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# Connect the Dots

April 17, 2012 - 3:00am

By Nancy L. Zimpher

A plan in Connecticut to legislate the end of most remedial education courses in public higher education (http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/04/04/connecticut-legislature-mulls-elimination-remedial-courses) has once again raised questions about why so many incoming students are not prepared for college-level work and what can be done about it. To fully comprehend and effectively address the nation's reliance on remediation, it is important to look at some basic facts surrounding the issue.

We do not have a system of public education in this country. As a nation, we have yet to connect the dots between early childhood programming, kindergarten learning, elementary and secondary education coursework, and college curriculums. Until we do, the issue of remediation – and the excessive costs associated with it in every state – will carry on.

Forty to fifty percent of children nationwide are underprepared for kindergarten, lacking the basic vocabulary and sensitivities that the work

demands. These same students are pushed through the system, and in third and fourth grade cannot comprehend early math and English instruction. By the time they reach college – if they make it that far – they are saddled with remedial coursework that costs taxpayers money and whittles away at the students' financial aid. At the State University of New York alone, we spend more than $70 million per year on remediation, and 20 percent — or $93 million — of financial aid awarded to our community college students goes toward remedial classes.

I applaud Connecticut's intent to abolish remediation, but this is not a legislative issue. It's a community issue that can only be effectively addressed by an agreement on behalf of everyone who has a stake in a child's education — parents, educators, civic groups, employers, and government leaders — to break out of our boxes and accept a shared responsibility for maintaining the education pipeline.

To eliminate the need for remediation, the disconnects among us must first be collaboratively addressed. Teachers can better communicate with parents about what is expected of their children in class and what can be done at home to ensure their preparation. School districts and colleges can work together to develop curriculums that will prepare students for the next stage of their education, from kindergarten to higher ed. Finally, stronger partnerships between colleges and employers will result in job-ready graduates who have been trained for in-demand careers.

SUNY is using this cradle-to-career approach to mend the pipeline (http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204449804577068733614557236.html) and educate our young people in a more systematic way. By year's end, we will have the results of a statewide study commissioned by the state legislature and carried out by SUNY that will provide a snapshot of student preparedness in New York.

Together with our K-12 partners, we will use the results of this study to evaluate proficiency and address weaknesses in the pipeline by expanding effective resources, such as educational opportunity programs, and introducing new ones, like "summer boot camp." Once students are enrolled in college and truly in need of remediation, we will work toward better results by improving student advisement services and carrying out best practices that are proven to equip students with the skills they need. By also re-evaluating existing student aid programs, we will ensure that remedial courses are delivered in a cost-effective manner until they are no longer needed.

In New York, Connecticut, and across the country, too many of our children are underperforming in school. By not collaborating to put effective education reforms in place that address every child's need from cradle to career, we are letting it happen. Any legislation that addresses our reliance on remedial education must be fully informed and carried out by all involved.

Bio

*Nancy L. Zimpher is chancellor of the State University of New York.*

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Manages and guides the Gonzaga University Career Center/GAMP employer outreach and alumni career relations for the purpose of creating internships and full time career opportunities for students and alumni.

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