English as a Second Language at California’s Community Colleges

An Early Examination of AB 705 Reforms

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California’s future is tied to the success of English Learners

- California Community Colleges (CCCs) educate a large number of English Learners with a wide range of goals
  - About one-third of all ELs intend to pursue a degree or transfer to a four-year college

- English proficiency is related to economic mobility

- Effective and equitable English as a Second Language (ESL) pathways at the CCCs are key
  - ESL placement policies and lengthy ESL course sequences can create barriers to degree- and transferring-intending students
Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705) mandates equity-centered reforms to ESL placement and curricula

- Requires colleges to maximize the probability that ESL students complete transfer-level English within three years
- Requires colleges to use high school records as the primary criteria for ESL placement
- Clarifies that ESL is distinct from remediation in English
- Implementation of AB 705 ESL reforms began in fall 2021
  - Delayed for a year by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic
Examining early implementation efforts can improve ESL reform

- PPIC assessed changes to ESL placement and course sequences in the first year of AB 705 implementation
  - College websites and documents
  - Student-level data from all 115 colleges
  - Interviews with ESL faculty and department chairs
- We find that AB 705 has led to remarkable changes to placement and credit ESL course sequences
- However, it is challenging to disentangle the effects of the pandemic from the impact of AB 705
The pandemic accelerated pre-existing enrollment challenges

Number of students enrolled in the fall term
ELs have several pathways to college composition

- **Transfer-level English (TLE):** The lowest-level English courses that are transferable to the University of California and/or to the California State University systems, based on articulation agreements.

- **Transfer-level English for ESL students (TLE-ESL):** Freshman composition courses offered by ESL departments and that also qualify as gateway courses.

- **Transfer-level English for Multilingual speakers (TLE-Multi):** TLE courses designed to provide additional language support for ELs in the classroom or through corequisite courses.
Colleges made great strides in implementing AB 705 despite COVID-19 challenges
Most colleges have moved away from standardized tests for ESL placement

Placement policies used by community colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAT, ACT, EAP, AP tests</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational background/English use survey</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other measures</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS data (self-reported or transcript)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved assessment test (incl. writing)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-placement</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided placement</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most ESL course sequences are now four levels or less.

Bar chart showing the percentage of colleges offering levels below transfer-level English from Fall 2021 and 2016–17.
Under AB 705, first-time ESL students are more likely to start one level below TLE

![Bar chart showing the percentage of first-time ESL students starting at different levels below transfer-level English for Fall 2021 and 2016–2017.]
Passing rates are higher in courses designed for ESL or multilingual students.

- TLE: First time 59, Continuing 49
- TLE-ESL: First time 70, Continuing 75
- TLE-Multi: First time 75, Continuing 77

Graph showing passing rates for different courses and student groups.
TLE-ESL passing rates are higher than TLE passing rates for all racial/ethnic groups

Passing rates for first-time students in transfer-level English
Outcomes vary across academic backgrounds and citizenship statuses

- US citizens are more likely to pass a standard TLE course
  - Passing rates are very similar for US high school graduates in TLE and TLE-ESL, and 7 to 8 percentage points higher in TLE-Multilingual

- Permanent residents and student visa holders are the most likely to pass TLE-ESL courses

- International high school graduates in TLE-Multilingual classes outperform those in TLE-ESL
Policy recommendations

- Expand access to college composition to all English Learners
- Monitor the validity and effectiveness of placement rules
- Make connections between ESL reforms and other systemwide initiatives
- Provide guidance and information to support ongoing implementation efforts
- Establish a longitudinal data system that identifies ELs across educational systems
Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.