AB 705 in the Los Angeles Community College District: Results from Fall 2019

JANUARY 2021

This research was conducted in a research-practitioner partnership between the University of Southern California and the Los Angeles Community College District. It was supported by a grant from the Spencer Foundation. All opinions are the authors' and do not reflect those of the granting agency. We would like to thank Stanislav Levin at LACCD for support with data analysis, and Elise Swanson, Elif Yucel, and Elizabeth Morris at the Rossier School of Education for research assistance.

Suggested citation:
Melguizo, T., Ching, C. D., Ngo, F., & Harrington, D. (2021). AB705 in the Los Angeles Community College District: Results from Fall 2019. Pullias Center for Higher Education.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 705 (AB705) is one of the most ambitious reforms in California higher education to date, as it directs all community colleges in the state to maximize the number of students completing transfer-level math and English courses in one year's time. This report describes outcomes in the Los Angeles Community College District after Fall 2019 – the first semester of full AB705 implementation – and the only "pre-COVID" semester. We examine enrollment and completion of transfer-level courses among first-time-in-college (FTIC) students entering in Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and Fall 2019, finding increased access and completion of transfer-level math and English courses, but significant variation by race/ethnicity

KEY FINDINGS

- AB705 led to over 5,000 additional student enrollments in transfer-level English courses and over 3,000 additional student enrollments in transfer-level math in Fall 2019. Overall, 29% of all FTIC students enrolled in a transfer-level math course, and 56% enrolled in a transfer-level English course, up from just 10% and 25% percent in Fall 2017.
- AB705 has the directive to place more students in transfer-level courses instead of developmental courses. In Fall 2019. Over 90% of all English enrollments were in transfer-level English, and over 75% of all math enrollments were in transfer-level math.
- Enrollment in transfer-level English and math courses substantially increased for all groups, but grew the largest for Black, Filipina/o/x and Latina/o/x students. For example, the share of Black FTIC students enrolling in transfer-level math grew by a factor of 5, Filipina/o/x students by a factor of 3, and Latina/o/x by a factor of 3.4.
- Black students and Latina/o/x students experienced the largest shift from developmental to transfer-level math courses, but more than one quarter of FTIC Black and Latina/o/x students still did not enroll directly in a transfer-level math course.
- Course passing rates declined in both transfer-level math and English.
- Over 2,200 more students completed transfer-level English, and nearly 900 more students completed transfer-level math in Fall 2019 compared to Fall 2017. This translates to one-semester throughput growing by a factor of 1.8x in English, and nearly 2.1x in math.
- Throughput growth was especially large for Black, Filipina/o/x, and Latina/o/x students, suggesting AB705 is removing barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges across the nation have been engaging in developmental education reforms designed to address longstanding disparities in student outcomes. Based on research showing that the placement tests traditionally used to assign students to coursework often result in placement errors,[1] and that developmental education more often is a hindrance rather than a help,[2] colleges have dramatically redesigned developmental education programs in the hopes that more students bypass remedial courses and complete college in a timely manner.

In Fall 2019, each of the 115 colleges of the California Community College system (CCC) was expected to implement the mandates of Assembly Bill 705 (AB705). Passed in 2017, AB705 instructs colleges to **increase the number of students entering and completing transfer-level English and math**. AB705 has ushered a change in institutional practices across the state, with colleges implementing reforms such as removing developmental education course offerings, changing the modality of instruction (e.g., acceleration), placing students directly in transfer-level courses with supports (e.g., co-requisite models), developing statistics-based pathways, and relying primarily on high school GPA and transcripts for course placement (e.g., multiple measures).

GOALS OF AB705

1) Maximize the probability that the student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe.

2) Use, in the placement of students into English and mathematics courses in order to achieve this goal, one or more of the following: *high school coursework, high school grades, and high school grade point average.*

GOALS OF THE REPORT

This report describes early outcomes of AB705 implementation in the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD), the largest district in the CCC, and one of the largest in the country. Using data on first-time-in-college (FTIC) students from Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and Fall 2019, we describe differences in math and English course enrollments, course passing rates, and one-term throughput (i.e., the number of completions of math and English transfer-level courses for each entering cohort) before and after AB705 implementation. We disaggregate the findings by race and ethnicity to explore whether and how the policy is reducing racial inequalities in community colleges student outcomes. Although we show all three semesters to describe trends over time, we believe the best pre-/post- policy comparison is between Fall 2019, when AB705 was implemented, and Fall 2017, when AB705 was first announced but not yet implemented. The data from 2018 include early adopters[3] of AB705, as colleges were given two years to experiment with interventions and innovations to meet the standards expected of AB705.

---

[1] Scott-Clayton, Crosta, & Belfield (2014); Ngo & Melguizo (2016)

[2] Melguizo et al. (2016); Valentine, Konstantopolous, & Goldrick-Rab (2017)

[3] See the California Acceleration Project report on "strong implementers" of AB705 across the CCC system.

KEY TERMS

First-Time-In-College (FTIC)
Students who are not concurrently enrolled in high school, are not continuing nor returning students, and are not transfer students.

Transferable / Transfer-Level
Courses that are transferable to the UC / CSU system.

One-Semester Throughput
The primary metric intended to be the yardstick for AB705 is "throughput" – the share of students completing transfer-level courses in math and English within one year of entry. Due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we compare the one-semester throughput rates for Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and Fall 2019 FTIC cohorts.

WHAT COURSES ARE TRANSFERABLE TO THE UC / CSU SYSTEMS?

Transferable
English 101: College Reading & Composition
Math 227: Statistics
Math 260: Precalculus

Developmental
English 021: English Fundamentals
English 028: Intermediate Reading & Composition
Math 125: Intermediate Algebra

FIRST-TIME-IN-COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A GLANCE

Roughly 19,000 FTIC students enrolled each fall semester across the nine LACCD colleges. Among those who eventually enrolled in an English or math course, more than half identified as female and the vast majority were under 20 years old. Latina/o/x students comprised two-thirds of FTIC students in Fall 2017, growing to over 72 percent two years later.

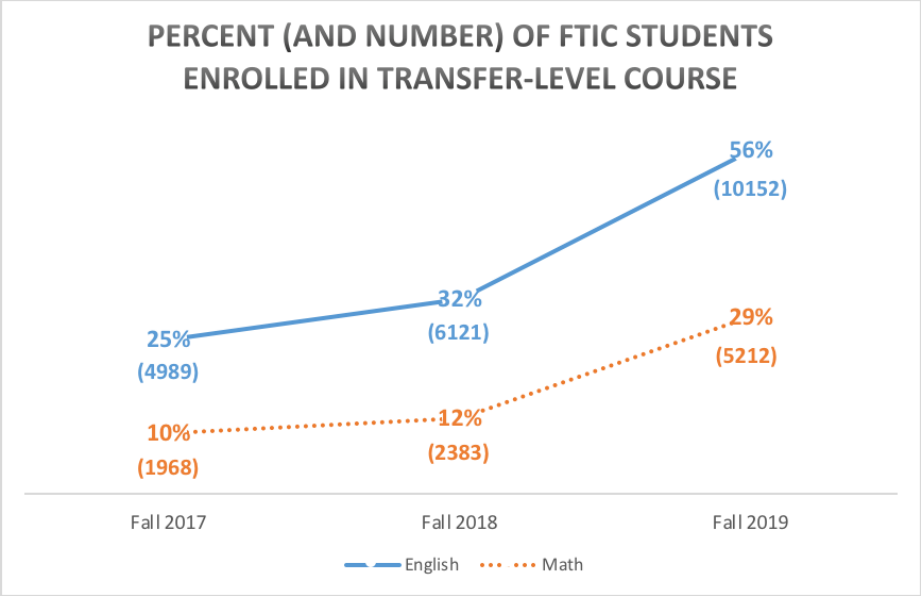
	Fall '17	Fall '18	Fall '19
New FTIC Students	19,877	19,371	18,161
Enrollment by Subject			
English	10,504	11,256	11,455
Math	10,389	10,295	7,071*
Gender (FTIC Students in Math or English)			
Female	51.3%	50.8%	52.2%
Male	48.7%	49.2%	47.8%
Age (FTIC Students in Math or English)			
Under 20	80.0%	84.1%	86.8%
20 - 24	11.3%	9.5%	8.3%
25 - 34	6.2%	4.3%	3.3%
35 - 54	2.3%	1.8%	1.4%
55 and over	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
Race/Ethnicity (FTIC Students in Math or English)			
Asian	3.8%	4.6%	4.3%
Black	7.8%	6.6%	6.3%
Filipina/o/x	2.4%	2.8%	2.7%
Latina/o/x	65.9%	71.4%	72.4%
Multiethnic	1.7%	2.1%	2.3%
Native American	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Unknown	9.2%	3.5%	2.3%
White	8.8%	8.5%	9.3%

*Some of this decline is due to increased enrollment in courses offered by Statistics Departments.
**We do not show results for Multiethnic and Unknown in the remainder of the report.

FINDINGS

FINDING 1: AB705 INCREASED ACCESS TO TRANSFER-LEVEL COURSES

There was a substantial increase in the number of students enrolling in transfer-level math and English courses. Despite declining FTIC enrollment between Fall 2017 and Fall 2019, there were an additional 5,163 additional student enrollments in transfer-level English courses in Fall 2019 compared to Fall 2017, and 3,244 additional student enrollments in transfer-level math courses.



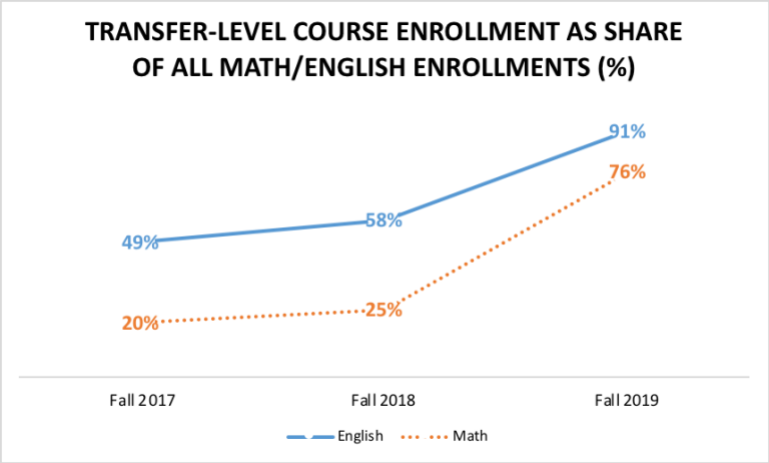
In a single semester, the policy helped over 5,000 more FTIC students access transfer-level English and over 3,000 students access transfer-level math between Fall 2017 and Fall 2019.

The share of FTIC students enrolled in transfer-level English *more than doubled*, and the share in math *nearly tripled*.

Accordingly, a significantly larger share of the entering FTIC Cohort enrolled directly in a transfer-level course. In Fall 2017, just 10% of all new FTIC students enrolled directly in a transfer-level math course, and 25% percent enrolled directly in a transfer-level English course. This grew in Fall 2019 to 29% in math and 56% in English, an increase of 19 and 31 percentage points, respectively.

A Shift Away from Developmental Courses

Data on English and math enrollments also indicate a substantial shift away from developmental course enrollments and towards transfer-level enrollments. In Fall 2017, just 20% of all math enrollments by FTIC students were enrollments in transfer-level courses, but this jumped to 76% in Fall 2019, a growth of 56 percentage points. Whereas 49% of all English enrollments by FTIC students were in transfer-level English, this grew to 91% in Fall 2019. This suggests that LACCD colleges were complying with AB705's mandate to place the vast majority of students directly in transfer-level courses.



Over 90% of all FTIC English enrollments were in a transfer-level English course and over 75% of all FTIC math enrollments were in a transfer-level math course.

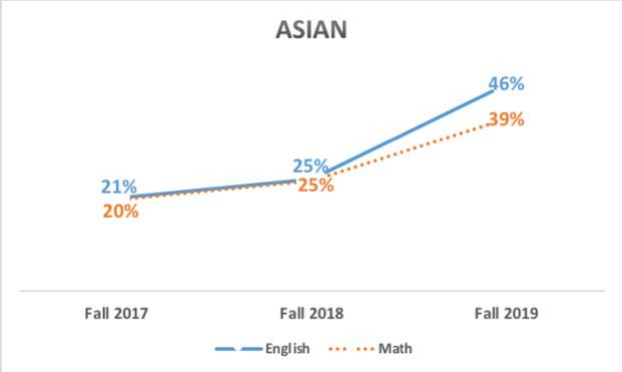
FINDING 2: AB705 IS NARROWING THE RACIAL GAP IN ACCESS TO TRANSFER-LEVEL COURSES, BUT GAPS REMAIN

We also disaggregate course enrollment data by race and ethnicity. This is important because a goal of AB705 is to ameliorate the persistent racial inequalities in community college student outcomes. Here are some key takeaways:

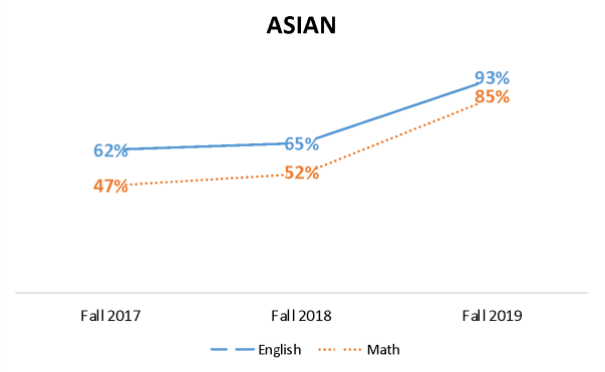
- Enrollment in transfer-level English substantially increased for all groups. Filipina/o/x and Latina/o/x students saw the largest growth, with 35 percent more Filipina/o/x and Latina/o/x FTIC students enrolling in transfer-level English.
- While the share of Asian and white students enrolling in transfer-level math roughly doubled, the share of Black FTIC students enrolling in transfer-level grew by a factor of 5, Filipina/o/x students by a factor of 3, and Latina/o/x by a factor of 3.4
- Black and Latina/o/x students experienced the biggest shift from developmental math to transfer-level math. While just 13% of Black students in math and 16% of Latina/o/x students in math were enrolled in a transfer-level course in 2017, this grew to 75% and 73% in 2019.
- Still, about one quarter of FTIC Black and Latina/o/x students who enrolled in math did not enroll directly in a transfer-level math course.

ENROLLMENT IN TRANSFER-LEVEL ENGLISH AND MATH BY RACE/ETHNICITY

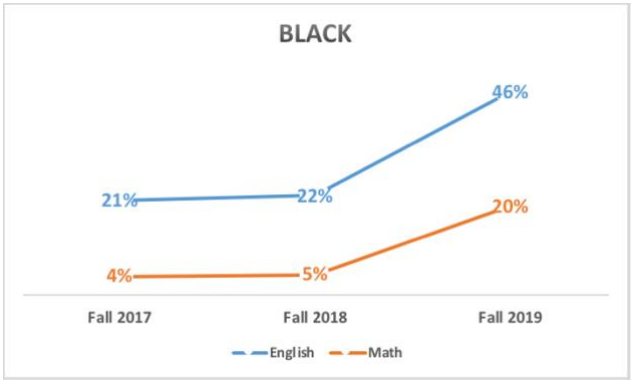
Out of All FTIC Students

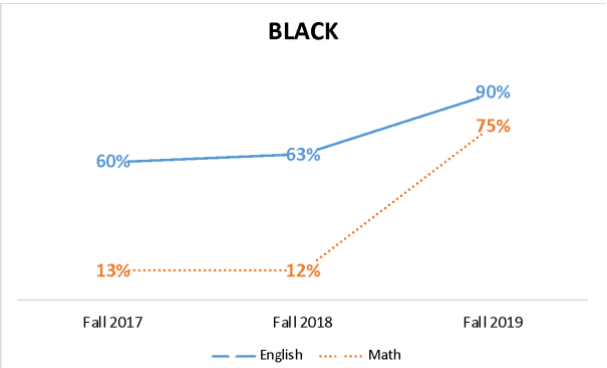


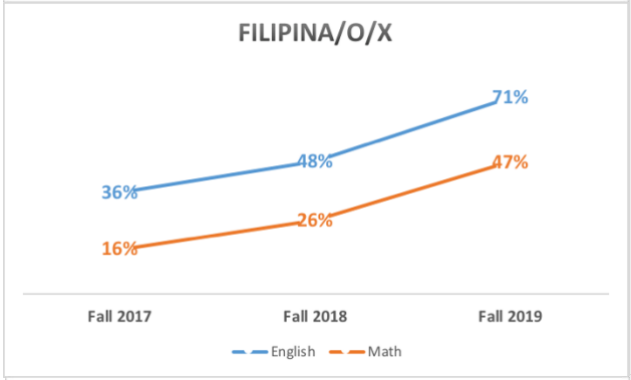
Out of FTIC Students Enrolled in English/Math

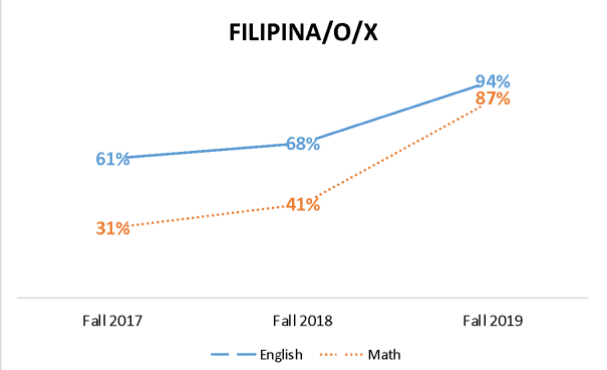


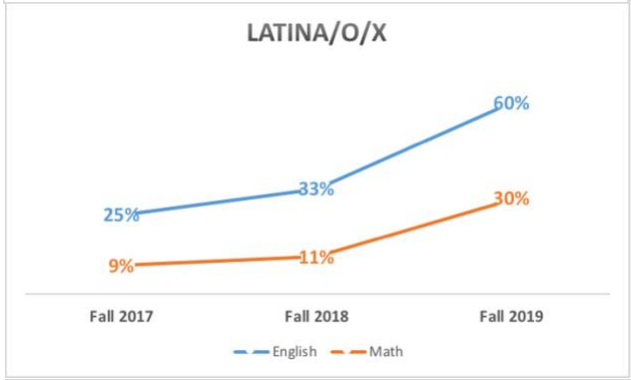
Out of All FTIC Students **Out of FTIC Students Enrolled in English/Math**

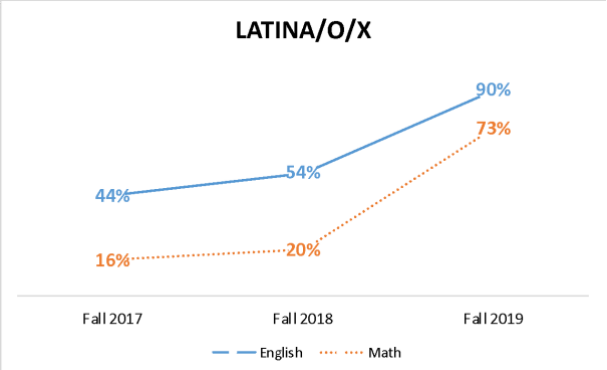


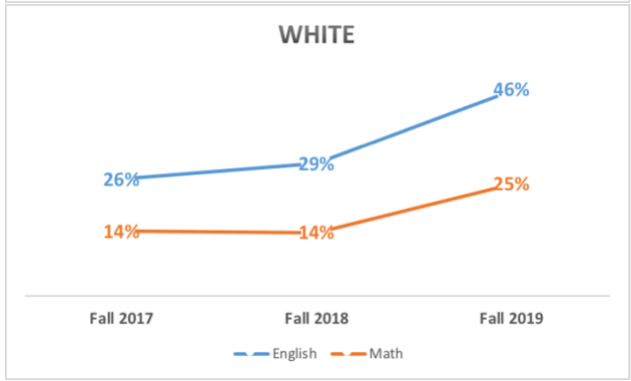


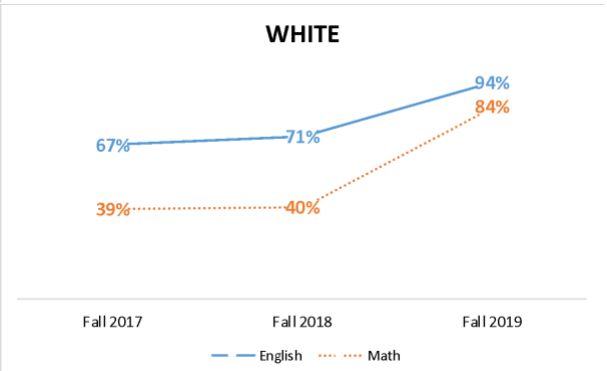












FINDING 3: MOST OF THE NEW TRANSFER-LEVEL MATH ENROLLMENT WAS IN NEW MATH PATHWAYS

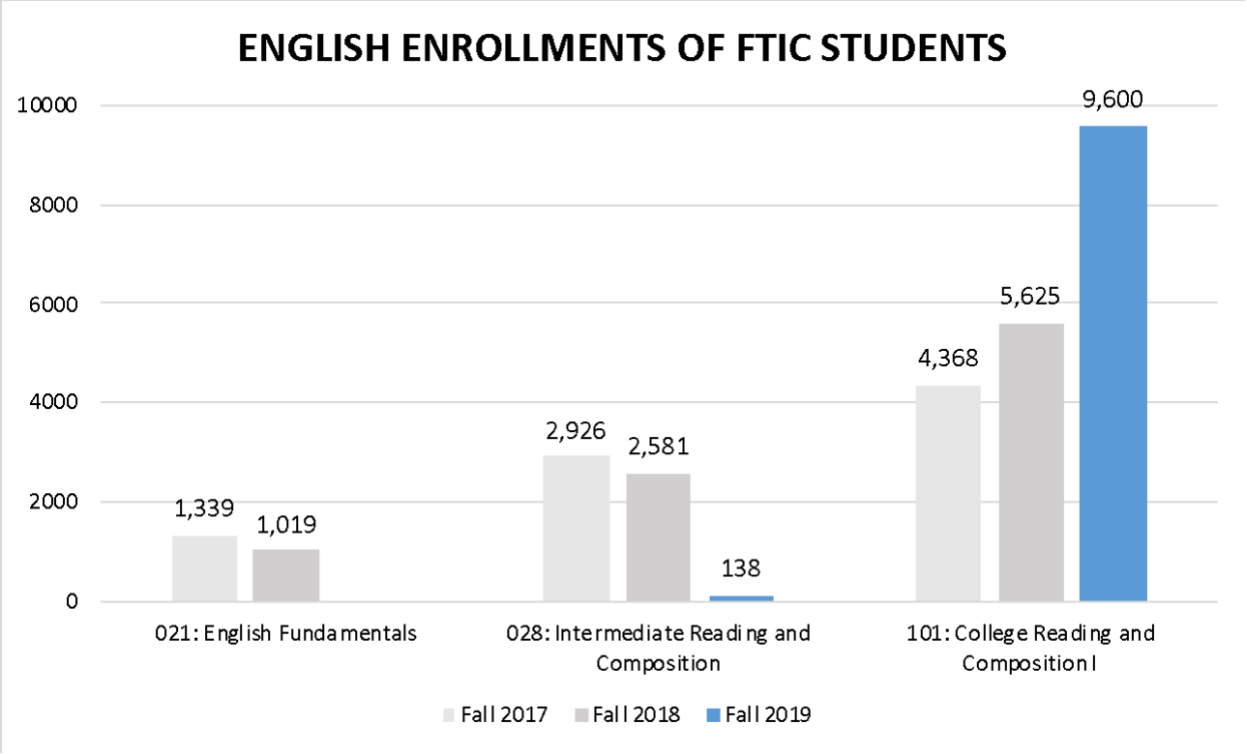
In English, the majority of students enrolled in English 101 in Fall 2019, with just a small number enrolled in the course one level below (English 028).

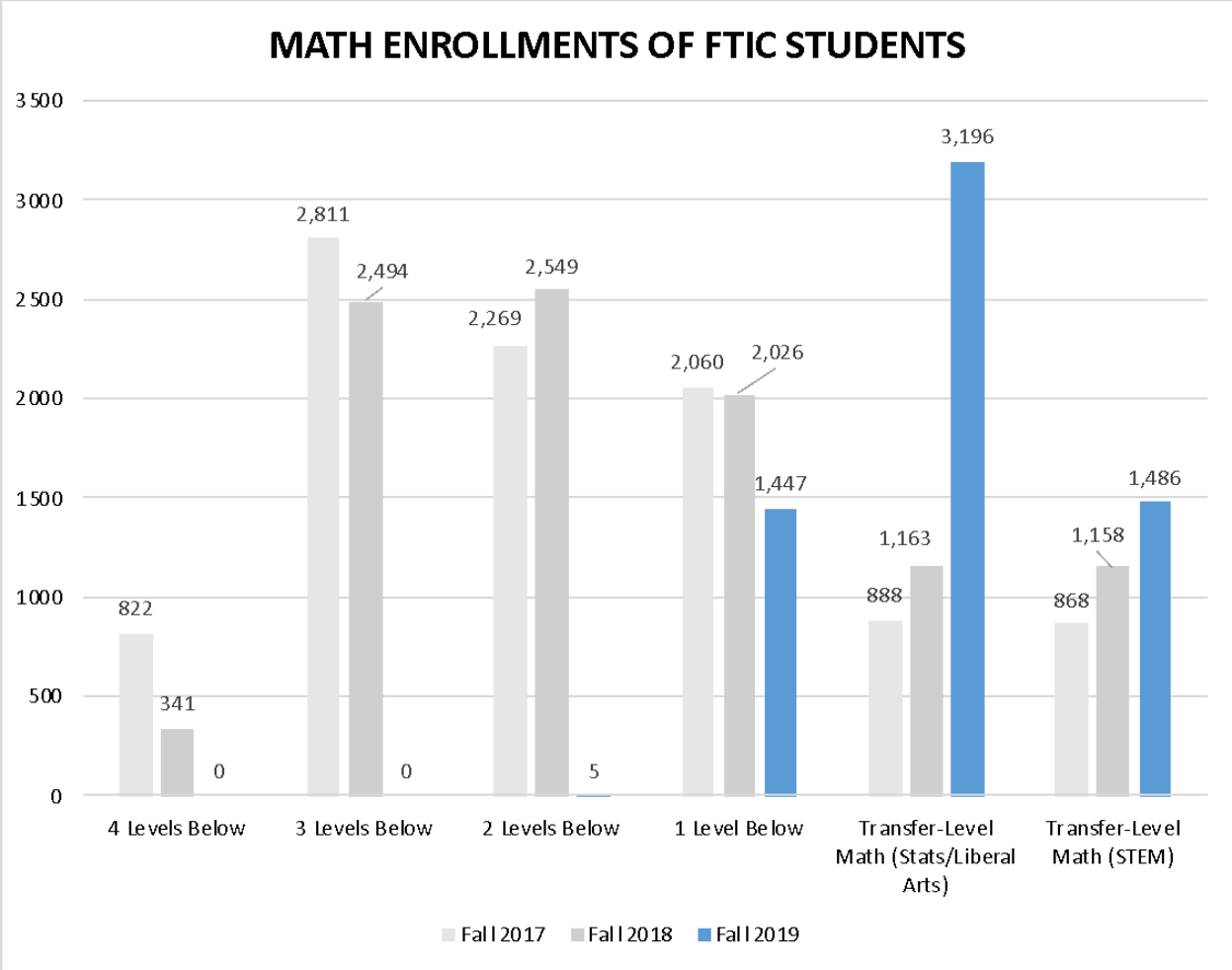
The majority of new transfer-level math enrollment was in statistics-based courses or math designed for liberal arts majors (e.g., SLAM). Less than half the number enrolled in these math pathways enrolled in the traditional calculus-based STEM pathway (e.g., BSTEM). Some students in Fall 2019 still enrolled in a math course one level below transfer.

NEW MATH PATHWAYS

Statistics / Liberal Arts Math (SLAM)
Math 227: Statistics
Math 230: Math for Liberal Arts Students

Business & STEM (B*STEM):
Math 260: Precalculus



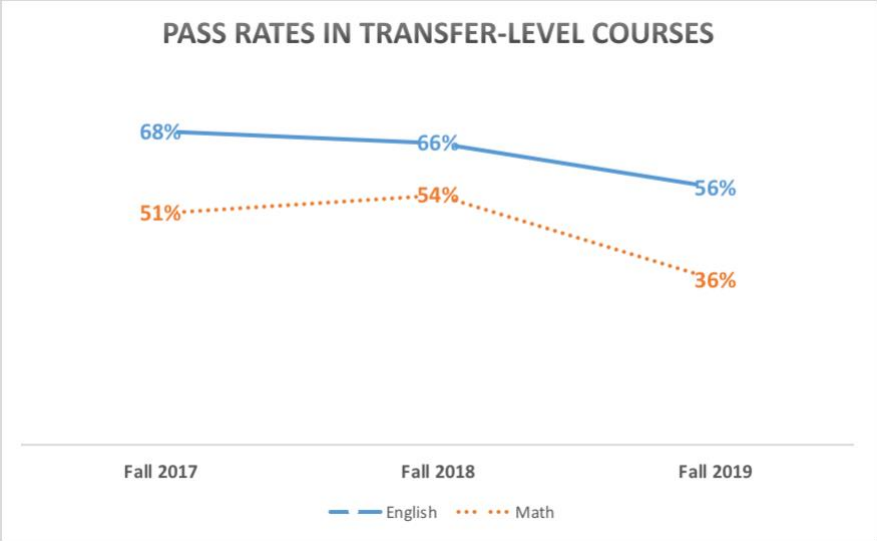


WHO DID NOT ENROLL IN TRANSFER-LEVEL COURSES?

AB705 does allow colleges to enroll students into courses below transfer-level (e.g., algebra 2) if they can demonstrate these would be more beneficial for student success. When we examined the characteristics of FTIC students who did not enroll in transferable courses, one pattern that emerged is that older students, age 20 and up, make up a larger share of students in developmental courses following AB705. Additional research is needed on which students are able to access transfer-level courses and STEM pathways.

FINDING 4: PASS RATES IN TRANSFER-LEVEL COURSES DECLINE, BUT MORE STUDENTS COMPLETE OVERALL

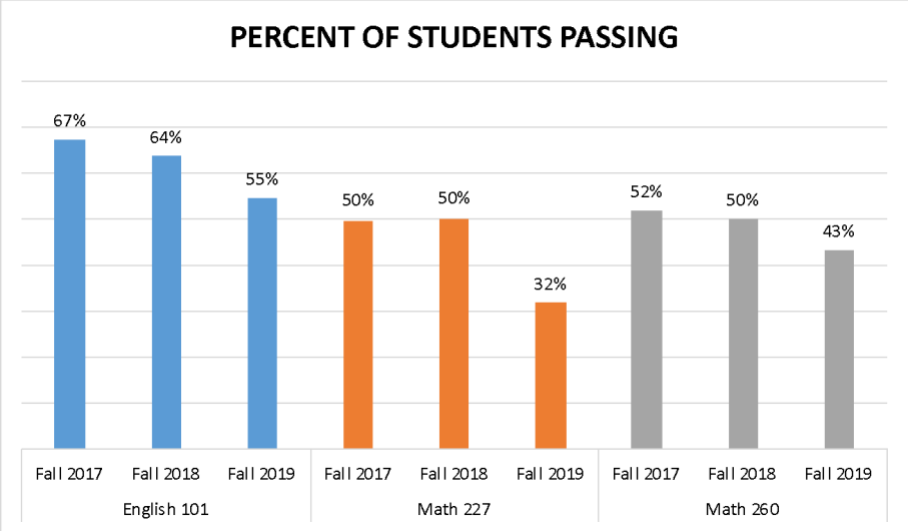
More students were able to enroll directly in transfer-level courses, but did they successfully complete them? Overall, the pass rate in transfer-level courses – the number of students completing transfer-levels courses divided by the number who enrolled in them – did decline in both English and math. There was a 12 percent drop in English and a 15 percent drop in math between Fall 2017 and Fall 2019.

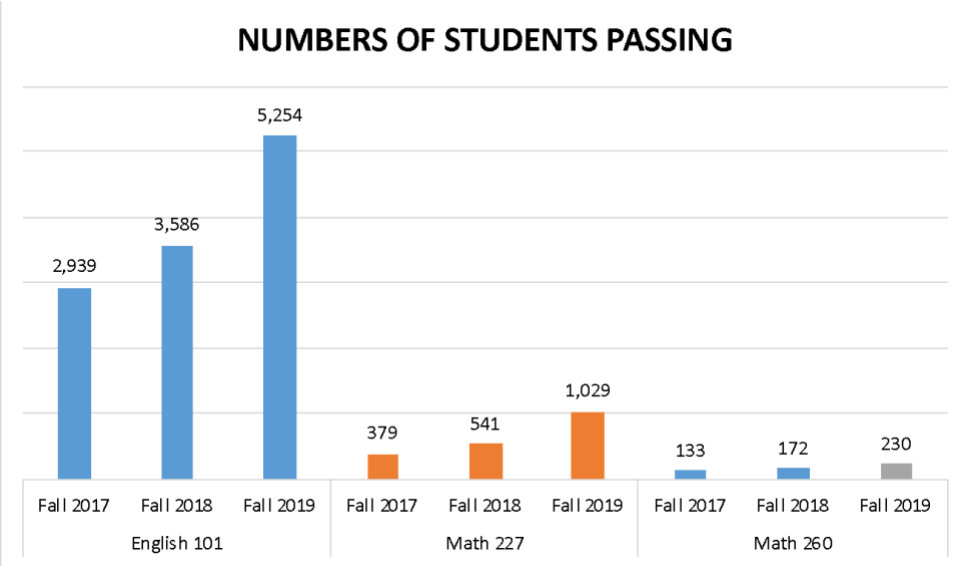


Taking a closer look at specific courses, we show here the transfer-level courses with the most enrollments: English 101, Math 227: Statistics, and Math 260: Precalculus. The data show that course pass rates declined between 2017 and 2019. Among those who enrolled in a transferable course, there was a 12 percentage point decline in the English 101 pass rate, an 18 percentage point decline in Math 227 (Statistics), and a 9 percentage point decline in Math 260 (Precalculus).

However, due to the sizable increase in enrollment in these courses, more students ultimately completed them. Over 2,300 more students passed English 101 in Fall 2019 than did in Fall 2017. Nearly 750 more students completed Math 227 and 260 in Fall 2019 than did in Fall 2017.

Nevertheless, the decline in course passing rates are a concern. It will be important to examine potential factors related to this decline. Is there a need to strengthen the support systems available to students in the college-level courses? Are counselors encouraging students to re-enroll immediately after not passing? Are colleges offering professional development opportunities related to strengthening pedagogical practices that would improve course passing rates? This should be a key aim of future research on AB705.

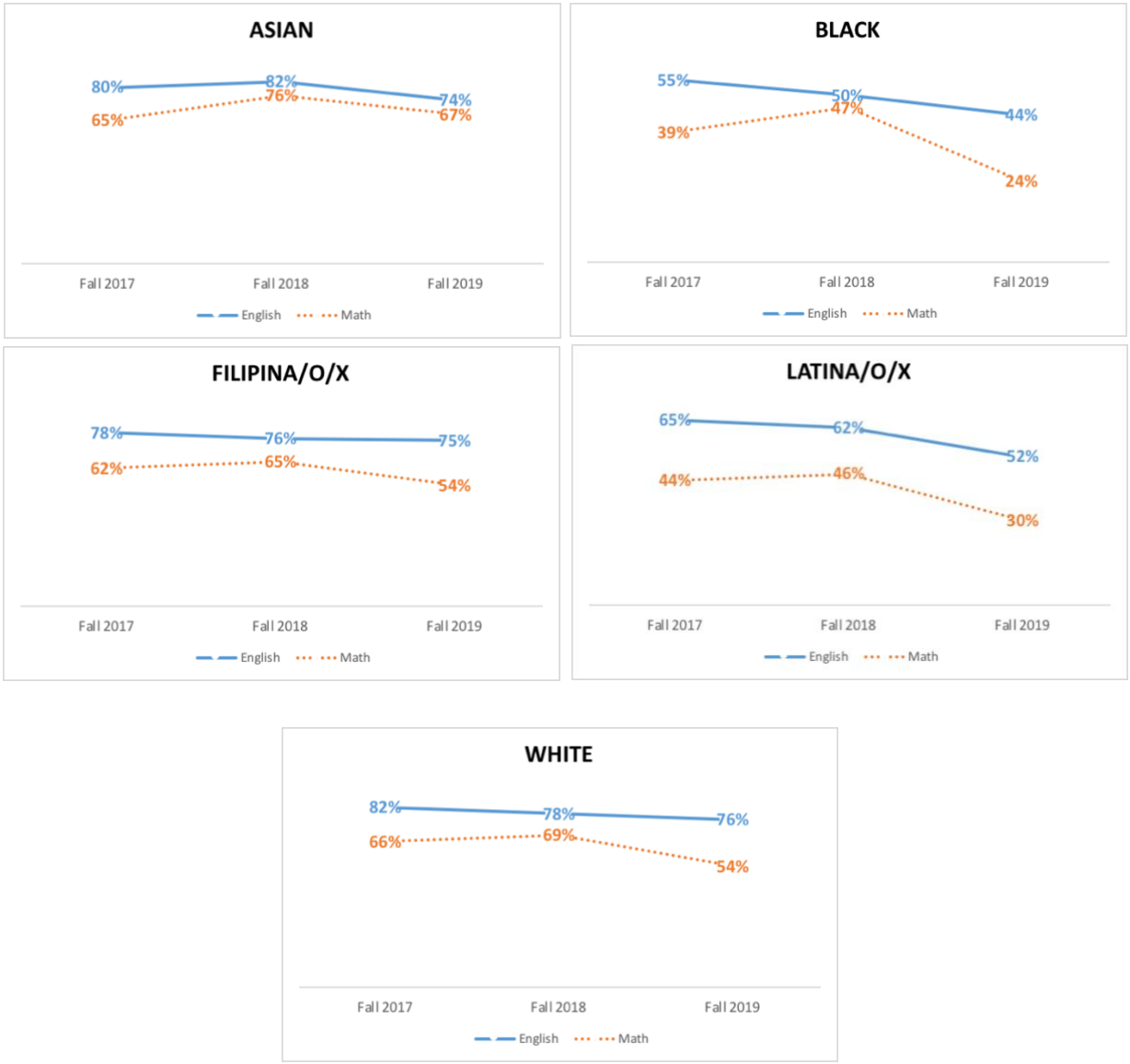

PERCENT OF STUDENTS PASSING
67%
64%
55%
50%
50%
32%
52%
50%
43%
Fall 2017
Fall 2018
Fall 2019
English 101
Fall 2017
Fall 2018
Fall 2019
Math 227
Fall 2017
Fall 2018
Fall 2019
Math 260


NUMBERS OF STUDENTS PASSING
2,939
3,586
5,254
379
541
1,029
133
172
230
Fall 2017
Fall 2018
Fall 2019
English 101
Fall 2017
Fall 2018
Fall 2019
Math 227
Fall 2017
Fall 2018
Fall 2019
Math 260

FINDING 5: DESPITE ENROLLMENT GAINS, BLACK AND LATINA/O/X STUDENTS LESS LIKELY TO PASS TRANSFER-LEVEL COURSES

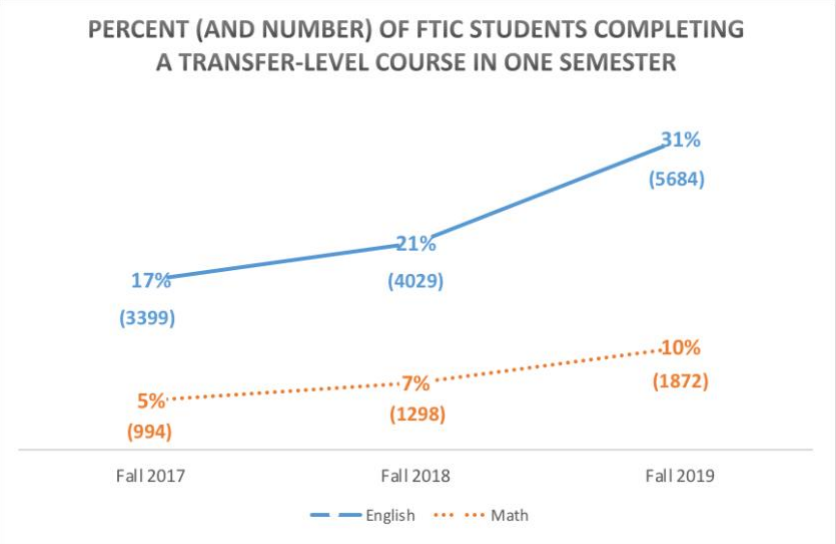
Although AB705 significantly increased access to transfer-level courses for all students, pass rates varied substantially by race. Just 44% of Black students who enrolled in transfer-level English passed it, along with 24% of those who enrolled in transfer-level math. Similarly, 52% of Latina/o/x students who enrolled in transfer-level English passed it, along with 30% of those who enrolled in transfer-level math.

PERCENT PASSING TRANSFER-LEVEL ENGLISH AND MATH BY RACE/ETHNICITY



FINDING 6: MORE FTIC STUDENTS COMPLETE MATH AND ENGLISH REQUIREMENTS IN ONE SEMESTER

AB705 was instituted to confront the historically high numbers of students enrolled in developmental education courses and low numbers of students who ultimately ever completed the math and English courses required for transfer. The metric used to assess progress in this area is **throughput**, the share of the entering cohort who passes a transfer-level math or English course in one year's time. Due to the complications arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, we compare the *one-semester* completion rates of any transfer-level math or English course for all FTIC students in Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and Fall 2019, or **one-semester throughput**.



As shown in the figure above, after AB705 was implemented in Fall 2019, there was a much higher share of FTIC students who completed transfer-level English and transfer-level math courses in one semester than in years prior. **While just 17 percent of the entering FTIC cohort completed transfer-level English courses and 5 percent completed transfer level math courses in Fall 2017, this grew to 31 and 10 percent respectively.** Despite declining FTIC enrollment, this is an absolute difference of 2,285 students in English and 877 students in math.

In Fall 2019, the first semester of full AB705 implementation, over 2,200 more students completed a transfer-level English course than in Fall 2017, and nearly 900 more students completed a transfer-level math course.

In fact, the number of 2019 FTIC students who completed transfer-level English and math in one semester is larger than the number who of 2017 FTIC students who completed within one year (5,506 in English in Fall 2017; 1,749 in math). This means that **in just one semester of AB705 implementation LACCD has accomplished what it normally accomplishes in one academic year**.

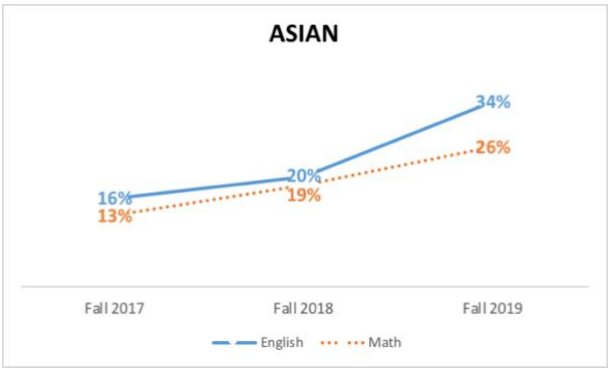
FINDING 7: GAINS IN THROUGHPUT ARE ESPECIALLY LARGE FOR ASIAN, FILIPINA/O/X, AND LATINA/O/X STUDENTS IN ENGLISH, AND FOR BLACK STUDENTS IN MATH

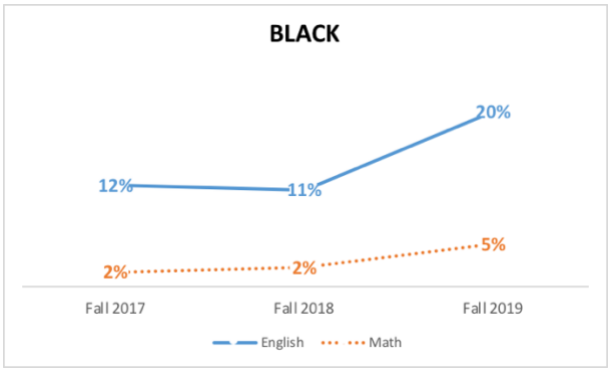
The throughput rate grew for each racial/ethnic subgroup, but grew much more for some than others. For example, the throughput rate in English grew by 2.1x for Asian students, and by 1.9x for Latina/o/x students and for Filipina/o/x students.

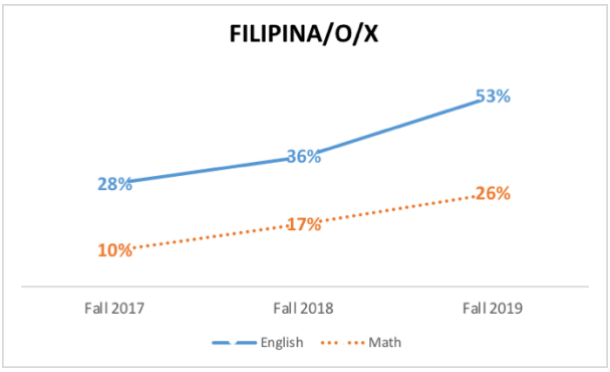
Throughput grew the most in math. The throughput rate more than doubled for Asian, Black, Filipina/o/x, and Latina/o/x students. That said, the figures below indicate just 5 percent of Black FTIC students and 9 percent of Latina/o/x FTIC students entering in Fall 2019 completed a transferable math course. Only 19 percent of Black students and 22% of Latina/o/x students who attempted any math course completed a transfer-level math course. These suggest the need for additional efforts to encourage Black and Latina/o/x FTIC students to attempt transfer-level math courses, and additional supports to help them complete those courses.

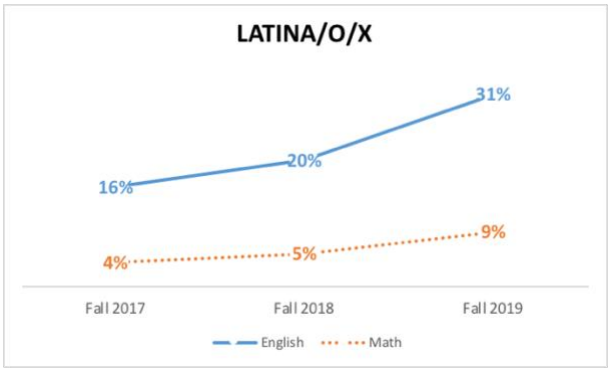
HOW MANY TIMES BIGGER IS FALL 2019 THROUGHPUT THAN FALL 2017 THROUGHPUT?		
	English	Math
Asian	2.1x	2.0x
Black	1.7x	3.0x
Filipina/o/x	1.9x	2.6x
Latina/o/x	1.9x	2.3x
White	1.7x	1.4x
Total	**1.8x**	**2.1x**

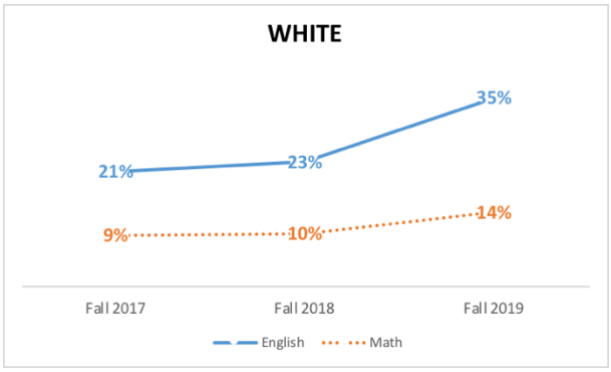
ONE-SEMESTER THROUGHPUT IN ENGLISH AND MATH BY RACE/ETHNICITY











Although throughput rates have increased after AB705, they remain low in absolute terms for Black and Latina/o/x students. Additional supports are needed to ensure these students are able to access and complete transfer-level courses.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

These data from Fall 2019, the first semester of full implementation of AB705, indicate that the policy has been successful in increasing direct enrollment in transfer-level courses. Thousands more students – most of whom would have previously been enrolled in developmental education – enrolled instead in transfer-level math and English courses. Of FTIC students who took any English or math course, over 90% of FTIC students began college in a transfer-level English course, and 75% began in a transfer-level math course.

The substantial increase in enrollments in these previously inaccessible courses also means that thousands more students have completed the courses need to transfer to a four-year college. Over 2,200 more students completed transfer-level English courses in Fall 2019, and nearly 900 more students completed transfer-level math courses in this one semester than the cohort entering just two year prior. This translates to the one-semester throughput growing by a factor of 1.8x in English, and nearly a factor of 2.1x in math.

The data show that AB705 has also narrowed racial inequalities in access and success outcomes, with thousands more racially minoritized students enrolling in and completing transfer-level English and math courses in one semester than typically have in years prior. Notably, throughput rates grew substantially for Black and Latina/o/x students in math. AB705 also increased throughput rates in English for all groups. Nevertheless, differences across student subgroups remain and additional attention should be directed towards completely eliminating these persistent inequalities.

Despite increases in access and throughput, the decline in course passing rates must also be weighed. It may be particularly difficult for instructors to stomach lower pass rates, as this means more students in a given course are experiencing failure and non-completion. To this point, more research in the California AB705 context can help us better understand reasons for lower course passing rates. Increased resources and support may help faculty reform curriculum and instruction, and supporting students in their coursework college-wide.

While the data show significant early success of AB705 in Fall 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the Spring 2020 semester and has upended the lives of students and faculty across the nation. It will be important to examine AB705 results for Spring 2020 in light of the challenges of the global pandemic as well as Fall 2020 as the CCC system continues with emergency remote instruction.