



Accountability & Continuous Improvement in Remedial Education

Getting Past Go Project

Education Commission of the States (ECS)

Matthew Smith, Associate Policy Analyst

January, 2011

ECS' "Getting Past Go" project seeks to leverage developmental education at postsecondary institutions as a critical component of state and system efforts to increase college attainment rates.

Remedial Education: A Pathway Toward College Attainment

Almost 60% of students entering the nation's community colleges require some form of remediation in math, reading or English.¹ Only about 15% of these students continue on to college-level work in one year and still fewer complete a postsecondary credential, leaving million of adults without the means of attaining a livable wage. To ensure student success and persistence on to college-level work, states must effectively use data and performance accountability to drive innovation in remedial and developmental education. National programs, such as [Complete College America \(CCA\)](#), [Developmental Education Initiative \(DEI\)](#) and the [Complete to Compete Project \(NGA\)](#) have championed the greater use of data for accountability purposes, namely for performance funding and continuous improvement strategies in developmental education. This brief contributes to the policy discussion by mapping the remedial and developmental education landscape and describing promising strategies for evaluating remedial policy and program effectiveness.

State of Remedial Education Accountability

State and national data on the high costs of remediation and low rate of student success have focused attention on the reform of remedial education policies. While some legislatures have addressed remediation challenges by pointing to failures of the K-12 system to prepare students, there is a growing sentiment among reformers that states would more feasibly reach attainment and workforce goals by viewing remediation as a second-chance opportunity for recent high school graduates and adults to receive college and career training. Legislatures and higher education systems concerned about remedial program cost and outcomes can implement accountability systems and continuous improvement strategies. By periodically evaluating programs, policies and institutional performance, states can leverage existing resources to produce more positive outcomes, more efficiently.

Getting Past Go (GPG) developed a [policy framework](#)² to help states create a comprehensive remedial education policy. The framework suggests how states may induce more desirable student and program outcomes by integrating the following policy levers: data and reporting; assessment and placement; instructional delivery and accountability; and continuous improvement. While these levers facilitate the evaluation of performance outcomes, continuous improvement is equally important. Focusing on continuous improvement ensures that states and systems think intentionally and strategically on how to *evaluate process, not just outcomes*, by examining programs and strategies that impact performance directly.

This framework has guided GPG's analysis of the accountability and continuous improvement policies for all 50 states and the District of Columbia in the [GPG policy database](#). This diverse set of policies governs how states and postsecondary systems hold institutions accountable for student success and how states and institutions develop continuous improvement strategies to evaluate and reform remedial programs. Our policy scan identified and analyzed accountability and continuous improvement policies in 38 states. The appendix contains a list of these state policies.

Using the framework, GPG placed the policies into four categories:

1. Performance reporting
2. Performance measures/benchmarking
3. Continuous improvement/strategic planning
4. Performance funding

Performance Reporting

Performance reporting is defined as any effort by states, postsecondary systems or institutions to publish data on remedial program participation, student success, program cost or student persistence to college-level work. States vary on which data they report. A scan of [performance reports](#)³ found that 33 states published data on remedial and developmental education. Fewer states incorporate these data into funding and accountability efforts.

Performance Benchmarking

Performance benchmarking involves the creation of indicators to measure and manage performance outcomes. States that use performance indicators for remedial education differ in the type and number of indicators used. Recently, states have trended toward using progress benchmarks correlated with

increased odds of student completion. In fact, states like Washington and West Virginia explicitly refer to their remedial performance benchmarks as part of a broader momentum point continuum. Indicators, such as remedial course completion, completion of first college-level course, second year persistence and degree completion are becoming prevalent measures. By monitoring indicators along the remedial and college continuums, states and institutions can identify and quickly pinpoint program deficiencies.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement policies are geared toward the regular and consistent evaluation of program effectiveness, the cost and productivity of remedial education, or the impact of policy on outcomes. Continuous improvement strengthens remedial education accountability by ensuring that policies and programs undergo periodic review and that institutions make efficient and steady progress on outcomes as intended in policy.

Performance Funding

Performance funding systems distribute resources to postsecondary institutions based on how effectively they serve remedial education students. The handful of states that use performance funding differ on the mechanisms used to evaluate performance and on the scope and magnitude of the funding operation. Also, these states vary in how they reward institutions for progress on remedial education benchmarks and what prominence they give to performance funding as a percent of the total state allocation.

Findings

A majority of states collect and track data on students taking developmental education courses, but few states have a formal accountability policy to connect data to the evaluation of programs and strategies.

GPG has found that 36 states collect and report remedial data. Only eight states track participation, success and cost data.⁴ A majority of states track student participation in remedial education, but rarely do these states track success in college-level courses or persistence rates after the first year of college. With more complete remedial education data, policymakers could estimate remediation needs and institute strategies to improve student success.

Most states have postsecondary accountability structures or mechanisms that could include developmental education performance indicators.

Strategic plans, performance reporting, and state or system performance benchmarks are essential elements of accountability and planning efforts. Still, few states incorporate remedial data and strategies into an existing accountability system. Including data on progress outcomes, such as completion of a remediation sequence, persistence to college-level work and fall-to-fall retention, allows policymakers, educators and the public to measure college performance. Recently, [CCA](#) and [NGA](#) have published progress and outcome metrics that states may use to measure student success and program productivity.

Trends show more legislatures and postsecondary systems are considering performance funding models as a means of incentivizing improvements in student and program outcomes.

Those states that have an accountability framework with a remedial and developmental education component vary in the size and scope of their strategies. For instance, California, Louisiana and South Carolina have remedial education policies for evaluating program effectiveness but no mechanism to reward institutions for improved performance. Other states (e.g., Indiana, Tennessee, Ohio and Washington) have shown interest in targeted performance funding for higher education and remedial education, in particular. The need to increase attainment rates has led many states to investigate performance funding as a way of addressing readiness and completion shortfalls most directly.

Cases: How States Hold Remedial Education Programs Accountable

The case studies below reflect four states' efforts to improve college readiness and completion by tracking developmental education outcomes. While each state has arrived at its performance accountability model through divergent processes, the four cases share one important similarity: the balanced use of mandates and incentives to create a comprehensive accountability plan, of which remedial and developmental education is a major part.

Kentucky – Improving College Readiness Rates and Completion Odds through Legislative Action

The Kentucky legislature addressed the persistent problem of low college readiness for recent high school graduates by reforming the P-20 education system. Senate Bill 1 (2009) contains provisions that require school districts and postsecondary institutions to develop collaborative readiness strategies. Two factors directly impacted the bill's passage: recognition that more than one-half of high school graduates required remediation⁵ and recent work in adopting national benchmarks through early leadership in the [Common Core Standards Initiative](#).

To attain the goal of improved readiness, the legislature established a two-prong approach. The first prong leverages state resources to increase engagement between school districts and postsecondary institutions on college-ready standards, assessments and interventions. The second prong directs postsecondary institutions to monitor student success and persistence rates for students with developmental education needs. While collecting retention and completion data does not directly evaluate the effectiveness of pre-college interventions, four benchmarks proposed by Senate Bill 1 evaluate outcomes influenced by all P-20 efforts. The benchmarks measure three momentum points for underprepared students: developmental education course completion, progression into college coursework and completion of a degree or certificate. Another institutional benchmark involves access to and participation in alternative delivery programs, such as bridge programs and learning communities. Overall, institutions must increase participation and persistence in remedial and developmental education programs by 2% and degree attainment by 3% annually. Tracking data on fall-to-fall retention and degree completion rates signals the state's emphasis on passing more students through the remedial pipeline into college-level coursework.

In response to Senate Bill 1, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE), and Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), partnered to create the Unified College and Career Readiness Strategic Plan. The plan outlines four strategies and creates benchmarks and outcome measures for them. The K-12 strategies involve pre-college interventions and programming that would reduce the need for college remediation. The postsecondary strategy

encourages institutions to adopt alternative delivery models, which would accelerate remedial instruction. The plan also requires institutions to measure developmental student success in remediation, through college-level courses and onto graduation. The strategic plan has improved the odds of Kentucky attaining its completion and workforce goals by ensuring that all education partners are held accountable for performance.

Postsecondary and K-12 leaders convened to develop a focused and systematic plan to implement the benchmarks and goals set by the legislature. Senate Bill 1 has outlined two of the four components of a comprehensive remedial education accountability strategy: data collection and performance benchmarks. As institutions incorporate the programs and strategies embedded in legislation, they may create the means to evaluate their programs. All the while, the legislature could incentivize continuous improvement by funding for performance or through innovation grants.

Ohio – Rewarding Community Colleges by Tracking Student Success across Momentum Points

Ohio, through the leadership of former Governor Ted Strickland and Chancellor Eric Fingerhut, articulated a need to more effectively leverage state investments in postsecondary education to improve the economic and workforce prospects of the state and its citizens. The Ohio Board of Regents responded by creating separate funding formulae for research universities, regional universities and community colleges. The formulae act as accountability mechanisms by rewarding institutions for making measurable improvements along specific benchmarks associated with college completion. The regents reward institutions for the number of students that achieve “success points.” These success points are progress metrics institutions will use to measure performance outcomes.

Beginning in fiscal year 2011, the regents will begin funding community colleges through a three-component formula: enrollment, student success and institutional-specific goal attainment. Seven student success codes assign points to colleges for each student who attains the success measure. Three of seven success points relate to developmental education: completion of first remedial course; completion of developmental math course and enrollment in college-level math course in same year; and completion of any developmental English course and enrollment in college-level English class in same year. The Regents system will phase out developmental education at four-year institutions, transferring the responsibility to community colleges. The new community college funding formula reflects the greater prominence placed on remedial and developmental education and the comprehensive focus on college readiness and completion.

The performance funding mechanism is noteworthy because it benchmarks institutions’ annual outcomes over a three-year period. This practice allows the Regents to assess the condition of developmental education at each community college, while giving the institutions feedback on how to improve performance. As such, the performance funding model also acts as a continuous improvement instrument, through which institutions can modify or enhance assessment, placement and instructional policies to reach their own college readiness goals.

The national Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has been instrumental in laying the foundation for remedial education innovations in Ohio. While the Regents focus on success-point funding and performance management, DEI has worked with five community colleges to redesign the way developmental education is delivered. By supporting policies and practices that reinforce positive student outcomes, DEI has complemented the work of the Board of Regents. The state has collected data, created benchmarks and piloted a performance funding

mechanism to reward institutions for improvement. The strategies piloted at DEI campuses may provide valuable insight into how other community colleges may reform developmental education to meet the new performance benchmarks. An adherence to the Ohio Board of Regents Master Plan by the chancellor and regents should allow for the eventual alignment of performance benchmarks with developmental education strategies, allowing for the presence of the fourth accountability component: continuous improvement.

Tennessee – Linking Continuous Improvement with State Higher Education Goals

While the General Assembly was working on landmark college completion legislation, the concern about low college and career readiness induced the Tennessee Board of Regents to conduct a redesign of their developmental education policies. Both policy initiatives were created separately but later converged around goals for improving college readiness and increasing college attainment rates. The passage of the 2010 Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA) fundamentally changed transfer, admissions and funding policies. As a result of the Board's efforts, they were well positioned to respond to legislative action that created greater accountability for the success of developmental education students. What is truly innovative about the legislation is its outcomes-based funding formula. Like Ohio, the funding formula varies by sector, with the community college measures radically different from those at the university level.

The Tennessee Developmental Education Redesign Initiative, which was funded through a [Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education](#) (FIPSE) grant and co-directed by Education Commission of the States, preceded the passage of CCTA. The initiative set in motion a process for redesigning developmental education courses at Tennessee Board of Regents institutions. Critical to the success of the initiative was the development and implementation of a new system-level policy on developmental education called the [A-100 guideline](#).

The new A-100 guideline and performance benchmarks outlined in the policy will be instrumental in the creation of performance measures for developmental education in the CCTA. Like the Act, the guideline outlines specific goals on college readiness and completion but gives institutions the flexibility to choose how to implement the goals. Each college may pursue its own strategies, as long as it produces performance outcomes in line with benchmark measures.

Institutions will track four performance measures: completion of developmental education, enrollment and success in college-level courses in remediated subjects, year-over-year retention and graduation rates. Institutions may produce additional performance measures to complement those set by the system. With institutions submitting strategic plans for developmental education and annual data reports marking their progress on system and institutional-specific benchmarks, the Board of Regents has ensured that accountability is an iterative process marked by continuous review of program effectiveness.

The concurrent development of legislation and system-level policy did have the benefit of aligning system strategies with legislative goals and a performance funding mechanism. The Board of Regents and Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) will assess developmental education on an annual basis, at various levels (i.e., state, system, institutional) and through varied means (e.g., performance funding, effectiveness audits, THEC reports).

Washington – Piloting Performance Funding to Ensure a Better-Skilled Workforce

The State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) adopted the Student Achievement Initiative in 2007 to increase educational attainment at its institutions. The initiative was a result of research on Washington workforce needs and on the piloting of the [Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training](#) (I-BEST) model. The research⁶ found that adults with one year of college or technical education instruction and a credential had higher earnings than similar students without a credential. Attaining the credential is what researchers called a “tipping point” for low-skill adult workers. Concurrent with the research, the board funded the I-BEST pilot. The goal of the pilot was to implement strategies that increased the number of remedial and developmental education students progressing into college-level work. The pilot and research culminated in the creation of the Student Achievement Initiative, which couches strategies and funding mechanisms in an accountability framework.

The *Tipping Point* report was the empirical foundation for the State Board’s decision to develop six progress measures, one of which measures course completion in developmental math and English courses. The progress measures and their accompanying funding mechanism are based on momentum points. The system rewards institutions for the number of students who accomplish each momentum checkpoint. The system views the number of developmental courses passed as an intermediate outcome toward community and technical college students pursuing a terminal outcome, such as a postsecondary credential, transfer or employment. As currently constructed, the Student Achievement Initiative is a performance-based supplement to state appropriations. For the current biennium, the state legislature has appropriated \$9 million toward performance funding.

The state has enlisted the help of the [Community College Research Center](#) (CCRC) to evaluate the impact of performance funding on colleges reaching strategic goals. SBCTC paid for the piloting of the Student Achievement Initiative and then solicited implementation funds from the state legislature and charitable organizations, such as The Bill and Melinda Gates and Ford Foundations.

Presenting performance data and research on credit accumulation and credentialing, as well as piloting the funding formula for two years, ensured legislative support. The data collected in the piloting stage showed the hypothetical impact of performance funding. The community and technical colleges demonstrated results and enlisted the legislature as a funding partner for their strategy. Leveraging money from several sources, the State Board produced a performance funding supplement to general funding that has the capacity to encourage innovative instructional approaches and strategies. This strength also presents a challenge of sorts: with performance funding not embedded in institutional appropriations, the program is subject to the biennial funding cycle in a way that regular instructional funds are not.

Wrap-up of Case Studies

The primary take away from the case studies is that states can leverage existing resources and align strategies with goals and measures to create truly cohesive and aligned accountability policies. The reviewed state initiatives share a similar goal: improving college readiness and increasing degree completion rates. Three of the four states showed a trend toward performance funding that includes remedial education benchmarks. The degree to which remedial education indicators are incorporated into the accountability systems shows the growing attention paid to developmental education, both as a strategy to ensure improved outcomes and as an opportunity to improve the destinies of states and their citizens.

Discussion

Components of an Accountability & Continuous Improvement System

The four components of a comprehensive accountability system:

- Data collection and reporting structure
- Performance benchmarks to contextualize the data
- Funding mechanisms that reward institutions for progress on goal-oriented outcomes
- Continuous improvements strategies that utilize data, benchmarks and funding incentives to improve student performance and program delivery.

Each of the states studied utilizes two or more of these accountability tools. Even with the growing cohesiveness of the policies, a lot is still left to be done. The alignment between state goals and the evaluation of strategies that accomplish these goals is still lacking. However, judgment of the state accountability systems is preliminary, as all of these policies are in the early stages of program implementation. Right now, though, we can say that accountability systems incorporating each of the four components listed above can improve the odds of states reaching college and workforce goals.

Aligning Goals, Strategies and Outcomes

States typically adopt accountability policies to address emerging problems by setting benchmarks for achievement and then providing rewards or penalties based on reaching those benchmarks. States can create more dynamic accountability systems also by evaluating the strategies to determine whether they achieve the goals highlighted in legislative or system-level policy.

In the case study states, the level of alignment between policy goals and specific strategies varied greatly. In Tennessee, the concurrent development of policies and strategies was fortuitous, allowing for complete alignment between goals, strategies and outcomes. In Kentucky, on the other hand, strategies are still being developed to achieve the performance goals and no mechanism is in place to evaluate the impact of the strategies.

Regardless of how far along states are in developing remedial education accountability, no accountability system should lack continuous improvement mechanisms that evaluate which strategies most effectively result in attainment of state benchmarks. States like Ohio and Tennessee use performance funding as a continuous improvement instrument. They encourage campuses to examine their strategies closely to improve the odds of hitting benchmark targets that will trigger performance funds.

With the focus on momentum points, these states have opened the “black box” to see how inputs result in expected outcomes. Taking it one step further, states can set forth continuous improvement processes that examine the success of policies and strategies in correcting intermediate problems, curbing negative results and addressing unintended consequences that undermine performance.

Conclusions and Considerations

Final observations on the present and future state of remedial and developmental education accountability:

1. The national focus on college readiness and completion reflects a policy imperative to increase persistence and completion rates for those students requiring remediation.
2. Incorporating developmental education programs into state postsecondary accountability systems recognizes developmental education as an important component of college completion efforts. Further, this approach galvanizes efforts to develop innovative strategies for increasing the success of remedial education students.
3. States will realize the maximum benefit from remedial education accountability by leveraging existing resources and mechanisms to induce reform, rather than creating separate accountability and funding mechanisms that are not connected with state goals or strategic plans.
4. Evaluating the impact of specific developmental education strategies should be incorporated into accountability systems to ensure continuous improvement and identify best practices that can be brought to scale.
5. Performance funding that rewards institutions not only for degree completion, but also for progress metrics, such as remedial education success, is an emerging trend that encourages innovation.

Appendix: Accountability and Continuous Improvement Policies for Remedial and Developmental Education

State	Performance Funding	Performance Measures & Benchmarking	Continuous Improvement	Performance Reporting
Alabama				X
Arkansas				X
California			X	X
Colorado		X		X
Connecticut				X
Florida		X		X
Georgia				X
Hawaii				X
Illinois				X
Indiana	X	X	X	X
Iowa				X
Kansas				X
Kentucky		X		X
Louisiana			X	
Maine				X
Maryland				X
Massachusetts				X
Michigan				X
Minnesota		X		X
Missouri				X
Montana				X
Nebraska				X
Nevada				X
New Jersey				X
New Mexico				X
North Carolina	X	X	X	X
Ohio	X	X	X	X
Oklahoma		X	X	X
Oregon				X
Rhode Island				X
South Carolina			X	
South Dakota				X
Tennessee	X	X	X	X
Texas		X	X	X
Utah				X

Washington	X	X		X
West Virginia		X		X
Wisconsin				X
38 STATES	5	12	9	36

¹ Thomas Bailey, Dong Wook Jeong and Sung-Woo Cho, *Referral, Enrollment, and Completion in Developmental Education Sequences in Community Colleges (CCRC Working Paper No. 15)* (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, December 2008, revised November 2009), 8, <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=659>, (accessed December 15, 2010).

² Bruce Vandal, *Rebuilding the Remedial Education Bridge to College Success* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, May 2010), 12-13, <http://www.gettingpastgo.org/docs/GPGpaper.pdf>, (accessed December 15, 2010).

³ Mary Fulton, *State Reporting on Developmental Education: Analysis of Findings* (Denver: Education Commission of the States), 5-6, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/85/27/8527.pdf>, (accessed December 7, 2010).

⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁵ *Developmental Education Needs in the 2006 Entering Cohort* (Frankfort: Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education), n.p., http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/B42243CB-D19A-4EC4-AD34-ECF2900D51B1/0/Dev_needs_2006_20090605.pdf, (accessed December 20, 2010).

⁶ David Prince & David Jenkins, *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice* (Olympia: State Board of Community and Technical Colleges), 1-26, http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/education/ford_bridges/bldg_pathways_to_success_for_low-skilled_adult_stdts.pdf, (accessed December 15, 2010).