

Progress made but high remediation rates remain



The state has seen an overall reduction in remediation rates since 2012, but nearly half of Delaware's public high school graduates who attend in-state college still must take at least one remedial course before taking credit-bearing courses toward their degrees. ([award photos](#))

During her senior year at **Woodbridge High School**, Katelyn Harding took *Foundations of College Math*.

Now a freshman at Wesley College in Dover, Harding, 18, says her first-semester math course was a “breeze” because of the strong math groundwork she received at Woodbridge.

“With the teacher I had and just the atmosphere of the class, it made everything I had already learned come to life,” Harding said.

The course is one of the strategies Woodbridge has used to reduce the college remediation rates among its graduates.

Of Delaware public high school graduates entering an in-state college or university, 42 percent will begin their post-secondary education behind their peers, according to the state's 2016 College Success Report released today.

Students who do not score well on college placement tests may be forced to take and pass non-credit, remedial courses before entering the college-level courses required for their degrees. These courses often cost the same as credit-bearing classes but don't count toward a student's degree.

In Delaware – as is the case across the country – many students are graduating high school unprepared for the level of rigor necessary in a college course. Acceptance to college does not guarantee readiness for college. The Delaware Department of Education [report](#) released Tuesday -- which includes school- and district-level data -- outlines recommendations for schools, districts, and the state to better prepare all students for college success.

"We already know that there is a strong correlation between the classes that students are prepared to take, the supports available to different students to succeed in those classes and student outcomes after graduation," Secretary of Education Steve Godowsky said. "We need to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in college before they enter the 12th grade. Some districts and schools are already seeing progress. We need to continue this good work and seek additional ways to better support our students."

Early signs of progress

Over the last few years, districts have increased access to college-level courses such as dual-enrollment and Advanced Placement classes. In addition, the state began a pilot course in the 2014-15 school year called *Foundations of College Math* to serve as a bridge course for students likely to require remediation in college.

These efforts are showing signs of early progress and the state has seen an overall reduction in remediation rates since 2012, the report found. Nine Delaware schools and districts have also started to reduce student remediation rates through changes to their curriculum and targeted student supports.

Foundations of College Math provided Harding with the introduction to algebra equations and quadratic functions that she needed to ace her Wesley class.

"In my first semester I was learning how to find vertexes and things I could not even imagine," Harding said. "I liked that the course in high school was mainly just basics because without them, I would probably not be doing so well now."

This year's College Success Report makes specific recommendations for all Delaware schools and districts to follow as they work to improve student preparedness for college and continue the successes they have already seen.

Woodbridge High School in the **Woodbridge School District** is among a handful of districts receiving recognition from the state this year for its reduction in student remediation rates.

"We are excited by the fact that a higher percentage of our students are entering Delaware colleges without the need to take remedial courses. This can be attributed to the hard work of our staff and the continued belief that our students are capable of achieving at higher levels," Superintendent Heath Chasanov said. "Although, we certainly aren't satisfied with our current percentages, we believe that this reduction in remedial rates will be a trend and not simply a one-time occurrence."

POLYTECH Principal Jason Peel credited the dedication of his school's math teachers, who have "embraced Common Core and the need for more rigorous math instruction."

The school stopped offering pure remedial math in 9th grade and instead enrolled the students in Algebra I with an extra period of supports. Year-long geometry and Algebra II courses were created for struggling students with extra support classes (double periods). Enrichment period supports also were instituted during the day for struggling math students, Peel said.

Special education supports in math were aligned so that co-teachers work together and have the same planning period on a more consistent basis. And POLYTECH quadrupled its AP Calculus enrollment and added an AP Statistics course.

Other districts recognized for reducing remediation rates between 2012 and 2014 include: **Colonial, Delmar, Indian River, New Castle County Vo-Tech, Red Clay Consolidated, Smyrna and Sussex Tech.**

Two different college experiences

After a concentrated review of student remediation data from 2012 through 2014, Delaware's 2016 College Success Report highlights that 42 percent of all public and charter school graduates enrolling in a Delaware college are unprepared to successfully complete a college-level course. These students require remediation classes before their first-year college courses.

Remediation classes yield zero credits and are often offered at a significant cost to students. Nationally, less than 50 percent of students enrolled in remedial courses actually finish them. Furthermore, 3 in every 10 students who require remediation in college never graduate with a bachelor's degree.

Students taking remedial courses must take additional courses that their peers aren't required to take. They can't successfully enroll in their college courses until they have completed the remedial courses. For some students this can set them a full semester or more behind. For students depending on financial aid to cover the costs of college, this can increase their overall debt as many scholarships will not cover these courses.

Several states across the country are starting to examine the remediation issue as more students are dropping out of college, taking longer to complete their degrees or graduating with significant debt.

Remediation numbers are also significantly higher for students of color, students with special needs, English language learners (ELLs), and students from low-income families.

Eliminating remediation

For students, the path to remediation begins early. Each year more students make the decision to enroll in college. A college acceptance letter marks a significant milestone in a student's educational journey and the path to the career of their dreams; however, the decisions and goals achieved prior to the college acceptance letter determine a student's first year college experience.

As students and parents work with their schools to select classes each year, they may not realize that not all classes will equally prepare students for success in college. The difference between an Advanced Placement course or a college prep course may ultimately mean a student graduates less prepared for college-level English, for example.

Similarly, students taking less rigorous courses in math will find themselves more likely to be placed in remedial courses. This means that a student placed in Algebra II over calculus is also at a disadvantage and more likely to need college remediation than if the student had been given the opportunity to enroll in more-difficult classes.

"We're not just suggesting that schools place students in the more rigorous courses, such as calculus or Advanced Placement," Shana Payne, director of the department's Higher Education Office, said. "Our systems must be designed to prepare students to succeed in these courses. The data show that the more advanced courses a student takes before graduating high school, the less likely the student is to need remediation in college."

The department is calling on educators to use the data from the 2016 College Success Report alongside other measurements, such as the 10th grade PSAT and the 11th grade SAT, to provide targeted interventions to students as soon as they are identified as not yet meeting the college-readiness benchmark.

Using this data, schools have the opportunity to identify when students are falling behind and provide the supports and access to more challenging courses so they can be ready for those first-year college courses.

Additionally, evaluating curriculum and instructional practices in all classes can help to reduce and eliminate these knowledge gaps students are demonstrating before students reach the 12th grade.

“The shift from 12th grade to college should be as simple as the shift from eighth grade to ninth grade or kindergarten to first grade,” said Michael Watson, the department’s chief academic officer. “Every student with a college acceptance letter and a Delaware high school diploma should be prepared to succeed in the college he or she chooses to attend.”