

SREB TRANSITIONAL COURSE PROJECT OVERVIEW

provided by the Arkansas Department of Education – 11/26/2012

Project Overview

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) was awarded a three-year grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to work on six different education issues: Benchmarking the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); Implementing Systems of Educator Effectiveness; Scaling Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and Math Design Collaborative (MDC) strategies; Career and Technical Education Pathways; College Completion and Implementing Transitional Courses. Thus, with a portion of this grant, SREB is working to develop and implement high school transitional courses in English language arts and mathematics. The purpose of these courses is to allow high school students to complete college remediation requirements while enrolled in high school and earn high school credit for completion.

In December of 2011, Arkansas and four other southern states were chosen to collaboratively write and eventually implement a statewide high school math transitional course. At the invitation of SREB, the Arkansas Department of Education and Arkansas Department of Higher Education identified a core group of Arkansas higher education, high school, and state agency educators to serve as our state's writing team.

Mathematics Course

This transition course targets students who have completed an Algebra II course, but have not met the ACT or SAT math non-remediation score as established by higher education. The course is modular, employs hybrid in-class and online approaches, focuses on the CCSS, includes LDC/MDC tools, and serves the purpose of helping students become college-ready and prepared to succeed in postsecondary pursuits. As of November 2012, the math modules, and their assigned state writing teams, include the following: Number Operations (AR), Solving Equations (TN), Measurement (KY), Linear Concepts (GA), Systems (KY), Quadratic Functions (NC), Exponential Functions (AR), and Statistics (TN). A major part of this effort, yet to be developed, will be online modules for the transitional course that states can use as part of their curriculum materials.

The Arkansas Writing Team members include: Anthony Owen, ADE; Dr. Theodore Kalthoff, ASU – Beebe; Brian Leonard, Lake Hamilton High School – Hot Springs; Kimberly Brown, Fort Smith School District.

Next Steps for Mathematics Course

The Arkansas writing team believes that this course has a potential mathematical benefit for a select group of our Arkansas high school students. There is concern about whether or not the course meets law of consistency and rigor and potential Smart Core (Academic Challenge Scholarship) implications. This concern is founded in the fact that the course spans mathematical concepts that are found in middle school and high school math courses that the students will have already completed. It contains very little content that the writers believe to be post-Algebra II. The writers do believe that the modules are written in a way that will lead to the concepts being reinforced using teaching strategies that capture the spirit of the Common Core State Standards Eight Mathematical Practices. If the course is implemented with fidelity, it can easily incorporate Arkansas's Purposeful Pedagogy and Discourse Instructional Model. At this time, the Arkansas writers support this course, on its potential, as a fourth math credit offering; however, they cannot honestly state that it should be considered as a course designated as "above and beyond Algebra II", which would make this course not applicable for students seeking Smart Core graduation.

English Language Arts Course

This transition course targets students who have completed 11th grade English, but have not met the ACT or SAT reading non-remediation score as established by higher education. The course is modular, employs close reading of rich texts, focuses on the CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, includes formative assessment tools, includes writing, vocabulary and note taking processes and skills, embeds research, and serves the purpose of helping students become college-ready and prepared to succeed in postsecondary pursuits. As of November 2012, this course has 6 required modules, 2 each for literature, science and social studies, including impact of technology for literature, nutrition and cellular biology for science, and freedom in America and globally for social studies. A major part of this effort, yet to be developed, will be online modules for the transitional course that states can use as part of their curriculum materials.

The Arkansas Writing Team members include: Margaret Herrick, ADE; Toney McMurray, Alma High School; Karen Ladd, Nettleton High School; Jennifer Garner, Lakeside High School – Hot Springs; Dr. Marla Strecker, SAU – Magnolia; Dr. Wade Derden, National Park Community College – Hot Springs; Dr. Olga Tarasenko, UALR – Little Rock.

Next Steps for English Language Arts Course

The Arkansas writing team believes that this course has a potential benefit for a large number of Arkansas high school students. With its focus on disciplinary literacy, which is expanded under the CCSS, the design of this course is appealing to our state team. The writing team does feel that this course should be used as an elective/career focus for students, but the team is not sure that this course should be limited to seniors only; the benefits for juniors or even sophomores taking this course could be large.