

June 2014

Better Preparation of BPS Students Required for College Success

Too many students attending community colleges in MA are not ready for the course work

More than one-third of BPS graduates who enroll in Massachusetts public colleges – and 60% in community college - are not fully ready for the course work and require at least one remedial class even though they have met the standards for high school graduation. That was the finding of a 2013 report prepared by NU's Center for Labor Market Studies with assistance from the Boston Private Industry Council for The Boston Foundation. Under the citywide *Success Boston College Completion* initiative, the Boston Public Schools launched an early academic intervention program in 2010 to decrease the number of BPS graduates needing remediation courses. The program is showing positive results, but more work is needed.

This college readiness gap is a troubling workforce issue for Massachusetts where it is estimated that 70% of the jobs will require college education by 2020. The state depends on public higher education to be the workforce pipeline for a growing economy.

Accuplacer Tests

Since 1998, community colleges, state colleges and public universities in Massachusetts have used the College Board's Accuplacer tests to determine whether incoming students will take regular, for-credit courses or need to take any non-credit "developmental" courses. Community colleges average 60-65% of incoming students who score too low on the Accuplacer and are required to take between one and four developmental courses. These courses cost the same and take the same time as regular, for-credit courses but don't count toward a degree. In the 2011-2012 academic year, \$37M was spent by students at the 15

Massachusetts community colleges for non-credit developmental tuition and fees. According to Complete College America, 90% of students who start community college in developmental courses drop out without earning a degree within three years.

High School Accuplacer–Preparation

Local community colleges provide professional development for BPS math and English teachers and access to their developmental education curricula as an intervention resource. These colleges administer developmental "boot camps" for incoming students. However, more students need to be offered Accuplacer–preparation programs in the high schools to raise their skills to college level to avoid spending time and money on remedial courses.

In a partnership with the nonprofit JFYNetWorks, the BPS has used the Accuplacer Diagnostic in five high schools as an early intervention tool to assist juniors and seniors to improve their algebra, arithmetic, reading comprehension, and writing skills. The JFYNetWorks system provides assessment data for customized online instruction, and online measurement of curriculum progress. The JFY team works with the classroom teacher to monitor progress and to determine additional treatment if needed. The [results](#) at individual schools have been impressive as the program has raised language and math skills high enough to reduce the need for students to take 295 developmental courses at a savings of approximately \$150,000. How to expand the program is the next challenge.