

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

To break the cycle of negative reinforcement, CUNY should exercise its tremendous influence over the New York City public school system. Its key first step should be to articulate the skills needed to succeed in college. With standards in place, CUNY should work with the BOE to establish congruence between the demands of college-level study and public school curricula, and should build a comprehensive testing program to reinforce the link. For its part, the BOE should abolish social promotion and ensure that every child graduates from high school with mastery of basic skills. Together, CUNY and the BOE should commit to greater public accountability by improving the tools they use for gathering, analyzing and reporting information. All stakeholders – parents, educators, business leaders and policy makers – will be able to use this information to enhance the quality of education in New York City. In short, we recommend that CUNY pre-empt the need for remediation before it starts. Prevention is, perhaps, the best remediation strategy of all.

Reconceptualize a K-16 system of education in New York City. The City University of New York and the NYC Board of Education need to re-conceptualize education as a K-16 system, starting with formal schooling in kindergarten and 1st grade and continuing as a seamless web up through four (possible) years of college. This kindergarten-through-college concept recognizes that the BOE-CUNY relationship can and should work in both directions. In particular, it recognizes that some students' academic problems begin early, continue through the elementary and secondary schools, and are then transported into college. According to this vision, the Board of Education bears a responsibility for upgrading the performance of students from the earliest grades – thus relieving the pressure on CUNY to remediate problems that should have been fixed during the K-12 years.

For its part, if CUNY had higher entrance standards, more rigorous testing and diagnoses, and better remedial programs (*e.g.*, pre-college summer schools, immersion programs and basic skills clinics available to high school and college-age students), these standards would likely percolate back into the K-12 years, bringing up all students' academic preparation. Today, the public schools use "social promotion" to move students from grade to grade, allowing ill-prepared children to complete schooling without basic skills. Open admissions effectively extends social promotion into college, making it possible for virtually any student to enter CUNY, bringing with them the academic problems and remedial needs they developed in school.

CUNY and the BOE share equal responsibility for making the K-16 concept a reality. CUNY needs to set standards and help the BOE to reach them. The BOE needs to raise standards (an effort that has already begun with the phase out of the local diploma), provide more rigorous courses, and implement higher testing standards.

This research also poignantly points up the central importance of language ability: knowing how to read, write and speak English predicts and prepares the way for successful BOE and CUNY experiences. The data on students with limited English proficiency and students not born in the US is powerful and convincing. LEP students perform consistently below others. The condition begins in the

earliest years, shows up at 8th grade with DRP and CAT-Math, again in high school on measures such as Regents math and English exam scores, high school grade point average, and numbers of college-prep courses taken, and resurfaces again when students take the RAT, MAT, WAT and SAT.

By linking up the two great systems of NYC education – the Board of Education and the City University – in a solid, trusting partnership, the problems will become more apparent and the solutions more possible. What can the BOE do? What does CUNY expect and need? How might remediation be improved, given the nature and origins of the problems? If English language acquisition is a (the) critical component of education improvement, how might CUNY and BOE – working with their trustees and boards, the Mayor's office, the borough presidents' offices, and key stakeholder groups such as the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the Public Education Association, (PEA), the City Council, churches and synagogues – structure an all-out effort to improve the ability of all students to communicate effectively in English first?

Build closer inter-institutional collaboration. Neither institution can go it alone. The Board of Education needs help from highly trained teachers – many of whom graduate from CUNY – and CUNY will always depend on the quality of BOE graduates in filling its freshman classes. This study shows the critical link between the two institutions. The City of New York can no longer think of "lower" and "higher" education as separate enterprises. Together they rise; separately, they fall. Success must be measured across a 16-year time frame, from the point where a child enters into formal education around age four until he or she is fully educated and prepared for life, work, family, and community participation. CUNY and the BOE shoulder an awesome responsibility and can only meet the challenges by working together.

Establish mutually reinforcing standards. When we view the BOE and CUNY as part of the same education "continuum" starting in kindergarten and ending with adult learners, the need to build a set of mutually defined and supportive standards becomes apparent. This research shows, clearly, that remediation is not the colleges' problem. Rather, the need for remediation begins early in the K-16 process and becomes more destructive as students progress through their education. Falling behind in elementary school affects scores on the 8th grade reading and math tests, which, in turn, are related to performance significantly on the 12th grade Regent exams and SAT. Similarly, poor high school performance is related statistically to poor performance on the college assessment examinations (FSATs), the need for extensive remediation, and reduced quality and productivity in college courses. Critical, it seems to us, are standards set and met in the lower grades.

Colleges did not invent the need for remediation; they inherited it from the K-12 system. As CUNY sets higher standards; as the BOE replaces social promotion with a system of "gates" at each grade level; and as the BOE administers better examinations to more students, students and their teachers will strive to attain the new standards. Thus, remediation will begin when students need it – at the point where their performance lags, and not years later when it is costly and counterproductive. Students do not pay to go to college to get the skills and content they were promised in the lower grades but never received. Standards at college "trickle down" to lower grades; and standards set and met in the lower grades "bubble up," benefiting students repeatedly during their academic lives.

Raise standard English skills: Among the most startling and important findings of this study was the pernicious effects of poor English language grounding on every other measure of school performance. LEP students suffer the effects at all levels, having 29 times greater chance of poor performance and remediation than a randomly selected student. Hence, *English acquisition is the most crucial step in improving education at all levels, K-16*. Bilingual education should be truly that: a transition from lacking proficiency to being proficient in English as early as possible. We have known about this problem for years; but this study clearly and positively demonstrates the crisis in English language acquisition and signals that all institutions must set, as PRIORITY ONE, getting all students up to English proficiency as quickly as possible. Bilingual education should not be a "life sentence" to being LEP – just a starting point toward English competency.

Improve the CUNY assessment test for writing. Our data confirm the problems with the Writing Assessment Test (WAT), which is required of every student applying to the City University. Its low reliability shows up in our analysis as anomalous results in comparison with student performance on the RAT, MAT and other tests. Since students cannot complete CUNY without passing all three of the FSATs, the low reliability of the WAT can become a serious impediment to college progress and completion. Problems existed with both the construction of the WAT and the rather erratic way in which it was graded and scored. Replacing the WAT with any one of a number of more valid and reliable measures of writing ability would do much to smooth entry and improve the progress of students in the City University system.

Enrich high school offerings. Our data seem to show that students who attend academically intensive high schools and have completed more high-end academic classes in the middle and upper grades do better in high school and college, and are less likely to end up in remediation. These findings support course enrichment in the middle and high school curricula. We found that the number of CPI courses passed predicted success or failure later in school. Enrichment, which goes hand and glove with higher standards, should become a priority of the BOE.

Align curriculum and requirements across grades and institutions. A central focus of this research was the tracking of student progress from elementary school through college. Standards at the upper levels should affect those at the lower levels. Back-mapping the curriculum, and aligning each level with those above and below it, are obvious key steps in improving the productivity of both the schools of the BOE and the colleges of CUNY. In terms of assessment, how do the DRP and CAT-Math build to the Regents English, to RAT, MAT, WAT and the SAT and college English? Perhaps the leaders of the BOE and CUNY should convene joint subject-skill committees to trace the curriculum across the grade levels to see that skills required at upper levels are taught and tested at the lower ones. Sometimes called "articulation," this linking process is critical if students are to grow and prosper in the K-16 education system of NYC.

Upscale CUNY. Our data clearly show that CUNY has, by and large, failed to attract well-prepared students. The CUNY/non-CUNY comparisons nearly always showed non-CUNY students scoring higher and doing better. This loss of high-end students has not always been the case

and should not continue. As the BOE graduates stronger students, as CUNY bears less of the burden of remediation, and as CUNY itself raises standards, CUNY should re-think its target population and create more high-powered, attractive courses and majors. The time is right; tuition is still modest; the locations are attractive. All CUNY colleges should create fast-track, "honors" and enriched programs and seek to recruit high-powered students and faculty.

Guide students through the remedial and academic thicket. Students confront a confusing array of requirements, whereby they must take certain remedial courses, based on their performance on FSATs and other indicators, plus "regular" courses in related subjects in order to be eligible for college status and aid. These requirements are a recipe for failure. How might the process of selecting remedial and college-level courses be improved? One possible solution is for CUNY to bolster its academic and financial aid advising system. Right now, under the CUNY's contract with the faculty union, student advising is the job of the faculty, who may lack the time, expertise and interest for proper execution. Another possible solution is to allow students opportunities to take remediation outside the context of a college degree program, or at least without the burden of a taking regular courses before students are ready.

Improve data interpretation and use. Both the BOE and CUNY need integrated, state-of-the-art tools and technologies for gathering, analyzing and reporting information about student and system performance for use by parents, teachers, school administrators and policy makers – all members of the New York City community. Only through better data can the City formulate a comprehensive strategy and best deploy resources for improving the education of all its students through all schools and colleges.

Engage assistance of third parties. Our preceding recommendations call on CUNY and the BOE to set ambitious goals. Unfortunately, the needed reforms are so extensive that they may overwhelm both institutions' current capacity to meet them. In an accompanying study entitled *Analysis of Remedial Education Outsourcing Alternatives*, the Task Force staff reports that for-profit education service companies and not-for-profit organizations throughout the City have some expertise in diagnostic-prescriptive testing and teaching basic skills – particularly at the K-12 level and in English language arts instruction, where CUNY and the BOE are weakest. Just as we believe a partnership between CUNY and the BOE would better serve the students of New York City, we believe that an education system that taps all available resources would serve students even better.