

# OPTIMIZING STUDENT SUCCESS

## A Report on Placement in English and Mathematics Pathways

SEPTEMBER 2020

This report was prepared by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges Guided Pathways Task Force with consideration of feedback from various stakeholders throughout the California Community College System.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Faculty statewide should be commended for their efforts to implement AB 705 (Irwin, 2017), creating pathways, evaluating and improving instructional methods, and designing support structures for their students. Successful implementation of AB 705, now statute in California Education Code section 78213, requires continuous evaluation and quality improvement, using a holistic approach considering the many variables that contribute to student success. Now more than ever, community colleges must recognize their student populations and their mission to successfully enable all students to reach their educational goals.

The California Community College system is the largest and most diverse community college system in the United States. As such, attending a California community college represents an effective mechanism for social justice, equity, social mobility, and economic health. Key in students realizing their chosen educational goals is proper placement into appropriate coursework in each student's self-determined pathway to optimize student success, increasing throughput for the institution, increasing the student's probability of success, and decreasing the student's probability of not completing the goal. In order to support this important mission, AB 705 was enacted with a goal of ensuring that prepared students did not face undue barriers to their educational goals and specifically were not placed into remedial education unless they were highly unlikely to succeed in transfer-level coursework. Furthermore, AB 705 aims to close equity and achievement gaps.

As stated in the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) Vision for Success, "With low tuition and a longstanding policy of full and open access, the CCCs are designed around a remarkable idea: that higher education should be available to everyone. The CCCs are equally remarkable for their versatility. They are the state's primary entry point into collegiate degree programs, the primary system for delivering career technical education and workforce training, a major provider of adult education, apprenticeship, and English as a Second Language courses, and a source of lifelong learning opportunities for California's diverse communities" (California Community Colleges, 2016).

Using a variety of placement methods including the Chancellor's Office default placement rules (AB 705 Default Placement Rules, 2018), colleges have reported an increase in the number of students placed into and enrolling in transfer-level English and mathematics. The overall number of students succeeding in transfer-level English and mathematics has also increased. However, early evidence indicates at least two areas of concern: first, far fewer students are enrolled in any credit English or mathematics course statewide; second, the numbers of students who are not successful have increased, particularly in historically disproportionately impacted student populations, such as some ethnic groups, foster youth, EOPS and CalWORKs. Equity or achievement gaps are showing a trend of increasing for most ethnic groups compared to the white non-Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups. Data from transfer-level English shows increased throughput and yet also suggests opportunities to improve strategies to optimize success for all students. Data on transfer-level mathematics shows increased enrollment and success, particularly in contextualized pathways for areas such as behavioral science statistics and liberal studies math, but shows decreased enrollment in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and decreased success in STEM related coursework.

The data analysis indicates three primary areas of concern:

- The overall decrease in students enrolled in any math and English, which are basic building blocks for higher education success;
- Growing equity gaps in successful completion of courses for every ethnic group other than white non-Hispanic and Asian; and
- Major equity gaps in success and throughput for some special populations, including Foster Youth, CalWORKs, DSPS, and others.

Some questions that colleges might consider in the evaluation and improvement of their placement protocols are as follows:

- Should certain placement considerations, particularly within disproportionately impacted populations, be more carefully examined to optimize student success?
- How should decreasing success rates—whether in basic skills, college-level, or transfer-level course work—be analyzed, and how are they being addressed?
- How do colleges balance considerations for throughput with other student outcome variables such as success rates, unsuccessful attempt consequences, retention, and persistence?
- What are the specific factors that influence transfer or basic skills success that can be identified within special population strategies such as Puente, EOPS, Umoja, and DSPS to better optimize success and reduce equity and achievement gaps?
- What has occurred regarding Statistics and Liberal Arts Mathematics (SLAM) and STEM mathematics enrollment and success, and are any implications apparent for specific student populations?
- Do opportunities exist to innovate and serve students—particularly those traditionally underserved—with tailored guidance and support to optimize success from an individual student perspective?
- How are full-time and part-time students served with newly designed pathways and placement protocols?