

Problem: Remediation as a Huge Barrier to Completion

Solution: Redesigning the Math Pathway at SUNY

The State University of New York (SUNY) created the Task Force on Remediation in 2012. The charge of the task force was to investigate potential solutions, as well as implementation strategies, to decrease the need for remediation while simultaneously increasing the success rates of students who require it (SUNY Task Force on Remediation, 2012). The group's inquiry revealed that more than 40% of New York's high school graduates were college-ready. Further, more than 85% of Black and Hispanic students graduated high school underprepared for college. Students requiring remediation were far less likely to persist than their college-ready peers, which is especially challenging at the community college level of SUNY, where most remediation occurs.

The Task Force identified several challenges, including a lack of adequate readiness assessments, the need for more targeted support for students requiring remediation, and insufficient funding mechanisms. Each of these challenges is further complicated by factors including "system-wide consistency vs. institutional autonomy, efficient vs. effective assessments of readiness, and supporting student progression and success while enforcing academic standards" (SUNY Task Force on Remediation, 2012, p. 8; see also Smith Jagers & Hondra, 2011). Overcoming these challenges would be key to meeting the demands of a growing proportion of incoming students, while also driving down remediation costs and improving retention, persistence, and completion.

The Task Force identified the Quantway™ and Statway™ Learning Pathways, developed by the Carnegie Foundation and the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, as programs that could assist students who require remediation. The learning pathways were designed to help students in need of developmental math succeed in credit-bearing, college-level math and statistics courses. These programs help to shift learning mindsets, empowering students to believe in their ability to grow intellectually and improving their likelihood of success (SUNY Task Force on Remediation, 2012; Yaeger, Muhich, & Gray, 2011). There is promising evidence that the pathways are effective, "with 57% of students in Quantway™ completing their developmental math requirements in one semester, and 52% of Statway™ students receiving college credit in one year" (SUNY Task Force on Remediation, 2012, p. 19). Seeing promise in these pathways with a proof of concept, two community colleges took the lead on a SUNY pilot, beginning by defining a mutual goal of dramatically increasing from 5% to 50% the percentage of students achieving college credit in math within one year of continuous enrollment. Since the initial pilot, many other community colleges across SUNY have expressed an interest in adopting the pathway models. Throughout the pilot, SUNY has deliberately left the decision to implement the Quantway™ and Statway™ models to math faculty at each of the campuses, in recognition of the critical role played by math faculty in testing, refining, and fully implementing new course pathways at the campus level. This approach avoided the perception that these pathways were simply a system-driven mandate. Further, these pathways have been designed with transferability in mind, not just within SUNY, but outside of it as well. Despite still being a young initiative, the pathways are improving the progression of students who require remediation into college-level courses, while also better aligning diverse campuses to suit the needs of an evolving body of students.

References

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- Smith Jagers, S., & Hondra, M. (2011). *The opposing forces that shape developmental education: Assessment, placement, and progression at CUNY community colleges* (CCRC Working Paper No. 36). Retrieved from Teachers College, Columbia University Website: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/opposing-forces-shape-developmental.pdf>
- Yeager, D., Muhich, J. & Gray, N (2011). *What we're learning about productive persistence: Early evidence from the Statway*. Presentation at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Winter Quantway Institute.