



SLDS Topical Webinar Summary

Adult Education and Postsecondary Collaboration Regarding Remedial and Developmental Education

Remedial and developmental education courses provide fundamental instruction in core academic areas such as English and math for students who are not yet ready to complete coursework in those subjects at the postsecondary level. Although usually taken in colleges or universities, remedial and developmental education courses do not carry postsecondary credit and can significantly increase the time and expense associated with earning a degree for some students. Many states are beginning to use data to better understand why students need remedial and developmental education and how high schools, adult education programs, and higher education institutions can work together to give students a greater chance at postsecondary success.*

Using data gathered in their statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs), Minnesota, Montana, and New Hampshire have begun to build a clearer picture of the role remedial and developmental education plays in the postsecondary careers of their students. They share their approaches to gathering data on remedial and developmental education enrollment and how those data are starting to shape state policies to help students succeed in higher education.

Minnesota: Using Data to Inform and Evaluate Developmental Education Policies

The Minnesota legislature has placed a priority on better understanding the need for developmental education among the state's postsecondary students and exploring ways to reduce that need for students graduating from public high schools. Education officials recognize a widespread lack of information about which students enroll in developmental education courses and why. Are public high schools failing to prepare students for college-level work? Are colleges and universities setting inconsistent or unrealistic expectations for incoming students? And how many developmental education students are returning to education after years in the workforce or are coming to Minnesota's higher education system from outside the state?

In 2014, Minnesota began using data from its SLDS to complete its annual, legislatively mandated Getting Prepared report, which tracks student enrollment in developmental education courses within two years of graduating from high school. For close to a decade before that point, the report was completed by the state's public college and university systems and did not include information from independent colleges and universities. With the addition of independent higher education enrollment data from the SLDS, the state's reported rate of developmental education enrollment dropped from 40 percent of public high school graduates to 28 percent. Investigators have also gained greater insight into how developmental education enrollment varies by the type of postsecondary institution.

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* The terms *remedial education* and *developmental education* are used interchangeably to refer to courses taken to prepare students for postsecondary-level academic work. In the state examples, the term used reflects state preference.

This product of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) was developed with the help of knowledgeable staff from state education agencies and partner organizations. The content of this publication was derived from a Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program monthly topical webinar that took place on January 28, 2015. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the IES SLDS Grant Program. We thank the following people for their valuable contributions:

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Data analysis has shown that, when controlling for institution type, students enrolling in developmental courses continued their postsecondary education at comparable rates to students not in developmental education, suggesting that developmental education does not affect persistence rates as strongly as previously thought.

Additionally, Minnesota has found that students immigrating to the state from other countries often rely on developmental education courses to strengthen their language skills while preparing for postsecondary degree programs. In many cases, these students come to Minnesota as teenagers or young adults and spend limited—if any—time in the state’s public high schools. The size of this audience for developmental education, coupled with the new findings about enrollment and persistence rates, have demonstrated to state officials the value of continuing to fund developmental education through the state’s financial aid program.

Among the policy measures being considered by the state legislature is having public high school students take ACCUPLACER—a test usually given at the college or university level to determine course placement—in order to identify students who might need developmental courses and intervene before they leave high school. In evaluating the feasibility and value of this proposal, education officials examined current measures of college readiness and found that existing accountability tests in high school are already strong indicators of whether students will need developmental education at the postsecondary level. They also see evidence that ACCUPLACER could be administered more effectively to better identify postsecondary students needing developmental education; students generally are not given resources to prepare for the test, and many do not know the test’s purpose before taking it. Moreover, differing course requirements for postsecondary degrees mean that even if ACCUPLACER indicates students need developmental courses, the students might not end up enrolling in them.

In addition to examining developmental education, Minnesota’s SLDS data will also be used to inform the state’s FastTRAC co-curricular education programs offered by public postsecondary institutions and adult basic education programs through a private grant. FastTRAC classes are usually taught by two instructors—one covering adult basic education and one covering postsecondary and vocational content. Additional data on students enrolled in these programs, as well as the collaborative relationships being established among K12, adult education, and higher education partners, will be key to navigating challenges related to future co-curricular programs, including the use of federal funding and how co-curricular and developmental education classes fit into postsecondary degree or certificate requirements.

Minnesota plans to continue exploring the characteristics and needs of students enrolling in developmental education through additional reports and analysis. Existing reports have focused on developmental education enrollment for students within two years of graduating from high school. Future research is planned to examine the developmental education needs of high school dropouts entering postsecondary programs, graduates of adult education programs, and adult learners entering higher education five to eight years after leaving high school. The state hopes this additional research will shed more light on the diverse pathways students take to postsecondary education and help educators tailor developmental education courses to better serve the students who need them.

Montana: Improving Indicators for College Readiness

As in Minnesota, Montana has been able to improve its reporting on remedial education by linking K12 student records and postsecondary records through its SLDS, known as Growth and Enhancement for Montana Students (GEMS). Before incorporating postsecondary data from the Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education into GEMS, remediation rates were calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in remedial courses at public postsecondary institutions by the number of students who graduated from public high schools that year. In 2013 the state launched a data transport project to link K12 and postsecondary records for a more accurate picture of postsecondary enrollment and remediation rates for a given cohort of students. Montana now has K12 and postsecondary records matched for students dating back to the high school graduating class of 2011.

With more accurate, longitudinal data, Montana enhanced its suite of college readiness reports to include more detailed information about postsecondary enrollment and participation in remedial courses. Reports track remedial education enrollment by course type, by demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the students at different time periods from immediately after high school graduation to 16 months after high school graduation. Figure 1 (next page) shows an example report on remedial education enrollment for students who graduated from Montana high schools in 2012 and enrolled in the Montana University System within three months. Reports available on the GEMS website allow educators, education administrators, legislators, and the general public to view enrollment rates at the college, high school, district, or county levels.

Montana is taking additional measures to make data matching easier. A new electronic transcript (e-transcript) system will provide data such as high school courses taken—identified using common statewide course codes—

Students Entering the MUS Within 3 Months Following High School Graduation - State							
Demographic	High School Graduating Class of 2011-2012 Summer and Fall 2012 MUS Enrollees						
	Total Enrolled	Math Remediation		Writing Remediation		Total Remediation(a)	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
STATE TOTALS	3527	895	25%	331	9%	1017	29%
Gender							
Female	1843	541	29%	150	8%	584	32%
Male	1684	354	21%	181	11%	433	26%
Economically Disadvantaged							
Low Income	696	247	35%	95	14%	275	40%
Not Low Income	2831	648	23%	236	8%	742	26%
Special Education							
No	3386	822	24%	282	8%	931	27%
Yes	141	73	52%	49	35%	86	61%
Limited English Proficiency							
Current LEP	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Former LEP	19	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not LEP	3501	885	25%	325	9%	1005	29%
Race-Ethnicity							
American Indian or Alaskan Native	153	64	42%	27	18%	70	46%
Asian	48	11	23%	*	*	13	27%
Black or African American	23	11	48%	*	*	12	52%
Hispanic	67	23	34%	13	19%	24	36%
Multi-Racial	29	*	*	*	*	*	*
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
White	3199	777	24%	279	9%	887	28%

Figure 1. Remediation rates for Montana University System students who graduated from high school in 2012.

grades earned, and extracurricular activities to colleges and universities directly from the K12 data collection at no additional cost to high schools. The e-transcripts will streamline the process of sharing student information with higher education institutions and minimize the risk of data entry errors at the postsecondary level. Several high schools are in the process of piloting the e-transcript system, and Montana plans to implement the system statewide by the 2015–2016 school year.

As Montana continues to link high school education data with postsecondary enrollment, course taking, and remediation records, it hopes to gain more information to inform policies at the school and state levels. On top of remediation rates, the state will use its longitudinal data to explore additional college readiness indicators such as postsecondary retention, graduation, and employment. Models based on those indicators will help predict which students might need remedial education at the college or university level and allow educators to better assist those students before they leave high school. Additionally, the data can help Montana address longstanding questions about how its high school course requirements might influence the need for remedial education in college.

Available information shows that students who take more than the state’s two required math courses in high school enroll in remedial education at different rates than those who take only two math courses, although postsecondary institutions suggest the grades earned in high school math courses more strongly predict the need for remediation than number of courses taken. Montana hopes the growing body of longitudinal data in GEMS can shed more light on this and other policy questions.

New Hampshire: Streamlining Pathways to Postsecondary Success and Reducing Costs with Adult Education

In 2012, New Hampshire’s newly elected governor launched a cross-agency examination of developmental education involving the state’s community colleges and its Bureau of Adult Education, which is part of the New Hampshire Department of Education. Concerned by national statistics that fewer than 20 percent of students who take two or more developmental education courses graduate from postsecondary institutions, the agencies began exploring ways to reduce the need for—and costs of—developmental education for students entering community colleges.

In comparing developmental education courses at New Hampshire community colleges with adult high school courses offered by the Bureau of Adult Education, officials noticed a significant amount of overlap in content of math courses but a large difference in costs. Developmental math courses at the community colleges cost students between \$900 and \$1,000, whereas a comparable adult education math class cost \$150. The Bureau of Adult Education began working with six of New Hampshire's seven community colleges to explore ways to align and consolidate math curricula between the two systems, both to save money for students enrolling in developmental education at the community colleges and to ensure that adult education graduates enrolling in community colleges will be sufficiently prepared to bypass developmental education.

In a pilot program at Great Bay Community College, college officials decided to stop offering the first of three levels of developmental math courses. Students placing into that first level—including students who already held high school diplomas—were referred to the local adult education program, which began offering a comparable math course on the community college campus. A similar collaboration between two additional community colleges and their local adult education centers allowed community college students placing at or below the lowest level of developmental math to take a foundational adult education math course on the college campus before moving into the colleges' developmental math sequences. In some cases, students who completed the adult education math course were then able to skip one or two levels of their college's developmental math sequence.

Community college students placing at or below the lowest level of developmental math take a foundational adult education math course on the college campus. In some cases, students who completed the adult education course were able to skip one or two levels of their college's developmental math sequence.

Adult education and community college representatives continue to meet regularly to refine the alignment of their courses and to discuss areas for future collaboration. The state plans to have collaborative programs with adult education centers in place at all seven community colleges by the end of the 2015–2016 school year. Officials are requesting state funding beginning in 2017 for developmental education activities as well as to improve data collection on adult education students, who currently are not assigned unique identifiers as are K12 and public postsecondary students.

Common Challenges and Lessons Learned

Understanding the needs of adult learners

Minnesota, Montana, and New Hampshire all recognize a need for more information about the characteristics, needs, and preparation of adult learners entering higher education following a gap in their academic careers. In many cases these students are entering college or university after working for several years after leaving high school. Some are entering higher education after completing an adult basic education program. Although all three states use a unique identifier that follows students as they move from public K12 schools to higher education, adult education students do not have that identifier unless they are former public K12 students. Being able to identify and match records for adult education students more easily would give states greater insight into the educational needs of adult learners, how well adult education prepares students for postsecondary coursework, and how adult education can further support students transitioning to higher education.

Communicating the significance—and limits—of data to partners and stakeholders

When sharing data and the results of data analysis with stakeholders and policymakers, it is important to provide enough context for the information to prevent them from misinterpreting or reaching false conclusions about an issue. When Minnesota's revised Getting Prepared report created with SLDS data showed a lower rate of developmental education enrollment than in years past, some legislators asked whether the lower numbers meant developmental education should no longer be a focus area for education policy research. Education officials had to explain clearly that the change in enrollment rate was due to the inclusion of additional data from independent higher education institutions, and that the new report provided a more accurate starting point for discussions of policies related to developmental education. In Montana, some high school officials worried that publishing college readiness data on the public GEMS website would invite greater scrutiny and criticism from the state legislature than before. SLDS leaders emphasized that the data reported online were similar to reports the state had been putting out for years, only now they were more accurate and more accessible. The criticism some stakeholders feared has not occurred.

Gaining the commitment of state and agency leaders

Multi-agency efforts to share information and develop new approaches to education programs benefit greatly from the commitment and support of executive and senior-level leaders. In New Hampshire, the governor's interest in exploring and improving the costs of developmental education in the state's community colleges was the key to bringing together the adult education programs and community colleges and ensuring that both systems prioritized the issue.

Additional Resources

Minnesota Department of Education
<http://education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html>

Minnesota FastTRAC
<http://www.mnfasttrac.org/>

Minnesota Office of Higher Education
<http://www.ohe.state.mn.us/>

Montana Office of Public Instruction
<http://opi.mt.gov/>

New Hampshire Department of Education
<http://www.education.nh.gov/>

SLDS Webinar: Linking K12 Student Data with Postsecondary Data
<https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/5793>