



Office of the President

October 31, 2014

Chris Cihlar, PhD  
Director, Office of Legislative Oversight  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Dr. Cihlar:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recent Office of Legislative Oversight report entitled, “Developmental Education at Montgomery College.” We welcome the opportunity to engage in a conversation about the academic and administrative challenges concerning developmental education, which are well-documented in the report. Montgomery College is proud of its mission to empower students to change their lives—to welcome students, regardless of their academic backgrounds or economic resources. Montgomery County needs its community college now more than ever because, in today’s economy, postsecondary education is a necessity for everyone. Unfortunately, it is not a certainty for everyone. The Board of Trustees and I are determined to close the achievement gap and to ensure more students achieve their educational goals and find success here at Montgomery College. The achievement gap and success in developmental education are two of the most vexing challenges that school districts and colleges across our state and our nation face. We look forward to a collegial exchange of ideas that will inform our efforts to enhance student success. We firmly believe that the College is and will continue to be the gateway to a strong middle class in Montgomery County.

As a first round nominee for the prestigious Aspen Institute Prize for Community College Excellence, Montgomery College has focused considerable resources on identifying and supporting the needs of those students who come to us without the academic skills for success in college-level coursework. As noted on page 50 of the OLO report, Montgomery College is engaged in 13 of the 14 identified “promising practices” in developmental education. These include the following initiatives:

- Accelerated courses in reading and English with the opportunity for students to advance through levels of developmental work
- Modularized and mastery-based developmental math curricula—allowing students to complete coursework on their own schedule, enabling a student to save time and money
- Mainstreamed developmental students into college-level courses in English
- Utilized learning communities that link courses to raise content relevance for students
- Provided tutoring centers for outside-of-class supplemental instruction
- Integrated new technologies for instruction and advising

Montgomery College continues to employ promising practices as academic leaders and faculty members learn from professional organizations and consult with their colleagues at other community colleges in order to learn effective practices in developmental education. For example, Montgomery College faculty members participate in the National Association for Developmental Education, the Two-Year College Association of the National Council of Teachers of English, the College Reading and Learning Association, and the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges. All of these professional organizations share their best practices in addressing the national conversation about developmental education and inform the curriculum at Montgomery College.

One of the key national conversations is about the use of standardized testing to identify students who need developmental instruction. The OLO report contains a recommendation for Montgomery College to pilot multiple measures to assess the remediation need for students. We support this recommendation. The College is currently piloting just such a process. Specifically, we will review the high school transcripts of students who test into the upper levels of developmental coursework. It is our hope that this pilot can help us determine how best to place students who test near-ready for college-level coursework. At this juncture, the College is not positioned to implement such individualized placement processes for all new students. First, as a member of the 16 community college consortium in Maryland, Montgomery College must use the Accuplacer instrument and common placement scores that have been sanctioned by the Maryland Higher Education Commission. Students may demonstrate college readiness through SAT or ACT scores set by statewide policy, or they may do so by achieving the Accuplacer score required by all community colleges throughout the state. Second, as the largest community college in the state, Montgomery College experiences a large influx of new students each semester and simply does not have the resources to provide an individualized application and transcript review process that may be available in selective institutions of higher education.

The second recommendation in the OLO report suggests greater alignment of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) coursework and the College's expectations for college readiness in math. We support this recommendation and certainly welcome any and all opportunities to work with MCPS to enhance student success. At this moment, statewide policy dictates that a student's readiness for math—at or above college-level algebra—is defined by the student's performance on any of the standardized instruments, specifically, SAT, ACT, or Accuplacer. However, the OLO report's findings about developmental math are indicative of the national debate about the misalignments between K–12 education and all levels of higher education, and cite some of the reforms that have been implemented in Texas and Colorado (p. 46). In fact, the Maryland higher education community is having similar conversations. While Montgomery College is very interested in programs such as Mathway and Statway, such curricular change would most likely necessitate a change in the Code of Maryland Regulations, which defines the math general education requirement for all colleges and universities, no matter the degree program, as “at or above college-level algebra.” This issue is the subject of the statewide math conference to be held today, October 31, 2014, at which Dr. Philip Uri Trisman will speak. He is a leading advocate on changing the general education requirements for math, and he received a warm welcome when he spoke several years ago at the annual Maryland Community College Completion Summit. We are also hopeful that implementation of Common Core curricula will

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drive greater alignment between secondary and postsecondary curricula. Nevertheless, until Common Core and the related Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers tests have been fully implemented—including adoption of the appropriate cut scores—or the general education requirements and the measurements of college readiness are changed statewide, Montgomery College will continue to implement promising practices to help our students achieve those state-defined competencies.

In conclusion, Montgomery College welcomes the continuing conversation about developmental education in Montgomery County. We share the County Council's commitment to serving the best interests of its residents and in using public funds responsibly and effectively. As the College continues to work with its colleague institutions in the state to shape curricula and assessment practices, we look forward to your partnership in shaping the public policy and resource allocation that will enable us to best serve all Montgomery College students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "DeRionne P. Pollard". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally on the page.

DeRionne P. Pollard, PhD  
President