A Common Framework for Remedial Reporting:

Response to Remedial Reporting Task Force Recommendations

Companion report to *A Cure for Remedial Reporting Chaos*

Education Commission **of the States**

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REMEDIAL EDUCATION REPORTING PROJECT

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Acknowledgment

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.

In December 2013, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) convened a steering committee of state education policy leaders from throughout the nation to discuss the implications of the inconsistent remedial education reporting practices in the states. After the conversation, the Remedial Reporting Steering Committee, which included elected officials, chief state school officers, state higher education executive officers and numerous education policy experts, advanced two recommendations:

1. States should work together to develop and implement standard procedures for measuring and reporting placement into and progression through remedial instruction.

2. In developing these new procedures, states should create a dynamic, comprehensive measurement methodology focused on progress and success rather than state-level accountability or comparative rankings.

The full report from this convening, *A Cure for Remedial Reporting Chaos: Why the U.S. Needs a Standard Method for Measuring Preparedness for the First Year of College*, includes details of state-level reporting practices and is available from ECS.

The co-chairs of the steering committee — Colorado Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia, Idaho State Sen. John Goedde and Massachusetts Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester — charged ECS with organizing a panel of technical experts to design a remedial reporting framework. This model framework would need to fulfill the committee's recommendations to modernize state remedial reporting policies. Specifically, the committee recommended that the framework:

✦ Avoid the blunt "ranking" of states by focusing on student progress and outcomes, not a point-in-time performance on course placement tests.

✦ 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 and easy to interpret.

✦ Incorporate multiple college readiness indicators, including the various national assessments used by states and students' prior academic performance.

Most important, the steering committee wanted the remedial reporting framework to be suitable for adoption by all states. Thus, the suggested framework should not only satisfy the recommendations, but potentially become the standard approach for state-level reporting on remediation. In conjunction with the steering committee's recommendations, the proposed framework is intended to launch a national dialogue about a more common, accurate and comprehensive approach to measuring and reporting remedial education rates and data.

Technical Advisory Committee Formed

In April 2014, ECS convened a small group of technical experts to respond to the steering committee's recommendations to design more standard procedures to measure and report placement into and progression through remedial instruction. All of the participants on the technical advisory committee were members of, involved with or staff for the Remedial Reporting Steering Committee. The members of the technical advisory committee are listed at the end of the document.

The technical advisory committee agreed that states should consider adopting standard procedures, hereafter referred to as a common framework, to 1) improve the accuracy of identifying students in need of remediation and 2) provide standards for reporting remedial data. The basic framework could be adapted to a state's data collection and reporting capacities and priorities, as well as their interest in more fully understanding the extent and nature of students' remedial needs and postsecondary success.

Moving Toward More Accurate Identification of Remedial Needs

The technical advisory committee recognizes that the most common approaches used by states to report the incidence of remediation are based upon: (a) assessment results below certain cut scores for placement into remedial courses and (b) enrollments in remedial courses regardless of test scores. Both approaches have limitations because they do not capture the full range of students identified for or participating in remediation.

A few states, including Colorado and Connecticut, have begun to use a hybrid approach and integrate assessment cut scores and course enrollment. These states include both the number of students recommended (based upon test scores) for remedial placement as well as the number of students who actually register for and enroll in remedial courses as part of the states' overall remedial rate calculation. Students are not double-counted; they are flagged as remedial if their test results fall below a particular cut score or if they enroll in a remedial course. This approach improves reporting accuracy, as it more precisely captures the magnitude of overall remedial needs in colleges or postsecondary systems.

The technical advisory committee endorses integrating these procedures, as it ensures that states can observe both students assessed at remedial levels — latent developmental needs — and those enrolled in remedial courses—active developmental enrollment. Together, these procedures improve awareness of the extent of remedial needs and also increase the precision with which policymakers can observe the effect of innovations such as co-requisite instruction or directed self-placement, which allow students identified for remediation to enroll in credit-bearing courses, often with additional support.

Importantly, the technical advisory committee does not endorse any particular cut score or placement policy, but recognizes that students are routinely misplaced as a result of over-reliance on rigid policies and procedures. The technical advisory committee endorses policies that use a more "holistic" review of student academic and motivational information, such as persistence. Research by the Community College Research Center found that the most accurate predictor of success in college-level courses is high school GPA, and yet few states incorporate this information into remedial placement policies.[1] The technical advisory committee encourages states to modify their placement policies in ways that take into account past academic performance in high school. The proposed framework for reporting the incidence of remedial needs also would incorporate high school GPA.

Ideally, therefore, states would consider high school GPA and test scores on national assessments to determine students' need for remediation. If students actually enroll in remedial courses — as a requirement or by choice — states also would factor in these percentages/numbers into the overall incidence of remediation.

Moving Toward a Standard and More Comprehensive Reporting Framework

The ECS technical advisory committee recommends a base framework (illustrated in Figure 1) as the standard model for states to report students' identification for and progression through remedial and credit-bearing courses. This framework is intended to be applied to cohorts of students — e.g., fall 2014 enrollees — but can accommodate transfer and part-time students. The framework is intended to employ a 24-month lookback for each cohort of interest, thereby capturing student progress over multiple semesters rather than at a single point in time or at a single institution. Moreover, the framework does not endorse a particular assessment cut score; instead, it simply requires that student records are flagged, and thusly coded, for remedial placement according to a particular state's policies or practices.

The proposed framework developed by the technical advisory committee distinguishes English and mathematics placement but it does not sort students according to course level. This is intentional. Given the great diversity of remedial programs, numerous curricular schemes, and innovative placement and instructional practices found throughout the nation, the technical advisory committee found that attempting to fit the framework to the multiplicity of approaches is unrealistic. Instead, the framework simply requires that students initially assigned to or recommended for remedial placement are coded as such, regardless of the students' subsequent enrollment behaviors.

The proposed remedial reporting framework considers credit accumulation (progression), within a time period — 24 months — but not traditional academic or within-year intervals (e.g., fall, spring or summer semester, or six, nine or 12 months). This is intended to allow the framework to dynamically and naturally capture the academic progression of myriad students — full-time, part-time or any combination thereof. In other words, the framework simply reports the enrollment in and passing of remedial or credit-bearing courses — in English or mathematics — within certain credit hour ranges. Though not specific to a particular course sequence, this aspect of the framework allows policy and education leaders to monitor student progression across certain credit hour ranges. It also naturally captures terminal events (i.e., dropout, failure, non-matriculation) without modifying the cohort.

Given that the majority of college graduates transfer at least once during their time in college, and that nearly all baccalaureate-aspiring students who begin at community colleges will eventually face transfer, the technical advisory committee built the proposed framework in a way that focuses on academic progression across institutions. The framework certainly could be used for a particular campus or system, but it was designed to view students as the unit of analysis, not a particular institution, thereby avoiding the common research problem of reporting transfers as non-completers.

Requisite Data and Related Capacities: The technical advisory committee attempted to design a framework that could be used by the majority of states, even those without robust P-20 data capacities. Minimally, the framework assumes that the user — primarily state departments of K-12 , higher education or similar entities — have the capacity to collect student unit-level records from all institutions. These data need not include personally identifiable information for reporting purposes, but will require the consistent matching of student records across systems and colleges. Additionally, these data need not be housed permanently in a single location, but must be collected across institutions in a consistent, if periodic, manner.

Variables Required for the Model Remedial Reporting Framework

The following data, unless noted as optional, are required to complete the proposed framework (Figure 1) and enable states to identify students for and track their progression through remedial and credit-bearing courses.

- ✦ High school grade point average (on 4.0 scale)
- ✦ Score on a national test (as independent proxy for general abilities or in combination with GPA; scores should be calibrated to a common scale)
- ✦ Credit hours completed by term and cumulatively
- ✦ "Flag" for placement into remedial and credit-bearing English and mathematics (can be binary [i.e., "yes/no"])
- ✦ Course information and grades or pass/fail flags in remedial and credit-bearing English and mathematics (note: assume that a "D" is a passing grade)
- ✦ High school and district codes (optional, for tracking students back to a high school and/or district)
- ✦ Sector and institutional code of enrollment (two-year, comprehensive four-year, or research university, and individual institution)
- ✦ Demographical information (optional)
  - Date of birth (age)
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Socioeconomic status (Pell-eligible recipient)
  - Gender
  - Residency (at time of entry)

Additional Assumptions of and Definitions for the Framework

High School Feedback: The vast majority of states have the capacity to match academic records across K-12 and postsecondary education systems. According to the Data Quality Campaign, 44 states have this capacity[2], so presumably, nearly all states could elect to adopt this framework and match the data back to high schools and districts. The technical advisory committee, however, designed the framework to work effectively with or without this cross-system capacity.

Population: Though the framework in Figure 1 could be applied to numerous populations, it is primarily intended to track first-time cohorts of students. Importantly, the framework can be applied to full- or part-time students as it is not term specific. Also, provided the user of the framework has the requisite academic performance information — test scores, high school grade point averages or both (or a proxy) — for the population of concern, the framework can be applied to a number of different populations. See Limitations section for a discussion of other student populations.

Performance Determinations: The framework requires students be ordered according to a consistent academic performance criterion, such as high school grade point average (GPA) or national test score, or an index of multiple criteria, such as a combination of GPA and test scores. The framework assumes that students will be organized into performance quartiles to recognize varying degrees of college readiness. This approach also would help track the progress of students who fall into the different quartiles, indicate the need for additional interventions for students who are not succeeding, and provide valuable data if students — in particular, lower-performing students — are making significant progress. Importantly, the framework is agnostic to a particular cut score so students in each quartile range could be assigned to remediation (or not). Therefore, the framework does not assign performance quartiles according to "national" benchmarks, but rather allows each state to organize its students according to natural classifications.

Two-year Lookback Period: The proposed framework is primarily focused on outcomes in remedial and entry-level or gateway courses in English and mathematics. Accordingly, the framework applies a two-year lookback period to capture student outcomes across different levels of academic intensity (i.e., part-time, full-time, one-course-at-a-time and so on). The purpose of this lookback is to allow researchers and policymakers to view student outcomes over the first 24 months and 45 credit hours of college. This decision was made to accommodate part-time students and remedial course sequences that may extend across multiple terms. It also attempts to accommodate the academic progression of a student placed in a remedial sequence with two or three levels below the credit-bearing course. The technical advisory committee did not elect to extend this threshold to 60 credits hours, as it was assumed that all students would attempt their first English and mathematics course by the beginning of the second term of their sophomore year in college, approximately the first third of a baccalaureate program or the three-quarters mark for most associates-level students.

The Special Case of Co-requisite Instruction: Co-requisite instruction is an innovation that allows certain students to bypass remedial instruction and enter directly into credit-bearing courses, oftentimes with supplementary academic support. Co-requisite instruction is increasing in popularity and while preliminary results are encouraging, data on the model's effectiveness still are emerging. The technical advisory committee wanted the proposed framework to effectively account for students enrolled in co-requisite courses. To do this, the framework first creates a baseline of students assigned to remediation; this number would include all students initially identified as needing remedial instruction regardless of the course in which they eventually enrolled. Thereafter, the framework monitors the number and percentage of students who enroll in and pass either remedial or credit-bearing courses. Consequently, the framework will show the outcomes of students originally assigned to remediation who elected to register for remedial or credit-bearing courses.

Limitations: As with any statistical model, tradeoffs must be made and the proposed framework is no exception. For example, the framework is not sensitive to specific state or system-level placement decisions, such as a particular cut score, so it is not recommended for use in tests of predictive validity. In addition, the proposed framework was not specifically designed for adult and non-traditional students, those with less recent high school academic performance information, such as GPA, or results on national test scores. The framework can be fitted to adults and non-traditional students provided common assessment results are known and included for purposes of ordering students, but combining such students with traditional students may skew the results. If adult and non-traditional students —

without recent high school transcripts — are of interest, the technical advisory committee recommends running the framework for such students separately from more traditional age students. Finally, because the framework is focused on credit accumulation and course success within states or systems and is sensitive to changes in state- or system-level policies, it is not necessarily ideal for narrowly evaluating particular curriculum-based strategies.

Conclusion and Next Steps

When the Education Commission of the States convened a steering committee of state-level policy leaders to consider the implications of the tangled assortment of remedial education reporting standards among states, one thing was apparent: a common framework to report and monitor students' performance in remedial education would enrich policymakers' awareness of their challenges and progress and allow states to learn leading practices from one another. The comittee endorsed the development of such a common framework and asked ECS to convene a technical advisory committee to develop recommendations for it.

In April 2014, ECS convened a group of leading data experts to design a "common" reporting framework, one that would meet many of the objectives recommended by the remedial reporting steering committee. Specifically, it focuses on the entire population of entering students and does not single out those with remedial needs only; therefore, it views student progression across academic abilities and does not focus solely on students with certain academic deficits. In addition, the framework is intended to focus attention on academic progression and outcomes — in particular the passing of credit-bearing courses in English and mathematics — and not on students' shortcomings. Importantly, the framework is not intended to rank or grade state performance, but rather to allow states to view the effectiveness of their policies in terms of student performance and view the comparable information across states. Finally, the framework is intended to be very user-friendly and easy to interpret. Policymakers need not have comprehensive expertise in remedial policies or statistical design to interpret data presented in the framework.

Epilogue

It is the technical advisory committee's sincere hope that the proposed framework satisfies the ECS Remedial Reporting Steering Committee's recommendations for a common reporting model and will stimulate action among policymakers to consider adopting reporting practices that are common across states. Comprehensive and consistent data are essential for state and education leaders to fully understand the scope and nuances of students' remedial needs, inform potential solutions and to evaluate reform strategies. The need to accelerate degree completion is urgent and many reforms to improve college readiness and minimize or avoid remedial instruction are underway in states. Without a common reporting framework, promising efforts to assist students may go unnoticed, thus risking the opportunity to advance transformative intiatives within and across states.

Improving college progression and attainment is a national imperative. We hope that state policymakers will give serious consideration to adopting the remedial reporting framework and presenting student performance data more broadly. The framework is not intended to compel a common approach to remedial placement practices or develop national standards for college readiness. The framework is intended to show, in an accessible and easy to interpret format, how all entering students perform during the critical first two years of college and to help advance states' efforts to improve student success.

Endnotes

1. Judith Scott-Clayton, *Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?*, CCRC Working Paper No. 41 (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012), http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=1026; Clive R. Belfield and Peter M. Crosta, *Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts*, CCRC Working Paper No. 42 (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012), http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=1030.

2. Data Quality Campaign, http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/action-issues/p-20-workforce-pipeline/ (accessed June 30, 2014).

Proposed Common Framework for Reporting on Student Placement and Progress

Figure 1

| | | | 0-15 Credit hours | | | | 16-30 Credit hours | | | | 31-45 Credit Hours | | | | Credits Earned |
| | | | Remedial | | Credit-bearing | | Remedial | | Credit-bearing | | Remedial | | Credit-bearing | | |
			Enroll	Pass	Enroll	Pass	Enroll	Pass	Enroll	Pass	Enroll	Pass	Enroll	Pass	
Performance Quartile	Identified for Remediation														
1		English													
		Math													
2		English													
		Math													
3		English													
		Math													
4		English													
		Math													
TOTALS															

Notes:

- All entering freshmen students are categorized by Performance Quartiles based on criteria selected by states, such as high school GPA, national test results and/or other factors.
- The percent/number of students Identified for Remediation is based on high school GPA and results on national assessments.
- ECS recommends that states include the percent — and ideally the number — of students identified for remediation and who enroll in and pass remedial and/or credit-bearing courses.

Additional Reporting Elements:

- High school curriculum and/or diploma type
- National assessment scores
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Age (17-19; 20-24; 25 and older)
- Pell vs. non-Pell Grant (eligible)
- Full-time vs. part-time
- Resident vs. non-resident
- Two-year vs. four-year institutions
- Student persistence
- Student retention
- Student completion/graduation
- Cost of remediation
- Individual high schools/districts graduates' need for remediation

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