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**Maryland Higher Education Commission  
College and Career – Are Maryland Students Ready**

**Testimony of Dr. Jennie C. Hunter-Cevera, Secretary of Higher Education  
to the Senate Education, Business, and Administration Subcommittee  
and the House Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**

**February 16, 2015**

**Issues**

- 1. The Secretary, Chancellor, and Presidents should comment on whether it would help students if public four-year institutions standardized placement cut scores. They should also comment on appropriate cut scores as misaligned cut scores may place more students in remediation education than necessary. - p. 6**

Since four-year institutions vary in their course offerings, and requirements can vary depending on which disciplines students go into, placement exams and cut scores should be aligned with a student's particular program of study. In mathematics, the Maryland Mathematics Reform Initiative (MMRI) will examine placement exams and cut scores across institutions and across majors. As pathways and sequences are modified through this initiative, placement practices will likely change. Over the next couple of years, Maryland institutions will also consider scores on the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) exam and compare them to other placement methods (e.g., Accuplacer and institutional exams), to look at the extent to which they align and place students into remedial or credit-bearing courses. These additional measures should help inform future policy decisions about cut scores, and to help ensure that students are appropriately placed.

- 2. The Secretary should comment on progress toward publishing the revised SOAR in 2015. – p. 9**

MHEC has designed a revised SOAR (Student Outcome and Achievement Report) that is intended to provide audiences with more helpful information about academic outcomes in college. The revised report, developed in consultation with K-12 educators, will include more detailed information about student success in college, remediation and throughput completion of credit-bearing courses, and student course-taking patterns in high school. The report will be prepared with the assistance of the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center (MLDSC), who will match student-level high school and college data. This student-level match will allow more detailed and more accurate analysis about the links between high school and college. Although it is difficult to say exactly when the

data will be ready for analysis, MHEC anticipates that a report will be published during 2015.

**3. The Secretary, Chancellor, and Presidents should comment on whether this type of reporting is a useful best practice for community colleges and four-year institutions. – p. 19**

MHEC believes that analyzing and reporting on course-level data, including drop/fail/withdrawal (DFW) rates, is a useful best practice for all institutions. This approach is especially helpful for identifying “bottleneck” courses in which large numbers of students tend to be unsuccessful, and that pose major challenges for student retention and progression. These courses, which often have high enrollments, may be good candidates for course redesign. That said, this analysis will not necessarily lead to information on remedial coursework at all institutions.

In addition, course-level data can be useful for tracking students from remedial courses into credit-bearing courses. Maryland institutions that have been involved in the course redesign process already regularly use these types of data for pre- and post- assessment purposes.

MHEC has recently expanded its collections to include more data related to remedial education. These include data on students (a) enrolling in remedial courses, (b) completing remedial courses, and (c) completing credit-bearing courses in fields related to enrollment. In addition, the data now include remediation-related data on all students, including adults, instead of only recent high school graduates as in previous years. Eventually, these data will also allow MHEC to report on longer-term educational outcomes such as persistence and graduation. In the near term, MHEC will be able to provide reporting of this kind on remedial coursework at institutions. MHEC expects to begin reporting on these data by the end of 2015.

In addition, MHEC is beginning to collect course-level data from all two-year and four-year public institutions, totaling over one million records per year. By 2016-2017, more course-level analyses of this nature can be conducted across campuses, to complement course-level analyses that are currently conducted on individual campuses.

**4. The Secretary should comment on changes in ABE participation since the 2012 changes to federal policy and whether Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) should report outcomes of ABE students in higher education versus other types of students. – p. 19**

MHEC does not collect student-level data on Adult Basic Education (ABE) enrollments. ABE courses are offered on a non-credit basis by community colleges, and MHEC does not collect student-level data on non-credit enrollments.

The GED program is overseen by the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR). DLLR is in the process of providing GED data to MLDC, and MLDC intends to study and report on outcomes for GED recipients.

**5. The Secretary and Presidents should comment on whether a common SAP policy among two-year institutions would benefit students. Also, the Secretary should comment on whether MHEC has data on remedial outcomes for students receiving State financial aid. – p. 20**

MHEC understands that there are advantages and disadvantages to the different Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policies in place at community colleges. The Presidents are well positioned to discuss these in more detail. MHEC is inclined to recommend that institutions be allowed to decide for themselves which approach is most likely to promote positive outcomes for students.

As noted above, MHEC has recently expanded its collections to include more data related to remedial education, including course-level outcomes. These data will be able to be connected to data on student financial aid by the end of 2015.

**6. The Secretary should comment on whether it would be beneficial to have MHEC reexamine public institution financing of remedial education expenditures. – p. 20**

Remedial coursework works. One of the strongest testimonials to the power and efficacy of remedial education is the annual Degree Progress Analysis data, which consistently shows that degree-seeking community college students who complete remedial coursework have the same success rates of those students who don't need remedial coursework. Banning remedial coursework at colleges does not eliminate the need for remediation, nor does it do anything to help students succeed. More students succeed with remedial education than without it.

Remedial education is designed to serve as a step up to further achievement, not as a hurdle or obstacle. Remedial education exists because students with talents in many areas but limitations in one or two areas can still work through those limitations, succeed in college, and earn degrees.

Remedial education at colleges is not restricted to the classroom. Most colleges and universities provide additional support systems for students in remedial courses, including specialized tutoring, dedicated study space and equipment, and customized advising. Most also provide support services specifically for adult students. These services are also part of the cost of remedial education.

MHEC understands that the financing of remedial education is an important policy issue, given that institutions invest substantial resources to provide these courses, and that remedial education costs time and money for students who are pursuing a college

degree. In Maryland, there are a number of developments which will likely shape and influence the state of remedial education in the near future, including the introduction of new general education mathematics pathways, the implementation of the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards and PARCC assessments, and the introduction of transition courses in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade beginning with the 2017-2018 school year. As a result, there could be substantial changes both in terms of what is included in remedial education, and in terms of how many students are placed into these courses. MHEC believes that it would make sense to wait to reexamine the cost of remedial education once these changes are in place, and to compare these findings to FY 2011.

**7. The Secretary should comment on the continued collection of this data, what it may be able to tell us, and when the most recent data will be available. – p. 22**

The Complete College America (CCA) data collection is conducted in the spring of each calendar year. The most recent data, the 2014 collection, covers data collected in the 2011-2012 collection year. MHEC submitted the 2014 collection to the Department of Legislative Services in December 2014. The 2015 collection, covering data collected during the 2012-2013 collection year, is scheduled to take place between March and June 2015. MHEC will submit these data to DLS as soon as they have been verified and completed, likely in September or October 2015.

MHEC's expanded data collections have been redesigned with the objective of collecting student-level data that would relieve institutions of the obligation to collect CCA data; however, the expanded data have not yet been collected for a sufficient period to relieve institutions of this obligation. This ad hoc collection of these data places a heavy burden on many institutions, especially on those with limited data resources.

The aggregate data provided to CCA can help to identify potential areas of success or concern. Perhaps the most prominent example of this occurred when CCA data were used to determine that Baltimore City Community College was allowing students to accumulate an extraordinary number of credits before graduation. When BCCC reviewed the data, it worked to install new advising structures to help ensure that students are moving more rapidly toward degree completion. It must be said, however, that because the CCA data are aggregate data, they can't be used to examine problems in detail. For example, although the credits-to-degree data indicated the presence of a potential problem, they did not allow detailed analysis of the nature of the underlying reasons for this situation.

Even given these limitations, the CCA data would be useful if the data were standardized across all participating states, and if the data were made available for researchers to make comparisons across states. However, the data are not standardized – for example, CCA's definition of an adult student does not specify whether the student must be the minimum age at time of entry, or at time of completion – and CCA only provides limited data for analysis on its website. It is not clear at this writing whether CCA would allow MHEC researchers to use CCA data sets. CCA tends to use the data it collects in service of its

particular policy agenda, rather than working to ensure that the data can be used by participating states and other researchers to improve educational outcomes.

- 8. The State Superintendent should discuss the upcoming college- and college-ready cutoff score process and the timeline and extent to which Maryland's high school graduation expectations will be aligned with college and career expectations. The State Superintendent should also discuss the plans for transition courses. – p. 27**

*No Response from MHEC.*

- 9. The Chancellor, MACC, and the State Superintendent should comment on the progress of MMRI and how it will align or complement the definition of college- and career-ready to be established by the PARCC consortium, which will also take place this summer. – p. 29**

*No Response from MHEC.*

- 10. The Secretary, Chancellor, Presidents, and the MLDS Director should comment on what new research questions the MLDS is capable of answering in the field of remedial education and when the MLDS could report back to the General Assembly on these questions. – p. 30**

The MLDS depends on MHEC to provide it with the data on postsecondary remediation to allow it to analyze questions related to remedial education. Therefore, MHEC's expanded collections will give the MLDS the ability to answer a number of additional questions. In particular, the MLDS is well positioned to connect information on remediation to its data on primary and secondary information and on the workforce to answer questions such as these:

- How do remedial non-completers enter and progress in the workforce, and how do these outcomes differ from those of remedial completers?
- What factors are associated with those students who do not complete remedial education but nevertheless achieve educational success?
- What are the high school characteristics of students who are assessed to need remediation?

MHEC will undoubtedly continue to work closely with MLDS to study and report on questions such as these.

However, given the lack of national standards or national data on remediation, and little available information on how educational contexts and practices vary from state to state, it is difficult to see how MLDS might be able to give rigorous answers to questions

about Maryland's need for remediation relative to that of other states. While the national CCA data offer some clues in this area, the data are not sufficient to address the question. It may be, for example, that Maryland has a higher remediation rate because it has higher cut scores or other standards for entry into credit-bearing courses. The data published by CCA do not provide information on this subject, and as noted above it is difficult to get access to detailed information held by other states. However, MHEC is willing to work with CCA to explore the possibility of conducting additional research with these data.

## **Acronyms**

ABE	Adult Basic Education
CCA	Complete College America
DFW	Drop/Fail/Withdraw
GED	General Educational Development
MLDSC	Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center
MMRI	Maryland Mathematics Reform Initiative
PARCC	Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers
SAP	Satisfactory Academic Progress
SOAR	Student Outcome and Achievement Report