

N.Y., Calif. Cracking Down on College Remediation

By Julie Blair

Higher education systems in two of the most populous states are cracking down on students in need of remedial help.

In a 9-6 vote late last month, the New York state board of regents approved a City University of New York proposal to phase out remediation and end open enrollment at the institution's 11 four-year colleges. At the same time, the university renowned for opening its doors to all students will be required to monitor the effects on racial and ethnic diversity.

New York's action follows a somewhat similar effort that took effect in California last year and was implemented for the first time this school year.

Trustees at California State University announced last month that they had kicked out 1,440 students—5 percent of the sophomore class—under a plan to eliminate underprepared pupils from the institution's 23 campuses.

The students, notified in August, failed to meet CSU's basic English and mathematics requirements, said Ken Swisher, a spokesman for the 360,000-student system.

Community College Role

The New York policy, part of CUNY's updated master plan, would take effect at Baruch, Brooklyn, Hunter, and Queens colleges next month, according to Alan Ray, a spokesman for the

regents. It will start at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York City Technical colleges and the College of Staten Island next September, and at City, Medgar Evers, Lehman, and York colleges in September 2001. The open-enrollment policy the new measure replaces has been in place since 1968.

Under the new policy, freshmen who do not make the grade on basic-skills tests will be redirected to the six CUNY community colleges, Mr. Ray said. Those who miss the mark by only a few points will be given the option of



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attending remedial classes offered by CUNY during the summer or the regular school year at the four-year colleges. Admission to the four-year colleges will be

contingent on success in the specially designed sessions.

"This is a vote for access with standards," Herman Badillo, who designed the policy and serves as the chairman of CUNY and the education adviser to New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, said.

Mr. Ray estimated that 150 to 200 students would be turned away from the four-year colleges because they lack the skills.

Critics say the policy will

have a broader impact.

The community college system will be "ghettoized" and perceived as a "place where the dummies go," contended Henry M. Levin, a professor of economics and education policy at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Some 200,000 students are currently enrolled at CUNY's campuses, said Rita Rodin, a spokeswoman for the institution—the largest urban university and the third-largest university system in the country. Half the members of every freshman class do not speak English as their first language, Ms. Rodin added.

'Hold the Standards'

Meanwhile, the displaced students from the California State University system have been sent to community colleges and can return to the university once they've passed the English and math requirements, Mr. Swisher said.

Under a plan crafted in 1996 and implemented in 1998, students deemed in need of remediation must do any catch-up work by the end of freshman year. Those who do not show proficiency at that time may not return to the university.

"We've got to hold the standards," Chancellor Charles B. Reed said.

Critics of the policy, however, contend that college students should not be punished for the inadequacies of the K-12 systems

from which they graduated.

"They trusted the system to prepare them," said Virginia Whitby, a spokeswoman for the California State Students Association, which represents those attending CSU. "This is a situation for the whole of the education community."

Last year, 79 percent of all CSU freshmen were deemed in need of remediation in either English or math, Mr. Swisher said. Every one of those students graduated from high school with a B average after taking four years of English and three years of math, he noted.

The CSU board of trustees hopes to reduce the number of incoming freshmen who need extra academic help by more than 10 percent by 2007, Mr. Swisher said. Such programs cost the institution about \$10 million a year.



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Officials recognize that booting underprepared students isn't the only answer, Mr. Swisher said.

The university last month allocated \$9 million to 223

K-12 schools in California to establish or expand efforts to reduce remediation at the college level. The recipients were targeted because they produced the largest numbers of CSU students in need of extra help.

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