

**A TEAMING APPROACH:  
WASHINGTON STATE'S INTEGRATED BASIC EDUCATION SKILLS TRAINING (I-BEST)**

Washington State is piloting an integrated approach to serving non-native English speaking students seeking workforce training. In the spring of 2004, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges' (SBCTC) Offices of Adult Basic Education and Workforce Education began a demonstration project at ten community colleges called Integrated Basic Education Skills Training (I-BEST). The I-BEST approach creates classroom teams of English as a second language (ESL)/adult basic education (ABE) instructors and professional-technical instructors, who co-teach an integrated course of language and vocational skills training at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

The program was designed to reach students with limited English proficiency seeking the skills that lead to higher wage and higher skills jobs. Like many other states, the state of Washington is experiencing an influx of non-English speaking immigrants. Between 1990 and 2000, the adult population of non-English speakers more than doubled, growing from 117,000 to 261,000.<sup>2</sup> State and national research conducted by the SBCTC revealed that low-skilled adults often begin their educational process in either ESL or ABE courses, and few make the transition to workforce skills training programs that allow them to reap the benefits of higher wage and higher skills jobs. The intention of the ten demonstration projects was to test "traditional notions that students must first complete all levels of basic education before they can begin workforce training."<sup>3</sup> All of the demonstrations included an ESL component.

I-BEST is not considered appropriate for students with very low levels of English proficiency. Typically, I-BEST students were chosen from students scoring a three or higher (of a possible six) in English language proficiency on the Washington State Competency System. The average I-BEST student scored a four.<sup>4</sup>

The I-BEST approach includes having two instructors in the classroom at the same time. I-BEST also seeks to support students through advising, tutoring, and mentoring, and to eliminate some of the obstacles faced by its students, including child care and transportation.<sup>5</sup> I-BEST administrators stress that an essential component of the I-BEST approach is substantial and intentional planning before, during, and after the program.

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<sup>1</sup> Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. *I-BEST: A Program Integrating Adult Basic Education and Workforce Training*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Research Report No. 05-2, December 2005. Accessed June 22, 2006, <http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Data/rschrpts/Resh05-2-I-BEST.pdf>; Seim, Aimee. "Ed Program Helps Reach Migrant Workers." *Columbia Basin Herald*, March 21, 2006. Accessed June 22, 2006, <http://www.smfws.com/art03212006d.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. *I-BEST: A Program Integrating Adult Basic Education and Workforce Training*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Research Report No. 05-2, December 2005, Page 3. Accessed June 22, 2006, <http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Data/rschrpts/Resh05-2-I-BEST.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Page 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Pages 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Seim, Aimee. "Ed Program Helps Reach Migrant Workers." *Columbia Basin Herald*, March 21, 2006. Accessed June 22, 2006, <http://www.smfws.com/art03212006d.htm>.

Faculty must plan the curriculum, faculty and administrators must work together to coordinate student support services, and rigorous assessment must be built in.

“With a focus on re-designing ESL education, colleges shifted from the traditional focus of primarily teaching ESL in the context of family and citizenship to teaching students how to learn language and college study skills within the context of and along with workforce education in the student’s chosen occupation. The workforce education content was the context for learning, practicing and mastering English. The focus on communication skills was no longer on the social aspects of a student’s life, which has traditionally been the focus of ESL instruction. Instead, it focused on work with specific language competencies for application in an employment environment (i.e., communication with the employer and co-workers, and occupation-specific language).”—Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2005<sup>6</sup>

I-Best demonstration projects offered programs including commercial driving, nursing, early childhood education, and help desk operation. A goal of the program is to ensure that I-BEST programs are a part of professional-technical programs that extend to at least one year of college training and result in a credential, as research has shown that those goals result in the most significant gains in the labor market.<sup>7</sup>

I-BEST is new, but results from the demonstration projects have been noteworthy. When compared to traditional ESL students at the same proficiency level studying during the same time period, students in the I-BEST program earned five times more college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete workforce training.<sup>8</sup> Over the same period of time<sup>9</sup>:

- Forty-four percent of I-BEST students completed skills training (18 percent of I-BEST students received a training credential and another 26 percent “reached other recognized skills attainment levels”)<sup>10</sup>.
- Three percent of the comparison group of ESL students also completed workforce training (1 percent received a credential and 2 percent completed non-credentialed programs)<sup>11</sup>.
- On average, I-BEST students earned 12 workforce and 10 college-level credits.

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<sup>6</sup> Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. *I-BEST: A Program Integrating Adult Basic Education and Workforce Training*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Research Report No. 05-2, December 2005, Page 3. Accessed June 22, 2006, <http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Data/rschrpts/Resh05-2-I-BEST.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Pages 4, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Page 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Page 6.

<sup>10</sup> Email from Tina Bloomer [tbloomer@sbctc.ctc.edu] to lara\_couturier@brown.edu. “Re: I-BEST Question.” June 22, 2006. Please note: the report entitled *I-BEST: A Program Integrating Adult Basic Education and Workforce Training* had a small error on page 6, which did not match the data presented in the table on page A-2. Correct data was confirmed via this email.

<sup>11</sup> Email from Tina Bloomer [tbloomer@sbctc.ctc.edu] to lara\_couturier@brown.edu. “Re: I-BEST Question.” June 22, 2006. Please note: the report entitled *I-BEST: A Program Integrating Adult Basic Education and Workforce Training* had a small error on page 6, which did not match the data presented in the table on page A-2. Correct data was confirmed via this email.

- On average, the comparison group of ESL students earned 2 workforce credits and 3 college-level credits.

Though the ESL training for I-BEST is customized to meet the specific needs of the workforce training program, the evaluation of the program suggests that I-BEST students made English skills gains at the same rate as their ESL counterparts. I-BEST students will need follow-up ESL training, but the I-BEST approach creates a foundation upon which to build. Three of the demonstration projects linked the I-BEST training pathway to longer workforce programs. However, data on student pathways beyond I-BEST into further training or the workforce is not yet available.

The SBCTC is now working on spreading I-BEST to other colleges in the state. To do so, it is creating a design for I-BEST programs, issuing planning grants, and running training institutes. Programs eligible for I-BEST are strictly defined, approved, and monitored. For example, programs must be in demand in the local workforce, and they must meet at least one of the following:

- “Contained within a currently approved professional-technical program at least one year in length or an approved professional-technical associate degree program;
- Results in high wage employment with jobs available for program graduates at a minimum of \$14.00 per hour in King County and \$12.00 per hour in the rest of the state; and/or
- Articulated with an approved program (i.e., certified nursing assistant to licensed practical nurse) where completers are given preferential status.”<sup>12</sup>

New funding to the colleges has not been provided for I-BEST. However, because of the costly nature of having two instructors in the classroom at the same time, the presidents have approved an enhanced FTE model wherein the colleges will “generate 1.75 FTE for I-BEST classes within the college’s current state FTE allocation.”<sup>13</sup>

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

<http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/oal/default.asp>

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<sup>12</sup> Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. *Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training, I-BEST: Program Guidelines and Planning Process*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, December 2005, Page A-1. Accessed June 22, 2006, [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Workforce/docs/I-BEST\\_Prog\\_Guidelines\\_and\\_Planning\\_Process.doc](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Workforce/docs/I-BEST_Prog_Guidelines_and_Planning_Process.doc).

<sup>13</sup> Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. *Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training, I-BEST: Program Guidelines and Planning Process*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, December 2005, Page 1. Accessed June 22, 2006, [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Workforce/docs/I-BEST\\_Prog\\_Guidelines\\_and\\_Planning\\_Process.doc](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/Workforce/docs/I-BEST_Prog_Guidelines_and_Planning_Process.doc).