



# Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot Report

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*The Louisiana Board of Regents wishes to express appreciation to the three school districts, four schools, six teachers, and college/university partners who participated in the exploratory study.*

# LOUISIANA TRANSITIONAL COURSES PILOT

## Executive Summary

The need to provide students with opportunities to participate in transitional courses while still enrolled in high school to meet the requirements for entry-level credit-bearing college math and English courses has been discussed by state commissions, legislators, higher education, and secondary educators in Louisiana. To address that need, the Louisiana Board of Regents obtained funding through a Core to College grant from the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors to conduct an exploratory study to examine the implementation of transitional high school courses created by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). The purpose of the pilot study was to examine implementation of transitional courses in three school districts and the feasibility of future implementation in other districts in Louisiana. Six research questions were identified that examined increases in ACT scores of participants, attainment of ACT cut-off scores for placement in entry-level credit-bearing college courses, self-efficacy of participants, process to implement the transitional courses, other factors impacting the implementation of the transitional courses, and future implementation of the transitional courses in other school districts.

Three school districts agreed to participate in the pilot and identified four schools, three mathematics teachers, and three English teachers who would be responsible for the implementation of units within the SREB transitional courses. A total of 60 high school students completed the transitional courses and retook the ACT assessment with 31 of the 60 students participating in both the literacy and math transitional courses, 16 additional students participating in the literacy transitional courses, and an additional 13 students participating in the math transitional courses. College and university partners were also identified for each district.

The overall finding for the implementation study was that it was not possible to generalize the results to other schools and states due to the varying approaches that were used by the three districts and teachers to implement the transitional courses. In addition, most students were enrolled in an additional math and English course during their senior year, and it was not possible to determine if differences in scores were a direct result of the transitional courses or a result of retaking the test after an additional year of high school instruction. The need for additional data existed.

However, an important finding was that 76% of the students participating in the math transitional courses demonstrated increases in their ACT scores. Although only 32% of the participants obtained ACT Math scores for placement in entry-level credit-bearing math courses, it was determined that among the 28 students who did not obtain the required placement scores, 54% had ACT math scores that were within two points of the ACT Math placement score. Students and teachers did provide verbal and written feedback to indicate that specific aspects of the transitional courses better prepared the participants for college readiness than traditional high school courses. The students indicated that although they did not enjoy the rigor of the reading, writing, and math expectations, they understood that the work was important for their success in college.

Major challenges identified by the districts pertained to retention of participants and sufficient time to cover the materials. Most districts offered the transitional courses as electives and retention was a challenge when students discovered the rigor of the transitional courses, knew that they did not need the elective to graduate, and withdrew from the transitional courses.

It was concluded that it will be important for school districts to use the twelve recommendations identified by SREB for the implementation of the transitional courses and use the lessons learned from this study as they fully implement the SREB transitional courses in the future and explore deeper research questions about the use of the transitional courses within their own districts.

# LOUISIANA TRANSITIONAL COURSES PILOT

## I. Introduction

### Identified Needs

The need to develop bridge courses for high school students who are not prepared for entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses has already been identified at national and state levels. National organizations (e.g., New America Education, Southern Regional Education Board - SREB, etc.) have identified the need for postsecondary and K-12 educators to work collaboratively to develop college-ready tools for students who have gaps in their college-ready and career-ready academic preparation and want to close those gaps prior to leaving high school. Louisiana's Remedial Education Commission has identified the need to develop innovative strategies and courses to reduce the number of high school graduates who need to take remedial courses once they enter college. Louisiana is unique in that the Board of Regents has adopted a policy that identifies consistent assessments (e.g., ACT, SAT, etc.) and scores that are used by all public two-year colleges and public universities for placement of students in entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses. In addition, high school students in Louisiana are required to take four years of English and four years of math to graduate from high school. Louisiana is also a state where all high school students are required to take the ACT at the end of their junior year and the scores are used for the state's K-12 School Accountability System to examine the effectiveness of high schools. High school students are allowed to retake the ACT at the end of their senior year. Thus, strategies are needed to support high school students during their 12th grade year to obtain the necessary ACT scores for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses.

### SREB Transitional Courses for College and Career Readiness

To address this need, SREB has worked with a number of states since 2007 to develop and implement special 12<sup>th</sup> grade courses. As noted in a SREB Policy Brief (2015) entitled *Essential Elements of State Policy for College Completion* ([http://publications.sreb.org/2013/013\\_Ess\\_Elem\\_Tran\\_Courses.pdf](http://publications.sreb.org/2013/013_Ess_Elem_Tran_Courses.pdf)), the courses have been developed to help students address rigorous state standards for college and career readiness in disciplinary literacy (reading and writing instruction specific to academic subjects so students can read and understand complex text) and math. The courses also include tools to help students build skills they will need to succeed in credit-bearing college-level courses. The work has been supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. SREB recommends that every state implementing the transitional curricula consider the following elements.

#### *Standards*

1. Ensure that transitional courses or modules are based on the Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards that are in the CCSS.
2. Ensure that all public postsecondary institutions recognize and apply the same standards in their student placement processes statewide.

#### *Readiness Assessments*

3. Ensure that all students (or a certain range of students based on achievement) be assessed for college readiness no later than the junior year.
4. Ensure that the qualifying scores on assessment(s) used to identify students who need the courses are strongly associated with success in first-year, credit-bearing courses in college.

5. Ensure that students assessed as meeting the readiness standards will not have to take a placement exam for entry-level courses once admitted to post-secondary education, although additional testing may be required to determine specific courses that are beyond basic, entry level.

### ***Transitional Course Implementation***

6. Ensure that all public high schools statewide offer transitional courses and that students take the courses if they do not perform at or above the cut-scores.
7. Ensure that the transitional courses carry high school credit and are eligible to be funded through the public school funding formula.
8. Ensure that the math transitional course is creditable as a fourth-year math course in high school.
9. Ensure that all public postsecondary institutions and agencies are partners with K-12 in developing, testing, evaluating, and revising transitional courses.
10. Ensure that public postsecondary institutions statewide recognize that the successful completion of a transitional course means readiness to begin credit-bearing, college-level courses without remediation.
11. Provide professional development on the transitional courses to all high school teachers.
12. Develop a statewide system for evaluation of the transitional courses and professional development activities to determine their effectiveness and impact on increasing the numbers of students leaving high school college- and career-ready.

### **Purpose of the Transitional Courses Pilot**

The purpose of the Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot was to examine the implementation of the SREB transitional courses in three school districts in Louisiana and the feasibility of implementing the transitional courses in other districts in the future. In addition, the study examined whether high school students participating in the transitional courses would obtain ACT English scores of 18 or higher and/or obtain ACT Math scores of 19 or higher to meet Louisiana's requirements for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses for fall 2014. This would improve their level of college readiness and eliminate the need for remedial courses once they entered college in Louisiana. Six primary research questions guided the study:

- Question #1: Did an increase occur in the ACT scores of students enrolled in the senior-year transitional courses?
- Question #2: Did 75% or more of the participants obtain the necessary ACT scores to be placed in entry-level, credit bearing math and English college courses?
- Question #3: Is college self-efficacy evident within participants who participated in the transitional courses?
- Question #4: To what extent were the transitional courses implemented using the materials and procedures developed by SREB?
- Question #5: Are there other factors that may have impacted successful participation in the transitional courses?
- Question #6: Should the transitional courses be implemented within the three pilot districts and other school districts in the future?

The intent of the pilot was to bring together teachers from three school districts, faculty from three two-year colleges, and faculty from three universities in Louisiana to contribute to the development and

implementation of a clear set of innovative steps for high school seniors to take if they plan to pursue postsecondary education and have not obtained required ACT placement scores and/or other scores for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses. These steps involved the use of content specific courses to fill gaps during the students' senior year. It was also anticipated that teachers in the piloting districts would acquire new knowledge about strategies to implement college and career-ready State standards when interacting with high school students in the other classes they taught.

### **Transitional Courses Pilot Funding**

Louisiana expressed an interest during 2012-13 in piloting the SREB transitional courses. The Louisiana Board of Regents obtained \$80,000 in funding from the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors through a Core to College grant to pilot the SREB transitional courses during the 2013-14 academic year in three school districts in Louisiana. Funds from the grant were used for selected teachers and post-secondary partners to participate in SREB training during summer of 2013 to support implementation of the transitional courses. Further, the grant provided funds for the selected teachers to purchase resources and also paid for the participating seniors to retake the ACT tests prior to the end of their senior year. Grant funding was also used to compensate the postsecondary education partners for time spent supporting the activities of the pilot and providing input into the research component of the study.

## **II. Methods**

### **Selection and Partnerships with K-12 and Postsecondary Education**

Representatives from state agencies (e.g., Louisiana Board of Regents, Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance, and Louisiana Community and Technical College System), faculty from a minimum of three community colleges, and faculty from a minimum of three universities were identified to help plan, develop, implement, and/or support the transitional courses pilot. High schools currently participating in the GEAR-UP initiative in three districts were identified. The Louisiana Board of Regents contacted the superintendents in the three districts to determine if their districts would be interested in participating in the development, piloting and implementation of the transitional courses. Districts were selected based upon a willingness to meet the following expectations:

#### ***Expectations for Schools/Districts:***

- Identify and recruit 15-20 high school seniors to participate in the pilot;
- Provide guidance to students who would benefit from the pilot and reach out to parents;
- Allow high school seniors to take the transitional courses as electives;
- Assign a math high school teacher and an ELA high school teacher to teach the transitional courses to a group of students as a pilot during 2013-14;
- Be willing to partner with a local two-year college/university to develop/pilot/support the transitional modules/courses; and
- Participate in plans to collect data to examine the impact of the transitional modules/ courses upon high school seniors who participate in the pilot.

#### ***Expectations for High School Teachers:***

Demonstrate:

- Effective teaching;
- Depth of expertise in math and English to successfully implement a curriculum based upon college and career-ready State standards; and

- Capability and willingness to work with collaborative student groups.

Willingness to:

- Critique transitional courses developed by SREB states;
- Participate in SREB transitional course training during summer 2013;
- Use engaging strategies to teach that extended beyond lecture; and
- Teach the transitional courses during 2013-14.

***Expectations for High School Students:***

- Demonstrate a desire to participate in transitional courses that would help them obtain the necessary ACT score(s) to enter entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses.

***Two-Year Colleges/Universities***

- Critique transitional courses being developed by SREB states;
- Provide support to high school teachers responsible for teaching the transitional modules/courses; and
- Provide input into the research components of the pilot.

Once the superintendents indicated a willingness for the districts to participate, they identified the schools, principals, and teachers that agreed to implement the transitional courses. Efforts were made to select schools with differing demographics. (See Table 1)

**Table 1: Demographic Information for Selected Schools in the Three Participating School Districts**

<b>Selected Schools Within Districts &amp; Types of Transitional Course</b>	<b>School Performance Scores for 2012-13</b>	<b>Number of Free and Reduced Lunch Students Enrolled in the School during 2013-2014 (Fall Count)</b>	<b>Number of Special Education Students Enrolled in the School during 2013-14 (Fall Count)</b>	<b>Number of Students Enrolled in the School during 2013-14 (Fall Count)</b>
District 1 – Math	B	14%	10%	1,340
District 1 – Literacy	B	27%	14%	1,181
District 2 – Math & Literacy	C	94.6%	11%	831
District 3 - Math & Literacy	D	80%	10%	1,388

A memo was sent to the four high schools with information about the pilot. Each district superintendent identified a district contact person who served as the primary person that the Board of Regents contacted regarding the implementation of the transitional courses pilot.

The Louisiana Board of Regents also sent a memo to the chief academic officers at the public two-year colleges and universities that served the three selected districts. The chief academic officers identified faculty members who were interested in supporting the districts selected for the transitional courses pilot.

The Coordinator for the Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot scheduled formal meetings for state personnel (i.e., Louisiana Board of Regents, Louisiana Department of Education) to meet with the individual Pilot District Team members (e.g., district contact person, principal, teachers, two-year college faculty member, and university faculty member) during May/June 2013 to discuss the initial implementation of the transitional courses. In addition, partners discussed types of data to collect about the pilot and a process to collect the data. Pilot District Teams discussed the need to have district team meetings with district personnel on an ongoing basis to examine the implementation of the pilots.

A second formal meeting was scheduled by the Coordinator for the Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot and held during June 2014 with each individual district team for state personnel to meet with the district contact persons, principals, and teachers to obtain final feedback about the implementation of the transitional courses.

A conference call was held with two year college and university faculty members during fall 2013 to discuss the roles of the postsecondary faculty and obtain input into research questions and procedures for the pilot. The post-secondary faculty was also asked to review the final draft report during September 2014 and provide feedback.

To help facilitate communication, a web site (<http://regents.louisiana.gov/transitional-courses-pilot/>) was created for the Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot on the Board of Regents web site that contained copies of all documents, memos, e-mails, meeting agendas, and meeting notes. In addition, a newsletter was disseminated during August 2013, September 2013, October/November 2013, and December 2014 to update district teams on information pertaining to the pilot. The Coordinator for the Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot maintained ongoing communication with the pilot sites as needs developed.

### **Materials for College and Career Readiness**

SREB worked with teams of teachers, faculty, agency staff and experts from around the country to write and test the following transitional courses.

**SREB Math Ready: Ready for College-Level Math:** The course framework consisted of eight (8) teaching units. These units focused on the following content areas: exponentials, quadratics, equations, measurements, number operations, systems, linear function and statistics (optional). In general, the lessons emphasized the understanding of key math concepts in an engaging environment instead of the memorization of procedures. Contextual based learning was used for student participants to foster a deeper understanding into the purpose behind the use of math procedures and various problem-solving methods. Teachers were encouraged to use various manipulatives as a way to supplement the classroom instruction.

**SREB Literacy Ready: Ready for Reading in All Disciplines:** The course framework consisted of six (6) teaching units. These units focused on the following content areas: 2 in social science, 2 in English, and 2 in science. In general, the literacy transitional courses lessons taught students strategies for reading and comprehending complex texts of literature in more than one subject-area (e.g., reading a biology textbook or reading a short fictional story). Student participants were encouraged to develop and support their ideas from the text and write about them at a college-level in the core disciplines. Group and individual activities were strategies used in the delivery of this course. Teachers were encouraged to use some outside reading materials (e.g., newspaper articles) as a way to supplement the classroom instruction; however, the main source of instruction came from the approved SREB course materials.

### **Student and Teacher Participants**

Prior to the start of the 2013-14 academic year, the four pilot schools in the three districts were asked to recruit the high school participants. Each school started the process by examining ACT scores of students at the end of their junior year and identifying students who obtained ACT scores of 15-18 in English or 15-19 in math. The Board of Regents created a web site for parents to view if in need of information about the transitional courses (i.e., purpose, partners, criteria for participation, benefits, and contact information). Each school district used additional strategies to notify students who met the criteria about the transitional courses.

Each school district used their own process to identify teachers who met the expectations identified for the pilot. A total of six teachers were selected and remained as instructors throughout the duration of the courses, with three teachers responsible for instructing the math transitional courses and three teachers instructing the literacy transitional courses, respectively.

### **Professional Development on the Transitional Courses**

Teacher development was identified by SREB as an important component in maximizing the impact of the college-readiness courses pilot. During the summer of 2013, English and math teachers from each of the pilot districts, plus English and math post-secondary faculty, participated in a four-day SREB Transitional Course Training Workshop in Charlotte, North Carolina to learn more about the courses. In general, the training focused on preparing classroom teacher in effectively teaching to the college-readiness standards and the transitional courses content curriculum. Additionally, the workshops served as an outlet where questions held by many of the participating pilot states could be addressed and included full breakout training sessions in both math and literacy. Teachers participated in other opportunities such as the Literacy/Math Design Collaborative (LDC/MDC) training and other professional development skills/strategies related to the CCSS. SREB provided opportunities for further professional development as ongoing conference calls and webinars were held with the teachers throughout the 2013-14 academic year.

### **Delivery of Transitional Courses**

The delivery of the SREB transitional courses differed in each of the three districts. Each district selected specific units that would be offered and not all districts exposed students to the same units.

**District 1 Delivery.** The math transitional course was offered in one school by one teacher and the literacy transitional course was offered in a different school by another teacher in District 1. The transitional courses were offered as electives and taught during the full 2013-14 academic year using a Traditional Schedule.

**District 2 Delivery.** The math and literacy transitional courses were offered in one school by two separate teachers. For those in the math course, the teacher taught the course as an Advanced Math course for high school credit and used a combination of Advanced Placement course materials and SREB transitional course materials when teaching. ACT prep was also incorporated into the Advanced Math course. High school students were enrolled in the literacy transitional course as an elective and were instructed using the transitional course materials. Two of the students in the literacy transitional course were also taking an English course at Baton Rouge Community College. The courses were taught during the full academic year using a Traditional Schedule.

**District 3 Delivery.** The math and literacy transitional courses were delivered by two separate teachers in the same school. A Block Schedule was used to deliver the course as a single elective during fall 2013 with the same group of students being exposed to teacher selected units within the literacy and math transitional courses curriculum. The school divided the students into Class A (15 students) and Class B (16 students). Class A would attend the literacy transitional course in the same week that Class B would

attend the math transitional course. The following week Class A would switch to Math and Class B to English. The switching of the teachers and students occurred throughout fall 2013. The literacy transitional course focused on the English units and did not address the SREB units pertaining to science and social studies.

### Data Collection

The Coordinator for the SREB Transitional Courses Pilot obtained input from state, district, and postsecondary personnel to create: (1) a set of research questions; (2) data indicators for each question; (3) instruments to collect data; (4) parent letters and consent forms; (5) teacher letters and consent forms; (6) data collection form for districts; and (7) data collection form for schools.

The district contact persons and teachers were responsible for collecting parent and teacher consent forms and submitting them to the Coordinator for the Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot. In addition, the district contact persons were responsible for ensuring that the district and school data collection forms were completed and submitted to the Coordinator for the Louisiana Transitional Courses Pilot. They also responded to clarification questions after the data were submitted. Codes were assigned to all students, teachers, and data to ensure confidentiality of all information. The Coordinator also obtained data that was collected by SREB pertaining to teacher reflections and student survey responses. The following is a description of the student, teacher, and school data collected. (See Tables 2 and 3)

**Table 2: Student Information**

<b>Names of Instruments</b>	<b>Brief Descriptions</b>
<b>ACT Scores</b>	ACT scores at the end of the junior year and ACT scores at the end of the transitional courses during the senior year.
<b>SREB Readiness Course Student Surveys</b>	Copies of the responses of high school students on a survey developed by the Southern Regional Education Board for all students participating in the transitional courses.
<b>Courses Taken by the Students</b>	List of English and math courses taken by students during high school.
<b>Demographic Information of Students</b>	Information submitted by the school/district about each student participating in the transitional courses: Age; race; gender; free- and reduced lunch status; special education status; grades in transitional courses; and GPA at end of the junior and senior years.

**Table 3: Teacher and School Information**

<b>Names of Instruments</b>	<b>Brief Descriptions</b>
<b>SREB Reflections of Teachers</b>	Forms prepared by SREB that provide teacher reflections while teaching the transitional courses.
<b>Demographic Information for School and Teachers</b>	Information submitted by the teacher/school/district about each teacher and school participating in the transitional courses pilot: Percentage of students in school by race, gender, free- and reduced-lunch status, and special education status; years of teaching experience of transitional teachers; number of students in the transitional courses

### III. Analysis of Data

The researchers used basic descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation) to understand the patterns of the dataset in a non-bias manner. Percentages were used to compare the students' ACT English, Math, and other scores. Narrative responses of students on surveys and responses of school/district personnel during debriefing interviews were coded and patterns in responses were identified.

### IV. Limitations

There were a few limitations associated with the study. First, caution should be considered when generalizing the results. This was an exploratory study regarding implementation with a limited sample size of participants in the pilot. Inferences derived from this study and their applicability to different states may be problematic. Second, limitations regarding the duration of the pilot period (1 academic year) should also be considered. Results of the study reflected the unique experiences of student participants over the course of one particular academic year, further contributing to some degree of discretion when generalizing the findings. Third, due to the nature of delivery in each piloting district, the results of this study should also be viewed with some level of discretion. For instance, each pilot site delivered the courses in a unique manner reflective of their needs and capacities. As such, this pilot study should be considered exploratory in nature.

### V. Findings

#### Participants

**Completion.** A total of 60 high school students (i.e., District 1 = 7; District 2 = 22; District 3 = 31) completed the transitional math and/or literacy courses with 31 of the 60 students participating in both the literacy transitional course, 16 additional students participating in the literacy transitional course and 13 additional students participating in the math transitional courses. Three students in District 3 completed the transitional math and literacy transitional courses but did not take the ACT resulting in 44 ACT scores being available for literacy transitional course participants and 41 ACT scores being available for math transitional course participants. It was noted that schools in two districts were less successful than the third district in recruiting and retaining student participants for the transitional courses. District 1 successfully recruited 15 high school students for the literacy transitional course; however, only three students completed the literacy transitional course. The same district recruited only six students for the math transitional course and only four students completed the course. The participating school in District 2 recruited fewer students for the math transitional course than the literacy transitional course; however, it retained all nine of the math transitional students throughout the academic year. (See Table 4)

**Table 4: Number of High School Students Who Started and Completed the Transitional Courses**

Districts	Literacy Transitional Courses		Math Transitional Courses	
	Number of Students Started Course	Number of Students Completed Course	Number of Students Started Course	Number of Students Completed Course
1	15	3	6	4
2	16	13	9	9
3	32	31 (28 took ACT)	32	31 (28 took ACT)
<b>Totals</b>	63	47 (44 took ACT)	47	44 (41 took ACT)

**Literacy Entrance Knowledge.** It was determined that the range of knowledge of high school participants entering the literacy transitional courses varied across the three school districts. All three of

the high school participants from District 1 had obtained an ACT English score of 18 or higher in 2013 and entered the literacy transitional course already meeting the requirement for placement in an entry-level, credit-bearing English college course. In contrast, the 2013 ACT English scores of participants in the literacy transitional course in District 2 ranged from a low of 5 to a high of 22 when they entered the transitional course. The majority of the participants in District 3 entered the literacy transitional course with 2013 ACT English scores in the range of 15-17 or higher. (See Table 5)

**Table 5: Number of Participants who Entered Literacy Transitional Courses With 2013 ACT Scores Within Varying Ranges**

Districts	LITERACY TRANSITIONAL COURSES							
	Number of High School Participants Participating in Literacy Transitional Courses With 2013 ACT Scores in Varying Ranges							
	Below 9	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20	21-23	24-26	Above 26
1					1		1	1
2	1	3	2	3	1	3		
3			3	16	7	2		
<b>Totals</b>	1	3	5	19	9	5	1	1
	44							

**Math Entrance Knowledge.** District 3 had two students with 2013 ACT Math scores of 19 or higher who entered the math transitional course already meeting the requirements for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math college courses. High school students entering the math transitional courses in District 1 and District 3 primarily had 2013 ACT Math scores that were in the range of 16-18 or higher. Both districts also had some students entering the math transitional courses with 2013 ACT Math scores in the 13-15 range. (See Table 6)

**Table 6: Number of Participants who Entered Math Transitional Courses With 2013 ACT Scores within Varying Ranges**

	MATH TRANSITIONAL COURSES							
	N Number of High School Participants Participating in Math Transitional Courses With 2013 ACT Scores in Varying Ranges umber of High School							
	Below 10	10-12	13-15	16-18	19-21	22-24	25-27	Above 27
1				4				
2			4	5				
3			7	19	2			
<b>Totals</b>			11	28	2			
	41							

### ACT Assessment Performance

This study primarily focused on the ACT Math and ACT English scores of participants since the same standard cut-off scores are used for those assessments at all public two-year colleges and public universities in Louisiana for placement in entry-level credit-bearing math and English college courses.

**Changes in 2013 and 2014 Scores.** It was determined that 76% (n=31) of the students who participated in the math transitional courses increased their ACT Math score, 20% (n=8) maintained their ACT Math

Score, and 4% (n=2) experienced a decrease in their ACT Math score when comparing 2013 scores and 2014 scores.

An examination of the ACT English scores indicated that 48% (n=21) of the students who participated in the literacy transitional courses increased their English ACT scores, 21% (n=9) maintained their English ACT scores, and 31% (n=14) experienced a decrease in their English ACT scores when comparing 2013 scores and 2014 scores. (See Table 7)

**Table 7: Number and Percentage of High School Participants who Increased, Maintained, or Decreased their ACT Scores from 2013 to 2014 After Participating in the Transitional Courses**

Districts	Changes in 2013 & 2014 ACT Math and English Scores After Participating in the Transitional Courses (Number & Percentage)		
	Increased	Maintained	Decreased
<b>LITERACY TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT ENGLISH SCORES</b>			
<b>1</b>	2 out of 3 (66%)	1 out of 3 (33%)	0 out of 3 (0%)
<b>2</b>	6 out of 13 (46%)	3 out of 13 (23%)	4 out of 13 (31%)
<b>3</b>	13 out of 28 (46%)	5 out of 28 (18%)	10 out of 28 (36%)
<b>Totals</b>	21 out of 44 (48%)	9 out of 44 (21%)	14 out of 44 (31%)
	44 (100%)		
<b>MATH TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT MATH SCORES</b>			
<b>1</b>	4 out of 4 (100%)	0 out of 4 (0%)	0 out of 4 (0%)
<b>2</b>	6 out of 9 (66%)	3 out of 9 (33%)	0 out of 9 (0%)
<b>3</b>	21 out of 28 (75%)	5 out of 28 (18%)	2 out of 28 (7%)
<b>Totals</b>	31 out of 41 (76%)	8 out of 41 (20%)	2 out of 41 (4%)
	41 (100%)		

It was observed that of the 14 students who experienced a decrease in their ACT English scores, 7 of the 14 students obtained a 2013 ACT English score of 18 or higher at the end of their junior year and had already met requirements to be placed in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses.

**Placement into Entry-Level Credit-Bearing Courses.** When examining placement of the literacy transition course participants in college courses and taking into consideration both 2013 and 2014 ACT English scores, it was determined that 70% (n=31) of the high school participants would meet the requirements for placement in entry-level credit-bearing English college courses, and 30% (n=13) would still be in need of developmental education.

When examining placement of the math transitional courses participants in college courses and taking into consideration both 2013 and 2014 ACT Math scores, it was determined that 32% (n=13) of the high school participants would meet the requirements for placements in entry-level credit-bearing math college courses, and 68% (n=28) would still be in need of developmental education. (See Table 8)

**Performance – Students Who Met Placement Requirements in 2013.** An examination was also made of ACT scores of the 16 high school students who obtained the required ACT score in 2013 for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses to determine if participation in the transitional courses increased their ACT scores from 2013 to 2014. It was determined that 25% (n=4) increased their English ACT score, 31% (n=5) maintained their English ACT score, and 44% (n=7) had a decrease in their 2014 English ACT score. (See Table 9)

**Table 8: Number and Percentage of High School Participants Who Did or Did Not Obtain Required ACT Scores for Entry Level, Credit-Bearing College Courses Based Upon 2013 or 2014 (After Pilot) Scores**

Districts	Obtained ACT Scores for Entry Level, Credit Bearing College Courses (Number & Percentage)		2014 (After Pilot) Did <u>Not</u> Obtain ACT Scores for Entry Level, Credit Bearing College Courses (Number & Percentage)
	2013 (Before Pilot)	2014 (After Pilot)	
<b>LITERACY TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT ENGLISH SCORES</b>			
<b>1</b>	3 out of 3 (100%)	0 out of 3 (0%)	0 out of 3 (0%)
<b>2</b>	4 out of 13 (31%)	3 out of 13 (23%)	6 out of 13 (46%)
<b>3</b>	9 out of 28 (32%)	12 out of 28 (43%)	7 out of 28 (25%)
<b>Totals</b>	31 out of 44 (70%)		13 out of 44 (30%)
	44 (100%)		
<b>MATH TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT MATH SCORES</b>			
<b>1</b>	0 out of 4 (0%)	2 out of 4 (50%)	2 out of 4 (50%)
<b>2</b>	0 out of 9 (0%)	1 out of 9 (11%)	8 out of 9 (89%)
<b>3</b>	2 out of 28 (7%)	8 out of 28 (29%)	18 out of 28 (64%)
<b>Totals</b>	13 out of 41 (32%)		28 out of 41 (68%)
	41 (100%)		

**Table 9: Number and Percentage of High School Participants Who Did Obtain ACT Scores in 2013 for Placement in Entry Level, Credit-Bearing College Courses Who Increased, Maintained, or Decreased their ACT Scores in 2014 After the Pilot**

Districts	Before Pilot	After Pilot		
	2013 Obtained Minimum ACT English Score for Placement in Entry Level, Credit Bearing College Courses (Number & Percentage)	2014 Increased ACT Score (Number & Percentage)	2014 Maintained ACT Score (Number & Percentage)	2014 Decreased ACT Score (Number & Percentage)
<b>LITERACY TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT ENGLISH SCORES</b>				
<b>1</b>	3 out of 3 (100%)	2 out of 3 (66%)	1 out of 3 (33%)	0 out of 3 (0%)
<b>2</b>	4 out of 4 (100%)	2 out of 4 (50%)	1 out of 4 (25%)	1 out of 4 (25%)
<b>3</b>	9 out of 9 (100%)	0 out of 9 (0%)	3 out of 9 (33%)	6 out of 9 (66%)
<b>Totals</b>	16 (100%)	4 out of 16 (25%)	5 out of 16 (31%)	7 out of 16 (44%)
	16 (100%)			
<b>MATH TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT MATH SCORES</b>				
<b>1</b>	---	---	---	---
<b>2</b>	---	---	---	---
<b>3</b>	2 out of 2 (100%)	1 out of 2 (50%)	0 out of 2 (0%)	1 out of 2 (50%)
<b>Totals</b>	2 (100%)	2 (100%)		

For the math transitional courses, only 2 students obtained the required ACT Math score in 2013 for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math courses, one of the students increased their score and one decreased their score in 2014 after participating in the math transitional courses. (See Table 9)

**Performance – Students Who Did Not Meet Placement Requirements in 2013.** When specifically examining the 28 high school students who did not obtain the 2013 English ACT score for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses, it was found that 54% (n=15) of the literacy transitional courses participants increased their ACT score in 2014 after participating in the pilot to meet the English ACT placement requirements and 46% (n=13) did not. (See Table 10)

Of the 39 high school students who did not obtain the 2013 ACT score for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math college courses, 28% (n=11) of the math transitional courses participants increased their ACT score in 2014 after participating in the math transitional courses to meet the ACT Math placement requirements and 72% (n=28) did not. (See Table 10)

**Table 10: Number and Percentage of High School Participants Who Did Not Obtain ACT Scores in 2013 for Placement in Entry Level, Credit-Bearing College Courses Who Did or Did Not Obtain the Scores in 2014 After the Pilot**

Districts	Before Pilot	After Pilot	
	2013 Obtained Minimum ACT Score for Placement in Entry Level, Credit-Bearing College Courses (Number & Percentage)	2014 Obtained Minimum ACT Score for Placement in Entry Level, Credit Bearing College Courses (Number & Percentage)	2014 <u>Did Not</u> Obtain Minimum ACT Score for Placement in Entry Level, Credit Bearing College Courses (Number & Percentage)
<b>LITERACY TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT ENGLISH SCORES</b>			
<b>1</b>	---	---	---
<b>2</b>	0 out of 9 (0%)	3 out of 9 (33%)	6 out of 9 (66%)
<b>3</b>	0 out of 19 (0%)	12 out of 19 (63%)	7 out of 19 (37%)
<b>Totals</b>	0 out of 28 (0%)	15 out of 28 (54%)	13 out of 28 (46%)
	44 (100%)		
<b>MATH TRANSITIONAL COURSES – ACT MATH SCORES</b>			
<b>1</b>	0 out of 4 (0%)	2 out of 4 (50%)	2 out of 4 (50%)
<b>2</b>	0 out of 9 (0%)	1 out of 9 (11%)	8 out of 9 (89%)
<b>3</b>	0 out of 26 (0%)	8 out of 26 (31%)	18 out of 26 (69%)
<b>Totals</b>	0 out of 39 (0%)	11 out of 39 (28%)	28 out of 39 (72%)
	39 (100%)		

A further examination of the individual 2012-13 and 2013-14 ACT Math scores and ACT English scores revealed interesting patterns. Among the 13 literacy transitional course students who did not obtain the required ACT English placement score in 2013 or 2014, only 2 students experienced an increase in their 2014 ACT English Score. The remaining 11 students either maintained the same ACT English score (n=4) or experienced a decrease in their 2014 ACT English score (n=7). A review of transitional course grades did not reveal a pattern of decreased scores being associated with low transitional course grades. (See Table 11)

In contrast, among the 28 math transitional course students who did not obtain the required ACT Math placement score in 2013 or 2014, 19 students (68%) obtained a higher score in 2014, 8 (29%) maintained the same score, and 1 (3%) experienced a decrease in their 2014 ACT math score. When examining the 2014 scores, it was observed that 54% (n=15) of the 28 students had ACT Math scores that were within 2 points of the required ACT Math placement score. (See Table 12)

**Table 11: 2013 and 2014 ACT English Scores of Thirteen Students Who Did Not Obtain the Required Placement Score for Entry-Level, Credit-Bearing English College Courses**

Students	Districts	2013 ACT English Score	2014 ACT English Scores	Differences	Transition Course Grade
1	2	17	14	-3	A
2	2	16	8	-8	A
3	2	14	13	-1	A
4	2	13	16	+3	A
5	2	10	10	0	A
6	2	5	5	0	A
7	3	17	16	-1	C
8	3	17	15	-2	A
9	3	15	16	+1	C
10	3	15	15	0	B
11	3	15	14	-1	C
12	3	12	9	-3	B
13	3	11	11	0	B

**Table 12: 2013 and 2014 ACT Math Scores of Twenty-Eight Students Who Did Not Obtain the Necessary Placement Score for Entry-Level, Credit-Bearing Math College Courses and Transition Course Grades**

Students	Districts	2013 ACT Math Score	2014 ACT Math Scores	Differences	Transition Course Grade
1	1	16	18	+2	A
2	1	16	17	+1	A
3	2	17	18	+1	B
4	2	16	16	0	B
5	2	16	16	0	C
6	2	16	16	0	D
7	2	15	18	+3	D
8	2	15	17	+2	D
9	2	15	16	+1	C
10	2	13	14	+1	B
11	3	17	18	+1	B
12	3	17	18	+1	B
13	3	16	18	+2	A
14	3	16	18	+2	A
15	3	16	17	+1	A
16	3	16	17	+1	B
17	3	16	17	+1	C
18	3	16	16	0	B
19	3	16	16	0	A
20	3	16	16	0	B
21	3	16	16	0	C
22	3	16	15	-1	B
23	3	15	17	+2	B
24	3	15	16	+1	B
25	3	15	15	0	B

26	3	14	18	+4	B
27	3	14	17	+3	B
28	3	14	16	+2	B

**ACT Composite, Reading, and Science Scores.** In addition to receiving ACT Math scores and ACT English scores, all high school participants also received ACT Composite Scores, ACT Reading Scores, and ACT Science scores. An examination of the scores indicated that 67% (n=38) of all participants increased their ACT Composite Score, 54% (31) increased their ACT Reading Score, and 56% (32) increased their ACT Science Score from 2013 to 2014. (See Table 13)

**Table 13: Number and Percentage of High School Participants Who Increased, Maintained, or Decreased their 2013 Composite ACT, Reading, and Science Scores**

Types of Scores	After Participating in the Pilot		
	Increased ACT Score from 2013 to 2014 (Number & Percentage)	Maintained ACT Score from 2013 to 2014 (Number & Percentage)	Decreased ACT Score from 2013 to 2014 Score (Number & Percentage)
ACT Composite Score	38 out of 57 (67%)	8 out of 57 (14%)	11 out of 57 (19%)
ACT Reading Score	31 out of 57 (54%)	8 out of 57 (14%)	18 out of 57 (32%)
ACT Science Score	32 out of 57 (56%)	6 out of 57 (11%)	19 out of 57 (33%)

**District 1 Performance.** Before the pilot, 100% of the 3 participating high school students in District 1 met the criteria for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses at the end of their junior year. At the end of the pilot, two of the three students increased their ACT English scores and one student maintained the same ACT English score to continue to meet the minimum ACT requirements for placement in entry level, credit bearing English college courses.

Before the pilot, 0% of the 4 participating high school students in District 1 met the minimum criteria for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math college courses. After the pilot, 50% of the students (2 out of 4) earned the minimum ACT Math score for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math college courses. The two students who did not obtain the minimum ACT Math score did increase their scores by 1-2 points.

**District 2 Performance.** Before the pilot, 31% of the 13 participating high school students in District 2 met the criteria for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing college English courses. After the pilot, 54% of the students (7 out of 13) earned the minimum ACT English score for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses. Of the 6 students who did not meet the placement requirement in 2014, 1 increased their ACT English score, 2 maintained the same ACT English score, and 2 experienced a decrease in their ACT English scores.

Before the pilot, 0% of the 9 participating high school students met the criteria for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing college math courses. After the pilot, 11% of the students (1 out of 9) earned the ACT Math score for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math college courses. Of the remaining eight students, five of the students increased their ACT Math scores by 1 to 3 points and the remaining three students maintained the same scores.

**District 3 Performance.** All high school students in District 3 participated in both the literacy and math transitional courses. Before the pilot, 32% of the 28 participating high school students in District 3 met the minimum criteria for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses. After the pilot,

75% of the students (21 out of 28) possessed the ACT English score for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses. Of the 7 students who did not obtain the minimum placement score for English, one student increased their ACT English score by 1 point, two students maintained the same ACT English scores, and five students decreased their original ACT English scores by 1 to 3 points.

Before the pilot, 7% of the 28 participating high school students in District 3 met the minimum criteria for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math college courses. After the pilot, 36% of the students (10 out of 26) possessed the ACT Math score for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math college courses. Of the 18 students who did not obtain the minimum placement score for math, 12 students increased their original ACT Math scores by 1 to 4 points, five students maintained the same scores, and one student decreased their score.

Of the 9 participating students who met English placement requirements based upon their 2013 scores and still participated in the literacy transitional course, three students maintained the same ACT English scores and six students decreased their ACT scores in English after completing the pilot. Of the two students who obtained minimum ACT Math scores at the end of their junior year and still participated in the pilot, one student increased their ACT Math scores and one student decreased their ACT Math score after completing the pilot.

### Perceptions of College Preparedness of Transitional Courses Participants

Descriptive statistics were provided from the student responses on a SREB Readiness Course Student Survey of students who participated in the pilot study. For the participants who self-identified themselves as being a part of either the math transitional course (n=39) or literacy transitional course (n=40), the means and standard deviations provide a measure of their response patterns. Overall, students who participated in the literacy transitional course felt more positive about their level of college preparedness as a result of participating in the pilot compared to students who participated in the math transitional course. Moreover, students who participated in the literacy transitional course in District 2 felt the most positive about their level of college preparedness as a result of participating in the pilot. (See Table 14)

**Table 14: Student Survey Responses of High School Students Participating in the Pilot**

<b>STUDENT SURVEY RESPONSE: On a scale from one (low) to ten (high), rate how well prepared you feel for college as a result of this course.</b>			
<b>Areas</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>OVERALL FOR COURSES</b>			
Literacy Transitional Courses	40	8.10	1.89
Math Transitional Courses	39	6.79	2.43
<b>LITERACY TRANSITIONAL COURSES BY DISTRICTS</b>			
District 1	3	7.33	1.47
District 2	11	9.91	0.29
District 3	26	7.42	1.76
<b>MATH TRANSITIONAL COURSES BY DISTRICTS</b>			
District 1	4	6.75	1.08
District 2	9	6.78	1.47
District 3	26	6.81	2.78

During the debriefing, district teachers and administrators indicated that the transitional courses helped prepare students to be ready for college. Teachers also indicated that the skills taught in the transitional

courses helped students use information in a meaningful way. Teachers also identified the group work as a positive aspect of the transitional courses. The districts indicated the following:

- **District 1:** For the students in the literacy course, it helped them with college readiness. Students will be using the skills they acquired in the courses in college, which will take away the need for remediation and developmental education . . . Further, the transitional courses helped students with ACT testing. It was observed that students could apply the same skills they acquired in History and the other content areas to their testing. The curriculum pushed for independent learning and helped with the development of college level skills. Their skills improved as they saw the importance of them.
- **District 3:** Students experienced a helpful glimpse of what will be expected in university courses . . . the students were more confident when taking the ACT assessment. The modules helped them to feel more confident. Many came back feeling good about the ACT after taking it . . . the gut feeling is that the students would not have done as well on the ACT if they had not taken the transitional course. They were better prepared to take the ACT. They read the problems, made annotation on the test, and managed their time better . . . this was not a semester of just learning tricks to take the ACT.

### **Materials and Procedures Used in the Transitional Courses**

Open-ended survey responses from the SREB transitional course student surveys, compiled notes from the district debriefing, and responses from the teacher reflection forms provide feedback about the materials and procedures used in the transitional courses pilot. Written sample responses were paraphrased and organized into themes to preserve the anonymity of the responders.

#### **(Students)**

**Reading.** Reading was identified as being the least favorite part of the transitional courses for the student participants, but it was mentioned the most often by the students as activities/lessons that prepared them best for college.

- There was a lot of reading involved.
- We read and studied a wide range of material.
- We read a lot of different books, excerpts, and articles.
- Reading course materials on a higher level helped me feel most prepared for college.

**Writing.** Although writing research papers and essays was identified as a least favorite part of the transitional courses by some students, techniques taught in the literacy transitional courses (e.g., note-taking, organization of ideas, outlining, editing paragraphs, skimming passages, etc.) and English in general were identified by the students as activities/lessons that best prepared students for college. Sample responses are listed below:

- The Cornell note-taking lesson helped a lot with preparing me for college because I had a difficult time identifying important information and finding key concepts in a lecture.
- The different ways of note-taking for classes and the different strategies that can be used to better organize my thoughts prepared me for college.
- The Cornell note-taking system, annotating journal articles, and understanding multiple representations were important skills that I learned while participating in this course.
- Systematically organizing ideas from the lessons helped me learn a lot during this course.
- The Literacy Ready course prepared me best for college.

**Math.** Students indicated that what they liked best about the implementation of the math transitional courses was the inclusion of hands-on activities, group projects, and group activities with partners. Sample responses are listed below:

- I liked how there were an abundance of hands-on activities.
- I enjoyed how easy it was to learn, and how it incorporated other ways of learning outside of the textbook.
- It really made me pay attention to what the lesson was covering.
- The lessons were a lot more fun than a normal math class.
- Based on my style of learning, I liked all of the posters and group projects that we were able to do. This aided me in understanding the classroom assignments more clearly

Among the students' responses, there were multiple references to the importance of linking activities/lessons to student performance on the ACT particularly for the math transitional courses participants.

**(Teachers and Administrators)**

**Reading.** Perception about the literacy transitional courses differed based upon the districts in which the courses were being offered. Debriefing comments from the districts include the following:

- **District 1.** The content in English IV was different than content in the transitional courses. It was apparent that the skills not covered in English IV had an added benefit to the student participants. In particular, it helped them to read at a greater proficiency and with more speed . . . they had to read more independently and cross examine text in History and Science.
- **District 2.** During literacy course instruction, there were challenges with reading some of the texts, with some of the students struggling with the level of reading (volume and content). When the students had difficulties, they went over them in class.
- **District 3.** Reading was where some of the most significant growth occurred. The modules engaged students with complex text and students benefited from this. Vocabulary development was important.

**Math.** Perception about the rigor of the math transitional courses differed based upon the districts in which the courses were being offered. Debriefing comments from the districts include the following:

- **District 1:** For the students in the mathematics course, it appeared that there were no new objectives learned. Instead, the teacher took what students previously learned and took it to a deeper level. This required the students to use more application in their learning . . . the content of the math transitional course was a review of Algebra I and Algebra II. Students could already do a lot of it . . . no new content is needed for the course. It was taken to a deeper level and the application was there.
- **District 2:** Overall, the transitional courses were rigorous . . . students lacked some of the skills needed to have success in the mathematics course. During mathematics course instruction, a teacher spends a considerable amount of time reviewing content from Algebra II. It appeared to be the greatest challenge.

## **Challenges Faced When Implementing the Transitional Courses**

Similarities and differences were identified when reviewing challenges identified by the teachers and school administrators during the debriefing interviews. The three primary challenges were the following:

**Recruitment of Students for the Courses.** District 1 identified recruitment of students to participate in the transitional courses as being a major challenge. Specific responses during the debriefing included the following:

- **District 1.** There were a lot of questions, but not enough information to convince students to take the transitional courses. More information is needed so that the courses are better known. It needs to be known that the courses can help students avoid remediation and improve student retention in college . . . there must be more of a focus on selling the course to the students and their parents which could improve the overall interest in the courses. Also, there were scheduling conflicts. Schools need to make sure that there are no scheduling conflicts with required courses in the future . Further, the State allows seniors to leave earlier during the school day. They usually leave early because they don't require them to take more classes. If the students were mandated to stay the full school day, then this could be a way to get more participation.

**Retention of Students Enrolled in the Courses.** All three districts identified retention of students in the transitional courses as being a challenge. All three identified the offering of the course as high school credit as being a way to retain students within the transitional courses. Specific responses during the debriefing included the following:

- **District 1.** It was difficult to keep students enrolled in the courses because the courses counted as an elective. It would be better to have the courses meet requirements for senior level credit. By offering them for credit, it could make them more appealing to students. The district offers Math Essentials, but students could benefit more from the SREB math transitional course. Math Essentials is used for students who do not plan to go to college and do not need a higher level math. This would be more beneficial than Math Essentials for students going to college.
- **District 2.** While teaching the course was enjoyable, there was a huge problem with student buy-in. Possible solutions could include marketing the transitional courses as part of some ACT Prep and by making the courses a part of English IV and other standard courses to get more participation. If the schools put it on the list of course requirements, then they might buy-in. Most of the students that took the course did so because they wanted to make a higher score on the ACT test. It was hard to get the students to sign up for another course.
- **District 3.** Because it was an elective, they had the impression that it would not be much work. When they saw the amount of work, they did not want to stay within the course.

**Sufficient Time to Fully Teach the Units.** Teachers in District 2 and District 3 indicated during the debriefing that there was not sufficient time to adequately cover all of the units and materials. Specific responses included the following:

- **District 2.** There was not enough time with the courses because of other factors (i.e., ACT Prep).
- **District 3.** If classes are on a Block Schedule and the same students are divided and taking the math and literacy transitional courses, there is not enough time to present all of the information. As a result of spending time doing the ground work before getting into the lesson, time ran out. It

was necessary to alternate instruction, and more time was needed for each discipline . . . classes would need to change and it would take a while for students to find their bearings when the classes started up again. A lot of reviewing had to be done to refresh the memory of the students. . . . it would have been helpful if there had been more time. There was not enough time to finish all of the modules.

## VI. Discussion

The discussion section of this report will focus on responses to the six research questions that were asked at the beginning of the study.

### **Research Question #1: Did an increase occur in the ACT scores of students enrolled in the senior-year transitional courses?**

Increases did occur from 2013 to 2014 in many of the ACT Math scores of students who participated in the transitional math courses. Results indicated that 76% (n=31) of the participating high school students increased their ACT Math scores, 20% (n=8) maintained the same ACT Math scores, and 4% (n=2) obtained a lower ACT Math score. Of the two students who obtained lower 2014 ACT Math scores, one student had already met ACT Math requirements for placement in entry-level, credit bearing math college courses based upon their 2013 ACT Math score.

Although not as high, increases did occur in ACT English scores of high school students who participated in the transitional literacy courses. Results indicated that 48% (n=21) of the participating high school students increased their ACT English score, 21% (n=9) maintained the same ACT English scores, and 31% (n=14) obtained a lower ACT English score. Of the 14 students that obtained a lower ACT English scores, seven of the students had already met ACT English requirements for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses based upon their 2013 ACT English scores.

The following increases were also observed for other ACT scores: 67% of participating students increased ACT Composite scores, 54% increased their ACT Reading scores, and 56% increased their ACT Science scores.

### **Research Question #2: Did 75% or more of the participants obtain the necessary ACT scores to be placed in entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses?**

There were increases in the percentage of participants who obtained the minimum score to participate in entry-level, credit-bearing math and English college courses; however, the extent of the increases differed across disciplines and school districts. In addition, some students participating in the transitional courses had obtained the required scores for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English and math college courses based upon their 2013 ACT scores.

Based upon 2013 and 2014 ACT English scores, 70% (n=31) of the high school students participating in the literacy transitional courses possessed an ACT score that met the requirements for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses and 30% (n=13) did not.

Based upon 2013 and 2014 ACT Math Scores, 32% (n=13) of the high school students participating in the math transitional courses possessed an ACT Math score that met the requirements for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses, and 72% (n=28) did not. It was interesting to note that although 31 out of 41 (76%) of the total math participants increased their ACT Math scores, the increases only resulted in 13 out of 41 students having scores that were high enough to meet the math placement requirement. Of the 28 students who did not obtain the required math placement score, 64% of the

students did increase their ACT scores. In addition, 54% (n=15) of the students were within 2 points of the required ACT math placement score when examining the 2014 scores.

**Research Question #3: Is college self-efficacy evident within participants who participated in the transitional courses?**

Responses from both teachers and students indicated that the transitional courses helped participating students become better prepared for work within a college environment. Both students and teachers identified how the transitional courses helped student become better prepared to take the ACT tests and identified specific ways in which the courses improved their reading, writing, math, and organizational capabilities.

**Research Question #4: To what extent were the transitional courses implemented using the materials and procedures developed by SREB?**

Due to the varying needs and capacities of school districts, variations existed in how the SREB transitional courses and materials were delivered across schools. As examples, District 3 implemented the literacy and math transitional courses to the same students using a Block Schedule with students alternating content and teachers every other week. A major challenge they expressed during the debriefing was insufficient time to fully implement the units due to the limited time they had for instruction. District 2 integrated content from the math transitional course units into an Advanced Math course and also included ACT prep instruction. They also identified insufficient time as a challenge that they faced.

Teachers in all three school districts independently identified which units they would use in the transitional courses and different combinations of units were used by the individual teachers. As an example, only one of the three teachers taught content and the disciplinary literacy, one teacher taught the English and history units, and one taught the English unit. Due to students in District 3 participating in both the literacy and math transitional courses as one elective in a Block Schedule, the amount of time available for teachers to cover the units was much less when compared to the other districts.

SREB requested that the teachers attend the monthly webinars to receive reminders on how to best implement specific units, get training “refreshers” and engage in an open dialogue regarding the successes or challenges. Only two of the six teachers attended most of the webinars, three teachers attended three or fewer webinars, and one teacher never attended the webinar. Thus, differences existed in the amount of professional development received by the six teachers.

The math students relatively fit the target audience for the SREB transitional courses and pilot. However, the students for the literacy courses were in the majority not the target audience with scores either being too low or above the benchmarks.

**Research Question #5: Are there other factors that may have impacted successful participation in the transitional courses?**

Three major factors/challenges were identified by the school districts. The first pertained to the recruitment of high school students to participate in the transitional courses. Only one of the three school districts met the expectation of recruiting 15-20 high school students for participation in the transitional courses. The second pertained to the retention of candidates once they were enrolled in the transitional courses. District 1 experienced the greatest difficulty in retaining students in the literacy transitional courses. A solution identified by all three districts to retain students was to be allowed to offer credit for the transitional course instead of the courses being counted as electives. As an example, District 3 recommended that the transitional courses received the same type of credit as students receive when

currently taking Math Essentials. It would have been of value to have collected consistent data from the students who did not complete the courses in all three districts. The third pertained to the availability of sufficient time to implement all of the units and activities for the transitional courses. Due to the amount of time needed to fully implement the transitional courses, the need to offer each math and English transitional as separate courses was identified. Although not identified by districts as a factor, it was also observed that although post-secondary partners were available from local community colleges and universities to help, their full potential was not utilized by the districts during the pilot. Since college faculty know what is expected of incoming Freshmen, more input from college faculty could have assisted the pilot teachers.

**Research Question #6: Should the transitional courses be implemented within the three pilot districts and other school districts in the future?**

Due to the many differences that existed in the implementation of the transitional courses and the fact that all three districts used varying combinations of transitional course units and materials when implementing the courses, it is difficult to generalize results beyond the schools within each school district. In addition, according to ACT, 57% of students do better after taking the ACT a second time with the average increase being about 1 point (<http://www.actstudent.org/faq/more.html>). Sufficient data were not gathered in the study to determine the full extent to which additional factors impacted differences in ACT scores. All three school districts saw benefits in the implementation of the transitional courses; however, all expressed the need for the students and parents to be better informed about the transitional courses and for students to receive credit for the courses instead of them counting as electives.

## **VII. Conclusions**

The major conclusion for this study is that it is very important for districts to fully address the twelve SREB recommendations cited at the beginning of this report pertaining to the implementation of the SREB transitional courses. In particular, teachers and district personnel participating in this study expressed a need for districts to provide high school students with credit for the transitional courses instead of offering the courses as electives. Difficulty in recruiting high school seniors for these important courses and difficulty in retaining high school seniors for the full academic year were found to be challenges when the courses were offered as electives.

Due to the exploratory nature of this implementation study and the fact that the transitional courses were not implemented in a consistent manner across all teachers and districts, it is not possible to generalize the results of this study to other states and schools within other districts. Due to the varying approaches that were used by the three districts to implement the transitional courses and the fact that most students were also enrolled in a fourth year of English and math while enrolled in the transitional courses, it is not possible to attribute the ACT scores solely to the transitional courses. More data needs to be collected to draw those types of conclusions.

However, the study has revealed interesting findings that may be of value to schools or school districts who are attempting to identify transitional courses to help prepare students for success in college. An important finding was that increases were demonstrated by many participating students on the ACT Math and ACT English assessments. In particular, 76% of the students participating in the math literacy transitional courses demonstrated increases in their ACT Math scores. At the same time, only 32% of the participants obtained ACT Math Scores of 19 or higher for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing math courses. It was encouraging to note that of the 28 students who did not obtain the required placement scores, 54% had ACT Math scores that were within 2 points of the required ACT Math placement score. These students might be good candidates for programs that allow college students to be concurrently enrolled in entry-level credit-bearing math college course and enrolled in a course that provides mathematical support.

A greater percentage (70%) of students completing the literacy transitional courses had ACT English scores of 18 or higher for placement in entry-level, credit-bearing English college courses based upon 2013 and 2014 ACT scores; however, 39% of the high school students had already met the placement requirements in 2013 which resulted in an additional 31% meeting the placement requirements in 2014. One district did see a drop in several ACT scores from 2013 to 2014; however, that district had less time to implement the transitional courses and could only focus on the English unit. Since time is needed to build critical thinking and writing skills and insufficient time was identified as an issue by that district, districts that implement the transitional courses in the future need to ensure that sufficient time is available to fully address the curriculum for the transitional courses.

Feedback from both students and teachers indicated that specific aspects of the transitional courses better prepared the high school students for college readiness than traditional high school courses. Although many students indicated that they did not enjoy the rigor of the reading, writing, and math expectations, they communicated an understanding that the work was important for their success in college.

As districts look to the future, they are encouraged to use the results of this study and the SREB recommendations for implementation to develop deeper research questions pertaining to the implementation of the SREB transitional courses and explore answers to their questions as they fully implement the units within the SREB Math Ready and SREB Literacy Ready transitional courses.