



CONNECTICUT STATE
COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES
BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Testimony by Dr. David Levinson
Board of Regents for Higher Education
ConnSCU
Before the Higher Education and
Employment Advancement Committee
February 16, 2012

Good morning, Senator Bye, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. For the record, I am Dr. David Levinson, Interim Vice President for the Connecticut Community Colleges of the Board of Regents (BOR). I am here today to speak on behalf of the 17 institutions that comprise the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (ConnSCU) System. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 5028, *An Act Concerning the Alignment of Common Core State Standards with College Curriculum*, House Bill 5029, *An Act Concerning College Readiness Assessments* and Senate Bill 40, *An Act Concerning Open Access to College Level Courses*

First let me comment on Senate Bill 40, *An Act Concerning Open Access to College Level Courses*. The Board of Regents is quite concerned at the results of remediation programs. They do not appear to lead to higher rates of degree attainment for the citizens of Connecticut. Here's the dilemma of remediation: too many students need it, and too few succeed when they get it.

Among community college students, about seven out of ten entering students take at least one remedial course upon entry, and while this proportion has been trending downward for full-time students from 74% in 2004 to 70% in 2011, it has increased for those entering as part-time students, from 63% to 71% over the same period. Remediation is less widespread at the Connecticut State University (CSU) campuses, but still about one out of five first-time full-time students at these four campuses enroll in at least one remedial course in their first semester. These remedial enrollment rates have dropped slightly from 23% in fall 2009 to 18% in fall 2011.

Unsurprisingly, success rates for students who are identified for remedial coursework are lower than those who aren't. Among full-time, first-time community college students seeking an associate's degree who do not need remediation, the three-year graduation rate was 19.1% for those entering in fall 2004 or just under one out of five. This level of success clearly should be improved, but it stands in stark contrast to students who need any remediation for whom the three-year graduation rate was 7.8%, which translated into a completion for just one out of every thirteen entering students. For students who place into one of the lower levels of remedial mathematics, the success rates drop below 5% or 1 in 20, although if these students are given another year to graduate, this figure improves to one out of ten finishing a degree.

Among the CSUs, these gaps are smaller, with a six-year graduation rate of 47.8% for full-time, first-time students entering in fall 2004 who did not take remedial courses upon entry, compared to those who did take remedial courses, for whom the six-year graduation rate was five and a half percentage points lower at 42.1%. To place such numbers in context, however, it is important to

recognize that all of the national research about graduation rates point to the primacy of students' academic inputs as the primary determinant of their college success. A recent study by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA found that the six-year graduation rate of students with high school grades in the A or A+ range was 79.3% (and this does not count those who transferred and graduated somewhere else). The graduation rate for students with a B+ high school average, however, was just 59.8%; it was 48.7% for a B average, 36.6% for a B- average, and 27.7% for students with a C+ average.

We agree that we have to fix the broken approaches to remediation. We agree that we should “mainstream” as many students as possible into college level courses by providing co-requisites or course embedded support for those needing extra help. But we also must face the reality that we receive at our doorsteps each fall, many students who are way more than a little behind, for whom extra support in the regular course would not work at all well.

For those students, we have evidence that intensive instruction (perhaps for the summer) does work quite well. And we know that the model of a series of three credit-equivalent courses does not work very well, but a summer or semester of intensive work may work well. The model of disconnected courses allows students to drop out. Currently they may take one semester of remediation, then some credit bearing courses, but they cannot advance in math or writing unless they complete their remediation, so they give up.

We agree wholeheartedly with the “Complete College America” call that we answer the fundamental question about remediation – is what’s being taught in developmental education what students really need to succeed? It is time to revisit both the structure and goals of remediation so that a coherent approach leading toward graduation becomes the norm, and we agree that tying a student’s future success to results on a placement test is not serving students very well at all.

In fact, we have been taking many of these initiatives in our ConnSCU institutions – Western’s Bridges Program, as well as other innovative summer programs across our campuses, for example. But we are concerned with the approach of SB 40 that takes away the ability of an institution to require students to move through remediation before taking college level courses. There may well be a kind of Darwinian result, where students fail at the introductory level in large numbers rather than receive the instruction they need to be prepared for college.

Since becoming an Achieving the Dream College in 2004, Housatonic Community College (HCC) has focused on increasing the success of students taking developmental math with the ultimate goal of students taking and completing college level math. HCC developed self-paced developmental math courses. Students progress at their own pace with mastery of all course content required in order to progress in the course and ultimately pass the course. Self-paced math permits students to accelerate their completion of developmental math. This has resulted in some students completing all remediation in one semester; others however, take more than one semester to complete one remedial course. The motivation and initiative of the student greatly affect the individual student outcomes. Providing the opportunity for acceleration of completion of developmental courses is stressed based upon the national research completed by Achieving the Dream and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Developmental Education Initiative. At the most recent State Policy meeting accelerated projects were extensively discussed and promoted.

My institution – Norwalk Community College – is also part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Developmental Education Initiative. We have been successful in reducing a students’ time solely in remediation by enrolling him/her in learning communities that are comprised of cohorts of students engaged in a “block-scheduled” combination of developmental and college level courses. I was a “participant observer” last fall when I taught a college-level Freshman Seminar Course that was conjoined to a college-level technology literacy course and a developmental English course. Learning communities as a promising practice for developmental education is underscored in the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) 2011 report “Developmental Education at Connecticut Community Colleges: A Key to Economic Recovery.”

Ideally, we would appreciate the opportunity to take full advantage of the consolidation and look across all 17 ConnSCU campuses to assess best practices, what’s working and what’s not as we work to address this issue in a more holistic way. Of course, we would be happy to report back our progress to you in a year and discuss a legislative approach at that point, if necessary.

House Bill 5028

We fully support efforts to ensure the alignment of standards and curriculum between high schools and our institutions. Over the past two years, the P-20 Council, which was co-chaired formerly by the Department of Higher Education and now by ConnSCU, has worked to build relationships and collaborations between K-12 and higher education at the state level, as well as extending to developing partnerships at the district and institution level, in order to better prepare students for success. In support of these partnerships, the Council also developed, with the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), the Connecticut College and Career Readiness Toolkit that provides examples of strategies to align curriculum between high school and higher education, which each member of the Committee received a copy of last week. District and higher education leaders that attended a series of workshops last fall received this toolkit, and shortly, every district and higher education leader in the state will receive it as well.

As further proof of our support and commitment to alignment efforts, there are a number of efforts underway in several of our institutions that have already begun to embark on this. Two examples of these efforts include the partnerships between Western Connecticut State University and Bethel school district, and Manchester Community College and Manchester and East Hartford High Schools. While both examples take different approaches to their alignment efforts, both are seeking the same goal, which is to prepare students that are college and career ready, including the reduced, if not eliminated, need for remediation. This requires faculty from both systems to work together. These are not the only examples of partnerships underway, and additional school districts and institutions have been in contact with us that are interested in developing similar partnerships to achieve the same end.

In order to ensure that alignment efforts are coordinated, we would recommend that a Common Core and Assessments Work Group be created as part of the existing P-20 Council charged with identifying and recommending strategies to achieve alignment of curriculum and assessments by school year 2014-15, when assessments aligned with the Common Core Standards are slated to be fully implemented. One already known barrier to these efforts, which the Work Group may need to address, is the lack of common or model curricula in math and English courses, which impacts the speed of scalability.

House Bill 5029

We support the implementing of assessments in high school that would provide students, parents, teachers and counselors with better and more timely information about whether a student is on track to being college-ready or if they may require remediation prior to graduating. Connecticut is a member of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, which is a national group charged with developing assessments from grades 3 through 11 that align with the Common Core Standards in math and English. The State Department of Education is the lead organization for Connecticut. As mentioned in my remarks regarding HB 5028, the implementation of these assessments is slated for school year 2014-15. As it currently stands, the assessment that would be provided in the 11th grade would indicate whether or not a student is college ready. There are additional assessments that are being developed as part of this system that we understand would provide teachers and students more details about the areas in which a student is struggling in order to inform course selection decisions and remediate prior to exiting high school. Our recommendation would be to support these efforts already underway. In order to ensure the coordination of these efforts between K-12 and higher education, we further recommend the development of a Common Core Standards and Assessments Work Group as part of the existing P-20 Council.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.