INTRODUCTION:

This follow-up report is based on the previous recommendations established by the same visiting team in May 2010. At that time, the visiting team was charged with providing guidance for changes outlined in the Cerritos Action Plan, in particular the development of an academic support program that serves the needs of the entire student population and girds the goals of Cerritos College’s evolving educational philosophy. The team’s current charge relates to assessing the progress of that initiative since the initial visit and outlining recommendations for further improvement.

Although the inertia of program development inevitably shifts toward focusing on areas for improvement, the visiting team wants to emphatically recognize the impressive transformation accomplished by Cerritos College since the 2010 evaluation. The individual and collective efforts have resulted in monumental changes that will have a positive impact on student success and a lasting impact on the college culture. The visiting team holds the utmost respect for these achievements and hopes that these recommendations are viewed as helpful strategies to maintain and bolster the new Cerritos College Success Center—what should clearly already be seen as a remarkable achievement.

PHASE I: Structuring a Coordinated Effort

1. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Appoint a single dean who will be responsible for the Cerritos College student success effort and the area of academic support services.

OBSERVATIONS: The position of “Dean of Academic Success & Institutional Effectiveness” has been created since the initial report and is charged with the supervision of the Cerritos College academic support services. The existence of this position demonstrates an institutionalized commitment to the Success Center initiative, and the college leadership should be commended for this strong signal of prioritization. This leadership has been invaluable in cultivating the relational trust necessary to undergo such a challenging transformation.

NEXT STEPS: In order to ensure the Success Center’s long-term stability and sustainability, the Dean of Academic Success & Institutional Effectiveness should have supervisory authority over all personnel and budgets supporting the Success Center network. The current structure’s reliance on faculty “release time” and pledged budgetary support is
ultimately too contingent on the people currently holding various leadership positions. Although all these stakeholders demonstrate a strong commitment to the Success Center, the re-organization of positions and resources under the Dean of Academic Success & Institutional Effectiveness better ensures a systemic investment in the Success Center that will be sustained long into the future.

2. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Consolidate the efforts of various “student success” groups into a single steering committee charged with guiding the reformation of academic support at Cerritos.

OBSERVATIONS: The visiting team did not meet directly with any steering committees during the follow-up, but various provided documents (committee minutes, integration strategies, action plans, etc.) demonstrate that the Success Center effort is being supported and vetted through a wide circle of campus stakeholders. However, it is somewhat unclear how well the Success Center is integrated with other student success efforts, most notably iFALCON. Creating a holistic student success effort networking the multitude of college engagement initiatives ensures greater impact by capitalizing on the collective synergy.

NEXT STEPS: The long term vitality and status of the Success Center will be bolstered through better integration with all student success initiatives. In particular, stronger connections to content-specific disciplines in addition to the core areas of reading, writing, and mathematics should be undertaken. Focusing on efforts that further engage faculty, programs, and committees beyond Developmental Education should be a priority in the next phase of Success Center evolution. The entire campus should be engaged in the process of developing the philosophy that guides the Success Center initiative. These efforts should incorporate more strategic partnering with Institutional Research and Information Technology to improve Success Center infrastructure.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- What is the role of the Success Center in other campus initiatives?
- Who are the stakeholders who would make those decisions?
- How are various student success initiatives coordinated and integrated into a comprehensive strategic vision?

3. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Appoint a faculty coordinator to assist the dean in leading the transformation of the academic support services.

OBSERVATIONS: The creation of the faculty coordinator has provided invaluable leadership for the Success Center initiative. The position ensures continuity among services and provides the dean with a person accountable for program development and problem-solving. The remarkable transformation that has already taken place would not have been possible without the dedication of the person currently assigned to this position.
NEXT STEPS: Just as the Dean of Academic Success & Institutional Effectiveness needs the faculty coordinator's support to be effective, the Success Center Coordinator has to be able to rely on leadership personnel within the Success Center to guide day-to-day operations and decisions. The current staffing structure does not clearly signal that other layer of faculty leadership, overburdening the coordinator position. Having faculty Instructional Specialists more fully assigned to their Success Center positions would greatly benefit the program and provide a more effective leadership structure. Although these assignments would need to be filled internally at this time, full-time Instructional Specialist positions should be prioritized whenever new full-time faculty are hired in the future.

4. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Re-configure the space in the Learning Resource Center to maximize the facility and its potential to serve as a comprehensive hub for academic support services.

OBSERVATIONS: Cerritos has literally “taken down the walls” between previously disconnected academic support programs. This effort required courage and resolve, but it is clear that the campus has committed to work together, be forward-oriented, and is now more invested in the future rather than focusing on the past. And there is no doubt that the willingness to take such a big risk has already reaped great rewards. As one faculty member stated, “the growing pains we have experienced are a result of success.” Significant space modification has already taken place in the Success Center, and further renovations are in the near future. The changes to the physical space and subsequent merging of programs have prompted operational adjustments that should continue to be examined and refined.

NEXT STEPS: The newly integrated facility needs to now be integrated at all levels of infrastructure. Reporting lines, budgets, policies, and procedures need to be streamlined to maximize efficiency in preparation for continued Success Center growth and expansion. In particular, the Language Success Center needs to continue efforts to cross-train personnel and work on flow issues that will benefit both staff and students.

The Success Center is scheduled to begin a second phase of renovations. Although the planning process has already been completed, taking the opportunity to physically separate as many non-Success Center services from the space should be considered in order to solidify the program's identity and move beyond the historical practice of the space being used to support various needs that do not have a place elsewhere on campus.

In addition, two important issues should be also considered. First, the plans have no designated office space for the Instructional Specialists. Other report recommendations indicate the need for more consistent faculty leadership in the Success Center, and this commitment should be mirrored in space planning.

Second, the place of “Semi-Independent Math” within the Success Center program and space remains undecided. Since “Semi-Independent Math” is a different “class” modality rather than an academic support program, it does not seem to fit into the organizational and/or physical structure of the Success Center. “Semi-Independent Math” program efficacy also seems to be in question. A larger discussion about how this instructional delivery aligns with Cerritos’ evolving educational philosophy seems warranted.
5. **PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION:** Maximize limited resources by leveraging necessary budgets and consolidating grant funds currently spread around campus to develop “boutique” academic support services.

**OBSERVATIONS:** Success Center funding is currently cobbled together from various budgets with different supervisory authority. Such a funding strategy made sense during the Success Center’s initial development phase, but this continued reality threatens the long-term stability and sustainability of the program. All current stakeholders expressed strong support for the Success Center, but the budget structure needs to better reinforce the permanence and priority of the program.

**NEXT STEPS:** All budgets supporting the Success Center should be re-organized under the Dean of Academic Success & Institutional Effectiveness. That position should have authority over the distribution of District and grant funds allocated to the Success Center effort in order to better promote program development. Long-term planning for the institutionalization of program costs after grant funding expires should also be a priority. In general, shifting the philosophical emphasis from identifying the level of service that can be provided with available funds to developing a needs assessment and then directing the necessary funds to scale to the desired level of service delivery is an important step to further cement the institutional priority of the Success Center.
PHASE II: Cultivating a Network Identity

1. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Define mission, vision, and/or scope of academic support services at Cerritos College.

OBSERVATIONS: Two years ago, college personnel expressed a desire to transform the “Learning Resource Center” into a centralized academic support services network. That initial impulse is now a reality. The new Success Center offers ample space for a multiplicity of learning and support deliveries, and there are plans to renovate the space to meet the needs even more effectively. The current space has been defined by “upstairs” activities centered around English, reading, and languages and “downstairs” activities in math and some limited “content-specific” tutoring.

NEXT STEPS: In order to move to the next level of campus-wide institutionalization, the Success Center needs to cognizant of the potential perception that the program primarily supports “basic skills.” To this point, the Success Center attempts to serves content-specific disciplines primarily through the connection to reading, writing, and mathematics skills. It is unclear the extent to which other areas (transfer, CTE, etc.) have engaged in dialogue about that direction. More importantly, it is unclear that such an approach would be the most effective way to attract student from content-specific courses.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

• What are the needs of students in other disciplines?

• How can those needs be determined?

• What services are needed to meet those needs?

2. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Review all practices within academic support services to ensure consistent compliance with Title 5 guidelines.

OBSERVATIONS: Title 5 requires that the positive attendance system in a learning center shall “accurately and rigorously monitor” student participation. The college has addressed a number of compliance-related issues in the past 18 months. However, the Success Center is in the process of implementing a new student tracking system while the existing CI Track system remains in place, requiring intake staff to utilize two intake systems. The continued use of two systems is both confusing and problematic for compliance.

Additionally, some faculty expressed concerns with the accuracy and user-friendliness of the reports generated by the Success Center. This may be a temporary problem until the new system is established, but faculty confidence in the data and the capacity to use reports are key considerations for the continued success of the program. The Success Center will also need to address the requirement to facilitate a “referral” process in order to claim apportionment. This may be a transitional issue, but it should be addressed as planning continues.
NEXT STEPS: As the new vision for academic support develops, the College should ensure it is created on a firm legal foundation while also providing useful data to classroom faculty about their students’ participation. Streamlining the positive attendance infrastructure and forging a more fruitful partnership with Institutional Research are vital to ensure compliance and demonstrate program efficacy.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- What information does the positive attendance system need to track for the Success Center, for students, for faculty, and for apportionment?
- Does the positive attendance system accurately reflect all of the deliveries offered in the Success Center?
- How can greater confidence and consistency be invested in the intake infrastructure and data?

3. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Create a comprehensive tutor training program grounded in a common foundation utilized by all learning centers as well as specialized discipline-specific training fostered through department collaboration.

OBSERVATIONS: In the past 18 months, the College has created a comprehensive tutor training effort, involving tutors who work at the Success Center and also support staff at other locations like the Veterans Center. The training curriculum involves the instructional specialists and other faculty experts, which fosters cohesiveness and shared buy-in at the departmental levels. The tutors clearly enjoy the training, and they receive valuable support as a result of this effort.

Tutors did express a concern about traffic flow issues in the Success Center and the ways that sign-up procedures impact quality. Faculty shared this concern. Interestingly, the faculty expressed more anxiety about preparedness to meet students’ expectations than the tutors did. This may be, in part, due to the faculty’s more nuanced understanding of discipline sensibilities.

NEXT STEPS: Shared faculty and tutor concerns about what should be emphasized during a tutoring session, as well as questions about other standards—like how many students can attend a workshop or how long should a tutoring session be—are fruitful starting points for continued training dialogue. Department faculty should be involved with development of these training standards and values so that they can be effectively communicated to all Success Center employees. This will ensure both consistency and quality in students’ Success Center experiences while simultaneously reinforcing the values of classroom instruction.

4. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Develop an infrastructure and culture for data-driven decision-making.
OBSERVATIONS: Previously, the college was given a recommendation to develop an infrastructure and culture for data-driven decision-making that includes a plan to actively pursue data collection and evaluation of the integrated and improved academic support services network. Although there has been some foundational work to capture students’ experiences through surveys, this data collection and evaluation is still in nascent stages.

There was some discussion about including student learning outcome measures being gathered. This, too, is an important aspect of a vigorous research effort. However, within the dialogue, there was a reference to using learning outcomes metrics as a way to determine if students should be “credited” for their activities. Typically, learning outcomes provide a scorecard for educators as to whether or not they adequately facilitated the intended learning. Creating an evaluative component to Success Center activities changes the dynamic for both Success Center employees and for students. It may cause students to avoid the Success Center rather than seek it because evaluative constructs create an “unsafe” environment from the student perspective.

NEXT STEPS: The Research Office should be included in any and all discussions about Success Center data collection. All inquiry by Success Center leadership should include the campus researcher so that appropriate metrics can be designed as services change or new services are included. This will better ensure integration to other campus research efforts. At this point, there seems to be limited connection between the Success Center and Institutional Research.

Due to issues with the duplicate student tracking systems, it is unclear to what extent the Research Office can integrate the necessary data to start to make meaningful correlations between Success Center attendance and course success. While the college has data that student success is improving overall, the data that specifically addresses the efficacy of the Success Center is not readily available. Ideally, the evolving research effort would also include efforts to measure the efficacy of different learning modalities and should be disaggregated to determine the effectiveness of the support for unique populations.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

• What type of information is currently gathered and how is that used and shared?

• What information is not being gathered that will be needed in future evaluation efforts?

• How can the current tracking tools be used to improve data collection?

• What research designs can be applied to examine the efficacy of the Center?

• What does the College know about students’ perceptions of academic support?
• To what extent can the College connect student success to the Success Center?

• What is the current state of SLOs/AUOs within the academic support services?
• How can learning outcomes data help the leadership determine future directions and decisions about Success Center operations and philosophy?

5. PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION: Develop diversified academic support offerings that support general college success strategies and discipline-specific content support.

OBSERVATIONS: The faculty and staff have made a considerable effort to diversify the learning options in the Success Center. They have created a more comprehensive tutoring structure, scheduled a variety of workshops, and developed an impressive list of directed learning activities. All of this work is a testament to the institutional commitment to the Success Center as a central aspect of the student success agenda. Although curriculum development will be an ongoing effort, the amount of progress to date—in terms of both quantity and quality—should be applauded.

NEXT STEPS: As stated in a previous recommendation, the College should engage faculty and students from the wide array of disciplines. The primary focus of the Success Center is reading, writing, math, and ESL, and while these areas are drivers of student success, students with other issues will inevitably seek support from the Success Center, and the faculty and staff should have a philosophical disposition about how to offer such support.

The administrative and faculty leadership should determine how the Success Center operation will more explicitly support content-specific disciplines. From the students’ perspective, when they need help with a content area, they may not immediately identify with the support as it is currently structured. The Success Center leadership needs to be mindful of inadvertently giving the impression that the Success Center does not serve all students and all courses. Since the Success Center is now poised for growth and scale, this is the right moment to consider the scope of services as inclusively as possible.

CONCLUSION:

Cerritos is poised to begin the next phase of the development of its Success Center program. The incredible amount of progress accomplished since the visiting team’s initial evaluation clearly demonstrates the College is deeply committed to this initiative and will be able to establish a lasting legacy of improving student success, achievement, and completion. And although the sustained focus on and dedication to program improvement will ensure continued success, the College should also create opportunities to celebrate and chronicle its accomplishments along the way.