

AB 705 and AB 1705 Questions and Answers

Question: Are students being harmed by changes made post AB 705?

Answer: Far more students are successfully completing transferable English and math requirements than before AB 705. Every student group studied to date has seen their completion of transfer-level courses rise substantially. There is no evidence of harm for any group, including:

- English students with low, middle, and high GPAs
- B-STEM students with low, middle, and high GPAs
- Statistics/liberal arts math students with low, middle, and high GPAs
- Students with disabilities
- Black, Latino, white, and Asian students
- Foster youth
- Low income/EOPS students
- B-STEM students who didn't take Algebra 2 in high school
- English language learners who graduated from a U.S. high school (even if they only spent a year there)

Most of the above data is available on this [Chancellor's Office dashboard](#). The bottom two items come from reports by the Multiple Measures Assessment Project or MMAP ([Algebra 2 study](#), [ESL research](#)). In addition, colleges submitted their own local data to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to see if they could validate that pre-transfer courses meet AB 705 standards, and not a single college was able to do so. See [CAP analysis](#) of these reports and an [EdSource article](#) about it.

Question: Are more students failing classes at California's community colleges?

Answer: It is true that – among students who begin in a transfer-level course – pass rates have declined somewhat statewide. However, context is important here:

- Pre-AB 705, most students who began in remedial classes were lost to attrition without ever enrolling in a transfer-level class. The large-scale failures of our prior system are invisible when we focus only on pass rates in transfer-level classes.
- Before AB 705, pass rates were artificially inflated by colleges' incredibly restrictive access to transfer-level courses. To illustrate this: if enrollment in Precalculus is restricted to students who've already passed Calculus I, the pass rate will likely be strong. With nearly universal access to transfer-level courses, some declines in pass rates are to be expected.

When we look at *all* English and math students, we see that completion of transfer-level courses increased from 49% to 67% in English and from 26% to 50% in math. Statewide, more than 41,000 additional students completed transfer-level English in the first year of AB 705 than a few years earlier, and more than 30,000 additional students completed transfer-level math (dashboard, 2015-16 vs. 2019-20).

If colleges are seeing pass rates drop at the transfer-level, we should work to improve them through professional development for faculty and additional supports for students. In particular, corequisite models - in which students receive extra support while taking transfer-level classes – have been shown to produce higher completion for all students and more equitable outcomes for Black and Latinx students. Colleges should focus on expanding and strengthening these practices, rather than returning to the ineffective practices of the past.

Question: Are racial equity gaps growing post AB 705?

Answer: Every group examined to date has higher completion post-AB 705, but some colleges are seeing larger gaps *between* groups. One key factor here is that colleges continue to disproportionately enroll Black and Latinx students in remedial courses, driving down their completion rates. Fully eliminating equity gaps will also require attention to other institutional drivers of inequity, such as inequitable classroom policies and practices. While more attention is needed, the solution is clearly not to return to a time when all students performed worse.

Question: Shouldn't students have the option to decide for themselves if they want to enroll in a remedial course?

Answer: If remedial courses are offered – even if they're not mandatory – many students will choose them out of fear or imposter syndrome, having internalized the message that they aren't capable. Students trust that taking these courses will help them succeed. After all, why else would colleges offer them? But this trust is misguided, and colleges are not informing students that taking remedial classes makes them more likely to drop out of college without making progress on their goals. Multiple studies have established that when remedial courses are optional, colleges disproportionately enroll Black and Latinx students in them, exacerbating inequities in completion. It is colleges' responsibility to ensure that our structures support students to achieve their dreams, not derail them.

Question: Is transfer-level math appropriate for all students? Doesn't Intermediate Algebra meet the requirement for an associate degree? Why make students take a higher level of math?

Answer: AB 705 allows colleges to enroll students in non-transferable math if they are in a program with specific requirements that cannot be met with a transfer-level course (e.g., contextualized math for certain career education programs). However, in the vast majority of

cases, transfer-level math is the best starting point for students, whether or not they intend to transfer:

- Transfer-level classes are not necessarily harder. In fact, students' pass rates in transfer-level classes are typically higher than in Intermediate Algebra.
- Transfer-level classes provide more relevant mathematics. Intermediate Algebra focuses on highly technical skills for calculus. If students are not going to take calculus, they're better served by a course in statistics, liberal arts math, occupational math for career technical education programs, or personal finance, all of which meet CSU quantitative reasoning requirements.
- Transfer-level classes support students to earn stackable credentials. If an associate degree student later decides to pursue a bachelor's degree, they will already have completed their transferable quantitative reasoning requirement.

Further, though colleges cite associate degree students as the reason to maintain below-transfer math offerings, they continue to enroll a large number of transfer-seeking students there. [PPIC found that in fall 2020](#), transfer-seeking students made up 60% of enrollment in below-transfer math.

Question: Do students need remedial classes to make up for learning loss under COVID?

Answer: The poor outcomes of remedial courses make clear that this is not the solution for potential learning loss. Instead, colleges should expand their corequisite support offerings, which enable students to review foundational concepts and skills while taking transferable courses. Now more than ever, students cannot afford to waste time and money on courses that don't transfer.

Question: Has AB 705 caused enrollment to decline at California's Community College?

Answer: If AB 705 were the cause of enrollment declines, California would be the only state experiencing this problem. In fact, nationwide community college enrollment has been trending downward [since 2010](#), with especially sharp [drops sparked by the pandemic](#).

Question: Have colleges had adequate time to prepare for changes post AB 705?

Answer: AB 705 was signed into law in 2017. Colleges had two years to plan for implementation and an additional two-year grace period to study the impact of the changes and report their findings. Further, in the decade before AB 705, [community colleges received hundreds of millions of dollars](#) of state funding to improve remedial education (Basic Skills Initiative, Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation grants).