

# Equity in Access



## Adult Learners

### ISSUE

Assembly Bill 1705, the Student Success Act of 2012, is having a negative impact on completion rates for adult learners. AB 1705 establishes additional regulations for equitable placement reform within the California Community Colleges system 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. 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.

### LEGISLATIVE ACTION

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 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 educational 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 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 largely been



positive, but that has not been the case for adult learners, who come to higher education not directly from K-12 schools, but rather after years, or even decades, after having been in a classroom. Many of these students raised children, had careers, but at some point, decided to return to college, only to find the support structures that existed to help nontraditional learners were no longer there. Looking at data from the California Community Colleges State Chancellor's Office from the 2021-22 academic year, first-year completion rates of transfer-level English of adult learners ages 25 and older was 12 percent compared to 42 percent of K-12 pipeline

students. Math follows a similar configuration as K-12 students outperform adult learners by 21 percentage points, leaving adult learning hovering around a five percent success rate in transfer-level math.

Assembly Bill 1705 makes few exceptions in allowability for developmental education fixes, but one that certainly should be added is noncredit developmental education for adult learners. This option could provide a means for later-in-life students to be more successful in transfer-level math and English without incurring any additional costs on them.

