

# REMEDICATION

Higher Education's

**Bridge to Nowhere**

**Remediation is a broken system.  
There's a better way — start many more students  
in college courses with just-in-time support.**

**COMPLETE COLLEGE** AMERICA

# It's time to close the Bridge to Nowhere.

The intentions were noble. It was hoped that remediation programs would be an academic bridge from poor high school preparation to college readiness — a grand idea inspired by our commitment to expand access to all who seek a college degree.

Sadly, remediation has become instead higher education's "Bridge to Nowhere." This broken remedial bridge is travelled by some 1.7 million beginning students each year, most of whom will not reach their destination — graduation.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that states and students spent more than \$3 billion on remedial courses last year with very little student success to show for it.<sup>2</sup>

While more students must be adequately prepared for college, this current remediation system is broken. The very structure of remediation is engineered for failure.

**It's not that students don't pass remedial courses, they do: It's that 30 percent don't even show up for the first course or subsequent remedial courses — and, amazingly, 30 percent of those who complete their remedial courses don't even ATTEMPT their gateway courses within two years.<sup>3</sup>**

To fix this, we must first commit ourselves to close every possible exit ramp. By doing so, we will eliminate all opportunities to lose students along the way, saving precious time and money.

## **Remediation is a classic case of system failure:**



### **DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #1: Too many students start in remediation.**

More than 50 percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities are placed in remedial classes.

Frustrated about their placement into remediation, thousands who were accepted into college never show up for classes. With so many twists and turns, the road ahead doesn't seem to lead to graduation.

### **Can an "open access" college be truly open access if it denies so many access to its college-level courses?**



### **DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #2: Remediation doesn't work.**

Nearly 4 in 10 remedial students in community colleges never complete their remedial courses.

### **Research shows that students who skip their remedial assignments do just as well in gateway courses as those who took remediation first.**

Never wanting to be in a remedial class in the first place and often feeling that they'll never get to full-credit courses, too many remedial students quit before ever starting a college class.



**DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #3:  
Too few complete gateway courses.**

Having survived the remediation gauntlet, not even a quarter of remedial community college students ultimately complete

college-level English and math courses — and little more than a third of remedial students at four-year schools do the same.



**DROPOUT EXIT RAMP #4:  
Too few graduate.**

Graduation rates for students who started in remediation are deplorable: Fewer than 1 in 10 graduate from community colleges within three years and little more than a third complete bachelor's degrees in six years.

## **THE BIG IDEA:** Start in college courses with support.

### **Students need a CLEAR PATH to graduation day.**

The concept makes common sense. Instead of wasting valuable time and money in remedial classes for no credit, students have been proven to succeed in redesigned first-year classes with built-in, just-in-time tutoring and support. Imagine an English or Math 101 class that meets five days a week instead of just three times. Three days a week the students receive the regular instruction and the other two they get embedded tutoring.

### **Extra academic help becomes a co-requisite, not a prerequisite.**

Institutions that have used this approach have seen their unprepared students succeed at the same rates as their college-ready peers. And best practices have demonstrated that as many as half of all current remedial students can succeed this way. With results like these, it's long past time to take this reform to scale.

Some will say this approach may work for those who just need minimal academic help, but that's not true. Students who are further behind should still be placed in full-credit courses with built-in support but should take the courses over two semesters instead of one. And those who seek to attend a community college with what amounts to little more than a basic understanding of fractions and decimals should be encouraged to enroll in high-quality career certificate programs that embed extra help in the context of each course and lead to jobs that pay well.

When higher education's Bridge to Nowhere is finally closed for good, it is true that some may still be lost. But nearly all of these students disappear today.

College students come to campus for college, not more high school. Let's honor their intentions — and refocus our own good intentions to build a new road to student success.

1 National Center for Education Statistics. (2010). *Digest of Education Statistics*. Table 241.

2 Alliance for Excellent Education. (May 2011). *Saving Now and Saving Later: How High School Reform Can Reduce the Nation's Wasted Remediation Dollars*.

3 Jenkins, D., Jaggars, S.S., & Roksa, J. (November 2009). *Promoting Gatekeeper Course Success Among Community College Students Needing Remediation: Findings and Recommendations from a Virginia Study (Summary Report)*. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, pp. 2-3.

**KNOW THIS**

# Too many entering freshmen need remediation.

**51.7%** of those entering a 2-year college enrolled in remediation

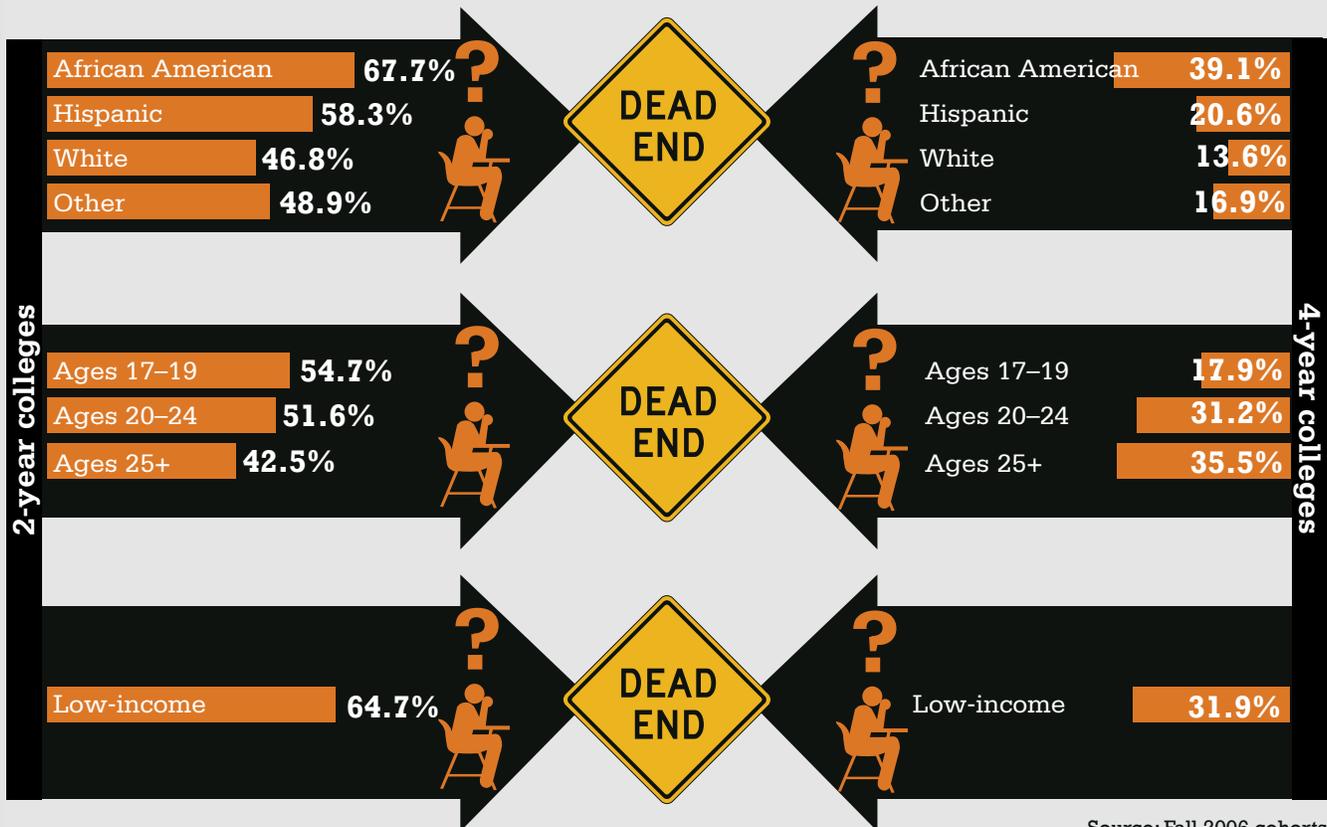


**19.9%** of those entering a 4-year college enrolled in remediation



If you're African American, Hispanic, or a low-income student, you're more likely to be headed toward the remediation dead end.

Percentage of students needing remediation



Source: Fall 2006 cohorts

**Strengthen high school so that students are actually prepared for college.**

**KNOW THIS**

# Most students don't make it through college-level gateway courses.

## 2-Year Colleges



62.0%

**Complete remediation**



22.3%

**Complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years**

## 4-Year Colleges



74.4%

**Complete remediation**

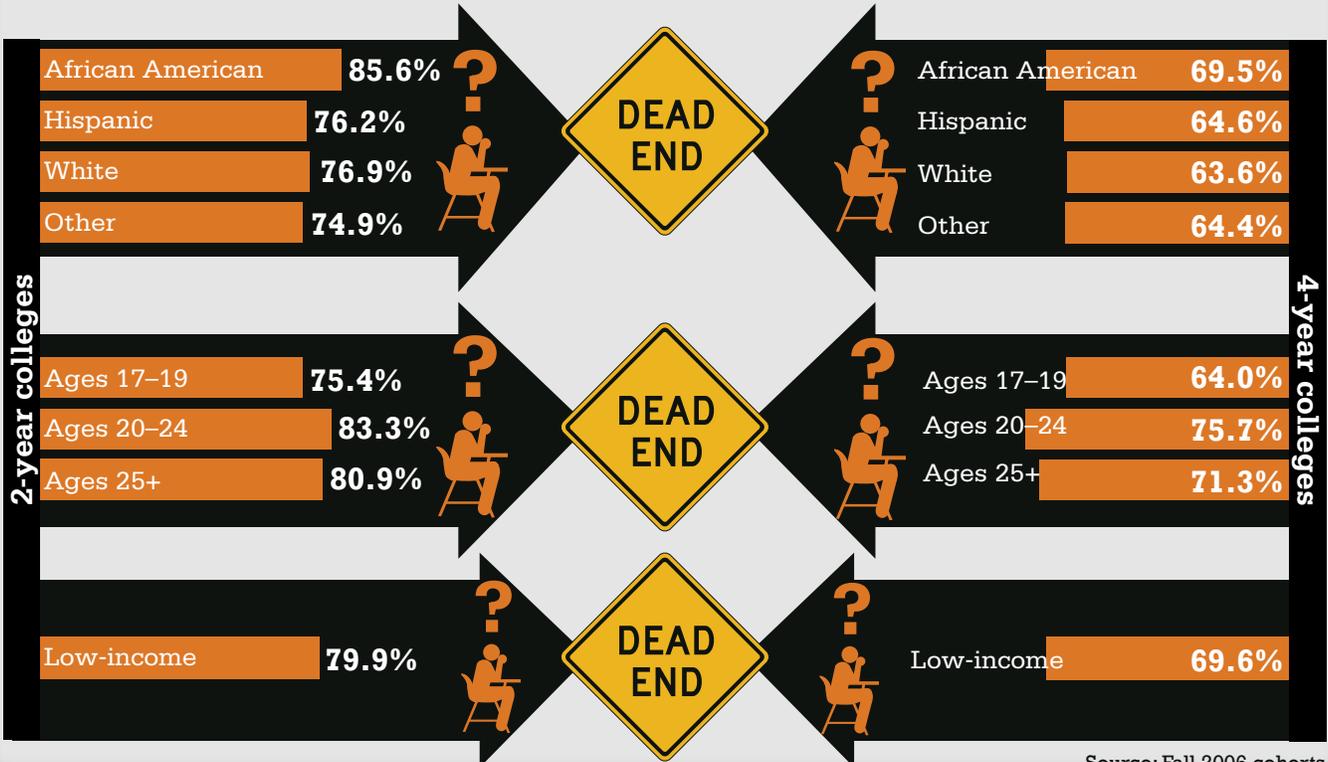


36.8%

**Complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years**

Gateway courses can be a roadblock for the vast majority of ALL students — regardless of race, age, or income.

Percentage who did NOT complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years



Source: Fall 2006 cohorts

**Get students into credit-bearing gateway courses as soon as possible.**

## DO THIS!

# Start college now. Provide help as a co-requisite, not a prerequisite.

Start college students in college courses, not more high school. Get them on track for graduation from the moment they step on campus by using only co-requisite approaches to deliver tutoring and support. Modify the length and method of built-in, just-in-time academic help to match students' needs.



### End traditional remediation; use co-requisite models instead.

- For students with few academic deficiencies, place them into redesigned first-year, full-credit courses with co-requisite built-in support, just-in-time tutoring, self-paced computer labs with required attendance, and
- For students with the most significant academic needs, provide alternate pathways to high-quality career certificates by embedding remediation and adult basic skills development into their instruction.

the like. The length of these courses should mirror the ordinary gateway courses so students stay on track for on-time graduation.

## DONE THIS: Some states are redesigning their gateway courses.



**Maryland:** Community College of Baltimore County's Accelerated Learning Project (ALP) enrolls remedial English students in a regular, credit-bearing English 101 course and a companion course that meets immediately afterward. The companion course provides in a small group targeted reinforcement of topics from the mainstream course that enables intensive faculty and peer support. Early results show that ALP students pass English 101 with a grade of C or better at more than twice the rate of the control group — and do so in just one semester, as opposed to the two semesters required to complete a remedial course before moving on to the credit-bearing course.

The University of Maryland at College Park identifies about 20 percent of incoming students as unprepared for college-level math and enrolls the top 60 percent of them, based on placement test scores, in a co-requisite math course. Scheduled five days a week, students receive accelerated remedial instruction for the first five weeks. After being retested with the same placement exam, passing students complete the remaining college-level class by attending five days a week for the remaining 10 weeks of the semester. More than 80 percent pass the retest and continue with the college-level course, ultimately matching the overall success rate for the course as nonremedial students.



**Tennessee:** Austin Peay State University in Tennessee eliminated remedial math courses and places students in redesigned credit-bearing courses that include extra workshops and specialized help. Initial assessments are given to determine specific knowledge gaps, then the workshops are used to provide additional instruction on key math concepts with special emphasis on individual areas of weakness. As a result, twice as many remedial students are passing their initial college-level math courses.



**Texas:** Texas State University-San Marcos enrolls students who need extra math help in concurrent remedial and college-level algebra and statistics courses, and it requires additional weekly tutoring, for which students earn credit. Seventy-four percent of participants in the program earn a grade of C or better in algebra during their first semester. This is more than twice the percentage rate of all remedial students at Texas State-San Marcos who earn similar grades in their first two years.

**KNOW  
THIS**

# Most remedial students never graduate.

## 2-Year Colleges



62.0%

**Complete remediation**



22.3%

**Complete remediation and  
associated college-level courses  
in two years**



9.5%

**Graduate within 3 years  
(projected)**

## 4-Year Colleges



74.4%

**Complete remediation**



36.8%

**Complete remediation and  
associated college-level courses  
in two years**



35.1%

**Graduate within 6 years  
(projected)**

Students who **don't** take remedial courses are more likely to graduate.



13.9%

**Graduate within 3 years  
(projected)**



55.7%

**Graduate within 6 years  
(projected)**

Source: Completion data: fall 2006 cohorts; graduation data: 2-year, fall 2004 cohorts; 4-year, fall 2002 cohorts

**Keep your eyes on the prize: graduation.**

## DO THIS!

# Provide co-requisite courses aligned with programs of study.

Most students come to our college campuses to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure a good job and a better life. A logical first step is to commit to a program of study. Remarkably, many students never do — and broken remediation programs are often to blame.

Committing to a program of study is much more than simply declaring a major. Anybody can declare a major, but completing the initial courses necessary to legitimately be on track in a program of study is a completely different matter. And it's in these fragile, early stages of college when remediation programs do the most damage.

Researchers at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University have found that **students who complete at least three required “gateway” courses in a program of study within a year of enrollment are twice as likely to earn certificates or degrees.**

Remediation programs, designed as prerequisite hurdles that must be jumped before getting to college-level classes, slow students' progress into programs of study. Studies prove that being trapped in endless remediation sequences or being unable to pass associated gateway courses in math and English are the primary reasons students do not enter programs of study during their first year. And the longer it takes for students to commit to programs of study, the less likely they ever will.

Worse, traditional remediation often seems irrelevant and disconnected from future ambitions, robbing students of precious time, money, and motivation. What's the result? Many students veer off course onto another dropout exit ramp.

 **Get students to commit to programs of study ASAP.** Using placement scores, high school transcripts, and predictive tools to determine student aptitude, guide all students to choose among a limited number

of first-year pathways — for example, health, business, liberal arts, or STEM — as soon as possible. Students should make the big choices of programs of study informed with an understanding of program requirements and available supports to achieve their career goals. Once they do, place them into structured program pathways constructed of relevant, sequenced courses chosen for them.



**Establish “default” programs for students not ready to commit.**

No longer allow students to be considered “unclassified.” Upon enrollment, nudge them into first-year pathways — for example, health, business, liberal arts, or STEM. This ensures a coherent pathway from the beginning, with core college-level credits that will count toward certificates and degrees. By doing so, students avoid excessive course-taking while wandering the curriculum, shortening the time it takes to graduate.



**Place students in the right math.** Most students are placed in algebra pathways when statistics or quantitative math would be most appropriate to prepare them for their chosen programs of study and careers.



**Expand co-requisite supports for additional college-level courses.**

Additional introductory courses serve as gateway classes for programs of study, not just English and math. Given high failure rates, they have become gatekeeper courses instead, too often blocking students' entry into their chosen fields. To help unprepared students get a strong, early start, build extra supports around introductory courses necessary for success like entry-level anatomy, biology, physiology, physics, accounting, and drafting.

# DO THIS! Four steps states should take right now to close remediation exit ramps

## EXIT RAMPS

**#1** Too many students start in remediation.



**1. Strengthen high school preparation.**

Reduce the need for college remediation altogether by adopting and implementing the new voluntary Common Core State Standards in reading, writing, and math. Align requirements for entry-level college courses with requirements for high school graduation. Administer college-ready anchor assessments in high school, and use them to develop targeted interventions before students fall too far behind. That way, high school graduates are ready for credit-bearing college courses from Day One.



**#2** Remediation doesn't work.



**2. Start students in college-level courses with built-in, co-requisite support.**

Immediately place freshmen with basic needs into entry-level, credit-bearing college courses with co-requisite support. That is, make this co-requisite model *the default*. For students needing more support, offer two-semester courses of the same content with built-in tutoring. Meanwhile, offer students with significant academic challenges skill certificate programs with embedded remediation.



**#3** Too few complete gateway courses.



**3. Embed needed academic help in multiple gateway courses.**

To help unprepared students get a strong, early start, build extra supports around all of the early gateway courses that are necessary for success in students' fields of study. For students to succeed in these course, they should have built-in tutoring and/or additional instruction time.



**#4** Too few graduate.



**4. Encourage students to enter programs of study when they first enroll.**

Students are twice as likely to graduate if they complete at least three courses in their chosen programs of study in their first year on campus. Create clear, limited, and structured program pathways containing core college-level courses. Then require students to choose a pathway. Unprepared students can achieve this significant milestone for success if the early college-level courses required in their programs of study have embedded help.

