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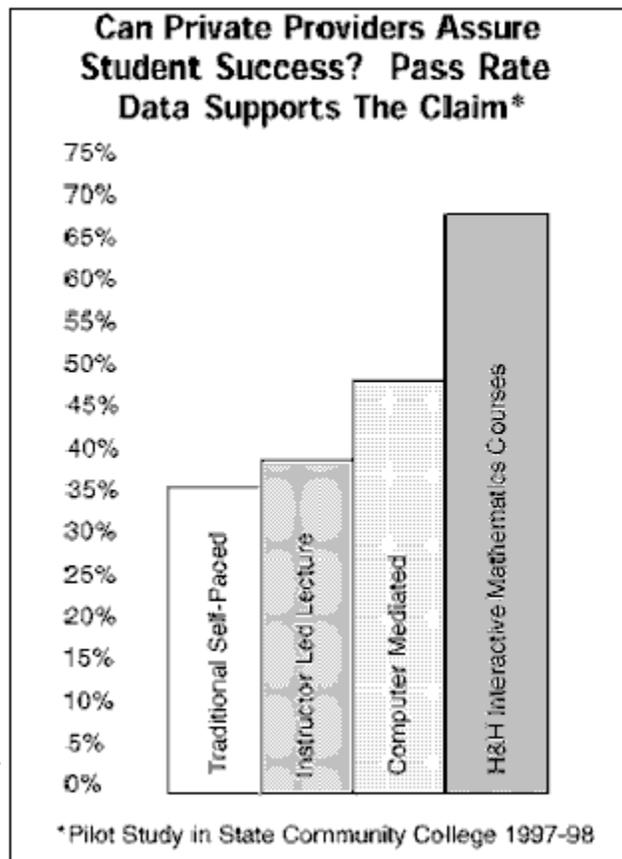
The Private Sector Can Offer Remedial Options to Community Colleges

By: Robert Hackworth, H&H Learning Systems

Saving taxpayer money is a worthy objective. Making an educational program more effective is another. I want to report on a new piece of legislation that promises to do both, but we need public discussion of the issues, the costs, and the logic that supports this new legislation. History clearly shows that without this public discussion the law will be largely ignored by those who must implement it and unknown to those who are the intended beneficiaries.

First, a little background on the problem.

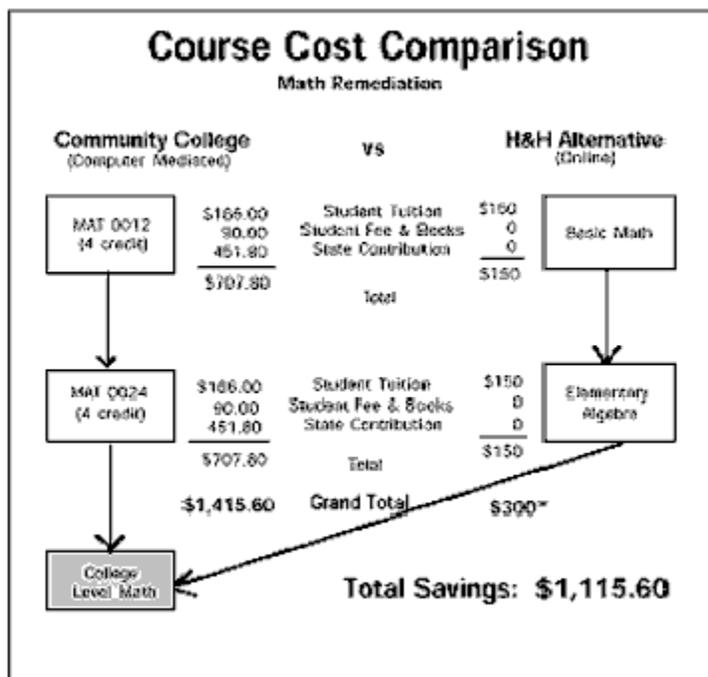
Remedial programs in Florida's community colleges cost taxpayers over \$60 million dollars a year. Sadly, they aren't effective. Only one of seven students who enrolls in a remedial class progresses into a college-level program. With a success rate of less than 15% you would think that community colleges would be concentrating on improving their instruction. Instead, they constantly go to the legislature pleading for more funds to take care of more students funds they spend on reremediating students who have failed already in their community college remedial programs. Why? They believe they are the only game in town and like most monopolies, they ignore the needs, concerns, and feedback of their consumers their students and Florida's taxpayers.



The community colleges blame the public schools for the large numbers of students who enter remedial programs. That is fair. But the community colleges also blame their

students for the fact that so many of them do not succeed in those remedial programs. That is neither fair nor responsible. In the community colleges 70% is the minimum passing grade on a course final but no one applies this same standard to classes where only 30%-50% pass to the next course. In fact, a 50% pass rate in a remedial course is often boasted about by the faculty and administration. No wonder then that the compounding effect of those low pass rates is the deplorable statistic that only 14.5% of the remedial students ever move on to college-level academic programs.

During the 1997 legislative session a bill was passed unanimously that required community colleges to improve their remedial programs and lower costs. Not a single institution in the State did and most slipped further in their effectiveness while raising the costs. The community college stance, orchestrated by the Division of Community Colleges, was that the legislation was vague and needed clarification. More honestly, the legislation was publicly ignored and administratively gutted. Faculty and staff were not informed. Faculty kept right on adopting materials and methods which only showed evidence of success for less than 50% of the students. Entering students were consistently counseled with information and requirements that openly contradicted the 1997 law. Reform was mandated, but the educrats only nodded and smiled, then did nothing.



This year the Legislature, again unanimously, has strengthened the law, clarified what was already quite clearly stated, and opened the area of remedial education to competition from other educational providers. The law's clear intent is to allow students to make informed choices among the opportunities that exist for overcoming their academic weaknesses. Community colleges no longer have a virtual monopoly on remedial instruction. Specifics of the law require that students be informed of the costs of all options and the ways to contact other providers. If students also know that they only have one chance in seven of being successful through the

* Using this example, the State has saved \$903.60 by eliminating its subsidy to the community college. The student has also reduced his/her cost for the required math remediation by over \$200.

community college, many will be encouraged to seek the services of private providers where there is no embarrassment and no risk to an academic future.

The promise of the "Open Door" made forty years ago created an opportunity for any Florida resident to attend one of the 28 community colleges. For years, that opportunity was real and thousands of Floridians with mediocre academic records progressed through remedial programs and attained academic degrees. Many who began in remedial programs achieved startling success in their college academic work and became leaders of our society. Sadly, but certainly, the "Open Door" is not working for today's citizens. It is a false promise maintained by our community colleges whose aim is to attract huge amounts of funds from the State while giving students only a revolving door that whirls them around for awhile in higher education, then spits them out to lives without the college skills they need for their futures. Those students return to the world of work with damaged self-esteems and limited capabilities for improving their lives through education.

The legislation is clear. The mandates are in place. What we need now is full public debate of the problems with Florida's remedial education programs. When that debate informs the great majority of its citizens, Florida will have put in place a level of competition that will assure a viable, affordable, and successful remedial education for all those who seek it. The State and its taxpayers will also dramatically decrease the \$60 million cost of remedial instruction and bring its community colleges back into the fold of higher education.

<p style="text-align: center;">POSTSECONDARY REMEDIATION FACT SHEET</p>

■81% of all entering community college students score below the cut score on their College Placement Test. *

■The State Board of Community Colleges reports 200,000 incidences of required remedial instruction per year in Florida's 28 community colleges.

■Most students require more than one remedial course. *

■Total Taxpayer contribution per year: \$60 million, or approximately \$300 per course.

■Student Cost per course for instruction and course materials: Over \$30 million annually or \$150 per course.

■Average full cost of instruction for a college preparatory course offered by the community colleges is \$450.

■Latest Florida Dept. of Education "College Readiness Report" indicates nearly 60% of all recent high school graduates that choose to attend a state community college require remedial instruction.

■ Nearly half of all remedial incidences are students who are recent high school graduates.
*

■ The other half of all incidences are adult students returning to school seeking further education and career training. *

* Division of Community Colleges' Accountability Report

About the Author

Robert Hackworth is Managing Director of H&H Learning Systems, a division of H&H Publishing Company, Inc., which was cofounded by his father, Dr. Robert D. Hackworth, in 1978. Dr. Hackworth taught at a state community college for 26 years and is recognized as a national authority on developmental mathematics. Their advocacy efforts to address the issue of both reducing the numbers and the cost of postsecondary remediation in the community college system have resulted in legislation that seeks to identify, assess, and consider better methods and different venues for required remedial instruction. The private for-profit company offers students a full distance-learning curriculum of college preparatory courses in mathematics, English, and reading.

Dr. Neil S. Crispo, Senior Vice President, Research and Operations
Joseph P. Lacher, Chairman; Dominic M. Calabro, President and Publisher
Daniel E. Sprague, Publications Director and Research Analyst
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For more information on this report, please call:

(850) 222-5052

OR

write Florida TaxWatch at:

P.O. Box 10209

Tallahassee, FL 32302