



Statewide AB 705 Update: Plans from California Community Colleges Suggest Notable Progress But Not Full Implementation

Summary

Four years after historic legislation transformed placement and remediation in California's community colleges, the system is still grappling with the complexities of implementing [AB 705](#) (Irwin 2017).

AB 705 requires colleges to recognize high school coursework instead of relying on inaccurate and inequitable placement testing, and all colleges now do this. The law also sets a standard for placement that requires colleges to “maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe.” [Research](#) shows that completion is maximized when students begin in transfer-level¹ courses, instead of remedial² ones. As of fall 2021, only 6% of the state's 115 community colleges met this standard by enrolling all students who need English and math³ into transfer-level coursework, with concurrent support if needed. To date, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's office has not publicly identified any college that meets this standard for students enrolled in remedial classes.

This report analyzes the [AB 705 Improvement plans](#)⁴ submitted by the 115 colleges in March 2022 in response to the latest [memorandum](#) from the state Chancellor's office. The memo “resets California Community Colleges work to fully implement AB 705.” These plans give a snapshot of the status of AB 705 implementation across the state.

The good news is that over half of California community colleges intend to phase out remedial enrollments altogether for fall 2022. These colleges also are more likely to implement a range of strategies to maximize completion of transfer-level math and English compared to colleges continuing remedial enrollments.

The bad news is that 41% of colleges plan to continue remedial enrollments in violation of regulatory guidance from the state's Chancellor's office, according to our analysis. As a result, implementation continues to be uneven and inequitable.

¹ The term transfer-level refers to courses that earn general education credit toward a baccalaureate degree.

² In this report the term “remedial” refers to pre-transfer-level courses. Remedial courses do not count for general education credit toward a baccalaureate degree.

³ In this report math includes quantitative reasoning courses, such as statistics or financial literacy, taught in other disciplines.

⁴ Plans are signed by the district's President/Superintendent/Chancellor, the college's Chief Instructional Officer, and the college's Academic Senate president or their designees.

Background

California's Assembly Bill 705 (Irwin, 2017) has dramatically improved student outcomes by requiring community colleges to place students into courses that maximize their likelihood of entering and completing transfer-level English and math within a year of enrollment in the discipline. Statewide studies show that completion is maximized when students begin in transfer-level courses, instead of remedial ones. ([PPIC](#), [RPGGroup](#))

During the first year of mandatory implementation, greater access to transfer-level coursework produced large [completion gains](#)⁵ in English and math for every group examined, including [Black and Hispanic students](#), [students over the age of 35](#), [low-income students](#), [students with disabilities](#), [STEM students with weaker math preparation](#), [foster youth](#), and [veterans](#). For most of these groups, completion of transfer-level math doubled.⁶

"The most consequential thing that is happening on our campuses that will really help move the dial in terms of success for students of color, and in particular Black and Latino/a students is AB 705."

[Pamela Haynes](#)

President, California Community College Board of Governors

Colleges had two years to implement AB 705 and another two-year grace period to study and refine their placement practices before submitting placement validation reports to the state's Chancellor's office in December 2020. [Our analysis](#) of these reports found that colleges did not meet the AB 705 standards for students enrolled in remedial math courses. In addition, at over half of the colleges, Black and Hispanic students had disproportionately lower transfer-level math completion rates when they began in remediation.

In a November 2021 [memo](#), the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office ended the phase-in period and directed all colleges to fully implement AB 705 by fall 2022 by ending practices in violation of the law. Citing extensive research, the CCCCO concluded that AB 705 standards require colleges to place and enroll all U.S. high school graduates, with limited exceptions, into transfer-level English and math/quantitative reasoning courses.

In March 2022 every college submitted an [AB 705 Improvement Plan](#). Colleges planning to continue enrollments in remedial courses, by requirement or as an option, had to also provide data verifying that this practice did not violate AB 705 standards.

This report examines the plans submitted by the California community colleges system's 115 colleges⁷.

⁵ These gains describe completion of transfer-level English or math within a year of the student's first enrollment in the discipline and include students beginning in remedial or transfer-level coursework.

⁶ Chancellor's [dashboard](#). Timeframe to Completion=1 year, Starting Course Level=All, 2017-2018 vs. 2019-2020

⁷ College plans were obtained from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office through a public records act request.

Our findings

- **The majority of colleges plan for full AB 705 implementation in fall 2022.**
- **Full implementation includes plans for better student supports, new math options, and equity-minded teaching.**
- **Many colleges plan to continue remedial math enrollments in apparent violation of the Chancellor’s Office AB 705 implementation guidance.**
- **In light of these plans, implementation continues to be inequitable and uneven.**

The majority of colleges plan for full implementation of AB 705 in fall 2022.

Full implementation of AB 705 is most visible when all students needing to take math and English start at the transfer-level. As of fall 2021, 6% (7 of 115) of the state’s community colleges had universal transfer-level enrollment in math and English. In fall 2022 an additional 61 colleges plan to join them. This means that when students choose to begin their coursework in math and English, they will start in courses that count toward a bachelor’s degree, with support when needed. This will now be true at 59% of the state’s community colleges if all goes as reported in the plans.

Full implementation includes plans for concurrent student support, new math options, and equity-minded teaching.

“As we continue to implement and evaluate the implementation of this transformational reform, focus must shift from compliance to full implementation, and not only to the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. The spirit and intent of this reform was not simply that students have the option to enroll in these essential gateway courses, but that districts and colleges ensure students’ entrance into, support in, and successful completion of these courses is maximized.”

[Dr. Aisha Lowe](#)

Vice Chancellor, Educational Services and Support Division
California Community College Chancellor’s Office
Guidance memorandum EES 21-300-015

Concurrent support

Colleges with plans for full transfer-level enrollment also have plans to transform the way that they support their students. All plan to increase tutoring. Most plan to provide concurrent support for students who may need or want extra help when they are taking transfer-level math or English. California community college [research](#) shows students starting in a transfer-level course with concurrent support are much more likely to complete transfer-level coursework in one term than students starting in remediation when given a year.

Compared to colleges planning remedial enrollment, colleges planning full transfer-level enrollment are more likely to plan for additional tutoring and concurrent support at the transfer-level.

New math choices

Most colleges with plans to enroll all students into transfer-level math say they will develop new transferable math and quantitative reasoning options for students who do not intend to transfer, including students in career education programs. At colleges leading the way, these students take a transfer-level course in financial literacy, liberal arts math, or technical math for the trades⁸ to satisfy math requirements for their associate degree, instead of taking a pre-transfer-level course like intermediate algebra. But transfer-level does not mean harder. Students are typically more successful in these courses than in Intermediate Algebra at colleges that have adopted this approach. As an added bonus, if students in these programs continue their studies, they will have met quantitative reasoning requirements for the CSU baccalaureate degree without taking additional courses.

The colleges with plans to transition to full transfer-level math enrollment are more likely to plan for new transferable math options compared to colleges with plans to continue enrolling students into intermediate algebra and other remedial math courses.

Equity-minded teaching

Almost all colleges with plans for full transfer-level enrollment say they will invest in professional development. They are more likely than other colleges to include strategies in their plans focused on equity-minded teaching practice, and to say that they will devote dollars to support Communities of Practice for faculty to share strategies that promote student engagement, foster belonging and mitigate stereotype threat.

Strategies from the Improvement Plan Template	Plan for full transfer-level enrollment 61 colleges ⁹	Plan for remedial enrollment 47 colleges
BETTER PLACEMENT: Use high school performance for math placement above entry transfer-level, e.g., start in calculus if pass precalc in high school.	80%	64%
BETTER MATH CHOICES: More <u>transfer-level</u> quantitative reasoning options for associate degree students, e.g., Financial Literacy, Technical Math for the Trades	79%	68%
INTEGRATED ACADEMIC SUPPORT: Develop new concurrent supports		
English	95%	77%
Business or STEM math	93%	70%
Statistics or liberal arts math	95%	81%
MORE TUTORING: More walk-in tutoring, more tutoring embedded in the classroom, incentivizing participation in tutoring	100%	81%
EARLY PROACTIVE INTERVENTION: Use early alert system to connect struggling students with supports	90%	74%

⁸ Examples: Financial Literacy: MiraCosta College [BUS 147](#), Liberal Arts Math: Cuyamaca [Math 120](#), Technical math: College of the Redwoods [Math 10](#).

⁹ The 7 colleges at full implementation in 2021 did not complete this part of the Improvement Plan.

INTEGRATED BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT: Integrate resources in classes to connect students to support for basic needs, mental health, stress management, etc.	87%	81%
BETTER TEACHING:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development in the use of high support, high challenge, equity-minded teaching practice 	97%	85%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities of Practice to share strategies that promote engagement, foster belonging, and mitigate stereotype threat 	93%	81%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe place for instructors to discuss inequities in their own classes' success rates and to innovate to close equity gaps in learning 	95%	87%

Many colleges plan to continue remedial math enrollments in apparent violation of the Chancellor’s office AB 705 implementation guidance.

Per the state Chancellor’s office [guidance](#), by fall 2022, all California community colleges are required to have default transfer-level placement and enrollment into English and math/quantitative reasoning for students who are U.S. high school graduates, with limited exceptions. However, colleges could still submit data in an attempt to show that remedial enrollments meet AB 705 standards for a specific program or group of students.

Of the 47 colleges indicating an intent to continue remedial enrollments, 5 did not submit data and 4 did not properly disaggregate their data by high school GPA, academic goal, or math pathway. We analyzed the remaining 38 data addendums with a focus on math.

None of the 38 colleges could reliably justify their plans for continuing remedial math enrollments, according to our analysis.

All 38 colleges inappropriately allowed multiple groups of students with strong high school performance to enroll in remedial courses. This practice violates the intent of AB 705’s “highly unlikely to succeed standard.”¹⁰

For students with the weakest high school performance, all 38 colleges failed to meet the “maximize completion” standard. Even students with the lowest HS GPAs were more likely to complete transfer-level math in a year if they bypassed remediation and enrolled directly into transfer-level coursework when compared to students with similar high school GPAs enrolled in remediation. This was true for students in math intensive business and STEM programs, as well as other programs.

¹⁰ In addition to the “maximize completion” standard, AB 705 also stipulates that colleges should not require students to enroll in remedial courses unless evidence suggests that they are highly unlikely to succeed in a transfer-level course. The Chancellor’s office operationalized the “highly unlikely to succeed” standard with [placement rules](#) based on system research. Students in the lowest high school GPA band are the only group that could possibly be considered as “highly unlikely to succeed” per earlier Chancellor’s office data reporting instructions (December 10, 2020).

Eight colleges *appeared* to meet the AB 705 standards in at least one math pathway for students with a transfer-goal and weak high school GPAs. However, cohorts were too small to draw reliable conclusions (most involved 10 or fewer students) or there were other problems with the data.

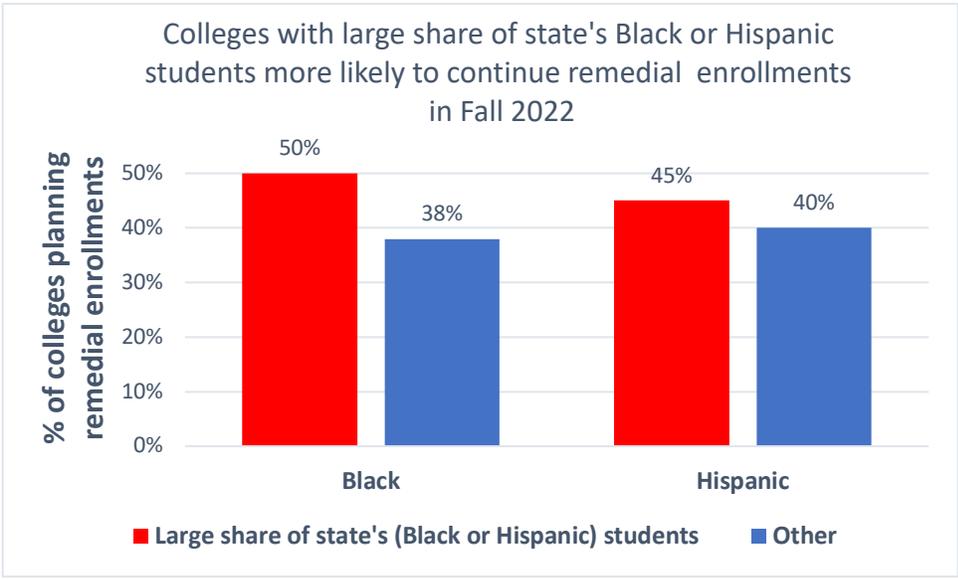
The instructions from the state Chancellor’s office tell colleges what to do when their local data fails to meet AB 705 standards, “Colleges planning to allow or require continued pre-transfer-level enrollment that cannot submit evidence that it meets the standards of the law will be expected to place and enroll all U.S. high school graduate, certificate, degree and transfer students in transfer-level coursework (with appropriate concurrent support as needed) by fall 2022.”

According to our analysis, these 47 colleges did not provide the necessary evidence to justify enrolling students in math remediation, yet they submitted plans stating that they plan to continue this practice in fall 2022 anyway.

In light of these plans, implementation continues to be inequitable and uneven.

Racial inequity

Colleges serving a large share of the state’s Black¹¹ and Hispanic¹² students are more likely to continue remedial enrollments in fall 2022, according to the AB 705 Improvement Plans.



¹¹ Large Black student population means at least 1.5% of the state’s Black community college students (at least 1,850 Black students) attend the college. There are 24 such colleges.

¹² Large Hispanic student population means at least 1.25% of the state’s Hispanic community college students (at least 12,690 Hispanic students) attend the college. There are 22 such colleges. Because Hispanic students are more evenly distributed across the state’s colleges, the benchmark for “larger share” is lower to generate a sample size of 20-25 colleges.

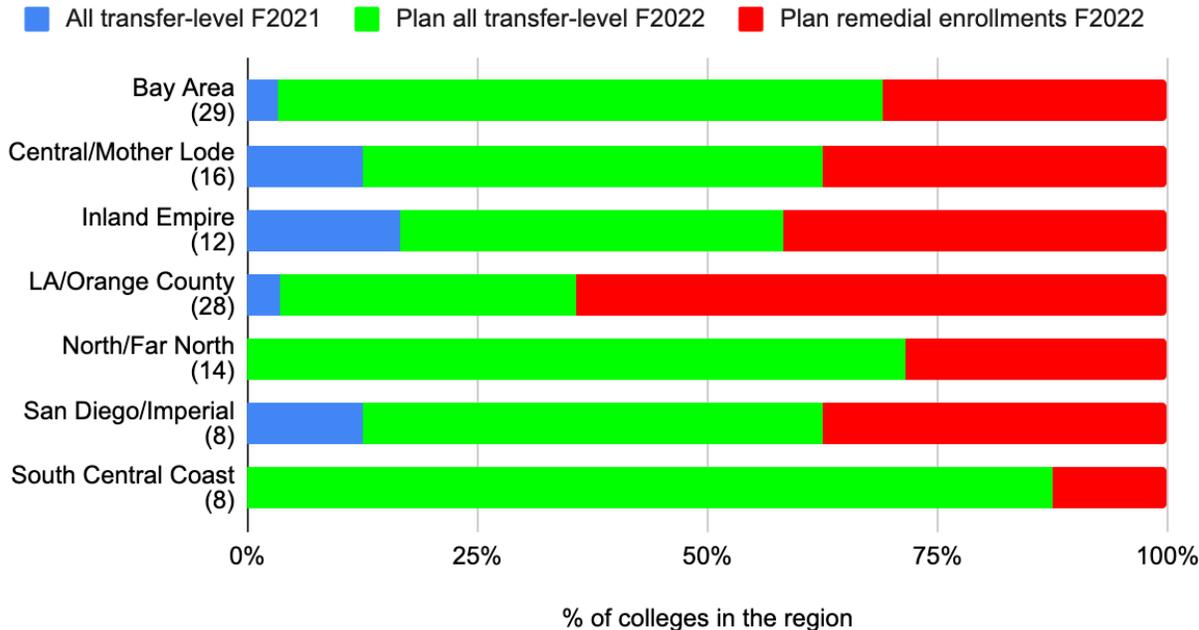
All colleges planning to continue remedial enrollments planned to do so in math. Our previous [analysis](#) of the first round of AB 705 reporting showed that remedial math enrollments had widespread disproportionate impact on transfer-level math completion for Black and Hispanic students.

Geographic inequity

Full compliance with AB 705 was rare across all regions of the state in fall 2021 but every region has many more colleges planning to step in line for fall 2022. Particularly notable is the South Central Coast region, where previously none of the 8 colleges were fully implementing the law and now there is only one hold-out.

Though every region is making progress toward full implementation of AB 705, some regions are lagging behind. Of particular concern is the Los Angeles/Orange County region which includes the Los Angeles Community College District, the largest district in the state. All 9 LACCD colleges plan to continue remedial enrollments in fall 2022.

Plans for AB 705 Implementation in Fall 2022



When a college reports an intention to continue remedial enrollments, it may still be reducing the number of students affected. This was not captured in the Improvement Plans. For example, at the largest LACCD college, the fall 2022 class schedule shows a 2/3rds reduction in the number of remedial math sections compared to fall 2020. But even with these cuts, there are seats in remedial math for over 800 students, and the college’s own data shows students are more likely to complete transfer requirements in math if they start at the transfer-level, with concurrent support if needed, instead of taking remedial courses. These plans are clearly not consistent with the CCCCO guidance.

Conclusion

This analysis of the AB 705 Improvement plans suggests that the California Community College system has made progress in implementing placement and remediation reform driven by AB 705. With a guidance “reset” from the state’s Chancellor’s office in November 2021, 61 more colleges are planning for full implementation in fall 2022, bringing the total to 68 colleges (59%).

Maximizing completion of English and math milestones to a baccalaureate degree involves placing and enrolling students directly into transfer-level coursework and supporting them there. Overwhelmingly, colleges that are ending remedial enrollments in fall 2022 intend to implement an array of student supports, re-envision math options for career education students, and invest in professional development to foster equity-minded teaching. These colleges are more likely to include these activities in their plans than colleges intending to continue remedial enrollments.

But there is still a way to go before the state achieves full and faithful implementation of this law. According to our analysis, 47 colleges (41%) plan to continue to enroll students into remedial courses in violation of the guidance from the state’s Chancellor’s office.

If colleges act as planned, implementation will continue to be inequitable because many of these colleges serve the largest populations of Black and Hispanic students. Implementation will also be uneven across geographic regions, which means that zip code may determine if the local college ensures that students begin in courses that give them the best chance of completing math and English requirements for a degree and for transfer.

Findings in this report reinforce the need for the Legislature to support [AB 1705](#). AB 1705 (Irwin, Medina 2022) clarifies AB 705 in ways that align with Chancellor’s office guidance and addresses issues that are currently undermining implementation of AB 705, including specifying exemptions for special populations. AB 1705 also clarifies that it is the responsibility of colleges to provide students with supports to help them succeed in transfer-level coursework.

Findings in this report also underscore the need for the Legislature and the Governor to approve Assemblymember Irwin’s budget request of \$64 million in one-time funding to support colleges as they transform policies, supports, curricula and teaching to fully achieve the promise of these historic reforms. The few colleges that have already transitioned to full implementation have done so using existing funding, but extra dollars could incentivize and accelerate this transformation at other colleges. Irwin’s request also includes ongoing funds of \$812,000 to ensure that the Chancellor’s office can provide meaningful oversight, data analysis and technical assistance to improve implementation.

This report was produced by **the California Acceleration Project (CAP)**. CAP is a faculty-led initiative supporting California’s 115 community colleges to produce stronger and more equitable math and English outcomes through placement and remediation reforms and professional development. accelerationproject.org/