AB 705 from Legislation to Action: How Board Support is Key to Implementation

By Pamela Haynes
Trustee, Los Rios CCD
Member, California Community College Trustee Board
Member, California Community Colleges Board of Governors

At its July 2017 meeting the Board of Governors approved the new strategic vision for the California Community College system. The vision focused on a number of overarching goals and commitments that were developed by a team of community college experts, who spent months reviewing research and gathering input from a wide array of policy makers, employers, college faculty and staff, social justice advocates and everyday Californians. A virtual town hall yielded more than 550 comments and suggestions.

The Vision for Success makes clear that a focus on getting every student to his or her defined objective will serve as the “North Star” guiding all reform efforts at every level: 1) increase credential obtainment by 20%, 2) increase transfers by 35%, 3) reduce the number of accumulated units from 87 to 79, 4) reduce the achievement gaps for historically under-represented students and students living in the rural parts of the state by 40 percent within 5 years and fully close the achievement gaps within 10 years.

AB 705 is key to this work and those defined goals. In addition, it should be noted that AB 705 was passed unanimously by the Legislature. It dramatically and positively changes the way that our colleges place students in math and English transfer-level courses. This new law will have the greatest near term positive impact on the Vision for Success goals, especially the goal of closing achievement gaps.

However, as important as your role is as trustee, it is also the key to ensuring that AB 705 is successfully implemented on your campuses. And as such, your “North Star” must be seen through an equity lens. Who will be served by the changes outlined in AB 705?

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This article summarizes a panel discussion from the League’s Annual Trustees Conference in May 2018. The panel focused on the implementation of AB 705, a new law governing placement and remediation for community college students. It included Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin, the bill’s author; Pamela Haynes, Trustee for the Los Rios Community College District and member of the Board of Governors for the California Community College System; Katie Hern, Chabot College English Instructor and Executive Director of the California Acceleration Project; and John Hetts, Senior Director of Data Science for Educational Results Partnership. AB 705 passed the California Legislature unanimously in 2017 and was signed into law by Governor Brown. To meet the Fall 2019 implementation deadline, curricular and policy changes will need to be put in place during the 2018-19 academic year.

What Trustees Need to Know

College of the Canyons student Andrés Salazar finished high school with a 4.0 GPA and an A in Algebra 2, but when he took the math placement test at College of the Canyons, he was assigned to an arithmetic class. This meant retaking up to four semesters of courses (two full years) that didn’t count toward a bachelor’s degree, repeating content he’d learned in grades K-12.

Salazar’s story was featured during a panel discussion at the League’s recent annual meeting for trustees to illustrate the problems AB 705 is intended to address. Fortunately, Salazar attended a college that used high school grades for placement. He was able to bypass remedial courses and enroll directly in College Statistics, where he earned an A, completed his math requirements in one semester instead of five, and proved that the placement test had massively underestimated his capacity.
“Using only placement tests to determine student access to courses has long held students back,” Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin said during the panel, explaining her goals as the author of AB 705. “We wanted to see the use of multiple measures, including high school grades and GPA, greatly expanded across the community college system.”

Irwin said that AB 705 is intended to ensure that college placement policies give students the best possible chance of completing English and math requirements for transfer.

“We know that some sequences lasting a year or more greatly reduce students’ chances of graduating because of the added financial cost, delayed timeline toward completion, and the burden of possibly taking classes that they passed already in high school.”

The goal of AB 705, said Irwin, was to build on the strong results at colleges already piloting placement and remediation reform across California. “Clearly, the vast majority of these students are capable of graduating and pursuing their careers.”

Under AB 705, colleges are prohibited from “requiring students to enroll in remedial English or mathematics coursework that lengthens their time to complete a degree unless placement research that includes consideration of high school grade point average and coursework shows that those students are highly unlikely to succeed in transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics.”

The law also builds on research showing that students are far more likely to complete transfer-level courses in English and math when allowed to enroll there directly instead of having to take remedial courses first. Under AB 705, colleges must ensure that students’ initial placement in English and math gives them the best possible chance of completing transfer-level requirements in a year — in other words, “maximize the probability that the student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe.”

Finally, AB 705 authorizes colleges to offer corequisite remediation, in which underprepared students “enroll in additional concurrent support, including additional language support for ESL students, during the same semester that they take the transfer-level English or mathematics course.”

AB 705 represents a sea change in the California community college system, but there is a large body of research supporting these reforms, said Katie Hern, an English Instructor at Chabot College and Executive Director of the California Acceleration Project, which helps colleges implement new models of placement and remediation.

Hern shared data from the math transformation at Cuyamaca College in the San Diego region. In 2016, the math department began using high school grades for placement and eliminated traditional remedial courses, replacing them with corequisite support models, including a corequisite model of College Statistics open to 100% of incoming students. In one year, completion of transfer-level math increased from 10% to 67% among students who previously would have taken remedial courses.
And as trustees, the issues of race, ethnicity and/or low economic status cannot be ignored but must be placed front and center in your discussions and deliberations.

It is critically important that your board places the status of AB 705 implementation on its agenda. Your leadership is critical to the success of implementing AB 705. And your public questions and inquiry is in itself impactful. There are several questions that you as trustees can and should ask:

1. How is the college planning to respond to AB 705 in English and math? As trustees you should watch for one of the common misinterpretations of the law – some faculty believe that all that faculty have to do is give students a one-year pathway, and that they are free to continue placing students into a course below the transfer-level. This ignores the language in the law about students' right to enroll in transfer-level courses unless research shows they are "highly unlikely" to succeed there; it also ignores the state Chancellor’s Office recent guidance and the research showing that placement below transfer substantially reduces students' chances of completing the transfer-level course.

2. Where is the college in developing co-requisite/concurrent support models for transfer-level courses? Some colleges have developed co-requisite courses below transfer-level math/English - these are ineffective and it is unlikely students could be placed into these courses under the law. We need to ensure that the support is provided concurrent to enrollment in transfer-level courses. Further, there should be multiple models of concurrent support in math, to serve students in different pathways – this includes Statistics with support, Quantitative Reasoning/Liberal Arts Math with support, College Algebra with support, Pre-Calculus with support, Business/Applied Calculus with support.

3. Is the college planning to use the default placement rules put out by the state Chancellor's Office? If not, please share the research showing that the placement rules do not infringe on students' right to be placed into courses that give them the best possible chance of completing transfer-level math and English within a year. To date, no research has identified a group of students whose completion would be higher if required to begin in a pre-transfer-level course. Given this, policies that deny students access to transfer-level courses should be scrutinized closely against the requirements of AB 705. This research should be quantitative and analyze students' high school grades, not simply a judgment call by faculty.

4. How is the college shifting enrollment offerings to expand sections of transfer-level courses and reduce sections of pre-transfer? How does the Fall 2019 schedule compare to Fall 2017, in the ratio of pre-transfer and transfer-level courses? There should be few, if any, sections of pre-transfer courses, since the research to date has not been able to identify students who can be placed into stand-alone remedial courses under the law.

5. Is the college planning to use guided and/or self-placement? If so, please describe how. Guided placement should not be a back-door way to ignore students' high school grades and continue placing them into basic skills. Even with guided placement, colleges are required to give students the best possible chance of completing a transfer-level course in one year. Guided placement policies should be scrutinized to ensure they do this.

6. What professional development is planned to help faculty support students' learning and success within transfer-level classes? Faculty have become accustomed to seeing only a very "filtered" population of students in transfer level courses – the small proportion who tested in, and those who survived the remedial sequences. The students they'll see after AB 705 will have a broader range of skills and typically be newer to college. Professional development will be useful to help faculty effectively reach the more heterogeneous student group.

Note: The ESL implementation deadline is going to be Fall of 2020. This will allow colleges more time to ensure that issues related to this population of students are addressed.
Congratulations to the Excellence in Trusteeship Program Graduates

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Marilynn Dunn Gustafson, Monterey Peninsula CCD
Sonia Lopez, Compton CCD
Marcia Milchiker, South Orange County CCD
Tami Nelson, Los Rios CCD
Mary Strobridge, San Luis Obispo County CCD

Recertified in 2018
Stephanie O’Brien, Marin CCD
Doug Otto, Long Beach CCD

UPCOMING LEAGUE EVENTS

Nov. 15-17, 2018 » Annual Convention, Westin Mission Hills, Rancho Mirage
Jan. 25-28, 2019 » Effective Trusteeship Workshop/Legislative Conference, Sacramento
March 1-3, 2019 » CEO Symposium, TBD
May 3-4, 2019 » Annual Trustees Conference, Resort at Squaw Creek
June 7-9, 2019 » CEO Leadership Academy, Granlibakken, Tahoe City
Among African American corequisite students, one-year completion of transfer-level math is now eight times higher than the state average (55% vs. 8%). For Hispanic students, completion is six times higher than the state average (65% vs. 11%).

Before AB 705, California had been lagging behind a number of other states in addressing the problems of remediation, said Hern. She shared data from states that replaced traditional remedial courses with corequisite remediation, including Tennessee, which implemented corequisite models across all community and technical colleges in 2015-16. Completion of college math increased from 12% to 55% statewide, more than a four-fold increase. Among students of color, completion was seven times higher.

So what will AB 705 mean in practice? Will colleges be able to exclude any students from transferable, college-level courses? John Hetts, Senior Director of Data Science for Educational Results Partnership, shared findings from the Multiple Measures Assessment Project, an ongoing, systemwide research collaboration between the RP Group and ERP which has analyzed transcript data from high schools and community colleges across California. The statewide analysis found that high school grades are far more predictive than standardized tests and that, like Andrés Salazar, hundreds of thousands of California’s students are being systematically underestimated every year.

In extending its analysis to address the criteria of AB 705, the MMAP group has found that all students – even those with the lowest high school grades – have better outcomes when allowed to enroll directly in transfer-level courses. In transfer-level English, Statistics, and Business-STEM math courses, the lowest-performing students are 2-3 times more likely to complete transfer-level courses if they enroll directly in the course, even without additional support, than if they begin in a remedial, non-transferable course.

Board of Governors member Pamela Haynes stressed that AB 705 is essential to achieving the ambitious goals of the system’s “Vision for Success,” including increasing credential obtainment by 20%, increasing transfers by 35%, and eliminating achievement gaps for historically under-represented students and students living in the rural parts of the state within 10 years.

Haynes urged trustees to place AB 705 implementation on their board agendas, and she provided a list of questions trustees should ask to ensure strong local implementation (see page 7).

“Your leadership is critical to the success of implementing AB 705,” said Haynes. “You are going to have folks who will push against this or that element of the data or the guidance language. Don’t let that dissuade you, because the preponderance of research is so overwhelming that AB 705 is moving the system in the right direction. But more importantly, it is in the best interest of our students.”

5. https://spanningthedivide.completecollege.org/
8. http://rpgroup.org/All-Projects/ctl/ArticleView/mid/1886/articleId/118/Multiple-Measures-Assessment-Project-MMAP
Worksheet: Questions for Your Next Board Meeting on the Status of AB 705 Implementation

1. How is the college planning to respond to AB 705 in English and math?

2. Where is the college in developing co-requisite/concurrent support models for transfer-level courses?

3. Is the college planning to use the default placement rules put out by the state Chancellor's Office? If not, please share the research showing that the placement rules do not infringe on students' right to be placed into courses that give them the best possible chance of completing transfer-level math and English within a year.

4. How is the college shifting enrollment offerings to expand sections of transfer-level courses and reduce sections of pre-transfer? How does the Fall 2019 schedule compare to Fall 2017, in the ratio of pre-transfer and transfer-level courses?

5. Is the college planning to use guided and/or self-placement? If so, please describe how.

6. What professional development is planned to help faculty support students' learning and success within transfer-level classes?
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Jim Moreno
CCCT Board President

Larry Galizio
President & CEO
Community College League
of California

Carmen T. Sandoval
Editor
Director, Education Services and Leadership Development

(916) 444-8641 • www.ccleague.org
Questions/Comments
Email Carmen T. Sandoval at csandoval@ccleague.org