




# DON'T HOLD US BACK:

## The Impact of Remediation in Central Valley Community Colleges



The insights of students into their lived experiences of remediation must shape how legislators and community college leaders make effective decisions about remedial education reform. To support equitable, student-informed decision-making, The Education Trust—West hosted five focus groups with Black and Latinx California Community College students to learn about their experiences in remedial courses and in transfer-level courses with corequisite support. Here we share students' perspectives on 1) the academic and social supports they found impactful, 2) how remedial courses and transfer-level courses with corequisites impacted their opinions of themselves and their campuses, and 3) improvements to remediation that would help more community college students graduate.

### Research Shows Transfer-Level Courses and Corequisite Support Improve Student Success More Than Remedial Courses

The focus group data are clear: remedial courses are ineffective at helping students earn degrees and transfer to four-year colleges in a timely way. This finding echoes prior research showing that **remedial courses, in fact, decrease students' ability to reach these educational milestones.**<sup>1,8</sup> Research also finds that students who start directly in transfer-level courses have the best chance of successfully completing English and math transfer-level courses compared to those who start in remedial courses.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, transfer-level courses offered with simultaneous corequisite support have been shown to *increase* completion of transfer-level courses for students who need additional assistance.<sup>3</sup>

## Glossary:

**Remedial Courses:** Preparatory reading, writing, and math courses that do not transfer to a four-year university. In math, these courses typically repeat K-12 content, sometimes as elementary as arithmetic.

**Transfer-Level Courses:** Courses that receive credit toward a baccalaureate degree upon transfer to a four-year university.

**Corequisite Models:** An alternative to traditional remedial prerequisites, corequisite models enable students to begin directly in a transfer-level course with additional support. Corequisite support typically involves added class hours, where the same instructor provides guidance, practice, and scaffolding to help students achieve the higher-level learning outcomes (e.g., review of foundational math concepts and skills in the context of statistics or precalculus).

## Prevalence of Remediation in the Central Valley:<sup>4</sup>

### Access to Transfer-Level Courses:

- ▶ In recent years, Central Valley community colleges have increased access to transfer-level courses. Most Central Valley community colleges — 12 out of 14 — provide “higher access” (91% or higher) or “medium access” (between 68% and 91%) to transfer-level courses (Fall 2020).<sup>5</sup>

### Remedial Course Enrollment:

- ▶ Is it important to note that, unfortunately, a college can both facilitate high access to transfer-level courses and still trap students in remedial courses.
- ▶ Between 38% and 40% of first-time math students started in remedial courses at Central Valley community colleges that provide “low access” (68% or lower) to transfer-level courses.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ In contrast, no first-time math students enrolled in remedial courses at Central Valley community colleges that provide “higher access” to transfer-level courses (Fall 2020).<sup>5</sup>

### Completion of Transfer-Level Courses for Black and Latinx Students:

- ▶ While completion rates for Black and Latinx students in transfer-level courses have increased in Central Valley community colleges since the passage of AB 705, they are still remarkably low.<sup>6</sup> Central Valley community colleges must tackle the systemic racism of excluding Black and Latinx students from opportunities; examine how instructor-level data impact success outcomes of Black and Latinx students; design curricula and pedagogy that engage and promote successful outcomes for Black and Latinx students; and provide holistic supports that will help Black and Latinx students thrive.

#### Black students:

Pre-AB 705 (2016-2017), **2% of all Black first-year students** enrolled in both transfer-level math and English completed those courses.<sup>6</sup>

Post-AB 705 (2020-2021), **5% of all Black first-year students** enrolled in both transfer-level math and English completed those courses.<sup>6</sup>

#### Latinx students:

Pre-AB 705 (2016-2017), **5% of all Latinx first-year students** enrolled in both transfer-level math and English completed those courses.<sup>6</sup>

Post-AB 705 (2020-2021), **10% of all Latinx first-year students** enrolled in both transfer-level math and English completed those courses.<sup>6</sup>

Definitions adapted from [California Acceleration Project](#) and [Public Advocates](#) in their 2020 report *“Still Getting There: How California’s AB 705 is (and is not) Transforming Community College Remediation and What Needs to Come Next.”*<sup>8</sup>



## What students are saying:

Students reported that remedial courses cost them additional money, negatively impacted their mental health and academic confidence, and delayed their degree completion and transfer goals. What's more, they reported that it threatened their ability to graduate. In contrast, students reported greatly appreciating corequisites in transfer-level courses, including opportunities for individualized support from faculty, as well as chances to work with other students, gain study skills, and receive credit for their efforts. While they generally had positive experiences in corequisite classes, the students we spoke to were presented with limited corequisite course offerings and desired more virtual or online opportunities.

### Remedial courses impact students time-to-degree

“...remedial classes take a longer period...  
they shouldn't take a longer period.”

—Betsey

“...I had to take more classes because of the  
remedial course sequence... feel cheated  
...[remedial courses] don't count for credit.”

—Bob

### Students liked corequisites in transfer-level courses

“[faculty and staff] were willing and ready to  
educate. I was able to learn preparation for  
college. Build up confidence. Prepared in the  
forms of tests that could come my way...”

—Bob

### Remedial courses negatively impact students' mental health

“Tell students ... those in remedial classes  
need to be mentally sound... because it is a  
lot more stressful and draining... can lead  
to a lot of sadness and depression.”

—Bob

To ensure confidentiality, each participant has been given a pseudonym  
(a name other than their real name).

## Concurrent Support in Transfer-Level Courses:

- ▶ Central Valley community colleges need to do more to encourage and enable their students to enroll in and complete transfer-level courses. So long as they continue to enroll them in remedial courses, community colleges decrease their students' likelihood of completion. Instead, they should provide students with concurrent support in transfer-level courses. Latinx and Black students in math corequisite models are three times more likely to successfully complete a transfer-level course compared to starting remedial, below transfer-level course.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Central Valley community colleges should increase the number of transfer-level math courses with corequisite supports instead of remedial courses. In fall 2020, only 19% of first-time math students started in corequisite models at Central Valley community colleges.<sup>5</sup>

## Bright Spot:

- ▶ Porterville College and College of the Sequoias are Central Valley bright spots.<sup>7</sup> The campuses offer no stand-alone remedial courses and have achieved [100% access to transfer-level courses](#).

## Recommendations:

The Legislature, the Governor, the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), and campus leaders have the ability and responsibility — to take actions that ensure California forever removes the unnecessary hurdle of remediation from students' college experiences. The Education Trust-West recommends that:

- ▶ **California must implement *Assembly Bill 1705 (Irwin)*.** AB 1705 seeks to strengthen AB 705 by clarifying the law's intent to ensure students are directly enrolled in transfer-level courses, thereby maximizing the probability of a student completing transfer-level math and English course within one year to achieve their degree and transfer goals.
- ▶ **Campus leaders utilize the \$64 million California Budget investment (Equitable Placement and Completion Grant Program) to support the implementation of equitable placement and completion policies (AB 705 Chapter 745, Statutes of 2017) and expand high-impact corequisites that support student success in transfer-level coursework.** Specifically, in order to support student success, campuses should offer corequisites that provide embedded tutors, a culturally-affirming instructional approach, and a sense of belonging. The corequisites should validate and affirm students' experiences and leverage equity-minded pedagogy, policies, and grading to meet the diverse needs of students. Campus leaders should also explore corequisite models that include a low number of units, a low number of hours, or zero-unit options.

## Endnotes:

1. Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness. A Brief History of Developmental Education Reform. Retrieved from: <https://postsecondaryreadiness.org/research/history-developmental-education-reform/>.
2. The RP Group. Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP) Summary of Methodology for English and Math Phase II Rule Sets and AB 705 Adjustments. Retrieved from: <https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/MultipleMeasures/Publications/MMAPInfographicWebVersion.pdf>.
3. For instance, students with a Grade Point Average of less than 2.3 receiving corequisite support in a transfer-level course are five times more likely to complete transferable statistics than their peers placed one level below transfer level (45% vs. 8%). Retrieved from: <https://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Getting-There-II-FINAL.pdf>.
4. Cal Pass Plus LaunchBoard Region Explanation. The California Community Colleges regions were broken down using the seven macroregions identified for the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. They include: Bay Area, Central Valley-Mother Lode, Inland Empire-Desert, Los Angeles-Orange County, North-Far North, San Diego-Imperial, and South Central Coast. Retrieved from: <https://www.calpassplus.org/CalPassPlus2.0/Media/Launchboard/region-explanation.pdf>.
5. Public Policy Institute of California. (2021). Community College Math in California's New Era of Student Access. Retrieved from: <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/1221mmr-appendix.pdf>.
6. California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. Cal-PASS Plus Student Success Metrics Cohort View. Retrieved from: <https://www.calpassplus.org/Launchboard/Student-Success-Metrics-Cohort-View>
7. The Education Trust—West. (2021). Mapping the Equitable Implementation of AB 705. Retrieved from: <https://westedtrust.org/mapping-the-equitable-implementation-of-ab-705>
8. Hern, K., Snell, M., and Henson, L. (2020). Still Getting There: How California's AB 705 Is (and Is Not) Transforming Remediation and What Needs to Come Next. Sacramento, CA: Public Advocates. Retrieved from: [https://accelerationproject.org/Portals/0/Documents/Still\\_Getting\\_There\\_Final.pdf](https://accelerationproject.org/Portals/0/Documents/Still_Getting_There_Final.pdf)

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