

The English Remediation Challenge and the National Picture

Remedial classes are courses offered by colleges/universities to address the gaps in math, reading comprehension and writing skills experienced by students enrolled in their institutions. In Delaware, 42% of public school graduates enrolled in the state's colleges/universities required at least one remedial course (www.doe.k12.de.us/collegesuccess). Remedial courses require students to take more classes than their peers who begin college taking credit-bearing courses. This increases the cost and time to complete college. For many students, the additional burdens cause them to drop out before graduating from college. There is a misperception that college acceptance equals college readiness. This readiness gap experienced by Delaware students has remained relatively flat since the class of 2012 when the state first reported the data.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires districts and states to support the transition from high school to post-secondary education and to ensure alignment between the high school courses and college entrance requirements (ESSA Section 1112 (b)(1)(A)). This will require Delaware to push forward in the recommendations identified by the sub-committees to reduce and eliminate remediation. The annual College Success Report (www.doe.k12.de.us/collegesuccess) identifies several key areas for Delaware schools to address in the elimination of remediation:

1. Students taking statistics and Algebra 2 are far more likely to require a remedial math course.
2. Students taking a college prep or general English course are far more likely to require a remedial English course.
3. Students not meeting the SAT benchmark are most likely to require at least 1 remedial courses.
4. Students who self-identify as being a student of color, speaking another language besides English as their native tongue, and/or identified as requiring special education supports are three times more likely to require remediation in college.

Throughout the College Success Report, readers can identify the root causes of these issues including course rigor. Students taking less rigorous courses upon graduation will be more likely to need remediation in college. In English, students taking a college prep English courses or general English courses will most likely require remediation in college.

Lastly the number of students taking only a remedial English course is small compared to the number of students requiring a math remedial course. However, many colleges will not allow students to take a credit-bearing course while complete the remedial English course because of the need to strengthen literacy and writing skills that span across disciplines.

English Remediation and the State of Delaware

In Delaware, 70% of our public high school graduates who enroll in college will matriculate to a Delaware college/university. For the class of 2015, 4% of those students required remediation in English only, while 19% required remediation in both English and math. This equates to just under 1,000 (or ¼) students for the class of 2015 college enrollees.

Through additional analysis completed by the math sub-committee co-chair, John Pelesko we are able to confirm that SAT and level of course rigor are relevant factors in predicting remediation for students. SAT has a strong correlation with remediation rates for English. For SAT, the data considers whether or

not a student met the college-readiness benchmark. Readers should note that the class of 2015 was the last class to sit for the old SAT based on the 2400 scale where college-readiness was defined as 1550 or higher.

As a sub-committee, we began with the end in mind by looking at the requirements for students in credit-bearing college English courses. We were able to confirm significant similarities in expectations across Delaware's colleges and universities. All the English courses focused heavily on writing and literacy expecting students to be able to read complex texts with comprehension, analyze multiple sources of data and articulate an argument. We then moved to the remedial course syllabi to understand what gaps students faced in readiness for these courses. Two areas of concern arose: literacy and writing. The high school subcommittee members confirmed these are the same areas where we see high school students and teachers struggle as well. Based on this foundational knowledge, we sought to develop a path to address these gaps and move the needle for students.

Recommendations from the Subcommittee

In this section, we present our final recommendations to the P-20 Council of the State of Delaware. We note that our overall goal is to change the P-20 system in the State of Delaware from one where remediation in English is commonplace for an exceedingly high percentage of our college-going population, to one where remediation in English is a rare occurrence for any of our college-bound high school graduates. This is an ambitious goal. While this is not a simple change, the subcommittee factored in targeted needs for students and educators as well as capacity to deliver. Our approach is to create a set of recommendations that fall into one of three buckets:

- ***Bridging the Gap***
- ***Professional Learning***
- ***Communications and Policy***

Bridging the Gap: Through the work of the sub-committee we have learned the value of structured ongoing dialogue between the k-12 system and higher education. These recommendations will leverage existing meeting structures to create an open dialogue regarding English curriculum, professional learning and student academic needs between k-12 and higher education.

Professional Learning: The sub-committee recognized the need for significant professional learning particularly at the middle and high school level for educators to develop a deep understanding of teaching writing and literacy through Common Core Standards. These recommendations will leverage partnerships between our higher education institutions and secondary schools to support deep professional learning across content areas.

Communications and Policy: The sub-committee identified wide-scales changes across our higher education system that will increase transparency for students regarding the measure for college readiness. The sub-committee will identify other potential leverage points for future professional learning or partnership models.

Members of the sub-committee will self-select membership in working groups designed to drive the work forward for each of the recommendations. Working groups will meet based on the necessary frequency to implement the recommendation. The full sub-committee will continue to meet quarterly in

advance of each P20 Council meeting to hear updates from the working groups and prepare for the P20 presentation.

Bridging the Gap Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Dedicate three secondary Literacy Cadre meetings per year as joint meetings with higher education institutions and Literacy Cadre members.

Discussion: Literacy Cadre meetings include reading and literacy specialists from districts statewide. Literacy Cadre meetings typically occur monthly and provided targeted professional learning for specialists to support implementation of the Delaware state standards for reading and writing. Higher Education Institutions will join the secondary Literacy Cadre members three times a year for a joint session. The Literacy Cadre would work with the higher education institutions to establish an agenda for the year and each of the three meetings will take a deep dive into the pushing the agenda forward. Potential topics could include the following: common rubrics for assessing writing, understanding expectations of college classrooms, grading policies, etc.

Professional Learning Recommendations

Recommendation #2: Develop a targeted professional learning cohort model including higher education institutions and selected districts.

Discussion: The model would enable districts to participate in a structured cohort model for professional learning over the course of a 3- year timeframe. Wilmington University established the initial cohort model with Smyrna High School through the creation of a Masters' level Writing Course for teachers across multiple content areas. The teachers participating in the course will be required to implement the strategies learned in the course as part of the course implementation.

The general structure will follow the proposed cycle: 1) Data analysis of student assessments and classroom work to identify gaps desired to be addressed. 2) 11th grade teachers and IHEs will co-develop the initial year of professional learning 3) 11th grade teachers will facilitate training for 10th grade teachers and 4) 10th grade teachers will facilitate training for 9th grade teachers. Additionally, based on performance the school will be identified as a model school for observation opportunities.

Higher Education institutions can support this through: 1) professional learning and/or 2) program evaluation depending on capacity of English faculty.

Potential metrics for evaluation include:

- PSAT to SAT growth
- Graduation rate
- College enrollment
- Reduction in remediation
- Course grade in freshman course
- Enrollment from 100-level to 200-level
- Retention to year 2 of college

Communications and Policy Recommendations

Recommendation #3: Higher Education institutions will use multiple pathways to define college-readiness for English and placement into credit-bearing courses.

Discussion: Utilizing multiple pathways for students to demonstrate readiness for credit-bearing college courses aligns with national research and best practices to both reduce remediation and ensure an accurate reflection of students' readiness for college courses. The higher education institutions established the following targets for college-readiness in English and placement into credit-bearing courses:

- SAT-EBRW score of 480 or higher
- C or higher in a dual enrollment English course
- Successful completion of the Foundations of College English course with 75% of better
- Placement test score upon entry into college (if one of the above measures is not met)

Each institution has placed these targets on their website. Once the math targets are approved, a one-pager can be developed for high schools to distribute.

Recommendation #4: Continue the subcommittee for continued evaluation and additional recommendation as needed.

Discussion: The sub-committee members identified several areas for additional research. Subcommittee members recommended ongoing meetings with less frequency to continue this work through the P20 Council.

Areas of research include:

- Success of college students in credit-bearing courses based on students meeting the ELA college readiness targets
- Success of students in credit-bearing courses following remedial courses
- Performance on placement test compared to performance in credit-bearing courses
- Alignment of placement test to initial year credit-bearing course objectives and standards
- Success of UD's English model post-elimination of remedial courses

Recommendation #5: Create an online repository via Schoology to include sample rubrics and assignments for college English courses and writing assignments from other content areas.

Discussion: The sub-committee identified a lack of understanding from high school teachers about the types of assignments and expectations for students in college courses regarding writing and reading comprehension. Members expressed a desire to have artifacts from our college faculty that include rubric for writing assignments and the sample writing assignments from diverse disciplines. Posted on Schoology these documents would provide access for teachers to additional information regarding expectations and strategies to inform their classroom instruction. Schoology can also create a forum for teachers and college faculty to connect in ongoing dialogue about classroom assignments and bridging the divide between high school and college.

Concluding Remarks

The sub-committee found the work to be extremely valuable to their daily work. The conversation helped identify core areas including literacy and writing instruction as levers to improve student achievement. Additional data analysis could identify other areas for support.

Higher education institutions will need to make a commitment for their faculty participation in the identified meetings for the sub-committee, Literacy Cadre and professional learning calendar. This will be essential to effective implementation of the recommendations and fidelity in implementation.

References

www.completecollegeamerica.org

www.doe.k12.de.us/collegesuccess

Appendix A: Meeting Minutes Summary

Shana Payne (Delaware Department of Education) and Jeffrey Gibson (Wesley College) served as co-chairs of the English sub-committee for the P20 Council in 2017-18. The sub-committee was established through the review of the state's College Success Report in effort to identify a long-term plan to address remediation rates in Delaware. The group had six representatives from Delaware's institutes of higher education (ihe): Elizabeth Kelleher (Delaware Technical Community College), Christine Cucciarre (University of Delaware), Adenike Davidson (Delaware State University), Kevin Hunt (Goldey-Beacom College), Mika Shipley (Wesley College), and Matthew Whelihan (Wilmington University). The group also had three K-12 representatives: Diane Albanese (Cape Henlopen School District), Ryan Buchanan (Smyrna School District), and Carol O'Hara (New Castle County Vo-Tech School District). The group met seven times over the course of the year in September, November, December, March (2x), May, and June. Below is a summary of the meeting discussions.

The English group began by identifying the outcomes the group would like to achieve and creating normative rules for how the group would operate as they attained these outcomes. The established outcomes are as follows:

1. Develop a deep understanding of the remediation problem on both sides of the conversation (K-12 and higher education). What are the solutions?
2. Determine if there is a common bar for DE students to demonstrate preparedness when entering credit-bearing courses in college. Define preparedness.
3. Identify the supports/structures that are necessary in high school and college to keep students on the path to preparedness.
4. Determine consensus on how Delaware meets the ESSA requirements to align our academic standards with our state's college entrance requirements.

To begin understanding the problem, the group conducted a question formulation exercise. The group split up into teams to focus on the prompt: "25% of Delaware's high school graduates who enter two- and four-year colleges in Delaware require remediation in English. Remedial courses carry no credit toward graduation. For students who begin their college journey in remediation, 1 in 10 graduate from

community college within 3 years and 3 in 10 complete a bachelor's degree within six years." They generated questions after hearing the prompt, and then prioritized the questions they conceived. The prioritized questions were as follows:

- How many students in remediation have been identified as special education or at risk?
- What are other states doing to reduce remediation (at the high school and college level)?
- How are the skills of a fully prepared college freshman determined?
- What is the format, structure, length, and teacher training for college remedial courses?
- Why are their disparities between high school performance and college preparation?

With these questions in mind, the group began investigating the problem at the next meeting. Each IHE presented rubrics from their first year English courses. Afterwards Theresa Bennett from the Department of Education presented on the Common Core standards to give a better understanding of the K-12 English system.

To compare the IHE standards to the Common Core, the group broke up into teams with one representative from an IHE and one from K-12. Some of the observations were as follows:

- Teachers use rubrics to help a student improve their work. K-12 and IHEs are working on critical reading and writing throughout their courses.
- However, rubrics and expectations across institutions are different.
- K-12 and IHEs focus on multiple writing assignments.
- However, types and styles of texts are different as higher education teachers have more autonomy in choosing their texts.

The group concluded their November meeting with a discussion about the Foundations of College English Course. First, the group discussed the Foundations of College Math course, which has been in place for the last three years. Now, with funding from Strada Education Network, Delaware will develop Foundations of College English course to be piloted through the Allied Health Program of Study. They will pilot in Allied Health because there is an immediate need for students in this pathway. The grant from Strada Education Network will focus on developing both the Foundations of College English Course and Readiness with a Purpose Modules.

The December meeting opened with an update on the Foundations of College English course. Bonnie Ceban, the Delaware Technical Community College Representative, presented an outlined draft proposal for the course. Then, she explained the goal of the course regarding reducing English remediation rates and increasing access to dual enrollment courses. The target is all higher education institutions in Delaware to review and accept the Foundations of English course as an acceptable equivalent to their remediation coursework. Students who have successfully completed with a 75% or higher will be placed directly in credit-bearing coursework when they enter college. She reviewed the anticipated requirements of the course. It is focused on 11th grade students, but also available for 12th grade. Students should have a score in the 380-480 range. Priority will be given to students who are completing a Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway, which requires credit-level coursework in their senior year. Then the subcommittee reviewed the draft course information to see if it aligned with Common Core Standards. They also reviewed the Unit Content and Assessment Summary. Bonnie informed the group that once districts identify an ELA instructor, the instructor would receive a 5-day/36-hour training as well as consistent follow-up. A Memorandum of Understanding based on this discussion was drafted for the next meeting.

In December, the group also listened to a presentation from College Board to understand the current assessments of students in high school. They reviewed the Reading and Writing sections of the SAT, and then, discussed SAT cut scores at each Delaware IHE. The cut scores varied across each IHE.

Finally, the group concluded the meeting by comparing remedial courses, with entry-level courses, and the SAT. They made the following observations:

- SAT and remedial courses use shorter passages for reading comprehension. Students later struggle with longer passages.
- Entry-level courses and remedial courses have similar objectives, but vary when it comes to writing length.

During the first meeting in March, the K-12 representatives discussed the implementation of the college and career ready standards for speaking and listening, reading comprehension, and writing at the high school level. The group pinpointed writing instruction was a key challenge at both the high school and college level. The English teachers wanted the students to engage students in longer, more complex texts earlier on in their education. Before the end of the meeting the group voted to establish a common bar of defining college-readiness across each institution. The metrics agreed upon include:

- SAT-EBRW score of 480 or higher
- C or higher in a dual enrollment English course
- Placement test score upon entry into college (if one of the above measures is not met)

The group received an update on the Foundations of College English class. They looked over the class unit by unit giving recommendations. The group asked about instructor training. Peg Enslin (DOE) and Liz Kelleher (DTCC) explained that there will be professional development in the summer for four days and invited any IHE representatives to attend. During the second March meeting, Liz Kelleher and Peg Enslin presented the final MOU, requested the group review the document and sign it.

Also during the second March meeting, the group discussed strategies related to writing instruction, teaching rhetoric & text structure, and curriculum guidance. Based on this discussion, Shana and Jeff identified potential strategies for discussion at the next meeting.

- Collect materials to put into repository (writing assignments, rubrics, etc. at both high school and postsecondary level)
- Discuss vertical alignment of professional development (middle school, high school, postsecondary)
- Checklist of supports/strategies available to identify students who need support
- Partnership with teacher prep programs

In the May meeting, the group was informed that the Foundations of College English team was working with districts to update delivery plans. Then, the group worked on narrowing their recommendations for the P20 Council.

The top seven recommendations were:

- 1) **Online repository for writing rubrics, syllabi, sample assessments across disciplines**
 - a. Discussion: Consider incorporating into recommendation #3.

- 2) **Vertical alignment and professional learning between elementary, middle, high school, college**
 - a. Discussion: This could be the vehicle for implementing learning communities
- 3) **Incentivize learning communities (within content areas) that allow for modeling progress across classrooms/schools/districts and to share resources and approaches**
 - a. Discussion: This is a process tool, consider models in DE already doing this well, discuss lessons learned and opportunities to expand to other schools/districts. Consider gathering common language, definitions, etc. It will be important to get 10th-12th grade teachers and higher education faculty together.
- 4) **Guidelines by discipline around reading/writing assignment expectations**
- 5) **Address reading strategies through teacher prep programs**
- 6) **More writing across the curriculum, being deliberate, quantifiable and informative.**
- 7) **Guidelines by discipline around reading/writing assignment expectations**
 - a. Discussion- Standardized wording will not solve everything, but creating sustainable process will help.

The group then voted on these recommendations with each person having three votes.

Recommendation 1 had the most votes (seven votes) with Recommendation 2 close behind (six votes).

In the final June meeting the recommendations were solidified into the five recommendations:

Recommendation #1: Dedicate three Literacy Cadre meetings per year as joint meetings with higher education institutions and Literacy Cadre members.

Recommendation #2: Develop a targeted professional learning cohort model including higher education institutions and selected districts.

Recommendation #3: Higher Education institutions will use multiple pathways to define college-readiness for English and placement into credit-bearing courses.

Recommendation #4: Continue the subcommittee for continued evaluation and additional recommendation as needed.

Recommendation #5: Create an online repository via Schoology to include sample rubrics and assignments for college English courses and writing assignments from other content areas.

The group also identified decision points for the leadership of P20 to ensure fidelity of these projects moving forward. A final report was drafted for review in October by the P20 Council.