

February 5, 2016

L E G I S L A T I V E   A N A L Y S T ' S   O F F I C E

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YEARS OF  
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## **Overview of Community College Basic Skills Programs**

Presented to:  
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2  
On Education Finance  
Hon. Kevin McCarty, Chair





## **Background on California Community Colleges (CCC)**

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- Governed by 72 Local Governing Boards Operating a Total of 113 Colleges**
- System Overseen by State Board of Governors**
- Served 2.3 Million Students in 2014-15**
  - 54 percent of students are female, 46 percent male.
  - 57 percent are between 18 and 24 years of age.
  - 40 percent are Hispanic, 29 percent white, 11 percent Asian, 7 percent African American, 13 percent other.
  - Two-thirds of students are part-time (taking fewer than 12 units).
  - Nearly half receive need-based financial aid.
- Students Have Various Educational Goals**
  - Learn English (as a second language), citizenship skills, or basic reading, writing, and math skills.
  - Earn an occupational certificate or obtain other workforce training.
  - Earn an associate degree and/or prepare for transfer to a university.
- Open Access**



## What Is “Basic Skills” Education?

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### **Basic Skills Encompass Several Types of Courses**

- Foundational skills in reading, writing, math, and English as a second language (ESL), as well as tutoring, learning skills, and study skills.



### **Basic Skills Students Have Various Goals**

- Learning skills to improve employability and civic participation.
- Preparing for and succeeding in college-level courses.



### **Basic Skills Courses May Provide College Credit**

- May be offered for credit (typically reading, writing, and math) or noncredit (primarily ESL and tutoring). Most credit basic skills courses are not degree-applicable.



### **Terminology Has Varied Over Time**

- Historically called remedial education, now more commonly called basic skills, developmental, or foundational education.



## How Many Students Enter CCC Unprepared for College?

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### **Three-Quarters of First-Time Students Assessed as Unprepared**

- More than 150,000 incoming degree, certificate, or transfer-seeking students each fall are unprepared.
- Various factors contribute to high rate, including:
  - Many students did not fully master skills during prior schooling.
  - Some students mastered skills in past but have forgotten them.
  - Some students mastered skills but did not perform well on assessment.



### **11 Percent of CCC Enrollment Is in Basic Skills Courses**

- In 2014-15, basic skills English, math, tutoring, and study skills courses accounted for 6 percent of enrollment, while ESL and other subjects accounted for 5 percent.
- 28 percent of all English units taken at CCC were in basic skills English.
- 24 percent of all math units taken were in basic skills math.



### **Unprepared Students Are Less Likely to Graduate**

- Fewer than half of these students complete basic skills courses and enroll in college-level courses. Even fewer complete degrees, certificates, or transfer outcomes.



## How Do Community Colleges Teach Basic Skills?

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### **Traditional Approach Involves Sequences of Semester Courses**

- **Testing and Placement.** Based on a test result, colleges place students into a sequence of courses they must complete prior to enrolling in transferable college-level English or math courses.
- **Example of Course Sequence.** Arithmetic, Pre-Algebra, Elementary Algebra, Intermediate Algebra.
- **Focus on Skill Attainment.** Often involves repetitive drills and emphasis on correct procedures and answers.



### **Shortcomings of Traditional Approach**

- **Sequences Extend Time in School.** Students beginning three levels below transferable college courses must complete three semesters of remediation.
- **Teaching Method Criticized as Ineffective.** Does not necessarily promote conceptual understanding or provide relevant context to help students connect what they are learning to their broader educational or professional goals.



## How Do Community Colleges Teach Basic Skills?

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### Innovations in CCC Basic Skills Education

- ***Reforming Assessment and Placement Policies.*** Reforms include adopting tests that reflect the expectations of college-level programs and using multiple measures to direct more students to college-level courses.
- ***Accelerating Progress Toward College-Level Courses.*** Reforms include doubling up on courses, compressing sequences, and pairing college-level courses with extra supports.
- ***Other Major Innovations.*** These include contextualizing basic skills within academic or CTE programs; providing alternative math pathways; adopting national models for improving reading, writing, and student habits; and embedding student services into basic skills courses.



## Student Support Services for Basic Skills Students

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### Student Success and Support Program

- **Array of Services for New Students.** Core services include orientation; assessment; and counseling, advising, and other educational planning services.
- **More Targeted Services for Continuing Students.** Includes extra support for students who are in basic skills courses, have not declared a major, or are on academic probation.



### Student Success Courses

- Courses cover topics such as introduction to college expectations and support services, educational planning, study skills, time management, organizational skills, and academic and social support.



### Tutoring and Supplemental Instruction

- Tutors typically work one-on-one with students who come to them for help with problems or assignments.
- Supplemental instruction leaders attend all classes and lead student discussions outside of class about various course topics. They guide students to help each other discover solutions and achieve deeper understanding.
- Both tutors and supplemental instruction leaders may be working closely with counselors or instructors.



## How Does the State Support Basic Skills Education?

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### Apportionment Funding

- In 2015-16, the state provided more than \$400 million in apportionments for English, math, tutoring, and study skills courses.



### Basic Skills Initiative

- State has provided at least \$20 million annually since 2007-08 for this initiative (about 95 percent of funds distributed to colleges in proportion to basic skills enrollment, with remainder for statewide professional development activities).



### Two Grant Programs in 2015-16 Budget Package

- ***Community Colleges Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program (\$60 million)***. Will provide incentive grants for colleges to improve their basic skills practices over the next three years.
- ***Basic Skills Partnership Pilot Program (\$10 million)***. Will provide incentive grants for colleges to collaborate with high schools and California State University campuses in the delivery of basic skills instruction.



### Components of Other Programs

- Includes Student Success and Support Program, Student Equity Program, Institutional Effectiveness Initiative, Awards for Innovation, and several other student support categorical programs.





## Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program

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### **Seeks to Improve Student Outcomes by Changing Basic Skills Practices**

- Requires participating colleges to adopt or expand the use of evidence-based models of assessment and placement, remediation, and student support that accelerate students' progress toward:
  - Completing a college-level English or math course, or both, within a sequence of three or fewer courses.
  - Earning industry-relevant certificate or degree within two years.
- Aims for a progressively increasing share of students to achieve these outcomes within a shorter time period.
- Grants may support curriculum redesign, professional development, release time, and data collection and reporting. Statute encourages collaboration with school districts to improve student preparation.



## Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program

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### Identifies Six Evidence-Based Strategies

- Using multiple measures to assess and place students into English and math courses.
- Placing students directly into college-level courses with co-requisite basic skills instruction.
- Requiring students to master only those skills needed for their programs of study.
- Contextualizing remedial instruction to relate to students' programs of study.
- Integrating student support services with instruction.
- Developing shorter sequences for completion of a college-level English or math course by using technology, the above strategies, or other strategies and practices that the college can substantiate are effective.



## How Is the State Measuring the Effectiveness of Basic Skills Education?

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### Three Common Measures

- Successful completion of basic skills courses.
- Successful completion of college-level courses.
- Completion of certificates/degrees/transfer.

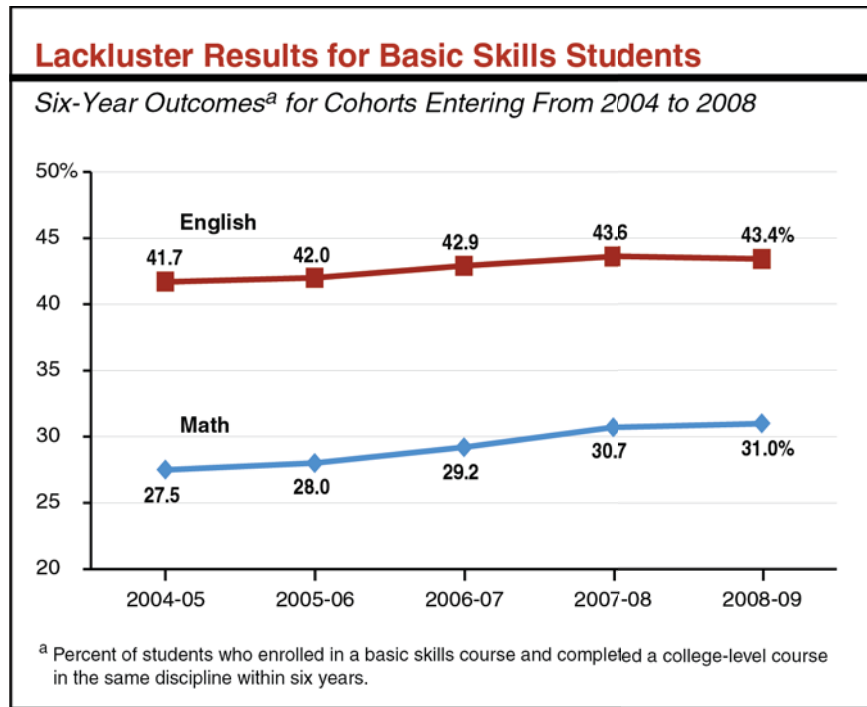


### Chancellor's Office Data Tools

- Basic Skills Cohort Tracker
- Student Success Scorecard
  - **Remedial Measure:** percent of students who enrolled in a basic skills course and completed a college-level course in the same discipline within six years.
  - **Completion Measure:** percent of degree, certificate, or transfer-seeking students who completed a degree, certificate, or transfer outcome within six years. Disaggregates results for college prepared and unprepared students.



## How Well Have State and Local Efforts Worked?



### Modest Increases in Transition to Transferable Courses

- Wide variation across colleges. Percent of basic skills students completing a college level course ranges from 19 percent to 73 percent in English and from 8 percent to 54 percent in math.



### Recent Decline in Completion Rate

- Completion of a degree, certificate, or transfer preparation increased slightly from the 2004-05 cohort to the 2006-07 cohort, but has declined slightly since then.
- Decline has occurred for both college-prepared and unprepared students (in part likely due to reduced course availability during recession), but prepared students continue to complete degrees at a far higher rate than unprepared students—70 percent compared to 39 percent, respectively, for students entering in 2008-09.



## How Well Have State and Local Efforts Worked?

*(Continued)*

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### **Evaluations of Basic Skills Initiative Reflect Some Successes but Limited Impact**

- Statewide professional development component has provided informational resources, workshops, and opportunities for faculty members to learn about and collaborate on successful practices.
- More than half of community colleges have participated in the California Acceleration Project to implement accelerated pathways in English, math, or both. Research on 16 pilot colleges showed large and robust increases in student completion of college-level courses.
- Dozens of colleges have participated in Reading Apprenticeship, Habits of Mind, and other projects based on national models for improving basic skills education.
- Initiative has supported many other successful interventions, but impacts have been limited by sparse adoption within and across community colleges.
- Early funding supported many small pilots that did not lead to institutional change. Since then, “easier” changes (such as expanding tutoring) have been more commonly adopted than more fundamental changes in design and delivery of courses.



## Issues for Legislative Consideration

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### **Fiscal Impact of Basic Skills Program Improvements**

- Aside from initial implementation costs, program transformation can involve reallocating existing resources from ineffective practices to more effective ones.
- Increasing student success rates can reduce cost per completion.



### **Challenges in Coordinating Multiple Initiatives**

- What can the Legislature do to ensure the many categorical programs supporting basic skills education are working well and in concert?
- In particular, how should the Basic Skills Initiative and the Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program interact?
- What is the best balance of central coordination versus local control?



### **Promoting Large-Scale Success**

- To date, basic skills categorical funding largely has supported experimentation, pilot programs, and small-scale reforms. How can the state ensure that future spending improves practices on a larger scale, whether for an academic department, college, district, or statewide?
- Should a portion of the Basic Skills Initiative allocation for colleges hinge on improvements in their outcomes for basic skills students?