

IMPROVING COLLEGE READINESS AT SCALE

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS FROM THE STATE OF MONTANA

“EdReady Montana has enjoyed tremendous success, and not just for its original intended purpose of assisting postsecondary students with remedial math. . . . The rate at which Montana students and teachers are utilizing EdReady is a testament to the need for such a program, the quality of the product, and the great implementation team at the Montana Digital Academy.”

—STEVE BULLOCK,
GOVERNOR OF MONTANA



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Introduction

Each year, more than half of U.S. students entering community college, and nearly 20% of those entering a 4-year college, need remedial courses before they can take college courses for credit.¹

For most, this remediation requirement is unexpected and a substantial barrier to earning a college certificate or degree. Fewer than half of the students who start college in remedial classes go on to complete their college studies.

FOR THOSE WHO FACE REMEDIATION ...



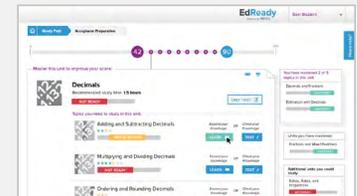
only 13% of 1-year certificate students complete their program within the first 18 months;



fewer than 10% of 2-year associate's degree students complete their degree in 3 years;



and only 35% of bachelor's degree candidates earn their degree in 6 years.²



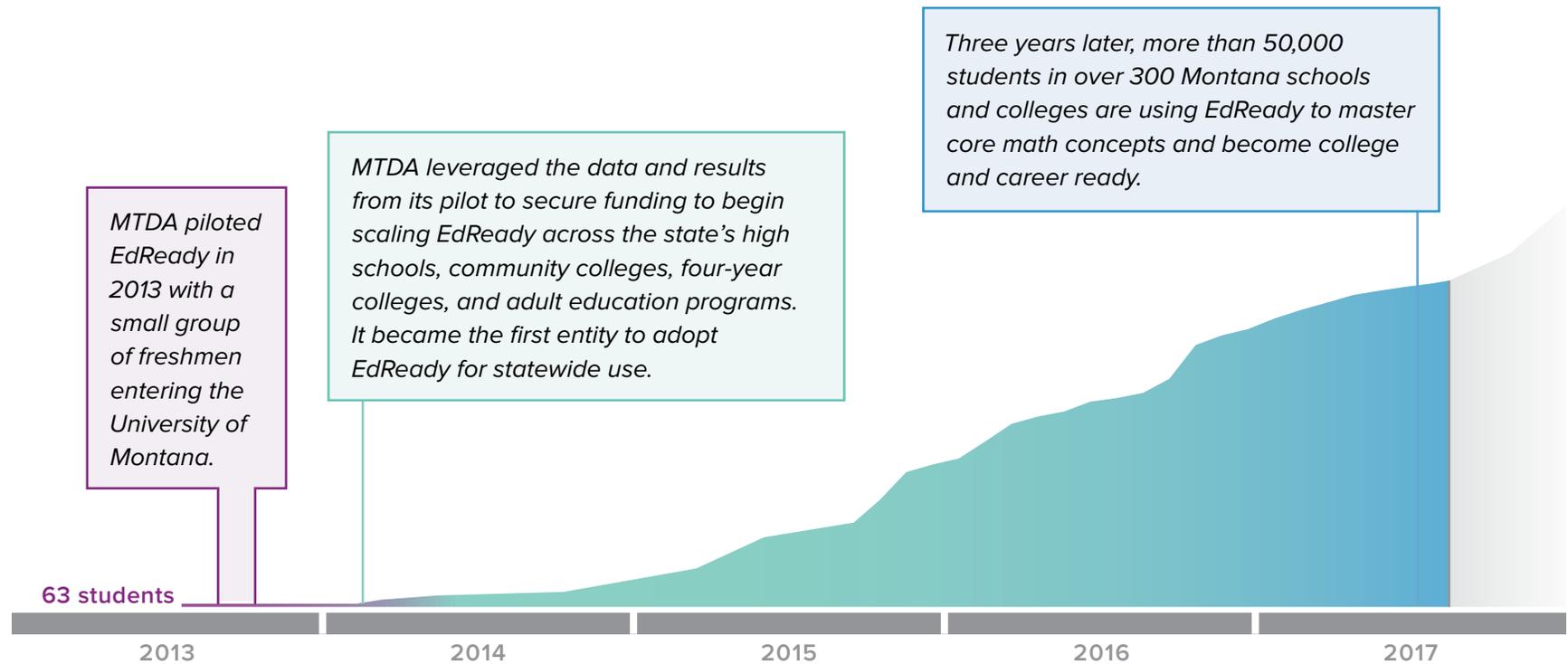
EdReady.org, a free website for all learners, is helping to solve this problem.

EdReady is a math and English readiness system that employs a knowledge inventory to personalize a learner's path to subject mastery within the context of a specific goal. The tool is provided by The NROC Project (NROC), an initiative that creates open and low-cost digital resources designed to be adapted and scaled to meet programmatic goals within a variety of instructional settings.



Montana Digital Academy (MTDA, Montana's public state virtual school), was an early adopter of EdReady.

This whitepaper describes the piloting and scaling plan that Montana created to effectively launch and disseminate the program across the state over a three-year period.



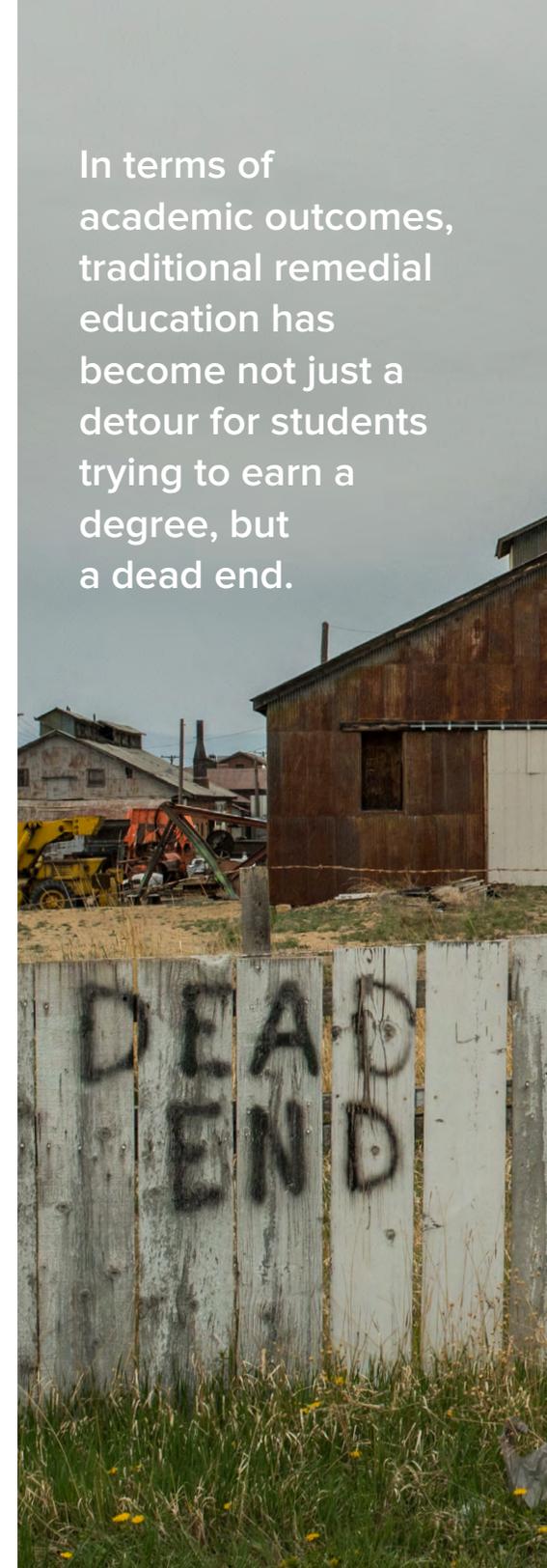
In terms of academic outcomes, traditional remedial education has become not just a detour for students trying to earn a degree, but a dead end.

The Problem

Montana, like many other states, had incoming college freshmen who were facing one, two, or even three semesters of developmental (remedial) math courses before they could enroll in a credit-bearing math course that would move them toward a college degree. Not only does a lack of readiness cost students money and time, but the majority of students who face remediation abandon their studies before ever earning a certificate or degree.

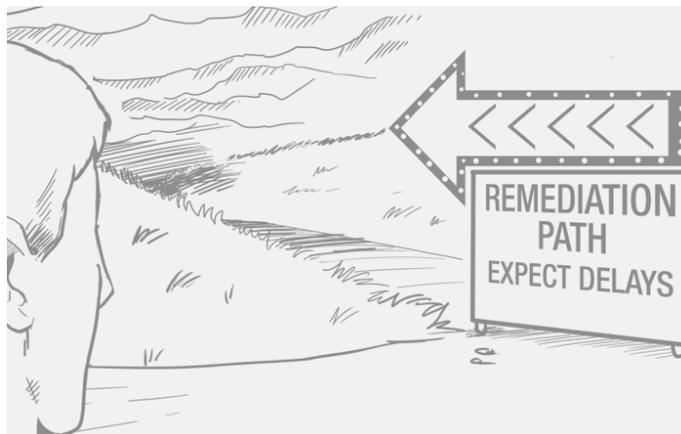
Students who are funneled into remediation often don't show up for the first class; those who do often don't finish the course. Even students who manage to finish their remedial courses often fail to enroll in the follow-up, for-credit course or graduate with a credential.³

This remediation roadblock disproportionately affects minority college students. Bruce Vandal, Senior Vice President of Complete College America, told Derek Johnson of GoodCall.com in an April 2016 interview, "Seventy percent of African-American students entering community colleges are being placed in remediation. Forty percent of those students are enrolled in both remedial math *and* English, and only 11 percent of those students are passing college-level courses within 2 years."⁴



In 2013, students entering the University of Montana (UM) without AP or prior college math credit were required to take a placement exam called ALEKS® (by McGraw-Hill Education) before registering for a math course.

The University of Montana had years of metrics showing that students who underperformed on the placement exam were getting stuck in remedial math classes and were unable to move forward toward a credit-bearing math class and, subsequently, a degree.



The Solution

Robert Currie, the Executive Director of Montana Digital Academy, saw in EdReady a way to help students move through remedial math courses more quickly (or skip them altogether) and move into credit-bearing college math courses, shortening the time to, and decreasing the total cost of, degree completion. That result would benefit the students and the University of Montana, which could increase both its student retention rate and its graduation rate. But Currie and his staff also knew that approaching math readiness with a new model could be challenging, and it would take time and dedication to effect change.



ROBERT CURRIE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
MONTANA DIGITAL ACADEMY



IN FALL 2013, INCOMING STUDENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO BE
GRANTED ACCESS TO EDREADY FOR
PLACEMENT EXAM PREPARATION.





LAYING THE GROUNDWORK: THE PILOT

For students who underperformed on the placement exam, UM wanted to offer math skill-building support to help the students increase their placement scores and reduce time in, or eliminate the need for, developmental math. In summer 2013, Currie and his staff at MTDA collaborated with educators at UM to pilot EdReady as a way to help those students quickly remediate their math skills before retaking the ALEKS exam.

First, they had to figure out the logistical details for the EdReady pilot, including:

- how students would be recruited,
- how and where the students would use EdReady, and
- how they would be supported by MTDA staff.

Currie tapped Ryan Schrenk, Ed.D, the Instructional Program Manager at MTDA, to guide the pilot project.

Pilot Recruiting

MTDA and UM needed to recruit incoming freshmen with low ALEKS scores to use EdReady for online, independent study during the summer before arriving on the UM campus. The program was promoted to students electronically (via emails and links to an informational website) and during face-to-face sessions at new student orientation.

THE TYPICAL PLACEMENT PROCESS



Students are given only one opportunity to take the required placement exam. Students who score poorly are required to register for remedial (non-credit) coursework.

THE 2013 EDREADY MT PILOT



Students who scored poorly on the placement exam were offered skill-building support (EdReady) and an opportunity to retake the placement exam.

During summer orientation, staff conducted presentations to inform students and parents about the no-cost opportunity to address math knowledge gaps and retake the placement test. In addition to presentations, staff distributed fliers and created an email list.

Student Support

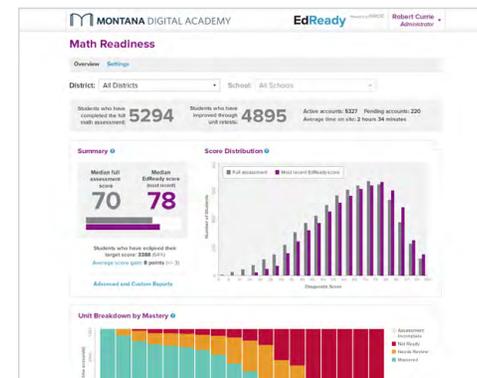
Holly Wright, Director of UM's Math and Study Jam Tutoring Programs, was designated as the primary point of contact for students using EdReady. Wright created the EdReady student accounts and notified or followed up with students as needed throughout the pilot. EdReady is a cloud-based tool with detailed, real-time reports, which made it easy for Wright to monitor individual student progress and time-on-task, as well as aggregate data for the entire cohort. Wright leveraged these data to reach out to students who stalled, usually at the point of completing the initial diagnostic or starting their custom path of study. She offered help and encouragement in addition to answering basic questions about the program.

Student Use of EdReady

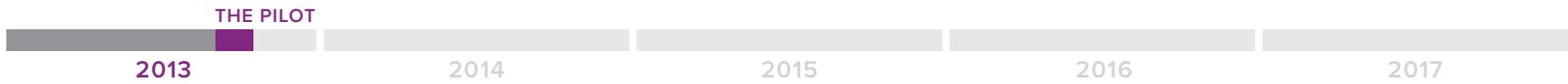
MTDA set the EdReady pilot to run for six weeks before the start of the fall term; students were asked to dedicate at least two hours weekly to studying in EdReady. Students accessed EdReady remotely, usually from a home computer connected to the internet. Each student's progress was entirely self-paced. The pilot offered students a choice of five EdReady pathways (each with a custom diagnostic assessment) corresponding to the five introductory math courses for different major tracks at UM.



HOLLY WRIGHT,
EDREADY ACADEMIC
COACH FOR THE
2013 PILOT



EDREADY REPORTS ALLOW STAFF TO MONITOR STUDENT PROGRESS AND FOLLOW UP WITH HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT AS NEEDED. (NOT REAL STUDENT DATA)



Data Collection

One of the staff’s most important tasks was determining exactly what student data they would need to collect before, during, and after the pilot.

FOR EACH STUDENT, THE FOLLOWING DATA WERE RECORDED:



These data provided the cornerstone to determine whether this EdReady use case was an effective solution to help students reduce or avoid remediation. Solid data allowed them to precisely measure the effectiveness of the EdReady intervention.

After the summer EdReady pilot, the participating students arrived on campus in the fall and took the ALEKS exam again. To determine if the students retained their knowledge and were able to complete and pass the course, the MTDA staff also tracked the pilot students through their first post-EdReady math course.



“This [learning gained through EdReady] is all meaningless if it doesn’t stick with them through that first college math course and allow them to complete that course with a passing grade,” says Currie.

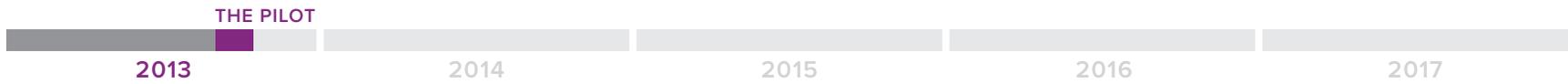
The MTDA team (Currie and Schrenk) was committed to piloting EdReady with college students; therefore, since there was no identified budget to support the effort, they provided their time on an “in kind” basis during the pilot.

Considerable collaboration between MTDA and UM was required to launch the pilot. Currie had to coordinate with UM’s Office of Student Success (which managed the information concerning which students qualified for the pilot); the Office of Advising (which informed students which math courses corresponded to the major track they were interested in pursuing); the Office of Placement and Testing (which administered the ALEKS exams and shared the students’ scores with MTDA); and the Math Department (for information on the five math tracks offered at UM and data on pilot student grades following their first, credit-bearing math course).

Schrenk worked with The NROC Project team to learn the ins-and-outs of administering EdReady and customized EdReady for the specific needs of their pilot. Customization included identifying five different EdReady goals based on students’ intended college majors. Math-intensive majors require stronger foundational math skills and, therefore, higher ALEKS placement scores. He also worked with NROC staff to learn EdReady goal and assessment setup and how initial diagnostic testing would work for pilot students.



RYAN SCHRENK, PROGRAM MANAGER, EDREADY MONTANA



Pilot Results

The results of Montana’s EdReady pilot were encouraging. Of the 63 students who participated, 41 (65%) reached the EdReady target score of 90; 40 of 41 took the ALEKS exam again; and 35 of the 40 students (87.5%) raised their ALEKS scores.

The ALEKS exam is scored on a 5-point scale, which means that each one-point increase represents a 20% score improvement. For each one-point increase on ALEKS, the UM students could skip one remedial course. The 35 students who raised their ALEKS scores fell into three categories:

- 24 students increased their ALEKS score by one point and skipped one remedial math class,
- 10 students increased by two points and skipped two remedial math classes, and
- 1 student increased by three points and skipped three remedial math classes.

The 37 students who raised their ALEKS scores skipped a total of 49 developmental math courses, collectively saving an estimated \$31,000 in tuition and fees.

What’s more, the EdReady pilot students averaged higher final course grades on their first math courses (average B-) than the incoming UM freshmen who had not used EdReady (average C+). These data confirmed that EdReady not only helped students increase their scores on the placement exam, but that the learning gained through EdReady carried through to the follow-up math courses.

2013 PILOT RESULTS SUMMARY



63 students participated (all had low ALEKS scores)



41 (65%) reached the EdReady target score of 90



40 re-took the ALEKS exam, and **35** raised their ALEKS scores

Collectively, participants avoided...



49 semesters of developmental math (saving about \$31k)

...and in their first math courses...



performed better, on average, than students who had not used EdReady



The Washington Foundation Gift: 3-Year Scaling of EdReady (February 2014)

- **ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**
- ◆ **MIDDLE SCHOOLS**
- **HIGH SCHOOLS**
- 📍 **COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES**
- ⚙️ **STATEWIDE & REGIONAL**

[SEE THE MAP ON PAGE 29](#)

EXPANDING STATEWIDE

The pilot data highlighted EdReady’s potential, inspiring Currie and Schrenk to make plans to expand the program beyond UM. In order to effectively serve both secondary and postsecondary students, they needed additional resources or a funding model to support the initiative’s growth.



Knowing that local education foundations often seek to catalyze change with grants to support college readiness, Currie developed a business plan that included a funding request, and, with the assistance and guidance of Dean Roberta Evans of the UM College of Education, he began to seek funding. Currie, along with Dean Evans and UM President Royce Engstrom, met with the leadership of the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation and, subsequently, received a \$2.4 million gift to field test and roll out EdReady over three years. This gift meant that they could offer EdReady to all Montana students in grades seven through twelve and Montana’s higher education institutions. Before long, the program grew to serve students in grades five through twelve, and all of Montana’s two- and four-year colleges and universities, private and tribal colleges, and learners in the adult education centers throughout the state.

With the Washington Foundation funding in hand, and the knowledge gained from running the pilot, the MTDA staff set about devising a plan for the field test and rollout of EdReady across the state.

2013

2014

2015

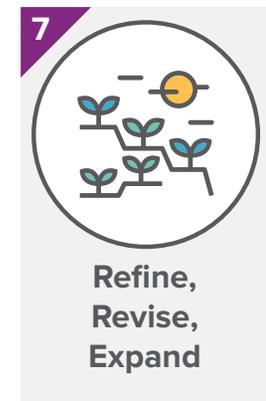
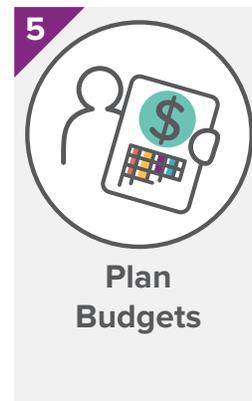
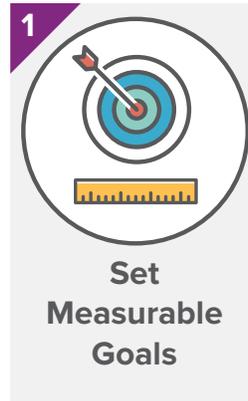
2016

2017

Currie assigned Schrenk to take over the EdReady Montana project for MTDA in the full-time position of Project Manager. Tasks such as promotional website creation, student information systems and processes integration, creation of an EdReady Montana logo, and program message development took longer than expected, as MTDA was the first institution to undertake a statewide EdReady implementation.

Once Currie and Schrenk addressed the basic, one-time start-up issues, they used a multi-step approach that has since become the model for other statewide and regional expansions of EdReady.

Seven Steps to Implement EdReady at Scale





Set Measurable Goals

As they expanded the field testing of EdReady, MTDA had to work with each field test site to determine exactly what problem they were trying to solve and what implementation of EdReady would best address their needs. The fundamental approach was to have each site “own” its local implementation of EdReady. Getting each local site from interest to implementation, where students were using the system in a facilitated environment, was the ultimate first-year goal for MTDA.

Working with a team from each site (ideally made up of an administrator, an educator who would use EdReady with students, and someone who could help manage student data and / or input students in the system), they would clarify the goals and objectives by answering the following questions:

- **What problem are you trying to solve? What do you want your students to be ready for?**
- **What actionable and measurable goals would help you address this issue?**
- **How will you measure the success of your EdReady implementation? Define your school’s indicators of success, how those will be measured, and determine a timeline associated with success.**
- **What are the potential barriers to your success and strategies to overcome those barriers?**

The answers to these questions allowed the site teams to determine both the use case and the data that would have the most impact on the defined problem.



Identify the Use Cases

Since EdReady is a versatile tool, Currie and Schrenk knew it was important to specify at each field test site exactly how EdReady would be implemented and identify a committed local team of educators who would facilitate the program with their students. The local team, guided by the MTDA staff, initially worked to identify “What do we want students to be ready for?” At a high school, that might include credit recovery, alternative education, test preparation, college readiness, or dual credit. For higher education institutions, it might be used as a prerequisite for a math course, as a placement test alternative, or as a co-requisite option with credit-bearing math courses.

The local team also had to consider what instructional model would be used for each use case. Would it be used in a traditional or accelerated classroom, as part of a short-term boot camp during summer or other school breaks, in a flipped classroom setting, as independent study, or fully online?

Although Currie and Schrenk were expanding their work with EdReady at UM, it was new field sites' first exposure to EdReady. For that reason, the use case for each site needed to be clearly defined and limited to something manageable. Additionally, the field site teams brought their knowledge of the local situation to the table, suggesting use cases that the MTDA staff might not have initially considered.

Says Currie, “Many of our use cases were suggested by people at a local site, and once that happens, don’t feel like you’re losing control of what you’re trying to do. Actually, that’s what you want. That’s when you know that they’re going to own it, and they’re going to feel that it becomes theirs.”

WHAT IS A USE CASE?

- 1 A use case is defined by **why** and **where** a group will be working together.
- 2 Secondly, a use case is defined by **how** an initiative will be delivered.



“It was our job to help make learning with EdReady happen, guide the application of the tool at each site, and support it and the teams using it. We also needed to figure out how to scale it to others looking to do the same things later.”

– RYAN SCHRENK, ED.D,
INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER AT MTDA

3



Measure Success

Currie and Schrenk knew that, just like each implementation site would have its own use case, each site would also need to determine what data it would collect and how it would collect them.

As Gary Lopez, Executive Director of The NROC Project, notes, **“Schools will want to collect data that they can analyze and then see if they’re moving the needle in the right direction. If they’re going to put in resources and rally colleagues, they want to have some authority by which they make statements about what’s going on.** They’re also going to learn things [from the data] they hadn’t considered, and it may light up other use cases.”



GARY LOPEZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
THE NROC PROJECT

Careful tracking of each student’s progress before, during, and after EdReady is key. EdReady captures each student’s initial diagnostic score, areas of deficit, progress in their study path, whether they reached the target, and more, and makes those data available to teachers and administrators in a number of reports. Schools, however, need to take that student information and correlate it to students’ progress in their math classes, attainment of math content standards, and movement toward graduation or a degree.

At the statewide level, Currie and Schrenk were careful to collect data that was relevant to the different stakeholders who might be able to influence the support for, and dissemination of, EdReady.



For the chancellor or president of a university, that might mean data related to the retention rate of remedial students and overall graduation rates. For a principal or curriculum director, it might mean students with better standardized test scores and fewer graduates entering the developmental math track. For the math department chair and math teachers in higher education, that might mean increased pass rates in their for-credit math courses and more students going directly into those courses upon college registration. At the secondary or elementary level, it could be attainment of skills needed for the next level or grade and learning the foundational concepts for math standards at the current level of study. And for students, of course, success would mean passing their required math courses, mastering the content standards at each level, and moving toward achieving their goal of graduation or earning a degree.

Somewhat surprisingly, after the first year of implementation, higher education enrollments in EdReady were outpaced by secondary and adult education participants. Measurement at each level, and sometimes at each district, campus, or even each building, may vary but is important to track.



A MONTANA MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT WHO WAS INTRODUCED TO EDREADY IN MATH CLASS

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

One example of EdReady's impact comes from Corvallis High School's "Back on Track" program. Traditionally, the school had 20-25 freshman students each year who tested below readiness for algebra 1. They would take pre-algebra as freshmen, then marginally pass algebra as sophomores, which usually led to unsuccessful math outcomes for those students as juniors and seniors, and likely developmental math tracks in college. In 2015, a team of three math teachers and the principal joined together to offer two blocks of math, with two instructors team teaching their students pre-algebra before the winter break, and algebra 1 before the end of the school year. The program used a station-rotation, blended-learning approach coupled with group instruction to start the block. One half of the class took part in teacher-guided instruction, and the other half did EdReady modules using technology. After 30 to 40 minutes, the class rotated the teacher instruction and EdReady work.

In the first year of the program, all 20 students successfully completed pre-algebra by the break and passed algebra by the end of the school year. This meant students were back on track to take geometry the following year. Students improved their Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores by 7.5 points compared to approximately 2 points in past years. In the second year of the program, students averaged a 9-point improvement. The program is helping Corvallis address the concern it had about students leaving its programs underprepared.

CASE STUDY:

EdReady CASE STUDY: GETTING HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN BACK ON TRACK IN MATH
Presented by NRDC

At Corvallis High School in Montana, incoming freshmen who have not yet mastered pre-algebra are catching up with their peers and getting ready for geometry in 10th grade through an intensive dual-block program that uses EdReady as a core component of the class.

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE
Corvallis High School in Corvallis, Montana, is a rural public high school (9th-12th grades) that serves approximately 425 students from the surrounding area. 25% of whom qualify for free lunch. EdReady is made available to Corvallis High School and other schools throughout Montana thanks to the Montana Digital Learning Academy (MTDLA) and a gift from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation.

IMPLEMENTATION
After taking a course in blended learning, math teachers Joanne Cleveland and Cory Souland chose EdReady as a program that could help their get incoming freshmen who were behind in math back on track by the end of 9th grade. Using the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) math scores of 8th grade teacher recommendations, they identified incoming freshmen who were not ready for algebra. Traditionally, these students would be enrolled in a year-long pre-algebra course, then spend the next year in algebra. But Cleveland and Souland created a new "back on track" math course that spanned a double block (90 minutes total) each day, 5 days per week. The goal was to get these students to complete algebra by the end of their freshman year so they would be ready to take geometry in their sophomore year. Cleveland and Souland team taught the class, alternating days. On occasion, a special education teacher would also join the class. The student progress in EdReady was included as part of the grade for the course.

WHO WAS SERVED: High school freshmen who were not on track to complete Algebra 1 by the end of 9th grade
WHEN: Academic Year 2015-2016
NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 21
IMPLEMENTATION: In class, five days a week, with 30 minutes per day spent in EdReady
RESULTS: For the 15 students who completed both the fall and spring administrations of the MAP test, the average math score increase over the year was 7.53 points (the mean annual increase for 9th graders is 3.1 points)
INSTRUCTIONAL APPLICATION: In-class, accelerated remediation of pre-algebra and algebra skills to allow 9th graders to get back on schedule in their high school math series.

Daily class time started with connecting homework as a group and reviewing what was covered, then they would split into two groups, half used EdReady on Chromebooks for 30 minutes, and half worked with the teacher to get instruction on new material. Then the two groups switched. Finally, for the last 30 minutes, the group came together again to work on that day's homework assignment. Students working in EdReady worked at their own pace and often on topics different than what was presented to the class as a whole.

"EdReady helps those kids who need a little bit of extra instruction."
—Joanne Cleveland, Math Teacher, Corvallis High School

EDREADY.ORG | A CASE STUDY | PAGE 1

Corvallis High School's
"Back on Track" program



Identify Support Roles and Professional Development

In the first year of the Washington Foundation gift, Currie worked at the executive level to manage the project both politically and financially, while Schrenk managed the operational aspects of the EdReady Montana program, building upon the work from the pilot and working on the programmatic relationships within Montana. Meanwhile, MTDA and UM identified an experienced math teacher to assist part-time with the day-to-day support of university students in year one, and a math professor took over in years two and three.

“This takes focus and time, but not necessarily full-time initially,” says Currie. “As you proceed, you’ll collect data and build the story, and the roles will grow.”

“For each new site, you need at minimum an administrator, a teacher, and someone to gather data,” notes Schrenk. “Without those three people, we’re starting with one foot in the bucket already. Think about who those team members are that can fill those roles for each of your sites.”

A new program like EdReady won’t really gain momentum with only one enthusiastic teacher but no administrators on board, or one administrator with no teacher support, he added.

Currie agrees. “You have to really get that local support person in place, whether you’re working at the higher ed, middle school, or high school levels. You need a connection, a commitment, and local ownership. Those people are critical. If students are left to their own devices, you won’t be happy with the results,” he says.

EXPANDING STATEWIDE

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017



VIRGINIA HALE,
EDREADY MONTANA
LEAD AMBASSADOR

Although Schrenk tackled most of the travel to schools during the first year, and both members of the MTDA team were dedicated to presenting to any audience, it became clear that local professional development was critical to large-scale implementation. To reach out effectively to a state as large and geographically dispersed as Montana, Currie and Schrenk needed help. As such, they added several quarter-time staff (all experienced teachers or administrators who knew the Montana educational landscape) to serve as regional ambassadors for EdReady. They fanned out across Montana to run information sessions and professional development trainings about EdReady at conferences, district meetings, and schools.

The Montana team ultimately identified three phases of professional development and training.



Orientation
Overview

The first phase was an orientation overview for the administrator, and in some cases a teacher, so they would know the basics about how EdReady works and what the faculty training would address. “Sometimes you’re meeting with them to talk about the program and find an ally,” says Currie, “and sometimes they’re ready to go and they just want to know more about the program, so that the key leader knows what you’re going to talk about at the faculty training.”



How to Use
EdReady

The second phase, “How to Use EdReady” professional development and hands-on training for the teachers, was key. That two- to three-hour faculty training allowed the school teams to understand how EdReady works and to what reports they would gain access. They also learned how to address details, such as which math topics they wanted EdReady to cover for each use case; what the target score would be; how they would enter the students into the system; how they would get students started on the diagnostic; and how they would help students keep

EXPANDING STATEWIDE

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017



A HANDS-ON,
REGIONAL TRAINING
MODEL WORKS BEST

moving through EdReady until they reached their target scores. The MTDA team helped facilitate those discussions and brainstorm how each local team, in partnership with the EdReady Montana team, would implement the program. MTDA has found that a hands-on, regional training model led by ambassadors works best, bringing teams from three to four schools together for the professional development piece. In a vast state like Montana, where face-to-face trainings are difficult, principals were appreciative for training close to home, and quite willing to allow teachers to go to regional trainings with ambassadors.



End User
Support

The third phase of professional development was the end-user support

from MTDA, helping sites with efficiently using EdReady reports, tracking students, and managing passwords. EdReady site administrators learn how the technology works and how to use the program effectively, often directly in the classroom or to support classroom instruction.

These three phases happen several times, says Currie. “Every time a new school sees EdReady, it’s naturally the first time they’ve seen it, so you have to start from the beginning.” Currie also notes that, for MTDA, the training and support pieces are ongoing. It’s an evolving conversation and partnership. MTDA might help a site get set up for the first day of implementation, but it might look a little different by the end of the first month or the first semester, and that shouldn’t be a surprise. The MTDA staff makes it clear to site coordinators that their feedback is welcome and encouraged. He says that all participants will need to be open about working with and refining their customization of EdReady for their particular use case.

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Plan Budgets

Once the Washington Foundation gift was in place, there were funds available to cover a small portion of Currie’s salary for overall project supervision and management. Schrenk, as mentioned, was hired to manage the program full-time. The EdReady Montana program budget included funding for marketing and advertising to reach out to students and encourage them to participate, and for NROC membership (which provides statewide access to EdReady). Other staff positions funded by the gift were an instructional registrar to manage the enrollment process, a part-time business and finance person, an administrative assistant, and several part-time ambassadors. The funding also provided budgetary items for ambassador travel and a student information system for the collection of pertinent data. Currie and Schrenk spent time attending secondary and postsecondary education conferences, where they demonstrated for deans, principals, counselors, teachers, and superintendents the EdReady program and how it could help them help their students. They also conferred with UM’s marketing team and their administration to support their local growth.

Montana’s field expansion efforts followed a classic pattern of expenses. During the pilot, the costs were modest. As they field tested and rolled out the program; however, there were some capital expenses required to get the program off the ground and to get local site personnel trained.

“Mostly, the first three years of our Washington Foundation gift were focused on personnel and establishing the systems necessary to implement the program and collect the important data,” says Currie. “There also was a significant awareness marketing campaign during the first three years.”



RYAN SCHRENK, EDREADY MT PROGRAM MANAGER, DISCUSSES EDREADY WITH AMANDA BEYER OF IOWA'S NORTHWEST AREA EDUCATION AGENCY

EXPANDING STATEWIDE

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

Currie recommends being creative in seeking funding. Look for local and regional educational foundations who may be interested in providing start-up support, for example.



“Foundations like to catalyze things,” he says. “Look for regional foundations, especially focused on education or economic development, for whom this work is exactly what they want to do. The trick is to find them. Make sure the scale of the gifts they give is within the range of what you’re really going to need. You might need millions of dollars to scale out to a statewide system. And you already have a story, we’ve got that. It’s not an ‘if’ it will work; it *will* work.”

Longer-term and ongoing operational expenses, he notes, could be funded legislatively, with support from the Governor or by major job creators who will benefit from better prepared students / workers. For those relationships to come to a point of maturation takes time, effort, and likely a few legislative cycles, so it’s good to be thinking of laying that groundwork in the first year of your implementation, recommends Currie. In the long run, he says, “EdReady can have an impact on the economic development in a region or state,” noting that MTDA is, itself, funded by the Montana legislature.

6



Define the Action Plan

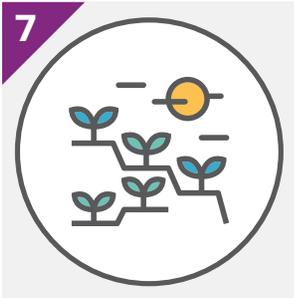
In a large-scale implementation, it's important to decide whom you will serve and how much service you will provide, with the ultimate goal of making the system user-friendly for students. MTDA and Schrenk's team employ a local support model where the technical support, goal setup, and student enrollment processes are centrally created and monitored, relieving individual school personnel from such pressures.

Schrenk recommends that, from the beginning, institutions should build their mindset around how to make accessing EdReady as simple as possible for students: "User name, password, log-in, GO!" he says. The site facilitators and teachers need the technical worries taken off their shoulders.

“Complex processes, even small technical hurdles, and multiple clicks aren't going to work,” says Schrenk. “Figure out how to make it as simple as possible to get them in and working. They, both students and teachers sometimes, are already afraid they don't know something; don't let them get hung up on your sign-in process.”

Like the use cases and the data, the specific action plan for each site needs to be customized for that site, and much of the groundwork for the action plan can be created during a professional development training session.

Schrenk notes that the most difficult part of the whole process for any site is getting the first students into and using EdReady. After that, it becomes easy over time to iterate the use case and make improvements. He ensures that each site knows that the MTDA team and the ambassadors will follow up with them and continue to offer support.



Refine, Revise, Expand

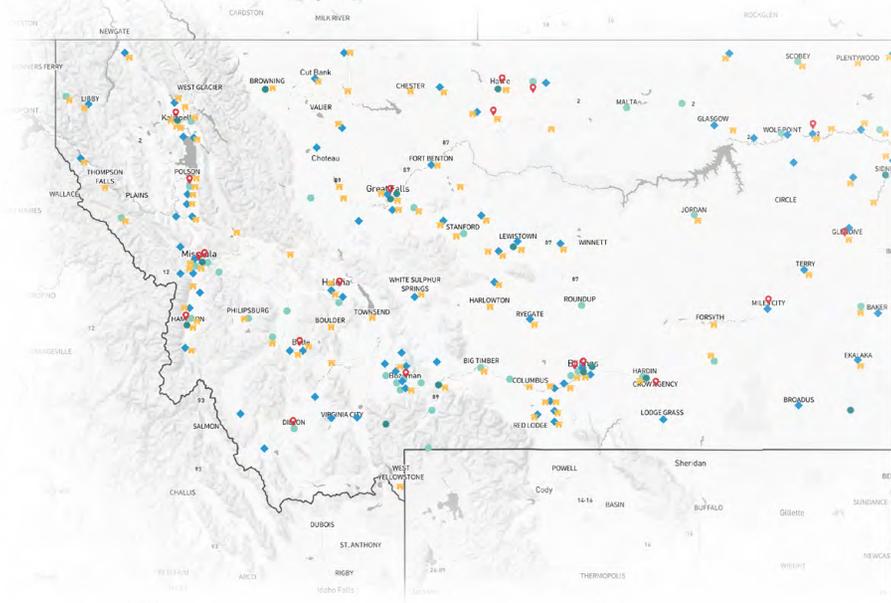
By the third year, MTDA was all lined up for the operational integration of EdReady in a way that would grow organically. “Unless you’re already working with a statewide initiative, you’ll need some momentum and a financial shift and a political shift, and this is where you set that up, so that when you step back, you’ve planted the seed and see that it’s growing on its own,” Currie says.

It’s also important to continue to tell the story of the impact of EdReady. From the first stages of implementation, it’s critical to collect site data, create case studies, and conduct research that demonstrate the student readiness challenges were met. Building support for the program and motivating administrators, teachers, and others to participate is an ongoing process. Currie notes, **“It’s getting easier and easier to get voluntary testimonials from people at the various levels to tell us about their success. We get pretty fired up when educators and students tell their own success story. It doesn’t get any better than that.”**

Currie states that as the EdReady Montana project moved into the third year, “[W]e began getting a growing number of questions about the future of the program and whether we would begin charging.” Since MTDA does not charge tuition for its digital classes, he ruled out charging fees for EdReady, as he considered that to be confusing to schools who used both programs. He also felt it would limit student access to EdReady. While this may differ from other implementations of EdReady, he only considered potential funding solutions that would allow its continuation at no cost to schools or students and adult users. The two options he considered were continued foundation funding or seeking state-level support by the Governor and legislature. The next step was to utilize the research and data compiled in the three-year field test and rollout to build a compelling case for funding EdReady for all Montana students.



“It’s going to be good,” Schrenk says of the sites’ first experiences with EdReady, “but there are growing pains. Some people deal with technology and change better than others. Stay in contact and make it a conversation. Build the partnership. Everyone has to do work, but the work is worth it.”



VIEW A FULL-SIZED,
INTERACTIVE MAP
OF EDREADY USAGE
IN MONTANA AT
EDREADYMONTANA.ORG
(CLICK HERE)

LOOKING FORWARD

2016

2017 +

- ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
- ◆ MIDDLE SCHOOLS
- HIGH SCHOOLS
- 📍 COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES
- ⚙️ STATEWIDE & REGIONAL

Looking Forward

A SECOND GIFT FROM THE WASHINGTON FOUNDATION

Today, with the dedicated leadership of the Montana Digital Academy, EdReady is available in over 465 schools across the state of Montana. Schrenk is still the main point person for statewide EdReady administration in Montana, advising and guiding district and school site administrators statewide. He now supervises a team that makes it easy for sites to implement on a daily basis.

“It looks a bit daunting,” says Schrenk about the challenge of scaling EdReady, “but once you get out there and start to help schools address some of their challenges, it gets a whole lot easier. It will begin to gain its own momentum. As you pilot and go into scaling phases, there are certain things that are pretty important, but the bottom line is: What do you want your students to be ready for?”



What do you want your students to be ready for?

- ? Create goals that are meaningful to your students.
- ✍️ Customize the scope of learning objectives.
- 📖 Select and prioritize content interventions.
- 👤 Access data for planning and evaluation.
- ✓ Customize messaging to let students know what is next.

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017 +

“It’s hard work if you want to get the kind of numbers that are exciting,” says Currie, “but it’s amazing. You will be amazed if you invest your time and others’ time into getting the word out and helping them to move the rock.”

As a testament to the success of the EdReady implementation in Montana, the Washington Foundation recently added a second gift. In their press release about the gift, they stated, “EdReady Montana has exceeded all expectations and inspired another generous gift of \$3.5 million from the Washington Foundation to continue its critical work with Montana students.”⁵

Mike Halligan, Executive Director of the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, notes that,

“While the work of EdReady Montana began with college math readiness, the expansion of the program into the PK–12 system, and inclusion of the English and JobReady components, has made EdReady a bridge that connects our entire education system to careers and job creators, helping to increase the pool of qualified employees for employers across the state. We are proud to partner with the Montana Digital Academy and NROC to expand this highly successful academic readiness program to meet the 21st century needs of our students and employers. The five-year, \$3.5 million grant provides stable funding to allow Bob Currie and his team to fully implement their vision for the EdReady Montana program.”



ABOUT US

ABOUT MONTANA DIGITAL ACADEMY



Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) is Montana's public state virtual school, located on the campus of the University of Montana. MTDA offers core classes, AP classes, and electives not available in the local schools. MTDA also offers credit recovery and remediation programs so that more students can graduate on time and college ready.

montanadigitalacademy.org



ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

The University of Montana (UM) hosts a population of roughly 15,000 students on four campuses, with a broad range of subjects that include the trades, liberal arts, graduate and postdoctoral studies, and professional training.

umt.edu



ABOUT THE NROC PROJECT

The NROC Project partners with educators to imagine, develop, test, and refine technological solutions that improve student success. Many of the digital resources developed by NROC are available to individuals at no cost via HippoCampus.org and EdReady.org. NROC membership affords institutions the ability to customize and adapt the NROC solution suite, which includes: NROC Math, NROC English, HippoCampus, EdReady, and more.

NROC.org

A NEW COLLABORATION



In fall of 2017, ACT announced the introduction of ACT® CollegeReady™, a web-based system that measures students' readiness for college math and English and provides a personalized study path for knowledge and skill building. The system is designed for colleges and universities as part of a new collaboration between ACT and The NROC Project, based on NROC's proven technology and educational content, including the use of EdReady in Montana as described in this whitepaper.

act.org/collegeready

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and NROC member institutions across the United States for supporting NROC and making EdReady possible.

And, thank you to the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation for its support of the EdReady Montana program.



DENNIS & PHYLLIS
WASHINGTON
FOUNDATION



ENDNOTES

¹ *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*, Complete College America, 2012, pg. 2.

² *Time is the Enemy: The Surprising Truth About Why Today's College Students Aren't Graduating*, Complete College America, 2011.

³ *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*, Complete College America, pp. 2–3.

⁴ Johnson, Derek. "What Happens When Colleges Start Treating Remedial Students Like Everyone Else," GoodCall.com, April 8, 2016.

⁵ "Foundation gives \$3.5M to expand EdReady statewide"