Last June, Inside Higher Ed ran an article by Alexandros Goudas and Hunter Boylan titled, “Knee-Jerk Reforms on Remediation.” The authors cautioned against using flawed interpretations of data about remediation to make unsupported assertions that lead to erroneous policy decisions concerning developmental education. In a recent article, “Addressing Flawed Research in Developmental Education,” [JDE 36(1)], Goudas and Boylan caution college presidents, legislators, and developmental education professionals to dig deeper before making sweeping changes in developmental education.

The points listed below can be used to make more informed and enlightened decisions:

- A number of policy makers and researchers have either deliberately or accidentally promoted the idea that all developmental education is ineffective. This is based on a handful of studies that claim most remedial courses in community colleges are not helping students.
- Commentaries that misconstrue the findings of this research and which have taken information out of context have further muddied the waters. Data in those studies may be accurate, but key assumptions in them are faulty, having to do with the purposes and definition of developmental education.
- A consistent faulty assumption is that students who take remedial courses should outperform those who do not. In fact, the purpose of developmental education is to bring underprepared students up to the same level at the college starting line. Multiple studies have shown that those who successfully complete their remediation perform as well as those who do not need remediation.
- Another faulty assumption is that because students who participate in developmental education have low graduation rates, developmental education must be the cause. This is a classic case of assuming that correlation implies causality, the sort of error made by those who do not understand research.
- The belief that developmental education is ineffective also overlooks caveats in the studies themselves, and other studies that challenge the conclusion. For instance, studies consistently show there may be other factors that affect the performance of developmental students in gateway courses.
- Based on the belief that developmental courses do not work, some legislative bodies are moving toward removing prerequisite developmental courses – a “reform” that is not based on research. Proper reading of the data and studies can lead instead to the conclusion that developmental education is effective.
- Some of the suggestions for improvement stemming from the recent research findings are laudable. However, one area of great concern is the suggestion to completely replace prerequisites with corequisites, a radical shift in the history of developmental courses in higher education. Another suggestion causing concern is that lower level developmental students should be referred to adult education. This is a recipe for eroding educational opportunity for minorities and the poor. Educators should be extremely concerned about these potentially harmful changes.
- In searching for ways to help students succeed, opportunity must not be confused with effectiveness, and “opportunity” here should not be defined as allowing students to enroll in gatekeeper courses for which they are not adequately prepared.
- The evidence cited in this article supports the need to meet underprepared students where they are academically in order to afford them the chance to improve their literacy skills and begin their higher education on a firm and equal footing with those who do not need remediation -- one of the major reasons that junior/community colleges were created.
- The option to remediate before college level courses begin should continue to be provided as long as necessary.

The proper conclusion from this research is that policy makers need to work with experts in the field of developmental education to make certain all underprepared students are given the opportunity to take and complete developmental education coursework that will result in the successful completion of their academic programs of study.