

Podcast Series on Remedial Education Reform AB 1705

Episode: Guest Julianna Barnes and Host Paul Fain Transcript

Paul Fain: I'm here speaking with President Julianna Barnes, Cuyamaca College. How are you?

Julianna Barnes: I'm good. How are you doing?

Fain: Well, thanks for speaking with me. So I gather that your institution has made quite a bit of progress in the dev ed reforms. And would you mind giving us the CliffsNotes of how you got there?

Barnes: Again, thank you for inviting me to to talk about something that's near and dear to my heart, and that is developmental education reform. And so before I even started as president about seven years ago, my math faculty sent me a document, and it was actually the best gift that I could have received as an incoming president. And the document was basically a proposal to go all in with regard to dev ed reform in math. Fortunately, I had done a lot of research on developmental education in my doctoral program about a decade prior, and I had a keen interest in dev ed and so to have the faculty come forward with a proposal to, you know, reform math was a beautiful gift. Now not all presidents get get that gift. And so, you know, in my very first week, I met with the faculty members, went over the proposal, and they had already presented the proposal to others at the institution prior to me. And there was a fear that we were going to lose enrollment because we had such a large proportion of students who were in developmental education, maybe weren't getting out, they weren't succeeding. But, you know, we had our enrollment was our money are based on enrollment. So there was a fear and I could I can understand that. So anyway, all that said, the proposal came forward. I didn't even hesitate. I said, let's do this. What do we need to do to get this done? And so we really it was a matter of getting all sides of the House, not just math, but also our student support services, our assessment arm, our technology arm. We needed to get all of those pieces in place to be sure that we were able to get this done. And plus our K through 12 partners, our high school partners also, of course, needed to be on board and understand the implications of the of this work. And so it was really, again, aligning all of the pieces and then getting started.

Fain: Well, as you say, starting with faculty leadership on this is ideal, but I gather you also drew in student support services early, too. Can you talk about why and how and how that played out?

Barnes: Yes. Because in our students support service area, this is where we did where we coordinated our traditional placement testing for math and English. And so for decades, our students support service areas had worked with the high schools to work with the seniors,

to get them tested and placed into their math and English courses. And so we really had to bring our students support services on board as well to say this is going to look different. We're going to be using high school transcript data. We're not going to be using the traditional placement tests. And they're like, Wait a minute, this has worked before. We have a system, you know? And so they also had to rethink and reframe the way they did business to support students. You know, we all thought we were doing right by the students at the time by having the traditional placement and the traditional remediation. So, you know, we had some work to do to get our students services on board as well and our high school partners, because they were like, What do you mean high school? Transcript Data You know, we've always placed students in classes and they were used to also using standardized tests for other things. So, you know, this idea of doing away with standardized tests that were coveted, you know, historically, I think it's it's a hard pill to swallow for some people because that's just what we're used to. And we kind of bought into the fact that the standardized placement tests were doing what they were supposed to do. And so, you know, we really did have to get our student support services folks on board, plus our high school partners on board to get this done.

Fain: And can you just give us a sense of where things stand now, how far down the road you've gotten?

Barnes: So we have been at this now, gosh, five, six years, at least in math and then also in English in our ESL area as well. And how far we've gone, it's fabulous. I think you've seen some of our data just to see that, you know, there was a period of time where we were placing 0% of African American students, for example, in college level English. If that is not a glaring, you know, issue with our placement test, you know, I don't know what is. So we now provide 100% of our students with the opportunity to take college level math and college level English. And again, 100% of students, you know, what we're telling our students is that they have the capacity to do this work. And we have you know, we have reformed our our placement and our instructional programs so that they can succeed. So not only have we provided the opportunities for students to enroll in the classes, we also provide the opportunity for students to succeed. While in the classes, we are providing the support that they need to succeed. And then even after they successfully complete their math and English courses at the college level, we are seeing success even in subsequent courses later on. And so, you know, we're we're able to look at some of our longitudinal data as well. We're far into it now. We're seeing a lot of great results. Hard to argue with those numbers in terms of real access for students.

Fain: Obviously, not every institution is there. Can you give any words of wisdom to folks about I mean, you've made clear this is hard for not just faculty, for people across the institution. What are some of the messages and strategies that worked best in helping people make these big changes?

Barnes: Well, you know, again, I was very grateful to be in a place where our faculty were ready to take on this work. And I think what is happening is that at other community colleges, there's not a readiness among faculty members for colleges who are seeking to really prioritize this work and make good by the legislation as well. Right. Of first to prioritize this work and second, to really intentionally bring faculty along. And there are faculty up and down the state now who have been doing this for a while, who have successful outcomes and strategies. And so there are opportunities for faculty who are not yet there with believing in this work whereby they can actually then they they can interface and learn from the faculty who have done this work. So there's just so many opportunities. There's really it's really should be inescapable. I mean, there's there's so many opportunities, I would say, for presidents to really work with their faculty, to connect with other faculty who have done this work successfully.

Fain: You know, related to that. Can you give us a bit on the role of legislation in helping to drive institutional or faculty will now and really where it can work best in terms of folks using that in a positive way.

Barnes: I was a big supporter of the, you know, initially 8705 and 1705. And again, there are many colleges where we're seeing some disparities across the California community college system. We're just talking about California with colleges who are carrying out the spirit and the letter of the law and others who are trying to find loopholes to not follow the law, basically. For me, I think it's always best to do things organically, bringing faculty, the faculty along, providing learning opportunities and opportunities for them, as I mentioned, to to interface with other faculty. I'm all for that, for it to be organically grown within the institution. However, those opportunities have now been there for a long time and there are still some colleges and faculty who are not going there. You know, the legislation, what I love about the legislation, just in its simplest form, it's really about using data to inform action. Colleges can still place students in lower level classes in math and English if they're able to demonstrate that students can succeed in those classes. Well, they're they're hard pressed to have that to find that data, because the students are not succeeding in those lower level classes. So that's what the legislation is, is like use data to inform practice. And I think we could all agree that our decision should be data informed and the legislation gives us an avenue to use that data to inform practice.

Fain: Well, President Barnes, congrats on the new the new role. And I thank you very much for sharing your time and expertise with us. Great.