Acceleration Strategies that Produce Powerful Results

A Planning Resource for Community Colleges

Under California's AB770 and the Basic Skills Outcomes Transformation Program, $60 million of new state funds have been allocated to increase completion among students designated underprepared for college. The funds support colleges to implement evidence-based practices that substantially increase student completion of transfer-level courses in English and math or an industry-recognized certificate or degree. This brief is intended to help colleges build their plans.

While basic skills sequences were developed to help students be successful, they are having the unintended consequence of weeding many out of college. The more remedial courses students are required to take, the lower their completion of transferable English and math. Statewide, just 7% of students placed three or more levels below college math go on to complete a transferable course within three years.[1] Students of color are disproportionately impacted because they are more likely to be placed into lower levels of remediation.[2] Our traditional approach is clearly not serving its intended purpose.

The California Acceleration Project is working with 61 colleges to implement three high leverage strategies that accelerate students' progress, substantially increase student completion of transferable, college-level English and math courses, and narrow equity gaps. The evidence from California and other states makes clear that students are not nearly as "unprepared" as we have believed. By changing our approach to placement and remediation, community colleges can help many more students to complete math and English requirements and build momentum toward their longer-term goals.

High Leverage-Strategies for Increasing Student Completion of Transferable, College-Level English and Math Courses

1. **Changing Placement Policies:** Colleges broaden access to transfer-level courses, and make access more equitable, by adjusting cut scores, using robust multiple measures, and requiring algebra-based testing and remediation only for access to courses that require substantial algebra.

2. **Implementing Co-Requisite Models:** Students classified as "below transfer level" are allowed to enroll in a transfer-level course with extra concurrent support, saving them at least a semester of stand-alone remediation and reducing their chances of dropping out (e.g., "1A-plus" models: students co-enroll in English 1A and 2 additional units with the same instructor).

3. **Redesigning Remedial Courses:** Multi-level sequences in English and math are replaced with accelerated courses that are well-aligned with the transfer-level requirements in students' chosen pathway.

THE IMPACT:
RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Strategy #1: Changing Placement Policies

Colleges broaden access to transfer-level courses, and make access more equitable, by adjusting cut scores, using robust multiple measures, and requiring algebra-based testing and remediation only for access to courses that require substantial algebra.

The Community College Research Center has found that a large number of students placed into remediation could have been successful if allowed to enroll directly in college-level courses. Studying a large, urban community college system, CCRC researchers estimated that:

- 61% of entering students could succeed in college English if allowed to enroll directly (19% were eligible under existing policies)

- 50% of entering students could succeed in college math if allowed to enroll directly (25% were eligible under existing policies)[3]

The CA Multiple Measures Assessment Project found that 72% of community college students could be placed into college English with an average grade of C+ using these multiple measures: 1) overall high school GPA 2.7 or higher, OR 2) C in AP English, OR 3) GPA 2.3 or higher and 12th grade English course B- or higher.[4]

At California community colleges that doubled and quadrupled student access to college English (Butte, Long Beach):

- Success rates in college English courses remained steady

- Completion of college English was 1.6 to 3 times higher for all students

- Students of color saw the greatest gains and equity gaps narrowed substantially[5][6]

Assessment validation studies had failed to detect the large number of students inappropriately placed into remediation at these colleges.

In the Virginia Community College system, completion of college-level math tripled after implementation of a pathways approach to placement, with different competencies required for students pursuing different majors (e.g., liberal arts vs. STEM).[7]

Investigating Local Placement Policies

What % of incoming students qualify for direct access to transfer-level English and math? How does this vary by race/ethnicity? Is your college in compliance with state guidelines on disproportionate impact? (Access for students of color should be no lower than 80% of white students' access.)

To what extent are multiple measures used in placement, especially overall high school GPA? Do multiple measures apply to only a narrow band of students near the cut score, or do they provide an alternative way to access transfer-level courses (e.g. students qualify by test scores OR overall high school GPA of 2.7 or higher)?

Is a student's educational goal part of math placement? Are algebra tests blocking access to courses that require little to no algebra? (e.g, College Statistics)
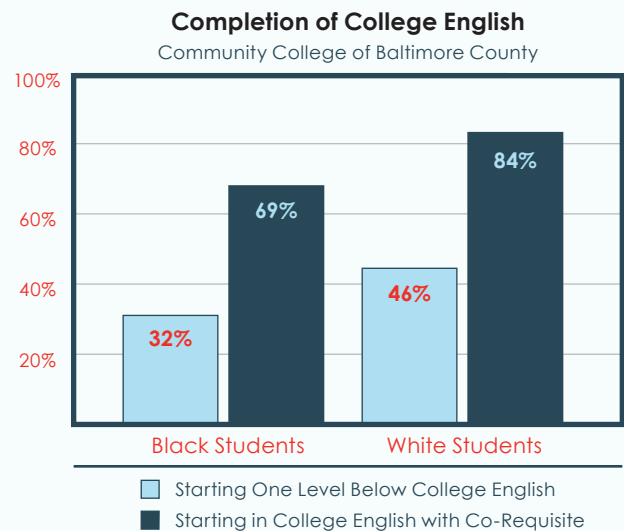
Strategy #2: Implementing Co-Requisite Models

Students classified as "below transfer level" are allowed to enroll in a transfer-level course with extra concurrent support, saving them at least a semester of stand-alone remediation and reducing their chances of dropping out (e.g., "1A-plus" models: students co-enroll in English 1A and 2 additional units with the same instructor).

Co-requisite models are producing such dramatic gains in completion of college-level courses that several states are implementing them system-wide (Tennessee, Colorado, Indiana, Virginia).

At four colleges offering co-requisite models, completion of college English was 1.6 to 2.3 times higher than in traditional remediation, increasing from 38-50% to 62-78%. Equity gaps for Black and Hispanic students narrowed or disappeared completely.[8]

CUNY's large randomized controlled experiment allowed students placed into elementary algebra to bypass remediation and enroll directly in college Statistics with supplemental instruction. The majority of students passed, and pass rates were nearly 20 percentage points higher than the control group enrolled in elementary algebra.[9]

Completion of College English
Community College of Baltimore County

- Black Students: 32% (Starting One Level Below College English), 69% (Starting in College English with Co-Requisite)
- White Students: 46% (Starting One Level Below College English), 84% (Starting in College English with Co-Requisite)

Legend:
☐ Starting One Level Below College English
■ Starting in College English with Co-Requisite

Descriptive data from the Community College of Baltimore County from CCRC study of 572 students in co-requisite model between F '07 and F '11. Students followed for at least one year after enrollment.[10]

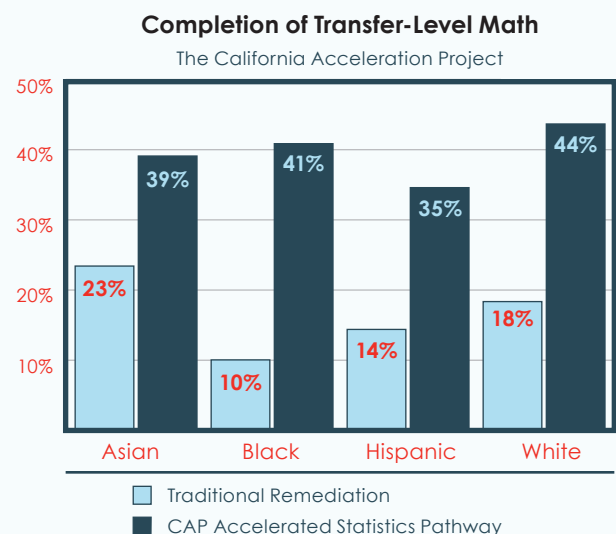## Strategy #3: Redesigning Remedial Courses

Multi-level remedial sequences in English and math are replaced with accelerated courses that are well aligned with the transfer-level requirements of students' chosen pathway.

At the first 16 colleges offering redesigned remediation with CAP, the RP Group found that students' odds of completing transferable courses were:

- 2.3 times higher in effective accelerated English pathways
- 4.5 times higher in accelerated statistics pathways

Further, all students benefitted from accelerated remediation, including all ethnic groups and placement levels, ESL students, students with low GPAs, and students with disabilities.[11]

At 26 colleges in the Carnegie Foundation's national Statway program, completion of transfer-level math more than tripled in half the time (49% in one year vs. 15% in two years).[12]

Completion of Transfer-Level Math
The California Acceleration Project

- Asian: 23% (Traditional Remediation), 39% (CAP Accelerated Statistics Pathway)
- Black: 10% (Traditional Remediation), 41% (CAP Accelerated Statistics Pathway)
- Hispanic: 14% (Traditional Remediation), 35% (CAP Accelerated Statistics Pathway)
- White: 18% (Traditional Remediation), 44% (CAP Accelerated Statistics Pathway)

Legend:
☐ Traditional Remediation
■ CAP Accelerated Statistics Pathway

Descriptive data on CAP statistics pathways from RP Group researchers Hayward and Willett. N = 653 accelerated students followed for 1.5-2 years.[13]

WHY ACCELERATION?

One Student's Story

City College of San Francisco student Lulu Matute was born in Chicago to Honduran immigrant parents. Though she had passed all her high school math requirements, she took a year off after graduating and her math skills got rusty. She didn't realize the high stakes of the placement test, didn't prepare for it, and was assigned to the lowest remedial level. When she met with a counselor to create an education plan, Lulu saw that this placement meant she'd have to be at CCSF for three to three and a half years. Enrolling in the first course left her further demoralized.

> "A lot of the problems were very grade school," she recalls. "I remember my professor told us it was OK if we needed to draw dots to help us count. In high school, I had taken trigonometry, I had taken algebra and geometry, but here I was in college counting dots."

Lulu was thrilled to discover the accelerated statistics pathway that CCSF had launched the year before. It was a perfect fit for her major, political science, and it not only reduced her time in remediation, it enabled her to finish her transfer requirements in two and a half years. She graduated CCSF with a GPA of 3.9.

Lulu was accepted into UC Santa Cruz, UC Santa Barbara, UCLA, and UC Berkeley. She plans to enroll at UC Berkeley in fall 2015, then go on to law school or graduate work in public policy. Ultimately, she sees herself running for public office.

Reflecting on her experience, Lulu remembers sitting in that lowest-level math class and looking around the room. "All the students in the class were students of color, students that looked like me." She said that they sometimes talked among themselves, wondering if there was something wrong with them. But taking the accelerated pathway and working with other student advocates, Lulu started to understand the problem differently. "It's not that we're not able to learn, not that we're not smart enough. The problem is the path."

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