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State Capitol North, 325 Don Gaspar, Suite 200  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501  
PH: (505) 986-4591 FAX: (505) 986-4338  
<http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs/lesc/lescdefault.asp>



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May 4, 2006

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Legislative Education Study Committee

**FR:** Pamela Herman

**RE: STAFF BRIEF: NEW MEXICO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES NEEDING  
REMEDIAL CLASSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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The 2006 Interim Workplan for the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) includes a presentation regarding a recent study of remedial courses taken in higher education by graduates of New Mexico high schools.

**Issues:**

- During the 2005 interim, the Public Education Department (PED) and the Higher Education Department (HED) convened a joint task force on alignment to address the disconnect between high school curricula and the placement tests used in higher education. To support the work of the task force, the Secretaries of Public Education and Higher Education commissioned a study by the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to quantify and determine patterns in remedial courses taken by New Mexico high school students who enroll in public institutions of higher education soon after graduation.
- On April 17, 2006, the Secretaries of Public Education and Higher Education and the OEA released preliminary results of this research in a report entitled *Ready for College? A Report on New Mexico High School Graduates Who Take Remedial Classes in Higher Education*. The report states that the purposes of the study are:
  - to gather detailed information about how many New Mexico high school graduates take remedial courses in colleges and universities;
  - to learn more about what kinds of remedial course these students take;
  - to learn more about what kinds of high school experiences these students have;

- to learn more about what kinds of college and university experiences these students have;
  - to develop baseline information that can be used by the Governor, the Legislature, educators and citizens in their efforts to improve New Mexico's education system; and
  - to strengthen the capacity of HED, PED and the OEA to track students throughout the P-20 education system and report on their progress.
- The report states that the study is based on records from PED and HED for 43,784 students who entered a public two- or four-year institution of higher education (IHE) at the age of 18 or 19 in 2000 through 2004. Students at tribal and private postsecondary institutions were not included.
  - Of the total, 35,654 students were graduates of 113 of a total of 115 public high schools, four of a total of 30 public charter schools, and nine of a total of 18 public alternative high schools in New Mexico. The remainder included general educational development (GED) certificate recipients, foreign students, and students from out of state. OEA and HED state that high schools of origin were determined by the ACT high school code on students' transcripts, which may not exist for all charter and alternative schools. Schools with fewer than 10 students in the sample were eliminated to protect student privacy.
    - Approximately 55 percent of students were female and 45 percent were male.
    - Approximately 45 percent of students were Hispanic, 39 percent White non-Hispanic, 7.0 percent Native American, 2.0 percent Black non-Hispanic, 2.0 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, and 6.0 percent did not identify their ethnicity.
  - HED and OEA state that because the HED Data Editing and Reporting (DEAR) system does not identify college classes as remedial or developmental, researchers classified them in five general categories: Basic Skills, General; Basic Skills, Other; Career Exploration; Literacy and Communication Skills; and Numeracy and Computation Skills.
  - The data show that of the total 35,654 public school graduates in the sample:
    - approximately 49 percent took one or more remedial classes in numeracy and literacy or both;
    - approximately 41.1 percent took classes in numeracy and computational skills;
    - approximately 31.1 percent took classes in literacy and communication skills;
    - approximately 15 percent took classes in general basic skills;
    - approximately 2.0 percent took classes in other basic skills; and
    - approximately 0.4 percent took classes in career exploration.
  - Remediation needs in higher education varied significantly by student ethnicity. The report shows literacy and/or numeracy classes were taken by:
    - approximately 66 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native students;
    - approximately 58 percent of Hispanic students;
    - approximately 55 percent of Black non-Hispanic students;
    - approximately 45 percent of students who did not identify their ethnicity;
    - approximately 38 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander students; and
    - approximately 36 percent of White non-Hispanic students.

- The report shows the percent of high school graduates who took literacy and/or numeracy classes in higher education by public school, and by school district.
- The report states the following conclusions:
  - New Mexico faces a critical challenge in ensuring that high school graduates are ready for college work. Too many high school graduates need remediation, particularly in literacy and communication, and numeracy and computation.
  - New Mexico needs a better understanding of why so many high school graduates are unprepared for college and what can be done to address the problem.
  - New Mexico needs to develop a more precise understanding of which developmental courses in college are considered remedial and what tests and other measures are used to place students in these classes.
  - New Mexico can help high school students become better prepared for college work by requiring that high school students become more proficient in math; by ensuring that high school math courses are better aligned with New Mexico Standards; and by supporting professional development for math teachers.
  - New Mexico can help high school students become better prepared by continuing and expanding efforts to improve students' abilities to read and write. Results from a variety of assessments indicate that a higher percentage of elementary and middle school students in New Mexico are becoming proficient in reading. This is a positive trend and needs to be supported into high school.
  - The results of this study should not be used as an excuse for assigning blame. Rather, these findings provide an opportunity for policymakers, educators, students and parents to work together to improve both the public schools and higher education.

**Background:**

Since the 2001 interim, the LESC has heard presentations regarding the need for a seamless, integrated statewide preschool through college system that prepares high school students for college success and enables them to transition smoothly into their postsecondary studies. In recent years, the LESC has endorsed and the Legislature has enacted a number of provisions specifically designed to stem the need for remedial education and eliminate barriers to earning a higher education credential, including:

- A requirement that students from grades 8 through 12 complete Next Step Plans setting forth their coursework for the grades remaining until high school graduation or for after high school.
- A requirement that school districts intervene, and document their interventions, in the case of truants and habitual truants to keep those students in an educational setting.
- A requirement that high school curricula and end-of-course tests be aligned with the placement tests administered by two- and four-year public educational institutions in New Mexico.
- A requirement that courses meeting high school graduation requirements be aligned with state academic content and performance standards, and provisions increasing graduation requirements in science and mathematics.

- Requirements regarding articulation and transfer of credits at the postsecondary level to minimize the likelihood that students will have to repeat courses when they transfer from one IHE to another.

**Presenters:**

Dr. Peter Winograd, Director, OEA, Department of Finance and Administration, will present the results of the study, *Ready for College? A Report on New Mexico High School Graduates Who Take Remedial Classes in Higher Education*.

Dr. Beverlee J. McClure, Secretary of Higher Education, and Dr. Veronica G. García, Secretary of Public Education, will describe existing and planned efforts by their departments to respond to the issues raised by the research.

**Questions the committee may wish to consider:**

1. Do any patterns emerge from the data regarding high schools whose graduates are most likely to require remediation, such as size, location, or inclusion in the school improvement cycle?
2. How does New Mexico compare with other states regarding the need for remediation in higher education by recent high school graduates?
3. How will the data be used by PED and HED to recommend policy that will assist students to be prepared better for postsecondary education?
4. Will the researchers perform a similar study of future cohorts of college freshmen?