RACE-CONSCIOUS IMPLEMENTATION OF A DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REFORM IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

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Contents

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Message from Dr. Estela Mara Bensimon

The adoption of AB 705, the legislative bill that aims to bring an end to the placement of students into non-credit English and Mathematics courses in California's community colleges, was a monumental accomplishment made possible by a coalition of racial equity advocates. For decades Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and marginalized Asian American and Pacific Islander students were placed into dead-end, tedious sequences of remedial education courses that served only to deny them the educational opportunity they were promised by the framers of California's Higher Education Master Plan. This serves as a perfect example of how promising policies can too often be derailed at the point of implementation for a variety of unforeseen reasons.

This report presents case studies that took place in two California community colleges; though these stories of implementing AB705 are California-based, they have clear national applicability. The conditions that have either challenged the intent of AB705 or helped enabled its success are captured vividly here. The most formidable challenge to AB705 has been the unwillingness of long-time practitioners to give up the power to determine who is capable of doing college level English and Math. The enablers of success, meanwhile, are practitioners who identify with those students who have been most harmed by remedial education and whose instructional practices are caring and innovative.

We know a great deal about co-requisites, and there are plenty of quantitative reports on the outcomes of remedial education reform. On the other hand, few have explored the implementation of remedial education reform from a critical race perspective. This report shows that the promise of educational reforms that purport to transform the lives of racially minoritized students is put at great risk when implementers, who are predominantly white, are strangers to the foundational concepts of systemic racism. Fortunately, the report is rich with strategies to implement remedial education reform with fidelity to racial equity.

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Message from Dr. Yolanda Watson Spiva

As states across the nation explore ways to advance their higher education student success and equity goals, many are re-evaluating their systems for postsecondary course placement and prerequisite remediation. We know that the corequisite model dramatically improves outcomes for students who need additional support to complete gateway college-level courses. As part of California's efforts to maximize the probability that a student will complete these courses within one year, the state's landmark Assembly Bill 705 encourages state community colleges to offer corequisite support, but it does not mandate this shift. It also recognizes the racial consequences of reforming placement and remediation policies but does not mention specific student groups in the actions it requires, expected outcomes, and accountability measures.

This report provides valuable insight into how writing a policy with implicit or explicit racial intent affects implementation on college campuses. The findings reinforce the importance of not just creating a policy but also evaluating implementation to ensure that the policy is having its intended impact — providing the opportunity to course correct if it is not. They also serve as the basis for **Beyond Good Intentions: Steps to Craft Equity-Driven Policy**, a companion tool from Complete College America and the USC Race and Equity Center on how to craft equity-driven legislation. We hope that this set of resources will serve as a guide for future California legislation and for other states that are considering similar policies.

Yolanda Watson Spiva
President
Complete College America

Executive Summary

This report draws on case study data to distill the conditions that are necessary to implement developmental education reforms with a focus on racial equity. There is a movement to eliminate developmental education in community colleges, but it is rarely framed as a racial justice movement. The premise of this report is that the policies and practices that guide the elimination of developmental education non-college credit courses are insufficient if developmental education is treated as race-neutral. Data on who is consigned to developmental education and who makes the successful transition into college-level courses make it clear that Latinx, Black, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders, and indigenous students have been the most disadvantaged. Take California, which has the country's most extensive community college system. Data on enrollments into lengthy developmental course sequences show that Black and Brown students have historically endured the heaviest burden of non-credit course taking and had dismal success outcomes.[1] A 2017 law transformed California's delivery of gateway English and math courses across community colleges by mandating for most students direct placement into the transfer level, use of multiple measures, and the addition of corequisite supports.

Among the states that have taken up developmental education reform, California is considered a leader because it has adopted a policy that has led to tens of thousands more students completing essential English and math requirements each year. Notably, this policy was made possible by a coalition of organizations for whom racial equity is a priority. Most of these organizations are led by people of color, many of whom are the first in their families to go to college and have a track record of social justice advocacy. However, AB 705 implementation has been inconsistent across California. For example, Black and Latinx students continue to attend California Community Colleges that offer a high proportion of developmental courses.[2]

This report highlights data from strong implementers of AB 705, drawing out whether and how leaders centered racial equity. It provides evidence of the ways equity-minded leaders and faculty can convince resisters that developmental education reform is a necessary imperative to strive for racial equity in course completion of transferable courses.

The report has three parts. First, I explain AB 705 and how it addressed developmental education as a practice that disproportionately disadvantaged racially minoritized students. Next, I use case study data to show that the implementation of a racially just policy can be derailed by faculty and leaders who oppose it and view it as an infringement of their academic sphere of influence. The findings emphasize that implementers must be supported with the resources (e.g., time to meet, professional development) and institutional commitments (e.g., faculty hiring) to enact the law with fidelity to racial equity. I conclude with recommendations on safeguarding racial equity in the reforms of developmental education.

Why Race Matters in Developmental Education Reforms

Students are more than statistics. Students are real people with families, histories and dreams. In the public debate over developmental education across the nation, the humanity of students, particularly students of color, is frequently overlooked. Students of color bring with them rich experiences and assets that fully prepare them to thrive in college-level English and math courses. However, when students of color get to college, they experience hostile academic cultures and low expectations from peers. For example, a study found that college counselors assumed white students were more intelligent and deserved higher course placement than Latinx students.[3] Another study found that Black students were perceived as incapable of performing well in developmental math by faculty and even their student peers in class.[4]

The common trope that students of color are unprepared for the demands of transferable courses is blatantly untrue. It was untrue for me as a former developmental community college student in California, and it is untrue for many more thousands of students in the system. In fact, a decade of research has told us the opposite. California community college students of color previously were placed in lower developmental course sequences and experienced grim success outcomes[5] despite having the same college readiness as their white peers.[6] In addition to feeling inadequate, students of color navigated exhausting developmental sequences with many exit points. What was intended to be an opportunity for college completion for students who may not have viewed college as a possibility turned out to be a gauntlet of non-credit courses that pushed most out of college.

A landmark California legislation passed in 2017 – **Assembly Bill 705** – sought to change this. The policy's purpose was to improve student success outcomes by ensuring that students enter and complete essential college-level transferable courses.

The legislation explicitly called for colleges to maximize students' probability of entering and completing these courses within one year. California Community Colleges were to achieve this ambitious goal by reforming their placement policies. They were directed to offer corequisite supports and/or remove lengthy prerequisite developmental course sequences, with limited exceptions.

The burden of proof to determine placement has now fallen on colleges, not students. That burden has serious racialized consequences for the many thousands of students of color who are now placed directly in college-level courses. A central question examined in this report is: ***What are the implications of whether a policy is implicitly and explicitly written in a race-conscious manner and why does this matter for local implementation on college campuses?***

This report highlights the importance of race-conscious policy design and implementation that affirms the agency, capability, and educational aspirations of racially marginalized developmental college students. It also spotlights longstanding racialized beliefs about students and the developmental education system that routinely dominates the debate between supporters and cynics of California's AB 705. Two community colleges in southern California considered leaders and early adopters of AB 705 are highlighted to show what works and what doesn't. The report summarizes how institutional leaders placed racial equity front and center and the resistance that followed.

The common trope that students of color are unprepared for the demands of transferable courses is blatantly untrue.

Three findings are spotlighted in this report:

- *Clear and concise policy language matters in faculty's sensemaking and responses to policy*

- *Respected race-conscious department leaders are central to equitable policy implementation*

- *Executive leadership must create conditions that center on racial equity during implementation*

Before discussing each theme, a brief historical overview of developmental education is provided. Themes provide examples and quotes from interviewees at two community colleges. In addition to offering action items that system leaders can take, lessons from these two colleges show that race-conscious reform of developmental education requires committed equity-minded department leaders, supportive executive leadership, and faculty willing to reimagine their careers.

For too many students, access to higher education does not automatically lead to equal opportunity or successful outcomes. States must be willing to change the status quo to improve completion rates among students who have experienced racial, economic, and other forms of inequity.

To meet these goals, they need to craft equity-driven policies that will lead to transformational change at colleges and universities as well as support state goals. Beyond Good Intentions builds on findings in this report to provide action steps and tips for creating policies that are specific, measurable, actionable, and well funded. Download the report at: https://completecollege.org/resource/beyondgoodintentions

BEYOND Good Intentions

STEPS TO CRAFT EQUITY-DRIVEN **POLICY**

✳ California's AB 705 and Nationwide Developmental Reforms at a Glance

Exceptional California gains in completion from AB 705

- *Systemwide, data dashboard shows vast improvements in the successful completion of transferable courses*

- *Substantial reduction in racial equity gaps in completion of transfer-level courses[7]*

- *Expanded access to and increased completion rates of Business, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (BSTEM), particularly among Black and Latinx students[8]*

- *Still, many colleges continue offering several developmental English and Math courses, colleges frequently attended in larger numbers by Black and Latinx students[9]*

Nationally, evidence supports developmental reforms

- *Corequisite supports leads to significantly higher completion rates[10]*

- *The University System of Georgia saw vast improvements in the completion of essential English and Math courses after the introduction of corequisite support, as well as near removal of racial equity gaps for Black, Latinx, pell-eligible, and first-generation students[11]*

- *Corequisite remediation with statistics courses in The City University of New York led to substantially higher completion and graduation rates[12]*

By fall 2020, a year after full implementation of AB 705 was to be in effect, colleges still offered many developmental courses instead of transfer-level sections with corequisite support.
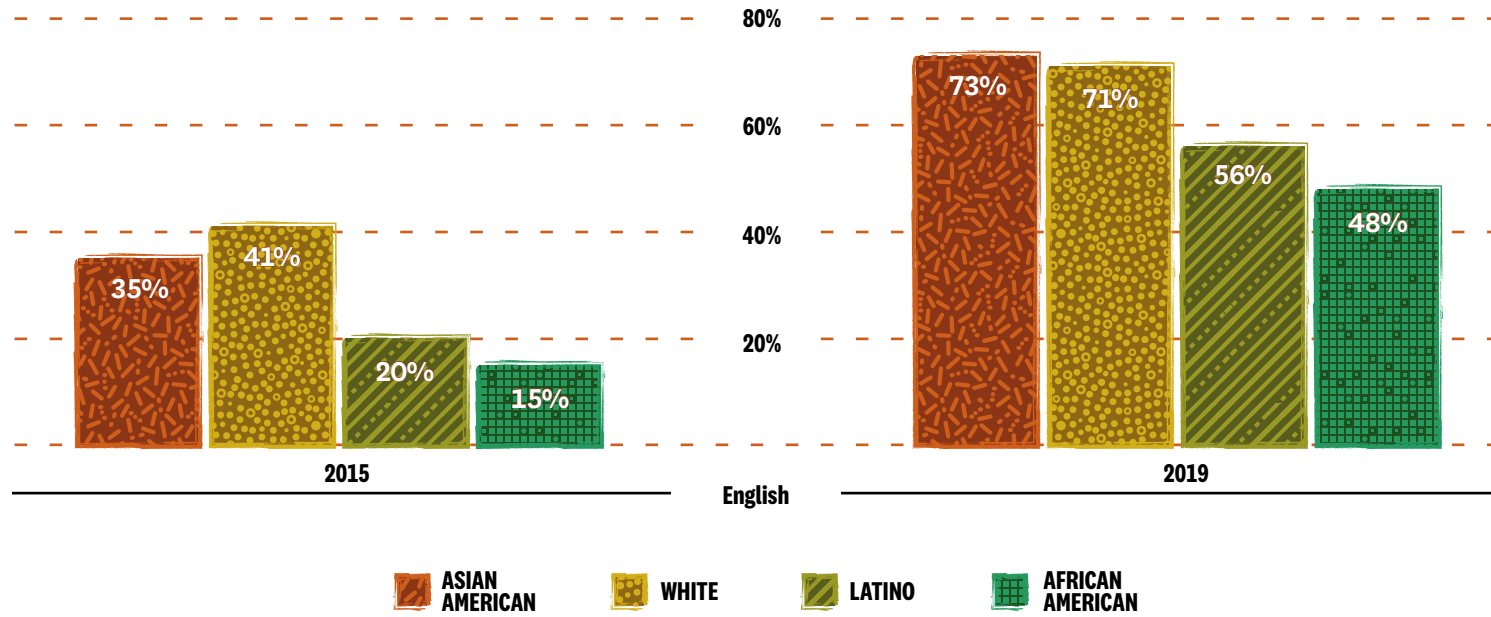
Only 15 out of 114 colleges offered at least 90% introductory sections at the transfer-level for both English and math.
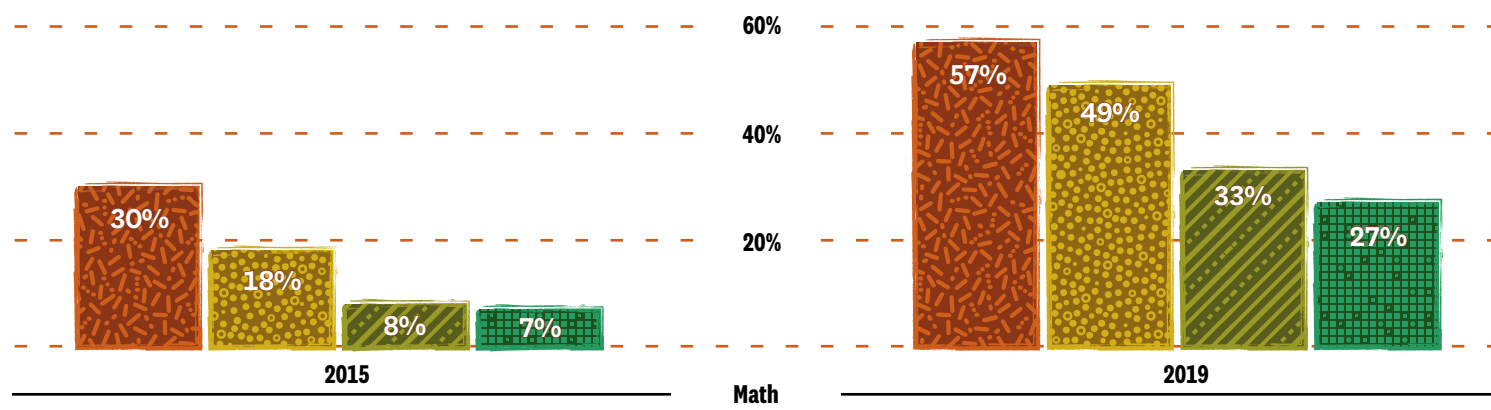
Citation
Hern, K., Snell, M., and Henson, L. (2020). Still Getting There: How California's AB 705 Is (and Is Not) Transforming Remediation and What Needs to Come Next. Sacramento, CA: Public Advocates.

## Throughput rates for college composition disaggregated by racial/ethnic groups

2015
- Asian American: 35%
- White: 41%
- Latino: 20%
- African American: 15%

2019
- Asian American: 73%
- White: 71%
- Latino: 56%
- African American: 48%

English

Legend:
- ASIAN AMERICAN
- WHITE
- LATINO
- AFRICAN AMERICAN

Throughput rates for transfer-level math disaggregated by racial/ethnic groups

2015
- Asian American: 30%
- White: 18%
- Latino: 8%
- African American: 7%

2019
- Asian American: 57%
- White: 49%
- Latino: 33%
- African American: 27%

Math

✳ Rethinking Developmental Education —How did we get here?

A key aspect of California's postsecondary education (i.e., master plan for higher education) is that anyone, regardless of their background, has access to higher education, and the various sectors of this system (e.g., 2-year and 4-year, public or private, for-profit institutions) are designed to create pathways and multiple entry points for students to complete their educational goals. Transferable course credits are the intended vehicle to bridge these systems. However, access to community colleges has not turned into equitable success outcomes across the board. Just as standardized tests[13] and access to advanced placement courses are discriminatory against students of color,[14] long developmental education sequences (DE) discriminate (vis-à-vis placement, enrollment, outcomes, etc.) and, up until recently, served as a gatekeeper for Black, Latinx, southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders, and indigenous students to transfer to 4-year colleges and universities.[15]

Since its inception in the early 20th century, long developmental education sequences have filtered which students complete essential college requirements and which ones saw their dreams diverted. That filter has protected the 4-year institutions from serving the students they deemed as unprepared while maintaining their privilege and status.[16] As table 1 shows, as access to higher education increased, so did the systematic assessment and placement of primarily students of color into lengthy developmental courses that instead of being helpful pushed them out of college. From the 2010s onward, California and other states nationwide have experimented with new models including accelerated courses, direct placement into college-level courses based on high school performance, and combinations of college-level courses with corequisite instruction, consistently finding that students can succeed without lengthy developmental sequences.
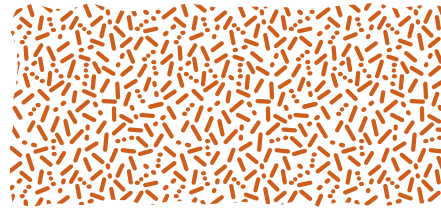
◀ *FIGURE 1 - AB 705 has led to vast improvements in English and Math course completion, but racial equity gaps persist.*

Mejia, M.C., Rodriguez, O., & Johnson, H. (2020). A new of student access at California's community colleges. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved from https://www.ppic.org/publication/a-new-era-of-student-access-at-californias-community-colleges/

Table 1 - Historical Context of Developmental Education in the U.S. 1900s-Present[17]

TIME PERIOD	HISTORICAL CONTEXT	STATE OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION
19th century – early 20th century	Primary and secondary education was not required in the 19th century. Developmental education began in the 20th century.	Since the mid-1800s, universities sought to end admission to students with "defective preparation."
1920s – WWII	High school preparation improved, and new generations of 2-year colleges were established.	Most 4-year colleges stopped providing developmental education. 2-year colleges absorb the bulk of developmental education students.
Post-WWII	Due to the G.I. Bill, many "underprepared students" enroll in colleges and universities.	4-year colleges begin testing applicants to identify "underprepared" students and admit only those most promising. Excluded students enroll in community colleges and technical institutions.
1950s	Sputnik-era/Cold war competition drives up college and university admission standards.	Further proportion of developmental training shifts to the 2-year colleges.
1960s-1970s	More "underprepared" students graduate from high school. The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) expands access to college for minoritized students.	2-year/4-year colleges expand developmental education offerings. By 1970s, developmental education was a key function of community colleges.
1980s	In California, the Mexican American Legal and Defense Fund (MALDEF) won a lawsuit against the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) arguing that Latinx students were subjected to racial discrimination by requiring them to take placement exams.	The lawsuit prohibited colleges from relying solely on standardized exams to determine placement into developmental education courses, but very few colleges complied with these mandates.
1990s	Tightening of higher education resources and more increases in the number of students' tracked into postsecondary developmental education.	States move towards improving K-12 preparation, raised admission standards for bachelor's degree programs, and more providers of developmental education (e.g., private for-profit colleges).
2000s-2010	2008 recession significantly decreases higher education funding. Increased higher education access to students with disabilities and increased eligibility for financial aid due to The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.	Studies examine the pitfalls of developmental education. Calls for efficiency in placement put pressure on the community colleges to improve their developmental course sequence offerings and placement practices.
2010s-Present	National foundations (e.g., Campaign for College Opportunity, Complete College America, Jobs for the Future, etc.) partner with organizations to push a developmental education reform movement to improve completion rates, shorten time to degree/credentials, and more effectively lead to college-level courses. National emphasis on completing degrees for economic vitality.	States adopt new reforms of developmental education, including corequisite courses, accelerated coursework, direct placement into college-level courses, supplemental instruction, multiple measures, etc.). Developmental education is seen as a major obstacle to efficiently and effectively completing degrees and transfer.

Who benefitted from the prior developmental education system?

The origin of lengthy developmental education sequences is important for current debates on keeping developmental courses post-AB 705. Often left unquestioned are which courses are offered, the content these courses include, who teaches them and how, and whether racially minoritized students are disproportionately channeled into non-credit courses. AB 705 has driven many colleges across California to transform department norms and traditions that colleges have found to discriminate against students of color. Consider the questions presented below to reflect on the historical context of developmental education at your institution. The key here is to examine racial/ethnic patterns in course placement and completion outcomes and whether your department continues to offer a high proportion of developmental courses.

| ORIGIN OF DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES AT YOUR INSTITUTION	WHO BENEFITS FROM THESE COURSES?
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DEPARTMENT:	
How did developmental education sequences expand at your college, if at all? Why did they? Did the expansion consider the identities, assets, and needs of students of color? Are students of color succeeding in the current sequence of developmental offerings (if any)? Is there resistance to the removal of developmental education, if at all? What is the origin of resistance?	When disaggregating your data by race/ethnicity, which students have disproportionately been placed and enrolled in developmental education tracks within the past 5-10 years? Does your department frequently use instructor-level data to examine success outcomes of developmental students by race and ethnicity? If not, why? Does your curriculum and pedagogical practices reflect and affirm the students represented on your campus?
THINGS TO AVOID:	
Frame students as deficient and unprepared. Focus on what is within your control as an institution. Prioritize compensation, course schedules, and shared governance processes. Place particular attention on how changes first and foremost impact students' success outcomes.	Refuse to review instructor-level data. Reflect on what the data can reveal about racialized enrollment patterns and transferable English and math course completion. Default to the status quo. Consider whether the existing curriculum makes students of color feel seen and affirmed in the classroom.
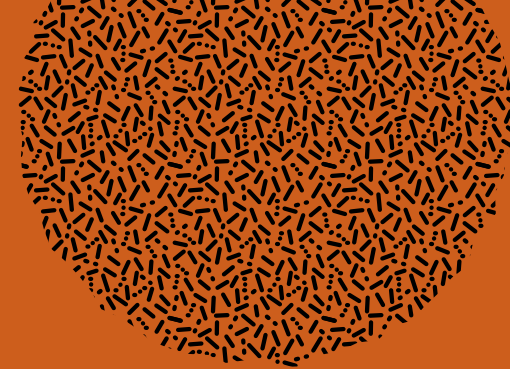
"At least half of colleges have placement practices that disproportionately harm Black and Latinx students."

Black and Latinx students continue to attend California Community Colleges that offer high proportion of developmental courses.

Citation
Hern, K. & Snell, Myra. (2021). Invalid Placement Practices Widespead in CA Community Colleges. California Acceleration Project. Access at: https://accelerationproject.org/Portals/0/Documents/CAPValidationReportAnalysisOct2021.pdf
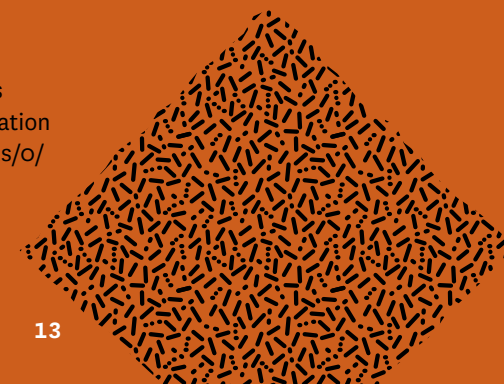
About Village and Sunnyville College: Leaders in reform *───

The two colleges highlighted in this report are large Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) with a strong transfer identity and diverse racial composition in their student body. They were selected because they are considered, "strong implementers" of AB 705 meaning that these colleges offered primarily transfer-level courses.[18] The colleges also differed in their shared governance structures.

Village College is in a middle-class to wealthy suburban neighborhood that is historically white but increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Village's quiet campus is nestled within parking structures, spanning buildings, and green spaces, that surround the edges of campus, with pine trees and green shrubs home to chirping birds.

Sunnyville College is located in a predominately white and historically affluent neighborhood. Its campus is modern – fountains, glass-walled buildings, and colorfully, bright décor span lecture halls and student support services buildings.

Both colleges are considered pioneers of AB 705 because they eliminated most of their developmental courses early on. Their innovation led both to present at popular statewide conferences on acceleration and AB 705 reform.
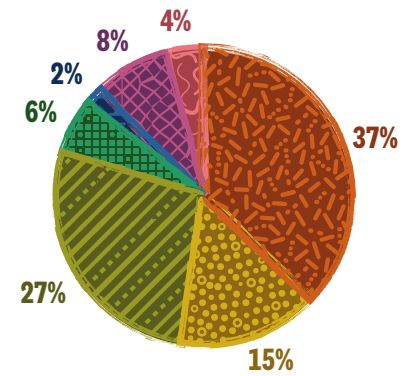
Legend:
- Latinx
- Asian
- White
- Unknown
- Filipino
- Black
- Multi-Ethnicity
- Pacific Islander
- Indigenous/Alaska Native

Village full-time student enrollments for the 2017-18 year

- 47%
- 25%
- 14%
- 5%
- 4%
- 3%
- 3%
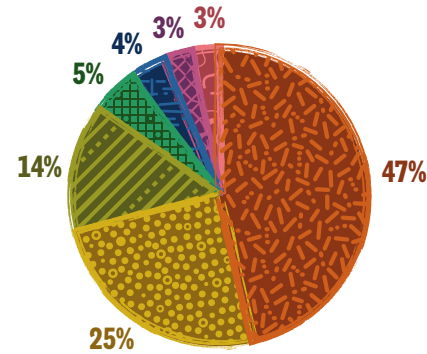
Sunnyville full-time student enrollments for the 2017-18 year

- 37%
- 15%
- 27%
- 6%
- 2%
- 8%
- 4%

* Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the institutions in this study.

Throughput rate for transferable English (Pre-AB 705)

Legend:
- Village 2-year Throughput
- Sunnyville 3-year Throughput

Group	Village 2-year	Sunnyville 3-year
Black	23.0%	24.4%
Indigenous/Alaskan Native	100%	100%
Asian American	70.0%	55.9%
Latinx	69.7%	64.3%
Multi-Ethnicity	39.0%	42.1%
(Latinx second)	53.0%	45.5%
Pacific Islander	25.0%	0.1%
Unknown	86.0%	62.5%
White	65.0%	56.1%
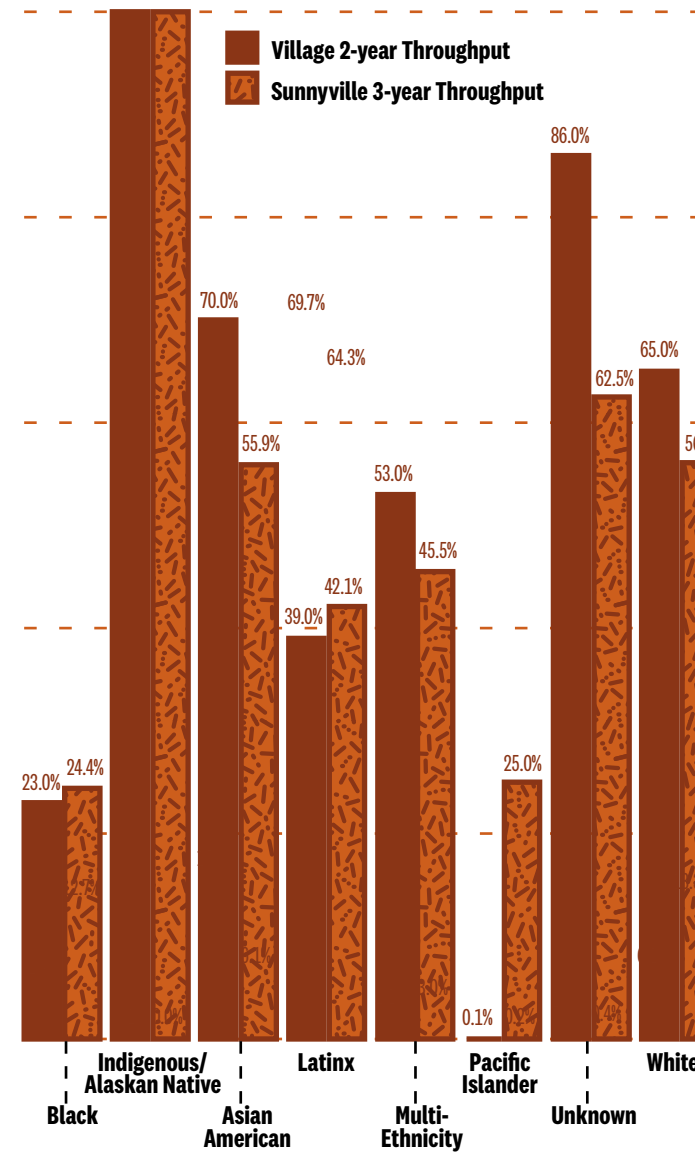
Throughput rate for transferable Math (Pre-AB 705)

Legend:
- Village 3-year Throughput
- Sunnyville 3-year Throughput

Group	Village 3-year	Sunnyville 3-year
Black	0.0%	9.4%
Indigenous/Alaskan Native	0.0%	66.7%
Asian American	5.9%	17.7%
Latinx	2.9%	12.3%
Multi-Ethnicity	7.3%	15.6%
Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%
Unknown	2.7%	10.6%
White	5.2%	17.3%
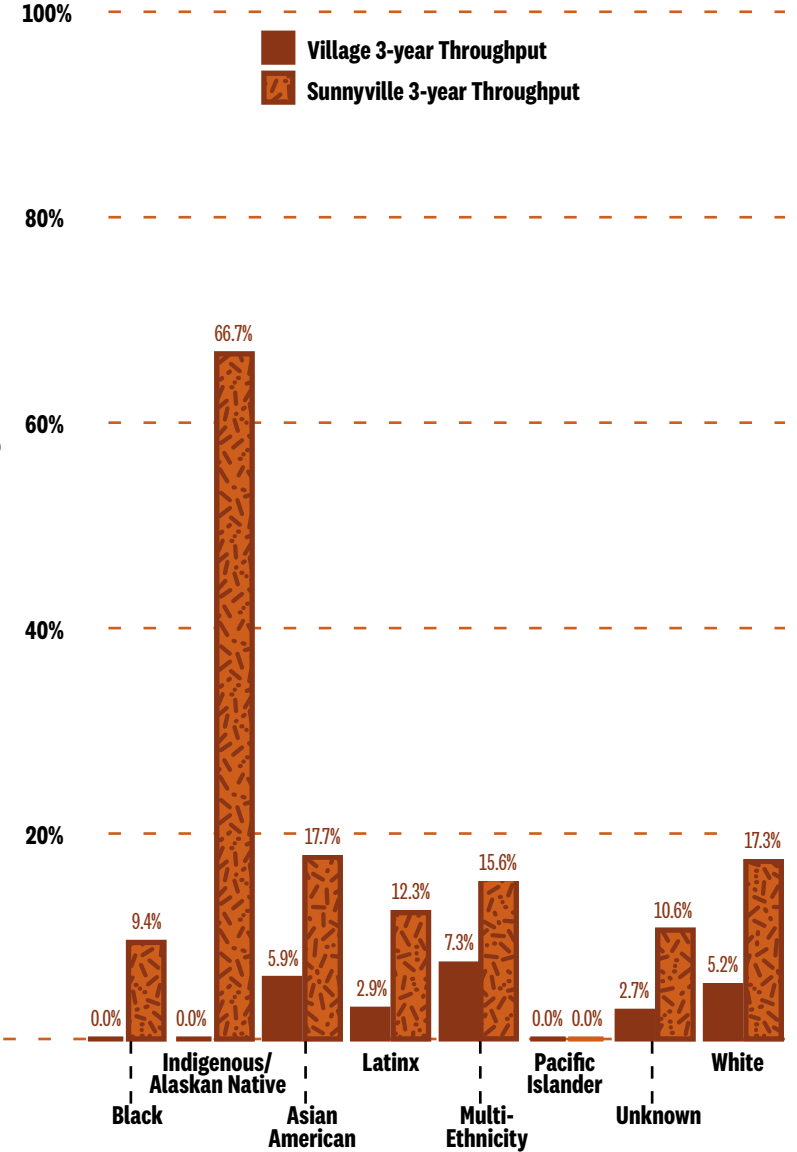
Data is from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Datamart Basic Skills Progress Tracker and institutional data collected from the two campuses.

The participants[1]

Length at Institution

- > 15 Years — 39.5%
- 5 – 15 Years — 34.2%
- < 5 Years — 26.3%

Tenure status

- Tenured faculty
- Untenured faculty

26.9%

73.1%

Racial composition

- Latinx
- Asian
- White
- Black
- Multiracial

2.6%
13.2%
23.7%
5.3%
55.3%

Self-identified gender composition

- Male
- Female

39.5%
60.5%

1 The binary gender representation in the table above is self-reported information by interview participants.

Composition of interviewees, Village and Sunnyville

- Math faculty 34.2%
- English faculty 34.2%
- Counseling 5.3%
- Administration 23.7%
- Staff 2.6%

Defining Key Terms as Used

Agency – Signifies whether individuals channel resources and opportunities to support and uplift historically marginalized students.[19]

Equity – <u>Does not</u> refer to equality. Equity is about parity in educational outcomes for students of color through intentional redistribution of resources, personnel, and the transformation of existing structures.[20]

Equity-Mindedness – An equity-minded institution or person is evidence-based, race-conscious, institutionally focused, systematically aware, and equity advancing.[21]

Power – A force about the exercise of control often used to exert influence in an organization.[22]

Race – Social construct that defines social reality with real and definite social consequences, even when race is not explicitly named.[23]

Race-conscious – Commitment to examining patterns of racial inequity that harm and exclude students of color.

Racial literacy – Competencies used to understand, explain, and actively dismantle white supremacy and explicit/implicit forms of racism.

**Sensemaking** – The process where an individual asks what does an event mean and what should I do next?[24]

Finding #1 – Policy Sensemaking is Key for Change

Key Takeaway: *Individuals' past experiences matter in the social understanding of new policies. More attention should be placed on local implementation.*

WHAT THE POLICY SAYS ABOUT ITS PURPOSE REALLY MATTERS

College faculty, counselors, student services professionals and other college leaders rely heavily on policy text and its rhetoric to interpret and actualize the aspirational goals of policymakers. As a policy text, AB 705 sought to advance racial equity outcomes. For example, first, in its opening remarks, the policy text makes clear that developmental education policies and practices have "serious implications for equity, since students of color are more likely to be placed into remedial courses" and that an "overwhelming majority of students" are referred to developmental education.[25] The policy then cites studies finding that over 86% of Latinx, Black students, and low-income students enroll in developmental coursework.[26] Bill analysis during committee deliberations also warned that students of color attend community colleges with fewer transfer-level course offerings than colleges with higher proportions of white students. Moreover, the bill references a 1991 lawsuit by the Mexican American Legal and Defense Fund (MALDEF) in which the Chancellor's office was found to discriminate against Latinx students by relying solely on standardized tests to determine course placement.
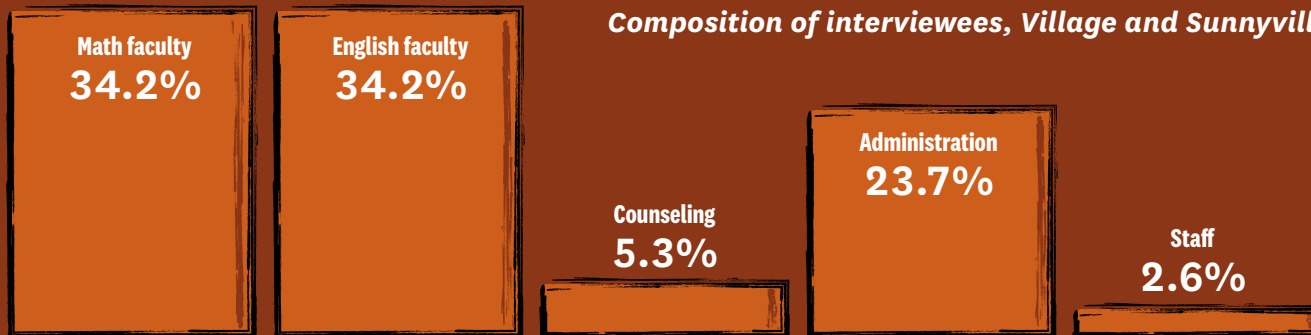
Study interviewees repeatedly referenced the policy text when sharing their view of AB 705. They sometimes cited the policy verbatim, named specific webinars and guidance memos, and presentations by system officials at conferences when explaining the aspirational goals of developmental reform. This is important because *it influenced what leaders believed was mandatory and possible under AB 705*. Advocacy of the bill from civil rights activists, non-profit organizations, student coalitions, and supporters of developmental reform also cemented AB 705 as a bill that could restore the democratic principles of community colleges. See **Beyond Good Intentions: Steps to Craft Equity-Driven Policy for strategies to implement equity-driven policies**.
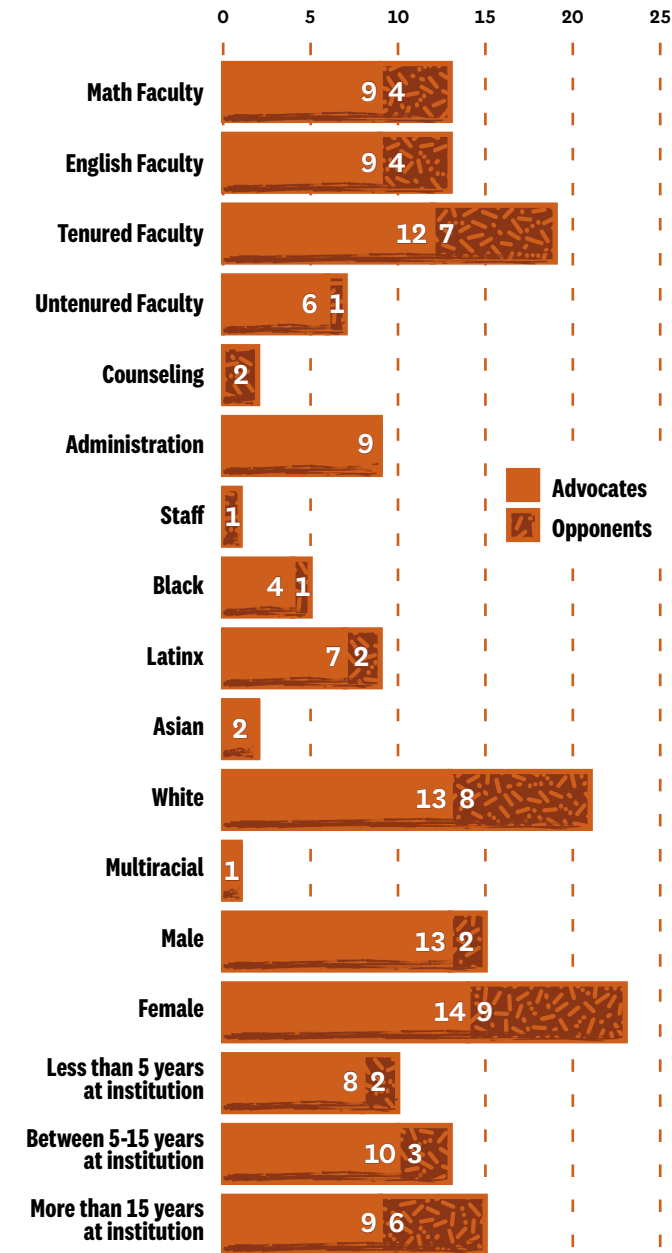
HOW PEOPLE MAKE SENSE OF POLICY IS CRUCIAL FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Insufficient attention is placed on how local leaders are introduced to new policies, how they make sense of the reform, and how their past experiences position them to support or oppose (and somewhere in-between) the aspirational aims of policy. As people are exposed to new experiences, their sensemaking of policy is crucial because it can serve as disconfirming or reaffirming evidence of one's beliefs. In other words, how we rationalize and explain our support or opposition to policies has a lot to do with whether that policy is in line with our existing beliefs developed over a lifetime. People generally change their points of view through consistent and novel exposure to new ideas and perspectives. Moreover, while AB 705 aspired as written to advance racial equity outcomes, it was limited or scarce in its accountability measures and required mandates that specifically called on implementers to take a race-conscious approach to the legislation.

TABLE 2 - Characteristics of Advocates and Opponents at Village and Sunnyville (2020) ➤

Respondents shared differing interpretations of AB 705 based on personal, social, and professional experiences during interviews. Based on their sensemaking that translated into decisions to support or reject the bill, interviewees were organized into two camps, "advocates" and "opponents" of AB 705.

Advocates were: 1) believers of data identifying prevailing equity gaps, 2) avid consumers and purveyors of professional development (PD), and 3) previous experimenters with developmental course acceleration. Therefore, supporters understood AB 705 as a social justice initiative that increased access to transferable courses, affirmed students as college-ready, and had the potential to close racial equity gaps. Advocates framed the problem of low transfer-level completion as one rooted in antiquated pedagogy, culturally unresponsive curriculum, and exclusionary procedures like placement exams. A larger share of AB 705 advocates were early career faculty, administrators, and people of color.

Opponents were: 1) believers that AB 705 was driven by efficiency and financial concerns, 2) mistrustful of lawmakers who were disconnected from the student experience, 3) convinced the policy limited faculty power over academic matters, and 4) concerned the policy set up students for failure. Whereas supporters understood the bill as empowering students to succeed, opponents believed that without developmental courses, students would fail because of perceived student deficiencies like inadequate K-12 schooling or poor study habits that made transfer level placement risky. Opponents framed developmental courses as necessary to bring students up to speed with the rigors of college courses. White women and tenured faculty at institutions longer than ten years made up the majority of opponents. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of advocates and opponents who had varied beliefs about AB 705.

	Advocates	Opponents
Math Faculty	9	4
English Faculty	9	4
Tenured Faculty	12	7
Untenured Faculty	6	1
Counseling	2	
Administration	9	
Staff	1	
Black	4	1
Latinx	7	2
Asian	2	
White	13	8
Multiracial	1	
Male	13	2
Female	14	9
Less than 5 years at institution	8	2
Between 5-15 years at institution	10	3
More than 15 years at institution	9	6

As people are exposed to new experiences, their sensemaking of policy is crucial because it can serve as disconfirming or reaffirming evidence of one's beliefs.

Finding #2 – Empowered Equity-Minded Faculty are Necessary for Transformation under AB 705

Equity-minded faculty, if empowered, can build coalitions that reimagine pathways through transferable courses. These faculty members should be heard, have a seat at the decision-making table, and have oversight of resources to promote self-reflection in department practices.

Key Takeaway: *Early experimentation in acceleration grew the "choir" of developmental reform supporters • Equity-focused faculty hires led acceleration movement • Exposure to professional development "bought-in" key faculty leaders.*

> **"We couldn't yet say explicitly, yes, we want to get rid of all basic skills because that was a nonstarter for anybody, you know?"**
>
> **ENGLISH PROFESSOR SOFÍA CHÁVEZ, VILLAGE**

AT VILLAGE, LONG DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCES TRANSFORMED THROUGH EARLY ACCELERATION EFFORTS AND NEW FACULTY HIRES

Village's English department became a leader of AB 705 in part because equity-minded English faculty pioneered accelerated courses long before the law took effect. In the early 2010s, Village's equity-minded English faculty created an accelerated transfer-level course that took two semesters to finish. That move caused anguish among defenders of developmental education, who were more senior and accustomed to holding decision-making power in the department. Among equity advocates, acceleration served as a

primer to AB 705 and prepared the department for future change. Despite desiring to remove all sequences, these primarily pre-tenure equity faculty knew it was politically unfeasible. In addition to innovating with acceleration, equity-minded faculty influenced the diversification of the department's faculty by serving on critical hiring committees. Village's newly hired full-time faculty in the English division were staunch supporters of AB 705 because like-minded colleagues coached them and because their college training and life experiences were rooted in social justice.

The *math division at Village* removed three out of four developmental sequences a full year before AB 705 took effect. This was possible because the department had committed equity-centered faculty leaders who had substantial influence and who routinely engaged their department in discussions with external data experts from the California Acceleration Project, the RP Group, and others. For example, in addition to a supportive math dean, Village's math department had a "fierce" proponent of reform, Deborah Ridge, who, over consistent exposure to professional development, realized lengthy developmental sequences harmed students of color. Professor Ridge was quite influential informally among colleagues as well as formally coordinating important basic skills grants through her prior role. Professor Ridge grew the coalition of AB 705 advocates by persuading newcomers and hesitant faculty to become supporters allowing the division to transform its offerings long before fall 2019. Many meetings and "hallway conversations" also helped build up buy-in for removing most offerings. By the time AB 705 took effect, the math faculty did not oppose the decision to remove the remaining level of developmental math.

SUNNYVILLE FACULTY LEADERS STRIVE TO CHANGE LENGTHY DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCES THROUGH INQUIRY

Sunnyville's equity-minded English faculty changed substantially because of AB 705. Previously, their sequence included *over six developmental courses* and a confusing roadmap to the transfer level. In 2015, Sunnyville began reforming its lengthy sequences by overhauling a "norming" process. "Norming" was an in-house process that consisted of faculty reviewing a "common essay" that students would complete at the end of a developmental course for the opportunity to be waived out of the next level. After reviewing data, Sunnyville English faculty identified stark racial disparities in who received waivers (i.e., white students) and who did not (i.e., students of color). As a result of investigating these waivers and holding data discussions departmentwide, the faculty voted to do what was previously unthinkable: eliminate four levels below transfer-level courses in 2017.

> **"There was clear racial bias in the way those waivers were being handed out."**
>
> **ENGLISH CHAIR KEVIN COOK, SUNNYVILLE**

Around the same time, the faculty attended an equity institute by the USC Center for Urban Education. The faculty learned the importance of reviewing their data by instructor disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Only instructors saw their own data. In fact, administrators did not have access to this information. What the data revealed sparked support among equity advocates who wanted to reform their developmental offerings further but angered more senior faculty who felt threatened and believed the data would be used for evaluative purposes.

Key takeaways: *Exposure to data helped faculty rethink developmental education • Financial incentives for faculty participation in professional development are essential for self-inquiry • Limited expertise to increase course readings that spotlight authors of color impeded new curriculum*

Besides data and waiver analysis, Sunnyville's English faculty also formed a committee to review the racial demographics of course text authors. They found that represented authors were overwhelmingly white and collectively decided to change that using allocated time and funding. The committee's shared goal was to center a person of color as the primary text author for that course. In the end, however, a primarily white English department chose to keep a book authored by a white male. A challenge was identifying scholarship from Latinx and Black scholars while moving away from "really good lesson plans." The point here is that norms around what is familiar prevented faculty from making courses at an HSI more culturally relevant to the student population served.

The approach of *Sunnyville's math division* was compliance-oriented and the least disruptive to the existing status quo. The department chair at the time, "hated" the new law, as did most faculty. They collectively believed the law would harm "unprepared" students. Before AB 705, the division had four levels below transfer. The math division still offered two developmental courses for students to enroll post-AB 705. The department reluctantly complied with the law and met its mandates, but not more. By offering two developmental courses, the department is required to prove its method works better than the Chancellor's Office recommended guidelines. To date, no college has provided data that proves placement in remediation is more effective than direct placement at the transfer level.

Finding #3 – Trusted Midlevel and Executive Leadership Must Support and Challenge Department Faculty

Key Takeaway: *Race-conscious leaders disrupt the status quo and use their power to remove exclusionary practices.*

Race-conscious department leaders can inspire faculty to reimagine the delivery of transfer-level coursework by: 1) disrupting racist norms, practices and policies that harm students of color, 2) leveraging their political and social influence to obtain buy-in from resistant faculty and, 3) remaining sensitive to the learning journey of faculty who may not have the exposure, life experience, and critical awareness of racial injustices.

Disrupt racist norms, practices, and policies.

Questions to consider:

- What daily taken-for-granted department practices disproportionately harm students of color?

- What is the racial and ethnic composition of department decision-makers? Do they reflect the student population?

- Are faculty of color able to express their perspectives? Do untenured faculty have a voice at the table?

- How do department meetings center conversations about race and racism in curriculum, pedagogy, hiring practices, and shared governance?

Leverage political and social influence persuade resistant faculty.

Questions to consider:

- As a department leader, how often do you engage in "coffee" or "lunch" with faculty to get to know them?

- Do faculty feel like their concerns are listened to and affirmed? Do faculty trust their department leader?

- How frequently do you engage in difficult conversations with faculty, individually or as a department?

- Having established authentic trust, how do you then challenge faculty to think more expansively about their role in contributing to racial inequities?

Sensitivity to the learning journeys of faculty striving for racial equity.

Questions to consider:

- How are faculty supported to critically examine their classroom practices from the perspective of racial equity? (e.g, professional development, learning communities, etc.)

- What professional learning opportunities do faculty have access to and how does that learning discuss topics like decolonization, white supremacy, and other racialized forms of oppression?

- Are faculty invited to reflect on their racial/ethnic identity, and how identity surfaces in the instruction of English and math courses?

Disruptive leaders viewed AB 705 as a transformative policy that affirmed students of color as capable of completing transferable coursework. These leaders are disruptive because they explicitly use their authority and power (e.g., via formal title, social networks) to transform political processes like committee formation, facilitation of department meetings, hiring processes, and curricular teams that previously maintained a status quo of lengthy developmental sequences. Disruptive leaders possessed racial literacy training through educational, personal, and professional experience in centering concepts like racial justice and used their expertise to reimagine transferable course pathways.

Village's English dean was a disruptive leader and the most vocal proponent of racial equity despite being considered an "outsider" to the system of California Community Colleges. This dean used her formal authority to empower early-career faculty by placing them in crucial curriculum and hiring committees. She also attempted to "flatten the hierarchy" that normalized more senior faculty as the sole decision-makers in department meetings. Her approach to AB 705 was *disruptive* because it challenged a longstanding culture where early-career faculty who supported AB 705 felt disempowered in their department.

Influential leaders leveraged their political and social influence to persuade resistant faculty to support AB 705. These highly influential leaders were praised for their transparency, commitment to students, and willingness to listen to faculty concerns. In addition to years of service at their college, these former faculty-turned-administrators were highly respected as "insiders" who built strong relationships allowing them to push back against faculty in support of AB 705 more easily.

Village's Math dean was an influential leader that frequently used data to pressure faculty to accept that lengthy developmental

education sequences did not work. Data convinced her that offering any developmental course harmed students. As a math dean, her expertise in racial equity was developed over time through Village's intentional investment in professional development over the last decade. Department trust in a data-driven equity leader made her exceptionally *influential* and allowed Village math to remove all developmental sequences entirely by the start date of AB 705 implementation (Fall 2019).

Accommodating leaders were committed equity advocates that sought to advance equitable outcomes for students of color. However, given their newfound familiarity with leading racial equity work, they were less comfortable with explicit race talk, were unsure how to facilitate department conversations rooted in race and racism specifically, and feared pressuring the faculty to transform their practice. Therefore, they accommodated the faculty, meaning that they focused on equity but were sensitive to the learnings needs and journeys of faculty, who, similar to the accommodating leaders, were still learning racial equity concepts.

Sunnyville's English chairs were accommodating leaders as they did not feel prepared to expand their faculty colleagues' awareness, training, and language on race and racism. Although they aspired to do so, they did not frequently engage in race talk and had difficulty facilitating

> "If you offer [developmental education], students will take it, even if they don't need it and if it's against their best interest."
>
> **MATH DEAN JENNA BLACKWOOD, VILLAGE**

conversations about race. Chairs *accommodated* faculty's "equity journeys," meaning that they *did not force* equity onto their faculty because they believed from personal experience that racial equity competence occurs over time. Notwithstanding these challenges, by 2018, the English division removed five of six developmental offerings and offered corequisite support for their transferable English course.

Compliance leaders followed the implementation of AB 705 in a procedural fashion. They were nonbelievers of the initiative and therefore complied with the law and its technical mandates. Compliance leaders believed developmental education reforms result in unprepared students post-transfer and feared the decreased quality of education. Contrary to supporters of AB 705, compliance leaders believed the law would exacerbate racial inequities.

Sunnyville's Math chair shows how a compliance implementation strategy led to the least disruptive changes to the status quo. The math chair made it clear to the faculty that she "hated" AB 705 and the department overwhelmingly favored this point of view. Despite her reservations, this math chair used her power to "make the best" of AB 705 through democratic faculty participation leading to little faculty resistance. The math division still offered two developmental courses to enroll post-AB 705.

"Let's make the best of [AB 705]."

MATH CHAIR
JESSICA AMIRI,
VILLAGE
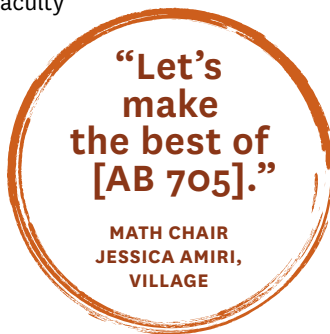
Disruptive, influential, and accommodating leaders all aspired to center racial equity in AB 705 implementation but were differentially equipped to do so, professionally and departmentally.

✳ Executive Leadership Should Provide Resources that Prioritize Racial Equity

Executive leaders are crucial as they have access to resources, including the power to appoint department leaders who oversee implementation, allocate funding for professional development training, and they can guide a college-wide vision that centers on racial equity.[27] In the interviews, executive leadership was engaged at varying levels in implementing AB 705 from the perspective of equity and exercised their influence accordingly.

How Bold Executive Leadership Center Racial Equity Campuswide

Village's executive leadership was deeply involved in shaping AB 705. A college-wide task force was created to plan, execute, evaluate, and communicate implementation progress to the entire campus community over many months. This committee included faculty and administrative leaders directly responsible for key areas affected by the law. Village's vice president of instruction and college president frequently connected with faculty and were often seen advocating for race-conscious enactment of the law. Respondents referenced these leaders by name and were well aware of their stance and commitments to racial equity. Recently hired English and math faculty were highly encouraged by executive leaders to be bold, creative and proactive in embedding racial equity in their courses and leadership as faculty. Village's executive leadership gave faculty and mid-level management full backing, legitimacy, and institutional support when needed, to prioritize racial equity – any resistance to follow would be safeguarded. When resistance began, executive leaders used their power to protect both implementers and the students who would be impacted.

Key takeaways: *Leaders can legitimate racial equity by conveying its significance, funding efforts that materialize it into policies and practices, and hiring employees who aspire for transformation • Faculty need support from leadership to bring together resources, teams, and ideas that center on racial equity • Structured time to reflect as a campus can create a uniform understanding of policy goals and approaches taken by a campus community.*

Why Faculty Resistance Surfaced.

Resistance to AB 705 unfolded for the following reasons:

- *Faculty compensation concerns for the teaching of corequisite units*
- *Senior faculty felt pushed aside in favor of early-career faculty*
- *Mistrust of college administrators*
- *Weariness of policymaker aims*
- *Concerns over decreasing quality of education*
- *New leader explicitly challenged hierarchies within the division*

How Leaders Responded to the Resistance:

In response to faculty backlash, which included grievances, the public chastisement of leaders, and the election to not develop a corequisite curriculum, Village's executive leaders established additional student supports for AB 705. The college president hired two support faculty for the writing center and the math success center. Under student services, these full-time tenure-track faculty create, "self-directed learning modules," identify students' roadblocks in classes, and design academic supports.

A Contrasting Example: Relying on Departments Leads to Guide implementation

In contrast to Village, Sunnyville's vice president was largely hands-off, leading to a siloed implementation outcome of AB 705. No coordinated approach existed "from the top" to organize a college-wide strategy. Instead, English and math faculty met on their own to decide on departmental changes. Sunnyville met twice over 2 to 3-hour meetings as a campus to coordinate implementation before shifting planning to departments. College-wide communication continued via phone calls or emails. Sunnyville interviewees often described implementation as "procedural." Sunnyville's vice president supported math and English departments by ensuring that revised courses met all logistical, regulatory, and legal curriculum requirements and troubleshooting any logistical challenges. Yet, respondents attributed absent leadership "from the top" to the weak implementation of AB 705 at Sunnyville. They suggested Sunnyville's vice presidents did not want to incur the risk of advocating for AB 705 from the perspective of racial equity in one direction or another due to fear of faculty backlash. This created a "power vacuum" that limited AB 705's potential because executive leadership did not *"put themselves on the line."* Moreover, interviewees seldom mentioned executive leaders except to argue that the college offered few professional development opportunities for their professional growth.

...Interviewees seldom mentioned executive leaders except to argue that the college offered few professional development opportunities for their professional growth.

✳ What are Barriers that Stalled Race-Conscious Implementation of AB 705?

As this report shows, local implementation of AB 705 depended a great deal on the critical consciousness of department and faculty leaders, who based on years of teaching experience were divided on whether the policy would lead to equitable student outcomes. Implementation varied greatly across English and math departments at the two colleges spotlighted. External factors were also clear barriers to effectively integrating race-consciousness into the law.

THE LEGISLATION.

As legislation, AB 705 acknowledges racialization in developmental education by describing "students of color" as those most likely to be placed into remediation.[28] However, beyond this general acknowledgment, AB 705 is race-neutral in acknowledging, evaluating the role of, and centering race in the reform of developmental education.[29] The reticence of policymakers and the Chancellor's Office to be more explicit about AB 705's racial equity aims from the perspective of respondents undermined implementation from the standpoint of racial equity. Although praised by advocates statewide, such as the Campaign for College Opportunity, AB 705 did not have sufficient structures and guardrails to ensure that implementation would be guided by an awareness of its potential to advance the racial equity goals envisioned in the Chancellor's strategic plan, Vision for Success. Implementation was left up to administrative and faculty leaders in positions of power that were differentially committed and capable of enforcing AB 705 as a racial equity strategy. See **Beyond Good Intentions: Steps to Craft Equity-Driven Policy for strategies to implement equity-driven policies**.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON RACIAL LITERACY.

Another challenge to centering race-conscious in AB 705 was lacking opportunities for professional development systemwide. Conferences and other training avenues influenced advocates and equipped them with the necessary data evidence, examples of reform, and methods of inquiry into specific practices that helped them interpret and welcome AB 705 with greater fidelity to racial equity. Equity leaders often participated in professional learning communities[30] like California Acceleration Project and RP Group conferences, helping socialize them into the statewide anti-developmental education faculty camp. Research consistently shows that training is key to successful policy reforms because it exposes implementers to concepts and evidence that better prepare them to accept new ideas.[31]

However, professional development had its challenges. First, since these opportunities are not compulsory and sparingly compensated vis-à-vis additional pay, only supporters or those open to new ideas tended to participate. Moreover, faculty adjuncts were largely kept out of this resource. Next, although professional development was an effective strategy in coalescing reformers, respondents shared that major statewide programs lacked a strong focus on racial literacy as applied to pedagogy, classroom culture, and curriculum. This was a missed opportunity to center conversations beyond the technical requirements of the law. Faculty need resources, time and support to critically examine their teaching practices and be exposed to research that shows the efficacy of developmental education reform through a lens of racial equity.

A 2021 report examining professional development webinars that focused on guided pathways and AB 705 by the Academic Senate for California Community College's (ASCCC) found that racial equity was not addressed directly and that equity was only addressed in vague, general terms.[32] Although the webinar presenters acknowledged equity as a central goal of the Chancellor's Office's Vision for Success (2020), the authors of the report write that the presenters "lacked the knowledge and expertise to speak about the enactment of racial equity" and that their "equity stance leaned toward fairness and equality for all (p.7)."

MISTRUST OF POLICYMAKERS AND ADMINISTRATORS OVER PRIOR REFORMS.

Opponents viewed AB 705 with suspicion and imagined that policymakers had hidden motives. Their mistrust of external policymakers and their agendas overwhelmed the educational aims of AB 705. As Cohen and March (1974) and Birnbaum (1989) suggest, in academic organizations that are complex and where different groups compete for power and resources, policies often become "garbage cans" to which unrelated things get attached.[33] This was clear in the arguments made against AB 705. It was viewed as a money-saving strategy that was being intentionally disguised as an education policy. It was also viewed as an attempt to divest faculty of their autonomy to exercise their prerogative on academic matters. For opponents, AB 705 symbolized the loss of power and perhaps their deprofessionalization as policymakers and external organizations were perceived as usurping the power of faculty to decide "what faculty members [teach]" and how it is taught.[34]

Campus implementers do not experience a policy like AB 705 as a detached, ahistorical, self-contained policy. Faculty participants recoiled at attacks on faculty autonomy to exercise their prerogative

on academic matters like curriculum and believed recent policies (e.g., AB 705, performance-based funding, equity funding) diminished their agency as instructors. For opponents, AB 705 was part of an efficiency and accountability state agenda that threatened faculty autonomy and eroded their power. Opponents' suspicions were not totally unfounded. The past Chancellor of California Community Colleges, Eloy Ortiz Oakley, has been more willing to challenge the statewide academic senate and join forces with external agencies to make monumental changes. He is the first chancellor to speak out on racial equity and institutionalized racism and to center a strategic plan (i.e., Vision for Success) on the imperative for closing racial gaps in graduation and transfer. Resistance to AB 705 highlighted in this report is important because it shows that college leaders are responsible for implementing new policies while responding to ideological resistance to reforms that span many years. The response to this resistance is vital as colleges systemwide have yet to realize the potential of AB 705.
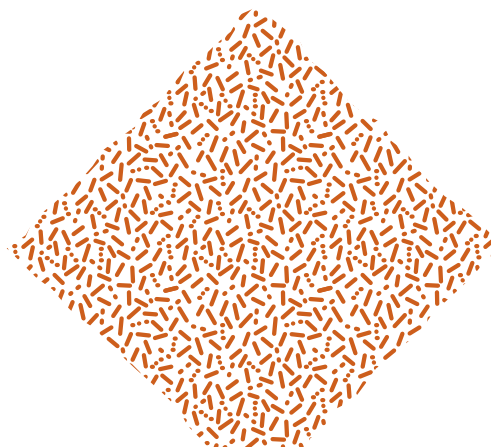
✳ Improving the Completion of Gateway English and Math Courses

Implications and recommendations for various stakeholders

1. CLEAR AND CONCISE RACIAL EQUITY LANGUAGE IN POLICY.

Policy research in higher education consistently shows that clear language in equity initiatives is needed to align the sensemaking of implementers with the aspirations of legislators. If colleges were to advance equity for students of color following the passing of the law in 2017, then they needed tools and resources accompanying AB 705 to reach that destination. For example, accountability measures (earlier than November 2020)[35] may have helped colleges evaluate their existing systems and coordinate change accordingly. Inconsistent guidance from the Chancellor's Office left implementers in a state of limbo over what to do next. If implementers took a step forward, they risked not complying with future Chancellor's office requirements. In respondents' words, the Chancellor's Office providing "guidance after the fact" complicated their planning efforts.

2. STATES MUST PROVIDE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

Research shows that policies that provide financial incentives and support tend to receive greater acceptance, enthusiasm, and support. The colleges spotlighted in this report were disappointed at the lack of financial support accompanying AB 705. Extensive reforms like AB 705 that require cognitive shifts in beliefs and a host of technical changes require funding to ensure smooth

implementation. Faculty should have release time and other financial incentives to support their development and leadership in reforming courses from the perspective of racial equity. We should not expect instructors to adopt culturally affirming pedagogies and reform their readings, syllabi, and course assignments if they do not have learning opportunities to dispel antiquated and racially exclusionary teaching practices.

3. COLLEGES SHOULD PROVIDE IMPLEMENTERS WITH STRUCTURED TIME TO REFORM.

College practitioners who respond to a broad range of reforms and unexpected challenges like the COVID-19 global pandemic are in a constant state of initiative fatigue. New responsibilities are added on top of existing ones. This reality clouded implementers' ability to spend adequate time understanding, examining, and adjusting their practices. College leaders and faculty need time led by internal or external facilitators to transform their practices. Empirical studies on policy sensemaking show that implementers need to experience a sense of dissonance, "or dissatisfaction with one's own behavior" that leads to the "reinterpretation of one's beliefs."[36] People need opportunities to engage with disconfirming evidence of their practices as well as time to rethink their existing beliefs, many of which are racialized. We cannot expect individuals to do so without the appropriate tools and resources.

4. HIRE MORE RACIALLY DIVERSE FACULTY.

Among the most pressing challenges in California community colleges is the diversification of the faculty body. The system should

continue its efforts to hire more Black, Latinx, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander, and Indigenous faculty. In the fall of 2020, white students in California community colleges represented 23.3 percent of the full-time equivalent student (FTES) body. White faculty represented 56.9 percent of tenured and tenure track faculty in the same semester. These numbers are even more disparate when disaggregating by faculty rank. For the 48.1 percent of Latinx students, the system has yet to be led by comparable percentages of Latinx administrators, faculty, and classified staff. A pillar of strength of the California Community Colleges stems from their rich diversity across race and ethnicity and the identities of the communities they serve. Employees of the system, including its leadership, should reflect that diversity.

From curriculum, pedagogy, and assumptions about students, all four departments studied in this report exemplified the centering of whiteness that respondents in part attributed to the underrepresentation of faculty of color. While department leaders were aware of this problem and had taken steps to recruit more faculty of color in recent years, such efforts were insufficient and too late to tilt the scales towards equity during the implementation of AB 705. Colleges need to recruit racially and ethnically diverse individuals with a range of personal and professional experiences that reflect race consciousness and care for racial equity. Without fresh perspectives to challenge the status quo, the culture of academic departments will remain insular and be used to discredit any "outsider" or policy from advancing reforms that improve the educational experiences of students of color.

5. EMPOWER EARLY-CAREER FACULTY.

Colleges should welcome new perspectives and create a culture of inclusion during implementation. The faculty at community colleges is predominantly white and many have been part of the system for decades. They have seen many innovations come and go. As one math faculty participant shared, some faculty "fossilize" and display a cynical attitude toward anything that represents a departure from the familiar. These cynical individuals may succeed in blocking reform-minded leaders and the early-career faculty who may not have the "social credits" to control the reform agenda. Although early-career faculty in this study felt enthusiastic about developmental education reforms like AB 705, they felt voiceless in their departments because they lacked tenure protections or were frequently disempowered by more senior colleagues. Colleges must find ways to empower and uplift early-career faculty who can energize and bring fresh perspectives to a department. The delivery of new learning modes (i.e., corequisites) and curricular reform requires that new points of view be invited to the table, not pushed away.

6. POLICY REFORMS SHOULD TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION INSTRUCTOR'S TEACHING IDENTITY.

AB 705 threatened the professional identities of some faculty. For example, faculty members described themselves with pride using titles such as "developmental specialist" and "basic skills expert." The pattern of academic labor distribution at community colleges made it a norm for faculty members to identify themselves as instructors of basic skills courses or transfer-level courses. Consequently, eliminating basic skills courses represented the loss of professional identity and potentially the loss of a job and income for basic skills faculty, especially many part-time faculty adjuncts. Their resistance was ideological as well as self-preserving. Faculty opponents who taught the transfer-level general education courses transferable to the CSU and UC systems also opposed AB 705.

For these opponents, the prospect of their courses being filled by students who, before AB 705, would have been channeled into basic skills courses represented the lowering of standards and loss of education quality. Their courses risked losing course "rigor" which was critical to their faculty identity and sense of purpose.

Patterns of hiring and allocating teaching loads along levels (developmental or transfer) created siloes rooted in professional identity and departmental cultures that prevented some faculty from seeing their practices in a new light. When educators interpret policies as contrary to their existing academic expectations, they may be less inclined to examine the validity of those expectations and abandon the status quo. College faculty and practitioners who implement reforms like AB 705 need the resources, time, and appropriate funding means to reimagine how we deliver higher education.

A pillar of strength of the California Community Colleges stems from their rich diversity across race and ethnicity and the identities of the communities they serve.

About the Author

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About the Centers

USC Race and Equity Center

The University of Southern California is home to a dynamic research, professional learning, and organizational improvement center that serves educational institutions, corporations, government agencies, and other organizations that span a multitude of industries across the United States and in other countries. We actualize our mission through rigorous interdisciplinary research, high-quality professional learning experiences, the production and wide dissemination of useful tools, trustworthy consultations and strategy advising, and substantive partnerships. While race and ethnicity are at the epicenter of our work, we also value their intersectionality with other identities, and therefore aim to advance equity for all persons experiencing marginalization. Our rigorous approach is built on research, scalable and adaptable models of success, and continuous feedback from partners and clients.
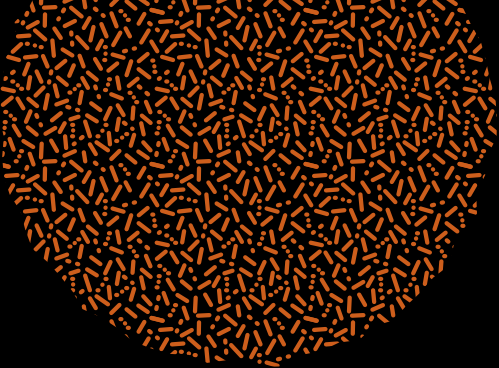
Complete College America

Complete College America (CCA) builds movements for scaled change and transforms institutions through data-driven policies, student-centered perspectives, and equity-driven practices. Since its founding in 2009, CCA has connected a national network of forward-thinking state and higher education leaders and introduced bold initiatives that help states and institutions confront inequities; close institutional performance gaps; and increase college completion rates, especially for historically excluded students.

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"It was the students of color that were being kept out of transfer-level English by the basic skills program. And so when my colleagues talk about basic skills students, what they're talking about is black and brown students, even if they don't say those words."

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