

CALIFORNIA BUDGET PROJECT

AT A CROSSROADS

# CALIFORNIA'S BASIC SKILLS STUDENTS:

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WHO SUCCEEDS AND WHY

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## California Budget Project

The CBP was founded in 1994 to provide Californians with a source of timely, objective, and accessible expertise on state fiscal and economic policy issues. The CBP engages in independent fiscal and policy analysis and public education with the goal of improving public policies affecting the economic and social well-being of low- and middle-income Californians. Support for the CBP comes from foundation grants, publications, and individual contributions. Please visit the CBP's website at [www.cbp.org](http://www.cbp.org).

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Budget Project's *At a Crossroads* series examines basic skills education – classes in literacy and math skills and in English as a Second Language (ESL) provided through the Adult Education Program of the California Department of Education and by the California Community Colleges. This report – the third in the series – explores the outcomes that different types of basic skills students achieve. To understand students' progress and identify factors that affect that progress, this study analyzes students' learning gains over a period of three years in the Adult Education Program and student achievement over six years in the California Community Colleges.

This research finds that few students in California's basic skills system make meaningful educational progress. It also identifies several critical factors that can increase student success. Students in the Adult Education Program who spend more time in the classroom make more progress than other students. In the community colleges, students who receive orientation and assessment services are more likely to succeed, as are those who enroll full-time and do not skip terms.

### This Research Identifies Three Distinct Types of Basic Skills Students

The data analyzed for this report suggest that there are three types of basic skills students in the community colleges:

- Recent high school graduates who aim to earn a credential or to transfer to a four-year institution but need help with specific skills, including ESL. These are essentially college-level students who do not quite meet college-level standards. More than half of basic skills students fit in this category.
- Adults who have been out of school for a few years and want to earn a vocational certificate or associate's degree or to transfer to a four-year institution but have weak basic skills. One-fifth of basic skills students are in this group.
- Older adults who have significant skill deficits – often, Latino English-language-learners – who do not intend to earn a certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution. More than one-fifth of basic skills students are in this group.

In addition, ESL students tended to be different from other community college basic skills students. ESL students on the whole were older, less likely to have completed high school, and more likely to be Latino. However, a significant share – one-fifth – of ESL students entered the community colleges in college-level courses. These students were as likely to be Asian (39.6 percent) as they were to be Latino (39.6 percent).

Fewer data are available to identify different types of students in the Adult Education Program. Data do show, however, that Adult Education Program students tended to be older than community college students taking courses in the same content area and that Adult Education Program students tended to have lower levels of educational attainment than community college students.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is likely that Adult Education Program students tend to be similar to the second and third basic skills student categories discussed above.

### What Outcomes Do Basic Skills Students Achieve?

The data analyzed for this report suggest that most basic skills students make only minimal progress over a period of several years, many make no progress at all, and very few earn a vocational or academic certificate or degree or transfer to a four-year institution.

### Student Success in the Adult Education Program

Success in the Adult Education Program is measured by test scores that indicate whether students completed one or more “educational functioning levels.” By this measure, ESL students tended to be more successful than Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education students over three years. This analysis found that:

- Just over half (51.0 percent) of ESL students completed at least one of the six ESL levels, although few (12.0 percent) completed two or more.
- More than two out of five Adult Basic Education students (42.3 percent) completed at least one of the four Adult Basic Education levels – approximately the equivalent of two grade levels – but very few (5.5 percent) completed two or more.
- Two out of five Adult Secondary Education students (40.9 percent) completed at least one of the two Adult Secondary Education levels – approximately the equivalent of two grade levels – but very few (4.5 percent) completed two levels.

Education levels – approximately the equivalent of two grade levels – but very few (4.5 percent) completed two levels.

## Student Success in the Community Colleges

Basic skills students who hoped to complete a vocational or academic certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution were relatively unlikely to do so: Just one out of five (19.8 percent) reached one of those milestones. In contrast, one out of four credential-seeking college-level students (25.2 percent) earned a certificate or degree or transferred. Compared to credential-seekers with similar characteristics who did not take any basic skills classes, basic skills students were:

- Slightly less likely to earn a vocational certificate.
- Somewhat less likely to earn an associate's degree.
- Much less likely to transfer to a four-year institution.

Much larger shares of credential-seeking basic skills students reached other educational milestones. Specifically:

- More than nine out of 10 (92.9 percent) enrolled in at least one college-level course.
- More than two out of three (69.1 percent) earned at least 12 units, and more than one out of three (34.7 percent) earned 30 or more units.
- More than three out of five (63.5 percent) enrolled in college-level English or math.

Basic skills students made a substantially greater investment of time and effort to earn credentials or to transfer compared to other students. Specifically:

- Basic skills students required approximately one additional year of school to earn a vocational certificate or associate's degree, and nearly one and a half additional years to transfer, compared to other students.
- Basic skills students took roughly nine more classes than college-level students.
- ESL and Adult Basic/Secondary Education students generally needed more time in school and more classes than basic skills English/math students in order to earn credentials or to transfer.

In addition:

- Few basic skills credential-seekers (8.8 percent) attended school full-time.

- Most basic skills credential-seekers (58.6 percent) waited until after their first school year to take a basic skills class.

Compared to other credential-seekers, basic skills credential-seekers were:

- More likely to undergo orientation and assessment.
- More likely to return for a second term or year.
- Approximately as likely to take classes continuously, rather than “stopping out” and returning to school.

## English-Language Learners' Success

Most ESL students – particularly those in the Adult Education Program and community college noncredit programs – did not make significant progress. Specifically:

- Slightly more than half (51.0 percent) of Adult Education Program ESL students completed one or more educational functioning levels over three years.
- Only 15.4 percent of community college noncredit ESL students moved into credit ESL during the six-year study period, and just one-fifth (19.6 percent) took a college-level course. Very few (3.7 percent) earned a certificate or degree or transferred to a four-year institution.

On the other hand, more than two-thirds (67.4 percent) of credit ESL students took at least one college-level course, and 13.7 percent earned a certificate or degree or transferred to a four-year institution.

ESL students who started in college-level community college courses were the most successful community college ESL students. These “collegiate” ESL students were as likely to be Asian (39.6 percent) as they were to be Latino (39.6 percent). Nearly one-quarter of collegiate ESL students (23.7 percent) earned a certificate or degree or transferred to a four-year institution.

## What Matters for Student Success?

In the Adult Education Program:

- Asian students were the most likely to complete one or more levels, followed by Latino students, and black students were the least likely to complete a level.
- In general, older students made more progress than younger students.
- Students generally completed more levels when they spent more time in the classroom.

- Nearly all progress was made during students' first year.
- Students' progress was similar regardless of whether courses were offered by school districts or by the community colleges that serve as Adult Education Program providers in some communities.

In the community colleges, demographic characteristics played a significant role in basic skills students' success. Specifically:

- Older basic skills students were slightly more likely than younger students to earn vocational certificates, but less likely to transfer to a four-year institution.
- Asian students were the most likely to earn certificates or associate degrees or to transfer. Black students were the least likely to earn certificates or associate's degrees, and Latino students were the least likely to transfer to a four-year institution.
- Men were less likely than women to earn a credential or to transfer.

Enrollment patterns and student services also affected basic skills students' success in the community colleges. Specifically:

- Orientation and assessment services increased the

likelihood that basic skills students would earn an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year institution.

- Basic skills students who took credit basic skills courses in their first year improved their chances of earning an associate's degree or transferring to a four-year institution.
- Basic skills credential-seekers were generally much more likely to earn certificates or to transfer if they enrolled continuously or full-time or started in college-level courses.

## Student Support Services Can Help More Basic Skills Students Succeed

This research points to specific supports that can enhance basic skills students' success. These supports include:

- Ensuring that basic skills students receive orientation and assessment services and take the basic skills courses they need without delay.
- Developing courses or programs that help students reach basic skills proficiency more quickly.
- Providing financial aid and other services so basic skills students can enroll full-time until they reach their educational goals. For students who cannot attend full-time for financial or other reasons, other services should be put in place to support and speed academic achievement.





# INTRODUCTION

A college degree or industry-recognized vocational certificate is now the principal pathway to a well-paid job. Increasingly, remedial English and mathematics and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are the gateway to college and skills training. These programs are of increasing importance because many recent high school graduates, high school dropouts, and low-skilled working adults lack the fundamental English and mathematics proficiency required for postsecondary education. Until recent budget cuts, California's basic skills programs – which provide remedial education – served more than 1.5 million students a year at a cost to the state of more than \$1.0 billion.

The California Budget Project's (CBP) *At a Crossroads* series aims to inform policymaking by providing an introduction to California's overall system of basic skills education and assessing its success. Previous reports in the series – *Basic Skills Education in California* and *Financing Basic Skills Education in California* – examined who provides these courses, who takes them, and how the programs are funded (see box). This report explores the outcomes that different types of basic skills students achieve. The final publication in the series, *Gateway to a Better Future: Building an Effective System of Basic Skills Education for California*, offers recommendations for improving basic skills education in California.

## New Analyses Examine Student Success

Efforts to make the basic skills system more effective have been hampered by a lack of information about how well California's basic skills programs serve their students or what services help students succeed. In part, this dearth of data stems from the fact that neither the Adult Education Program nor the community colleges has historically tracked their basic skills students' long-term progress or followed students as they moved from one program to another. In particular, federal WIA reporting requirements for the Adult Education Program focus on student progress over the course of a year, and the program does not measure longer-term student achievement.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the Legislature recently directed the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to report annually on a wide range of student indicators, and the new "accountability reports" measure basic skills students' progress over periods of up to eight years.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no coordinated reporting of outcomes data for Adult Education

Program and community college students to explore success in the state's basic skills system as a whole.

This report seeks to fill this data gap by following two sets of students – one in the Adult Education Program and one in the community colleges – over a period of several years and analyzing their academic performance. Specifically, this report explores the following questions:

- Why did students enroll in basic skills courses?
- How did students who enrolled in basic skills courses differ from other students in terms of age, race and ethnicity, educational achievement, and sex?
- What educational milestones did basic skills students achieve, and how did their achievements compare to those of non-basic-skills students?
- How were English-language learners different from, or similar to, other basic skills students?
- How can basic skills providers help students reach their goals?

The rest of this chapter describes the basic methodological approach used in this study. The next chapters turn to the Adult Education Program and the community colleges, comparing the demographic characteristics and educational outcomes of different student groups and exploring factors that were important to student success. These chapters are followed by a closer look at the state's largest basic skills subject area: ESL. The report concludes with a discussion of the study's key policy implications.

## Methodology

This report is based on analysis of administrative data from the Adult Education Program and the California Community Colleges.

### Data on Adult Education Program Students Were Analyzed by CASAS

The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), an organization that collects and analyzes Adult Education Program performance data for the California Department of Education, analyzed data on enrollment and progress for all 583,088 students who took basic skills classes through the Adult Education Program in 2005-06 and were subject to federal data reporting requirements.<sup>4</sup> CASAS linked annual data to follow that set of students for a period of three years – through 2007-08.<sup>5</sup>

# Basic Skills Education in California

There is no precise estimate of the number of Californians who could benefit from basic skills education, but indicators of the need for these programs include the following facts:

- Nearly one out of three California ninth-graders fails to complete high school within four years.
- More than four out of five new community college students do not have the skills to complete college-level work.
- Nearly one out of four California adults cannot read and understand an English-language newspaper.
- More than 1.5 million California adults enrolled in basic skills classes in 2006-07.

Basic skills courses are provided by the Adult Education Program of the California Department of Education and by noncredit and credit programs of the California Community Colleges. A snapshot of California's basic skills programs shows the following:

- The Adult Education Program serves three-fifths of all basic skills students (62.6 percent).
- Most basic skills students are enrolled in ESL programs (55.5 percent). ESL is an even larger share of the Adult Education Program (65.1 percent), but a smaller part of community college programs (39.5 percent).
- Basic skills students are predominantly Latino (60.1 percent), with Asians and whites making up similar shares – 17.0 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively. Blacks are overrepresented in non-ESL basic skills courses compared to their share of the state's population, but are virtually absent from ESL programs.
- Basic skills programs tend to serve older students: Three-fifths are 25 or older, and a significant share – 16.8 percent – are 45 or older. In the community colleges' non-ESL basic skills programs, young people are predominant.<sup>6</sup>

Funding for the Adult Education Program comes from two primary sources: General Fund dollars allocated by the Legislature through the state budget and, for some providers, federal grants through Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). Community college basic skills programs receive "apportionment" funding from local property taxes, student fees, and the General Fund, and some community colleges receive WIA Title II funding to serve as Adult Education Program providers.<sup>7</sup> Funding for the community colleges' Basic Skills Initiative, which seeks to implement "best practice" basic skills education, comes from the state's General Fund.

In 2007-08 – the last "normal" budget year for the Adult Education Program and the community colleges – California spent more than \$1.0 billion on basic skills education.<sup>8</sup> Since then, the state's ongoing budget crisis has seriously threatened funding for basic skills programs, both through direct funding cuts and by allowing funding to be shifted from basic skills to other programs. Many school districts and community colleges have reduced basic skills enrollment, course offerings, and support services in response to new funding constraints.

## California's Basic Skills System



## The California Community College Chancellor's Office Provided Datasets for Analysis

The CBP analyzed data on community college student demographics, course enrollment, and achievement provided by the CCCCCO. The CBP linked CCCCCO datasets to examine a set of 378,422 students who first enrolled as California community college students in 2002-03 and their educational progress over a period of six years.<sup>9</sup>

Community college students were grouped into four categories based on the types of courses they took over the entire period covered by the data, according to the following hierarchy:

- ESL students: Took at least one ESL class.
- Adult Basic/Secondary Education students: Took no ESL, but enrolled in at least one Adult Basic/Secondary Education course.
- Basic Skills English/Math students: Took no ESL or Adult Basic/Secondary Education classes but enrolled in at least one Basic Skills English/Math course.
- College-level students: All other students, who took no basic skills classes in the study period.<sup>10</sup>

The first three of these groups reflect basic skills course-taking, but they do not necessarily identify all students with low levels of basic skills development. The community colleges do not test all students' basic skill competency or require basic skills coursework of all students with low skills, so some students with low English and/or math proficiency never attended a basic skills class. On the other hand, national research indicates that some academically successful students take basic skills courses because of poor academic counseling, low self-confidence, or some other reason.<sup>11</sup> Thus, an individual student who took a basic skills class may not have had lower skills than a student who did not.

## The Adult Education Program and the Community Colleges Have Different Measures of Student Success

The primary measure of student success in the Adult Education Program is the completion of "educational functioning levels."<sup>12</sup> These levels are designed to track student progress – and providers' "pay-for-performance" funding – in adult education programs that receive WIA Title II funding. In Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education, one level is approximately equivalent to two K-12 grade levels.<sup>13</sup> Local WIA-funded providers evaluate students' skill levels when the students enroll in an Adult Education Program course,

using CASAS assessment instruments, and assign students to an entering level based on those scores. Scores on tests taken later in the academic year show whether students made progress within their starting level, completed that level, advanced to a higher level, or made no progress.

Data available for this report could show students completing a maximum of one level per year or three levels over the three-year period covered by this analysis. However, a student reported as having completed one level in one year might actually have completed two or more levels in that year.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, this report's findings on level completion may underestimate student progress.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, CASAS checks administrative data to identify students who completed high school or earned a GED after enrolling in the Adult Education Program. This information cannot be linked to individual students with the data available for this report, but it is discussed in this report to provide a more comprehensive picture of student success.

In contrast to the limited achievement data available for Adult Education Program students, a wide range of indicators of community college students' effort and achievement can be measured with the data provided by the CCCCCO. Indicators evaluated in this report include:

- The number of classes taken and the number of units completed – two very basic metrics of a student's chance of success and the amount of effort required for success.
- Whether a student returned to the community colleges for a second term or second year – referred to as "retention" or "persistence."

## The Community Colleges Enacted Significant Changes After the Study Period Ended

This analysis of community college basic skills students looks at student achievement during the period 2002-03 through 2007-08. Toward the end of this period, the community colleges began a Basic Skills Initiative to improve basic skills programs, teacher training, and data collection and analysis.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the CCCCCO's data management system has been revised to identify and classify basic skills courses more accurately. These changes take steps toward addressing some of the barriers to student success that are highlighted in this report.

- Transitions from basic skills courses to college-level courses.
- Students' success in earning vocational and academic certificates and degrees and transferring to four-year institutions.

## Statistical Analyses Focus on Factors That Affect Success

Data that describe students who take one or the other kind of basic skills course illustrate how student populations differ, but they cannot show which specific factors affect student success. To do that, this study used statistical analysis to isolate the relationship between certain key student characteristics and experiences and students' outcomes, holding other factors constant.<sup>17</sup> The statistical analysis is restricted to credential-seekers because those students are focused on specific, measurable goals whose attainment may be affected by student demographics and institutional practices. This analysis builds on evidence and hypotheses from other research, in part to see if factors that are important to the success of students in general are also significant for all basic skills students, or for some particular groups of basic skills students. The analysis explores the importance of:

- Age, race and ethnicity, educational background, and sex.
- Receiving “matriculation services” – orientation and/or assessment for course placement purposes – soon after starting classes.
- Attending school full-time.
- Taking classes continuously, rather than “stopping out” and then returning to school.
- Taking college-level courses in the first term.

Appendix A provides more information on the methodology used in this report.

## THE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Adult Education Program is the state's largest provider of basic skills courses, serving more than three out of five of California's basic skills students with course offerings in ESL, Adult Basic Education, and Adult Secondary Education. This chapter compares the basic demographic characteristics of students in the three Adult Education Program basic skills content areas and examines the learning gains students achieved over one to three years.

## Students' Demographic Characteristics Varied in Important Ways Among the Three Content Areas

ESL is by far the largest basic skills content area in the Adult Education Program, enrolling nearly two-thirds (65.1 percent) of the program's basic skills students in 2005-06 (Figure 1).<sup>18</sup> Compared to students working on literacy and math skills through the high school level in Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education programs, ESL students tended to be older and were much more likely to be Latino and female (Table 1). Specifically:

- Only 25.0 percent of ESL students were under age 25. In contrast, 40.0 percent of Adult Basic Education students and 57.0 percent of Adult Secondary Education students were in that age group.
- Most ESL students were Latino (74.6 percent), with Asian students comprising the second-largest group (18.3 percent). Approximately half of Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education students were Latino (47.3 percent and 49.5 percent, respectively); a smaller share were Asian than was the case for ESL students, and more were white or black.

- More than half (57.6 percent) of ESL students were women. In contrast, a majority of Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education students were men (62.0 percent and 54.7 percent, respectively).<sup>19</sup>

## Most Adult Education Program Students Had Significant Skills Deficits

Most students in the Adult Education Program had significant skills deficits. The majority (82.7 percent) of ESL students were placed in beginning or intermediate classes based on test scores, and, by definition, Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education students do not have the skills to complete high school. Specifically, among students in the study cohort:

- More than one-third (37.7 percent) of ESL students tested into beginning ESL. Those classes are designed for students with skills ranging from no ability to read or speak English to the ability to speak in phrases and read some words.
- A much smaller share of ESL students (17.3 percent) tested into advanced ESL, at which level students would have

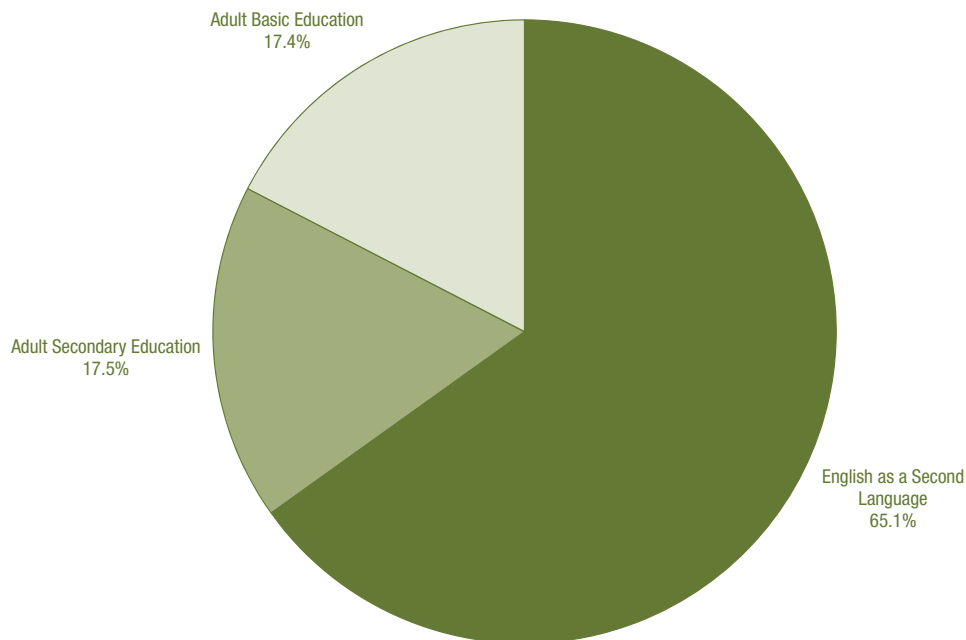
some conversational fluency and be able to read and write simple narratives.

- More than one-fourth (27.9 percent) of Adult Basic Education students tested at the beginning educational functional level, indicating that they had roughly the equivalent of a third-grade education or less.
- Two-thirds (67.4 percent) of Adult Secondary Education students were at approximately the ninth- or tenth-grade level of educational functioning.<sup>20</sup>

## More Than Half of ESL Students Completed At Least One Level and Two Out of Five Other Students Advanced At Least Two Grade Levels

Although 90.3 percent of all Adult Education Program students made some progress over three years, fewer than half (48.4 percent) made enough progress to complete a level during that time (Figure 2).<sup>21</sup> ESL students tended to complete more

Figure 1: ESL Students Account for Nearly Two-Thirds of Adult Education Program Basic Skills Students



Note: Data are for all students enrolled in 2005-06, including those who did not meet WIA Title II reporting requirements.  
Source: CASAS

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Adult Education Program Basic Skills Students by Content Area, 2005-06**

	ESL	Adult Basic Education	Adult Secondary Education
Age			
16 to 18	4.0%	15.2%	26.7%
19 to 24	21.0%	24.8%	30.3%
25 to 44	53.2%	44.3%	34.0%
45 or Older	21.8%	15.7%	9.0%
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian	18.3%	6.6%	8.5%
Black	0.7%	19.4%	13.5%
Latino	74.6%	47.3%	49.5%
Other	1.4%	3.0%	2.3%
White	4.9%	23.8%	26.2%
Sex			
Men	42.4%	62.0%	54.7%
Women	57.6%	38.0%	45.3%
Educational Functioning Level			
Beginning ESL	37.7%	*	*
Intermediate ESL	45.0%	*	*
Advanced ESL	17.3%	*	*
Beginning Basic Education	*	27.9%	*
Intermediate Basic Education	*	72.1%	*
Low Adult Secondary Education	*	*	67.4%
High Adult Secondary Education	*	*	32.6%
Number of Students	418,834	102,488	61,766

\* Not applicable.

Note: Data are for students who enrolled in programs that received funding through Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and who met WIA data reporting requirements. The four educational functioning levels for Adult Basic Education were combined into the two shown here for simplicity. The race/ethnic group "other" includes American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Source: CASAS

educational functioning levels than either Adult Basic Education or Adult Secondary Education students. Specifically:

- Just over half (51.0 percent) of ESL students completed at least one of the six ESL levels, although few (12.0 percent) completed two or more.

- More than two out of five Adult Basic Education students (42.3 percent) completed at least one of the four Adult Basic Education levels – approximately equivalent to at least two grade levels. However, very few (5.5 percent) completed two or more levels.
- Two out of five Adult Secondary Education students (40.9 percent) completed at least one of the two Adult Secondary Education levels – approximately equivalent to at least two grade levels. Very few (4.5 percent) completed two levels.

## Many Adult Secondary Education Students Completed High School

The most important measure of success for many Adult Secondary Education students is whether they earned a high school diploma or GED. These students may be able to earn a high school credential without completing any educational functioning levels. Because the data available for this report did not state whether a student completed high school, the findings on students' completion of levels reported above likely understate Adult Secondary Education students' success in reaching their educational goals. A supplemental analysis found that, in 2005-06, approximately one-quarter of Adult Secondary Education students earned a high school degree or a GED.<sup>22</sup>

## Nearly All Progress Occurred in Students' First Year in the Adult Education Program

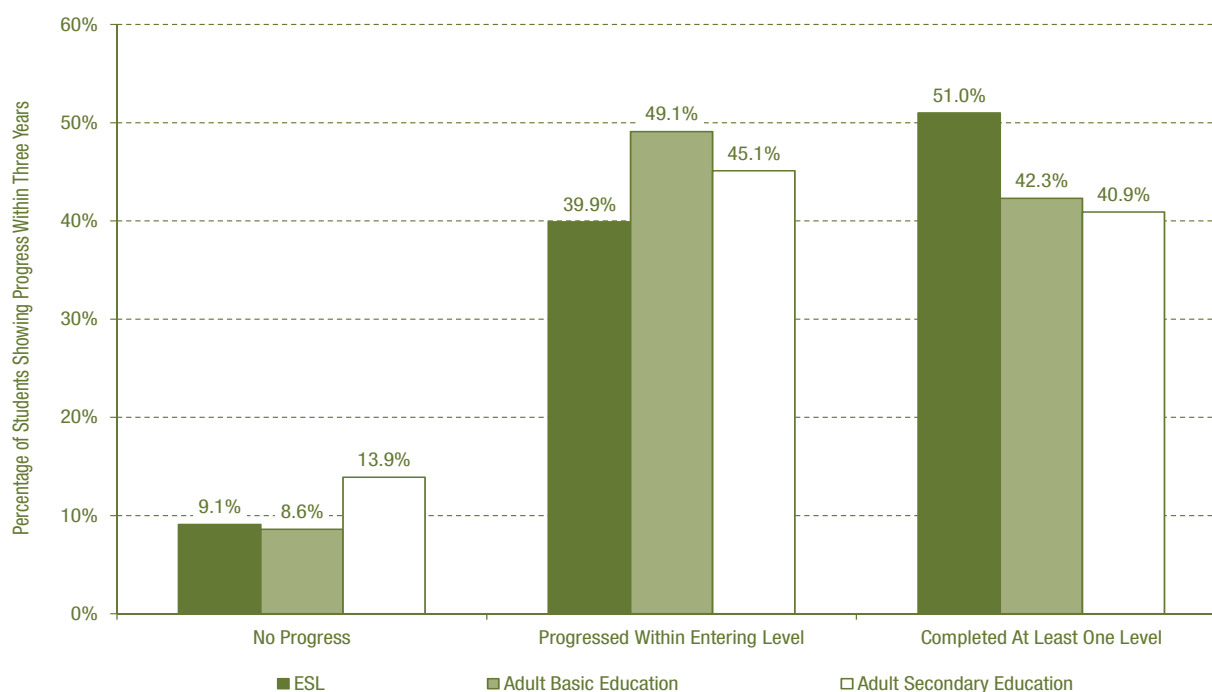
Nearly all the progress Adult Education Program students made over the study period was achieved in their first year, with little additional progress occurring in the second and third years.<sup>23</sup> To some extent, this reflects the high attrition in the Adult Education Program – only one-quarter (25.6 percent) of 2005-06 basic skills students returned in 2006-07, and fewer than one out of 10 (9.3 percent) enrolled in all three years.

## Students in Correctional Institutions Were More Likely To Make Some Progress Than Other Students, But Less Likely To Complete a Level

Students in Adult Education Programs offered through correctional institutions were more likely to make some progress than other students, but students in correctional institutions were less likely to complete a level (Table 2).<sup>24</sup>



Figure 2: ESL Students Were More Likely To Complete At Least One Level



Source: CASAS

Specifically:

- The vast majority of students in correctional institutions made some progress (96.2 percent) – meaning their test scores improved – compared to 89.7 percent of other students.
- More than two out of five students in correctional institutions (41.9 percent) completed one or more educational functioning levels; half (49.1 percent) of other students completed at least one level.<sup>25</sup>

## Students Did Equally Well in Courses Provided by Adult Schools and by Community Colleges

Adult Education Program courses are offered through a variety of local providers. Most providers are “adult schools” run by school districts, but 18 community colleges received WIA funding through the Adult Education Program to offer basic skills courses in 2005-06.<sup>26</sup> Students in these community college and adult school settings made nearly identical progress over the three years covered by the data.<sup>27</sup>

## In General, More Hours of Instruction Increased Progress

ESL and Adult Secondary Education students who spent more hours in the classroom made significantly more progress than other students in 2005-06.<sup>28</sup> Specifically:

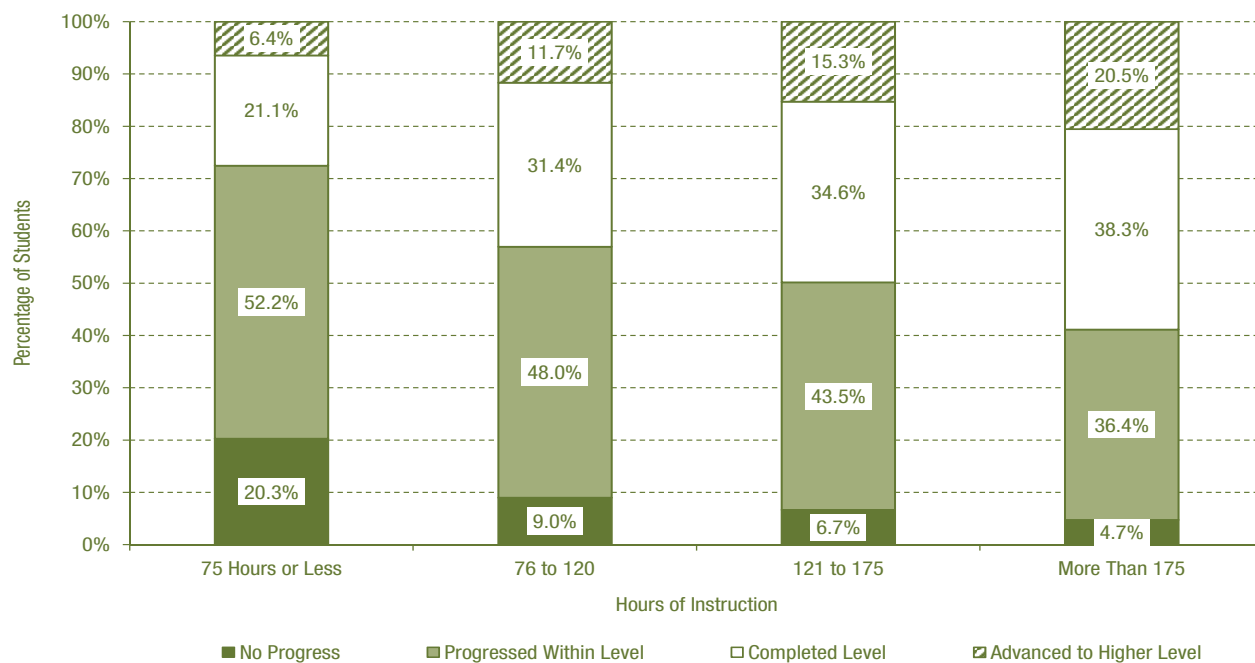
- Nearly three out of five ESL students who spent more than 175 hours in class (57.1 percent) moved up one or more levels that year, but only one out of seven students with 75 or fewer hours of instruction (14.6 percent) advanced.
- More than one out of six students who spent 75 or fewer hours in an ESL classroom (17.6 percent) did not make *any* progress.
- Of students spending more than 175 hours in Adult Secondary Education classes, one out of five (20.5 percent) advanced a level that year, and nearly another two-fifths (38.3 percent) completed one level (Figure 3).
- Just 27.5 percent of Adult Secondary Education students with 75 or fewer instructional hours completed a level or advanced a level.

Table 2: Adult Education Program Students' Progress Over Three Years

	No Progress	Progressed Within Entering Level	Completed One Level	Completed Two Levels	Completed Three Levels
<b>Age</b>					
16 to 18	13.8%	39.8%	40.2%	5.0%	1.1%
19 to 24	9.6%	45.1%	41.3%	3.2%	0.8%
25 to 44	9.8%	36.2%	31.8%	17.3%	4.9%
45 to 59	8.1%	42.3%	38.0%	8.7%	2.9%
60 or Over	7.1%	39.8%	36.9%	11.4%	4.8%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
Asian	6.9%	39.3%	41.0%	9.4%	3.4%
Black	9.5%	48.2%	37.4%	4.2%	0.7%
Latino	10.1%	41.7%	37.7%	8.1%	2.4%
White	10.0%	45.3%	38.6%	5.1%	1.0%
<b>Correctional Institutions Compared to Other Providers</b>					
Students in Correctional Institutions	3.8%	54.2%	36.8%	4.4%	0.7%
Students of Other Providers	10.3%	40.6%	38.5%	8.1%	2.5%
<b>Adult Schools Compared to Community Colleges</b>					
Adult School Students	10.4%	40.7%	37.9%	8.3%	2.7%
Community College Students	9.3%	41.0%	40.9%	7.2%	1.6%

Source: CASAS

Figure 3: Adult Secondary Education Students With More Classroom Hours Progressed More Than Other Students



Source: CASAS



A student could accumulate 175 instructional hours in the Adult Education Program by attending class for 15 hours per week for 12 weeks. To put these data in perspective, research suggests that students who are literate in their native language may achieve basic English literacy after 500 to 1,000 hours of ESL instruction.<sup>29</sup>

The relationship between classroom hours and progress was somewhat ambiguous for Adult Basic Education students. This may in part reflect the very low beginning literacy levels of some Adult Basic Education students who have developmental disabilities and typically achieve very small learning gains regardless of their time in the classroom.<sup>30</sup>

## Race, Ethnicity, and Age Affected Students' Progress

Students of different racial and ethnic groups made generally similar progress over three years, but there were some significant differences. Asian students were the most likely to complete one or more levels, followed by Latino students, and black students were the least likely to complete a level.

In general, older students made more progress than younger students. Students ages 25 to 44 were the most likely to complete one or more levels, and students under 25 were the least likely to.

## Summary: The Majority of Students in the State's Largest Basic Skills Program Made Little Progress Over Three Years

The Adult Education Program is the state's largest provider of basic skills courses. ESL is the largest content area in the program, primarily serving older and Latino students. The majority of students who took basic skills classes through the Adult Education Program in 2005-06 did not complete an educational functioning level, although many Adult Secondary Education students earned a high school diploma or passed the GED. Few Adult Education Program students returned for a second year. In general, Asian students, students age 25 or older, and students who spent more time in the classroom advanced further than other students.

## THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Based on the evidence that emerged from the data analysis, this report takes a different approach to studying community college basic skills students than the first two reports in the *At a Crossroads* series. The institutional view of basic skills programs reflected in the earlier reports distinguishes between noncredit and credit basic skills classes because administrative structures and funding have historically emphasized that distinction (see box).<sup>31</sup> However, the data suggest that students care less about the boundary between noncredit and credit courses than about learning the specific skills they need in order to reach their educational goals. Students who take noncredit basic skills courses may also take credit basic skills courses, either at the same time or later in their community college career, and they may share the same goals as college-level students.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, students working toward a certificate, degree, or transfer who need some help in math or English and/or are English-language learners may elect to take noncredit rather than credit basic skills courses for reasons of cost or convenience.

This chapter looks first at students' goals when they entered the community colleges, their demographic characteristics, and their educational outcomes. Much of this analysis focuses on credential-seekers – students who were seeking a vocational or academic certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution. These data indicate how student populations differ, but they cannot show which specific factors affect student success. To do that, the chapter concludes with reports of statistical analyses that isolate relationships between certain key student characteristics and experiences and students' outcomes, holding other factors constant.

## Many Basic Skills Students Entered the Community Colleges To Complete a Certificate or Degree or To Transfer to a Four-Year Institution

Students' reports of their reasons for entering the community colleges clearly reflected a divide between credential-seekers and other students (Table 3).<sup>33</sup> Although one out of four entering students did not indicate an educational goal and students may not be aware of the requirements for reaching their goals, stated goals are likely to be correlated with differences in students' educational commitment.<sup>34</sup>

More than half (55.8 percent) of basic skills students who were defined as credential-seekers in this report enrolled in a community college to earn a vocational or academic credential or to become eligible to transfer to a four-year institution. In contrast, basic skills students who were *not* credential-seekers tended to seek better job skills or basic skills generally or not to have a particular educational goal. Specifically:

- Two out of five basic skills credential-seekers (41.5 percent) entered community college as a step toward transferring to a four-year institution. An additional 14.3 percent of basic

skills credential-seekers hoped to earn a certificate or degree. Just 3.7 percent had the primary goal of improving their basic skills.

- Among basic skills students who were not credential-seekers, the most common reasons for entering college were to improve basic skills (18.8 percent) or to improve job skills (16.1 percent). Nearly half (47.6 percent) of basic skills non-credential-seekers did not report a specific goal for entering college.

## This Report Explores Several Important Distinctions Among Basic Skills Students

This report explores several distinctions that divide students into populations with very different demographic characteristics and educational outcomes. Specifically:

**There are three types of course credit.** Students take courses that offer one of three types of credit in the community colleges: credit programs of the California Community Colleges. A snapshot of California's basic skills programs shows the following:

- Noncredit courses: Provide no credit of any type. Noncredit courses are not graded, and many allow students to start or leave at any point in the term. No fees are charged for basic skills noncredit courses.
- Non-degree-applicable credit courses: Cannot be applied toward the requirements for an associate's degree. Students pay fees for these courses, and state and/or federal financial aid may cover those fees and other costs of attendance. Non-degree-applicable basic skills courses are often referred to simply as "credit basic skills" to distinguish them from noncredit courses.
- Credit courses: Count toward associate's degrees and may be transferable to the California State University and University of California systems. Students pay fees for these courses, and state and/or federal financial aid may cover those fees and other costs of attendance. Basic skills courses are not offered for this type of credit.

**Much of the analysis focuses on "credential-seekers."** These are community college students whose behavior suggested they were likely to be seeking a vocational or academic certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution – they were not taking classes simply to improve their life skills or for personal fulfillment, for instance. This is the primary distinction between populations of basic skills students used in this report. Serving this group of students is a core community college mission, and thus their success is a key measure of the community colleges' performance.

This report defines credential-seekers as students who did at least one of the following during the six-year period covered by the data:

- Completed 12 units.
- Enrolled in an advanced occupational course or transfer-level English or math course.
- Took a credit basic skills English or math course.
- Reported that they hoped to earn a certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution.<sup>35</sup>

Students who did not complete any of these activities were classified as non-credential-seekers.

**Some analyses compare students who are "collegiate" to those who are not.** Students who took a college-level course in their first community college term are defined as "collegiate" students in this report. Research suggests that basic skills students are more successful if they begin college-level work right away, rather than spending one or more terms taking only basic skills courses.<sup>36</sup> The data analyzed for this report suggest that identifying collegiate students was especially important for determining factors that enhance student success and in assessing the progress of ESL students.

More than half (58.0 percent) of basic skills students in the study cohort were collegiate students. The majority of collegiate basic skills students took basic skills English or math; relatively few were ESL or Adult Basic/Secondary Education students.<sup>37</sup> Nearly all collegiate basic skills students (98.2 percent) were also credential-seekers. Three out of four basic skills students (76.7 percent) were credential-seekers.

**Some analyses compare students taking courses in three content areas, with a focus on English-language learners.** This chapter compares ESL students to students taking basic skills courses in other content areas in the community colleges, and the next chapter takes an institutional view, comparing ESL students in the Adult Education Program to students in the community colleges' noncredit and credit ESL programs.

In the community colleges, the three content areas examined include:

- **ESL:** Targets English-language learners at all levels of educational attainment. Content includes speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills.
- **Adult Basic/Secondary Education:** Provides basic reading, writing, and math instruction for students functioning below the 9th grade level (Adult Basic Education) or between the 9th and 12th grade levels (Adult Secondary Education). Adult Secondary Education also prepares students to earn high school diplomas and pass the five GED subject-area tests.
- **Basic Skills English/Math:** Prepares students for college-level classes, including courses required for transfer to four-year institutions.

Table 3: Students' Goals on Entering the Community Colleges

Goal	Credential-Seekers		Non-Credential-Seekers		Total
	Basic Skills	College-Level	Basic Skills	College-Level	
Explore Educational or Career Interests	5.9%	5.8%	8.3%	21.8%	9.0%
Complete High School or GED	2.4%	1.0%	8.6%	2.4%	2.5%
Improve Job Skills	9.6%	9.1%	16.1%	27.7%	13.4%
Maintain Certificate or License	1.6%	1.6%	0.7%	9.8%	3.0%
Improve Basic Skills	3.7%	0.6%	18.8%	2.5%	3.9%
Earn Vocational Certificate or Degree	6.2%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	5.5%
Earn Associate's Degree	8.1%	7.3%	0.0%	0.0%	5.5%
Transfer to Four-Year Institution	41.5%	48.3%	0.0%	0.0%	32.2%
Undecided	16.8%	13.5%	16.4%	28.2%	17.6%
Not Reported	4.1%	3.7%	31.2%	7.6%	7.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of Students	129,280	140,892	39,322	68,927	378,421

Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

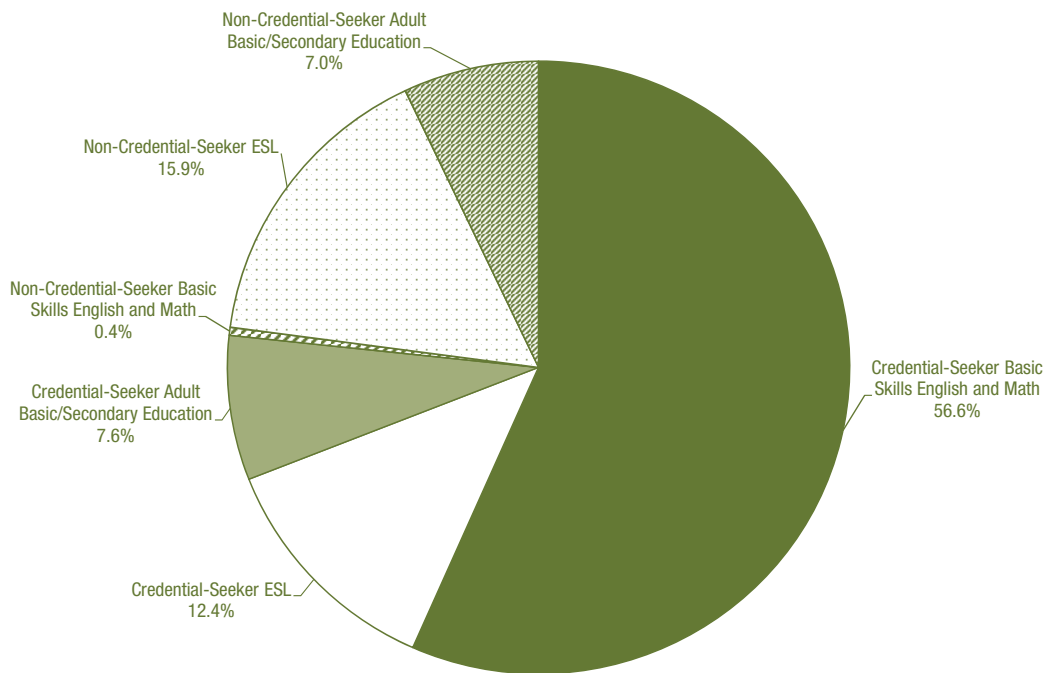
## Basic Skills Credential-Seekers Differed From Other Basic Skills Students, But Were Similar to College-Level Credential-Seekers in Important Ways

Three out of four basic skills students (76.7 percent) met this report's definition of "credential-seeker" (Figure 4). These students were very different from non-credential-seeking

basic skills students, but were very much like college-level credential-seekers in some important ways (Table 4). Specifically:

- Credential-seeking basic skills students tended to be young: Nearly three out of four (73.9 percent) were ages 17 to 24. In contrast, fewer than one out of three non-credential-seeking basic skills students (30.1 percent) were 24 or younger.
- Approximately two-fifths (41.7 percent) of basic skills credential-seekers were Latino, and more than one-quarter

Figure 4: More Than Three Out of Four Basic Skills Students Were Credential-Seekers



Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

were white (28.2 percent). In contrast, a larger share (61.5 percent) of non-credential-seeking basic skills students were Latino, and a smaller share (14.2 percent) were white.

- Credential-seeking basic skills students were more than twice as likely as non-credential-seeking basic skills students to have completed high school (84.3 percent and 35.7 percent, respectively).
- Similar shares of credential-seeking basic skills students and credential-seeking college-level students were young – age 17 or 18. Credential-seeking basic skills students were roughly as likely to have a high school degree as credential-seeking college-level students. However, a larger share of credential-seeking basic skills students were Latino as compared to credential-seeking college-level students.

Most basic skills credential-seekers – 58.6 percent – waited until after their first school year to take a basic skills class. These students tended to take few basic skills courses – 70.2 percent took three or fewer. However, these students took considerably more classes overall than college-level credential-seekers did: 45.0 percent of basic skills credential-seekers took 21 or more total classes, compared to 32.4 percent of college-level credential-seekers.

## The Three Basic Skills Content Areas Served Very Different Student Populations

The three basic skills content areas – Basic Skills English/Math, Adult Basic/Secondary Education, and ESL – served very different student populations (Table 5).<sup>38</sup> The data show that:

- Basic Skills English/Math students were typically recent high school graduates who were committed to earning a credential or transferring, but needed help with specific skills.
- Adult Basic/Secondary Education students included many younger adults with clear postsecondary educational goals, along with older adults returning to school to finish high school or improve their skills.
- ESL students were much older, on average, and focused primarily on improving their English-language skills. However, more than two out of five (43.9 percent) were working toward a credential, and one out of five (20.9 percent) entered the community colleges in college-level courses.

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics and Educational Outcomes of  
Community College Students by Credential-Seeker and Basic Skills Status

	Credential-Seekers		Non-Credential-Seekers		Total
	Basic Skills	College-Level	Basic Skills	College-Level	
Age in 2002-03					
17 to 18	43.7%	43.0%	8.9%	10.7%	33.9%
19 to 24	30.2%	26.4%	21.2%	21.3%	26.2%
25 to 44	21.1%	22.0%	49.6%	38.1%	27.5%
45 or Over	5.0%	8.6%	20.3%	29.9%	12.4%
Race/Ethnicity					
Asian	16.5%	13.1%	17.9%	10.2%	14.2%
Black	10.8%	8.5%	3.9%	9.4%	9.0%
Latino	41.7%	25.7%	61.5%	28.8%	35.4%
Other	2.8%	3.0%	2.5%	2.2%	2.7%
White	28.2%	49.8%	14.2%	49.4%	38.7%
Education					
Had a High School Degree in 2002-03	84.3%	87.9%	35.7%	78.6%	81.7%
Sex					
Men	42.2%	52.3%	48.2%	51.2%	48.2%
Women	57.8%	47.7%	51.8%	48.8%	51.8%
Number of Basic Skills Courses Taken					
1 to 3	70.2%	*	74.6%	*	31.7%
4 to 6	17.7%	*	14.4%	*	7.6%
7 or More	12.0%	*	10.9%	*	5.3%
Total Number of Classes Taken					
1 to 5	16.6%	33.2%	79.0%	91.1%	42.9%
6 to 20	38.5%	34.3%	19.2%	8.6%	29.5%
21 or More	45.0%	32.4%	1.8%	0.3%	27.7%
Share of Students Who Enrolled in Certain Courses					
Credit Basic Skills English or Math	85.0%	*	*	*	29.0%
Credit Basic Skills ESL	14.3%	*	16.9%	*	6.7%
College-Level English or Math	63.5%	56.1%	0.5%	4.6%	43.5%
Any College-Level Course	92.9%	98.9%	9.1%	95.0%	86.8%
Number of Units Earned					
12 Units During Study Period	69.1%	59.7%	*	*	45.8%
30 College-Level Units in First Year	0.8%	2.7%	*	*	1.3%
30 College-Level Units During Study Period	34.7%	33.6%	*	*	24.4%
Credentials and Transfer					
Vocational Certificate	2.9%	3.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.2%
Associate's Degree	5.1%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%
Transferred	11.8%	17.9%	0.2%	0.6%	10.8%
None	80.2%	74.8%	99.7%	99.1%	83.6%

\* Not applicable.

Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

Table 5: Demographic Characteristics and Educational Outcomes by Basic Skills Content Area

	Basic Skills Students			College-Level Students
	ESL	Adult Basic/Secondary Education	Basic Skills English/Math	
Age in 2002-03				
17 to 18	8.1%	39.4%	48.3%	32.4%
19 to 24	22.9%	28.3%	30.6%	24.7%
25 to 44	51.2%	24.0%	17.0%	27.3%
45 or Over	17.8%	8.3%	4.0%	15.6%
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	27.5%	14.2%	12.3%	12.1%
Black	1.2%	11.0%	12.8%	8.8%
Latino	56.1%	44.3%	41.6%	26.7%
Other	2.2%	3.7%	2.8%	2.7%
White	13.1%	26.8%	30.5%	49.7%
Education				
Had a High School Degree in 2002-03	60.0%	58.8%	86.5%	84.9%
Sex				
Men	41.6%	51.7%	42.5%	52.0%
Women	58.4%	48.3%	57.5%	48.0%
Number of Basic Skills Courses Taken				
1 to 3	54.3%	70.2%	79.9%	*
4 to 6	20.4%	18.0%	15.0%	*
7 or More	25.3%	11.8%	5.1%	*
Total Number of Classes Taken				
1 to 5	50.0%	48.1%	17.4%	52.3%
6 to 20	29.9%	24.9%	38.3%	25.9%
21 or More	20.0%	27.1%	44.3%	21.8%
Share of Students Who Enrolled in Certain Courses				
Credit Basic Skills English or Math	19.6%	29.3%	97.0%	*
Credit Basic Skills ESL	52.8%	0.0%	0.0%	*
College-Level English or Math	19.0%	33.7%	67.4%	39.2%
Any College-Level Course	40.7%	53.5%	94.7%	97.6%
Number of Units Earned				
12 Units During Study Period	34.3%	34.8%	66.9%	40.1%
30 College-Level Units in First Year	0.3%	0.6%	0.8%	1.8%
30 College-Level Units During Study Period	12.6%	20.3%	35.1%	22.6%
Credentials and Transfer				
Vocational Certificate	1.8%	1.6%	2.7%	2.1%
Associate's Degree	2.0%	2.4%	5.3%	2.9%
Transferred	4.4%	8.7%	11.5%	12.2%
None	91.9%	87.2%	80.5%	82.8%
Number of Students	47,680	24,738	96,184	209,819
Share of All Basic Skills Students	28.3%	14.7%	57.0%	*

\* Not applicable.

Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

Latinos and blacks were overrepresented in Adult Basic/Secondary Education and Basic Skills English/Math, compared to students who did not take basic skills classes. ESL students were predominantly Latino (56.1 percent) or Asian (27.5 percent).

## Basic Skills Students Were Less Likely Than Other Students To Earn a Certificate or Degree or To Transfer

Credential-seeking basic skills students were relatively unlikely to earn a certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution: Just one out of five (19.8 percent) reached one of those milestones (Figure 5). In contrast, one out of four credential-seeking college-level students (25.2 percent) earned a certificate or degree or transferred. Thus, among credential-seekers, basic skills students were three-quarters (78.6 percent) as likely as other students to earn a certificate or degree or to transfer.

Much larger shares of credential-seeking basic skills students reached other educational milestones. Specifically:

- More than nine out of 10 (92.9 percent) enrolled in at least one college-level course.
- More than two out of three (69.1 percent) earned at least 12 units, and more than one out of three (34.7 percent) earned 30 or more units.
- More than three out of five (63.5 percent) enrolled in college-level English or math.

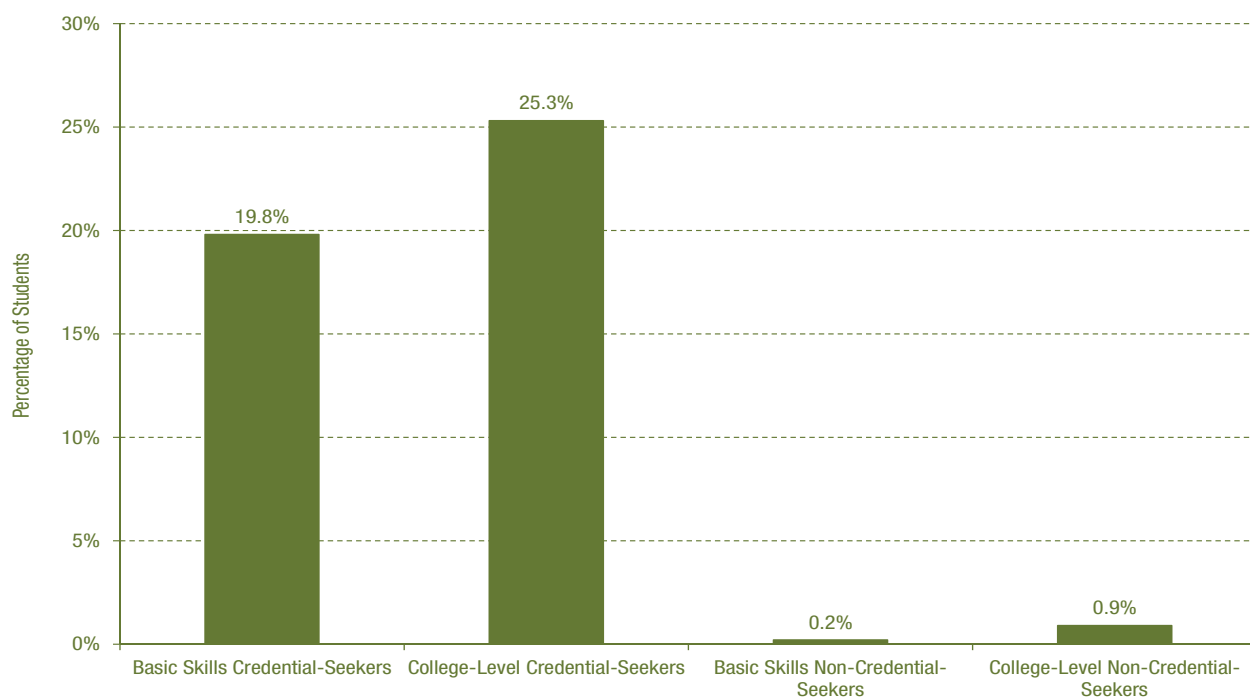
In contrast, basic skills students who did not meet the definition of credential-seeker tended to take few classes and to make virtually no progress toward major educational milestones. Specifically, basic skills students who were not credential-seekers:

- Took few basic skills courses and few classes overall.
- Were unlikely to enroll in a college-level course.

Compared to college-level credential-seekers, basic skills credential-seekers were (Table 6):

- More likely to undergo orientation and assessment.
- More persistent – that is, they were more likely to return for a second term or year.

Figure 5: One Out of Five Basic Skills Credential-Seekers Earned a Certificate or Degree or Transferred



Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data



- Less likely to attend school full-time for the majority of their community college terms.
- Approximately as likely to take classes continuously, rather than “stopping out” and returning to school.

## Basic Skills Students Spent More Time in School and Took More Classes To Earn a Credential or To Transfer Than Other Students

Basic skills students made a substantially greater investment of time and effort to earn credentials or to transfer compared to other students (Table 7). Specifically:

- Basic skills students required approximately one additional year of school to earn a vocational certificate or associate's degree, compared to other students. In other words, students who took no basic skills classes earned credentials in approximately two-thirds the time of basic skills students.
- Basic skills students were in school nearly one and a half more years before transferring to a four-year institution than other students.

- Basic skills students took roughly nine more classes than college-level students.
- ESL and Adult Basic/Secondary Education students generally needed more time in school and more classes than Basic Skills English/Math students in order to earn credentials or to transfer.

Table 6: Services Received and Enrollment Patterns for Credential-Seekers

	Basic Skills	College-Level
Matriculation Services Received in First Year		
Orientation	68.1%	52.7%
Assessment	76.6%	63.5%
Enrollment Patterns		
Returned for Second Term	83.9%	73.3%
Returned for Second Year	72.8%	61.3%
Continuously Enrolled	26.2%	27.0%
Enrolled Full-Time for Most Terms	8.8%	11.1%

Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

Table 7: Average Number of Terms, Classes, and Units To Earn a Credential or To Transfer

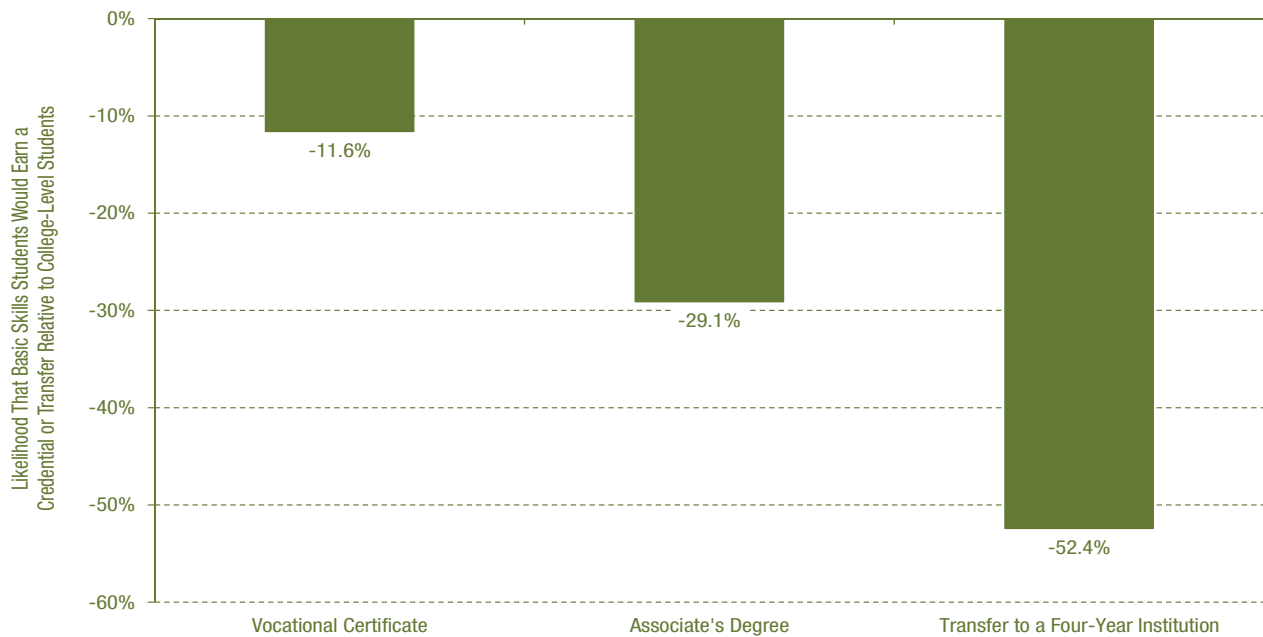
Credential	Basic Skills Content Area			All Basic Skills Students	College-Level Students	Difference Between All Basic Skills Students and College-Level Students
	ESL	Adult Basic/ Secondary Education	Basic Skills English/Math			
Vocational Certificate						
Number of Terms Enrolled	7.5	7.4	6.6	6.8	4.8	2.0
Number of Classes Taken	26.6	25.6	23.1	24.0	15.2	8.8
Number of Units Earned	58.0	52.2	49.4	51.4	36.1	15.3
Associate's Degree						
Number of Terms Enrolled	9.9	9.9	8.7	9.0	6.9	2.1
Number of Classes Taken	39.5	34.2	32.9	33.9	25.8	8.1
Number of Units Earned	87.0	70.2	72.4	74.1	60.5	13.6
Transfer to a Four-Year Institution						
Number of Terms Enrolled	9.6	8.9	8.4	8.7	6.0	2.7
Number of Classes Taken	38.8	30.8	33.1	33.5	23.0	10.5
Number of Units Earned	87.2	63.0	72.6	73.2	54.3	18.9

Note: Data are for credential-seekers.

Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data



Figure 6: Basic Skills Students Were Much Less Likely Than College-Level Students To Earn an Associate's Degree or To Transfer to a Four-Year Institution



Note: A data point of 0 percent would mean that basic skills students were as likely as college-level students to earn the credential or to transfer.  
Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

## Demographic Characteristics, Orientation and Assessment, and Enrollment Patterns Affected Student Success

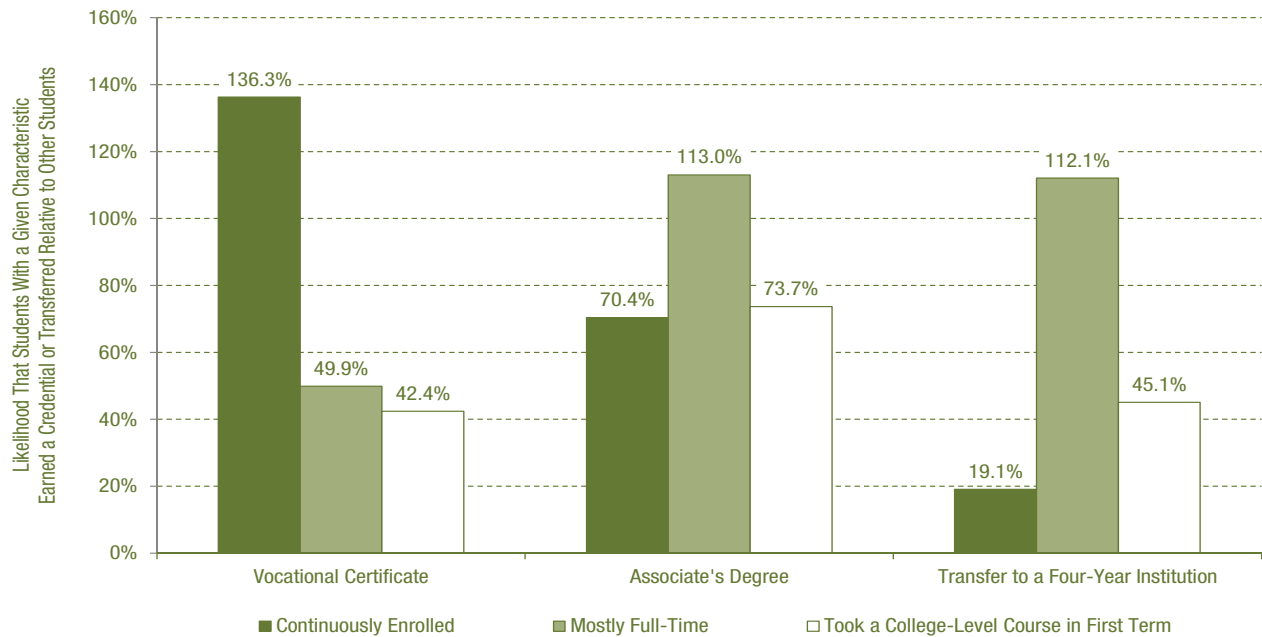
The data presented thus far tell a complicated story about students, their goals, and their outcomes. This section uses statistical analyses to explore the factors that make a difference to students' success. The analyses isolate the relationships between certain key student characteristics and experiences and credential-seekers' outcomes, holding other factors constant.<sup>39</sup> The analyses build on other research, including findings suggesting that community college students are more likely to succeed if they receive certain services or follow certain enrollment patterns. Specifically, the statistical analyses focus on how basic skills credential-seekers' chances of earning a credential or transferring to a four-year institution are affected by:

- **Age.** Studies show that, in general, younger students tend to be more successful than older students.<sup>40</sup>
- **Race and ethnicity.** Research shows that black and Latino students are less likely to reach significant educational milestones than are white students.<sup>41</sup>

- **Matriculation services.** Some researchers believe it is better for students to receive orientation services – which introduce them to the community college environment and to the services available to help them – and assessment for course placement purposes as soon as they enter the community colleges.<sup>42</sup>
- **Enrolling every term.** “Continuous enrollment” is associated with greater success than “stopping out” and then returning to school.<sup>43</sup>
- **Full-time enrollment.** Enrolling full-time rather than part-time is also associated with greater success.<sup>44</sup>
- **Collegiate status.** Taking college-level courses in the first term may enhance success.<sup>45</sup>
- **Timing.** Taking courses to improve basic skills when first enrolling, rather than waiting until a later year, may enhance students' success.<sup>46</sup>

These analyses show that basic skills credential-seekers were substantially less likely than other credential-seekers to earn a credential or to transfer, controlling for other factors that affect student success (Figure 6). Compared to credential-seekers with similar characteristics who did not take any basic skills classes, basic skills students were:

Figure 7: Enrolling Continuously, Attending Full-Time, and Starting in College-Level Courses Were Key Determinants of Basic Skills Students' Success



Note: A data point of 0 percent would mean that the factor did not affect the likelihood of earning the credential or transferring.  
Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

- Slightly less likely to earn a vocational certificate.
- Somewhat less likely to earn an associate's degree.
- Much less likely to transfer to a four-year institution.

Demographic characteristics played a significant role in basic skills students' success. Specifically:

- Older basic skills students were slightly more likely than younger students to earn vocational certificates, but less likely to transfer to a four-year institution.
- Asian students were the most likely to earn associate's degrees or to transfer. Black students were the least likely to earn certificates or associate's degrees, and Latino students were the least likely to transfer to a four-year institution.
- Men were less likely than women to earn a credential or transfer.

Orientation and assessment services did not help basic skills credential-seekers earn vocational certificates. However, those services increased the likelihood of earning an associate's degree or transferring, compared to the success rate of students with similar characteristics who did not receive those services.

Basic skills students who took credit basic skills courses in their first year improved their chances of earning an associate's degree or transferring to a four-year institution. These students were:

- Somewhat more likely than other basic skills students to complete an associate's degree.
- Slightly more likely than other basic skills students to transfer to a four-year institution.

Having time to focus on college, and starting out in college-level courses, was generally more important to earning credentials and transferring than demographics, orientation, or assessment (Figure 7).<sup>47</sup> Specifically, basic skills credential-seekers who:

- Enrolled continuously were more than twice as likely to earn a vocational certificate as were comparable students who "stopped out."
- Enrolled full-time in most terms were more than twice as likely to earn an associate's degree or to transfer as were comparable students who mostly attended school part-time.
- Started in college-level courses were much more likely to earn a vocational certificate or associate's degree or to transfer as were comparable students who waited to take college-level courses.

## Summary: This Research Points to Strategies That Boost Student Success

The data analyzed for this report suggest that there are three types of basic skills students in the community colleges:

- Recent high school graduates who aim to earn a credential or to transfer to a four-year institution but need help with specific skills, including ESL. These collegiate-credential-seekers are essentially college-level students who do not quite meet college-level standards. More than half (56.9 percent) of basic skills students fit in this category.
- Adults who have been out of school for a few years and want to earn a vocational certificate or associate's degree or to transfer to a four-year institution but have weak basic skills. One out of five basic skills students (19.7 percent) were of this type.
- Older adults who have significant skills deficits – often, Latino English-language-learners – who do not intend to earn a certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution. More than one out five of basic skills students (22.3 percent) were in this group.

ESL students tended to be older than other basic skills students. Many entered the community colleges in college-level courses, and a significant share sought a credential or to transfer to a four-year institution. Unlike ESL students who were not seeking a credential, who were predominantly Latino, more than one-third (35.7 percent) of credential-seeking ESL students were Asian.

In general, credential-seeking basic skills students were much less likely to succeed than were students with similar characteristics who did not take basic skills courses. This was particularly true for transferring to a four-year institution: Basic skills students were less than half (47.6 percent) as likely as other students to transfer. In addition, basic skills students who were successful had to devote considerably more time and effort to their education than other students did. There are at least two factors that may explain these facts: Basic skills students may be different from other students in ways the data did not measure – for instance, in their underlying academic abilities, the quality of their high school education, or the supportive services they needed to stay in school; or it may be that getting on the basic skills pathway – which is a longer road to success, according to these data – discouraged many students from staying in school and reaching their educational goals.

The data also point to specific supports that can enhance basic skills students' success. These supports include:

- Ensuring that basic skills students receive orientation and assessment services and take the basic skills courses they need without delay.
- Developing courses or programs that help students reach basic skills proficiency more quickly.
- Providing financial aid and other services so basic skills students can enroll full-time until they reach their educational goals. For students who cannot attend full-time for financial or other reasons, other services should be put in place to support and speed academic achievement.

## ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

This chapter steps back from the student perspective used in the earlier chapters to take an institutional view of programs for English-language learners, comparing the three programs that offer ESL: the Adult Education Program, the community colleges' *noncredit* programs, and community college *credit* programs.<sup>48</sup> ESL instruction is the largest component of the state's basic skills system, serving more than half of all basic skills students in the Adult Education Program and the community colleges in 2005-06 – a total of more than 700,000 students.<sup>49</sup>

ESL programs serve students with a wide range of literacy skills, from individuals who cannot read and write in their first language to highly educated professionals with some English-language proficiency who want to become more fluent for professional or personal reasons. The ESL student population is different from the rest of the basic skills student population: Overall, ESL students are much older than other basic skills students, and Asian and Latino students make up much larger shares of the ESL student population. Many ESL students in the community college study cohort took classes primarily to improve their language skills, but more than two-fifths (43.9 percent) demonstrated an interest in earning a credential or transferring to a four-year institution.<sup>50</sup> Just one-fifth (20.9 percent) of community college ESL students took a college-level course in their first term, however. With this mix of providers, demographics, and student goals, serving California's ESL students presents special challenges.

The Adult Education Program has by far the largest ESL program, serving more than two-thirds (68.1 percent) of basic skills ESL students in 2005-06 (Table 8). Noncredit courses in the community colleges are the next-largest, with more than one-fifth (22.6 percent) of ESL basic skills students. Noncredit programs typically provide instruction through the high school level. They do not offer credit of any type and are not graded. Many allow students to start or leave at any point in the term.

Table 8: Demographic Characteristics of ESL Students in the Adult Education Program and the California Community Colleges, 2005-06

	Community Colleges		
	Adult Education Program	Noncredit ESL	Credit ESL
Age			
17 to 18	4.0%	4.0%	6.5%
19 to 24	21.0%	22.4%	28.0%
25 to 44	53.2%	48.8%	46.9%
45 or Older	21.8%	24.7%	18.7%
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian	18.3%	22.5%	38.6%
Black	0.7%	1.2%	1.5%
Latino	74.6%	68.7%	44.5%
Other	1.4%	1.1%	2.3%
White	4.9%	6.4%	13.2%
Sex			
Men	42.4%	44.6%	35.3%
Women	57.6%	55.4%	64.7%
Skill Level or Educational Attainment			
Beginning ESL	37.7%	*	*
Intermediate ESL	45.0%	*	*
Advanced ESL	17.3%	*	*
Had a High School Degree in 2002-03	*	46.3%	79.0%
Number of Students	418,834	138,962	57,631

\* Not applicable.

Note: The age group 17 to 18 includes 16-year-olds in the Adult Education Program. To compare Adult Education Program students and community college students in the same year, community college data are for all students who enrolled in community college basic skills courses in 2005-06.

Source: CASAS and CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

In contrast, community college credit basic skills ESL courses are explicitly designed to prepare students for college-level work – but fewer than 10 percent of basic skills ESL students enroll in these courses. Credit from these courses cannot be used to meet requirements for associate's degrees. However, courses are graded, and students are expected to attend for an entire term. Students taking credit basic skills courses may be eligible for financial aid to offset fees and other costs of attendance.

## The Adult Education Program and Noncredit Community College Programs Served Very Similar Student Populations

The Adult Education Program and the community college noncredit programs served very similar ESL populations in 2005-06. In general, these students:

- Tended to be much older than other basic skills students. Three out of four Adult Education Program ESL students (75.0 percent) were age 25 or older, and more than one-fifth (21.8 percent) were 45 or older. Similarly, three-fourths (73.5 percent) of community college noncredit ESL students were 25 or older.
- Were most likely to be Latino – especially in the Adult Education Program, in which three-fourths of students (74.6 percent) were Latino. In comparison, two-thirds (68.7 percent) of community college noncredit ESL students were Latino. Just under one-fifth (18.3 percent) of ESL students in the Adult Education Program were Asian, as were just over one-fifth (22.5 percent) of community college noncredit ESL students.
- Were somewhat more likely to be women than men.
- Entered the program at low skill levels: Fewer than one out of five Adult Education Program ESL students (17.3 percent) entered at an advanced ESL level, and fewer than half of noncredit ESL students (46.3 percent) had completed high school.<sup>51</sup>

## Community College Credit ESL Students Were Different From Noncredit Community College ESL Students

Community college *credit* ESL students had a different demographic profile than ESL students in *noncredit* community college programs and in the Adult Education Program. Credit ESL students were:

- Somewhat younger – more than one-third (34.5 percent) were younger than 25, compared to 25.0 percent of Adult Education Program students and 26.4 percent of noncredit community college students.

- Much less likely to be Latino (44.5 percent of credit students, compared to 74.6 percent of Adult Education Program students and 68.7 percent of noncredit students) and much more likely to be Asian (38.6 percent, compared to 18.3 percent of Adult Education Program students and 22.5 percent of noncredit community college students).
- More likely to be women (64.7 percent, compared to 55.4 percent of noncredit students).
- Much more likely than noncredit community college ESL students to have completed high school (79.0 percent, compared to 46.3 percent of noncredit students).

## Most ESL Students Made Little or No Meaningful Progress; Credit Students Were by Far the Most Successful

ESL students' success in the Adult Education Program is measured by test scores that indicate whether students completed one or more of six "educational functioning levels." Community college data include a number of progress indicators, including the number and level of classes taken, the number of units completed, and whether students earned vocational or academic certificates or degrees or transferred to four-year institutions. By these measures, most ESL students – particularly those in the Adult Education Program and community college noncredit programs – did not make significant progress over the study period. On the other hand, many community college credit ESL students transitioned to college-level courses and some credit ESL students earned a credential or transferred to a four-year institution. Specifically:

- Half (49.0 percent) of Adult Education Program ESL students failed to complete even one educational functioning level over three years: Nearly one out of 10 (9.1 percent) made no progress, while 39.9 percent made progress within their entering level but did not complete it. Another 39.0 percent completed one level; 9.1 percent completed two levels; and 2.9 percent completed three or more levels.
- Only 15.4 percent of community college noncredit ESL students moved into credit ESL during the six-year study period, and just one-fifth (19.6 percent) took a college-level course. Even fewer – 14.0 percent – earned 12 units, approximately the equivalent of one full term of classes. Very few (3.7 percent) earned a certificate or degree or transferred to a four-year institution.

On the other hand, just over two-thirds (67.4 percent) of *credit* ESL students took at least one college-level course, including

nearly one-third (32.3 percent) who enrolled in college-level English or math courses. In addition, 13.7 percent earned a certificate or degree or transferred to a four-year institution.

In general, credit ESL students took many more basic skills classes than non-ESL basic skills students in the community colleges. For instance, 27.3 percent of credit ESL students took seven or more basic skills courses, but only 6.5 percent of non-ESL basic skills students took that many. In contrast, credit ESL students took fewer total classes: 30.8 percent of credit ESL students took 21 or more courses overall, compared to 40.8 percent of non-ESL basic skills students. Overall, credit ESL students were less successful than non-ESL students, although a meaningful share reached a significant educational milestone such as moving into college-level coursework or earning 12 units (Table 9). Specifically, credit ESL students were:

- Much less likely than non-ESL basic skills students to enroll in college-level English or math or any other college-level course.
- Less likely than non-ESL basic skills students to earn a certificate or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution (13.7 percent and 18.1 percent, respectively).
- Just 3.5 percentage points less likely than college-level students to earn a credential or to transfer (13.7 percent and 17.2 percent, respectively).<sup>52</sup>

## ESL Students Who Started in College-Level Community College Courses Were the Most Successful

The data show that ESL students who started in college-level community college courses – that is, "collegiate" students – were the most successful community college ESL students. Specifically:

- This group of students was slightly more likely than community college credit ESL students overall to earn a certificate or degree or to transfer – nearly one-quarter (23.7 percent) achieved one of those milestones.
- More than half (50.8 percent) of collegiate ESL students took college-level English or math, and more than one-third (36.3 percent) earned 30 college-level units.

Asian students made up a much larger share of collegiate ESL students (39.6 percent) than of non-collegiate ESL students (24.2 percent). In fact, collegiate ESL students were as likely to be Asian (39.6 percent) as they were to be Latino (39.6 percent). Collegiate ESL students also tended to be younger

Table 9: ESL Students' Educational Outcomes in the Community Colleges

	Noncredit ESL	Credit ESL	Adult Basic/Secondary Education and Basic Skills English/Math
Number of Basic Skills Courses Taken			
1 to 3	57.4%	50.4%	77.9%
4 to 6	18.9%	22.3%	15.6%
7 or More	23.7%	27.3%	6.5%
Total Number of Classes Taken			
1 to 5	61.5%	35.6%	23.7%
6 to 20	27.0%	33.6%	35.6%
21 or More	11.5%	30.8%	40.8%
Share of Students Who Enrolled in Certain Courses			
Credit Basic Skills English or Math	8.3%	33.9%	83.1%
Credit Basic Skills ESL	15.4%	100.0%	*
College-Level English or Math	8.4%	32.3%	60.5%
Any College-Level Course	19.6%	67.4%	86.3%
Number of Units Earned			
12 Units During Study Period	14.0%	59.8%	60.3%
30 College-Level Units in First Year	0.1%	0.6%	0.7%
30 College-Level Units During Study Period	5.4%	21.6%	32.1%
Credentials and Transfer			
Vocational Certificate	0.8%	2.9%	2.5%
Associate's Degree	0.8%	3.4%	4.7%
Transferred to a Four-Year Institution	2.1%	7.4%	10.9%
None	96.3%	86.3%	81.9%
Number of Students	26,583	21,097	120,922

\* Indicates that this row does not apply to this group of students.

Note: Data are for the study cohort of students who enrolled for the first time in 2002-03.

Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office data

than non-collegiate ESL students and were more likely to have completed high school.

## Summary: Most ESL Students Made Little Progress Toward Significant Educational Milestones

California's three ESL programs serve a substantial number of students: more than 700,000 students annually, most of them in the Adult Education Program. ESL students in the Adult Education Program and noncredit community college programs were very similar in terms of demographics; community college *credit* ESL students tended to be somewhat younger than students in the other ESL programs and were much more likely to be Asian. In general, ESL students made very little progress toward significant educational

milestones. The community colleges' credit programs were an exception: More than one out of eight credit ESL students in the community college study cohort earned a certificate or degree or transferred to a four-year institution. Even that group of ESL students, however, had lower success rates than other basic skills students. ESL students who started in college-level community college courses were the most successful community college ESL students.



## CONCLUSION

California makes a substantial investment in basic skills education every year, serving more than 1.5 million students at a cost to the state of more than \$1.0 billion. Policymakers are increasingly concerned about the impact of this investment, and student advocates question whether basic skills programs do enough to help students reach their educational goals. The findings of this report suggest that there is cause for concern – in general, basic skills students achieved few educational milestones over a period of several years. This research also points to policies that improve student success. Specifically, community college basic skills student success is enhanced by:

- Providing students with orientation and assessment services in their first year of enrollment.
- Helping students reach basic skills proficiency more quickly.
- Ensuring that students can attend school full-time and without missing terms.

In the Adult Education Program, students generally made more progress when they spent more time in the classroom. Policies that allowed students to complete their coursework, or to move through it more quickly, would promote student success in that program as well.

One key finding from this report is that a significant share of basic skills students are essentially college-level students who hope to earn a credential or to transfer to a four-year institution, but need help with specific literacy or math skills, including ESL. These students may not match policymakers' image of the typical basic skills student, but they are an important focus of education policy because they are the most likely to translate effective basic skills classes into credentials and four-year degrees. Yet it took basic skills students substantially longer – an additional year or more – to earn a credential or to transfer compared to students who did not take basic skills courses.

The state faces a particular challenge in meeting the needs of ESL students – the largest group of basic skills students. ESL students are currently served by three programs that must provide instruction at all literacy levels both for students without specific educational goals and for those who hope to earn a credential or to transfer to a four-year institution. This report finds that few ESL students reached meaningful educational goals.

California does not collect comprehensive data that would show whether other types of basic skills students met their goals, or that could track students as they move between the community colleges and the Adult Education Program. Coordinated data collection and analysis is critical to understanding what the state's basic skills students want, what they achieve, and what barriers they face.

# APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ANALYSIS

## The CCCCCO Datasets

The CCCCCO provided administrative data for the years 2002-03 through 2007-08 for this study. Three types of files were provided: a “status” file containing information on student characteristics and general academic progress, which the CCCCCO collects at the end of the academic year; a “course” file with information about every course enrollment; and a “first” file that contains information about students’ achievement of key milestones, such as the first term each student attended any California community college or met initial requirements for transferring to the California State University or University of California systems. The CBP linked data from all the files, constructing a complete record of students’ experiences in the community colleges from 2002-03 through 2007-08.<sup>53</sup>

The analysis included only students who first enrolled at a California community college between the summer term of 2002 and the spring quarter or semester of 2003 – that is, during the 2002-03 academic year. The analysis excluded students who were under age 17 who were concurrently enrolled in high school and a community college, who first

enrolled at a four-year university within six months of entering the California Community Colleges, or who took only noncredit non-basic-skills courses during the six-year period covered by the data. The final dataset included 378,422 students in 2002-03, nearly one-fifth of whom were also enrolled in 2007-08.

## Data Definitions

Course numbers that were identified as basic skills for purposes of the CCCCCO’s accountability reporting and carried either noncredit or non-degree-applicable credit were defined as basic skills courses for this study.<sup>54</sup> There were two English basic skills courses – Writing, and Reading Skills Development – and three math courses – Career Technical Computational Skills, Pre-Algebra, and Elementary Algebra. ESL basic skills courses included Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced ESL, ESL Civics, and Vocational ESL.

The racial/ethnic categories Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander were combined into “Asian,” and American Indian/Alaska Native was combined with “Other Non-White” to form “Other.” “Full-time students” took at least 12 units in at least three-fourths of their community college terms.

## Statistical Analysis Focuses on Factors That Affect Student Success

This study used statistical analysis to examine the impact of certain demographic characteristics, student services, and enrollment patterns on the probability of students earning a vocational certificate or an associate’s degree or transferring to a four-year institution. More specifically, this work used Cox’s proportional hazard model, a type of regression analysis that focuses on the rate at which individuals achieve an outcome over time and assumes that all individuals have the same underlying hazard rate at any point in time.<sup>55</sup> The Cox regressions are stratified by the first college a student attends, to allow each college to have its own underlying hazard rate and to control for the overall academic strength and socioeconomic status of each college.

Number of Students in the Study Cohort by Year

Academic Year	Number of Students
2002-03	378,422
2003-04	202,342
2004-05	150,142
2005-06	114,109
2006-07	89,701
2007-08	75,057

Source: CBP analysis of California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office data



# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Data on the educational achievement of Adult Education Program students are from CASAS, *California Adult Education Student Progress and Goal Attainment Report: Adult School Programs in California, Program Year 2006, July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006* (prepared for the California Department of Education: no date), p. 8.
- <sup>2</sup> In fact, the Adult Education Program is generally prohibited from using Social Security numbers to follow students as they move among Adult Education Program providers or into the community colleges.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges: Draft Report: A Report to the Legislature, Pursuant to AB 1417* (February 2011), Tables 1.4 to 1.6 and 13 and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Basic Skills Accountability Report* (September 1, 2009).
- <sup>4</sup> Federal reporting is required for students 16 and older who were not concurrently enrolled in high school, completed a minimum of 12 hours of instruction, and had a valid assessment of their educational functioning level and whose provider received funding through Title II of the WIA. There were 833,624 WIA-funded basic skills students in the Adult Education Program in 2005-06, 69.9 percent of whom met the federal reporting requirements. Due to data limitations, this analysis could not be restricted to students who took their first Adult Education Program class in 2005-06. CASAS assigned students who enrolled in more than one type of course in one academic year to a single program, with ESL course-taking given first priority, followed by Adult Basic Education and then by Adult Secondary Education.
- <sup>5</sup> Only students with consistent identification numbers over that period could be tracked in 2006-07 and 2007-08. CASAS' Adult Education Program data are rarely used to follow students' progress over more than a single year. CASAS' research brief *Preliminary Findings of Learning Gains for Adult Learners With Developmental Disabilities* (October 2007), which analyzed the basic skills achievement of students with developmental disabilities over the three-year period 2003-04 to 2005-2006, is a notable exception.
- <sup>6</sup> Data are for 2005-06. To compare Adult Education Program students and community college students in the same year, these statistics are for Adult Education Program students in the study cohort and all students who enrolled in community college basic skills courses in 2005-06, whether or not they were part of the community college cohort for this study. This is a different set of students from those in the main analysis of community college students presented in this report, which only included students who entered the community colleges in 2002-03.
- <sup>7</sup> WIA funding is available for noncredit courses only.
- <sup>8</sup> According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, 2007-08 "is considered by most to be the last fairly 'normal' year for higher education funding," because significant budget cuts were imposed beginning in 2008-09. Legislative Analyst's Office, *The 2010-11 Budget: Higher Education* (February 25, 2010), p. HE-10. Similarly, the Adult Education Program was subject to "flexibility" options and budget cuts starting in 2008-09.
- <sup>9</sup> Some other researchers have used six-year periods to study California community college students. See, for example, Nancy Shulock and Colleen Moore, *Rules of the Game: How State Policy Creates Barriers to Degree Completion and Impedes Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: February 2007), p. 5 and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Report on the System's Current Programs in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Basic Skills* (January 2008), p. 36. In contrast, other researchers have tracked students over a period of five years (D. Timothy Leinbach and Davis Jenkins, *Using Longitudinal Data To Increase Community College Student Success: A Guide To Measuring Milestone and Momentum Point Attainment* (Community College Research Center: January 2008), p. 1) or seven or more years (Ria Sengupta and Christopher Jepsen, *California's Community College Students* (Public Policy Institute of California: November 2006), Table 7 and Figure 6; Steven Spurling, Sharon Seymour, and Forrest P. Chisman, *Pathways and Outcomes: Tracking ESL Student Performance: A Longitudinal Study of Adult ESL Service at City College of San Francisco* (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy: January 7, 2008), p. iii; and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Basic Skills Accountability Report* (September 1, 2009), Tables D-1 through D-4). Students who were concurrently enrolled in high school or college, were under 17, or took only noncredit courses in subjects other than basic skills over the study period were excluded from the study. The dataset includes students in Adult Education Program courses provided by the community colleges.
- <sup>10</sup> Some analyses also distinguish between noncredit and credit ESL students and between noncredit and credit Basic Skills English/Math students. In these analyses, students who ever took a noncredit course in the relevant content area are defined as noncredit students; those who only took credit courses are defined as credit students.
- <sup>11</sup> Nationally, 10 percent of high school seniors scoring in the top quartile on a math and reading assessment took basic skills courses in college. Paul Attewell, et al., "New Evidence on College Remediation," *The Journal of Higher Education* 77:5 (September/October 2006), p. 899.
- <sup>12</sup> The National Reporting System for Adult Education has defined four levels in Adult Basic Education students' skill levels, two in Adult Secondary Education, and six in ESL. Each level corresponds to a detailed definition of literacy and numeracy skills and to scores on CASAS assessment tests.
- <sup>13</sup> As an example of the skill-level difference between ESL levels, students entering high-beginning ESL "can write some simple sentences with limited vocabulary.... Writing shows very little control of basic grammar, capitalization, and punctuation . . ." while a student entering the next higher level, low-intermediate ESL, "can write simple notes and messages on familiar situations but lacks clarity and focus. Sentence structure . . . shows some control of basic grammar (e.g., present and past tense) and consistent use of punctuation (e.g., periods, capitalization)."
- <sup>14</sup> Personal communication with CASAS (September 1, 2010).
- <sup>15</sup> On the other hand, students who completed fewer than 12 instructional hours were not included in the analysis, which would tend to overestimate student progress.
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example, California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Focus on Results: Accountability Reporting for the California Community Colleges: A Report to the Legislature, Pursuant to AB 1417* (Pacheco, Stat. 2004, Ch. 581) (March 31, 2009), p. 3.
- <sup>17</sup> For instance, the data show that among students who took a college-level course in their first term, basic skills students were *more* likely to earn a credential or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution than non-basic-skills students. This outcome could reflect the fact that the basic skills students were predominantly women, and women may have tended to achieve more educational milestones than men. The regression analyses discussed in this section consider all relevant factors simultaneously and identify which factors are associated with student success. Appendix A provides more information on the methodology used in these regression analyses. Full tables of results and standard errors are available from the authors.
- <sup>18</sup> These data are for all basic skills students, including those who did not meet WIA Title II reporting requirements. Among students meeting those reporting requirements in 2005-06 – the group that CASAS examined for this report – 71.8 percent were in ESL.
- <sup>19</sup> In fact, blacks made up a larger share of Adult Basic Education and Adult Secondary Education students than their representation in the state population as a whole. State population data are from Department of Finance, *E-3 California County Race/Ethnic Population Estimates and Components of Change by Year, July 1, 2000-2008* (June 2010). The overrepresentation of blacks and males in Adult Basic Education courses reflects students in programs offered in jails and prisons. Personal communication with CASAS (November 19, 2010).
- <sup>20</sup> Grade-level equivalents are discussed here to provide context for students' skills levels, although CASAS recommends against presenting data in terms of grades. See CASAS, *Why CASAS Scale Scores Are Better Than Grade Level Equivalents* (no date), downloaded from <https://www.casas.org/home/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.showContent&MapID=715> on October 26, 2010.
- <sup>21</sup> Students who were enrolled in all three years made much more progress. Of that group, 91.2 percent of ESL students, 61.8 percent of Adult Basic Education students, and 71.8 percent of Adult Secondary Education students completed at least one level. Personal communication with CASAS (November 18, 2010).
- <sup>22</sup> CASAS, *California Adult Education: California Annual Performance Report: Federally Funded Workforce Investment Act, Title II Programs, Program Year 2006, July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006* (prepared for the California Department of Education: no date) and personal communication with CASAS (November 30, 2010 and February 11, 2011).

- <sup>23</sup> Data were not available to restrict the study cohort to students who entered the Adult Education Program in 2005-06; thus, in that year, some students may have been in their second or third year of Adult Education Program classes. However, the vast majority of students who took classes in 2005-06 did not return the following year, so it is likely that most students who enrolled in 2005-06 had not taken classes from the Adult Education Program previously.
- <sup>24</sup> In 2005-06, 9.5 percent of Adult Education Program students were in correctional institutions.
- <sup>25</sup> Students in programs in correctional institutions are likely to have unusually good attendance, but may not be incarcerated long enough to complete many educational functioning levels. Personal communication with CASAS (November 19, 2010).
- <sup>26</sup> WIA funding may be used only for noncredit courses in the community colleges. In 2005-06, 11.6 percent of Adult Education Program students were enrolled in the community colleges.
- <sup>27</sup> Previous research found that community college Adult Secondary Education students were about half as likely as adult school students to complete a level in 2001-02. See CASAS, *Adult Basic Education and Community Colleges in Five States* (report to the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy: September 2003), Table 9, p. 15.
- <sup>28</sup> Data on the relationship between hours of classroom work and student progress for the second and third study years were nearly identical to the first-year results.
- <sup>29</sup> JoAnn Crandall and Ken Sheppard, *Adult ESL and the Community College* (Working Paper 7, prepared for the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy: December 13, 2004), p. 15.
- <sup>30</sup> CASAS, *Preliminary Findings of Learning Gains for Adult Learners with Developmental Disabilities* (October 2007), Table 1a.
- <sup>31</sup> The box on page 15 describes the differences between different types of course credit.
- <sup>32</sup> All students who did not take a basic skills course during the study period are “college-level students” in this report.
- <sup>33</sup> Table 3 presents the goals that students reported when they entered the community colleges. Students had opportunities to report different goals at other points in their community college careers, and this report defines students as credential-seekers if they ever reported a goal of earning a certificate or degree or transferring. Therefore, Table 3 may not reflect differences between credential-seekers’ and non-credential-seekers’ ultimate goals.
- <sup>34</sup> See Colleen Moore, et al., *Beyond the Open Door: Increasing Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: August 2007), pp. 4-5, for a discussion of the validity of stated goals.
- <sup>35</sup> The general concept of “degree-seekers” is widely used by the CCCCO and other researchers. See, for example, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, *Accountability Reporting for the California Community Colleges: Draft Report: A Report to the Legislature, Pursuant to AB 1417* (February 2011), p. 640 and Colleen Moore, et al., *Beyond the Open Door: Increasing Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: August 2007), pp. 3-5.
- <sup>36</sup> See, for example, Thomas Bailey, Dong Wook Jeong, and Sung-Woo Cho, “Referral, Enrollment, and Completion in Developmental Education Sequences in Community Colleges,” *Economics of Education Review* 29 (2010), p. 261; data are for students in nine states. In addition, students who take college-level courses in their first term but enroll in basic skills at some point may essentially be college-ready students with weak skills in one area – they may need one basic skills math course, for instance, in order to complete transfer-level math.
- <sup>37</sup> In contrast, more than half (53.2 percent) of non-collegiate basic skills students were English-language learners.
- <sup>38</sup> More than half (57.0 percent) of basic skills students took basic skills courses in English and math; more than one out of four (28.3 percent) were ESL students; and the remaining 14.7 percent enrolled in Adult Basic/Secondary Education courses.
- <sup>39</sup> For instance, the data show that, among students who took a college-level course in their first term, basic skills students were *more* likely to earn a credential or degree or to transfer to a four-year institution than college-level students. This outcome could reflect the fact that the basic skills students were predominantly women, and women may have tended to achieve more educational milestones than men. The regression analyses discussed in this section consider all relevant factors simultaneously and identify which factors are associated with student success. Appendix A provides a detailed description of the methodology used in these regression analyses. Data in this section are for credential-seeking students only.
- <sup>40</sup> See Ria Sengupta and Christopher Jepsen, *California’s Community College Students* (Public Policy Institute of California: November 2006), pp. 18-19 and Colleen Moore, Nancy Shulock, and Jeremy Offenstein, *Steps to Success: Analyzing Milestone Achievement To Improve Community College Student Outcomes* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: October 2009), p. 4.
- <sup>41</sup> See Ria Sengupta and Christopher Jepsen, *California’s Community College Students* (Public Policy Institute of California: November 2006), Table 8, p. 19; Colleen Moore, et al., *Beyond the Open Door: Increasing Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: August 2007), p. 19; and Colleen Moore and Nancy Shulock, *The Grades Are In – 2008* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: February 2009), Figure 13, p. 19.
- <sup>42</sup> See the Center for Student Success and the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges* (Second Edition: July 2007), pp. 18 and 23.
- <sup>43</sup> See Colleen Moore, et al., *Beyond the Open Door: Increasing Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: August 2007), p. 19.
- <sup>44</sup> See Colleen Moore, et al., *Beyond the Open Door: Increasing Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (California State University, Sacramento Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy: August 2007), p. 19.
- <sup>45</sup> Thomas Bailey, Dong Wook Jeong, and Sung-Woo Cho, “Referral, Enrollment, and Completion in Developmental Education Sequences in Community Colleges,” *Economics of Education Review* 29 (2010), p. 261.
- <sup>46</sup> See the Center for Student Success and the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges* (Second Edition: July 2007), p. 18. The regression analyses also included information on the first community college each student attended. In this way, the analysis accounted for factors that may vary by community college, such as student socioeconomic characteristics, teacher quality, or student support services.
- <sup>47</sup> Data are for basic skills credential-seekers and control for demographic and other factors. Receiving assessment services in the first year had a larger impact on students’ achieving transfer to a four-year institution than continuous enrollment did.
- <sup>48</sup> The box on page 15 describes the differences between noncredit and credit basic skills courses.
- <sup>49</sup> To show the scale of ESL programs in 2005-06, these data are for all students who enrolled in ESL courses in the Adult Education Program or the community colleges in 2005-06, whether or not they were part of the cohorts analyzed for this study. This is a different set of students from those in the main analyses of Adult Education Program and community college ESL students presented in this report, which were limited to Adult Education Program students who were subject to federal reporting under WIA Title II and students who entered the community colleges in 2002-03.
- <sup>50</sup> See the box on page 15 for the definition of credential-seekers as that concept is used in this report.
- <sup>51</sup> Data on the share of Adult Education Program students in the study cohort who had a high school credential were not available for this report.
- <sup>52</sup> College-level students did not take any basic skills courses during the study period.
- <sup>53</sup> Students who had not reported a social security number (SSN) to their college, and therefore could not necessarily be tracked accurately as they moved through the community college system, were dropped from the study. Approximately 5 percent to 15 percent of students in each year of the study dataset did not provide an SSN to their college.
- <sup>54</sup> Courses such as supervised tutoring were therefore not identified as basic skills courses.
- <sup>55</sup> The Cox regressions account for “right-censoring,” or the possibility that an outcome may not be observed because it may occur after the end of the period covered by the data.

