STRONG START
TO FINISH

Building momentum for postsecondary success

EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATES
Your education policy team.

California Community Colleges: Early Progress

LEARNING FROM
THE REFORM
from **STRONG START TO FINISH**

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Acknowledgements

About Strong Start to Finish

Right now, a first-year student sits in a college classroom being ill-served by remedial math.
And if we fail them, they most likely will not earn their degree. There is a persistent trend among students placed in remedial or developmental courses—particularly math and English. They are not completing the courses and, in most cases, should not be taking them in the first place. This should not be their path.

We are a network of like-minded individuals and organizations from the policy, research, and practice spaces who've come together for one reason—to help all students, not just the select few, find success in postsecondary education.

Strong Start to Finish, an initiative of Education Commission of the States, was created to better the chances of low-income students, students of color, and returning adult students to create a fundamental shift in the outcome of their college journey. We have networked higher education leaders, policy entrepreneurs, institutions, and technical assistance providers to drive toward an outcome where all students pass their first credit-bearing English and math courses during the first year of study.

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Introduction

Over the past few years, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office has focused on student success, supported by data-driven, evidence-based best practices. The efforts have been part of the 2012 California Community Colleges Success Initiative, followed by the 2017 *Vision for Success: Strengthening the California Community Colleges to Meet California's Needs*, which lays out a series of goals and commitments directed toward increasing the number of students who reach a defined goal and decreasing the time and cost to do it. During this period, the system also has been engaging in a number of innovative reform efforts, including Guided Pathways, improvements in data technology, and the implementation of the Student Success Funding Formula that includes funding for colleges for completion of transfer-level English and math.

Nonetheless, there are significant challenges that will need to be addressed to meet the *Vision for Success* goals. Given longstanding equity issues, it is critical that reform efforts consider the specific barriers faced by underrepresented groups and find ways to reduce achievement gaps. For example, CCC data show that policies on placement into remediation have been a major factor contributing to low completion rates. Prior to the implementation of new equitable placement policies and processes, more than 75% of CCC students were classified as "underprepared." These students were required to take remedial courses in math and/or English—often multiple remedial courses—with the majority never completing necessary requirements to transition to college-level gateway courses. Further, these placement practices disproportionately impacted students of color, who are more likely to enroll in multiple remedial courses that don't count toward a degree.

Future Goals

Under the broad context of increasing student success, CCC is making major changes to placement policy and remedial instruction, such as:

- Changing the process by which students are placed into initial math and English courses at every community college by ending the use of assessment tests as the method of placement into credit-bearing courses and instead using multiple measures, such as high school performance;

- Making credit-bearing, transferable gateway courses the default placement method and allowing directed self-placement; and

- Aligning math course sequences to student goals.

These changes are expected to lead to semester-to-semester retention of 48,000 more students of color, returning adults, and low-income students each year, as well as 100,000 more students completing transfer-level English, 60,000 more completing transfer-level math, and 14,000 more completing at least 24 units in their first year.

Timeline of Reform	
2012	California Community Colleges Success Initiative
2017	Vision for Success adopted
2017	Assembly Bill 705 approved
2017	California Guided Pathways Project
2018	Student Centered Funding Formula
2019	AB 705 implementation
2019	CCC-Strong Start to Finish Project launched

CCC-Strong Start to Finish

Beginning in May 2019, CCC-Strong Start to Finish was created as a partnership among the CCC Chancellor's Office and the Success Center at the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC). The Success Center was launched by the Foundation and CCC Chancellor's Office in 2014 to act as a hub to support efforts around the state to improve college completion.

CCC-Strong Start to Finish encompasses 73 college districts and 115 public 2-year institutions. The broad aim of this effort is to expand the number and proportion of students who complete math and English gateway courses in their first year as a result of these ongoing changes to placement policies and remedial course design.

This project is focusing on five priority action areas to bring these reforms to scale:

- Eliminating the use of a single placement test score for placing students into remedial instruction.

- Establishing and expanding math pathways across all institutions.

- Providing guidance and implementation strategies to support English as a Second Language (ESL) learners.

- Using quantitative and qualitative information to understand and advance reforms.

- Integrating developmental education reforms within guided pathways.

All 115 CCC institutions are being supported by the CCC-Strong Start to Finish partnership to help them implement the reforms by supporting activities such as technical assistance, convening of stakeholders and professional development that expands current reform efforts. The CCC Chancellor's Office plays a key role in providing guidance and support, as a technical assistance provider and thought partner. The Foundation for California Community Colleges is an official auxiliary to the Chancellor's Office and Board of Governors and sponsors a range of initiatives, programs, and expertise to support California Community Colleges. The Success Center for California Community Colleges leverages resources for the system, including external research and expertise and philanthropic support.

"The resources that SSTF has been able to provide to the Success Center have been crucial to our support of the system as they implement statewide developmental education reform and provide hundreds of thousands of students with the opportunity to achieve their academic goals."

-Stacy Fisher, Senior Director of Strategic Projects and Initiatives Foundation for California Community Colleges

The following sections describe the context of reform within the state, the current status of project activities, and some early insights coming out of the work.

Policy Background

Research shows that each year, the majority of first-time students enrolling in California community colleges are placed in developmental education courses, but many do not move on to credit-bearing courses. Over time, many individual CCC institutions have experimented with changing their developmental education placement policies or reforming the structure of developmental education courses to improve outcomes. However, the past few years have seen a movement to make reforms on a larger scale.

Assembly Bill 705

Recently, the state has sought to bring about systemwide improvements through passage of Assembly Bill 705, which will implement reforms by fall 2019. The law prohibits community colleges from requiring students to enroll in traditional developmental education courses unless data demonstrate that the students are highly unlikely to succeed in college-level courses and that enrollment in a pre-transfer course will improve the likelihood of completing a transfer-level course within one year. Students can be required to enroll in corequisite instruction. but again, only if there is evidence that they will be highly unlikely to succeed without that support.

Guided Pathways

A number of existing initiatives have also helped provide a context for reform, such as the state's investment in the California Community Colleges Guided Pathways project. The goal of Guided Pathways reforms is to change the CCC experience by using a highly structured approach that gives students clear pathways for course taking as well as integrating supports so that it is easier for students to get help when they need it. There have been two stages in the implementation of Guided Pathways in California. In 2017, 20 colleges joined the California Guided Pathways Project (CAGP), partnering with the

Foundation for California Community Colleges. Then in 2018, all colleges become part of a state-funded, systemwide effort that helps the colleges integrate and scale multiple initiatives.

Regional Initiatives

Other initiatives have been occurring on a regional basis. For example, the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium (CVHEC) is a consortium of public and private colleges in a nine-county region that focuses on completion. Along with hosting a data dashboard, CVHEC promotes strategies to reduce disparities in student outcomes, such as Guided Pathways, math pathways, Associate Degree for Transfer, and corequisite instruction. Given that the colleges are locally governed, the statewide initiative is being supported by the CCC Regional Coordinators Network.

Related Initiatives

In addition to the primary partners, the CCC Chancellor's Office collaborates with the California State University (CSU) Chancellor's Office on transfer articulation issues, and with the Academic Senate for CCC to establish faculty support. In addition, work of CCC-Strong Start to Finish relies on a strong, systemwide professional development and technical assistance infrastructure that supports project activities, including organizations with substantial experience with developmental education reform in California.

- The California Acceleration Project (CAP) was founded in 2010 to support campus-level reform of developmental education and placement, directed by a faculty-led professional development network. Since then, CAP has supported community colleges in efforts to increase completion of transferable, college-level math and English courses. It has advocated for using multiple measures for placement, replacing standalone developmental education courses with corequisite instruction, and matching gateway math courses to students' programs of study. CAP will support the project using its network, which helps colleges implement placement changes, math pathways, and corequisite models.

- The California Community Colleges Success Network (3CSN) is an initiative of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office that hosts events, regional networks, and communities of practice to facilitate networks of faculty, staff, and students for curricular and institutional redesigns. 3CSN will provide leadership trainings, seminars, workshops, and other technical assistance, as well as fostering peer-to-peer learning through Communities of Practice.

- The California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI), which is housed at the Foundation for California Community Colleges, hosts a technology platform that holds and transmits student data, partnering with K-12 school districts. The goal is for students' academic transcript data to follow them across educational systems and provide a baseline of guidance and support. Tools on the platform allow students and educators to complete and support college and career planning activities, such as tracking college applications. CCGI will assist the project with technical help related to accessing high school performance data and development of education plans.

- The RP Group, which has been involved with the Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP) since 2014, is working with the CCC Chancellor's Office to provide research and recommendations on improving the proportion of students who complete transfer-level math or English courses in one year, or ESL courses in three years.

Priority Action Areas

Framing the CCC-Strong Start to Finish project are the requirements of the state law enacted by AB 705 and related regulations established by the system office. The CCC Chancellor's Office has established an AB 705 Implementation Committee, as well as an ESL subcommittee, to provide guidance on implementation strategies. A key goal is for AB 705 and related regulations to be implemented within each college's context, with local control on how it is accomplished. However, the CCC-Strong Start to Finish project partners play a crucial role in supporting the colleges' efforts by providing them with data collection and analysis tools, technical assistance, and professional development.

In addition to efforts directly related to AB 705 implementation, CCC-Strong Start to Finish will build on existing initiatives as they continue to expand. This includes:

- Steady elimination of standalone developmental education courses in favor of corequisite and/or prerequisite courses;
- Expansion of Guided Pathways statewide; regional meetings, and other convenings; and
- Dissemination of best practices in improving equity; and
- Strategic communications and capacity building.

Changes in Assessment and Placement

The CCC Chancellor's Office established an AB 705 Implementation Committee—including many stakeholders from the field—to develop guidance for the colleges as they prepared for full implementation of AB 705 deadline in fall 2019.

After the CCC Chancellor's Office released guidance to the field for implementation, the Success Center assisted with regional convenings to gather feedback from the colleges about their implementation barriers and questions. These regional convenings have been the primary opportunity for stakeholder engagement since AB 705 was passed.

As a result, and in accordance with AB 705 timelines, implementation plans submitted in July 2019 indicate that community colleges in California are not using assessment tests for placement.

As these changes to placement and other regulations are implemented, CCC-Strong Start to Finish and the system partners will be helping colleges adopt new practices by providing technical assistance, disseminating promising practices and tools, and providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. Once fully implemented, the default mechanism for student placement is direct placement of almost all students in transfer-level math and English courses. Colleges will better align math and English sequences with student goals and identify the supports needed for students to pass transfer-level courses.

Corequisite and Pre-requisite Models

As noted in the AB 705 legislation, colleges can require students to enroll in corequisite instruction only if there is evidence that they would be "highly unlikely" to succeed otherwise. Over time, many CCC institutions have experimented with corequisite models for delivering academic and nonacademic supports, to replace standalone developmental education courses. Given the new regulations, colleges will need to decide whether to use those models or develop their own system of student supports.

Guided Pathways Institutes

Guided Pathways is the framework for implementing the Vision for Success. Guided Pathways provides a highly structured approach and clear course-taking patterns that facilitate more successful enrollment. The California Guided Pathways Project aims to improve completion at California Community Colleges by using an approach modeled on the AACC Pathways Project. In 2017, 20 colleges were selected for the project. College teams participate in six two-day institutes, along with expert guidance, that focus on the elements needed to implement a pathway model institution-wide. The teams, which include presidents, faculty, and other stakeholders, have time at the meeting to develop campus plans and timelines during the project period.

Ongoing from fall 2019, colleges that demonstrate alignment with AB 705 requirements will be eligible to receive state funding for Guided Pathways work.

Improving Equity

Given the importance of reducing gaps in attainment for underrepresented students, the Chancellor's Office Diversity Task Force has developed recommendations for increasing faculty and staff diversity. In September 2019, the Board accepted the diversity plan created by the task force. It also adopted a systemwide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement and supported a budget proposal for the work of the diversity plan.

Professional Development for the Colleges

Another important component of the project is the series of professional development opportunities available to colleges; trainings, toolkits, and workshops will be provided by project partners to build awareness about AB 705 requirements, use of data, and best practices.

Some of the technical assistance for the colleges will come from CAP, which already provides trainings to colleges on developmental education reform that aligns with AB 705 but will be complemented by online toolkits provided by the CCC Chancellor's Office and the Success Center. Depending upon the audience, other assistance is provided by the RP Group/MMAP, 3CSN, and the Academic Senate.

Stakeholder Communications and Capacity Building

A Vision Strategic Communications Plan is in the initial stages of development, with the goal of bringing together communications related to the systemwide Vision for Success and how it is related to other systemic reforms like AB 705. As one early step in this plan, the project team worked with Jobs for the Future (JFF) to create three "case making videos" that feature early adopters of remedial education reform.

Successes, Challenges and Lessons

Successes to Date

The CCC-Strong Start to Finish project has begun only recently, but some very early learnings have become clear. The partnership with the Academic Senate has been crucial, because faculty are the connection to the students that the SSTF CCC project is designed to reach. In addition, project implementation will depend on strategic communications to both internal and external audiences. An important goal will be to explain how developmental education reform is integrated with Vision for Success through a Guided Pathways framework.

Challenges

Some challenges are expected. For example, the California Community Colleges is composed of 73 local districts, each of them governed independently. Thus, some districts and/or colleges are likely to be resistant to change while others embrace it more enthusiastically. In addition, it is likely that colleges will implement reform at different rates, given their campus context and previous experience with individual aspects of reform. Finally, significant budget reductions are likely as a result of COVID-19 that may impact implementation of student-centered reforms, including AB 705.

Emerging Lessons

Collaborating with groups who have different perspectives and concerns helps to integrate a broad scope of knowledge. Being involved in almost every large project at the Chancellor's Office over the last three years provides the opportunity to point out how AB 705 implementation integrates with these other projects and where information from one effort can be leveraged to support another. It is important to frame developmental education reform appropriately for the context. It cannot be seen as "just another initiative" but as a critical and integrated part of AB 705 that is necessary to achieving goals. This point needs to be consistently reinforced.

Guided Pathways Regional coordinators have been trained in the last few months to work closely with their colleges to support implementation and evaluate the first year. Through this network, the Chancellor's Office builds a strong feedback loop that will inform the future.

Next Steps

As implementation of AB 705 wraps up, the project's focus will turn toward the other initiatives. Many activities are planned over the next year. For example:

- Work continues on developing tools for the AB 705 toolkit that has been created on the Vision Resource Center—the CCC system's primary source of professional development resources and support.

- With significant financial support from SSTF, the Success Center is working to collect data to determine exactly what gateway course supports and resources are being provided to students at the college. The results of this work will be used to inform future policy and practice as the colleges continue to improve on equitable placement and student success in gateway courses.

- Professional development for the regional coordinators will be continued, including support from JFF and Leading from the Middle.

Meanwhile, a number of strategic efforts will be ongoing, such as change management consulting to support capacity in the Chancellor's Office and creation of a system-level workplan for the reform process. This workplan would include subplans on communications, stakeholder engagement, and risk assessment. As part of this process, the Vision Strategic Communications plan will continue to be built out. Capacity building for district boards of trustees and college presidents will also be made available, with the goals of helping local leaders understand their role in supporting transformational change and create a sustainable peer-support.