

# A Cure for Remedial Reporting Chaos:

## Why The U.S. Needs a Standard Method for Measuring Preparedness for the First Year of College



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*This report was written by Matt Gianneschi, ECS vice president of policy and programs, and director of the Postsecondary and Workforce Development Institute and Mary Fulton, ECS policy analyst. Anne Button, Effect Communications, and Sarah Emery, Betsy Harper and Matthew Weyer, ECS interns, also contributed to the report.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to review state-level practices that identify, track and regularly report the numbers of students identified for remedial instruction. In doing so, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) hopes to begin a national dialogue regarding if and how states could share information about students' referral to and success in remedial and college-level courses.

In fall 2013, ECS collected information on state-level remedial education reporting and standards. ECS established the Remedial Reporting Steering Committee, comprised of elected officials, state education policy officers and education experts. The members of this steering committee include Colorado Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia, Idaho State Sen. John Goedde and Massachusetts Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester, who served as chairs. A complete list of members is contained in the appendices.

The findings in this report reveal that there is little consistency across the states regarding how and when remediation is measured and reported. A few states — Colorado, Nevada and Texas — prepare robust annual reports with information concerning placement, student characteristics and outcomes, and costs. Others, including Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Vermont, do not appear to report remedial data. Even among states that regularly report on remediation, the methods used to count and monitor students vary widely. As a result, it is not possible to accurately measure the incidence of remediation in many states or to conduct cross-state analyses of efforts intended to improve remedial outcomes.

In response to these conditions, the Remedial Reporting Steering Committee developed two major recommendations to remedy the inconsistency in reporting on and measuring state remedial rates. The recommendations are as follows:

1. **States should work together to develop and implement standard methods** for measuring and reporting placement into and progression through remedial instruction.
2. In developing these new methods, **states should create a dynamic, comprehensive measurement methodology** focused on progress and success rather than state-level accountability or comparative rankings.

A smaller technical advisory subcommittee was convened to design a model framework for measuring and reporting remedial data. The elements of the model are presented in a companion document, *A Common Framework for Remedial Reporting*. The technical subcommittee recommended that the framework:

- ✦ Avoid the blunt "ranking" of states by focusing on student progress and outcomes.
- ✦ Enable stakeholders to use the information to evaluate the effectiveness of state-level remedial reform initiatives.
- ✦ Accommodate for the capacity and sophistication of states' data systems and be user-friendly.
- ✦ Incorporate multiple college readiness indicators, including the various national assessments used by states and students' prior academic performance.

With these elements, subcommittee members have created a framework that meets states where they are now — rather than requiring they adopt a certain test or bolster their data systems before participating.

*At ECS, we believe states can improve their education systems by learning from each other. We hope this report assists in those continuing efforts.*

# INTRODUCTION

College and career readiness is a universal priority across the states. At least 47 states and the District of Columbia have or are in the process of implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards in English language arts and mathematics, as part of the Common Core State Standards initiative or other state-specific initiatives. Further, more than two-thirds of states have adopted formal statewide postsecondary attainment goals. Despite these important efforts to prepare and motivate greater numbers of students to pursue and complete a postsecondary credential, only 30 states consistently track and report the incidence of remediation in college.

Federal statistics show 19 percent to 26 percent of all college freshmen are identified as needing remedial courses. That figure usually is lower on four-year campuses and rises as high as 60 percent for some two-year schools. While these data are startling, they do not capture the full extent or nuances of remedial needs nor do they offer accurate comparisons across — or often within — states.

States have already sought nationally consistent ways of measuring students' performance in high school and their readiness for college upon graduation, as illustrated by recent precedents:

- ✦ In 2005, states voluntarily agreed on a universal way to calculate the **high school graduation rate**, which had previously varied considerably from state to state. The agreement, through the National Governors Association (NGA), led to efforts to improve data collection, reporting, analysis and sharing of best practices to improve high school graduation rates.<sup>1</sup>
- ✦ Since 2010, 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the **K-12 Common Core State Standards**, which set a uniform definition for the knowledge and skills that students need to succeed in college and in the workforce.<sup>2</sup> In addition, other states such as Texas and Virginia have developed their own college- and career-ready standards apart from the Common Core Standards.

With the full implementation of the Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments in 2015, there will be consistent ways to measure college readiness across most states. ACT, Inc., and the College Board, which administers the SAT, have used their entrance exams to identify college readiness benchmarks, and the National Assessment Governing Board recently issued a report on using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as a college readiness indicator.<sup>3</sup> These efforts, however, were independent and largely focused on the likelihood of students' success in college-level courses. As such, there is no corresponding uniform definition of what it means for students to be college-ready at the postsecondary level or how the Common Core standards will affect the number and types of students taking remedial coursework in college. This requires states to determine if and how high school-level determinations of college and career readiness should be honored at the postsecondary level.

Regardless of the solution, an essential component of evaluating students' readiness for and progress through postsecondary education is reliable, comprehensive data. This is particularly important since the pressures to improve on-time college completion rates are complicated by students' inconsistent enrollment patterns and high rates of transfers across institutions. State policymakers will need to ascertain whether to collect data on college remediation that is comparable and consistent across states. To inform the discussion, this report provides a preliminary analysis of how states collect, calculate and report remedial education data.

## Preliminary Findings on Remedial Education Reporting and Rate Calculation

ECS collected information on state-level remedial education reporting requirements and standards in an effort to analyze and provide recommendations for how states should establish a common remedial reporting model. The analysis was developed around three basic questions for each state:

- 1. Does the state annually and consistently report rates of remedial education?**  
Apart from data independently collected by colleges, high schools or university systems, is there a state-issued requirement or commitment to report remedial rates?
- 2. If so, what remedial data are being reported?**  
Data collection standards vary widely from state to state. This research question was designed to address issues such as: remedial placement by subject; reporting graduates' remedial needs to high schools; tracking student performance in and beyond remedial classes.
- 3. Which indicators do states use to identify students in need of remediation?**  
Do states determine remedial rates through a test score or enrollment in a remedial class, or both?

ECS identified 39 states with remedial reports issued over the past five years, 2009-2014, for all institutions/postsecondary systems that offer remediation. Based on an analysis of those reports, the preliminary findings indicate the following (see Appendix A for more details):

- ★ 32 states reported statewide remedial education information, such as the number of students assessed as needing remediation in mathematics and in English, on an annual basis for all institutions/postsecondary systems that offer remediation.
- ★ 18 states provided information back to high schools on their graduates' need for remediation in college. For example, some states report how many of high school graduates are placed in remedial mathematics classes.
- ★ 34 states reported placement into remedial mathematics.
- ★ 33 states reported placement into remedial English.
- ★ 12 states provided information on remedial placement based on gender.
- ★ 9 states reported the age of remedial students.
- ★ 17 states provided information on remedial placement based on race/ethnicity.
- ★ 12 states reported student success in remedial courses.
- ★ 17 states tracked remedial students' retention, persistence, success in college-level courses and/or graduation.
- ★ 7 states reported the cost of remedial education.

Of the **32 states** that issued remedial reports **on an annual basis** for all institutions/postsecondary systems that offer remediation, the preliminary findings indicate the following (see Appendix B for more details):

- ★ 15 states provided information back to high schools on their graduates' need for remediation in college.
- ★ 27 states reported placement into remedial mathematics.
- ★ 26 states reported placement into remedial English.
- ★ 8 states provided information on remedial placement based on gender.
- ★ 14 states provided information on remedial placement based on race/ethnicity.
- ★ 4 states reported the age of remedial students.
- ★ 7 states reported student success in remedial courses.
- ★ 13 states tracked remedial students' retention, persistence, success in college-level courses and/or graduation.
- ★ 3 states reported the cost of remedial education.

ECS placed a special emphasis on states that annually report remedial information to demonstrate this practice is doable and beneficial. States that report remedial data on an annual — or at least a regular — basis are in a better position to understand the full extent of remedial needs, as well as trends over time. Further, the more comprehensive reports allow state and education leaders to make well-informed decisions to reduce the need for remediation, address students' specific deficiencies and to track students' progress. Colorado, Nevada and Texas are examples of model states that publish annual reports that include data on high school graduates' remedial needs; the percentage and number of students identified for remediation; subject matter data; student characteristics; and remedial student success. Florida and West Virginia also have fairly comprehensive and informative annual reports.

## How States Identify Students in Need of Remediation

In the course of its analysis of state-level remedial reporting standards, ECS identified three predominant methods for identifying students in need of remediation.

The most common method used by states to determine remedial needs is reporting students with assessment results below certain placement cut scores, typically on national exams such as SAT, ACT, Compass and Accuplacer. The second most common method is reporting students who actually enroll in remedial courses regardless of their reported test scores. Both methods have limitations. For example, the assessment method only reports point-in-time abilities on a particular test, but not ultimate registration in remedial courses. The course enrollment method captures the number of students who actually register for remedial courses, but likely underreports the incidence of remedial needs, as underprepared students may delay entry into remedial courses or depart college before attempting a remedial course.

The third method is a hybrid, which includes both students identified through assessment results and students identified through enrollment in remedial courses. With the advent of more robust data systems and improved capacities to integrate data across institutions and state departments, a few states, including Colorado and Connecticut, have begun to adopt this approach. Students are not double-counted — they are flagged as remedial if their test scores fall below a particular cut score if they enroll in a remedial course. This method improves reporting accuracy, as it more precisely captures the magnitude of overall remedial needs in colleges or systems. It ensures that at any given juncture a state can observe both students assessed at remedial levels — latent developmental needs — and those enrolled in remedial courses — active developmental enrollment. Importantly, integrating these two methods will likely increase the reported need for remediation, as it captures students previously missing under the cut score and course enrollment methods.

## Questions for States to Consider Regarding Remedial Rates

Participants at the Remedial Reporting Steering Committee meeting raised several issues to consider in determining whether consistent standards of practice should be used by states when reporting the incidence of remediation:

- ✦ *Is there a need to differentiate the remedial rates of recent high school graduates from those of older, nontraditional students?*
- ✦ *Should states look at a more refined breakdown of remediation or a finer-tuned definition of it? For example, would it be more appropriate to track the differences in levels of remediation required, from a brief refresher in one subject to multiple courses across several disciplines? What about progress through entry-level — or gateway — college courses?*
- ✦ *Should states focus more on statewide aggregated or institutional rates of remediation? Is it more important to monitor overall remedial needs and trends or view them by institution and subject?*
- ✦ *Rather than assessing a binary “remedial or not” classification, should states develop a metric based on the likelihood of success in entry-level gateway classes? Benchmarks for this metric could include college-entrance or placement exam results, or high school GPA, etc.*
- ✦ *Should states provide better indicators to high school students about whether they're likely to require remediation in college?*
- ✦ *Should states track persistence in college and graduation rates after successful completion of remediation?*

## Considerations for Adopting a Consistent Measure for Remedial Rates

The steering committee also raised a number of issues to consider regarding the actual process of adopting consistent standards for measuring remediation rates:

- ✦ Whether the committee should recommend that states voluntarily sign a compact, similar to the NGA initiative on a consistent definition of high school graduation rates.
- ✦ If the committee were to recommend a consistent measure, a number of technical specifications need to be identified. A technical advisory committee would need to clarify the precise research questions to be asked.
- ✦ Whether there is the political will to advocate for a consistent remedial reporting standard.

The traditional, semester-based delivery approach to remediation is not effective for most underprepared students. One purpose of any consistent standard for measuring remediation would be to gain a better understanding of the instructional approaches and other practices that are successful. Since the goal of remediation is to spur student success, the consistent calculation of remedial rates could be viewed as a tool to get states to the ultimate goal of graduating more students. The point of a standard definition of remedial rate calculation would not be to compare states, but rather to have metrics that show what's working so states can share best practices for improving remediation efforts.

## Next Steps for States

ECS continues to consult with various state policy officials and data experts to develop technical guidance and potential new models for state-level remedial education reporting. In spring 2014, ECS convened a technical advisory committee to propose initial recommendations for a common remedial reporting method that conforms to the recommendations of the Remedial Rate Reporting Steering Committee. These recommendations are summarized in a companion report, *A Common Framework for Remedial Reporting: Response to Remedial Reporting Task Force Recommendations*.

## About the Data

ECS reviewed state websites and conducted follow-up correspondence with several state officials to identify reports that included remedial education data and were published between 2009 and 2014. Every attempt was made to locate reports and accurately summarize the information. ECS considered reports that included statewide data for all institutions that offer remediation, even if published by separate postsecondary systems, and issued on an annual, biennial, periodic and one-time basis. If states issued more than one report, then all the data points were indicated in Appendix A.

New Jersey issues annual remedial information for individual institutions (referenced in Appendix D), but the data are not aggregated to a statewide level. This report is included in Appendix D. South Carolina provides annual information on the number of remedial course credits taught at their two-year technical campuses, however, ECS' did not include this data point in its analysis.

ECS did not include data for reports published by only one of the postsecondary systems that offer remediation. The Oregon University System issues annual reports, but ECS did not locate a report for the decentralized community colleges. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission issues an annual report; the Tennessee Board of Regents collects and makes remedial data available upon request and for specific purposes. These reports are noted at the bottom of Appendix A and included in the resource list in Appendix D.

Reports that included remedial data were not identified for seven states: Delaware, Iowa, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. ECS recognizes that some institutions in these states might collect remedial data for internal purposes, but do not formally publish the information. Further, some states' decentralized postsecondary governance structure could make it less likely that statewide remedial data are collected and published.

## Endnotes

- 1 National Governors Association, *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date*, December 2010, <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1012GRADCOUNTSPROGRESS.PDF>.
- 2 Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/>.
- 3 ACT, Inc. *College Readiness Standards* (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, Inc., 2014), <http://www.act.org/standard/>; *The SAT® College and Career Readiness Benchmark User Guidelines* (Washington, DC: College Board, 2011), [http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/sat/12b\\_6661\\_SAT\\_Benchmarks\\_PR\\_120914.pdf](http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/sat/12b_6661_SAT_Benchmarks_PR_120914.pdf); *Towards The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as an Indicator of Academic Preparedness for College and Job Training* (Washington D.C.: National Assessment Governing Board, May 2014), <http://www.nagb.org/content/nagb/assets/documents/what-we-do/preparedness-research/NAGB-indicator-of-preparedness-report.pdf>.

# APPENDIX A | REMEDIAL REPORTING: STATE SUMMARY CHART

				REMEDIAL INCIDENCE		SUBJECT REPORTED		STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS REPORTED			STUDENT SUCCESS		
	Report Annually (Statewide Data)	Biennial, Periodic or One-time Report	Individual High School Reports	Percent	Number	Math	English	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Remedial Course Completion	Retention, Persistence, College-level Course Completion or Graduation	
ALABAMA	+		+	+	+	+	+						
ALASKA		+		+		+	+						+
ARIZONA		+		+	+	+	+				+		
ARKANSAS	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+
CALIFORNIA (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++			++		++	++	++	++	++	++	++	
CALIFORNIA (CA STATE UNIV.)	++		++	++	++	++	++	++	++			++	
COLORADO	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+
CONNECTICUT		+			+	+	+	+	+				
DELAWARE													
FLORIDA	+			+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	
GEORGIA (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++				++	++	++						
GEORGIA (UNIV. SYSTEM OF GA)	++				++	++	++				++		
HAWAII	+		+	+	+	+	+						
IDAHO	+	+	+	+		+	+			+	+	+	
ILLINOIS	+			+	+								
INDIANA	+		+	+	+	+	+		+				
IOWA													
KANSAS	+			+		+	+			+			
KENTUCKY	+		+	+	+	+	+		+				
LOUISIANA		+		+		+	+				+	+	+
MAINE	+		+	+	+	+	+					+	
MARYLAND	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+				+
MASSACHUSETTS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+						
MICHIGAN	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+			+
MINNESOTA	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+			+	
MISSISSIPPI	+			+	+	+	+					+	
MISSOURI	+		+	+		+	+	+	+				
MONTANA	+			+	+	+	+				+	+	
NEBRASKA													
NEVADA	+		+	+	+	+	+		+		+	+	+
NEW HAMPSHIRE													
NEW JERSEY													
NEW MEXICO	+			+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	
NEW YORK		+			+							+	
NORTH CAROLINA (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++											++	
NORTH CAROLINA (UNIV. OF NC)	++					++	++					++	++

APPENDIX A (CONT.)				REMEDIAL INCIDENCE		SUBJECT REPORTED		STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS REPORTED			STUDENT SUCCESS		
	Report Annually (Statewide Data)	Biennial, Periodic or One-time Report	Individual High School Reports	Percent	Number	Math	English	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Remedial Course Completion	Retention, Persistence, College-level Course Completion or Graduation	Costs
NORTH DAKOTA	+				+								
OHIO	+	+	+	+	+	+	+			+			
OKLAHOMA	+		+	+	+	+	+						
OREGON													
PENNSYLVANIA													
RHODE ISLAND													
SOUTH CAROLINA													
SOUTH DAKOTA	+		+	+	+	+	+						
TENNESSEE													
TEXAS	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	
UTAH													
VERMONT													
VIRGINIA	+			+	+	+	+	+	+			+	
WASHINGTON (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++			++	++	++	++		++	++			
WASHINGTON (FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS)	++				++	++	++	++	++	++		++	
WEST VIRGINIA	+			+		+	+				+	+	
WISCONSIN		+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		
WYOMING	+			+	+	+	+				+	+	
<b>U.S. TOTALS</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>

++ State postsecondary systems that offer remediation produce separate reports; the state was included in counts if both reports contain the particular data element

- California:* Community college and California State University systems issue separate annual reports; University of California does not offer remedial education.
- Georgia:* University System of Georgia publishes annual reports; Technical College System of Georgia's remedial data were included in publicly available reports until 2012.
- Idaho:* Annual reports contain general information, but less frequent reports included additional information; Idaho is reviewing their data collection process.
- Kentucky:* Most recent annual report issued in 2010, but other reports included additional data; Kentucky is developing an extensive remedial data reporting process.
- Maryland:* In addition to the annual report, the state plans to revise a previously, more comprehensive report for release in 2015.
- Minnesota:* Previous biennial report now will be published annually; 2014 edition only includes reading, but future reports will add writing and other information.
- New Jersey:* Issues an annual report for individual institutions, but no statewide data are included.
- New Mexico:* Annual report shows math or reading, but can't distinguish between subjects; previous annual and a one-time report included additional data.
- New York:* Department of Education issued a report in 2011; City University of New York (CUNY) publishes remedial reports; no reports were identified for State University of New York (SUNY).
- North Carolina:* University of North Carolina issues annual report; community college system tracks data for remedial students who enroll in college-level math and English courses.
- Oregon:* Oregon University System issues annual report; no reports were identified for the decentralized community colleges.
- Tennessee:* Tennessee Higher Education Commission produces an annual report; Tennessee Board of Regents collects and makes available remedial data, but does not publicly publish the data.
- Wyoming:* Only community colleges offer remedial education, but University of Wyoming contracts with two-year campuses for these services.

# APPENDIX B | REMEDIAL REPORTING: STATES WITH ANNUAL REPORTS

			REMEDIAL INCIDENCE		SUBJECT REPORTED		STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS REPORTED			STUDENT SUCCESS		Costs
	Report Annually (Statewide Data)	Individual High School Reports	Percent	Number	Math	English	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Remedial Course Completion	Retention, Persistence, College-level Course Completion or Graduation	
ALABAMA	+	+	+	+	+	+						
ARKANSAS	+	+			+	+	+	+	+	+		+
CALIFORNIA (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++		++		++	++	++	++	++	++	++	
CALIFORNIA (CA STATE UNIV.)	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++			++	
COLORADO	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+
FLORIDA	+		+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	
GEORGIA (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++			++	++	++						
GEORGIA (UNIV. SYSTEM OF GA)	++			++	++	++				++		
HAWAII	+	+	+	+	+	+						
IDAHO	+		+		+	+						
ILLINOIS	+		+	+								
INDIANA	+	+	+	+	+	+		+				
KANSAS	+		+		+	+			+			
KENTUCKY	+	+	+	+	+	+		+				
MAINE	+	+	+	+	+	+					+	
MARYLAND	+		+	+								
MASSACHUSETTS	+	+	+	+	+	+						
MICHIGAN	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+				
MINNESOTA	+	+	+	+	+		+	+			+	
MISSISSIPPI	+		+	+	+	+					+	
MISSOURI	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+				
MONTANA	+		+	+	+	+				+	+	
NEVADA	+	+	+	+	+	+		+		+	+	+
NEW MEXICO	+		+	+				+				
NORTH CAROLINA (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++										++	
NORTH CAROLINA (UNIV. OF NC)	++		++	++	++	++					++	++
NORTH DAKOTA	+			+								
OHIO	+	+	+	+	+	+						
OKLAHOMA	+		+	+	+	+						
SOUTH DAKOTA	+	+	+	+	+	+						
TEXAS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	
VIRGINIA	+		+	+	+	+	+	+			+	
WASHINGTON (COMMUNITY COLLEGES)	++		++	++	++	++		++	++			
WASHINGTON (FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS)	++			++	++	++	++	++	++		++	
WEST VIRGINIA	+		+		+	+					+	
WYOMING	+		+	+	+	+				+	+	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>

++ State postsecondary systems that offer remediation produce separate reports; the state was included in counts if both reports contain the particular data element

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University of Texas- Austin*

**Bruce Vandal**

*Vice President  
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**Charles Wiger\***

*Chair, Senate Finance Committee, E-12 Division  
Minnesota Senate*

*\*Denotes ECS Commissioner*

### ALABAMA

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#### *Alabama High School Feedback Reports*

(Alabama Commission on Higher Education, Fall 2013)

<http://ache.alabama.gov/Content/StudentDB/SDBReports.aspx/2006%20Profiles/UM/UMco.pdf>

#### *Alabama Institutional Student Profiles*

(Alabama Commission on Higher Education, Fall 2013)

<http://www.ache.alabama.gov/Profiles/2012Profiles/2012-Profiles.pdf>

### ALASKA

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