

REMEDICATION

Higher Education's

Bridge to Nowhere

**Remediation is a broken system.
There's a better way — start many more students
in college courses with just-in-time support.**

COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

REFORMERS WHO LEAD IT

In our groundbreaking September 2011 report, *Time Is the Enemy*, Complete College America applauded “Governors Who Get It.” And they deserve our thanks once again for the data necessary to determine the findings that follow.

Our greatest appreciation, however, must be reserved for impatient reformers who have toiled and innovated, often without the recognition they deserve, in community colleges, colleges, and universities across America. They are faculty and researchers who share extraordinarily important characteristics: intolerance for failure and the courage to change.

If not for their willingness to see the truth in the data and to reject broken methods and long-held beliefs, a clear path forward would still be unknown. If not for their years of hard work and accomplishment, proven approaches that enable success for unprepared college students could not be recommended today. They were working simply to help save their students’ dreams.

In college completion, Complete College America has discovered governors who get it. In the essential work of ending remediation as we know it, these are some of the reformers who lead it. We thank them and look forward to finding more of their colleagues in arms.

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- Selina Vasquez Mireles
Director, Center for Mathematics Readiness, Texas State University-San Marcos

SPECIAL NOTE: We are very interested in identifying and spotlighting more successful innovations and reforms. Please let us know.

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AMERICA**

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A stylized graphic of a bridge structure, rendered in black and light blue, set against a blue gradient background. The bridge is shown from a low angle, looking up at its massive, triangular support structure. The top of the bridge deck is composed of several rectangular segments, and the support structure has two vertical pillars. The overall aesthetic is modern and architectural.

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It's time to close the Bridge to Nowhere.

The intentions were noble. It was hoped that remediation programs would be an academic bridge from poor high school preparation to college readiness — a grand idea inspired by our commitment to expand access to all who seek a college degree.

Sadly, remediation has become instead higher education's "Bridge to Nowhere." This broken remedial bridge is travelled by some 1.7 million beginning students each year, most of whom will not reach their destination — graduation.¹ It is estimated that states and students spent more than \$3 billion on remedial courses last year with very little student success to show for it.²

While more students must be adequately prepared for college, this current remediation system is broken. The very structure of remediation is engineered for failure.

It's not that students don't pass remedial courses, they do: It's that 30 percent don't even show up for the first course or subsequent remedial courses — and, amazingly, 30 percent of those who complete their remedial courses don't even ATTEMPT their gateway courses within two years.³

To fix this, we must first commit ourselves to close every possible exit ramp. By doing so, we will eliminate all opportunities to lose students along the way, saving precious time and money.

Remediation is a classic case of system failure:



DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #1:

Too many students start in remediation.

More than 50 percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities are placed in remedial classes.

Frustrated about their placement into remediation, thousands who were accepted into college never show up for classes. With so many twists and turns, the road ahead doesn't seem to lead to graduation.

Can an "open access" college be truly open access if it denies so many access to its college-level courses?



DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #2:

Remediation doesn't work.

Nearly 4 in 10 remedial students in community colleges never complete their remedial courses.

Research shows that students who skip their remedial assignments do just as well in gateway courses as those who took remediation first.

Never wanting to be in a remedial class in the first place and often feeling that they'll never get to full-credit courses, too many remedial students quit before ever starting a college class.



**DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #3:
Too few complete gateway courses.**

Having survived the remediation gauntlet, not even a quarter of remedial community college students ultimately complete

college-level English and math courses — and little more than a third of remedial students at four-year schools do the same.



**DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #4:
Too few graduate.**

Graduation rates for students who started in remediation are deplorable: Fewer than 1 in 10 graduate from community colleges within three years and little more than a third complete bachelor's degrees in six years.

THE BIG IDEA: Start in college courses with support.

Students need a CLEAR PATH to graduation day.

The concept makes common sense. Instead of wasting valuable time and money in remedial classes for no credit, students have been proven to succeed in redesigned first-year classes with built-in, just-in-time tutoring and support. Imagine an English or Math 101 class that meets five days a week instead of just three times. Three days a week the students receive the regular instruction and the other two they get embedded tutoring.

Extra academic help becomes a co-requisite, not a prerequisite.

Institutions that have used this approach have seen their unprepared students succeed at the same rates as their college-ready peers. And best practices have demonstrated that as many as half of all current remedial students can succeed this way. With results like these, it's long past time to take this reform to scale.

Some will say this approach may work for those who just need minimal academic help, but that's not true. Students who are further behind should still be placed in full-credit courses with built-in support but should take the courses over two semesters instead of one. And those who seek to attend a community college with what amounts to little more than a basic understanding of fractions and decimals should be encouraged to enroll in high-quality career certificate programs that embed extra help in the context of each course and lead to jobs that pay well.

When higher education's Bridge to Nowhere is finally closed for good, it is true that some may still be lost. But nearly all of these students disappear today.

College students come to campus for college, not more high school. Let's honor their intentions — and refocus our own good intentions to build a new road to student success.

1 National Center for Education Statistics. (2010). *Digest of Education Statistics*. Table 241.

2 Alliance for Excellent Education. (May 2011). *Saving Now and Saving Later: How High School Reform Can Reduce the Nation's Wasted Remediation Dollars*.

3 Jenkins, D., Jaggars, S.S., & Roksa, J. (November 2009). *Promoting Gatekeeper Course Success Among Community College Students Needing Remediation: Findings and Recommendations from a Virginia Study (Summary Report)*. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, pp. 2-3.

METHODOLOGY

The data presented in this report were provided by the 33 participating states themselves, using the Complete College America/National Governors Association Common Completion Metrics. National findings in each category were based on the calculated medians of the state data.

More than 10 million students enroll in public institutions annually in the states whose data

are captured in these findings — a clear majority of American students in public colleges and universities today. While we recognize that there may be some variance in the data higher education institutions provided to their states, the significant number of students represented means that the most alarming trends can be traced across all of the states represented in these findings.

About the Common Completion Metrics

Common metrics — uniformly designed and applied — help us frame our data collection to be most useful for driving change. Moreover, adopting and reporting common metrics unifies us in a shared goal and communicates our commitment to doing the hard work necessary to bring about improvement.

In July 2010, the National Governors Association (NGA) adopted the Complete College America Common Completion Metrics in announcing its

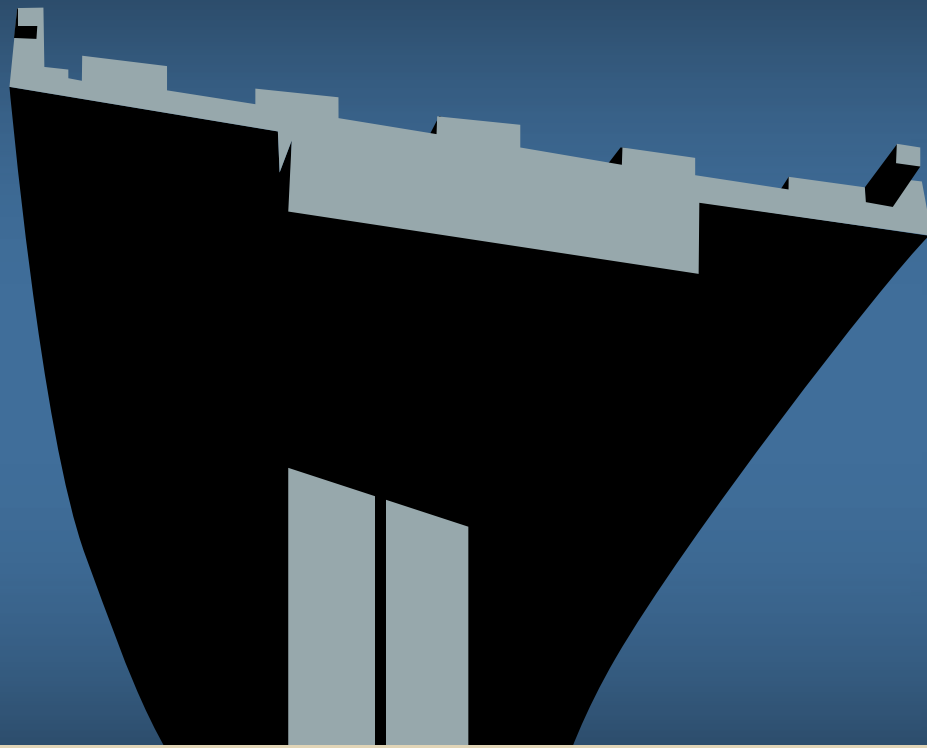
“Complete to Compete” initiative, placing the metrics at the core of NGA’s call to governors to make college completion a priority. This significant action signaled a new national focus on the importance of consistent data to document the progress and success of postsecondary students across all states.

For more information on the Common Completion Metrics and the companion Technical Guide, please visit www.completecollege.org.

Governors Who Get It

These leading governors are owed our appreciation once again. First, they made *Time Is the Enemy* possible, allowing us to deliver the most comprehensive review ever of the state of American higher education. And now, these same chief executives have enabled us to reveal a comprehensive understanding of the plight of their remedial students. While it’s true that the failure of remediation knows no border, it still takes courage to publicly acknowledge problems, especially those that have wasted so many resources. As before, we applaud these “Governors Who Get It.”

- Gov. Jan Brewer (Arizona)
- Gov. Mike Beebe (Arkansas)
- Gov. Edmund Gerald Brown, Jr. (California)
- Gov. John Hickenlooper (Colorado)
- Gov. Rick Scott (Florida)
- Gov. Nathan Deal (Georgia)
- Gov. Neil Abercrombie (Hawaii)
- Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter (Idaho)
- Gov. Pat Quinn (Illinois)
- Gov. Mitch Daniels (Indiana)
- Gov. Stephen L. Beshear (Kentucky)
- Gov. Bobby Jindal (Louisiana)
- Gov. Martin O’Malley (Maryland)
- Gov. Deval Patrick (Massachusetts)
- Gov. Mark Dayton (Minnesota)
- Gov. Haley Barbour (Mississippi)
- Gov. Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon (Missouri)
- Gov. Brian Sandoval (Nevada)
- Gov. John Lynch (New Hampshire)
- Gov. Susana Martinez (New Mexico)
- Gov. Bev Perdue (North Carolina)
- Gov. John Kasich (Ohio)
- Gov. Mary Fallin (Oklahoma)
- Gov. John A. Kitzhaber, MD (Oregon)
- Gov. Tom Corbett (Pennsylvania)
- Gov. Dennis Daugaard (South Dakota)
- Gov. Bill Haslam (Tennessee)
- Gov. Rick Perry (Texas)
- Gov. Gary Richard Herbert (Utah)
- Gov. Robert McDonnell (Virginia)
- Gov. Chris Gregoire (Washington)
- Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin (West Virginia)
- Gov. Matthew Mead (Wyoming)



PART 1:
Bridge to Nowhere

KNOW THIS

Too many entering freshmen need remediation.

51.7% of those entering a 2-year college enrolled in remediation

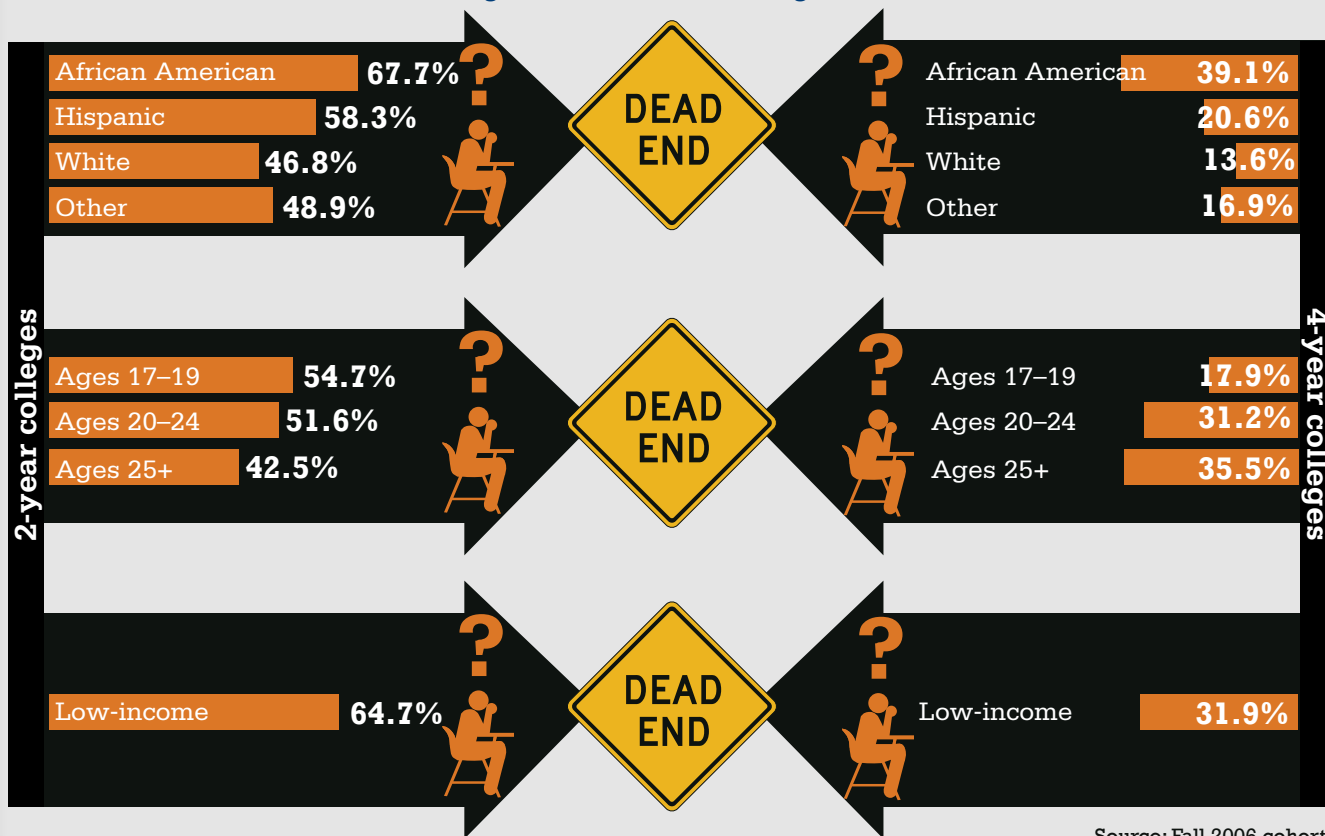


19.9% of those entering a 4-year college enrolled in remediation



If you're African American, Hispanic, or a low-income student, you're more likely to be headed toward the remediation dead end.

Percentage of students needing remediation




Source: Fall 2006 cohorts

Strengthen high school so that students are actually prepared for college.


DO THIS!


Fully prepare students for college.


Students should be college-ready upon graduating high school. However, colleges and universities have a responsibility to fix the broken remedial system that stops so many from succeeding.

 **Adopt and implement the new Common Core State Standards in reading, writing, and math.** These voluntary standards, currently supported by more than 40 states, offer multiple opportunities for states and sectors to work together to:

- Align high school curriculum to first-year college courses;
- Develop bridge courses; and
- Create support programs to help students make a smooth transition to college.

 **Align requirements for entry-level college courses with requirements for high school diplomas.** Academic requirements for a high school diploma should be the floor for entry into postsecondary education. K–12 and higher education course-taking requirements should be aligned. Provide 12th grade courses designed to prepare students for college-level math and English.

 **Administer college-ready anchor assessments in high school.** These tests give students, teachers, and parents a clear understanding about whether a student is on track for college. Giving these assessments as early as 10th grade enables juniors and seniors to address academic deficiencies before college.

 **Use these on-track assessments to develop targeted interventions.** K–12 systems and local community colleges or universities can develop programs that guarantee that successful students are truly college ready and exempt from remedial education as freshmen.

 **Use multiple measures of student readiness for college.**

- Recognize that current college placement assessments are not predictive and should be supplemented with high school transcripts to make recommendations for appropriate first-year courses.
- Have all students taking placement exams receive a testing guide and practice test and time to brush up on their skills before testing.

DONE THIS: Some states are ensuring that more entering freshmen are prepared.



California: The California State University (CSU) system added a series of college readiness questions to the state's 11th grade exam. After students take the test, they are told whether they are on track for college-level classes in the CSU system. Plus, CSU is helping high school teachers work with unprepared students and is developing a 12th grade transitional curriculum.



Indiana: Since 2005, Core 40 graduation requirements have been the required high school curriculum and the minimum admissions requirement for the state's four-year public universities. Developed jointly by the K–12 and higher education systems, they ensure that high school graduates are prepared for college and careers.



Virginia: This is one of several states (including Texas, Florida, and Kentucky) creating 12th grade transitional courses and end-of-course tests based on college readiness standards and first-year courses. Students who earn high enough scores can bypass additional placement tests and proceed directly into full-credit college courses.

KNOW THIS

Most students don't make it through college-level gateway courses.

2-Year Colleges



62.0%

Complete remediation



22.3%

Complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years

4-Year Colleges



74.4%

Complete remediation

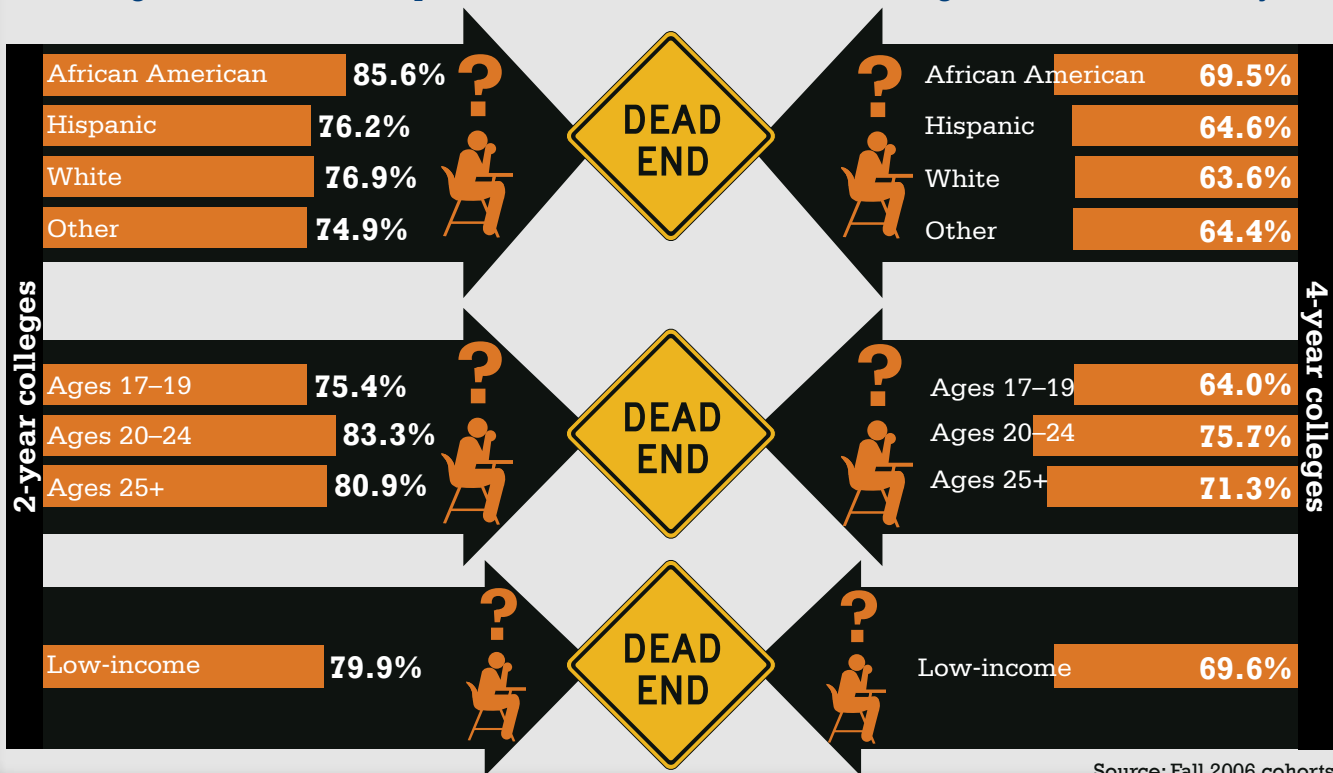


36.8%

Complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years

Gateway courses can be a roadblock for the vast majority of ALL students — regardless of race, age, or income.

Percentage who did NOT complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years



Source: Fall 2006 cohorts

Get students into credit-bearing gateway courses as soon as possible.

DO THIS!

Start college now. Provide help as a co-requisite, not a prerequisite.

Start college students in college courses, not more high school. Get them on track for graduation from the moment they step on campus by using only co-requisite approaches to deliver tutoring and support. Modify the length and method of built-in, just-in-time academic help to match students' needs.



End traditional remediation; use co-requisite models instead.

- For students with few academic deficiencies, place them into redesigned first-year, full-credit courses with co-requisite built-in support, just-in-time tutoring, self-paced computer labs with required attendance, and
- For students with the most significant academic needs, provide alternate pathways to high-quality career certificates by embedding remediation and adult basic skills development into their instruction.

the like. The length of these courses should mirror the ordinary gateway courses so students stay on track for on-time graduation.

DONE THIS: Some states are redesigning their gateway courses.



Maryland: Community College of Baltimore County's Accelerated Learning Project (ALP) enrolls remedial English students in a regular, credit-bearing English 101 course and a companion course that meets immediately afterward. The companion course provides in a small group targeted reinforcement of topics from the mainstream course that enables intensive faculty and peer support. Early results show that ALP students pass English 101 with a grade of C or better at more than twice the rate of the control group — and do so in just one semester, as opposed to the two semesters required to complete a remedial course before moving on to the credit-bearing course.

The University of Maryland at College Park identifies about 20 percent of incoming students as unprepared for college-level math and enrolls the top 60 percent of them, based on placement test scores, in a co-requisite math course. Scheduled five days a week, students receive accelerated remedial instruction for the first five weeks. After being retested with the same placement exam, passing students complete the remaining college-level class by attending five days a week for the remaining 10 weeks of the semester. More than 80 percent pass the retest and continue with the college-level course, ultimately matching the overall success rate for the course as nonremedial students.



Tennessee: Austin Peay State University in Tennessee eliminated remedial math courses and places students in redesigned credit-bearing courses that include extra workshops and specialized help. Initial assessments are given to determine specific knowledge gaps, then the workshops are used to provide additional instruction on key math concepts with special emphasis on individual areas of weakness. As a result, twice as many remedial students are passing their initial college-level math courses.



Texas: Texas State University-San Marcos enrolls students who need extra math help in concurrent remedial and college-level algebra and statistics courses, and it requires additional weekly tutoring, for which students earn credit. Seventy-four percent of participants in the program earn a grade of C or better in algebra during their first semester. This is more than twice the percentage rate of all remedial students at Texas State-San Marcos who earn similar grades in their first two years.

**KNOW
THIS**

Most remedial students never graduate.

2-Year Colleges



62.0%

Complete remediation



22.3%

**Complete remediation and
associated college-level courses
in two years**



9.5%

**Graduate within 3 years
(projected)**

4-Year Colleges



74.4%

Complete remediation



36.8%

**Complete remediation and
associated college-level courses
in two years**



35.1%

**Graduate within 6 years
(projected)**

Students who **don't** take remedial courses are more likely to graduate.



13.9%

**Graduate within 3 years
(projected)**



55.7%

**Graduate within 6 years
(projected)**

Source: Completion data: fall 2006 cohorts; graduation data: 2-year, fall 2004 cohorts; 4-year, fall 2002 cohorts

Keep your eyes on the prize: graduation.

DO THIS!

Provide co-requisite courses aligned with programs of study.


Most students come to our college campuses to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure a good job and a better life. A logical first step is to commit to a program of study. Remarkably, many students never do — and broken remediation programs are often to blame.

Committing to a program of study is much more than simply declaring a major. Anybody can declare a major, but completing the initial courses necessary to legitimately be on track in a program of study is a completely different matter. And it's in these fragile, early stages of college when remediation programs do the most damage.

Researchers at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University have found that **students who complete at least three required “gateway” courses in a program of study within a year of enrollment are twice as likely to earn certificates or degrees.**

Remediation programs, designed as prerequisite hurdles that must be jumped before getting to college-level classes, slow students' progress into programs of study. Studies prove that being trapped in endless remediation sequences or being unable to pass associated gateway courses in math and English are the primary reasons students do not enter programs of study during their first year. And the longer it takes for students to commit to programs of study, the less likely they ever will.


Worse, traditional remediation often seems irrelevant and disconnected from future ambitions, robbing students of precious time, money, and motivation. What's the result? Many students veer off course onto another dropout exit ramp.

 **Get students to commit to programs of study ASAP.** Using placement scores, high school transcripts, and predictive tools to determine student aptitude, guide all students to choose among a limited number

of first-year pathways — for example, health, business, liberal arts, or STEM — as soon as possible. Students should make the big choices of programs of study informed with an understanding of program requirements and available supports to achieve their career goals. Once they do, place them into structured program pathways constructed of relevant, sequenced courses chosen for them.

 **Establish “default” programs for students not ready to commit.**

No longer allow students to be considered “unclassified.” Upon enrollment, nudge them into first-year pathways — for example, health, business, liberal arts, or STEM. This ensures a coherent pathway from the beginning, with core college-level credits that will count toward certificates and degrees. By doing so, students avoid excessive course-taking while wandering the curriculum, shortening the time it takes to graduate.

 **Place students in the right math.** Most students are placed in algebra pathways when statistics or quantitative math would be most appropriate to prepare them for their chosen programs of study and careers.

 **Expand co-requisite supports for additional college-level courses.**

Additional introductory courses serve as gateway classes for programs of study, not just English and math. Given high failure rates, they have become gatekeeper courses instead, too often blocking students' entry into their chosen fields. To help unprepared students get a strong, early start, build extra supports around introductory courses necessary for success like entry-level anatomy, biology, physiology, physics, accounting, and drafting.

DO THIS! Four steps states should take right now to close remediation exit ramps

EXIT RAMPS

#1 Too many students start in remediation.



1. Strengthen high school preparation.

Reduce the need for college remediation altogether by adopting and implementing the new voluntary Common Core State Standards in reading, writing, and math. Align requirements for entry-level college courses with requirements for high school graduation. Administer college-ready anchor assessments in high school, and use them to develop targeted interventions before students fall too far behind. That way, high school graduates are ready for credit-bearing college courses from Day One.



#2 Remediation doesn't work.



2. Start students in college-level courses with built-in, co-requisite support.

Immediately place freshmen with basic needs into entry-level, credit-bearing college courses with co-requisite support. That is, make this co-requisite model *the default*. For students needing more support, offer two-semester courses of the same content with built-in tutoring. Meanwhile, offer students with significant academic challenges skill certificate programs with embedded remediation.



#3 Too few complete gateway courses.



3. Embed needed academic help in multiple gateway courses.

To help unprepared students get a strong, early start, build extra supports around all of the early gateway courses that are necessary for success in students' fields of study. For students to succeed in these course, they should have built-in tutoring and/or additional instruction time.



#4 Too few graduate.



4. Encourage students to enter programs of study when they first enroll.

Students are twice as likely to graduate if they complete at least three courses in their chosen programs of study in their first year on campus. Create clear, limited, and structured program pathways containing core college-level courses. Then require students to choose a pathway. Unprepared students can achieve this significant milestone for success if the early college-level courses required in their programs of study have embedded help.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is an unprecedented report, which would not have been possible without the support and hands-on expertise and assistance of many people and institutions.

THE 33 STATES: their governors, higher education leaders, and higher education institutions. They showed real courage in providing these data, the good and the bad.

OUR PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and Lumina Foundation for Education.

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AND OUR PRODUCTION PARTNERS: KSA-Plus Communications, which provided editorial assistance and graphic design.

ABOUT COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

It's really about the states ... we're just here to help.

Established in 2009, Complete College America is a national nonprofit with a single mission: to work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

The need for this work is compelling. Between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment in the United States more than doubled, while the completion rate has been virtually unchanged. We've made progress in giving students from all backgrounds access to college — but we haven't finished the all-important job of helping them achieve a degree. Counting the success of all students is an essential first step. And then we must move with urgency to reinvent American higher education to meet the needs of the new majority of students on our campuses, delicately balancing the jobs they need with the education they desire.

Complete College America believes there is great reason for optimism ... and a clear path forward. With a little more support — and a lot of common sense — we can ensure that many more young people get the high-quality college education that will help them live productive and fulfilling lives. All Americans will share in the benefits of their success.

COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

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