

Propelling Student Success: An Equitable Course Placement and Completion Checklist for California Community Colleges



In recent years, California's community colleges implemented course and placement reforms, also known as remediation/developmental education reform, that kept more students on the path to a college degree through big gains in the completion of transferable college-level English and math coursework across all demographic groups. But the work is not done. It will require administrators, faculty, and staff across the campuses to work together to help community college students, especially Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, Asian American, and Native American students, to thrive in class and achieve their educational dreams.

California Community College leaders, faculty, and staff can use this checklist to implement equitable course placement and completion policies. Based on recent legislation, research from the field, and guidance from the Community College Chancellor's Office, this checklist includes three key principles and associated checklists that provide clear, actionable strategies for achieving the promise of recent legislative reforms for equitable course placement and completion.¹

Key Principles:

1. Ensure that all students begin English and math coursework in transferable, college-level courses that position them to satisfy requirements for their degrees, programs, or majors.
2. Provide concurrent academic assistance, (and other assistance) to support students' progress toward their goals.
3. Prioritize race-conscious and equity-minded practices inside and outside of the classroom.

Principle 1: Ensure that all students begin English and math coursework in transferable, college-level courses that position them to satisfy requirements for their degrees, programs, or majors.

- Coursework that counts:** Class schedules should reflect the expectation that students with an academic goal start in transfer-level English and math/quantitative reasoning courses.
- Placement for English as a Second Language (ESL) students:** English language learners with an academic goal who graduated from a U.S. high school should start in transferable, college-level English courses. For those without a U.S. high school diploma, ESL placement should be based on multiple measures (e.g., high school coursework, high school grades, and high school grade point average).
- Math offerings aligned to students' courses of study:** Students should start in transfer-level math or quantitative reasoning courses that count toward their intended certificate, degree, or major (e.g., statistics courses for humanities majors and calculus for engineering students), including options in other departments (e.g., statistics taught in the psychology department).

Principle 2: Provide concurrent academic assistance, and other assistance, to support students' progress toward their goals.

- Embedded or linked support:** Colleges must provide targeted concurrent learning support, such as corequisites or support-enhanced transfer-level courses, instead of preparatory courses that do not count toward the students' degree or program, including ESL support for English language learners in college composition courses.
- Proactive holistic supports:** Colleges should use early alert systems to identify students who are struggling academically and provide timely holistic support, including basic needs support, counseling, mental health, and financial aid support, on-campus racial affinity groups (i.e., UMOJA, A2MEND, and PUENTE), and mentorship opportunities.

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Principle 3: Prioritize race-conscious, equity-centered practices inside and outside of the classroom.

- Race-conscious goals:** Establish race-conscious goals at all levels to improve outcomes for students of color, including departments, programs, and individual faculty.
- Disaggregated data:** All levels of the college, including departments, programs, and individual faculty, should use disaggregated data to identify and address racial inequities.
- Anti-racist classroom policies and culture:** Create classroom cultures that support all students through a growth orientation (i.e., a belief that talent and ability can be developed) and anti-racism (by infusing anti-racism and equity in course goals, learning outcomes, course design and course content). Faculty should use culturally responsive and inclusive class policies, curriculum and teaching practices, and best practices for equitable grading.
- Diverse hiring:** College leaders should hire diverse faculty in clusters (i.e., multiple faculty hired at the same time) to teach transfer-level English and math/quantitative reasoning courses comprised of equity-minded instructors committed to serving racially diverse communities.
- Professional development:** Faculty and staff should receive implicit bias training for and participate in communities of practice to support the adoption of research-backed, equity-driven teaching practices.

The legislation behind the reforms:

- Assembly Bill 705 (2017):** AB 705 ended placement testing and instead sets standards for placement based on high school transcript data to maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within one year.
- Assembly Bill 1805 (2017):** As a condition for receipt of Student Equity and Achievement funding, this law required community colleges to provide public notice of placement policies and to report placement data to the chancellor's office annually.
- Assembly Bill 1705 (2022):** This law addressed issues impeding the equitable implementation of AB 705 and provided greater protections from placement policies and enrollment practices that hamper students' progress
- Equitable Placement and Completion Grant:** Established in the 2022 Budget Act, this one-time \$64 million allocation to community colleges was intended to ensure that they implement equitable placement and completion policies and practices fully.

Recommended Resources:

Chancellor's Office memos, implementation guides and other resources for equitable placement and completion <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/equitable-placement/resources>

Chancellor's Office transfer-level gateway completion dashboard <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/transfer-level-dashboard>

The RP Group's statewide placement validation studies https://rpgroup.org/RP-Projects/All-Projects/Multiple-Measures/AB705_Resources

California Acceleration Projects publications <https://accelerationproject.org>

Dadgar, M.; Riggs, S.; Hodara, M.; & Buck, D. (2023). Counting on Math Faculty: Examining the role of Faculty and Instructional Practices in Students' Gateway Math Success. Education Equity Solutions. <https://www.edequitysolutions.com/counting-on-math-faculty>

Wood, L., & Harris, F. (2023). Equity-Minded Faculty Hiring Practices. The Campaign for College Opportunity. <https://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2023-Inclusive-Hiring-Practices-FINAL-compressed.pdf>

Endorsed by:



Endnotes

1 In this context equitable course placement and completion means (a) removing an unnecessary obstacle to college success known as remedial courses by ensuring students of color are not placed in remedial English or math courses; (b) students of color are placed in English and math transfer-level courses that aligned with their intended major, certificate, degrees, and transfer requirements; (c) and student of color are supported with completing transfer-level courses, which serve as critical stepping stones to make progress and achieve their educational goals.

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