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New Law is Catalyzing Big Changes at California Community Colleges

Colleges in Los Angeles, Inland Empire and Central Valley take key steps to tackle long-standing problems with remedial education, but progress is uneven.

(Los Angeles, CA) - - The Campaign for College Opportunity released a regional progress report, "Getting There: Are California Colleges Maximizing Student Completion of Transfer-Level Math and English?" that looks at how well California's community colleges are implementing AB 705, a new law intended to reform remedial education.

Beginning this fall, California's community colleges are required, under AB 705, to utilize a student's high school grades for English and math course placement. The law also prohibits colleges from denying students access to transfer-level courses and gives students the right to begin in courses where they have the best chance of completing the English and math requirements for a bachelor's degree. Until now, colleges largely relied on ineffective standardized tests that placed more than 75% of incoming students into lengthy remedial math and/or English sequences where few ever reached transfer-level courses or achieved their college goals.

The progress report, conducted by the California Acceleration Project, looks at course schedules from 47 colleges in Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, and the Central Valley and finds that AB 705 has catalyzed tremendous changes in community college course offerings. Between 2018 and 2019, colleges have doubled the proportion of transfer-level courses they are offering; transfer-level classes have increased from 45 percent to 88 percent in English and from 33 percent to 71 percent in math.

There has also been a dramatic growth in the number of colleges offering transfer-level courses with additional support (co-requisite courses). Across the 47 colleges studied, the number of colleges offering co-requisite courses in English increased from 10 colleges to 39, from five to 33 in statistics, and from zero to 30 in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses. These courses put students on the path to completing their degrees, while ensuring they are supported as they pursue their college goals.

"For too long, talented California students were getting trapped in a downward spiral of remedial education courses from which they'd never emerge. But thanks to good public policy, California's community colleges are ushering in a new era of placing students into courses where they are most likely to succeed instead of maintaining the status quo of a broken remedial education system," said Audrey Dow, Senior Vice President of the Campaign for College Opportunity.

One region stood out amongst the others in terms of strong implementation across both math and English: California's Central Valley. Across the 14 Central Valley community colleges, 93 percent of introductory English and 79 percent of introductory math sections are transfer-level. Leaders in the region attribute their success to taking a coordinated regional approach to college completion and setting goals for implementing corequisite models.

“Getting There,” also highlighted areas of implementation that need improvement. At many colleges, remedial courses still constitute a large proportion of initial course offerings, especially in math, even though research clearly shows there is no group of students that benefits from starting in remedial classes. At many of the colleges offering substantial remedial courses, none provides information to students on how enrolling in these courses reduces their likelihood of completing transfer-level courses. Many colleges also fail to provide enough transfer-level sections of statistics and quantitative reasoning, the math most students need for their degrees.

To realize the full potential of the law - ensuring all students have the best chance to complete their degrees – the authors make the following recommendations for campuses and the state:

Campuses

- Shift course schedules to offer primarily transfer-level courses in English and math, with few, if any, stand-alone remedial courses;
- Revise college websites to ensure students receive accurate, consistent and encouraging messages about their right to enroll in transfer-level courses
- Provide students with clear information about how enrolling in a transfer-level or remedial course will affect their likelihood of completing transfer-level requirements

State

- Dedicate an additional round of funding for faculty development including learning aimed at advancing racial equity in gateway courses by examining the role of implicit bias;
- Develop a strategic, statewide communications plan and guidelines for use by colleges that promote clear and consistent messages about AB 705;
- Refine data collection and monitoring;
- Require colleges that are performing poorly to submit a detailed plan for improvement.

“I am excited to see campuses making progress toward reducing barriers to student success and am grateful to the hard work of the Campaign and their allies as they continue to monitor implementation of this landmark legislation. While the progress colleges have made is encouraging, we know we must continue to monitor and strengthen implementation so that all students receive the benefits of AB 705 and we ensure college is accessible and equitable for the next generation of students,” concluded California State Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin, AB 705 author.

To read the full report and recommendations, click [here](#).

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About Campaign for College Opportunity:

The Campaign for College Opportunity is a California non-profit bipartisan policy and research organization focused on a single mission: to ensure all Californians have an equal opportunity to attend and succeed in college in order to build a vibrant workforce, economy and democracy. For more information, visit www.CollegeCampaign.org / [Facebook.com/CollegeCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/CollegeCampaign) or follow [@CollegeOpp](https://twitter.com/CollegeOpp).