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COMMENTARY

Tierney and García on the Early Assessment Program

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William G. Tierney and Lisa García have a new article featured in American Behavioral Scientist that reviews the findings and implications of their past study of Early Assessment Program (EAP) implementation in Los Angeles. The study, *Preparing Underprepared Students for College: Remedial Education and Early Assessment Programs,* is now accessible online for background information.

The authors' findings are almost uniformly negative. The students who participated in their focus groups or responded to their survey know almost nothing about the EAP, and their high school teachers and counselors do not know much more. The students do not understand the consequences of placement into remedial coursework in post-secondary education, and the courses that the California State University (CSU) has designed that might prepare them to avoid this fate are not available in their schools.

Tierney and García Bedolla conclude that "no one took any action that they would not have taken in their senior year even if the EAP did not exist," with the obvious corollary that the EAP had no impact on the likelihood that students would be placed into remedial classes when they enrolled in college. They state that "the best way to provide support is to provide it, rather than to provide information that [students] may never receive or comprehend." The discovery that EAP is not affecting the behavior of educators or students in schools where it has not been implemented is hardly surprising, but it begs rather than answers some key policy questions.

The first of these concerns the role of information in student decision-making, and in the education system more generally. No one is likely to dissent from the authors' conclusion that producing information that students neither receive nor comprehend is a poor use of scarce resources. At the same time, though, it's quite possible and perhaps even likely that telling students whether or not they are ready for college-level coursework while there is still time to do something about it will have a positive effect on their behavior and their academic success. This was the hypothesis that guided the development of the EAP, and the data produced by Tierney and García Bedolla offer no useful insight on whether or not the hypothesis is correct.

The second question has to do with EAP implementation. The authors are right to point out that the EAP has received more praise that it deserves, given meager (but nevertheless real) evidence of positive program impact.

This hardly justifies a death sentence, though. Instead, it poses a choice for policy-makers: should they seek to strengthen the implementation of the EAP, or abandon it in favor of something else? This is a critical question, not only in California but nationally, as two multi-state consortia seek to build something like EAP into a new national assessment system.

Tierney and García Bedolla's hostility to EAP may or may not be justified, but their study provides no basis for judgment one way

or the other.

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