

Remedial Education Reforms at California's Community Colleges: Early Evidence on Placement and Curricular Reforms

Prepared by Christopher M. Crew, Ph.D., Research Analyst (ccrew@sbccd.edu)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

ARTICLE GOAL 1: To provide a comprehensive examination of developmental education reform efforts prior to AB 705 requirements.

ARTICLE GOAL 2: To shed some light on both the potential gains in student outcomes and the challenges that colleges could face as they move toward compliance with AB 705.

AB 705 REFORMS:

- **Reform 1:** Promote more consistent and accurate assessment and placement policies using multiple measures (including high school records – colleges decide GPA cutoffs for transfer-level default placement).
- **Reform 2:** Minimize attrition and accelerate students' progress into transfer-level courses, with co-requisite remediation emerging as a promising approach.

AB 705 IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES:

- **Issue 1:** Staff and Faculty prefer to use minimally disruptive, small-scale methods (Edgecombe et al 2013).
- **Issue 2:** Logistical issues with scheduling, advising, registration and IT make it difficult to scale up reforms.

RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- All colleges that implemented AB 705 reforms have experienced increases in transfer-level enrollment.
- Course success rates have remained high and the completion of transfer-level courses has increased.
- All demographic groups experienced increases in transfer-level course completion, but equity gaps remain.
- The magnitude of improvement varied across colleges, but all colleges saw notable increases in throughput.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD UNDER AB 705:

1. **Compliance:** (1) Use default rules recommend by the Chancellor's Office; (2) Align math pathways with students' program of study; (3) Develop low-unit co-requisite courses; and (4) Tailor to your college needs.
2. **Basic skills funding:** Chancellor's Office should help colleges understand how the new funding formula will affect funding allocations, and which funding streams are available to support AB 705 reform efforts.
3. **Professional development:** Provide training to faculty, counselors, academic advisors and other student support staff to ensure success as a greater diversity of students will now be taking transfer-level courses.
4. **Narrowing equity gaps:** (1) Incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom; (2) Train faculty to recognize their own biases; (3) Adopt equity-minded practices & policies; and (4) Rigorously evaluate all policies.
5. **Research:** Use qualitative and quantitative longitudinal research studies to determine which kinds of concurrent support efforts work, for which students are they most impactful, and why.
6. **Planning for growth:** CCC's, CSU's, UC's must work together to expand their capacity to serve a greater number of transfer-ready students that will be applying and matriculating.

KEY FINDINGS:

This research brief highlights key findings from the article entitled “[Remedial Education Reforms at California’s Community Colleges: Early Evidence on Placement and Curricular Reforms](#)” (Rodriguez, Cuellar Mejia & Johnson 2018), which focuses on outcomes for early implementers of AB 705 reforms.

AB 705 was enacted in response to the observation that developmental courses seemed to be a significant, and perhaps unnecessary, barrier to transfer-level completion for community college students across the nation. As presented below, statistics for transfer-level completion under the “remedial education model” were concerning.

- **Research Finding 1:** Only 27 percent of students who took at least one developmental math course and 44 percent of those who took developmental English completed a college-level course in the same subject (Cuellar Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson 2018).
- **Research Finding 2:** Only 24 percent of students who enrolled in developmental coursework transferred to a four-year college after six years, compared to 65 percent of those who were deemed college ready (Cuellar Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson 2018).

The key legislation in AB 705 is the mandate that colleges use high school records as the primary criteria for placement recommendations. Colleges retain the autonomy to choose their GPA cutoffs for entry into transfer-level courses however, any deviation from the default placement model must be accompanied by data showing that the deviation resulted in higher placement.

Table 1: Key Findings from Early Implementers

<p>Increasing Access and Throughput Rates:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amongst the early implementers of AB 705, transfer-level enrollment has expanded more rapidly for English (37% increase) than math (24% increase). • Early Implementers saw major gains in access to (+24% early implementers vs. +4% statewide) and throughput in (+10% early implementers vs. -5% statewide) transfer-level courses.
<p>Making Decisions on where to Place Students:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most colleges reported using the measure that resulted in the highest possible placement. • Most colleges reported that high school records generated the highest placements.
<p>The Promise of Co-Requisite Remediation:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students enroll in designated sections of a college composition course with a one-to-three-unit linked support course. • Students in one-semester acceleration are more likely to complete college composition, than to those who start 2 to 3 levels below transfer-level (42% vs. 27% & 14%, respectively). • At 4-year colleges, co-requisite students throughput rates are 30-40% higher than the rates for students who took one-term accelerated developmental English courses.
<p>AB 705 is Closing the Equity Gap:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The white/Latino gap is 6% at early implementers and 16% statewide. • The white/African-American gap is 1% at early implementers and 17% statewide. • 1 in 2 Latinos at early implementers starts in transfer-level math. Statewide is 1 in 5. • African-Americans average access rate at early implementers is 56% while 18% statewide. • Almost half of Latino, African American, and low-income students complete transfer-level math within 1 year at these colleges. The statewide average is fewer than 1 in 4.