% of basic education students who transition to college outside of the I-BEST program. The comparison of I-BEST student completion rates compared to those of any other student group has remained constant over each year we have evaluated the program, and they provide the clearest evidence we have of the program's effectiveness.

6. Collaboration:

Offering I-BEST in support of professional-technical and academic transfer students has required that basic education collaborates with nearly every other department on campus, at every level from lesson planning through quarterly scheduling. In addition, the program has been strongly supported by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, both in terms of training and funding.

7. Success Factors:

Two items come to mind: Early on, we attempted to place all I-BEST students into stand-alone cohorts. Not only did this make the model extremely expensive, but it also philosophically worked against the idea of inclusion--if I-BEST students are just as capable as other students, then why did they need to be taught separately from their college peers? After these initial attempts, we began reserving spots for I-BEST students in standard college classes. Since that time, students have commented on how much they learn from one another, and instructors have said they often cannot tell which students are in I-BEST and which came to them through other college programs.

Secondly, we have found that the initial method of piloting I-BEST, only in short workforce certificate programs, really underestimated the skills students brought with them to a class. We now award more degrees to I-BEST students than certificates since so many students want, and are capable of earning degrees up to and including our Bachelor's of Applied Science.

8. Challenges Faced and Overcome:

The old models of remedial education were brutally ineffective, but they were really easy to advise. A student comes in, takes a test, we check a chart, and voila! The student is placed into a mandatory level from which there is no escape. I-BEST, in contrast, provides plenty of options, and it defies old conceptual models that students have to hit a certain test score before being successful in college. Now students can enroll in pre-college courses offered in differing formats, they can bypass prerequisites, and in many cases, they can accelerate and complete multiple academic levels in a quarter.

This is a different way of delivering pre-college education, and probably the greatest battle we fight is with internal marketing. The jargon around I-BEST is daunting, which makes explaining it very challenging, and the program explodes all the deficit-based models that faculty and staff have developed and worked with for decades.

In addition, the pandemic has caused its challenges. LWTech was the first college in the nation to be affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, moving to fully remote instruction beginning the first week of March and only allowing some students to return for lab-based classes on a limited basis for summer and fall quarters. The pandemic has forced changes

to almost everything we do, from placement and assessment to student advising to course instruction, and we still have work to do.

Specific changes we have made to I-BEST include the following:

- We have streamlined some of our initial intake and assessment procedures, using a combination of web-based documents, initial intake sessions conducted in real-time by staff using Zoom, and better coordination between Basic Education for Adults (BEdA) assessment practices and college assessment, allowing students to take just one assessment rather than the two they often had to complete in the past. We use the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) test for pre-and post-testing, though we also require a writing sample at initial placement and homegrown performance measures in reading/writing/listening/speaking at the end of each quarter. Although we rely on CASAS to a large extent in both initial placement and in the promotion to higher levels, we're not mandated to use CASAS solely in making those decisions, and the additional information we gain from the writing sample and so on has been really helpful.
- Because I-BEST requires a great deal of initial navigation and advising, we hold real-time advising sessions over Zoom with frequent ongoing contact through emails, phone calls, and texts.
- Although some of the professional-technical programs with which I-BEST partners conduct their classes asynchronously online, we hold all our program support classes online but synchronously, both because some of our students struggle with the technology and also because one of I-BEST's strengths seems to be in the community that gets formed among students and the team of instructors. For that reason, we have striven to make sure there's a human face attached to class instruction.

To date, even though conducting advising and instruction requires more upfront time than we have ever had to dedicate before, our enrollment has remained strong throughout the pandemic. At this time, the program has seen double-digit percentage enrollment increases for summer and fall.

9. Funding and Sustainability:

LWTech is fortunate to be part of the Washington State system which counts each I-BEST enrollment as a 1.75 full-time equivalency enrollment, and this enriched funding helps pay for both the team teacher and the extra navigation students are provided. Beyond that, the program has done well by using funds from a variety of sources: we have a college budget reserved just for I-BEST, we have received additional funding from the college because of the dramatic increase in enrollment, and we have received both short- and long-term grants to help fund new initiatives. This mix of funding streams has allowed us to be flexible and not overly reliant on any one pot of money.

All three of our I-BEST models (professional-technical, developmental math, and academic transfer) were started with grants, with professional-technical and academic funded originally with pilot money from the state and developmental math funded through a Gates Foundation grant administered by the state. Currently, we fund the program through a mix of local funds, federal WIOA Title II dollars, and a three-year

state-funded I-BEST expansion grant, with that last being the primary driver in allowing us to build at least one I-BEST offering per school.

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