



Steps Taken to Reduce the Need for College Remediation; Accountability Processes Should Be Strengthened

at a glance

The Florida Legislature, the Board of Governors and the Department of Education have taken steps we recommended to reduce the need for college students to take remediation classes. The Legislature required the State Board of Education to review and revise Florida's K-12 education standards, and it created additional mechanisms to encourage high school students to pursue majors, accelerated and advanced studies, and career education. The Legislature and the department have also taken steps to improve mathematics preparation. However, additional steps could be taken, including raising the minimum FCAT scores required for high school graduation and strengthening accountability processes for college preparatory programs.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken concerning two related OPPAGA studies: a 2006 report examining the readiness of students entering college to take college-level coursework without requiring remediation; and a 2007 report examining the effectiveness of college preparatory (remediation) programs provided by postsecondary institutions.¹

¹ *Steps Can Be Taken to Reduce Remediation Rates; 78% of Community College Students, 10% of University Students Need Remediation*, Report No. [06-40](#), April 2006, and *Half of College Students Needing Remediation Drop Out; Remediation Completers Do Almost as Well as Other Students*, Report No. [07-31](#), May 2007.

Background

Students entering Florida's public community colleges and universities (referred to as first-time-in-college students) are tested for their reading, writing, and mathematics proficiency.² Students who do not take the SAT or ACT examination or who score below certain minimum scores on these exams must take the Florida College Entry-Level Placement Test (also called the Common Placement Test). Students scoring below the minimum cut-off scores on the Placement Test must enroll in college preparatory or remedial courses in the respective subject area(s) before taking college-level courses in those subjects.

Florida law authorizes the state's 28 community colleges and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University to offer remedial education courses.³ The other 10 state universities are not permitted to provide remedial courses but may contract with community colleges to provide these courses for university students who need remediation. Remedial education coursework is designed to enable students to address their academic deficiencies so that they are successful in college-level coursework.

² According to s. 1008.30(4)(a), *F.S.*, a passing score on a standardized, institutionally developed test must be achieved before a student is considered to have met basic computation and communication skills requirements.

³ Section 1008.30(4)(b), *F.S.*

Current Status ---

As we recommended in our 2006 report, the Florida Legislature, the Board of Governors, and the Department of Education have taken steps to improve the college readiness of high school graduates and to reduce the need for remediation. However, some additional options for reducing the need for remediation have not yet been implemented, and actions are needed to strengthen accountability processes for college preparatory programs at postsecondary institutions.

Steps have been taken to improve the college readiness of Florida high school graduates; additional actions could be taken

Our 2006 report found that 78% of students attending community colleges and 10% of students attending public universities require some remediation. Several factors influence whether high school graduates are college ready, particularly whether students have taken rigorous mathematics and English courses while in high school. Most of Florida's educational improvement initiatives over the past 10 years, such as Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), had focused on improving educational outcomes in the K-12 system rather than focusing on improving college readiness of high school graduates.

Since the publication of our report, the Legislature, the Board of Governors, and the Department of Education have taken steps to address this problem. These actions have strengthened the state's K-12 education standards, improved mathematics preparation, created additional incentives for student achievement, and provided students access to remedial instruction prior to high school graduation. However, additional actions could further reduce the need for remediation. These actions include revising the minimum FCAT scores needed for a standard high school diploma and creating incentives for collaboration between school districts and community colleges.

Steps have been taken to revise Florida's K-12 education standards. Consistent with our recommendation, the Florida Legislature has

taken steps to strengthen Florida's K-12 education standards. Specifically, the 2006 Legislature amended s. [1001.03\(1\)](#), *Florida Statutes*, to require the State Board of Education to establish a schedule for periodic reviews of the standards. The reviews will assess the standards to ensure adequate rigor, relevance, logical student progression, and integration of reading, writing, and mathematics across all subject areas. The State Board of Education adopted a six-year cycle for reviewing and revising all K-12 content standards as well as aligning the new standards with assessments, instructional materials, professional development, and teacher licensure exams. In addition, the 2008 Legislature amended s. [1003.41](#), *Florida Statutes*, to require the State Board to replace the Sunshine State Standards with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

Steps have been taken to improve mathematics preparation. As we recommended, the Legislature and the Department of Education have taken steps to improve the mathematics preparation of Florida students. The 2006 Florida Legislature enacted s. [1003.428](#), *Florida Statutes*, increasing mathematics graduation requirements to four credits for students entering high school in the 2007-08 school year; one of which must be Algebra I, a series of courses equivalent to Algebra I, or a higher level mathematics course. In addition, Florida postsecondary mathematicians and math education faculty participated in developing new world-class mathematics standards for Florida. The State Board of Education has incorporated new course descriptions in the high school curriculum that reflect these more rigorous standards for use beginning in the 2008-09 school year.

The Legislature created additional mechanisms to recognize academic achievements by high school students. Our 2006 report noted that students who take additional, higher level, and more rigorous academic coursework in high school are more likely to be ready for college without remediation. As we recommended, the 2008 Legislature created additional mechanisms to encourage and recognize academic achievements by high school graduates. Specifically, the Legislature created s. [1003.4285](#), *Florida Statutes*, which requires school districts to include several

designations on standard high school diplomas, if applicable, beginning in the 2008-09 school year. These designations recognize students for completion of specific coursework.

- **High school majors.** Diplomas will recognize a student's major area of interest if he or she completes four sequential credits in a major area of interest such as a career and technical field, fine and performing arts, or academic content area.
- **Accelerated or advanced studies.** Students pursuing advanced academic studies will receive recognition for completion of four or more accelerated college credit courses such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Advanced International Certificate of Education or dual enrollment.
- **Career education.** Students pursuing interests in specific career fields will receive recognition for achieving career education certification or for completing the Florida Ready to Work Credential.

The Legislature took steps to ensure that students have opportunities for remedial instruction prior to high school graduation. The 2008 Legislature amended s. [1008.30](#), *Florida Statutes*, to require high schools to evaluate the college readiness of selected students prior to the beginning of grade 12. These students include those who indicate an interest in postsecondary education and score at Level 2 or 3 on the reading portion of the grade 10 FCAT or at Levels 2, 3, or 4 on the mathematics portion of this test. To the extent practicable, 12th grade students are to be given access to remedial instruction to address identified deficiencies. The remedial instruction must be a collaborative effort between secondary and postsecondary educational institutions.

State efforts have identified cross-sector strategies to improve student preparation. The department created the Go Higher Florida Task Force in 2007 to improve student transition among Florida's major education sectors: K-12, community colleges, and the state's public and private universities. In February 2008, the State Board of Education approved a number of Task Force recommendations, which included

- requiring all high school students to take rigorous and relevant courses that prepare them for life after graduation;
- developing and adopting high school and postsecondary assessments which are clear in purpose and function; for example, assessing skills in core courses for high school graduation or postsecondary readiness in core courses; and
- joining the 30 states currently participating in the American Diploma Project to better prepare students for the 21st century workplace.

The department and Board of Governors have begun implementing some of these steps. Specifically, department representatives have begun meeting with representatives of the College Board and ACT to discuss the college readiness assessment currently in place and its alignment with Sunshine State Standards and FCAT as well as its potential use as a diagnostic tool. In addition, Florida has been accepted as a member of the American Diploma Project and has begun reviewing the project's end of course exam in Algebra for potential pilot testing in Florida.

Additional actions could further reduce remediation needs. Students in grades 3-10 in public schools are tested using the FCAT to demonstrate their mastery of the grade-level expectations set forth by the Sunshine State Standards. Students in 10th grade who do not score at least Level 2 on the FCAT cannot graduate with a standard high school diploma. Our 2006 report concluded that while scoring the minimum Level 2 on the FCAT helps ensure that students have mastered basic academic concepts, it does not ensure students are prepared for college level work. The Department of Education has not yet implemented our recommendation to reexamine the minimum FCAT scores required for high school graduation. Reviewing the current minimum scores to determine if they should be raised would help to ensure students have the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in either college or the workforce.

In addition, our 2006 report found that collaboration between Florida high schools and community colleges to reduce the need for remediation was inconsistent throughout the state and could be improved. The department and the Board of Governors have not yet implemented any new strategies to encourage more collaboration among high schools, community colleges, and state universities to ensure that high school graduates are prepared to begin college level coursework.

Accountability processes for college preparatory programs should be strengthened

Our 2007 report found that only half (52%) of the students entering community colleges in need of remediation completed their college preparatory or remedial coursework. To address this problem, we recommended improving the accountability processes for college preparatory programs. However, neither the State Board of Education nor Department of Education have taken steps to strengthen accountability processes for the college preparatory programs provided by postsecondary institutions. State-level accountability processes continue to lack performance expectations for college preparatory programs, and the State Board has not directed community colleges to evaluate the success of their local college preparatory programs. In addition, the current performance measures for college preparatory programs (as reported by the department) should be improved by reporting the number and percentage of students who eventually complete remediation requirements in all subject areas.

While accountability processes have not changed, the department has supported ongoing efforts to improve college preparatory programs. For example, the department, through its Division of Community Colleges, conducted a statewide program review of developmental education in 2005 and plans to conduct a follow-up review in 2010. The division also regularly publishes entries in its Fast Facts Student Success Series, brief synopses of research and strategies related to improving student performance. Recent examples include *Multiple College Preps in a Semester* and *Early Leaks in the Pipeline for Students Needing College Prep Mathematics*.⁴ In addition, the department continues to support four community colleges—Hillsborough, Valencia, Tallahassee and Broward—that are participating in the national Achieving the Dream Project. This project began in 2003 and is designed to promote new initiatives to improve student success, particularly among low-income and minority students. Since many of these students need remediation when they arrive on community college campuses, the four participating institutions have focused on improving outcomes for remedial students.

⁴ *Multiple College Preps in a Semester*, #2007-01, January 2007, and *Early Leaks in the Pipeline for Students Needing College Prep Mathematics*, #2007-05, May 2007, Fast Facts Student Success Series, Florida Community Colleges, Florida Department of Education.

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