



Math project puts high school students a step ahead

By MPCC
 Communications

Developmental courses don't have to be the only option for high school graduates who aren't quite ready to take college-level math.

Mid-Plains Community College is one of five community colleges across the state participating in the Nebraska Math Readiness Project this fall. The purpose of the Nebraska Math Readiness Project is to provide a bridge to success for high school seniors who need to improve their math skills before entering a college-level math course.

The three-year pilot project is funded by a grant from the Peter Kiewit Foundation. Participating community colleges work with two to three high schools within their service areas to offer math readiness to seniors who plan to pursue a post-secondary education, but who only scored between 13 and 16 on the ACT math exam.

"I'm really excited about this project," said Chad Swanson, MPCC mathematics instructor. "If it could lead to us of-

fering less developmental math and more college level math that would be wonderful."

The need

Math readiness has fallen to its lowest point in 14 years according to The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2018, ACT's annual report released Oct. 17. The report is based on 2018 graduates around the country who took the ACT test.

The percentage of ACT-tested graduates who met or surpassed the ACT College Readiness Benchmark in math, suggesting they are ready to succeed in a first-year college algebra class, fell to 40 percent — down from a high of 46 percent in 2012.

Additionally, the students' average score on the ACT math test dropped to its lowest level in more than two decades — 20.5 from 20.7 last year. If those students move on to the college level, they could be unprepared for what awaits them.

"All too often we see students who were excited not to have to take a math class their senior year of high school," Swanson said. "When they get to college, they wish they

would have. We want students to be successful, but if they don't have a good foundation that's difficult."

Typically, students who don't score high enough on college placement tests end up in a developmental math class. Participants in the NMRP can skip that step.

"One of the biggest selling points is that it will save them time and money," Swanson said. "If a student has to take a developmental course in college, they will have to pay full tuition and get no college credit for it."

How it works

NMRP allows students to work through interactive computerized modules at their own pace. They begin by taking a pre-test on each module. If they score 80 percent or better, they can move on to the next module.

If they don't, they have to work through all of the lessons within the module, achieving 80 percent or better, and then take the test again. Failing the post-test two times, results in a consultation with the instructor.

"Right now the way we teach classes, if a student

fails a test, it's like, 'Sorry, we have to keep moving,'" Swanson said. "The NMRP allows students to bypass things they already know how to do and spend more time on the things they don't."

There are two levels to complete. The first focuses on fundamentals, such as fractions, decimals and ratios. The second level consists of a review of things such as word problems, algebraic expressions, exponents, graphing and linear equations.

"If a student finishes both levels, he or she can go to any community college in Nebraska and automatically advance to Intermediate Algebra," Swanson said. "There's no placement test. It will just show up on the student's transcript that math readiness was successfully completed."

The progress of NMRP students will be monitored throughout their college journey. If the project is successful, it may be rolled out to other high schools throughout the state. Currently, Mid-Plains is working with North Platte High School, McCook High School and Southwest Public Schools in Bartley.



Photo courtesy of MPCC

Twins Hope and Destinee Toole, both of North Platte, take a Math Readiness practice exam on Monday. Mid-Plains Community College is one of five community colleges across the state participating in the Nebraska Math Readiness Project this fall.



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Chad Swanson, Mid-Plains Community College mathematics instructor, helps North Platte High School senior Abigail Jean with an assignment in the Math Readiness class on Monday. Students who successfully complete the class can automatically advance to Intermediate Algebra at any community college in the state.