
Results of Remedial Education Have Been Modest

SUMMARY

Minnesota school districts received about \$255 million in state and federal aid for K-12 students' remedial education during the 1996-97 school year, according to a report issued by the Legislative Auditor's Office. Yet, despite the large amount of money appropriated for remedial education, more than one-fourth of Minnesota's public school students failed the eighth-grade reading or math skills test given in 1996 and 1997 that the state now requires for graduation.

In its study of Minnesota's remedial efforts, the Legislative Auditor's Office reviewed national education research to learn about effective remedial strategies. It found substantial evidence supporting individual tutoring of students in the primary grades as the most effective remedial reading strategy. Several highly structured reading programs for the early grades that have consistently demonstrated effectiveness, such as *Reading Recovery*, *Success for All*, and *Metra*, include a tutoring component. Grouping students by ability, while often criticized, has been somewhat effective, and some of the more successful remedial reading programs use this approach. Small class sizes

were also effective and seemed to be the only strategy where increased funding for schools had a demonstrable impact.

Program Evaluation Report
Remedial Education
January 21, 1998

Key Findings:

- About one-fourth of the state's public K-12 enrollment received remedial services during 1996-97.
- To address students' remedial needs, schools used a variety of methods, but few of proven effectiveness.
- Allocating remedial funds solely on the basis of poverty may not target those students who need remediation.

Recommendations:

- The Legislature should consider distributing some portion of remedial funds based on measures of student need for remediation.
- The Department of Children, Families & Learning should monitor and report on schools' remedial efforts.
- Whenever possible, schools should adopt proven methods of remediation rather than use locally-developed strategies of unknown effectiveness.

*The report is available at our web site:
<http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/pe9802.htm>.
Copies of the full report or summary are also available by
calling 612/296-4708.*

The Legislative Auditor's study surveyed a sample of schools about the remedial services that they provided low-achieving students during the 1996-97 school year. The study found that schools were making efforts to address the needs of students who were not performing at grade level. The report found that elementary schools, especially those with higher percentages of children eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch, identified more low-achieving students than middle or secondary schools and were more likely to provide these students with individual tutoring. Although schools were trying a variety of methods to improve low-achieving students' performance, the study noted that the practices most likely to be successful were not being used widely enough to have a substantial impact statewide.

National studies have found that programs funded through Title I, the largest source of federal funding for remedial programs, have not been successful in closing the

achievement gap between disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged children. The Legislative Auditor's study compared Minnesota's efforts with those nationally and concluded that, overall, state programs were no more successful than national programs in helping students perform at grade level.

After analyzing schools' test results for Title I and the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests, the study found that schools' attendance rates had a consistent and strongly positive relationship with average school test scores—attendance was more closely related to achievement than student poverty or race. While middle and secondary school principals indicated that their remedial efforts stressed student attendance, the study noted that these efforts were either too new to have any effect on remediation or too little given the size of the problem.

Although federal and state policies use poverty as the main criterion for directing funds toward remedial education, the Legislative Auditor's study

suggests that this may not be the best criterion to use. It found only a moderate relationship between poverty and low achievement, as measured by test scores.

The report recommends distributing some portion of remedial funds based upon measures of student need for remediation rather than poverty. This could be done by using students' scores on standardized achievement tests, such as the annual tests now required of third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade students. The Legislative Auditor calls on the Department of Children, Families & Learning to use this new system to monitor and report on schools' efforts to ensure that all students are performing appropriately for their grade in school.

Copies of the report, entitled *Remedial Education*, may be obtained from the Office of the Legislative Auditor at 612/296-4708 or at <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/pe9802.htm>. For further information, contact Jo Vos or Roger Brooks at 296-4708.