

## **NYS HIGHER EDUCATION PLAN 2012-2020**

### **Pg 27 Remediation**

As the NYS Office of Higher Education has drafted its 2012-2020 Plan the NYS Board of Regents has passed an Emergency Action to allow the State Education Department to lower the passing rate on Regents exams for students with disabilities. The plan is a revision of the current safety net. The new safety net allows students with disabilities who score between 45-64 on Regents exams (other than English and Math which still require a passing grade of 55) to earn a local diploma as long as each grade between 45-54 is balanced by a score on another Regents exam which is 65 or higher so that the two when averaged equal a minimum grade of 55.

This change is occurring at the same time as SUNY, in the response to college readiness, states that a grade of 75 on the English Regents and 80 on the Math Regents are necessary to demonstrate college readiness for degree credit course work. SUNY is simultaneously proposing a 10 year plan to eliminate remediation citing an annual base cost of \$70 million to provide remedial support.

**Impact on Community Colleges:** The proposed low pass rate on one or more Regents exams awards a student with a high school diploma and with it eligibility to enroll in full opportunity NYS colleges. This means that these students will be eligible to be admitted for matriculation in these colleges without the requisite skills to be competitive and complete a program of study. The impact on full opportunity community colleges cannot be overstated.

At a time when all colleges are straining to function with shrinking budgets, even a moderate increase in the number of students requiring the level of assistance required by these local diploma graduates would overwhelm existing resources of the disability offices, Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP), tutoring centers, and pre-college programs.

### **Pp 44-45 College and Career Readiness**

Forty percent of the state's high school graduates are unprepared or under prepared for college-level work. Only 37 percent of high school graduates have the skills needed to succeed in credit bearing college courses or entry level career opportunities. Further, we have significant gaps among students with disabilities, English language learners, Black and Hispanic students.

According to the US Department of Education, the need for remediation translates into lower degree completion: only 17% of high school graduates who require at least one remedial reading course and 27% who require at least one remedial math course earn a bachelor's degree. Further, data from the NYSED Office of Research and Information Systems June 2012

(draft Higher Education Plan pages 64-65) indicate that each remedial course a student requires lowers their likelihood of program completion.

Data from the Heath Resource Center at George Washington University indicate that enrollment of students with disabilities is steadily increasing and that 50% of those students are enrolled at public community colleges. Enrollment of students with disabilities in NYS colleges and universities has increased 36% between 2000 (33,759) and 2010 (45,978) according to data from the NYSED Office of Research and Information Systems. The NYS Higher Education Plan 2012-2020 (draft) highlights the College and Career Readiness of June 2012 graduates. **Only 44.6 % of NYS all high school students with disabilities graduate and of those only 4.4% (the lowest rate of all at-risk populations) were considered to be college and career ready.**

Granting local diplomas to students with passing grades of 45-64 on Regents exams other than English and Math which still require a minimum grade of 55 will increase the number of NYS residents with high school diplomas and make more students eligible for full opportunity college admission but will not make them college ready. Students with local diplomas will require intense levels of tutoring and remediation. Each course that requires remediation extends a student's time to complete a degree. Completion of remedial coursework is often required prior to beginning core courses.

SUNY has reported that grades of 75 on the English Regents and 80 on the Math Regents exams are necessary to demonstrate readiness for college degree course work. Students earning local diplomas with grades ranging between 45 and 65, or even Regents diplomas with exam scores below 75 may require multiple courses of intensive remediation in order to acquire minimal college level competence. Each developmental or remedial course extends the time required for program completion and decreases the student's likelihood of program completion. In addition, funding is complicated by changes to Title IV funding (Pell grants, work study and subsidized student loans) that went into effect in July 2012, limiting lifetime eligibility for Pell to 12 semesters (previously 18 semesters). Many students' financial aid may be exhausted before they can complete their academic programs. Others may simply drop out due to their inability to compete. None of these changes support the Higher Education Plan to address the gaps in college and career readiness for students with disabilities.

US Census data indicate that the majority of children with disabilities come from lower income families. These families will not have the resources to help support the student's pursuit of a college education and many students will apply for student loans to help fill the financial gap. Failure to complete their academic programs to prepare them to earn competitive incomes increases the potential for default on student loans and significantly reduces their lifetime earning potential and their ability to add to the economic vitality of the state.

## **SUNY Response**

Students with disabilities are largely ignored in the Higher Education Plan. The Plan as drafted cites the following data but offers no measures to address the issues:

- Only 44.6% of all students with disabilities graduate high school in NYS and of those, only 4.4% are considered college ready.
- Enrollment of students with disabilities across NYS increased a dramatic 36% between 2000 and 2010.
- Approximately 11% of all college students are self-identified as having a disability
- Veterans are enrolling in college in increasing numbers since the implementation of the Post 9-11 VA Bill.
- More data is needed to address the needs of students with disabilities

## **High School graduation and college readiness**

When considering the data that only 44.6% of students with disabilities graduate from high school in New York State, it is important to take into consideration that disability includes all individuals from those with the most severe intellectual and physical disabilities who are alternately assessed to those with above average intelligence with physical or mental impairments but who will graduate with Regents diplomas. More importantly, only 4.4% of the 2012 graduating class of students with disabilities were deemed to be college ready. The State Education Department's P-12 division currently has a proposal before the Regents to lower the passing rate on Regents exams to 45 for Science, US History and Global Studies and maintain the 55 passing grade for English and math to result in awarding a student a local diploma. This would increase the number of New Yorkers with high school diplomas which is part of the goal, but would also flood New York's public colleges with students in severe need of remediation at a time when the SUNY Chancellor is laying out a 10 year plan to eliminate remediation in SUNY quoting an annual cost of \$70 million. Those local diploma students will most likely not gain admission to the SUNY operated campuses; they will flood SUNY's 32 community colleges.

This influx of students may overwhelm existing programs and services ranging from the disability offices to EOP, tutoring centers, testing centers, and financial aid. Each academic area of weakness will require one or more developmental courses extending the time for program completion and reducing their chances of reaching that completion. If the data on remediation in the Higher Ed plan from the US Department of Education is correct, only about 20% of the local diploma graduates are likely to earn a Bachelor's degree. Some will complete Associates Degree programs but many will drop out or exhaust their TAP and Pell before they can complete their degrees. Some will have taken student loans. Without completing their degrees, their earning potential is decreased and the probability of defaulting on their student loans

increases. A college's eligibility to grant financial aid is partly dependent upon its ability to maintain a satisfactory default rate on student loans. This eligibility may be jeopardized.

### **Increase in Enrollment**

The 36% increase in enrollment is a double edged sword. On the positive side is the news that increasing numbers of students with disabilities are attempting the rigors of college and many are graduating. On the opposite side is the challenge to serve an increasing number of students with mental health issues, autism spectrum disorders and wounded warriors. These students require the development of new support programs and services such as academic coaching, independent living skills and mental health services at a time when all campuses are dealing with reduced funding and limited staffing while trying to maintain existing services. A number of disability offices are staffed by only one full-term person with assistance from related offices, and many handle disability in addition to other responsibilities.

The disability services provider faces other challenges. The disability service provider is often expected to be an expert on all things related to disability. Most service providers are also middle management and while the upper level of management is free with sending information down the line to them, the flow back up to presidents, vice presidents/ provosts, chief fiscal officers and heads of Information Technology with respect to compliance issues is often slow. Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act is an institutional responsibility and not exclusively within the domain of the disability office. A joint *Dear Colleague* letter issued by the Department of Justice and the US Department of Education in May 2010 regarding emerging technology is an excellent example – while this letter was passed along to the disability services offices, the information needed to be retained and acted on by other offices. If the NYS Education Department and SUNY System Administration were to lead by example by affirming through words and actions that web and other technology accessibility is vital to their educational missions and that each institution needs to establish a team, do an assessment, develop and implement a plan to achieve compliance, all NYS postsecondary institutions, their students, employees, visitors and vendors would be better served.

### **Data**

The Higher Education State Plan 2012-2020 states that data is needed to determine the needs—currently met and those unmet—of students with disabilities. While that is undoubtedly true, the issue cannot be ignored until such data is collected. There are 64 campuses in SUNY that can and are willing to supply information that could result in more comprehensive resource allocation of staff, space, technology, etc. Many of these campuses have long called for lending closets for low-incidence, high-cost assistive technology (e.g., Braille printers, refreshable Braille devices, FM systems, etc.) to no avail. Comprehensive data collection that collects not

simply what kind of disability students have, but what kind of auxiliary aids and devices are needed to provide access to these students is critical both for ready access and for budget and planning purposes.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) and the Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) have collaborated on the development of new standards for disability departments that were scheduled to be published fall 2012. In 2010 the federal Government Accountability Office published HIGHER EDUCATION AND DISABILITY Education Needs a Coordinated Approach to Improve its Assistance to Schools in Supporting Students ([www.gao.gov/new.items/d1033.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1033.pdf)) reporting on visits to colleges, paper and phone surveys to colleges and universities across the US on the staffing, resources, technology , issues and challenges associated with making postsecondary education accessible to students with disabilities. These documents can provide the basis for developing an action plan to address the issues around students with disabilities on SUNY campuses. In addition, the SUNY sector members of the New York State Disability Services Council are willing and eager to assist in any way in developing such a plan.