



Bright Spot:

Ventura College Eliminates Remedial Math and Improves Student Success

A BRIGHT SPOT ON THE CENTRAL COAST: VENTURA COLLEGE (VC)

Ventura College (VC) is a California Community College located on the state's Central Coast. As one of three Ventura College District colleges, VC serves 10,764 students (Fall 2022).¹ The college is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), with more than half (64 percent, Fall 2022) of the student population identifying as Latinx.¹ Notably, 91 percent of its students benefit from the California College Promise Grant (tuition waiver), which means that over 9 in every 10 students at VC come from low-income backgrounds.¹

To support community colleges in implementing [Assembly Bill 705](#) (see sidebar), The Education Trust—West (Ed Trust—West) created a [framework](#) to identify community colleges that are bright spots for AB 705 implementation for students of color. The framework defines a set of criteria for identifying exemplary colleges. To be considered exemplary, an institution must serve a high proportion of students of color and eliminate remedial courses to offer 100% transfer-level math courses by 2022, among other criteria.

From August 2022 to February 2023, Ed Trust—West collected and analyzed VC's data and reviewed its promising practices by conducting interviews, primarily with Professor Michelle Beard, Professor Jack Bennett, and VC students. Professor Beard, who has worked at VC for the past eighteen years, began her career as an adjunct math professor and has served as Math Department Chair for the past six years. Professor Bennett has been a math faculty member and leader at VC for ten years. Both are pivotal leaders in adopting equitable placement and course completion reforms at VC. With faculty support, The Education Trust—West team conducted outreach to identify and interview VC students that had recently completed or were currently taking a transfer-level math course with corequisite support.

[AB 705](#) was enacted in 2017 to address the negative impact of remedial education on students in California's community colleges. The law requires colleges to discontinue placement testing, to use high school grades for course placement, and to place students into coursework that gives them the best chance of completing transferable, college-level math and English courses within a year of their first attempt. [After AB 705's enactment](#), the rate of one-year completion of transfer-level math almost doubled (going from 27% to 50% from 2016-17 to 2019-20), with significant completion gains for every demographic student group for which data was collected.



[AB 705 is] huge in promoting equity and transformation, corequisite support has helped Latinx students in particular [...], and it's helped remove equity gaps.

**Professor Jack Bennett,
Professor of Mathematics
Ventura College**



We realize that the world of education is not equal. It has biases and systemic racism built into it. So as faculty, we seek to address those inequities.

**Michelle Beard,
Math Department Chair
Ventura College**



VC'S STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Administrative Leadership

When Professor Beard first learned about [Assembly Bill 705 \(Chapter 745, Statutes of 2017\)](#), she loved the goal. She was eager to think creatively to solve problems with remediation and support the math department through the transition. When commenting on VC's approach to implementing the new policy, Professor Beard shared, "We have amazing support from our administration, Dean, Vice President, and President, and we collaborate."

From the beginning, VC's administration demonstrated their commitment by funding dedicated faculty positions called "AB 705 Math and English Coordinators" (now called "Gateway Facilitators") who led and oversaw AB 705 implementation efforts. These coordinators were given release time from their teaching commitments to research Cuyamaca College and other community colleges' corequisite models to replicate those successful approaches at VC. VC administration also provided faculty stipends to create transfer-level math course material, content, and resources. These materials were uploaded to the math department Canvas platform (their web-based learning management system) as an easily accessible resource for all math faculty.

Moreover, VC created several structures explicitly designed to enable frequent collaboration around AB 705 implementation, contributing to the college's success. Those structures included monthly math communities of practice; cross-team meetings/roundtables about AB 705 for math and English faculty, counselors, student services staff, and administration; and cross-team meetings with the two other community colleges in their district.

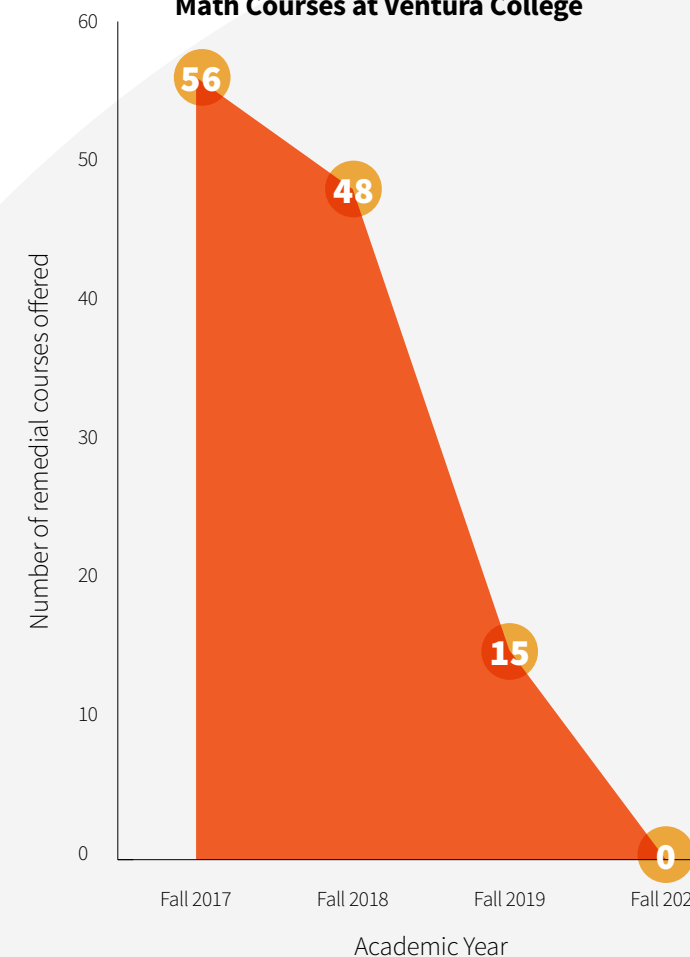
Professional Development and Communities of Practice For Faculty

Professional development has played a vital role in strengthening VC's equity and remedial education reform efforts. VC's math faculty, English faculty, administrators, and counselors attended [California Acceleration Project \(CAP\)](#) conferences. They then applied CAP's principles around changing remedial course offerings and expanding transfer-level and support courses on their campus. Professor Bennett shared that at CAP conferences, staff learned: "If you offer remedial courses, they'll fill [...], and so, we decided not to offer the remedial courses because they would fill, and they don't have the best outcomes."

Professor Beard, Professor Bennett, and other faculty also participated in Project PROMESAS, a professional development program.² Designed as a two-year program composed of institutes and workshops, Project PROMESAS involves participating in a community of practice where a cohort of math faculty engages collaboratively around a set of learning themes. Math faculty learned and implemented research-backed and equity-driven classroom practices (e.g., community-building exercises, group work, project-based learning with real-world applications, and authentic assessments), which they could use in transfer-level and supported math courses.

VC's math department then created its own community of practice. Since 2019, Professor Bennett and others have led a monthly community of practice open to all math faculty. During these meetings, math faculty report on learnings from professional development, share practices they have found to be successful in the classroom, and co-create resources. Closing the loop from information to implementation, faculty in communities of practice then adopt new best practices approaches and track outcomes they see in the classroom to inform continuous improvement. Both Professors Beard and Bennett highlighted a positive shift in students' attitudes toward and engagement in their math courses after implementing their curriculum and instruction improvements.

Figure 1: Below Transfer-level (Remedial) Math Courses at Ventura College



Source: Data provided during interviews with Ventura College math department

THE RESULT: VC ELIMINATES REMEDIAL MATH, SUPPORTS STUDENTS AND FACULTY, AND IMPROVES OUTCOMES

Access to Transfer-Level Math

By Fall 2022, all of VC's introductory math courses were transfer level.³ Implementation was described as slow and steady, and faculty noted that moving the needle forward consistently was essential. In Fall 2017, VC had 56 below transfer-level courses (remedial courses); in Fall 2018, it had 48; in Fall 2019, it had 15; and in Fall 2022, it had 0 remedial courses (Figure 1). Eliminating remedial math courses and increasing access to transfer-level math resulted in more equitable participation for Latinx students, who were previously underrepresented in transfer-level math at VC.⁴

DEFINITION BOX

Some of the criteria included in Ed Trust–West’s framework, were drawn from incisive research published by the Public Policy Institute of California, which seeks to quantify equity gaps in access to transfer-level math and English courses across California Community Colleges; one such metric is throughput rates.⁵

Throughput: Throughput rates reflect the percentage of students successfully completing a transfer-level math or English course, out of all students enrolling in any introductory level of math or English for the first time.

Completion of Transfer-Level Math

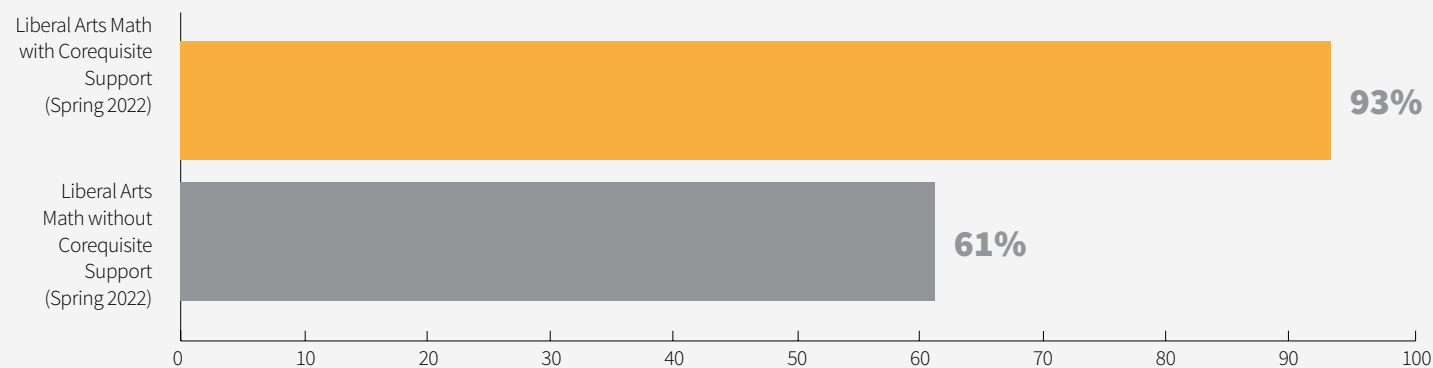
In transfer-level math, the one-year throughput rate was 69 percent (2021-22) at VC, higher than the statewide throughput rate of 62 percent (2021-22), meaning more students are completing transfer-level math courses in a one-year timeframe.⁶ From the 2016-2017 academic year (pre-AB 705) to the 2021-2022 academic year (post-AB 705), Ventura College observed its transfer-level completion rates nearly double, going from 32% to 63%.⁶ Ventura College’s rate of Latinx students completing transfer-level courses has also increased significantly, going from 32% in 2016-2017 to 59% in 2021-2022.⁶ In the 2021-2022 academic year, the transfer-level math completion rate for Latinx students at Ventura College was 59%, which surpassed the statewide rate of 46%.⁶

Embedded Tutoring in Transfer-Level Math Corequisite Support Courses

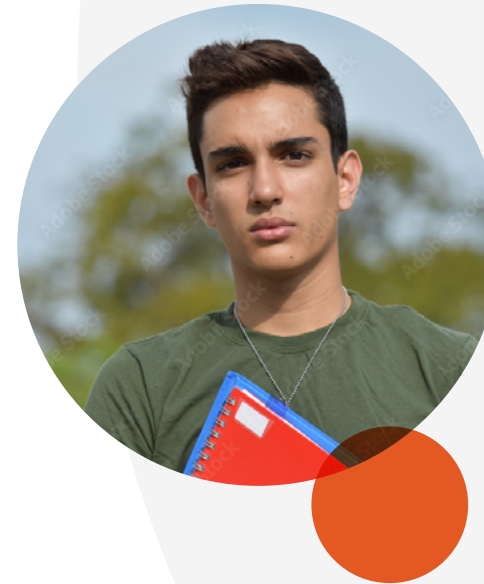
The key to transfer-level math success at VC is formalized tutoring as part of transfer-level math support courses (i.e., corequisites) which brings tutoring services to students in the classroom. In Fall 2022, VC offered about a quarter (24 percent) of transfer-level classes with embedded tutoring, for students who need the additional support.³ VC recruits former students who have been successful in the course to be embedded paid tutors. Embedded tutors can access the math course material, assist with homework, prepare students for exams and projects, and provide individualized and group tutoring sessions. Embedded tutors in transfer-level math support courses have been an effective and successful strategy, according to both faculty and students.

Professor Bennett described AB 705 as “huge in promoting equity and transformation.” He explained that “corequisite support has helped Latinx students in particular [...], and it’s helped remove equity gaps.” For instance, in Spring 2022, transfer-level liberal arts math (i.e., a course in which students learn applications-oriented, problem-solving exploration into a variety of real-life, everyday mathematical problems and situations) success rates were 61 percent for the courses without corequisite support and 93 percent for the courses with corequisite support (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Liberal Arts Math: Success Rates in Support vs. Non-Support Courses at Ventura College



Source: VC Course Success Rate Dashboard Emast Math



Student Experience

To students, the transfer-level math and support courses feel like one class because the same faculty teach both, and the support course is scheduled right after the transfer-level math class. Students do not receive extra assignments as part of the support course curriculum. Instead, instructors focus on habits of mind, growth mindset, and study skills. In the support course, VC math faculty engage students in the coursework (e.g., by using the just-in-time support model), and teachers use the time for active learning and group work.

Oscar⁷, a first-generation Latino student studying mechanical engineering at VC, completed a transfer-level math course with a one-unit corequisite support class. Oscar shared that the support course “offers more support than your normal individual class.” For Oscar, the embedded tutor was a classmate and friend, which made all the difference because the tutor knew how to connect with the students. Oscar explains that if you walk into the math transfer-level support class at VC, you will hear and see students collaborating in groups, using one of the multiple whiteboards around the classroom to figure out their math assignments together. The support course allowed students to receive one-on-one and group support for their math homework from both tutors and classmates: “You really were there just to learn together.”

This dynamic educational model is a stark contrast to the past. Professor Beard shared that before VC implemented AB 705, her students felt frustrated knowing they needed to take three remedial math courses to get to transfer-level statistics, prolonging their paths to completion and graduation. Her students expressed the impact of this long road to transfer-level coursework on their morale and motivation by commenting, “It’s too much, there’s no point to it, I’m feeling overwhelmed.” She mentioned that now at VC, “Students don’t have to feel like they have to go through so many courses [...] Students are more hopeful.”





RECOMMENDATIONS TO CAMPUS LEADERS

Drawing from lessons learned on Ventura College's journey in implementing AB 705, Professors Beard and Bennett share the following advice for other faculty in math departments at California Community Colleges who may be eager to see similar success:

- ▶ **Data-driven decision-making.** Examine the data on course-taking and success rates, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, and use it to inform decisions about how to expand access to transfer-level math courses, increase transfer-level math success, and close racial equity gaps in completion.
- ▶ **Cross-functional collaboration.** Communication and partnership with English faculty, math faculty, counseling faculty, and administrators are essential. These VC faculty uplifted the importance of listening to each other and collaborating on implementing AB 705 to improve student outcomes.
- ▶ **Professional development.** Take advantage of professional development opportunities to continually improve teaching practices. Specifically, colleges should provide training that focuses on teaching introductory courses in ways that promote equity and advance student outcomes. These instructors recommend the [California Acceleration Project's](#) training and joining a community of practice as colleges fully implement AB 705.



CONCLUSION

Remedial courses threaten racial equity and educational justice. By implementing AB 705, giving all students direct access to transfer-level courses, ensuring that they enroll in them, and providing robust support, VC dramatically improved their students' opportunities and outcomes. All California Community Colleges can achieve these results, and now have an opportunity to leverage state resources in service of that goal. The state has invested \$64 million (Equitable Placement and Completion Grant Program, 2022) through [AB 705 \(Irwin, 2017\)](#) and [AB 1705 \(Irwin, 2022\)](#) to provide California Community Colleges the needed support to implement equitable placement and completion policies. On May 1, 2023, the California Community College Chancellor's Office released a new resource, [Memo – Required Action: Equitable Placement, Support and Completion AB 1705 Funding Allocation and the Submission of Funding Plans](#) to assist colleges on accessing these funds. As the state's community colleges tackle the elimination of remedial courses, we encourage them to provide corequisite support in transfer-level courses, utilize culturally responsive curriculum and teaching practices, and commit to upholding and centering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in all remedial education reforms.

AB 1705 strengthens AB 705 by clarifying the law's intent to ensure students are directly enrolled in transfer-level courses, thereby maximizing the probability of a student completing transfer-level math and English courses within one year to achieve their degree and transfer goals.

AB 1705 requires that colleges:

- ▶ Enroll students in math and English classes where they have the greatest likelihood of completing degree and transfer requirements.
- ▶ Not require students to repeat math and English classes they passed in high school.
- ▶ Provide greater protections to ensure that students are not required to take extra math and English courses that do not count towards their degree requirements.
- ▶ Ensure that students have support that helps them progress toward their goals.

Endnotes

1. California Community College Chancellor's Office. Management Information Systems Data Mart. Retrieved from: https://datamart.cccco.edu/Services/FinAid_Summary.aspx
2. VC math faculty participated in the Project PROMESAS in collaboration with Oxnard College, Moorpark College, and Cal State Channel Islands. It aimed to dramatically improve the success rates, retention, and experiences of students in STEM courses.
3. California Acceleration Project. (2022). Nearly There: Large Scale Improvements in Math Implementation of AB 705. Retrieved from: <https://accelerationproject.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/CAP%20Nearly%20There%20Final.pdf>
4. Public Policy Institute of California. (2020). A New Era of Student Access at California's Community Colleges. Retrieved from: <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/1120mcr-appendix.pdf>
5. Some of the criteria included in our framework for identifying bright spots were drawn from incisive research published by the Public Policy Institute of California. This research aims to quantify equity gaps in access to transfer-level math and English courses across California Community Colleges, with one key metric being throughput rates.

Throughput: Throughput rates reflect the percentage of students successfully completing a transfer-level math or English course, out of all students enrolling in any introductory level of math or English for the first time.
6. California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. Transfer-Level Gateway Completion Dashboard. Retrieved from: <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/transfer-level-dashboard#:~:text=Transfer-Level%20Gateway%20Completion%20Dashboard%20This%20dashboard%20provides%20completion,or%20below%20transfer%20level%29,%20Statewide%20or%20College%20View>
7. To ensure confidentiality, the student interviewed has been given a pseudonym.



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ADMINISTRATION



The Education Trust-West

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