

TRANSFORM REMEDIATION

**COMPLETE
COLLEGE
AMERICA'S GOAL:**

By 2020, six out of 10 young adults in our country will have a college degree or credential of value.

U.S. students don't just need to go to college; they need to complete college. Access has improved — we are sending more students to higher education — but success has declined.

In just 10 years, six of 10 new jobs will require a college education, but fewer than half of students who enter college today finish with a degree or credential. Those who do complete college are taking longer, paying more, and graduating with more debt.

Transform remediation: In spite of best intentions, remediation most often becomes the place where students fall down and drop out instead of catch up. It's time to make major changes in remediation so that students have a real chance for the ultimate success — college completion.

WHY TRANSFORM REMEDIATION?

Students who show up for college often are not ready for college, especially at two-year campuses. Most end up being placed into an extended series of remedial courses that don't count toward their degrees. With each course typically lasting 16 weeks, it's not uncommon for students to spend three semesters or more over multiple years just treading academic water, getting no closer to graduation day. Rather than providing an on ramp to courses they need for diplomas, developmental education often is an exit.

Consider:

- 60 percent of students entering two-year colleges and 25 percent of those entering open-admissions universities are placed in remediation.
- Only 30 percent of community college students pass the developmental math sequences in which they enroll.
- Fewer than 25 percent of community college students who are placed in remedial education ever receive a degree or certificate. Moreover, the longer a student spends in remedial education, the less likely he or she is to ever complete a degree.
- 75 percent of the nation's colleges and universities offer some remedial education courses, at a national cost of \$2.5 billion or more annually.

Some argue the fault lies with a K–12 system that produces too few graduates who are college ready, while others argue remediation in its current state is a backwater on most college campuses.

Solutions must exist on both sides of the K–12/higher education continuum.

Efforts to eliminate the need for remediation in college for recent high school graduates should accelerate through strengthened high school preparation. At the same time, higher education must transform remediation strategies for those who continue to arrive on campus underprepared. This work should take place with a clear understanding that the goal is not better remediation. Rather, the goal is college completion.

Transforming remediation matters because:

- Developmental education as offered on most campuses often causes students to slow their progress toward a degree, accumulate more debt, jeopardize financial aid, lose momentum, and drop out. One recent study on developmental education in Virginia found that among students identified by college placement tests as needing remediation, those who did not take the recommended remedial courses generally fared no worse — and sometimes fared better — in earning a degree than those who enrolled.
- Traditional developmental education suffers from two fatal flaws. First, it is disconnected from the credits students need to obtain credentials and degrees — even though data indicate that underprepared students have the best shot at success when they can move into college-level courses as soon as possible. Second, it is rarely tailored to individual students' needs.

Successful efforts to transform remediation appear to focus on key steps.

1. **Pre-test guidance.** Better guidance to students by providing test guides, practice tests and time to brush up.
2. **Select the right math** (algebra, statistics, literacy) sequence that aligns with a student’s program interest.
3. **Provide three options.**
 - a.) **Co-requisite model** — Students start in college math or English class with a paired developmental class.
 - b.) **Accelerated model** — Students take one semester of a developmental course back mapped from the college level math or English class. Require the college level course to be taken the very next semester after the remedial course is completed.
 - c.) **Embedded model** — Embed basic skills into a skill certificate that can lead directly to employment or further study.

WAYS TO TRANSFORM REMEDIATION

- **Start by clarifying what constitutes readiness for success in the first year of college.** Most states can’t answer basic questions about how placement policies relate to success rates — in part because states often allow dozens of different definitions of college readiness, all determined by different placement exams with varying cut scores. States should standardize placement policies and work to develop and implement better placement tools with greater diagnostic ability — all of which are essential for more targeted developmental education.

- **Divert students from traditional remedial programs into more customized tiered approaches.** A one-size-fits-all sequence of semester-long courses is a failed and obsolete model that needs to change. States, systems, and institutions need a more segmented approach to developmental education that meets the unique academic needs of students along the developmental education continuum.

Specifically:

1. **Place more students directly into courses that count toward degrees — and shift resources to support them there.** In the current system, many students score just below college-level on college placement tests and get placed in developmental education. The growing consensus is that these students can be successful in college-level work if they are provided some additional academic support (tutoring, computer labs, extended instructional time, etc.). Evidence suggests that their chances of success are greater going straight into college-level courses than being sent to remedial classes. Some four-year institutions are using this model today, although most are not describing it as developmental education.
2. **For students with greater academic needs, implement targeted programs that accelerate learning.** Many students who place two levels or more below college-level are not good candidates for the experience described above. The approach that makes the most sense for these students is a one semester accelerated model. The course is back mapped from the college math or English course. So the pre-skills necessary for success can be learned. The college level class is then taken the semester after completing the remedial class.

3. For students significantly behind, other pathways should be available.

For students who are two or three levels below college-level in multiple subjects, the odds of being successful in a traditional developmental education sequence are slim. Many of these students are right on the border between being eligible for adult basic education and developmental education. Many require instruction in English as a second language (ESL). These students are likely to benefit from programs that deliver or embed basic skills and ESL instruction, with an ultimate goal of earning a career certificate or other career-related credential.

In addition, states should accelerate their efforts to ensure all high school students graduate college and career ready.

■ **End the college admissions mystery by aligning requirements for entry-level college courses with requirements for high school diplomas.**

Academic requirements for a high school diploma should be the floor for entry into postsecondary education. K–12 and higher education policies should be aligned to articulate the same course-taking requirements.

■ **Administer college-ready anchor assessments in high school.** States should assess students in high school with college-ready anchor assessments that give students, teachers, and parents a clear understanding if a student is on track for college. Giving these assessments as early as grade 10 enables junior and senior year to be used to address academic deficiencies before college. Academic interventions should be developed in collaboration with local community colleges or universities to

ensure that when students complete the intervention they will be deemed college ready and therefore will be exempt from developmental education.

The Common Core State Standards and Race to the Top Comprehensive Assessment System Grant provide significant opportunities for states to leverage federal investment in college-ready assessments that can and should open the door for cross-sector and cross-state work on:

- alignment of curriculum to first-year courses;
- development of bridge courses;
- student-readiness programs and supports for the transition from K–12 to postsecondary; and
- alignment of exit standards in high school and placement policies in postsecondary.

STATES IN ACTION

States should tap the growing research base about what works to bring students up to speed quickly and prepare them for success in first-year courses. Depending on their readiness, students should either go directly into a degree program that includes support or enroll in an accelerated program to get them on track quickly.

While no state has yet developed a system that addresses all the components noted above, consider these emerging models. All have track records of boosting success more effectively than the remedial courses they replaced:

- In **Maryland**, Community College of Baltimore County’s Accelerated Learning Project (ALP) enrolls remedial English students in the regular credit-bearing English 101 course as well as a companion course that meets

immediately afterwards. The companion course provides targeted reinforcement of topics from the mainstream course in a small cohort group that enables intensive faculty and peer support. Early results show that ALP students passed English 101 with a grade of C or better at more than twice the rate of the control group — and did so in just one semester, as opposed to the two semesters required to complete a remedial course before moving on to the credit-bearing course.

- **Austin Peay State University** in rural Tennessee eliminated developmental math courses and instead places students in redesigned credit-bearing courses that include extra workshops and specialized help.
- The **California State University** system added a series of college-readiness questions to the state’s 11th grade exam. After students take the test, they are told whether they are on track for credit-bearing classes at colleges in the CSU system. Just as important, CSU has invested in professional development with high school teachers to help work with underprepared students and is developing 12th grade transitional classes to assist students.
- In **Indiana**, Core 40 graduation requirements were co-drafted by the State Board of Education and Indiana Commission for Higher Education in 1994 as a voluntary college and career ready pathway. Then, in 2005, on the

recommendation of business as well as K–12 and higher education leaders, Core 40 was enacted into law as the required high school curriculum and the minimum admissions requirement for the state’s four-year public universities.

- **Texas, Florida, Kentucky, and Virginia** are currently creating 12th grade transitional courses in math, reading, and writing. Each state’s courses are based on its college-readiness standards. These courses will be available statewide to students who are identified during their junior year as not college ready so they have the opportunity to prepare while still in high school. To smooth the path into college-level courses for these students, states also are developing end-of-course assessments that are tied to the college-readiness standards and first-year college courses. Students who score at a high enough level can bypass additional placement tests and move directly to college-credit coursework.
- The **Washington I-BEST** and the **Arkansas Career Pathways** programs deliver basic skills instruction with the goal of students’ earning a career certificate or other career-oriented credential. In Washington, students receive basic skills and ESL instruction in a course that also delivers career-specific instruction. In Arkansas, students attain skills that are aligned with specific career opportunities.

Complete College America is a national nonprofit organization working with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

Five national foundations are providing multiyear support to Complete College America: the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Lumina Foundation for Education.

Additional information and data sources are available at www.completecollege.org.