



REMEDIAL EDUCATION

by Josh Abram

Remedial education refers to academic courses in higher education intended to improve the basic skills of new or returning college students, so that they are adequately prepared for college-level work. These basic skills courses are typically non-credit courses. This *issue brief* discusses how students are identified for remediation, the number involved, the cost, and recent innovations intended to reduce the incidence of remediation at higher education institutions in Colorado.

Nationally, it is estimated that one-half of all students entering community colleges, and 20 percent of students entering four-year colleges, require some amount of remediation, and that fewer than 25 percent of these students will graduate with a degree or other postsecondary credential. Similarly, Colorado students who require remedial education are less likely than other students to persist beyond their freshman year. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) has set a goal of increasing the number of state residents aged 25 to 34 who hold a high-quality postsecondary credential to 66 percent.

Who provides remedial education?

Remediation is typically offered by community colleges, although some four-year schools may also provide basic skills courses. Only Adams State University, Colorado Mesa University, local community colleges, and community colleges governed by the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education (SBCCOE)

are authorized to offer basic skills courses and receive stipends from the College Opportunity Fund (COF) for students enrolled in these classes.

How are students placed in remedial classes?

High school students typically take a college placement exam such as the ACT or the SAT and submit those test scores along with their college application. If a student achieves a score below the score determined to indicate college readiness, or if the student does not include placement exam scores with his or her application, that student is given a second placement test by the institution, which is used to determine whether remedial classes are needed. In Colorado, most students requiring remediation need help with math. Remedial education is also offered in writing and reading.

How many students require remedial education?

The percentage of high school graduates in Colorado placed into remediation in at least one subject has historically stayed around 40 percent. Results from the 2013 legislative report on remedial education prepared by the Department of Higher Education (DHE) showed a 4.4 percentage point drop in statewide remediation rates compared with 2011. The downward trend is also evident when measuring the remediation rates specific to community colleges (2.5 percentage point drop since 2011) and four-year schools (4.4 percentage point drop since 2011).

Across all institutions, Colorado Students enrolled in over 72,000 credit hours of remedial courses during the 2012-13 academic year. Approximately 62 percent of these students passed their remedial courses, while the remaining 38 percent failed, withdrew, took as incomplete, or audited the course work. This is a 3 percentage point improvement over the number of successfully completed remedial education courses in the previous year.

Who pays for remediation? Parents and students pay the majority of the cost for remedial education. Since these courses are not typically credit-bearing, remedial education often increases the overall cost of a postsecondary degree. Depending on the institution, a student's financial aid might not apply, requiring that the student pay for remediation "out of pocket." The state also provides supplemental funding to the institutions authorized to teach basic skills courses via the COF, which serves to buy down the tuition cost of higher education for resident students.

How much does remediation cost? The state does not calculate an up front cost for remediation or make a single appropriation in advance; rather, the cost is estimated by using actual year-end expense data provided by the institutions. Total expenditures are divided by the total number of credit hours taught over the same fiscal year to generate an average cost per credit hour. This average cost is then applied to the number of remedial credit hours, which generates an estimated average cost for total remedial education. In the 2012-13 academic year, the estimated cost of remedial education was about \$56.1 million. Of that amount, tuition from students was \$37.5 million, and state funding accounted for \$18.6 million. The 2012-13 remedial education cost is a decrease over the previous year's estimated cost of \$58.4 million, possibly as a result of fewer students taking remedial education courses.

How does Colorado track and report remediation rates? A recent policy review by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) found that there is little consistency in how states

identify, track, and report the number of students assigned to remedial education. For example, some states determine remedial rates by enrollment in basic skills courses; other states count remedial rates by placement test scores.

Colorado uses both enrollment and test scores to more completely measure remedial education rates, and has developed data-sharing agreements between the state departments of higher education and K-12 education to better report remedial education data to public high schools. Colorado is also among the few states that prepares an annual report with data on new students' remedial needs, the percentage and number of students identified for remediation, subject matter data, student characteristics, and remedial student success. Current law requires that schools authorized to offer basic skills courses collect and report the following for students identified as needing remediation: the school district from which these students graduated; the number of students from each school; and the basic skills for which they need remediation. The institutions report these data annually to the DHE, which compiles and analyzes the information as part of its annual report.

Recent Colorado reforms in remedial education. In 2013, the CCHE approved updates to the state's remedial education policy, which take effect beginning with the 2014-15 academic year. The new policies: increase the number of assessment options used by institutions of higher education to identify remedial education students; reduces the time an institution of higher education may consider a student's college placement assessment results from five to three years; and allow for supplemental academic instruction (SAI). Supplemental academic instruction allows an institution to enroll students with limited academic deficiencies to credit-bearing courses and provide those students with supplemental academic support on campus, rather than having students attend remedial courses off-site at a community college.