Testimony before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
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My name is Elsa Núñez and I am the president of Eastern Connecticut State University. I am also the Vice President of the Connecticut State Universities for the Board of Regents for Higher Education of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System. It is in the latter role that I am here today to represent the Board of Regents and share with you the progress being made within our CSCU System to implement Public Act 12-40.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to thank Committee Chairs Senator Steve Cassano and Representative Roberta Willis, ranking members Senator Toni Boucher and Representative Timothy LeGeyt, and the other members of the committee for inviting me to provide testimony today.

What we are doing in our state colleges and universities to better prepare entering students for success is an important issue for Connecticut citizens. Indeed, it is a critical issue across our entire nation. The plan that Connecticut has for breaking the remediation conundrum is visionary, and as I will explain, is showing high promise for success.

Let me set the stage for you. Across our nation, more than 60 percent of all community college students and 20 percent of all four-year students, including many graduating from high school with a 3.0 or higher GPA, require remedial coursework in college. In some states, the figure is even higher—for instance, 90 percent of students at El Paso Community College in Texas are required to take remedial math.

Yet taking remedial courses seems to be a predictor of lower success rates. Only 13.7 percent of community college students who take some form of remediation get an associate degree within four years. Only 10 percent of those that transfer to a senior institution (about a third of all community college students) graduate with a four-year degree—about 3 percent of all community college students.

It is easy to blame the K-12 public school system, but that is neither fair nor productive. We need to look at our entire educational system and work on solutions together. I think Connecticut educators and policymakers are in agreement that the key to our success at the college level will be to concentrate and target remedial instruction so it doesn't become a cycle of students taking, failing and retaking non-credit remedial courses and using up their financial aid.

We have seen progress in other states, and have used that knowledge to our advantage in crafting our own remediation program. For instance, according to a report by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education's Taskforce on Retention and Completion Rates at Community Colleges in February 2007, students completing remediation by the end of their first semester are twice as likely to persist and five times as likely to graduate from community college within three years.

Here in Connecticut, in passing PA12-40 to address the issue of college remediation, the legislature considered the following goals.

1. **Develop programs that allow community college students to complete remedial coursework in their first semester.**

   In the conventional model that colleges across the country have been using, with remediation taught in non-credit developmental courses, students often must take and pass up to two semesters of developmental math and English without earning college credits and/or without being ready to take credit courses in those two subject areas to meet core requirements. In this process they use up all or most of their financial aid. Minimally, we can save a student an entire semester and grant them credits in the process. If they were failing remedial courses in the conventional/developmental model, the time we save them can be even greater, if we can create a successful model where only one semester of remediation is needed.

2. **Achieve higher student success rates for students in these remedial courses.** Again, we want to get past the paradigm where students can be trapped in an endless circle of taking and failing non-credit developmental courses without completing credit work or gaining the confidence and skills to continue their path to a degree. As we know, success fosters continued success.
3. **Achieve higher persistence and retention rates of students, so that they can progress more quickly to college credit courses and to ultimate degree and program completion.** If students can see progress and feel confident in their basic English language and math skills, they can move ahead to higher intellectual challenges and achieve higher rates of degree completion and graduation.

To meet these goals, we have instituted and are testing or have completed testing a set of pilot programs in Connecticut's State Colleges and Universities. The model includes:

- **Using a more robust set of multiple measures to assess and place students in the right level of remediation.** Those measures include high school GPAs and transcripts; SATs and other entrance exam scores; written essays; and such standard tests as Accuplacer.
- **A set of three, sequential levels of remedial instruction that reflect the wide range of English language and mathematics skills with which students enter college. Those include:**
  - **Level one—our highest level—consists of Embedded remediation within content courses, instead of using separate remedial/developmental courses, as has been our model in the past.**

I should mention that we have used embedded remediation within content courses at Eastern for more than 10 years and on our own campus, we have confidence that this can be a successful strategy because our data are compelling: we have a 92 percent pass rate. If you think about it, the idea of learning foundation skills in the **context** of learning academic content aligns with everything else we know about learning—context and application of theory and basic intellectual skills is critical to learning. However, as the entire state system entered into last fall's pilot of embedded courses, we certainly had no guarantees that such a strategy would yield consistent, universal results.

- **Level two consists of Intensive remedial coursework for students with lower test scores so that we can jump-start their English and math skills.** By lowering class caps to allow for more one-on-one instruction; providing time for intensive English composition; and using reading instruction as a tool to develop critical thinking skills, colleges throughout our state system were able to design English and math courses that met the needs of their students. One critical factor: the pilot allowed flexibility at the institutional level in developing new courses.
- **Level three—the level where students have the greatest skill gaps—is called the Transitional level.** Whereas we have completed pilots at all 17 CSCU institutions for levels one and two, we will not complete all transitional pilots until the end of the summer term.

Therefore, I do not have aggregate data to show you today, and my report on this level will be largely general. I can tell you that level three instruction is free to students; they do not use up their financial aid; it is intense—much like a boot camp—and non-credit bearing. We are issuing an RFQ for an outside consultant to review the data on the Level III pilots.

- **Use of the latest instructional technology to benefit students.** This is a key component; the efficiencies gained from using technology can be a tremendous resource to support the individualized instruction that still has to occur in the classroom.

In last fall's pilot courses, use of technology ranged from computer-assisted instructional modules such as MyMath and ALEKS (Assessment and Learning in Knowledge **S**paces) for mathematics, to Pearson's MyFoundation Lab for English, a web-based tool that students can use from home to supplement classroom instruction.

By putting this model in place and supporting it with technology, staffing and other resources, our ultimate goal was to raise the fundamental academic skills of our students—English language arts and mathematics in particular—so that they can be successful in college. They deserve it, and our state and national economies require it. With the demographics of Connecticut and the United States continuing to become more diverse, if we do not increase our college participation and graduation rates, this nation will have a bleak economic future.

That sounds dire. But I have positive news to report. The results I am about to share with you demonstrate that our model is working. Let me share a brief summary of data to illustrate our progress. Again, the data I am about to show you is for levels one and two—embedded and intensive courses. The data on Level III, Transitional, will be analyzed this summer by an outside consultant.

SLIDE 1: This shows how those enrollments were broken down into the three categories: There were 883 total sections—763 in conventional mode, 53 intensive sections, and 67 embedded courses. Of the total enrollments, 88 percent were in conventional developmental courses, and six percent each were in intensive and embedded courses.

SLIDE 2: This shows the enrollments in our fall 2013 pilot; all 17 Connecticut State Colleges and Universities participated, with the majority of students in the pilot courses being at community colleges. The data shown here is from the community colleges. A total of 12,981 students attempted remedial courses—intensive, embedded, or conventional/developmental.

SLIDE 3: This is a summary of GPA comparisons. The baseline was fall 2012 conventional coursework, with comparisons to this past fall's pilot, conventional/ developmental, intensive, and embedded course sections being in play. I think the takeaway here is that no harm was done by introducing a new model of intensive and embedded courses; GPAs were not negatively affected. One data point of note: the GPAs of students taking embedded college level mathematics were the highest across the three course types and two subjects. Many faculty felt this was counterintuitive.

SLIDE 4: This slide shows the most significant set of data and I want to take a moment to thoroughly review it for you. It shows that students taking embedded or intensive remedial were retained and moved into college level courses at much higher rates than students taking conventional developmental courses.

Seventy-six percent of students who passed embedded courses are taking college level courses this spring, and 55 percent of students who passed intensive courses, compared to only 42 percent of those passing conventional developmental courses. More than 90 percent of the students from the embedded or intensive pilots last fall are in college credit courses or continuing their efforts to meet the English and math skill thresholds for taking college credit classes. You can also see that the largest withdrawal rate among the three modalities is for students who took conventional developmental courses this past fall.

Now I would like to shift to a brief description of our level three instructional modality—the transitional level.

As I mentioned earlier, transitional instruction is for students with the greatest skill gaps in English and/or math. It is free; they do not use their financial aid; it is self-paced instruction and students do not earn credit. It is presented in an accelerated format— in most cases, three weeks instead of the usual semester length of 16 weeks. Instruction is more self-paced and modular, so that students can study, test, and retake separate modules as needed instead of repeating the entire instructional program. This transitional level of instruction also takes advantage of web-based and other technology, and makes use of supplemental, one-on-one instruction.

While the embedded and intensive pilots took place this past fall, transitional pilots started in spring 2013, and some are taking place this term. The last two will be completed during the summer 2014 session. Therefore, I do not have aggregate data on the transitional component of our model to show you.

I can say that reports from individual community colleges have been encouraging, with pass rates ranging from 50 percent to as high as 89 percent. An RFQ has been developed and an outside consultant will be hired to analyze theses data. This work will be done over the summer.

One challenge that we face in offering transitional instruction is that students at this level do not receive financial aid. The instruction is free, and we need your assistance in ensuring that we have adequate funding to manage this important element of our plan.

As we shift from conventional, developmental remediation to a model of Embedded, Intensive, Transitional instruction, we believe we can successfully implement PA12-40 such that we will be able to provide students with a speedier path to college level courses and successful program and degree completion.

We have much to learn, and improvements to make. But based on this initial pilot program, we have confidence that progress can continue to be made. Again, I appreciate your time this morning, and I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

One question that might come up is what happens if a student fails a remedial course in their first semester. Aynsley's point is from the beginning, it was understood that each institution's policies and practices regarding retaking courses would prevail. The one-semester timeframe is a goal to be reached, not a prerequisite for program success.

Another question may deal with the numerical discrepancy between slides 1 and 2. Slide 1 shows there were 19,000 seats in the 883 courses; slide 2 shows 12,981 enrollments. That means we were operating at about 68 percent capacity. This meant smaller class sizes and more individualized instruction.

Another question might ask to clarify how students were chosen for embedded vs. intensive.

Each campus made its own determination about how to place students in embedded or intensive courses. Embedded courses, though, are designed for students who are close to being college ready while intensive courses are designed for students who are less prepared.