

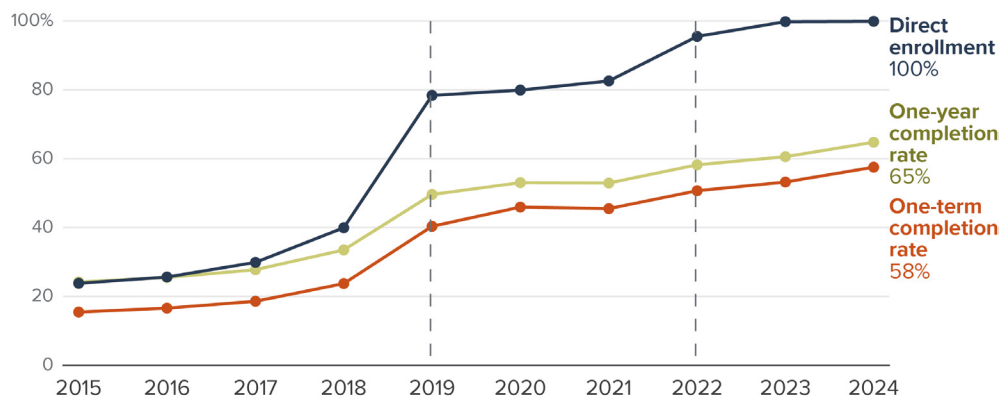
Has Universal Access to Transfer-Level Courses Changed Student Outcomes at California Community Colleges?

The California Community Colleges system began overhauling its placement and remediation policies and practices seven years ago, via the implementation of AB 705. How has this reform affected student success in transfer-level math, a key milestone on the path to college completion? And how have students' long-term outcomes changed? Our focus is on the years 2022 to 2024—by 2022, access to transfer-level courses was close to universal, and cohorts of students were starting college under AB 705.

Completion rates for transfer-level math courses have continued to improve

In fall 2024, 58% of first-time math students completed a transfer-level course in their first attempt, a 7 percentage point gain since fall 2022. Practically all students were enrolling directly in transfer-level math courses, so this increase was not driven by expanded access.

Completion of transfer-level math courses has continued to improve



Source: Authors' calculations using MIS data.

Notes: Fall cohorts of first-time math students.

Completion gains have varied across demographic groups. Latino and Black students saw much larger increases in one-term completion rates than their Asian and white peers. Completion rates among first-time math students aged 25 or older grew more sharply than rates among traditional-age students, and increases were slightly higher among women than men.

Recent improvements have been driven largely by statistics and liberal arts math (SLAM). In fall 2024, about six in ten first-time math students enrolled in SLAM courses, and SLAM completion rates increased by 5.4 percentage points, to 62%. Both corequisite courses and standalone sections saw improvements. We do not see similar increases among first-time math takers of transfer-level math courses leading to Calculus I (i.e., college algebra, trigonometry and precalculus).

Transfer rates to four-year colleges have risen

This is especially true for two-year outcomes. From 2019 to 2022, 11% of students transferred within two years of initial enrollment, 4.5 percentage point gain over the average rate from 2015 to 2018.

Here, too, gains have varied across demographic groups. Two-year transfer rates increased more for women vs. men, for traditional-age vs. older students, and for Asian vs. Latino and Black students.

Longer-term outcomes are better for students who pass transfer-level math in their first attempt. About a fifth (19%) of students who completed transfer-level math in their first attempt transferred within two years, versus only 4% of students who did not. Students who do not complete these courses on the first try are more likely to leave the system without transferring or earning degrees.

These outcomes have not worsened under AB 705. Two-year outcomes of students who successfully complete transfer-level math courses on the first try do not differ greatly from outcomes of successful students in pre-AB 705 cohorts—despite concerns about expanded access prompting instructors to dilute course content, leaving students unprepared for more advanced coursework.

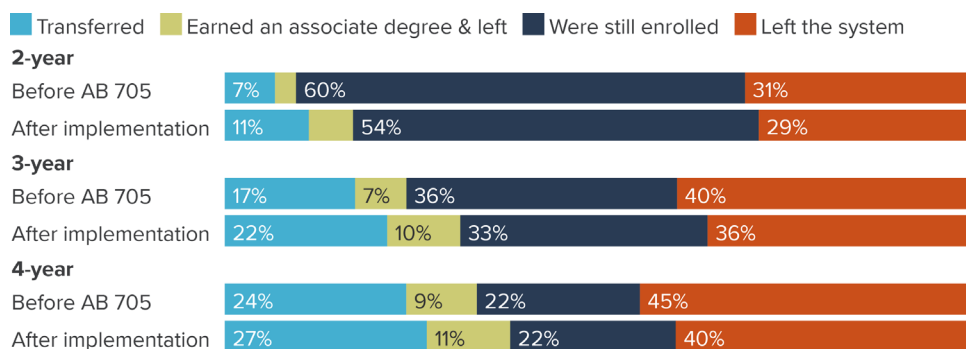
Longer-term outcomes improved for students with remedial needs. Specifically, 8% of students who started in math courses with concurrent remedial support transferred to a four-year institution within two years of initial enrollment, compared to just 3% of students who started in below-transfer-level courses.

Looking ahead

The improvement of short- and long-term outcomes in the years since AB 705 implementation is encouraging. However, more work is needed to increase the odds that students who do not successfully complete transfer-level math on the first try will persist and achieve their academic goals.

- ▶ College initiatives that address the academic and non-academic needs of students should be prioritized—of particular interest are programs that provide wraparound support, especially those modeled on effective evidence-based programs like [CUNY ASAP](#).
- ▶ Implementing well-designed corequisites should also play an important role. Some colleges are having great success with corequisite models, while other colleges are lagging far behind.
- ▶ The state’s \$64 million investment to support the implementation of AB 1705 may lead to additional improvements in student outcomes. Future research should examine how colleges have invested these funds, and how these investments impacted completion rates and racial/ethnic gaps.
- ▶ More research is needed on Calculus I, which has been debated [in the context of AB 1705](#), and has been more of a gatekeeper than a gateway to business and STEM majors. We need to see if an increase in students enrolling directly in and completing Calculus I is linked to increases in the number and diversity of students earning degrees and/or transferring to four-year colleges as BSTEM majors.

Students are more likely to earn degrees and transfer to 4-year colleges



Source: Authors’ calculations using MIS data.

Notes: Based on cohorts of first-time CCC students from fall 2015 to fall 2022. Restricted to degree/transfer-intending students who ever enrolled in a math course. In each time frame, we are comparing the same number of years before and after AB 705 implementation. See Technical Appendix A in the full report for more details.

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Source: Adapted by Mary Severance from [Has Universal Access to Transfer-Level Courses Changed Student Outcomes at California Community Colleges?](#) by Marisol Cuellar Mejia and Charlie Wigul.