

Higher Education Remediation, Retention and Graduation Rates

Presented to

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Presented by

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Thank you for the invitation to speak before this Task Force today. Also, I want to express appreciation and thanks to the members of the Task Force for the work done during the past several months toward addressing a plan to decrease remediation and improve retention and graduation rates. . The issues as defined by ACT 570 (Remediation, Retention and Graduation Rates) span across Arkansas education systems and have serious implications for institutions, the economy and the well-being of society in general.

To increase the capacity of Institutions of Higher Education and P-12 schools as well to change and to increase the capacity of students to learn will require re-thinking schools and schooling.

The Federal Government – “No Child Left Behind”, and states promises that no child will be left behind. For this promise to become reality, schools then must be successful with young people who were not among the successful ones of the past.

As traditional educators, we are too often committed to requiring children to adapt to school rather than redesigning schools to meet the needs of children. Frank Anthony, Superintendent, Pine Bluff School District, always reminds us that, “parents are sending their best children to school.” Therefore, schools must find ways to motivate children and to serve them better.

An ongoing question among educators and policy makers is, Who is to blame for the condition of education?” This is especially of great interest when it comes to “remediation” because that is where the blame is passed around and often ends up with families and parents.

Critical to the process of providing an adequate education is teacher quality. In general, it is believed by educators that effective teachers are capable of inspiring greater learning gains in their students when compared with weaker colleagues.

Reports and research will show that schools located in the poorest communities and school districts serving poor and minority children are less able to compete for and employ highly qualified teachers. In addition, these districts have a higher turnover in teachers and they are less likely to provide a curriculum that prepares students for college entrance.

To improve higher education in Arkansas, we must place it among the highest education priorities of the state. During recent years, considerable attention has been devoted to P-12 education including reform that addressed teacher quality, teacher salaries, facilities, professional development, funding, assessments, performance standards, etc.

Arkansas is faced with changing its way of thinking about higher education. To often a four year degree is not within the vision of too many P-12 students. Secondly, for those with the vision, facts associated with poverty derail the vision for many poor and minority students.

Generally it is believed that parents and children want an education and they see the relationship between an education and future earnings. If parents want education for their

children, then a common question arises, “Why do schools have problems with parent and family involvement?”

I reviewed many of the reports that you have studied regarding remediation, retention and graduation rates. So to avoid duplication of effort and your time I would like to suggest for your consideration the following measures to determine the student level of readiness for improving retention, reducing remediation and increasing graduation. Some of these measures were listed by Education Week in the reporting of the “report card” by states. The following measures are thought to be critical to making changes needed to improve education performance in Arkansas.

- Preparation
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Support
- Transparency
- Performance standards
- Accountability
 - Curriculum Alignment
 - Mentoring
 - Teacher Recruitment/Retention
- Parent Involvement
- Closing the Achievement Gap
- Assessment

Preparation:

The state recently responded to the Lakeview case that addressed adequacy and equity among P-12 schools. A part of the response was written in the recommendations of the Arkansas Blue Ribbon Commission report. Many of the recommendations were submitted as policy and approved by the General Assembly.

The 83rd General Assembly approved the Blue Ribbon Commission that became law in 2001. Students who were in school at the time the recommendations/legislature became law would have been almost 7th or 8th grade. We must assume the students going to college in the future will perform better due to reform measures associated with the Lakeview case. I believe the state is now beginning to see some results in student performance. However, until such time, institutions must provide opportunities for the under-prepared students attempting college.

Accessibility:

State policy requires a score of nineteen on ACT or its equivalency on the SAT or some other measures. Many students are still scoring well below nineteen on the test. Many of these students aspire to go on to college. With scores below nineteen, remediation and conditional admission are required. This costly process places a burden on the student, family and institutions. The pressure to graduate students in a traditional four year time frame places institutions in a situation that favors recruiting and admitting the better qualified students.

At the same time, some institutions, by their mission, are obligated to admit and serve those same students who might very well graduate from P-12 schools with a 3.0 GPA and an ACT score well below nineteen.

Affordability:

Tuition and associated cost to attend college continues to increase annually. Many students come from homes where the median income has been reduced due to the economy, single parent families, health issues, etc. These conditions require students to seek employment for maintenance which often takes away time that is needed for study. Too often the burden of remedial, non-credit courses consumes student financial eligibility before students complete their courses of study.

Academic Support:

To effectively engage students who require remediation, institutions must be prepared to provide a curriculum to meet the skill deficiencies of a group of diverse students who are both traditional and non-traditional.

Institutions may opt to offer a range of services through laboratories, writing, reading, math etc. Additionally, support may be provided through Trio programs, tutorial services, counseling and assessment and offices for career development and orientation.

Consideration and funding must be given to institutions which, by their mission, are charged with serving students who are economically deprived and to all institutions with demonstrated commitments to help address this growing issue of remediation/retention and graduation.

According to Lee Bollinger, President, Columbia University, “The achievement gap that exists in American education is not a gap in ability, but a gap in resources and a gap in expectation. We know that students from all backgrounds can succeed at the highest levels of education when they are given the support they need to succeed; the support that is regularly given to the students from the top income brackets.”

Accountability:

Accountability is a critical buzz word in education that will not go away in the near future. The need to hold schools, districts, educators and students responsible for results cannot be overlooked by policymakers and tax payers.

New performance measures create an environment that requires all participants to be engaged. It was only a few years ago that P-16 schools were only held accountable at best for enrollment monitoring attendance and teaching a minimum curriculum that had no alignment with state or national standards.

Transparency:

P-12 programs and higher education institutions working together to promote a seamless system of well prepared students with access to institutions that are affordable will be required to help create a system of education that is transparent, accountable, effective and meets the global challenge.

Recommendations:

1. Establish accountability measures for concurrent enrollment and early college programs to ensure preparation for college admission.
2. Align P-12 curriculum with assessments and college admission requirements.
3. Require all P-12 schools to provide the ACT plan or the College Board Readiness plan/SAT for all students.
4. Make the Smart Core or its equivalency a requirement for all students meeting high school graduation requirements.
5. Support the Arkansas Renewal Zone concept and other such programs establishing P-16 partnerships and collaborations.
6. Fund mission specific higher education institutions to enhance programs to improve remediation, retention and graduation and to include funding for adequate faculty and salaries.
7. Provide adequate funding for students who cannot afford college.
8. Support Schools of Education in recruiting teacher candidates.
9. Review the impact of Title II of the 1998 amendments to the Higher Education ACT of 1965 and related provisions of the No Child Left Behind ACT of 2001 on poor and minority students.

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