

# The Community College Reform Movement Has Failed Students: A Critical Review of the Literature

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National Organization for Student Success (NOSS) Conference  
Conference Presentation  
2025 February 21, 2:45–3:00PM  
New Orleans, LA

# Anonymous Evaluations: What People Are Saying About This Presentation

“Statistically significant?? More like sadistically significant!”



“Good but too wordy”



“We didn’t understand it, but we know it was the best presentation at the conference. Five stars! Love, Mom & Dad.”



# The Original Goal of Reforms: To Increase Graduation Rates

Obama's 2009 Completion Agenda:  
Experts originally promised that because  
remediation was a barrier, reforming it would  
*increase graduation rates*

# 2010 American Graduation Initiative Promise: Increase Public 2-Year Graduation Rates

Dr. Thomas R. Bailey, former head of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University, at the White House Summit on Community Colleges (Bailey & Cho, 2010)<sup>1</sup>:

“The picture of past and current developmental education appears bleak. If students cannot get established in college with college-level courses, then they will certainly not be able to graduate. ... Finding better ways to address the needs of underprepared students is a necessity for meeting the Obama administration’s goal of increasing the number of community college graduates by 5 million by 2020” (p. 7).

# The Three Most Common Reforms

- Multiple measures assessment
- Corequisites and other accelerated models
- Mathematics pathways

# CCRC Litschwartz et al. (2023)<sub>2</sub>

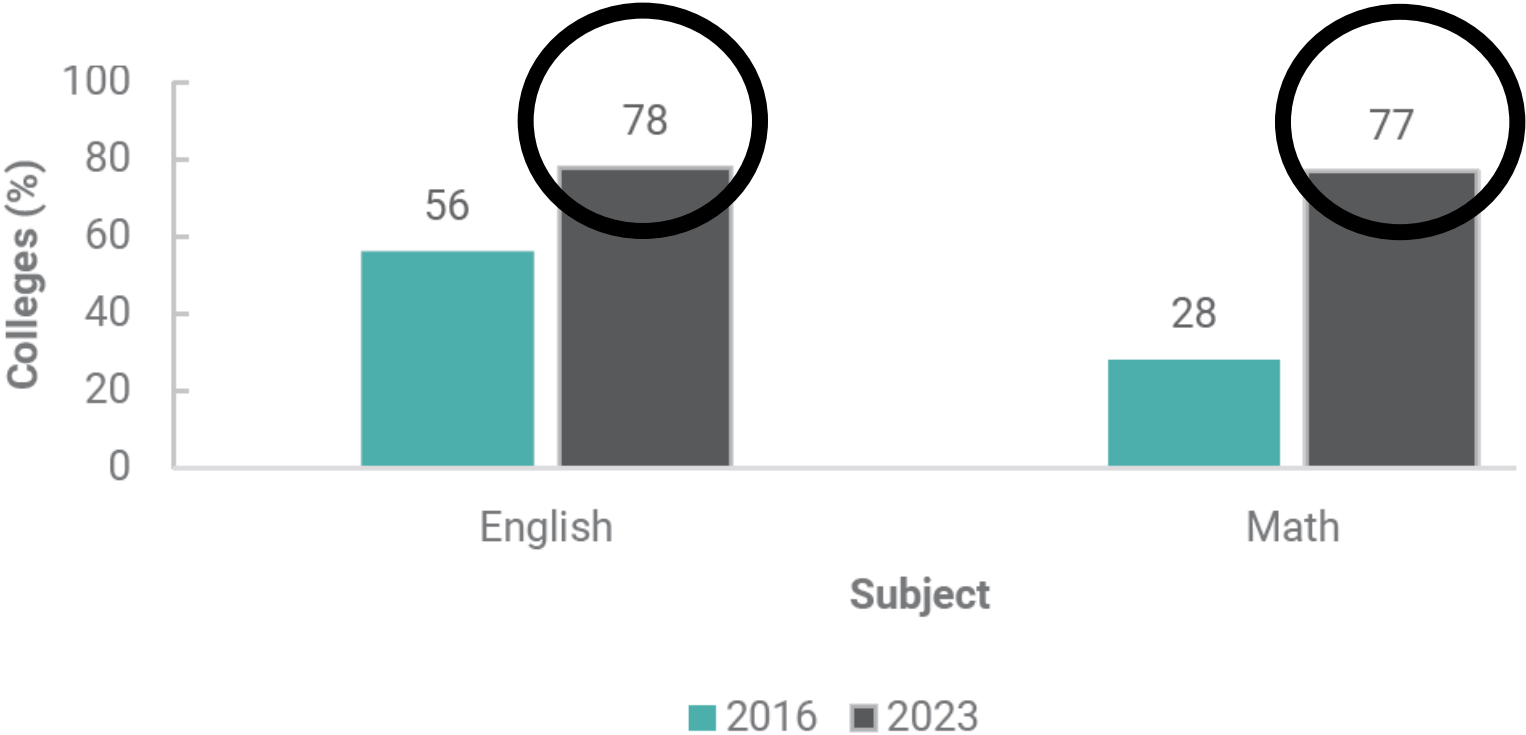
**TABLE 1. Developmental Course Policies at U.S. Community Colleges, 2023**

Measure	English (%)	Math (%)
Placement system uses indicators of high school performance	73	73
Only prerequisite developmental courses offered	18	21
Only corequisite developmental courses offered	14	12
Both prerequisite and corequisite developmental courses offered	64	65
Neither prerequisite nor corequisite developmental courses offered	4	2
Sample size = 99		

*SOURCE: Data from 2023 and 2016 nationally representative surveys of two-year public colleges.*

# CCRC Litschwartz et al. (2023)<sub>2</sub>

**FIGURE 3. Two-Year Public Colleges Offering Corequisite Developmental Courses 2016 to 2023**



*SOURCE: Data from 2023 and 2016 nationally representative surveys of two-year public colleges. Data were collected and updated from February 2023 through October 2023*

CAPR Dev  
Ed Reforms  
(Bickerstaff  
et al.,  
2022)<sub>3</sub>

Report | October 2022

## Five Principles for Reforming Developmental Education

A Review of the Evidence

*Susan Bickerstaff, Katie Beal, Julia Raufman, Erika B. Lewy,  
and Austin Slaughter*



CAPR |  
CENTER FOR THE ANALYSIS OF  
POSTSECONDARY READINESS

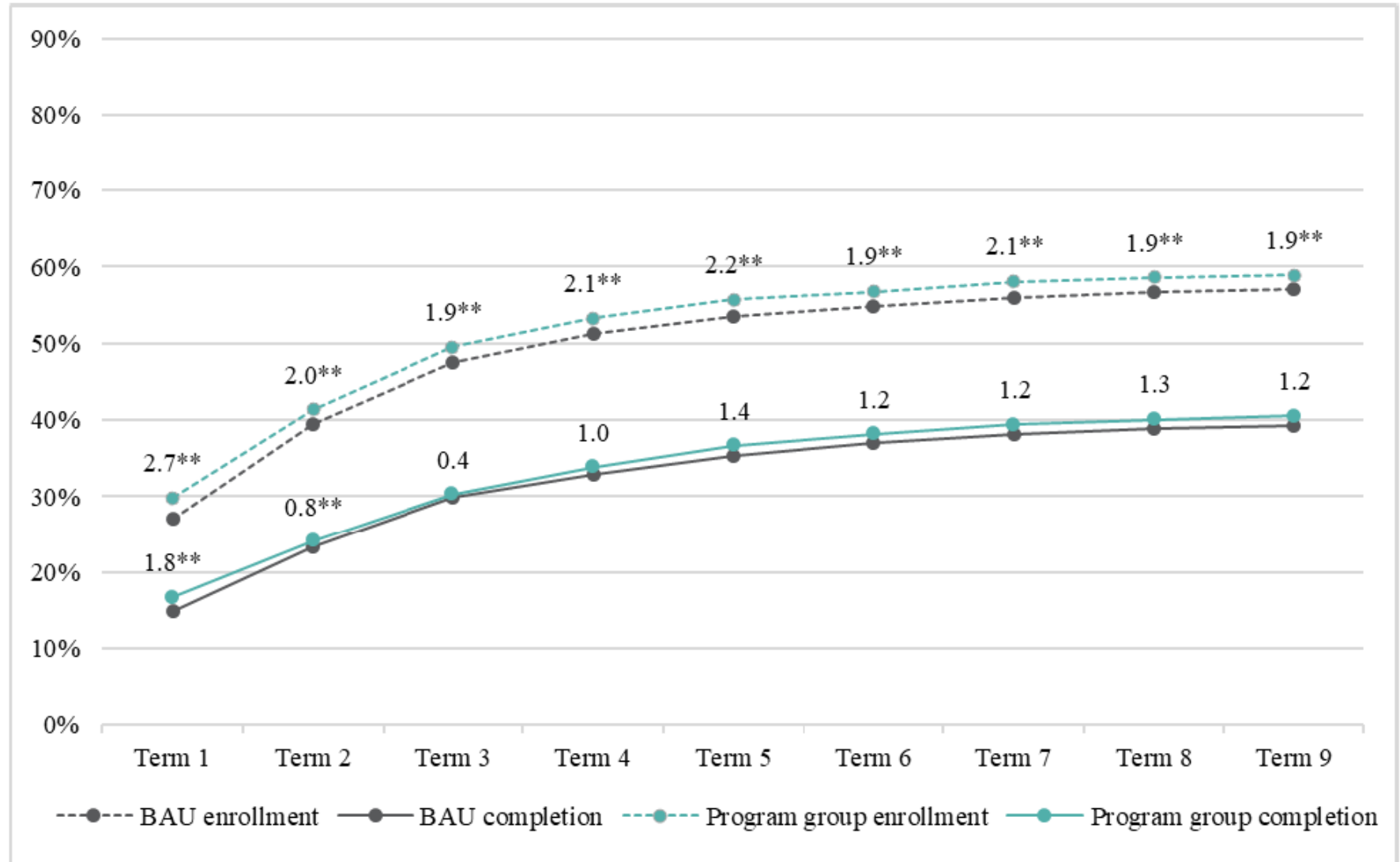


**I provide a critical review of the most rigorous and recent literature on MMA, corequisites and other accelerated models, and pathways**

# **Multiple Measures Assessment (MMA)**

Figure 4.1

College-Level Math Course Outcomes (Among Students in Math Subsample)



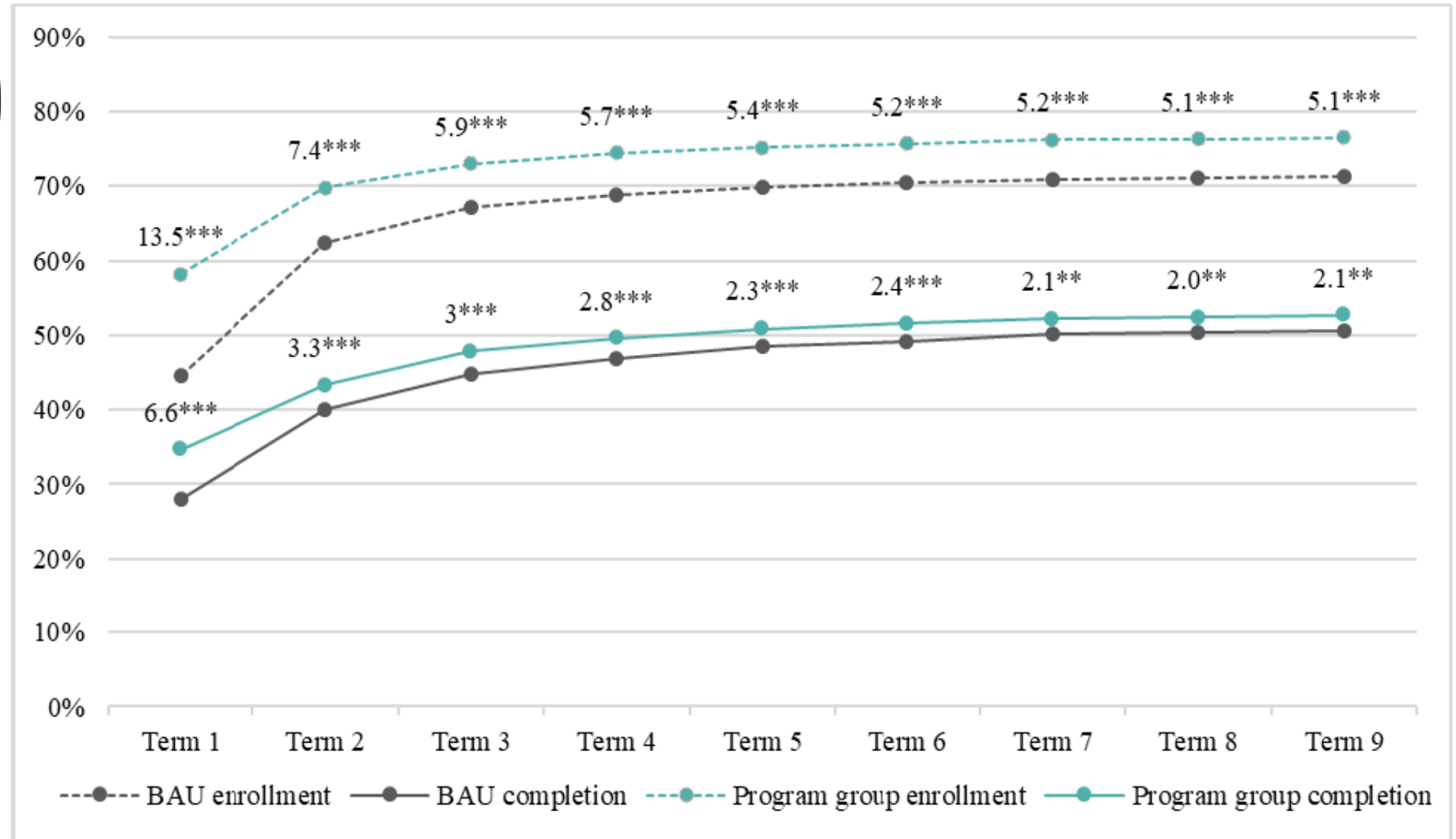
NOTE: Data labels represent impact estimates, or the percentage-point difference between the mean outcomes for business-as-usual and program group students.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .10$ .

Multiple Measures (Kopko et al., 2023)<sup>4</sup>

Figure 4.2

College-Level English Course Outcomes (Among Students in English Subsample)



NOTE: Data labels represent impact estimates, or the percentage-point difference between the mean outcomes for business-as-usual and program group students.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .10$ .

Multiple Measures (Kopko et al., 2023)<sup>4</sup>

Multiple  
Measures  
(Kopko et  
al., 2023)<sup>4</sup>

“MMA did not have a statistically significant impact on non-subject-specific outcomes including persistence and credential attainment or transfer overall” (pp. 17–18).

“We also do not find any evidence that MMA affected credential-specific outcomes, including certificate attainment, associate degree attainment, and bachelor’s degree attainment, among the whole sample. That said, as shown in Figure 4.3, program group students attempted more college-level credits than their business-as-usual peers, and by term 9, program group students attempted approximately one more college-level credit. We do not observe a statistically significant difference between study groups in the number of college-level credits earned” (p. 18).

# **Corequisites and Other Accelerated Models**

Corequisites  
(Douglas et  
al., 2022)<sup>7</sup>

**One of the most cited studies on corequisites is Logue et al. (2016, 2019)<sup>5,6</sup>. The 7-year follow-up came out in 2022 (Douglas et al., 2022)<sup>7</sup>. The abstract misleads readers into thinking the 7-year results showed large effects on graduation:**

“The current study examined the 7-year results of a randomized controlled trial of corequisite remediation with college-level statistics. *Students assigned to the corequisite group were 50 percent more likely to complete associate’s degrees within 3 years, and 100 percent more likely to complete bachelor’s degrees within 5 years [emphasis added].* Corequisite students also earned, on average, \$3,000–\$4,500 more in years 5 to 7” (abstract).

Corequisites  
(Douglas et al., 2022)<sup>7</sup>

**Remedial:  
41%**

**Coreq Grad Rate  
After 7yrs: 44%**

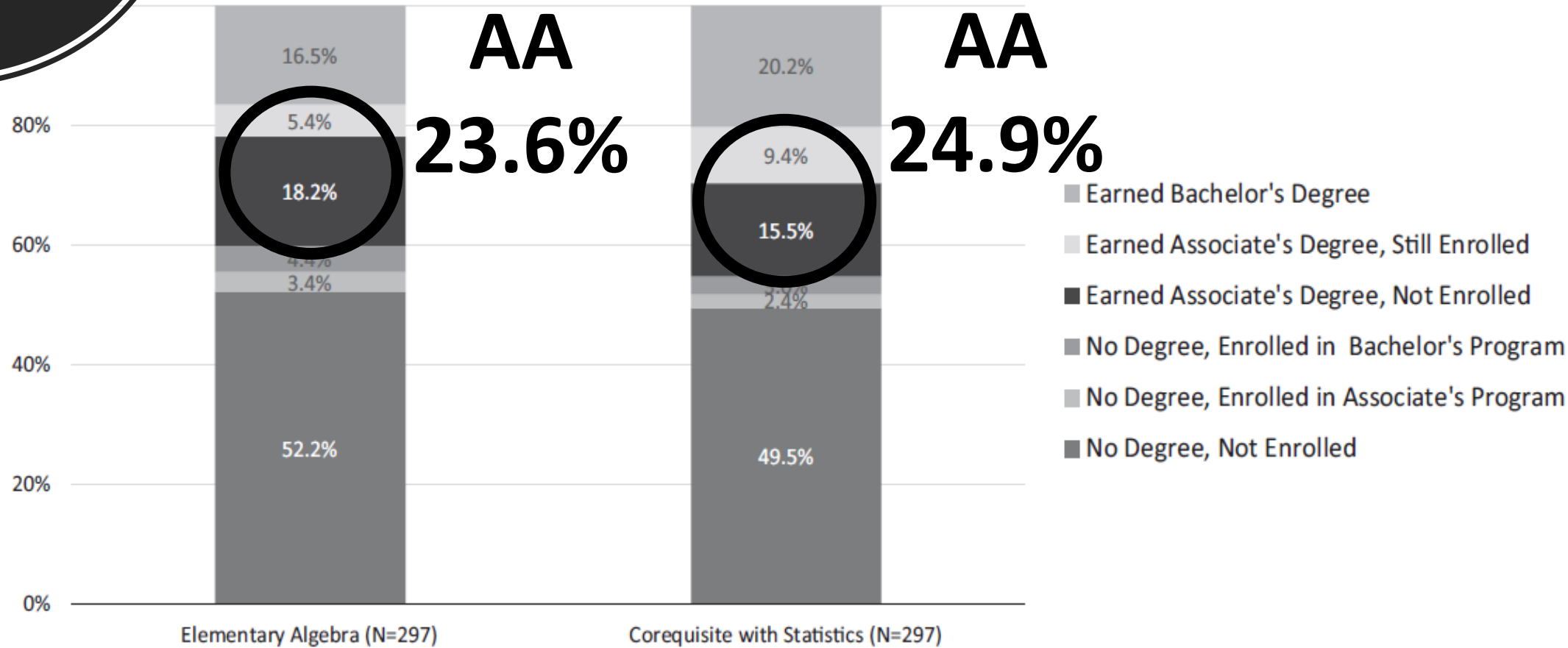


FIGURE 1. *Student disposition in fall 2020 by treatment status.*



# Mathematics Pathways

DCMP  
Math  
Pathways  
(Sepanik,  
2023)<sup>9</sup>

“While the early version of DCMP did help a significant number of students complete their first college-level math course, it was not as successful in supporting students’ completion of a second college-level math course and it did not have a discernible impact on students’ average accumulation of math credits by the end of the five-year study” (p. 4).

“While more students who were offered DCMP passed their first college-level math course, the early version of the DCMP model had no discernible effect on students’ total college-level credits earned during any year of the study” (p. 5).

DCMP  
Math  
Pathways  
(Sepanik,  
2023)<sup>9</sup>

“This early version of the DCMP model did not have a statistically significant impact on students’ credential completion or current enrollment at a four-year college during any of the five study years. There were also no impacts on ever earned a certificate, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree after five years when measured separately” (p. 6).

DCMP  
Math  
Pathways  
(Schudde &  
Keisler,  
2019)<sup>10</sup>

“Enrolling in and passing non-algebra college math coursework explained the majority of the increase in college math completion” (p. 16).

“Participating in DCMP has a small negative relationship with taking and passing college algebra, lowering the probability of each by about 1 percentage point” (p. 16).

“The observed increase in college-level math course enrollment and completion among DCMP students may partially stem from students taking non-algebra college-level math, a key component of the DCMP model” (p. 11).

**Why do researchers place importance on increasing gateway pass rates?**

**An assumption in the theory of  
*early momentum***

# The CCRC Moved the Goal Line From Graduation to Pass Rates to Continue Reforms

- Momentum is a term used to describe continuous progress toward a degree for college students
- *Early momentum* refers to a theory that if there is an increase in gateway pass rates or credits earned in the first year (i.e., early momentum), then that will lead to increased graduation rates later (Wang, 2017)<sup>11</sup>
- CCRC adopted early momentum metrics (EMM) in 2017 as an argument to keep implementing reforms targeting first-year gateway pass rates (Jenkins & Bailey, 2017)<sup>12</sup>

**There is no evidence  
that reforms promoting early  
momentum actually lead to increased  
graduation rates**

***In fact, we now know some reforms  
are lowering graduation rates***

Corequisites  
in TN  
(Ran & Lee,  
2024)<sup>13</sup>

In a groundbreaking study on the 10-year results from the full implementation of corequisites in Tennessee, Ran and Lee (2024) analyzed student outcomes at all levels, as opposed to students just beneath the cutoff in Ran and Lin (2019), the initial study on TN corequisites

**The authors' findings are extremely important because it is the first study on the effects of a statewide full-scale implementation of corequisites and mathematics pathways:**



Corequisites  
in TN  
(Ran & Lee,  
2024)<sup>13</sup>

“The proportion of students earning degrees at the associate level or higher did not change significantly before and after the corequisite reform” (p. 24).

“After the corequisite reform, remedial students accumulated similar amounts of college-level credits while enrolling in fewer courses overall, making the allocation of time and financial aid resources more efficient. However, these positive effects on early college-level credit accumulation did not lead to improved downstream outcomes. We found that remedial students, particularly those with lower placement scores, were more likely to drop out and were less likely to earn short-term certificates” (p. 29).

Corequisites  
in TN  
(Ran & Lee,  
2024)<sup>13</sup>

“The fact that college-level course pass rates and average grades became lower for corequisite cohorts than for prerequisite cohorts indicates that the concurrent academic learning support was still not enough for some remedial students to succeed in college-level courses. In addition, with both on-level and remedial students, college-level classrooms have become more heterogeneous learning environments. These changes present new challenges for faculty to accommodate students with a wider range of academic needs” (p. 29).

Corequisites  
in TN  
(Ran & Lee,  
2024)<sup>13</sup>

“Interventions that showed positive effects on attainment outcomes incorporated components of curriculum reforms (Logue et al., 2019) or a holistic set of academic and financial support (Scrivener et al., 2015). Students may need ongoing academic and nonacademic support to translate the momentum gained from additional college-level coursetaking into improved persistence and completion outcomes” (p. 30).

“Together with similar results from the initiative to move remediation to high school (Kane et al., 2021), the literature in this area provided emerging evidence that the problems with traditional remediation models were *not* the primary drivers of low college completion rates” (pp. 29–30).

**Research  
Not Highlighted  
By CCRC**

**For decades, numerous studies showing positive results for remediation have been published in top journals (e.g., *Research in Higher Education*, *The Review of Higher Education*, *The Journal of Higher Education*) but have not been widely cited or shared**

# Data Showing Positive Results for Remediation

Cabrera et al. (2005)<sup>14</sup>: “Those taking math remediation courses were 4% more likely to transfer than those who did not.... However, among Lowest-SES students, the effect of taking remedial reading is particularly noteworthy. For this group taking remedial reading actually increases their likelihood of transferring by 24%” (p. 174).

# Data Showing Positive Results for Remediation

Lesik (2006)<sup>15</sup>: “Using the regression-discontinuity design and an instrumental variables strategy to model selection bias, I concluded that participating in a developmental mathematics program significantly increases the odds of successfully completing a college-level mathematics course on the first try” (p. 17). (*The Review of Higher Ed*)

Fike and Fike (2008)<sup>16</sup>: “Students who did not enroll in developmental mathematics had lower odds of retention than those who enrolled in developmental mathematics but did not successfully complete the course. This finding suggests the significant role that developmental mathematics plays in student retention” (p. 78).

# Data Showing Positive Results for Remediation

Moss and Yeaton (2013)<sup>17</sup>: “For the term-by-term RDDs, using parametric estimates, we found a consistent pattern whereby DE students benefited from completing developmental English. During each of the five terms, DE students experienced higher achievement at the cut score when compared to NDE students” (p. 393).

Turk (2019)<sup>18</sup>: “When two groups of statistically similar students were compared, developmental education generally improved the chances of earning an associate degree” (p. 1090). (*Research in Higher Education*)



# Data Showing Positive Results for Remediation

Saw (2019)<sup>19</sup>: “For 2-year college students, remediation enrollment in both mathematics and English improved the likelihood of transferring to a 4-year college and earning a bachelor’s degree” (p. 298). (*Journal of Higher Education*)

Sanabria et al. (2020)<sup>20</sup>: “Taking remediation is associated with a nearly nine percentage-point increase in bachelor’s degree completion for 2-year college students after accounting for demographic, familial, and academic background characteristics” (p. 474). (*Research in Higher Education*)

# CCRC Knew Early On That Reforms Would Not Increase Graduation Rates

Top CCRC researchers' conclusions on most common reforms to remediation (Jaggars & Bickerstaff, 2018)<sup>21</sup>:

“Research suggests that the most popular reform models (including multiple measures assessment and placement, math pathways, and the co-requisite approach) will indeed improve students' rate of success in college-level math and English, but they are unlikely to substantially improve graduation rates” (p. 496).

# Tens of Millions of Taxpayer Dollars Have Been Used to Create a False Narrative

- CCRC/NCPR/CAPSEE/CAPR (all basically one organization formerly headed by Dr. Thomas R. Bailey) have received well over \$35 million in taxpayer dollars since 2006 (IES, n.d.)<sup>22</sup> to conduct this research, during which they created a biased narrative
- Tens of millions of dollars have also been donated to interest groups such as Complete College America, who still want to eliminate remediation, from such philanthropies as the Gates Foundation, Lumina, etc.

**In spite of all this widely available data,  
reformers are still working hard to  
eliminate stand-alone prerequisite  
remediation**

FutureEd  
Report  
(Kim,  
2024)<sup>26</sup>

## **New Report on Dev Ed (Kim, 2024): *Incomplete: The Unfinished Revolution in College Remedial Education***

**If every state in the country were to replicate Tennessee's results in dev-ed reform, 226,618 additional students would finish gateway math and English every year. Of this group, more than 100,000, or nearly half, would be Latino or Black.**

Corequisites  
in TN  
(Ran & Lee,  
2024)<sup>13</sup>

## Ran and Lee (2024)

“We found that students placed into corequisite remediation were up to 20.4 percentage points (or 77%) more likely to pass gateway math and 22.8 percentage points (or 42%) more likely to pass gateway English within one year of enrollment compared with otherwise similar students placed into prerequisite remedial courses” (p. 4).

“Since the corequisite reform, students placed below the college-readiness threshold were 4.3 percentage points (or 8.1%) less likely to continue enrolling in the state’s public college system and 3.0 percentage points (or 28.8%) less likely to earn a credential (mostly certificates) within three years of the initial enrollment” (p. 4).

“Our sample covers a higher proportion of underrepresented minorities, which represents approximately 55% of the lowest scoring group” (p. 5).

***If Tennessee had done nothing, they  
would have higher graduation rates  
today***

**The solution is to offer stand-alone  
prerequisite remediation for students  
who need it, especially with wrap-  
around supports**

# Include Remedial Options, but Comprehensive Developmental Education is Best

- The most effective reform, the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP), does not eliminate remediation (Miller & Weiss, 2021)<sup>23</sup>
- Original model more than doubled graduation rates (21% vs. 48% for developmental students) and was an RCT comprised of 90% students of color (Scrivener & Weiss, 2013)<sup>24</sup>
- Miller et al. (2020)<sup>25</sup> studied a replication of ASAP in Ohio and found that this model of true holistic *developmental education* caused a 3-year graduation rate increase of 12 percentage points (49 vs. 37%) (p. 48) at a cost of \$1,840 per student per year (p. ES-7)
- These models included required developmental coursework first



**Anecdotes are powerful:**  
***What do students say about  
remediation and developmental  
education?***

**(Please collect and send me some more  
anecdotes to include)**

## Student Quotes on Remediation


Jason, who was a nontraditional student at a community college in the Midwest, took a remedial English course (the lower of two levels). Here is what he said:

“Remedial English is not just a refresher. It is a lifeline for older students returning to education after many years, providing the essential skills they need to navigate the academic world with confidence.”

## Student Quotes on Remediation

Stephon Boncek was a remedial mathematics student in Florida. Here is what he said:

“Taking the prerequisite math courses provided me with the essential skills and knowledge that I needed to excel in my college math classes. Without them, I'm sure I would have been lost and frustrated.”



## Student Quotes on Remediation

Tracey Stallworth took remediation in Florida. He said this:

“I believe that prerequisite developmental/remedial courses were necessary for my success in college. Without them, I would have struggled in a lot of my courses. Having barely passed my GED, I am thankful for those developmental classes. They offered the education I needed to chart my path forward. In addition, these courses provided the knowledge that I would need to excel in my classes while pursuing my AA. Moreover, strong relationships were made by the instructors which still exist by those who encouraged me to reach my full potential.”

Student  
Quotes on  
Remediation



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# Stand-Alone Prerequisite Remediation and Developmental Education Should Be Options

- Based on DCMP findings, Ran and Lee (2024), and other recent rigorous research, stand-alone prerequisite remediation should be offered as options for students
- We need to keep supporting underserved students like Jason, Stephon, and Tracey
- Please ask students you may know who have benefited from remediation and developmental education to contribute a quote if they are open to that. There are many more success stories to share!

# Thank you!

Please take these data to your institutions and argue to keep stand-alone remediation and developmental education as an option for at-risk students!  
I'm happy to assist you.

References below and more reading available:

**communitycollegedata.com**

alexmgoudas (at) gmail (dot) com

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(See below for references with links)

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