Improving Course Access and Enrollment

*Virginia colleges improve accuracy of placement exams by aligning college-level math learning outcomes to student needs*

The need to improve access to college-level courses for underprepared students prompted the Virginia Community College system to redesign its developmental math programs. To improve the accuracy of course placement, VCCS also created the Virginia Placement Test-Math (VPT). This exam improved alignment with the learning outcomes of multiple mathematics pathways at the college-level and assessed student proficiency in math following nine content modules. Students were placed into mathematics courses based on their majors and skill in specific module content. Importantly, students in the Liberal Arts and programs that did not require Calculus were not required to demonstrate mastery of concepts traditionally taught in Intermediate Algebra courses. The report finds that students in all majors experienced improved outcomes post-redesign. For instance, after using the VPT for assessment, Liberal Arts and STEM students were placed into and enrolled in college-level math at statistically significant higher rates as compared to pre-redesign outcomes: seven percentage points and 12 percentage points, respectively.

In addition to sharing placement and enrollment outcomes, the brief also addresses implementation of the VPT and presents the challenges and benefits of using the new placement policy. One challenge is that students who placed into college-level math passed these courses at lower rates post-redesign highlighting the need to provide additional support for learners. One key benefit was the reduction of developmental math requirements for students who declared Liberal Arts and career-technical education majors. This Points of Interest highlights the need for pairing structural changes with continued support for students.

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