

Equity in Access

Adult Learners and AB 1705

ISSUE

Assembly Bill 1705, the Student Success Act of 2012, authored by Seymour-Campbell, is having a negative impact on completion rates for adult learners. AB 1705 establishes additional regulations for equitable placement reform at the CCC by stipulating the way high school transcript data, whether formal or provided by the student, will be used to determine a student's placement and enrollment in English and mathematics courses at the CCC. AB 1705 has removed previously available remedies, particularly noncredit coursework, which could aid adult students who are not coming through the K-12 pipeline and may not have encountered college-level math for years or even decades.

REQUESTS

Advocate for a return of noncredit developmental education to support adult learners.

BACKGROUND

The positive causality between completing college-level English and math courses and degree completion rates is well established and well known in higher education.

Students who complete college-level math and English (particularly in their first year of study) tend to complete their degrees at a much higher rate than students who struggle to complete these courses. For decades, to aid students in the completion of their college-level math and English courses, colleges offered developmental ed courses (courses that help students build up to college level math by filling in gaps in their knowledge of arithmetic and other basic math). These classes were popular, but mostly they were offered for credit and were therefore rightfully criticized for adding costs to a student's college education for credits that did not count towards their degree. For this reason, amongst a multitude of others, legislation was enacted in the form of AB 1705 that prohibited developmental course requirements, and then later in AB 1705, which severely limited developmental education, even via noncredit, though these remedies did not add additional costs to students as they can be offered tuition free.

For K-12 pipeline students, the effects of this legislation have been positive, but that has not been the case for adult learners, who come to higher education not directly

from a K-12 school, but rather after years or even decades of having sat in a classroom. Looking at recent data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office from the 2021-22 academic year, first year completion rates of transfer-level English, only 12% adult learners (ages 25 and older) successfully completed their course (compared to 42% of K-12 pipeline students), with math following a similar pattern as K-12 students outperform adult learners by 21 percentage points, leaving adult learning hovering around a 5% success rate in transfer-level math.

AB 1705 makes very few exceptions in allowability for developmental ed fixes, but one that certainly should be added is noncredit developmental education for adult learners, who are quickly being left behind by their K-12 counterparts, who having just recently graduated from high school are better versed in pre-college math than adult learners who may have spent their time having a career, raising kids, or both, before returning to the college classroom. Providing this option could provide a means for these students to be more successful in transfer-level math and English without incurring any additional costs to them.