

Precollege (Remedial) Education

A launchpad to credentials

Washington's community and technical colleges are fundamentally transforming precollege (remedial) education to move students faster into credit-bearing classes. Our colleges are working with high schools to prevent the need for remediation. They are also shortening the path for college students of all ages who need the extra help.

Courses bring students up-to-speed in math and English language arts (reading/writing) so they can complete college, land well-paying jobs and upskill Washington's workforce.



Upgraded skills for college success

Many students need to brush up their academic skills before taking college-level courses.

- It's a common misconception that most precollege students are straight out of high school. More than half (55 percent) of precollege students are older and well out of high school. Of these older students, most are 25 years old or older.¹
- Precollege courses at community and technical colleges provide a vital second chance. Of recent high school graduates, 57 percent have to take at least one remedial class in math, reading or writing.²
- Most students take one or two precollege courses, typically math, while enrolled in other college-level classes.³
- Often called a "perishable" skill, math continues to be the area of greatest need. The vast majority of precollege students – 70 percent – are enrolled in math.⁴
- Precollege enrollment accounts for only nine percent of state-supported full-time equivalent students at Washington's community and technical college. Most instruction continues to focus on preparing students for the workforce or to transfer to a university.⁵
- Precollege education provides a critical entry-point into college for students who would otherwise be unable to earn the credits required for a certificate or degree. Forty percent of all bachelor's graduates from public four-year universities started at a community or technical college. Most (59 percent) of these transfer students took at least one precollege level class at a two-year college that made it all possible.⁶

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1. State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (Revised April 2012). *Role of Precollege (Developmental and Remedial) Education 2008-09 Public High School Graduates Who Enroll in Washington Community and Technical Colleges in 2009-10*. Olympia.

2-3. Ibid.

4. SBCTC, 2013 Fall Quarter Report, Olympia.

5. SBCTC. 2013-14 Academic Year Report. Olympia.

6. State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2013). *The Role of Transfer in the Attainment of Baccalaureate Degrees at Washington's Public Bachelor's Degree Institutions, Class of 2011*. Olympia.

Prevention

- **Career and college readiness standards:** Over time, career and college readiness standards are expected to reduce the need for remediation at college. Adopted by most states, the standards aim to prepare high school students for college, work and a global economy. Here in Washington, students will take “Smarter Balanced Assessments” in grades 3-8 and again in 11th grade. The 11th grade test warns students whether they’ll be college-ready by graduation. Students then have their senior year to catch up, maintain or boost their knowledge.

Under a landmark agreement reached by two-year and four-year colleges, students who score at the college-ready level on the 11th grade Smarter Balanced Assessment will automatically place into college-level math and English classes when they enroll, without having to take a college placement test.

Students who score lower on the assessment will have a second chance to catch up in 12th grade with “Bridge to College” classes, which are now in the pilot phase in 11 school districts around the state. Those who earn a B or better in the classes will also be able to bypass college placement testing at community and technical colleges. These pilot classes were pioneered by the community and technical college and K-12 systems. Universities are also exploring the bridge classes as a placement tool. Funding for the bridge classes is provided by College Spark Washington.

- **Other placement alternatives:** Beyond the Smarter Balanced Assessment for high school students, community and technical colleges give students of all ages other ways to show they are college-ready. These include traditional placement tests – such as COMPASS or ACCUPLACER – as well as high school transcripts, transcripts from other colleges or a student’s performance in a college-level class.

Innovation

- **Math pathways:** Colleges are avoiding the “one size fits all” approach to math. Instead, math requirements are matched to students’ academic plans. STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) majors still take the traditional math sequence, while other students can take math more aligned with their career goals. For example, a paralegal might take quantitative reasoning or statistics. The goal is to avoid overpowering students with math expectations unrelated to their future careers or lives.

- **Competency-based education.** Colleges are condensing the number of required precollege courses and allowing students to advance once they’ve mastered the topic, rather than waiting for the course to end. This saves students time and tuition money and reduces the possibility of content repetition.
 - **Filling gaps in knowledge:** Rather than requiring students to take quarter-long courses, many colleges simply target knowledge gaps so students can move ahead quickly. Self-study options and personally tailored curriculum are a few of the approaches.
 - **Leveraging technology:** Colleges are using “flipped” classrooms. Students learn content online and cement their knowledge in class, where they problem-solve and practice with instructors. This allows students to get specific, personalized help and to practice what they learn.
 - **Defaulting to “yes” for those on the margin:** At some colleges, students who test just below the cut-off scores for college-level courses are mainstreamed into the courses. These students get extra tutoring help or often simply catch up in class.
 - **Offering I-BEST courses, or “Integrated Basic Education Skills Training”:** I-BEST pairs two instructors in the classroom — one to teach academic or job-training content, and the other to teach precollege content — so students move ahead faster.
 - **Measuring precollege success in our performance-based funding model:** Our Student Achievement Initiative awards colleges points, and funding, when students reach key academic milestones. Colleges receive points after students complete the highest level of precollege classes in English and math, rather than when they complete each individual class in a sequence. This shifts the focus from the number of classes taken, to the highest level of knowledge gained. An extra point is awarded if a student completes a college-level math or English class within the same year as completing a precollege class. The goal is to close the “persistence gap.”
 - **Participating in Achieving the Dream:** Nineteen of our 34 community and technical colleges participate in “Achieving the Dream” a national effort that promotes evidence-based college reforms to increase student success at community colleges. Achieving the Dream focuses heavily on gatekeeper courses, including precollege math and English courses.
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