



KANSAS LEGISLATIVE
DIVISION *of*
POST AUDIT

A Performance Audit Report Presented to the Legislative Post Audit Committee

Evaluating the Need for Developmental Education Courses

March 2022

Report Number: L-22-003

Introduction

Representative Kristey Williams requested this limited-scope audit, which was authorized by the Legislative Post Audit Committee at its June 29, 2021 meeting.

Objectives, Scope, & Methodology

Our audit objective was to answer the following question:

1. What do stakeholders say about why developmental courses in college are necessary?

We interviewed staff at the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) to understand what developmental courses are and which students must take them. We analyzed KBOR data to determine how many Kansas high school students enrolled in a developmental course in 2020. We also interviewed several K-12 and post-secondary stakeholders to get their opinions on why students need developmental courses in college. We sent surveys to 342 post-secondary instructors who teach developmental education courses. 144 post-secondary teachers responded for a 42% response rate. We also sent surveys to 11,547 high school teachers, principals, and guidance counselors 1,559 high school staff responded for a response rate of 14%.

More specific details about the scope of our work and the methods we used are included throughout the report as appropriate.

Important Disclosures

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Overall, we believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on those audit objectives.

Audit standards require us to report limitations on the reliability or validity of our evidence. The very low response rate to the survey we sent to high school staff means the results may not be representative of the larger group we surveyed.

Our audit reports and podcasts are available on our website (www.kslpa.org).

Stakeholders reported many reasons students might need developmental education courses including having been out of school for an extended period of time, a lack of parental support, and inappropriate coursework in high school.

Developmental education courses are for college students who are not academically prepared to complete regular college-level work.

- Technical colleges, community colleges, and universities offer developmental education courses because some college students are unprepared in the core areas of math, reading, or writing to succeed in college. Most colleges and universities offer math and writing developmental courses, but a few also offer developmental reading courses. These courses typically cover material that is covered in high school. They are meant to prepare students for successful completion of college-level work.
- Community colleges and technical colleges identify students who need developmental education courses differently than universities. Community colleges and technical colleges typically administer a standardized math and English test called the AccuPlacer to incoming students. Students who score below a certain threshold must enroll in a developmental course. KBOR staff told us some colleges also consider high school grades, SAT, or ACT scores to determine which students would benefit from a developmental course. However, universities typically do not administer the AccuPlacer. Generally, they look only at measures such as high school GPA, SAT, or ACT scores.
- Students are charged tuition for these developmental courses, but do not earn college credit toward their degree. When a student successfully completes the developmental course, the student can then enroll in a credit bearing English or math course.

Many post-secondary institutions offer corequisite courses instead of traditional developmental education courses.

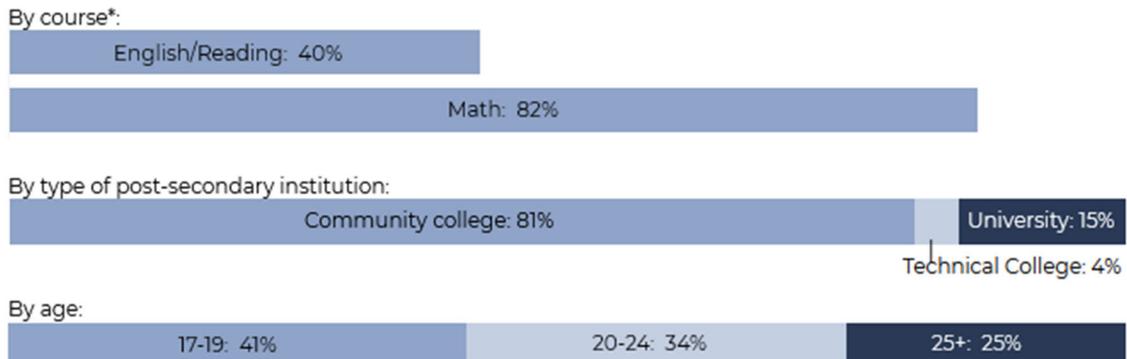
- KBOR officials reported that about half of Kansas post-secondary institutions offer corequisite math or English courses with or instead of traditional developmental education courses. These courses also serve students who are not prepared for regular college-level work.
- Corequisite courses place students directly into college-level courses but also provide additional classroom supports. The course covers both remedial material and the regular college-level material. For example, a corequisite math course may meet for 5 hours a week instead of the traditional 3. The extra hours allow the teacher to provide some remedial instruction and pace the class more slowly. Unlike traditional developmental courses, corequisite courses allow students to earn college credit.

- Colleges and universities identify students for corequisite classes in the same way they identify students for traditional developmental education courses.
- For the remainder of the report, we will refer to both traditional developmental and corequisite courses as developmental education courses.

A little more than 11,000 Kansas high school graduates enrolled in at least one developmental education course in 2020.

- KBOR officials provided us with data on the number of Kansas high school graduates who enrolled in at least one developmental course in the 2019-20 school year. We looked at the year prior to COVID-19 because of the effect it may have had on college enrollment. This data does have a few caveats:
 - The data includes only those students who graduated from a Kansas high school. However, older students who may have graduated more than 15 years ago may not have been included. This is because high school data is not available for that timeframe to be cross-referenced to post-secondary students.
 - Several colleges and universities that offer corequisite courses do not report them as developmental courses. As a result, the enrollment numbers in this report are somewhat undercounted. KBOR officials told us they plan to have all colleges and universities report corequisite courses by the 2023 school year.
- In the 2020 school year, a little more than 11,000 Kansas high school graduates were enrolled in at least one developmental education course. **Figure 1** shows more detailed information about the students who took a developmental education course in 2020. As the figure shows, 82% of the students took a math course while 40% took an English or reading course. Further, 81% of students who took at least one developmental education course were enrolled at a community college.
- Students aged 17 to 19 represent the largest group of students who enrolled in at least one developmental course in 2020. As the figure shows, 41% of students were aged 17 to 19. Additionally, 34% of the students were aged 20 to 24 while the remaining 25% were 25 or older.
- Due to time constraints, we were unable to determine what percentage of Kansas high school graduates must take developmental education courses. KBOR reported in 2020 that about 34% of students in community colleges were enrolled in developmental education courses. Additionally, about 10% of university students were enrolled in developmental education courses. However, these numbers include both Kansas and out-of-state students. Further, they include only students enrolled in developmental education courses during their first year in college.

Figure 1: Students aged 17 to 19 represent the largest group of students who enrolled in a developmental education course in 2020.



Based on 11,149 students who enrolled in at least one developmental or corequisite course in the 2020 school year.
*Adds up to more than 100% because some students took both a Math and an English/Reading course.
Source: LPA analysis of Kansas Board of Regents data.

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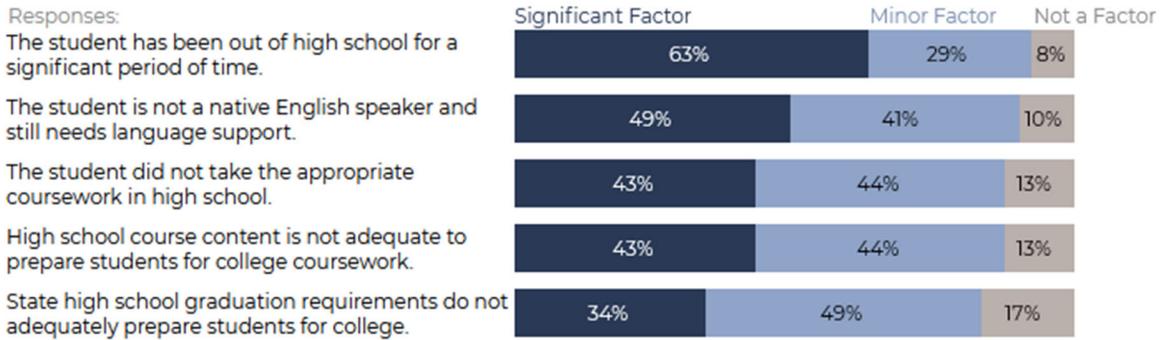
Nearly two-thirds of post-secondary survey respondents reported that the length of time a student has been out of high school is a significant factor in the need for developmental education courses.

- We sent surveys to 342 post-secondary developmental education instructors. This included instructors at 30 of the state’s 33 public post-secondary institutions. Officials at two schools reported that they did not offer any developmental education courses. One school did not respond to our request. 144 instructors responded to the survey for a response rate of 42%. Given the response rate, we think the results are reasonably representative. However, returning the survey was voluntary, which can introduce a self-selection bias.
- We asked instructors to report how significant several factors are in a student’s need to take a developmental education course. We worked with KBOR officials to determine what options to provide recipients in the survey. Further, we provided an open-ended question so respondents could note other factors they thought were important. **Figure 2**, on the next page, shows how respondents reported the significance of each factor. As the figure shows, 63% reported the length of time a student has been out of high school is a significant factor. Additionally, 49% reported not being a native English speaker is a significant factor in the need for developmental education courses.

Figure 2: 63% of post-secondary survey respondents reported that a significant factor in the need for developmental courses is if a student has been out of high school for a long period of time.

Question:

In your experience, when students must take a developmental or corequisite course how significant are the following factors?



Source: LPA analysis of survey responses from post-secondary instructors.

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- Instructors reported some additional opinions about the need for developmental education courses in college.
 - Other reasons students may need developmental education courses include a poor home life, lack of maturity in high school, and a lack of a well-rounded education in the early grades.
 - Several noted that developmental education courses are necessary to maintain broad access to college. One respondent wrote, “Developmental education opens a door to better education and quality of life for so many who would otherwise be shut out.”
- We also asked post-secondary instructors how well they thought developmental education courses prepare students for regular college-level work. 69% of respondents reported that traditional developmental education courses prepare students “very well.” 62% reported that corequisite courses prepared students “very well.” Nearly all the remainder of respondents reported that developmental or corequisite courses prepare students “somewhat well”.
- The results to additional survey questions we asked post-secondary instructors are in **Appendix A**.

About two-thirds of high school survey respondents reported that a lack of educational support at home and a lack of course mastery are significant factors in students not being prepared for college.

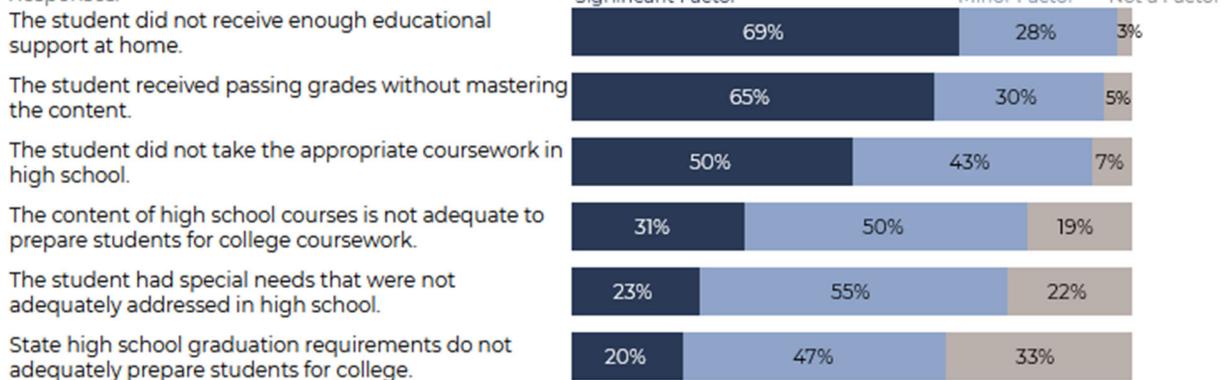
- We sent surveys to 11,547 high school teachers, principals, and guidance counselors. At least one person in every school district with a high school (five school districts in Kansas do not have high schools) received a survey. 1,559 high school staff responded for a response rate of 14%. Because of the low response rate, the results may not be representative of the larger group. Further, we cannot draw any broad conclusions from the survey, but respondents did report several relevant things.
- We asked staff to provide their opinions on the reasons recent high school graduates are sometimes unprepared for college. We worked with KSDE officials to determine what options to provide recipients in the survey. Further, we provided an open-ended question so respondents could note other factors they thought were important. **Figure 3** shows the survey results. As the figure shows, 69% of respondents reported that a lack of educational support at home is a significant factor in students not being prepared for college. A similar percentage (65%) reported that students receiving passing grades in high school without mastering course content is a significant factor.

Figure 3: More than two-thirds of high school survey respondents reported that a lack of educational support at home is a significant factor in students not being prepared for college.

Question:

In your opinion, when a recent high school graduate is not prepared for college-level work, how significant are the following factors?

Responses:



Source: LPA analysis of survey responses from high school teachers, principals, and guidance counselors.

- High school staff also reported some additional opinions on the reasons students are sometimes not prepared for college.
 - Many respondents told us that academic expectations were too low in high school. One teacher wrote, “...it’s not hard to pass with a 60%. That does not, however, make a student college ready.” Another noted that, “grade inflation is rampant...the curriculum is watered down.”
 - Several also reported that things outside the school’s control can influence a students’ college readiness. Teachers noted things like health issues, home environment, or student motivation can interfere with a student’s education.
 - Many also noted that students are struggling with basic skills when they enter high school. One teacher wrote, “students are being socially promoted in elementary schools and do not learn basic concepts.”

The other stakeholders we talked with all reported that a lack of appropriate coursework in high school is an important factor in the need for developmental courses in college.

- We spoke with several post-secondary and K-12 stakeholders about their opinions on why developmental education courses are necessary. The stakeholders we interviewed included organizations such as the Kansas Department of Education, the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees, and the Kansas National Education Association.
- Every person we spoke to told us that a lack of appropriate high school coursework is an important contributor to the need for developmental education courses in college. More specifically:
 - Many stakeholders noted that students often do not take enough math courses in high school. State high school graduation requirements require three years of math. As a result, many students do not take any math their senior year of high school. This often leaves them unprepared to take college algebra and results in the need for a developmental math course.
 - Some also noted that students may change their minds about their post-high school plans. This can result in students deciding too late to take courses that will prepare them for college.
 - A few also reported that college algebra may not be the appropriate starting point for all college students. For students who plan to attend college for art, theater, or other similar areas college algebra may not be truly necessary. Further, the student’s strengths may not be in advanced math. As a result, the student may not take the necessary courses in high school to be prepared for college algebra.

- A few stakeholders also mentioned other factors. Some noted that students who have been out of high school for a long period of time are more likely to need developmental courses. Additionally, a few thought that lowering college admission standards may also contribute. They reported that students may no longer feel the need to be prepared for college because they are likely to be admitted regardless.

Survey respondents and stakeholders reported several strategies to reduce the need for developmental education courses in college.

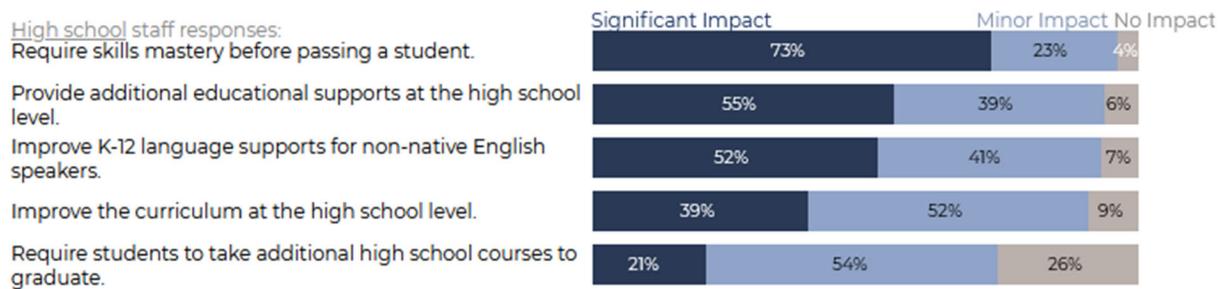
- As part of the survey and our interviews with stakeholders, we asked about actions that could improve college readiness and reduce the need for development education courses.
- **Figure 4**, on the next page, shows how significant of an impact survey respondents rated various actions that could reduce the need for developmental education. As the figure shows:
 - 73% of high school staff thought requiring skills mastery before passing students would have a significant impact on improving college readiness.
 - 69% of post-secondary respondents reported that providing additional education supports in high school (i.e. tutoring or small group instruction) would have a significant impact on reducing the need for developmental education. 55% of high school staff thought this would have a significant impact.
 - About half of high school and post-secondary staff thought improving language supports for non-native English speakers would also have a significant impact.
- Nearly all the stakeholders we talked with thought more communication with students about what courses they should take in high school would be helpful. Some mentioned that independent plans of study could help students plan better. Others thought more guidance counseling could help students better connect their high school courses to their post-secondary plans.

Figure 4: High school and post-secondary staff reported several actions that could reduce the need for developmental education courses.

Question:

In your opinion, how much impact would the following actions have in improving college readiness?

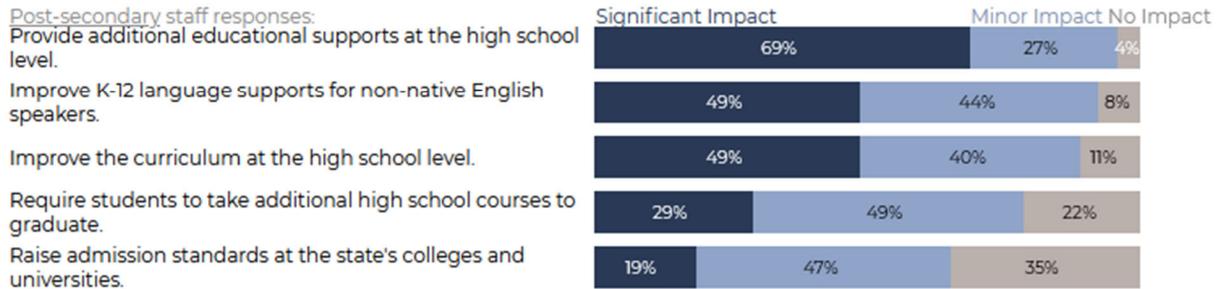
High school staff responses:



Question:

How much impact would the following actions have in reducing students' need for developmental or corequisite courses in college?

Post-secondary staff responses:



Source: LPA analysis of survey responses from post-secondary instructors and high school teachers, principals, and guidance counselors.

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Conclusion

We did not draw any conclusions beyond the findings already presented in the audit.

Recommendations

We did not make any recommendations for this audit.

Agency Response

On January 26, 2022 we provided the draft audit report to the Kansas Board of Regents and the Kansas Department of Education. Because we did not make any recommendations, a response was optional. KSDE did not submit a response.

KBOR's response is below. Agency officials generally agreed with our findings and conclusions.

Kansas Board of Regents Response

Dear Ms. Clarke,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft of Legislative Post Audit's report entitled Evaluating the Need for Developmental Education Courses, to be published in February 2022. Although your audit does not make recommendations for the Kansas Board of Regents, we are pleased to present the following official response.

At the direction of the 2020 Legislature, the Future of Higher Education Council was assembled and held a series of meetings in 2020. They adopted 14 recommendations, the first of which was directed at developmental education:

The Council recommends the Kansas Board of Regents implement/ incentivize systemwide corequisite remediation in math and English. Corequisite remediation allows students who need additional support in college-level math and English to enroll in those credit-bearing courses and receive extra help. In most cases, students take an additional support course that is paired with the traditional college course or attend supplemental lab sessions.

Our colleagues across the system of postsecondary education are considering ways to improve the academic achievement of our students. We have partnered with the National Institute of Student Success at Georgia State University in order to identify policies and procedures that inhibit students' progress or create barriers to academic success. We know from research in other states that the old model that places students in remedial classes not counted toward progress on a degree does not deliver the results we need. Many of our institutions have implemented corequisite courses, but in order to incentivize change at a swifter pace, we will need the Legislature's partnership.

We also look to the State Board of Education and the Legislature to partner with us on restoring the college going rate of our high school graduates. Academic preparedness is an important piece for a high school graduate to make the investment in their career and postsecondary institution. We know there can be several barriers to taking that step and hope that the Kansas Challenge to Secondary School Students Act (2021 HB 2134) will help our high school students realize academic success at the postsecondary level while still in high school.

We appreciate the work the auditors undertook to review the topic of developmental education courses at the postsecondary level in the State of Kansas. Please let us know if we can provide further assistance.

Sincerely,
Blake Flanders, Ph.D.
President and CEO, Kansas Board of Regents

Appendix A

This appendix shows the results of two survey questions we did not discuss elsewhere in this report.

Appendix A: The majority of post-secondary respondents reported that college admission standards are appropriate and that colleges appropriately identify students who need developmental education courses.

Question:

Do you think the admission standards at your college/university are appropriate?

Answers:



Question:

Do you think your college/university appropriately identifies students who need developmental or corequisite courses?

Answers:



Source: LPA analysis of survey responses from post-secondary instructors.

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