

Measuring Success, Making Progress

Informing Educational Improvement in California

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CONTENTS

<p>Executive Summary 1</p> <p>College Readiness 4</p> <p>Coursework 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">TRENDS</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of graduates completing all a–g requirements: 2004–08 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of graduates completing all a–g requirements, by race/ethnicity: 2004–08 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of graduates completing all a–g requirements, by gender: 2004–08 4</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Community college course taking during high school: 2007–08 4</p> <p>Assessments: SAT and AP Exams 5</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">TRENDS</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of 12th-graders who take the SAT and their scores: 2004–08 5</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Participation and pass rates on AP exams: 2004–08 5</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Student performance on AP exams, by subject: class of 2008 5</p> <p>Assessments: Early Assessment Program (EAP) 6</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">TRENDS</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">EAP participation: 2006–09. 6</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of 11th-graders ready for college: 2009 6</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">DETAIL</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">English EAP results, by race/ethnicity: 2009 7</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Mathematics EAP results, by race/ethnicity: 2009 7</p>	<p>High School Graduation 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">TRENDS</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Averaged freshman graduation rates: Selected years, 1991 through 2008. 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of students from 2002 7th-grade cohort enrolled in subsequent grades 8</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">DETAIL</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Averaged freshman graduation rates in California, by race/ ethnicity: 2008 9</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Six-year longitudinal graduation rate, by race/ethnicity: 2008 9</p> <p>College Enrollment 10</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">TRENDS</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of high school graduates who enroll immediately in higher education: 2003–07. 10</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of high school graduates who enroll immediately in higher education, by type of school: 2003–07 10</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">DETAIL</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Percentage of high school graduates who enroll immediately in public higher education in California, by race/ethnicity and gender: 2007 11</p> <p>Underprepared Students— Course Completion 12</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">TRENDS</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Statewide annual successful course completion rates for basic skills courses 12</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">DETAIL</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Course completion rates by income 13</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Course completion rates by race/ethnicity 13</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Course completion rates by gender 13</p>
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CONTENTS—CONTINUED

Underprepared Students—Progress14

PROGRESS IN EIGHT YEARS

Percentage of basic skills students who completed a higher-level course in the same subject area14

Community College Completion and Success15

Completion and Progress15

COMPLETION RATES

Of first-time students, percentage who are degree-seekers and of degree-seekers, percentage who completed in six years15

STUDENT PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT RATE

Of first-time students, percentage with intent to complete and of those, percentage making progress or completing in six years . . .16

Completion Details17

TRENDS

Type of completion among all degree-seekers17

Type of completion among recent high school graduates who are degree-seekers17

DETAIL

Total completion by race/ethnicity18

Total completion by attendance status in first term18

Total completion by gender18

Total completion by low-income status19

Total completion among full-time low-income students, by Pell Grant status19

Basic Skills Completion20

TRENDS

Total completion, by basic skills status20

Type of completion, by basic skills status: 2008–09.20

Percentage of degree-seekers who completed 12 credits and attempted a transfer-level math or English course, by basic skills status20

Interim Milestones Among Non-Completers21

TRENDS

Progress among students who did not complete within six years. . . .21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE TRANSITION from high school to college has become an important target for efforts to improve student success. Nationally, alliances among states and reform organizations are promoting academic standards that prepare students for college, fostering greater collaboration and alignment between secondary and postsecondary institutions, and encouraging the exchange of data to allow more accurate measurement of student success.¹ In California, partnerships among institutions, organizations, and foundations,² as well as recently enacted legislation,³ are designed to strengthen the preparation and support students receive as they navigate this crucial transition.

The educational success of California students—especially those attending public schools and community colleges—has been a significant focus of the Hewlett Foundation for nearly 10 years. As part of this work, the Foundation develops a set of priorities for its investments and chooses metrics to monitor. Until California has a data system in place that tracks students across education sectors—from elementary through postsecondary education⁴—the Hewlett Foundation

¹ American Diploma Project, Postsecondary Connection and P-20 Councils, Data Quality Campaign.

² Cal-PASS; The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, (2008) *Strengthening Pre-collegiate Education in Community Colleges*, http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/publications/elibrary_pdf_774.pdf; MDRC, Student Support Partnership Integrating Resources and Education (SSPIRE), http://www.mdrc.org/project_31_77.html.

³ The Early Commitment to College program; The Education Data and Information Act of 2008.

⁴ A framework for developing and implementing a comprehensive statewide student data system, led by the California

shares the most up-to-date information available on its priority student outcomes. The indicators pinpoint where on their education pathways students struggle and, therefore, can help identify crucial times and places to intervene. We believe decision-makers should pay close attention to these existing indicators, and work continuously to improve the quality of available data, so that they and the wider community can learn more about how best to serve students throughout their education.

Preparation for College

Statewide, students' readiness for college and preparation during high school has changed little in recent years. As early as 9th grade, students can begin taking courses that prepare them—and meet eligibility requirements—for college admission. But by the time they graduate, only one-third have successfully completed the series of courses (called “a–g” courses) required for admission to the University of California and California State Universities, a rate that has not increased over time. Likewise, just over one-third of 12th-graders take the SAT college entrance exam, and both participation and the percentage of those earning high scores have remained steady.

On a more promising note, California students' rate of taking and passing Advanced Placement (AP) exams is well above the national average. Almost one-third of the 2008 graduating class

Department of Education (CDE), is described in a report by McKinsey & Company, December 2008. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/pc/index.asp#mckinsey>.

attempted an AP exam, and about 20 percent earned a passing score, for which they can receive college credit.⁵ However, like other indicators of college preparation, participation and pass rates have remained flat.

Completing courses at community colleges is another way that high school students can earn college credit. In a sample of high school students, some 4 percent were concurrently enrolled in community college (“dual enrolled” students). Better data on these dual enrolled students could shed more light on this type of preparation for college.

Since 2006, many California students have had access to a useful new tool to gauge their readiness for college. The Early Assessment Program (EAP) shows 11th-graders their readiness for college-level work at California State Universities (CSUs). This assessment is appended to the standardized tests required at the end of certain high school courses. Participation is particularly high on the English portion, because most students take that standardized test; 75 percent of students enrolled in 11th grade took the EAP English test. Only 35 percent took the EAP math test, however, in part because far fewer students were enrolled in the eligible math courses. **Test results indicate that few students are prepared for college-level work: 12 percent of students in English (16 percent of test takers) and 5 percent of**

⁵ Nationwide, 25 percent of students took an AP exam during high school, and 15 percent earned a passing score of 3 or higher. http://www.collegeboard.com/html/aprtn/pdf/ap_report_to_the_nation.pdf.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY—CONTINUED

students in math (13 percent of test takers) scored at the “Ready for College” level. Despite those discouraging rates, one finding suggests that these tests are providing useful and timely signals to students. On the math test, students may score at a level called “Ready for College—Conditional,” which requires them to complete specific coursework during their 12th-grade year to be prepared for college. Thirty-seven percent of students who scored at that level in 2007 went on to complete the necessary coursework the following year.

California schools have made little progress in increasing the proportion of students who complete high school. For over a decade, the best estimates of graduation rates have lingered around 70 percent, indicating that 70 percent of students enrolled in 9th grade graduated four years later. Until recently, the state had not collected student-level information that tracks individuals, so all statewide rates are still best guesses. They also do not capture students who drop out before 9th grade. To provide a better look at when students leave the system, one indicator tracks a cohort of students in a sample of school districts from 7th grade through graduation. **Only 55 percent of those students originally enrolled in 7th grade graduated six years later in 2008.**⁶ Although almost 70 percent were still enrolled in 12th grade, many failed to earn a diploma. This may be due in

⁶ While this rate seems very low, the analogous rate from Florida, which tracks all students from kindergarten through postsecondary education, is 48 percent (data provided by Jeff Sellers, Chief of the Education Data Warehouse, Florida Dept. of Education).

part to failure to pass the high school exit exam: more than half of the 12th-graders who failed to graduate had not passed that exam.⁷

For Hispanic and African American students, the picture of college preparation and high school completion is consistently worse across all indicators. Their graduation rates trail those of their White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers by 20–35 percentage points statewide. Large gaps between racial/ethnic and income groups exist across all indicators of college readiness.

College Enrollment

College enrollment in California is difficult to measure. Students are not tracked from high school into postsecondary institutions. Public colleges and universities report enrollment, but private institutions do so only voluntarily, and there is no reliable way to identify California students enrolled outside the state.⁸ A system connecting secondary to postsecondary education data would provide a much clearer picture of how many students successfully transition into college. The best estimates available indicate that about half of high school graduates enroll the following fall in a two- or four-year college in California, a

⁷ This finding is consistent with a recent study by Reardon and Kurlaender (PACE Policy Brief 09-3), which found a large negative effect of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) on graduation rates for students in the bottom quartile of achievement, and that this impact was especially large for minority students and for girls. <http://gse.berkeley.edu/research/pace/reports/PB.09-3.pdf>, August 2009.

⁸ To some extent, these data exist in the National Student Clearinghouse, but there is currently no way to make that connection statewide.

figure that has not increased in recent years. It also trails the national average—about two-thirds of recent high school graduates enroll immediately after high school.⁹ Among California students who enroll in college, roughly two-thirds do so at a community college.

Success in Community College

Among students who enroll at a community college after high school and seek a degree,¹⁰ about one-quarter transfer to a four-year college or complete a certificate or degree.

After an initial increase, completion rates fell for students in the most recent cohort (ending in 2008–09). These students, however, began their enrollment in the midst of budget cuts and resulting reduction in course selections and student services, all of which may have played a role in the completion decline. Additional findings indicate that fewer students are able to complete 12 units (3 or 4 courses), which is the coursework milestone used by colleges to show “intent to complete.”

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 2009*.

¹⁰ Completion rates for community college students are hard to measure because students enroll for many reasons besides earning a degree, certificate, or transferring. The Hewlett Foundation is interested in understanding how a broad population of community college students fare in their studies because its efforts are intended to support increasing students' college aspirations as well as their college success. In their accountability reporting for the state of California, colleges report success rates of a smaller cohort of students, those who have demonstrated degree-seeking behavior by reaching defined coursework milestones. We also present this indicator in the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY—CONTINUED

A closer examination of the completion data reveals at least one effective opportunity for intervention: in the most recent cohort, students who received any financial aid completed community college at a rate 5 percentage points higher than those who did not. In particular, **Pell Grants awarded to low-income students are associated with higher rates of completion: recipients complete at higher rates than low-income students receiving other forms of financial aid and compared with students who received none.** Students who receive financial aid attend full time more often than their peers who do not and full-time attendance is strongly associated with higher completion rates.

Underprepared Students

As exams like the EAP reveal, many students leave high school unprepared for college. However, that lack of preparation does not guarantee poor outcomes. **About 60 percent of students who require pre-collegiate coursework (called “ba-**

sic skills”) when they first enroll in a community college, pass their initial basic skills course. Moreover, according to new data, depending on the subject, between 16 and 35 percent of students who start in basic skills courses pass the subsequent college-level course.

Interim Milestones

Many students who do not complete community college still make significant progress toward a degree. In the most recent cohort of students, 40 percent who did not complete community college earned at least 12 units, and 25 percent achieved the half-way mark by completing 30 or more units. Tracking students through these interim milestones can help institutions target resources and programs more effectively to improve student success.

College Achievement Gaps

By the time students enroll in and complete post-secondary education, racial/ethnic gaps have

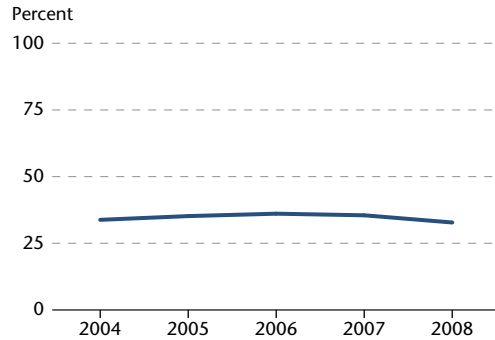
widened. Asian/Pacific Islander students enroll in college at substantially higher rates than any other racial/ethnic group, and more than one-quarter of Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates in California enroll in the University of California (UC). African American and Hispanic students, in contrast, enroll at much lower rates. Proportionally more Hispanic and African American students than White or Asian/Pacific Islander students enroll in California’s community colleges.

Conclusion

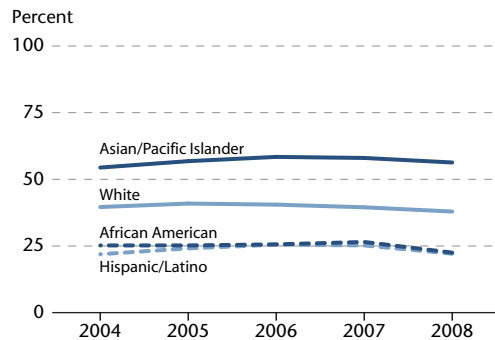
Despite a few promising signs, little progress has been made in recent years on any measure of student success in the transition from high school to college and beyond, and wide gaps between racial/ethnic and income groups persist. Although these results are discouraging, the indicators offer policymakers a web-based set of comprehensive data they can use as they consider policies to strengthen education and measure progress over time.

COLLEGE READINESS—COURSEWORK

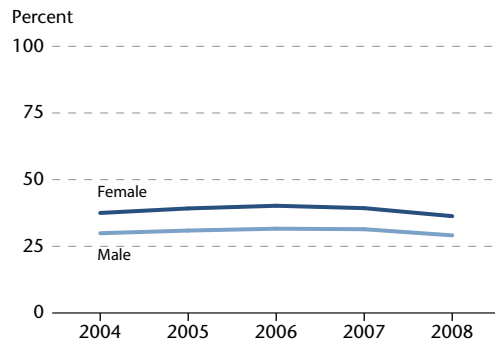
Percentage of graduates completing all a–g requirements: 2004–08



Percentage of graduates completing all a–g requirements, by race/ethnicity: 2004–08



Percentage of graduates completing all a–g requirements, by gender: 2004–08



Trends

Rates of a–g course completion have held fairly steady, between 33–36 percent, since 2004. In 2008, they declined almost 3 percent overall, from about 36 percent to 33 percent.

Among 2008 high school graduates, Asian students had by far the highest rate of a–g course completion, almost 20 percentage points higher than White students and 35 points higher than African American and Hispanic students. Since 2004, completion rates for Asian and Hispanic students have increased slightly, while rates for White and African American students have decreased slightly.

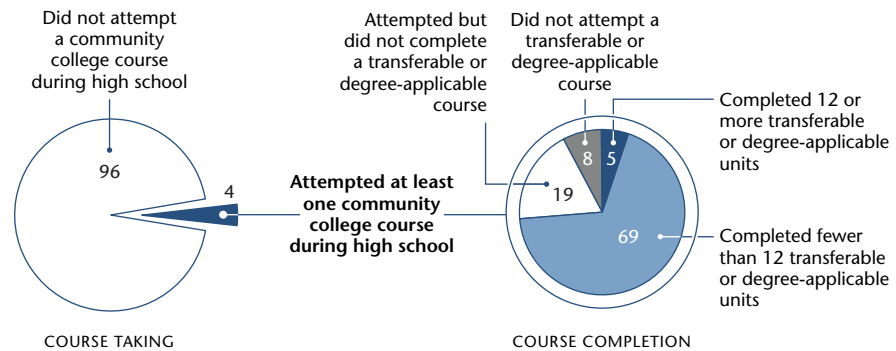
About 4 percent of a sample of 12th-graders in 2007–08 enrolled at a community college before they completed high school. Of those 4 percent, more than two-thirds completed at least one transferable or degree-applicable course. Five percent of those who enrolled (about .2 percent of all 12th-graders) completed 12 transferable or degree-applicable units, the equivalent of one semester of college-level work before the end of high school.

About the Data

A–G requirements: California’s postsecondary institutions have defined a series of high school courses, called the “a–g requirements,” required for students who wish to attend University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) schools. This report shows the percentage of all high school graduates who completed those courses.

Community college enrollment: The dual enrollment data are an estimate that does not include all California students. Figures include 64 California community colleges and more than 300,000 12th-graders from participating schools and districts in Cal-PASS. All K–12 information is based on data submitted to Cal-PASS by local education agencies; community college data are from the Community College Chancellor’s Office MIS (COMIS).

Community college course taking during high school: 2007–08



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Department of Education.

SOURCE: Analysis of Cal-PASS cohort data and data from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office Management Information System (COMIS).

COLLEGE READINESS—ASSESSMENTS: SAT AND AP EXAMS

Trends

In 2008, 36 percent of 12th-graders in California took the SAT. Slightly less than half of those students received a high score. The average verbal score was 494, and the average math score was 513, both out of a possible 800. Both the rate of participation in the SAT and average scores have remained fairly constant since 2004.

California students participate in and earn passing scores on AP exams at higher rates than the national average. Almost one-third of students in

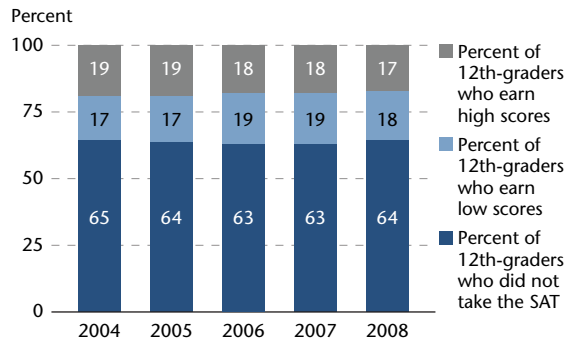
the class of 2008 took at least one AP exam during high school (compared with one-fourth nationwide), and 20 percent earned a passing score of 3 or higher on at least one exam (compared with 15 percent nationwide). Participation and pass rates have held steady over the past five years: California's student population has grown, and the number of students taking and passing the tests has kept pace. A higher percentage of students took and passed a social science AP test than any other subject area test.

About the Data

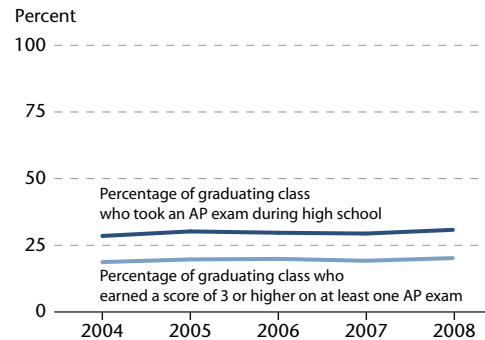
SAT The SAT college entrance exam has three sections, each with a maximum score of 800 points. High scores are defined as a combined math and verbal score of 1000 or above (before 2005–06) or a combined math, verbal, and writing score of 1500 or above (in 2005–06 and later).

AP AP exams are scored on a 1–5 scale; scores of 3 or higher are considered passing, and students may receive some college credit for them.

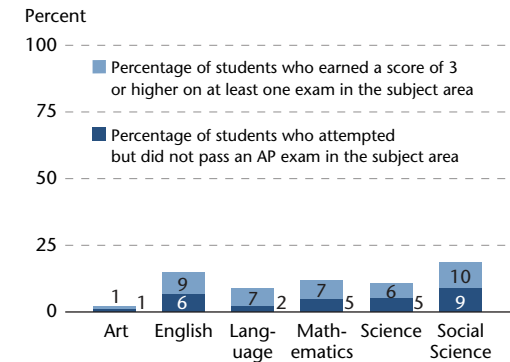
Percentage of 12th-graders who take the SAT and their scores: 2004–08



Participation and pass rates on AP exams: 2004–08



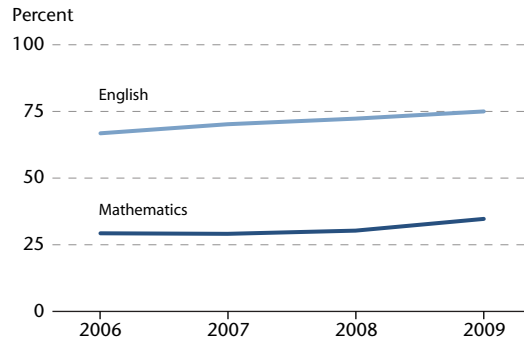
Student performance on AP exams, by subject: class of 2008



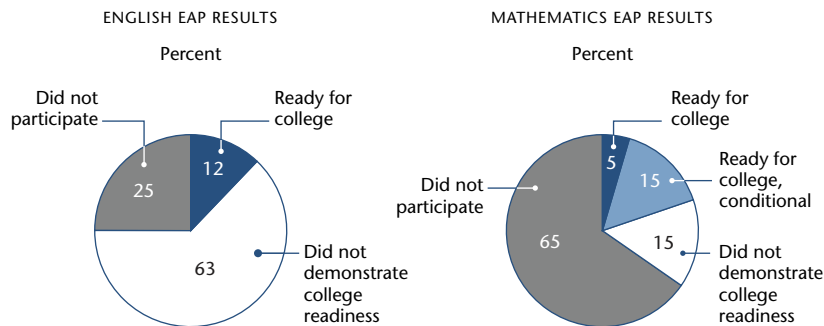
SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Department of Education. College Board, *AP Report to the Nation, 2005–2009*.

COLLEGE READINESS—ASSESSMENTS: EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (EAP)

EAP participation: 2006–09



Percentage of 11th-graders ready for college: 2009



SOURCE: Analysis of California State University EAP data.

Trends

The Early Assessment Program (EAP) has allowed 11th-graders to test their readiness for college at California State Universities since 2006. In 2009, 35 percent of 11th-graders took the math assessment and 75 percent took the English assessment. Participation is associated with course taking, particularly in math, because the EAP is offered as a supplement to the Algebra II and Summative Math California Standards Tests (CSTs), which about half of 11th-graders take.

A relatively small percentage of students demonstrate college readiness on the EAP. Twelve percent of all 11th-graders (16 percent of test takers) scored at a level indicating they were ready for college in English. Five percent of all 11th-graders (13 percent of test takers) demonstrated college readiness in math. Students can also score as “Ready for College—Conditional,” on the math exam, which indicates they will be ready for college if they meet certain course-taking requirements. Of the students who scored as conditionally ready for college in 2007, 37 percent completed the coursework necessary to be college-ready.

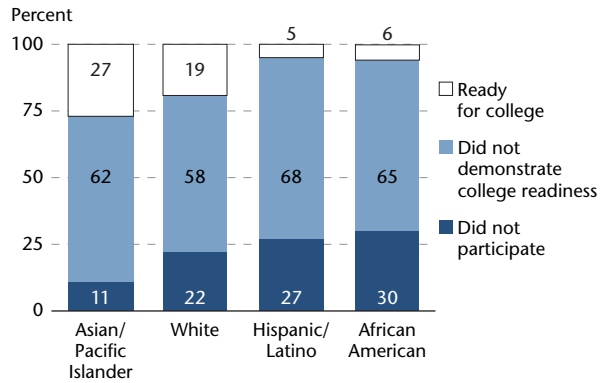
About the Data

EAP participation: Participation is calculated by dividing the number of EAP test takers by the number of 11th-graders enrolled. Because enrollment is measured in the fall and fewer students are enrolled in the spring when the test is administered, this may underestimate the participation rate.

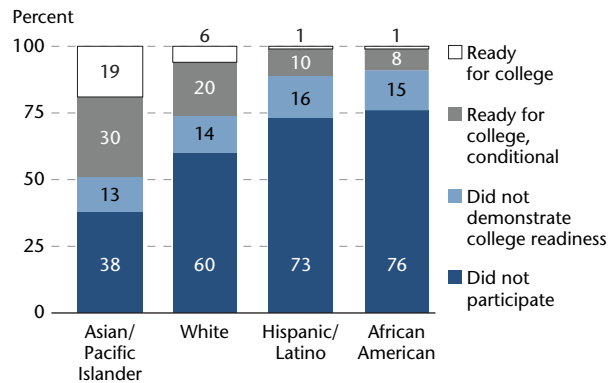
EAP scores: Exam scores indicate whether students demonstrate readiness for college-level courses at a California State University (CSU).

COLLEGE READINESS—ASSESSMENTS: EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (EAP)

English EAP results, by race/ethnicity: 2009



Mathematics EAP results, by race/ethnicity: 2009



Detail

Participation in the math Early Assessment Program (EAP) varies widely by race/ethnicity: 62 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students took the math EAP, by far the highest rate. About one-quarter of Hispanic and African American students participated. To a large extent, this may reflect differences in math course taking, since the EAP is given as a supplement to specific end-of-course math exams. Differences in participation on the English assessment were smaller.

Test results also differ by race/ethnicity. Almost one in five Asian/Pacific Islander students scored at a college-ready level on the math exam, compared with one in twenty White students and about 1 percent of Hispanic and African American students. The differences on the English test are also large. Nineteen percent of White and 27 percent of Asian students score as college-ready, compared with about 5 percent of their Hispanic and African American peers.

About the Data

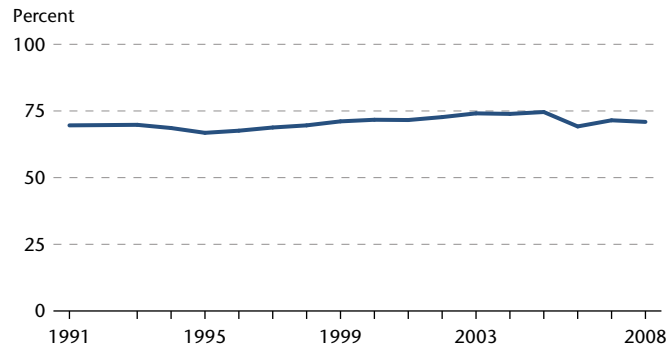
EAP participation: Participation is calculated by dividing the number of EAP test takers by the number of 11th-graders enrolled. Because enrollment is measured in the fall and fewer students are enrolled in the spring when the test is administered, this may underestimate the participation rate.

EAP scores: Exam scores indicate whether students demonstrate readiness for college-level courses at a California State University (CSU).

SOURCE: Analysis of California State University EAP data.

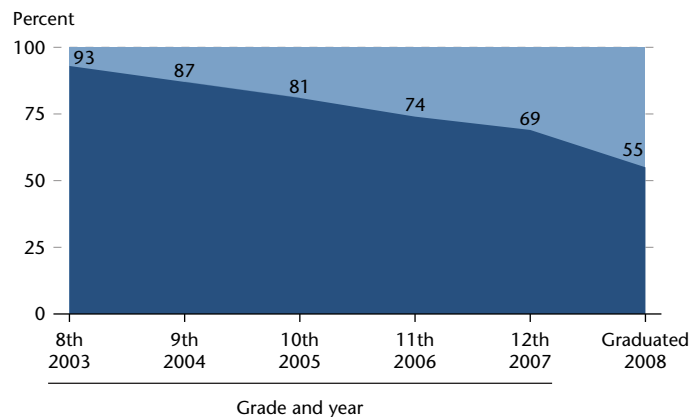
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Averaged freshman graduation rates: Selected years, 1991 through 2008



SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics, 2008* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009020>); Stillwell and Hoffman 2008 (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008353rev.pdf>); analysis of data from the California Department of Education.

Percentage of students from 2002 7th-grade cohort enrolled in subsequent grades



SOURCE: Analysis of Cal-PASS cohort data.

Trends

High school graduation rates have held steady at 68–75 percent over the last 15 years. The 2008 rate was 71 percent.

Some estimates differ, but trends are similar. The California Department of Education reported a statewide graduation rate of 68 percent in 2008, which was calculated by dividing the number of diplomas issued in 2008 by the number of 9th-graders enrolled four years earlier. That rate has also held fairly steady, within 3 percentage points, over the last 10 years.

2008 Six-Year Longitudinal Rate

Only 55 percent of 7th-grade students from a sample of California districts received regular diplomas six years later, in 2008. Three-quarters of the original group of 7th-grade students made it through the end of 10th grade, and almost 70 percent were promoted to 12th grade. The biggest drop-off—14 percent of all students—occurred between entering 12th grade and graduation.

At present, longitudinal rates tracking the progress of individual students can only be

calculated using data from voluntary partnerships like Cal-PASS, an initiative that collects, analyzes, and shares student data among partner districts and institutions. Because of the voluntary nature of Cal-PASS, the longitudinal rate is not necessarily representative of the state as a whole. One useful comparison for this sample of Cal-PASS districts is Florida, which does have the capacity to calculate longitudinal rates statewide. There, 48 percent of 7th-graders graduated high school six years later in 2008.

Of those students who were enrolled in 12th grade but did not graduate, 56 percent had not passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). A 2009 Stanford study¹ found that low-achieving students subject to the CAHSEE requirement had substantially lower graduation rates—an average of 15 percent lower—than similar students not subject to the CAHSEE. These negative effects fell disproportionately on female and minority students.

¹ Reardon et al. (2009). <http://ed.stanford.edu/suse/faculty/displayFacultyNews.php?tablename=notify1&id=871>.

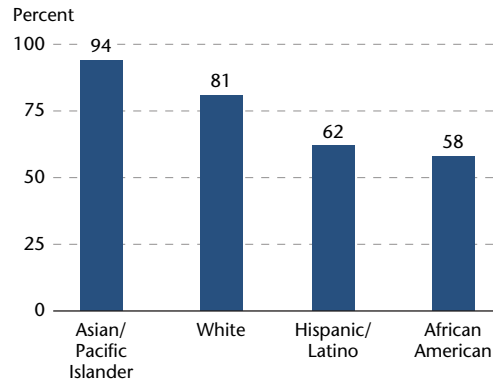
About the Data

Graduation rate: These rates are calculated using the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) for public high schools, an estimate widely used in the absence of data systems that track individual students over time. AFGR divides total graduates by a “smoothed” estimate of 9th-grade enrollment four years earlier. Ninth-grade enrollment numbers are often inflated due to a large number of students repeating that grade. This method averages the 8th-, 9th-, and 10th-grade enrollment numbers for each cohort of students. Dividing graduates by this “smoothed” estimate yields an arguably more accurate and credible graduation rate, one that is widely recognized and used by the National Center for Education Statistics to compare rates between states.

Six-year longitudinal rate: This method tracked 15,359 7th-grade students in five school districts. These districts were selected to test the longitudinal tracking method and do not necessarily represent California as a whole. These students were enrolled in grade 7 as recorded in the Cal-PASS K–12 Student file. Some attrition is due to student mobility: Cal-PASS cannot track students who leave the state or move to a district that does not participate in Cal-PASS. All information is based on data submitted to Cal-PASS by local education agencies.

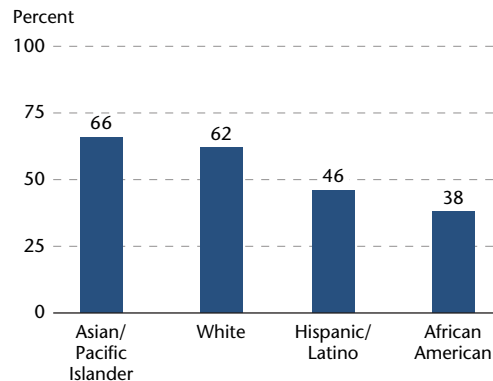
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Averaged freshman graduation rate in California, by race/ethnicity: 2008



SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics, 2008* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009020>); Stillwell and Hoffman 2008 (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008353rev.pdf>); analysis of data from the California Department of Education.

Six-year longitudinal graduation rate, by race/ethnicity: 2008



SOURCE: Analysis of Cal-PASS cohort data.

Detail

Statewide graduation rates are substantially lower for students of color than for their White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers. In 2008, graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students were about 20 percentage points lower than rates for White students and about 30 percentage points lower than rates for Asian students.

The disparities are similar in the six-year longitudinal cohort. More than 60 percent of White and Asian/Pacific Islander students received a diploma six years after they enrolled in 7th grade, but rates are substantially lower for other racial/ethnic categories. Slightly less than 40 percent of African American students in the five-district sample graduated on time.

Context

Without a data system that tracks individual students throughout their education, calculating true statewide graduation rates has been notoriously difficult. Many types of estimates, each with its own proponents and critics, have been employed to develop a realistic idea of the proportion of students who graduate from high school on time. Every method, however, is still simply a best guess, and the variety of estimates

and disparities among them can confuse those who simply want to know the proportion of students who earn a diploma.

This is beginning to change. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education issued new regulations directing states to track individual students to calculate graduation rates, beginning with reports for academic year 2010–11.

California is well on its way to reporting actual graduation rates. The state is currently rolling out its new longitudinal data system and has released two years of dropout rates based on student-level data. It reported an adjusted one-year dropout rate¹ of 5.3 percent for 2008. In other words, 5.3 percent of students in grades 9–12 left school during the 2007–08 school year.

With fewer than four years of student-level data, it is impossible to calculate a real four-year graduation rate, but those data should be available for the class of 2010. Meanwhile, voluntary data partnerships like Cal-PASS can calculate longitudinal rates for samples of students in participating high schools.

¹ Calculated as the number of reported dropouts, minus students who re-enrolled, plus students counted as “lost transfers,” those who reported changing schools, but who never enrolled in another school.

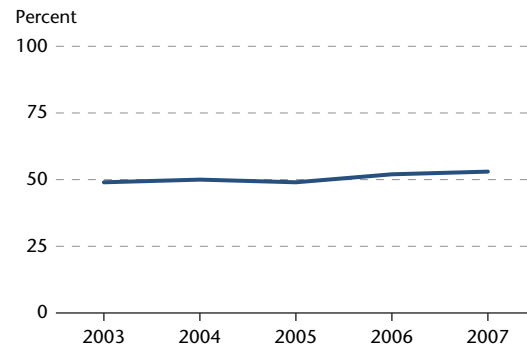
About the Data

Graduation rate: These rates are calculated using the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) for public high schools, an estimate widely used in the absence of data systems that track individual students over time. AFGR divides total graduates by a “smoothed” estimate of 9th-grade enrollment four years earlier.

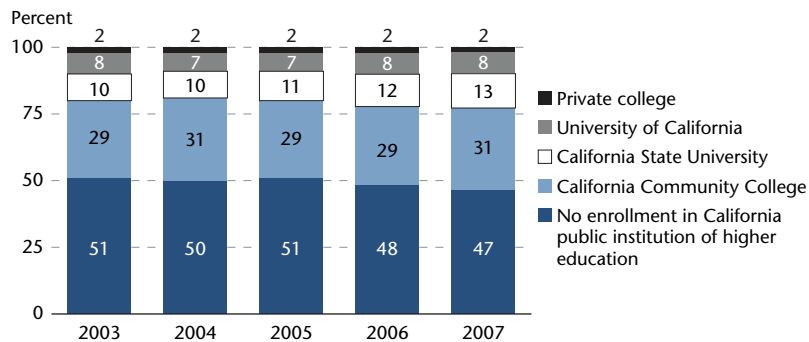
Six-year longitudinal rate: This method tracked 15,359 7th-grade students in five districts until graduation. All information is based on data submitted to Cal-PASS by local education agencies.

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

Percentage of high school graduates who enroll immediately¹ in higher education: 2003–07



Percentage of high school graduates who enroll immediately¹ in higher education, by type of school: 2003–07



Trends

About half of 2007 high school graduates enrolled immediately in some form of higher education¹ in California. The majority of students who enrolled did so in a California Community College (CCC). Among all recent high school graduates, slightly less than one-quarter enrolled in the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), or a private college. These rates may undercount private college enrollment, however, since data submission from those schools is voluntary and varies from year to year. These rates also do not capture students who leave the state for college. Nationwide, about 67 percent of high school graduates enrolled immediately in postsecondary education in 2007.² Better data on California students' enrollment is necessary for a more complete understanding.

Slightly higher rates of high school graduates enrolled immediately in California institutions of higher education in 2007 than in the previous four years. Percentage of immediate enrollment in the UC system and private colleges has held fairly steady, while enrollment in CCCs and the CSUs has increased slightly.

¹ These figures include only students in regular postsecondary education programs as defined by the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

² National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2009*.

About the Data

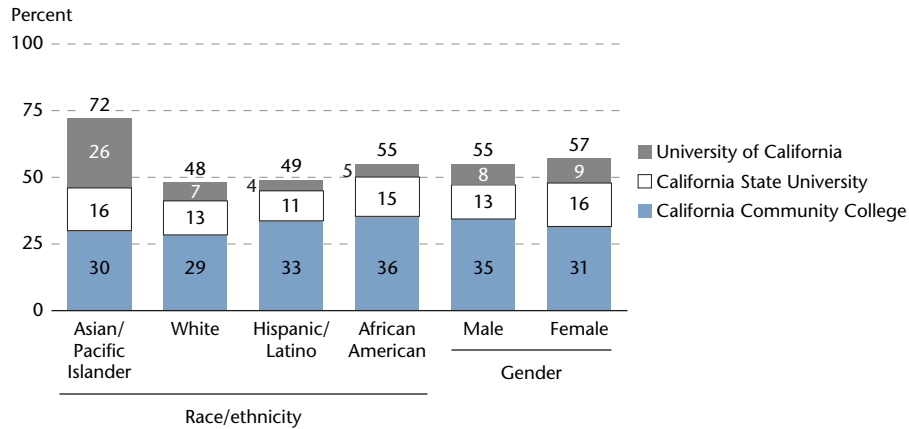
Rates of college enrollment are calculated by dividing the number of first-time freshmen age 19 and under who are enrolled in regular postsecondary education programs by the number of high school graduates in California during the previous academic year. Students are not tracked individually, so these numbers are only estimates. Because data submission by private colleges and universities is voluntary and varies each year, and students who enroll in other states are not counted, the college enrollment rate is likely underestimated.

¹ Calculated as the number of first-time freshman age 19 and under, enrolled in regular higher education programs, divided by the total high school graduates in the previous academic year.

SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

Percentage of high school graduates who enroll immediately¹ in public higher education in California, by race/ethnicity and gender: 2007



¹ Calculated as the number of first-time freshman age 19 and under, enrolled in regular higher education programs, divided by the total high school graduates in the previous academic year.
 NOTE: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.
 SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission.

Detail

White students enroll in California public institutions of higher education at the lowest rates, compared with Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and African American students. This difference may be due to larger proportions of these students enrolling in private institutions and in colleges outside the state, possibilities not captured in these figures. Asian/Pacific Islander students enroll at the highest rates, 72 percent overall and 26 percent in the University of California (UC) system. African American and Hispanic students have the highest rates of enrollment in California Community Colleges (CCC).

Women enroll in postsecondary education at higher rates than men, and they have higher rates of enrollment in four-year public colleges.

The University of California system publishes data on its applicants and admissions every year.¹ In 2008, about 85 percent of applicants were accepted to a UC campus, and about half of those enrolled. Almost 90 percent of White and Asian/Pacific Islander students were admitted, compared with 81 percent of Hispanic students and 68 percent of African American students. Asian/Pacific Islander students matriculate at UC schools at a substantially higher rate: about 60 percent of those admitted did enroll, compared with 45 percent of other students.

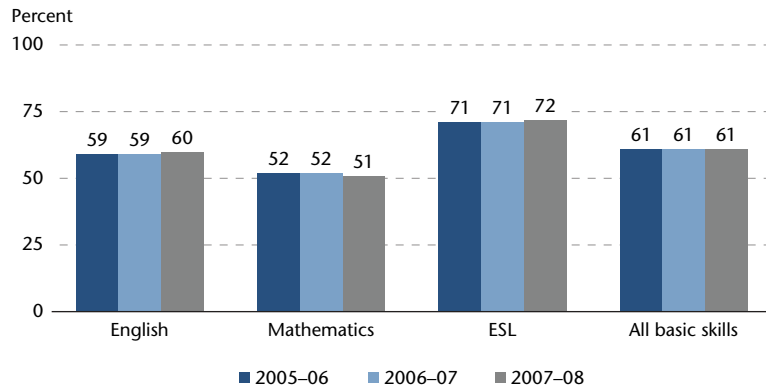
¹ <http://statfinder.ucop.edu>.

About the Data

Rates are calculated by dividing the number of first-time freshmen age 19 and under who are enrolled in regular postsecondary education programs by the number of high school graduates in California during the previous academic year. Students are not tracked individually, so these numbers are only estimates. Because data submission by private institutions of higher education is voluntary and varies each year, and students who attend college in other states are not counted, the college enrollment rate is likely underestimated. Private high schools do not report the gender or race/ethnicity of their high school graduates, so disaggregated rates include only public high school graduates.

UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS—COURSE COMPLETION

Statewide annual successful course completion rates for basic skills courses



SOURCE: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. *Focus on Results: Accountability Reporting for the California Community Colleges*, March 2009.

Trends

Many students enter college unprepared for college-level work. As a measure of initial success in pre-collegiate or basic skills courses, the pass rate for students' first course in English, mathematics, or ESL is tracked.

Successful completion rates for basic skills courses in all three disciplines remained stable over the three-year period 2005–08, with only slight improvements in English from 59 percent to 60 percent.

However, differences in the success rates among the three disciplines are notable. English as a Second Language (ESL) shows the highest rates, followed by English and then math, with the differences of about 20 percentage point between ESL and math in all three years.

About the Data

Basic skills courses: Courses that a community college has designated as precollegiate. For the purposes of this analysis, these courses are limited to those offered in English, math, and English as a Second Language (ESL).

Basic skills successful course completion rate: The percentage of students who completed a basic skills course with a final course grade of A, B, C, or CR/P. The cohorts for this rate include students enrolled in credit basic skills courses in the academic years of 2005–06, 2006–07, and 2007–08. These cohorts excluded “special admit” students (students enrolled in a K–12 school at the time they take the basic skills course).

Methodological limitation: The colleges will continue to monitor these rates over time, but it should be noted that the current metric makes it difficult to compare success rates among colleges. Although there are multiple levels of Basic Skills courses in each discipline, in the current metric, colleges collapse the success rates for all of the courses into one discipline-level success rate. Thus, there is one success rate for Basic Skills Math, rather than a success rate for three levels below college, a success rate for two levels below college, and so on. Given that success rates tend to be lower in lower-level classes, the proportion of students in each level of Basic Skills courses affects the college's overall discipline-level success rate. For example, if 50 percent of students at College A are enrolled in Basic Skills Math three levels below college and 10 percent of students at College B are enrolled in the same course, the success rate for College A is likely to be lower solely due to this difference in enrollment. This methodological limitation could be addressed in future years by reporting success rates for each level within the Basic Skills sequence for each discipline.

UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS—COURSE COMPLETION

Detail

Women have higher completion rates than men in all three disciplines. The greatest difference between women and men is seen in ESL, with women’s average rate being 8 percentage points higher (75 percent, compared with 67 percent among men). The differences between women and men for English and math are 7 and 5 percentage points, respectively.

Asians have the highest completion rates in English (71 percent) and math (62 percent), but White students have the highest completion rates in ESL (77 percent). African American students have the lowest completion rates in English (47 percent) and math (38 percent).

The average completion rates of Pacific Islander and Asian students differ greatly in all three disciplines, which argues against the common practice of grouping Pacific Islanders and Asians together in calculations.

Low-income students have lower completion rates than all other underprepared students in two of three disciplines, with the most pronounced difference (6 percentage points) in math: 49 percent of low-income students completed math compared with 55 percent of all other students. There is no difference in ESL rates between the two groups.

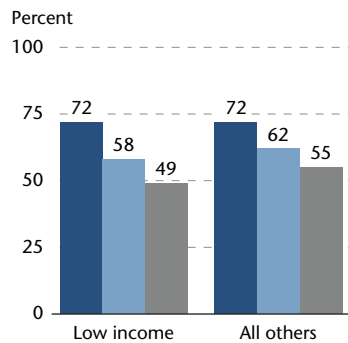
About the Data

Basic skills courses: Courses that a community college has designated as precollegiate. For the purposes of this analysis, these courses are limited to those offered in English, math, and English as a Second Language (ESL).

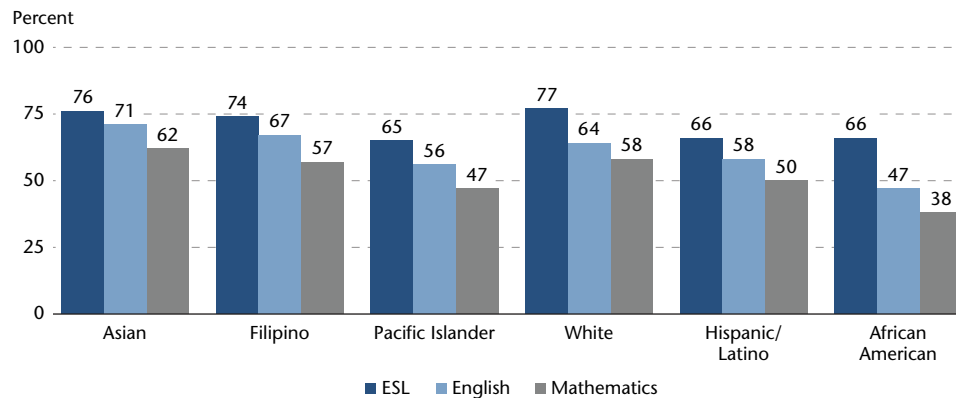
Basic skills successful course completion rate: The percentage of students who completed a basic skills course with a final course grade of A, B, C, or CR/P. The cohort for this rate includes students enrolled in credit basic skills courses in the academic years of 2007–08. These cohorts excluded “special admit” students (students enrolled in a K–12 school at the time they take the basic skills course).

Low-income: Income is not available for most students in the data. Therefore, low-income is defined as a student who received a need-based grant (such as a Pell Grant or fee waiver). This information is known only for students who apply for financial aid, and not all low-income students apply.

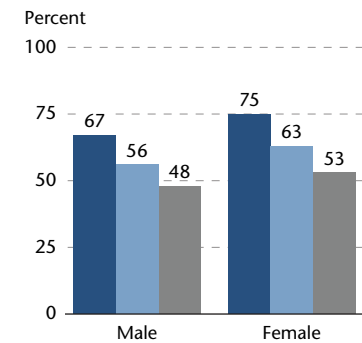
Course completion rates by income



Course completion rates by race/ethnicity



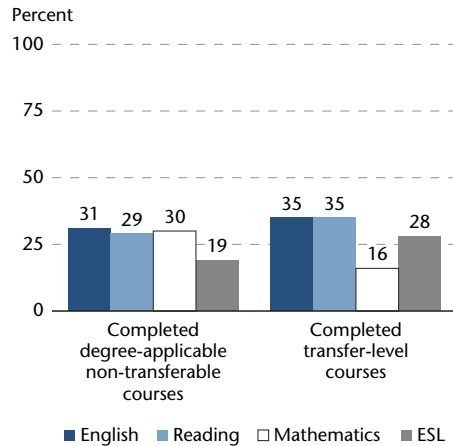
Course completion rates by gender



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office Management Information System (COMIS).

UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS—PROGRESS

Percentage of basic skills students who completed a higher-level course in the same subject area¹



¹ Students in reading or ESL may have completed a college-level English course.
SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS).

Progress in Eight Years

Students who began in basic skills English or reading are more likely to complete transferable courses than those who began in math or ESL. In contrast, students who began in basic skills math are more likely than reading or ESL students to complete courses that are applicable to an AA or AS degree but are not transferable. Basic skills math students are almost twice as likely to complete degree-applicable/non-transferable math courses as they are to complete transferable math courses (30 percent vs. 16 percent)

Students who began in basic skills ESL are more likely to complete transferable courses than degree-applicable courses. This finding seems to indicate that stu-

dents who persist in ESL intend to transfer.

These data represent the first effort to track student progress in basic skills. Because there are some inconsistencies in the data at the levels below transfer, only aggregated results are presented. There is a large initiative underway to achieve consistency across the community colleges in how levels below transfer are identified and categorized. As a result of this effort, future data that follow the progress of students within each level below transfer will be more accurate. In addition, the availability of comparable placement score information for all students would also contribute to a more accurate understanding of how students progress.

About the Data

Basic skills: Those foundation skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and English as a Second Language, as well as learning skills and study skills, which are necessary for students to succeed in college-level work. Basic skills courses are designed to develop reading or writing skills at or below the level required for enrollment in English courses one level below freshman composition, computational skills required in mathematics courses below Algebra, and ESL courses at levels consistent with those defined for English.

Basic skills courses: Courses that a community college has designated as being at a precollegiate level. For the purposes of this analysis, these courses are limited to those offered in English, reading, math, and English as a Second Language (ESL).

Successful course completion: Completion of a course with a final course grade of A, B, C, or CR/P.

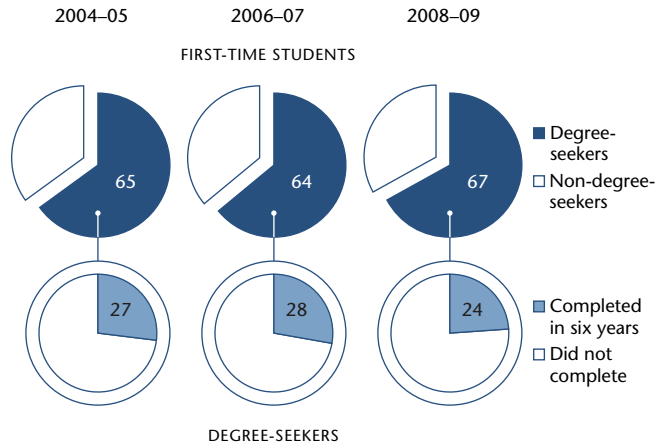
First-Time Freshman (FTF) cohort: First-time students who enrolled in a basic skills English, reading, ESL, or mathematics course at any time during the 8-year tracking period (starting in 2001). The cohort excluded students currently enrolled in K–12 when they took the basic skills course.

Progress in math, English, reading and ESL: A measure that represents successful completion of courses above the basic skills sequence, determined by the number and percentage of credits basic skills students complete. Two measures of student progress are examined:

1. *Completed Degree-Applicable Courses (math, English, reading and ESL)*—Percentage of first-time students who successfully completed a course sequence from basic skills to a college-level course that is applicable to an AA or AS degree, but not transferable to a UC or CSU, within eight years of entry. Students in basic skills reading or ESL may have completed a degree-applicable course in English.
2. *Completed Transfer-Level Courses (math, English, reading and ESL)*—Percentage of first-time students who successfully completed a course sequence from basic skills to a college-level course that is transferable to the UC or CSU systems within eight years of entry. Students in basic skills reading or ESL may have completed a transfer-level course in English.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS—COMPLETION AND PROGRESS

Of first-time students, percentage who are degree-seekers and of degree-seekers, percentage who completed in six years



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS).

Completion Rates

Completion rates for community college students are hard to measure because students enroll for many reasons besides earning a degree, certificate, or transferring. The Hewlett Foundation is interested in understanding how a broad population of community college “degree-seekers” fares in college, because its efforts are intended to support increasing students’ college aspirations as well as their college success. Therefore, degree-seekers are identified by their stated goals, age, and coursework. In their accountability reporting for the state of California, colleges report success rates of a smaller cohort of students who show “intent to complete,” by reaching defined coursework milestones.¹

The percentage of first-time students identified as degree-seekers remained about the same over time—at about two-thirds—though it increased slightly in the 2008–09 cohort. Among degree-seekers, after an initial increase in the six-year completion rate between 2004–05 and 2006–07, the rate dropped by about 4 percentage points—from 28 to 24 percent—between 2006–07 and 2008–09.

The drop does not necessarily reflect on colleges’ performance, other factors such as state budget cuts and resulting reduction of course selections and student services might have played a role. Moreover, whether this is a downward trend or a one-time fluctuation can only be seen with future data.

¹ See “Student Progress and Achievement” indicator. For a detailed analysis and discussion see Horn and Lew (2007). http://mprinc.com/products/browse_by_subject.aspx?pubID=415

About the Data

First-time students: Enrolled in a California community college (CCC) for the first time six years prior to the specified year with no previous college degree and not currently enrolled in a high school.

Degree-seekers: Defined in one of three ways:¹

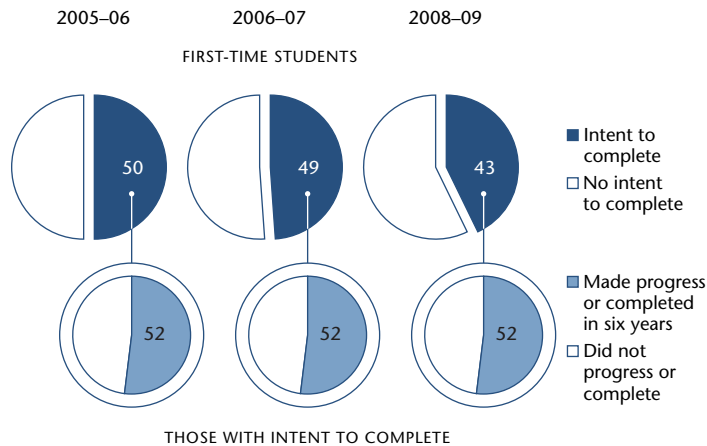
(1) by age (17 to 19); (2) by goal (desire to transfer to four-year college or earn a degree/certificate); or (3) by course taking (completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level mathematics or English course).

Completion: Transfer to a four-year institution or completion of a degree (AA or AS) or vocational certificate of at least 18 units within six years of first enrollment. Students can complete in more than one way, for example, transferring to a four-year institution after obtaining an AA.

¹ Shulock and Moore (2007). http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Rules_of_the_Game_02-07.pdf.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS—COMPLETION AND PROGRESS

Of first-time students, percentage with intent to complete and of those, percentage making progress or completing in six years



SOURCE: Data provided by the California Community College Chancellor's Office from the Management Information System (COMIS).

Student Progress and Achievement Rate

Another type of success indicator is presented in *Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges*¹ (ARCC), an annual report to the California Legislature by the California Community College Chancellor's Office. The "Student Progress and Achievement Rate" (SPAR) differs from the completion indicator, both in who is counted and how success is defined. Students who are counted (i.e., the equivalent of "degree-seekers") are those who reach the 12-unit milestone and attempt certain courses required for transfer or a degree. By completing this coursework, students have shown "intent to complete." In the latest cohort, 43 percent of first-time students had demonstrated intent to complete within six years, but this number dropped from 49 percent in the earlier cohort. This drop corresponds to the decline in the completion rates, shown previously.

The ARCC success indicator defines success more broadly than the completion indicator. In addition to completion (associate's degree, certificate, or transfer to a four-year college), success includes completion of the math and English courses required for transfer, which are recognized as significant "gatekeeper" courses. By passing these transfer courses, students have made significant progress toward completion within six years.

Of students showing intent to complete through their coursework, 52 percent make significant progress toward completion or achieve completion. This rate has remained steady over time. These results combined with the completion data indicate that fewer students are making it to the 12-unit milestone, but among those who do, the likelihood of making significant progress toward completion remained the same.

¹ http://www.cccco.edu/Portals/4/TRIS/research/ARCC/arcc_2009_final.pdf

About the Data²

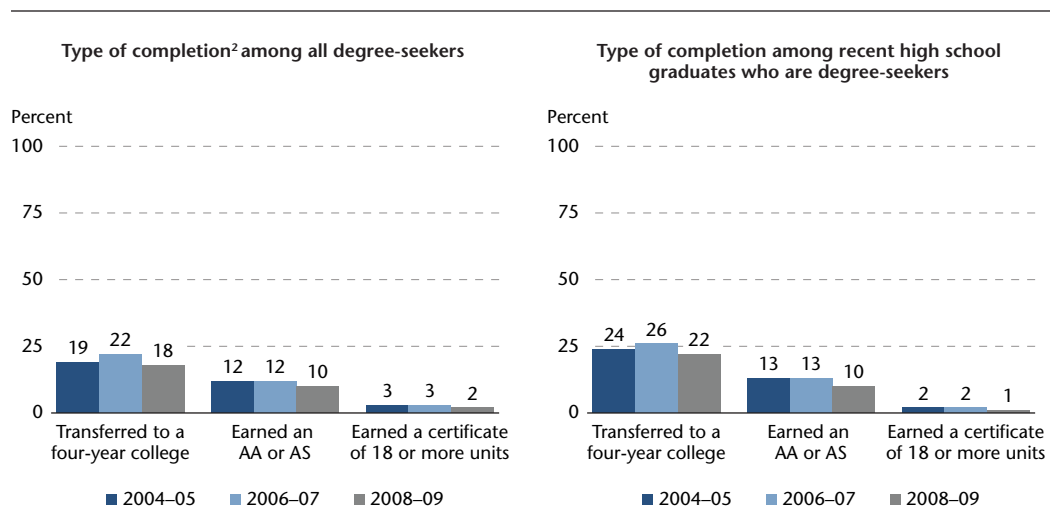
First-time students: Students enrolled in a California community college for the first time six years prior to the specified year with no previous college degree. Note, beginning cohort year differs from completion indicator.

Intent to complete: Earned at least 12 units in any community college coursework, including remedial courses, AND attempted one of the following: transfer-level math and English course OR a course required for a certificate.

Progress and success: Completed by transferring to a four-year college or attaining a degree (AA or AS) or vocational certificate of at least 18 units; OR achieved significant progress in one of the following ways: passing both transfer-level math and English courses OR completing 60 UC/CSU transferrable units with a GPA of 2.0 or higher.

² For more detail, see http://www.cccco.edu/Portals/4/TRIS/research/ARCC/arcc_2009_final.pdf (appendix B, p. 748)

COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS—COMPLETION DETAILS



² Will not add to total completed because students may have earned a credential and transferred.
 SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS).

Trends

The four-year transfer rate and rate of earning AA or AS degrees both declined, as did rates of earning a vocational certificate. Completion rates for first-time students who enrolled as recent high school graduates are 3–4 percentage points higher than for all students. Recent high school graduates are slightly more likely to transfer to a four-year college and slightly less likely to receive a vocational certificate.

About the Data

First-time students: Enrolled in a California community college (CCC) for the first time six years prior to the specified year with no previous college degree and not currently enrolled in a high school.

Degree-seekers: Defined in one of three ways:¹ (1) by age (17 to 19); (2) by goal (desire to transfer to four-year college or earn a degree/certificate); or (3) by course taking (completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level mathematics or English course).

Completion: Transfer to a four-year institution or completion of a degree (AA or AS) or vocational certificate of at least 18 units within six years of first enrollment. Students can complete in more than one way, for example, transferring to a four-year institution after obtaining an AA.

¹ Shulock and Moore (2007). http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/Rules_of_the_Game_02-07.pdf.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS—COMPLETION DETAILS

Detail

Women outperformed men in community college completion, although the rates for both groups fell during the period examined. Asian/Pacific Islander and White students completed at higher rates than did African American and Hispanic students in every year. The gap between Asian/Pacific Islander students and other groups narrowed substantially, however, due to Asian/Pacific Islander students' completion rates declining more than the rates for other students.

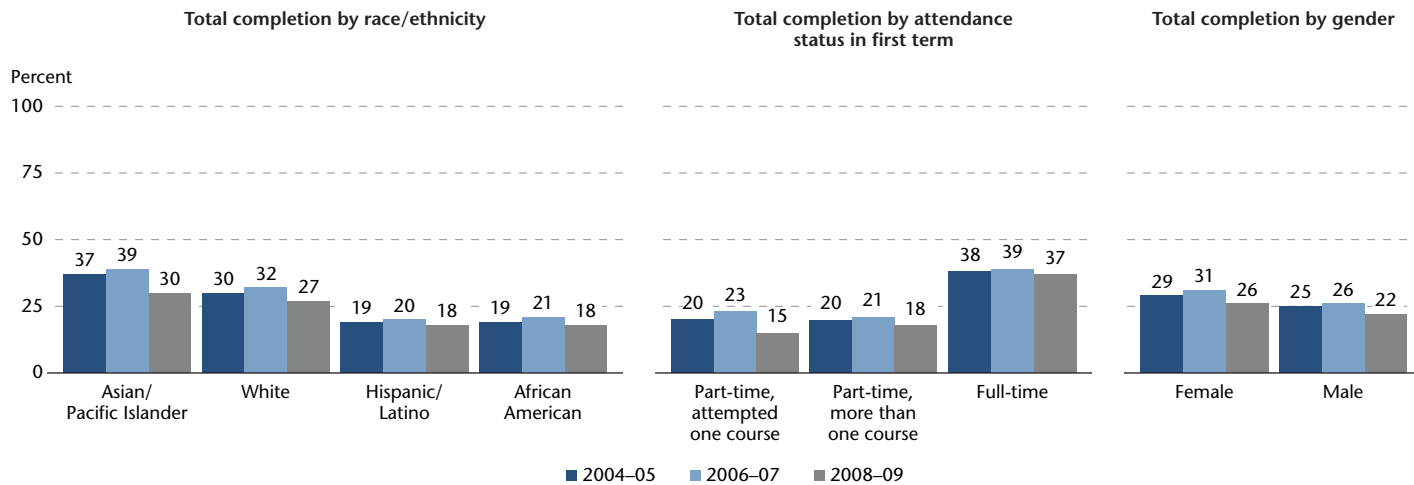
About the Data

First-time students: Enrolled in a California community college (CCC) for the first time six years prior to the specified year with no previous college degree and not currently enrolled in a high school.

Degree-seekers: Defined in one of three ways:¹ (1) by age (17 to 19); (2) by goal (desire to transfer to four-year college or earn a degree/certificate); or (3) by course taking (completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level mathematics or English course).

Completion: Transfer to a four-year institution or completion of a degree (AA or AS) or vocational certificate of at least 18 units within six years of first enrollment. Students can complete in more than one way, for example, transferring to a four-year institution after obtaining an AA.

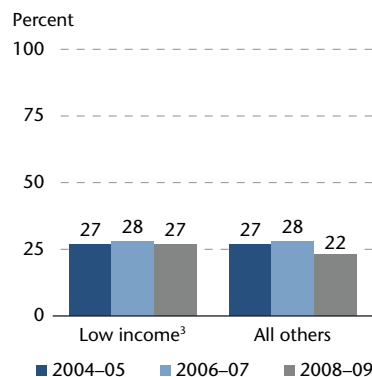
¹ Shullock and Moore (2007). http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Rules_of_the_Game_02-07.pdf.



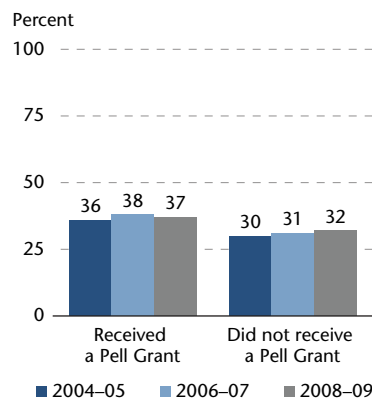
SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS).

COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS—COMPLETION DETAILS

Total completion by low-income status



Total completion among full-time low-income students, by Pell Grant status



³ Received Pell Grant, Cal Grant, or fee waiver.
SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS).

Detail

Completion rates for all students fell among the most recent cohort (2008–09), but the completion rate for low-income students declined less and was therefore 5 percentage points higher than for students not identified as low-income. One explanation is that a majority of low-income students receive federal financial aid in the form of Pell Grants. Pell Grant recipients are more likely to attend full time, which is strongly correlated with completion.

Pell Grants are themselves associated with higher rates of completion.¹ Among low-income degree-seekers attending full time during their first term, Pell Grant recipients completed at higher rates than recipients of other types of financial aid. Among three recent cohorts, the difference in completion rates was 5–6 percentage points.

¹ Woo (2009). <http://www.mprinc.com/products/search.aspx?pubID=473>.

About the Data

First-time students: Enrolled in a California community college (CCC) for the first time six years prior to the specified year with no previous college degree and not currently enrolled in a high school.

Degree-seekers: Defined in one of three ways:² (1) by age (17 to 19); (2) by goal (desire to transfer to four-year college or earn a degree/certificate); or (3) by course taking (completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level mathematics or English course).

Completion: Transfer to a four-year institution or completion of a degree (AA or AS) or vocational certificate of at least 18 units within six years of first enrollment. Students can complete in more than one way, for example, transferring to a four-year institution after obtaining an AA.

Low-income: Income is not available for most students in the data. Therefore, low-income is defined as a student who receives a need-based grant (such as a Pell Grant or fee waiver). This information is known only for students who apply for financial aid, and not all low-income students apply.

² Shullock and Moore (2007). http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Rules_of_the_Game_02-07.pdf.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS—BASIC SKILLS COMPLETION

Trends

Recent cohorts of degree-seeking students taking basic skills courses have completed community college at rates similar to students who never attempt basic skills courses. While completion rates dropped by 7 percentage points for non-basic-skills students in the most recent (2008–09) cohort, the completion rate for students taking basic skills courses remained steady.

In addition to higher rates of completion overall, among degree-seekers in the most recent cohort, those who took basic skills courses earned AA or AS degrees at twice the rate of students who never attempted a basic skills course.

The relative success of students taking basic skills courses may be related to their strong degree-seeking intentions, especially their course-taking behavior. Students who attempt a basic skills course are much more likely than their peers who never attempt one to reach the 12-unit course-taking threshold. In the latest cohort, 44 percent of students taking a basic skills course completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level math or English course, compared with just 15 percent of students who never attempted a basic skills course.

About the Data

First-time students: Enrolled in a California community college (CCC) for the first time six years prior to the specified year with no previous college degree and not currently enrolled in a high school.

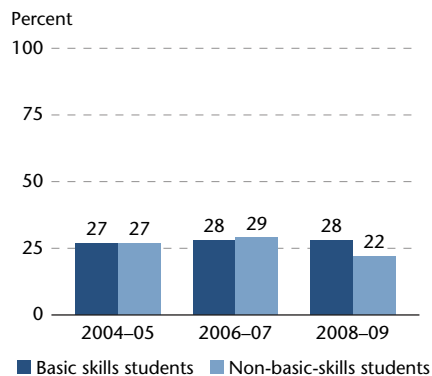
Degree-seekers: Defined in one of three ways:² (1) by age (17 to 19); (2) by goal (desire to transfer to four-year college or earn a degree/certificate); or (3) by course taking (completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level mathematics or English course).

Completion: Transfer to a four-year institution or completion of a degree (AA or AS) or vocational certificate of at least 18 units within six years of first enrollment. Students can complete in more than one way, for example, transferring to a four-year institution after obtaining an AA.

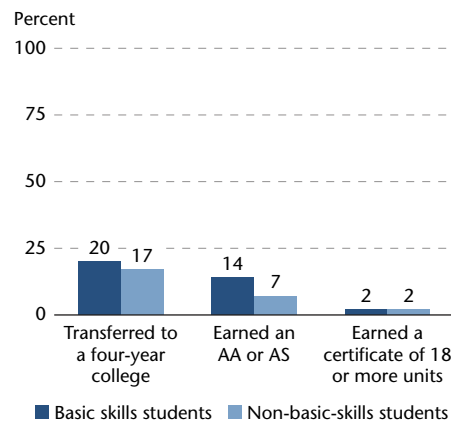
Basic skills students: Degree-seekers who ever attempted any of the following courses: remedial English, remedial mathematics, or English as a Second Language (ESL).

Non-basic-skills students: Degree-seekers who never attempted a basic skills course.

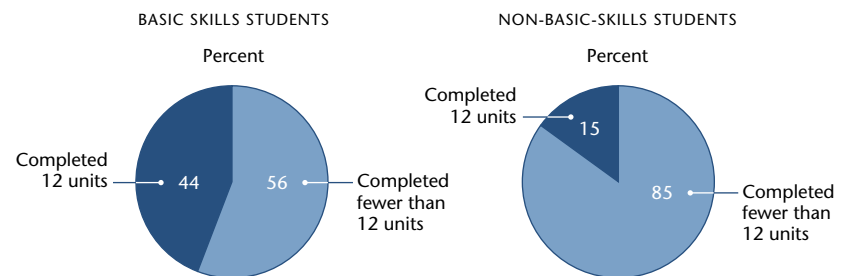
Total completion, by basic skills status



Type of completion, by basic skills status: 2008–09



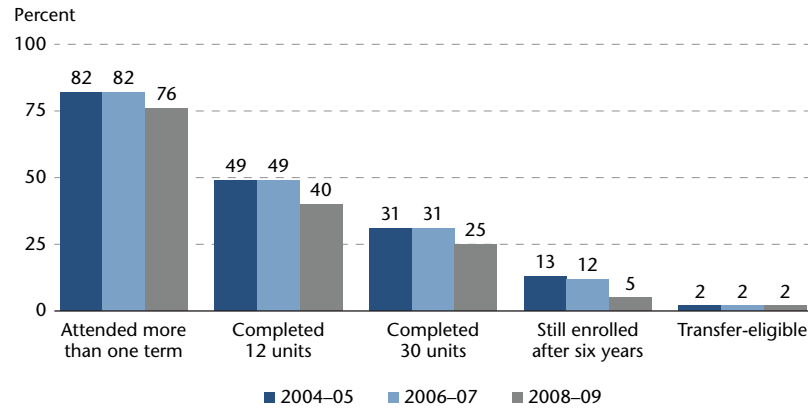
Percentage of degree-seekers who completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level math or English course, by basic skills status



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS).

COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS— INTERIM MILESTONES AMONG NON-COMPLETERS

Progress among students who did not complete within six years



SOURCE: Analysis of data from the California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS).

Trends

Completion is not the only measure of progress among degree-seeking students; other benchmarks can indicate success as students move through the education pipeline for those who do not transfer or complete a degree or certificate. For example, more than three-quarters of non-completers in the most recent (2008–09) cohort enrolled for more than a single term, and 40 percent completed at least 12 units. One-quarter completed 30 units or more. Smaller numbers were still enrolled after six years or were transfer-eligible but did not transfer.

Progress among non-completers declined across all benchmarks for the 2008–09 cohort. Some of the sharpest declines occurred among students earning 12 or 30 units. These students began their college careers in 2002–03, when budget cuts forced colleges to cut course sections and student services, which may explain the drop in outcomes for that cohort.

About the Data

First-time students: Enrolled in a California community college (CCC) for the first time six years prior to the specified year with no previous college degree and not currently enrolled in a high school.

Degree-seekers: Defined in one of three ways:¹ (1) by age (17 to 19); (2) by goal (desire to transfer to four-year college or earn a degree/certificate); or (3) by course taking (completed 12 units and attempted a transfer-level mathematics or English course).

Completion: Transfer to a four-year institution or completion of a degree (AA or AS) or vocational certificate of at least 18 units within six years of first enrollment. Students can complete in more than one way, for example, transferring to a four-year institution after obtaining an AA.

¹ Shullock and Moore (2007). http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Rules_of_the_Game_02-07.pdf.