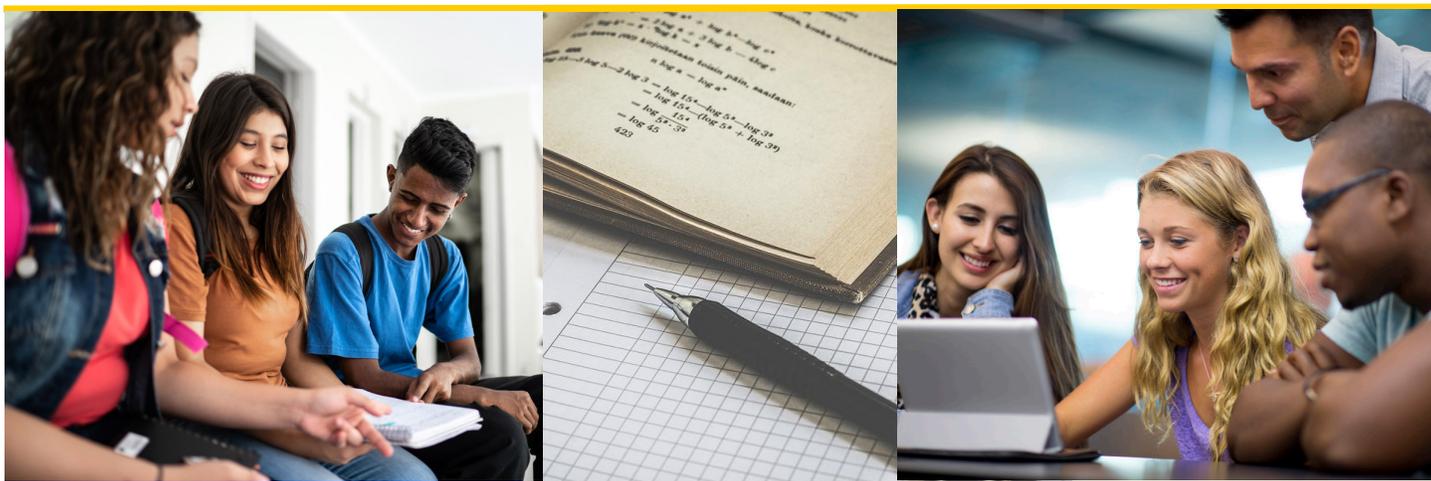


# AB705 Implementation in the Los Angeles Community College District: *Results from a District-Wide Survey*



February 2022

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 705 (AB705) is one of the most ambitious reforms in California higher education to date. It directs all 116 community colleges in the California Community College (CCC) system to maximize the probability that students complete transfer-level math and English courses in one year's time. Full implementation began in Fall 2019, and since then California's community colleges have made significant changes to "business-as-usual" by drastically reducing student placement in developmental education, and instead placing the majority of students directly into transfer-level courses. Through these changes in placement, along with reforms to curriculum and student supports, there have been substantial increases across the CCC in the number of students completing transfer-level math and English courses.

The Pullias Center for Higher Education, as part of the USC-LACCD Research-Practice Partnership (RPP), is conducting a mixed-methods evaluation of AB705 focused on how community college practitioners are implementing this landmark policy. This report describes the findings of a survey completed by 486 administrators, faculty, and staff in the 9 LACCD colleges during Spring 2021. The survey asked about: (a) respondents' policy knowledge; (b) the guidance received and changes made in response to AB705; and (c) respondents' beliefs about the policy goals and student capacity.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Knowledge, Information, & Involvement in Implementation

**KF1:** The vast majority of respondents were familiar with the goals of AB705.

**KF2:** Over 70% of respondents said their work had a direct connection to AB705, however only 55% said they were involved in AB705 discussions and planning.

**KF3:** Respondents were divided on whether policy guidance and support to implement multiple measure placement, to revise curricular sequences and transfer-level courses, and to develop co-requisite and other academic supports, were adequate.

**KF4:** Faculty and staff received information and guidance related to implementation from multiple sources, though perceptions of usefulness varied by source.

**KF5:** Administrators were seen as most responsible for planning, but faculty were viewed as most responsible for implementation.

### Changes Made in Response to AB705

**KF6:** Most respondents observed changes in assessment and placement, counseling and advising, and academic experiences practices, but one-third did not believe these changes translated to increased supports for students.

**KF7:** The majority of math and English faculty agreed that AB705 had made them rethink how they approach their classes.

**KF8:** Many counselors reported making changes to their advising and placement practices as a result of AB705, and increased collaboration with math and English departments.

## **Beliefs about Students and AB705**

**KF9:** There were substantial disciplinary difference in beliefs about student capacity.

**KF10:** Overall, English faculty held optimistic beliefs in AB705's goals and changes, but sometimes held beliefs about students' abilities that contradicted the main goals and underlying changes brought about by AB705.

**KF11:** Math faculty were less optimistic about the goals and potential of AB705 and were more skeptical of students' ability. Their views on multiple measures were mixed.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

AB705 has led to substantial progress and material change in campus practices. However, this study of stakeholder's sensemaking about AB705, including their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the policy and about students, draws attention to additional ways that implementation can be supported. There is a clear need to improve communication about policy goals, policy guidance, and policy successes. There is also a need to staff and support campus research offices. Leaders can also include more stakeholders in discussion and planning to work against feelings of alienation and increase buy-in and involvement at every level. Practitioner beliefs about the policy and about students should be monitored, and opportunities to discuss and challenge these beliefs should be developed.

## **Authors**

This report was prepared by Cheryl Ching (University of Massachusetts, Boston), Elif Yücel (University of Southern California), Federick Ngo (University of Nevada, Las Vegas), Elise Swanson (Harvard University) Tatiana Melguizo (University of Southern California), and Deborah Harrington (LACCD).

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The California Community Colleges (CCC) system is the largest postsecondary education system in the nation, comprised of 116 community colleges that are organized into 72 districts and that enroll nearly 1.8 million students (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office [CCCCO], 2022a). One in every four community college students in the United States attends a CCC, many of whom come from racially minoritized backgrounds. For the vast majority of these students, the CCC is the way towards earning a postsecondary credential. However, according to the CCCC Student Success Scorecard, just 49% of degree- or certificate-seeking students who matriculated in the 2012-2013 academic year completed a degree, certificate, or transfer outcomes within six years (CCCCO, 2019).

California Assembly Bill 705 (AB705) seeks to address this problem by “maximiz[ing] the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within a one year time frame” (CCCCO, 2018a). Since Fall 2019, all CCCs (a) must use multiple measures of college readiness such as high school coursework, high school grades, and high school grade point average for assessment and placement instead of standardized tests such as the ACCUPLACER; and (b) should ensure that the curriculum and student supports result in successful completion of transfer English and math in a year.

Early statewide results show that access to transfer English and math has increased substantially for all students, as has the number of students who complete these courses with a C or better, post-AB705 (Cuellar Mejia et al., 2020). Further, there is virtually no percentage point gap by race/ethnicity in access to transfer-level English, and there are smaller gaps than previously in access to transfer-level math. Racial completion gaps persist, however. While these results suggest that the work is not over, AB705 is starting to change the “business-as-usual” of access and success in the CCC.

What does this change look like at a local level? How did community colleges respond to and implement AB705? With support from the Spencer Foundation and in partnership with the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD), the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California (USC) is examining how community college practitioners in LACCD are implementing AB705 and how implementation relates to educational outcomes. To achieve these goals, we are conducting a range of research activities, including analyses of access and completion outcomes in LACCD (Melguizo et al., 2021), a district-wide survey of the first year of AB705 implementation (2019-2020), and case studies of implementation at three focal colleges.

### **AB705 Outcomes in Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD)**

As the largest community college district in California, the LACCD is made up of 9 colleges that serve the greater Los Angeles area. LACCD colleges enroll a diverse group of about 230,000 full- and part-

time students each year, the majority of whom consider themselves students of color. Of the Fall 2019 cohort, nearly 60 percent are Latinx, and 8.8 percent are African American/Black. Fifty-six percent reported that they were the first in their families to attend college, and 53 percent had income levels at or below the poverty line (LACCD, 2022a). Similar to statewide results, the one-year transfer English and math course completion rates have substantially increased in the district post-AB705. In Fall 2019, 44.8 percent and 21 percent of first-time in college (FTIC) students passed transfer English and math within one year, as compared to 27.7 and 8.85 percent in Fall 2017. The substantial increase suggests that policy implementation has been effective, however, it is worth noting that only 1 in 5 FTIC students in LACCD attained this outcome (LACCD, 2022b).

### **Examining Implementation: A Sensemaking Approach**

Scholars who study policy and reform implementation and change in K-12 and higher education settings argue that implementation is shaped by how implementing actors (e.g., teachers, college leaders) make sense of policy goals and mandates (Kezar, 2013; Spillane, 2002). Their “sensemaking” can turn on a range of factors, including:

- The information they receive about a policy (e.g., guidelines from system or district offices, related research);
- The source of the information (e.g., colleague, peer, campus leader);
- Their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about the problem(s) a policy seeks to address (e.g., racial inequities in assessment and placement) and the solution(s) the policy offers (e.g., use of multiple measures for A&P);
- The context in which they work (e.g., whether there is sufficient capacity and resources on a campus to implement, what is the campus culture towards change and reform)

Sensemaking matters especially with policies and reforms like AB705 that seek deep, fundamental transformation of existing arrangements, rely on change from the ground-up, and—at least in the early days—come with general direction for implementation but few specifics.

Drawing on these insights, we developed a survey to examine the first implementation year (2019-2020) of AB705, with a focus on:

1. Administrators, faculty, and staff knowledge and understanding of AB705 goals and guidance;
2. Their involvement in AB705 implementation;
3. Their beliefs and attitudes toward AB705 and related topics like assessment and placement, co-requisites, and developmental education;
4. Their thoughts on the actions undertaken and changes made on their campus; and
5. Their perspectives on ongoing challenges.

The survey went to 1,045 administrators, faculty, and staff at the 9 LACCD colleges in Spring 2021. 486 responded, for a total response rate of 46.5 percent. On the next page, Table 1 includes a breakdown of respondents by role while Table 2 shows a breakdown of respondents by college. It is important to note that the number of respondents for each question varied, either because certain questions were asked of specific groups (e.g., faculty) or because respondents chose not to answer some questions.

In this report, we present key survey findings, with selected findings disaggregated by role and college. The findings are organized in three parts:

- I. AB705 Knowledge and Information, and Involvement in Implementation
- II. Changes Made in Response to AB705
- III. Beliefs about Students and AB705

To help contextualize the findings, we include selected quotes from case study interviews we conducted with five district administrators and 30 staff, faculty, and administrators at three LACCD colleges who were directly involved in AB705 implementation.

The Appendix includes technical details related to survey administration and analyses, as well as a glossary of terms used in the report.

**Table 1. Survey Responses by Role**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Number of Recipients</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
Administrators	85	25	29.4%
Counseling Faculty	327	69	21.1%
English Faculty	331	144	43.5%
Math Faculty	357	126	35.3%
No Role Listed*		122	

Note. \* Includes respondents who did not specify their role.

**Table 2. Survey Responses by College**

<b>College</b>	<b>Number of Recipients</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
East Los Angeles College	216	75	34.7%
Los Angeles City College	118	40	33.9%
Los Angeles Harbor College	102	31	30.4%
Los Angeles Trade Tech College	101	40	39.6%
Los Angeles Mission College	82	21	25.6%
Los Angeles Pierce College	166	45	27.1%
Los Angeles Southwest College	73	30	41.1%
Los Angeles Valley College	127	44	34.6%
West Los Angeles College	86	31	36.0%
No College Listed*		117	

Note. \* Includes respondents who did not specify their college.

**I. KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION, AND INVOLVEMENT IN IMPLEMENTATION**

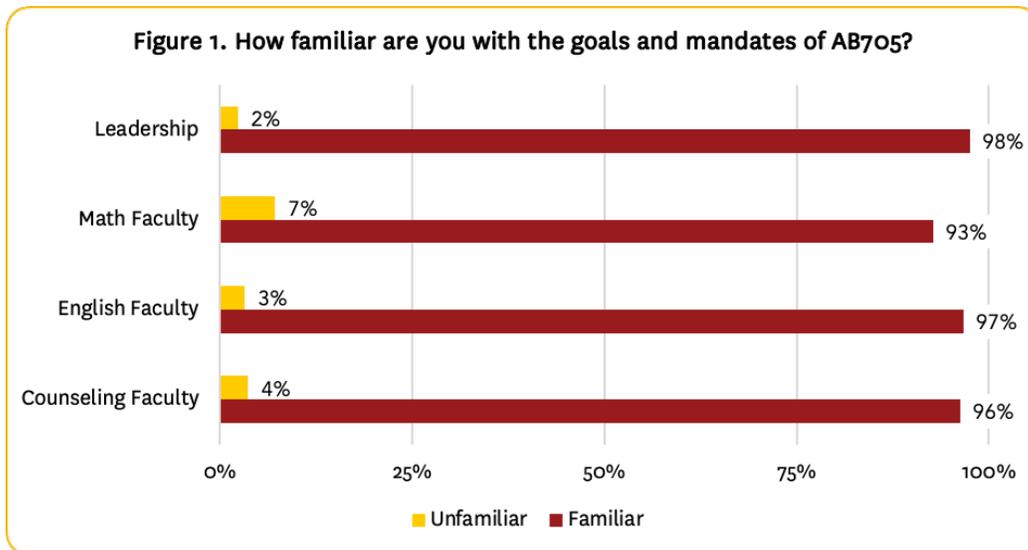
In this section, we present five key findings on survey respondents’ AB705 knowledge and information, and involvement with AB705 implementation on their campus.

**Key Finding 1**

**Across the district, over 95% of respondents were “very” or “somewhat” familiar with the goals of AB705.**

Overall, respondents reported high degrees of familiarity with AB705 goals and mandates, with 53% saying they were “very familiar” and 43% reporting they were “somewhat familiar,” for a total of 95% (Figure 1). This was generally consistent across the 9 LACCD colleges.

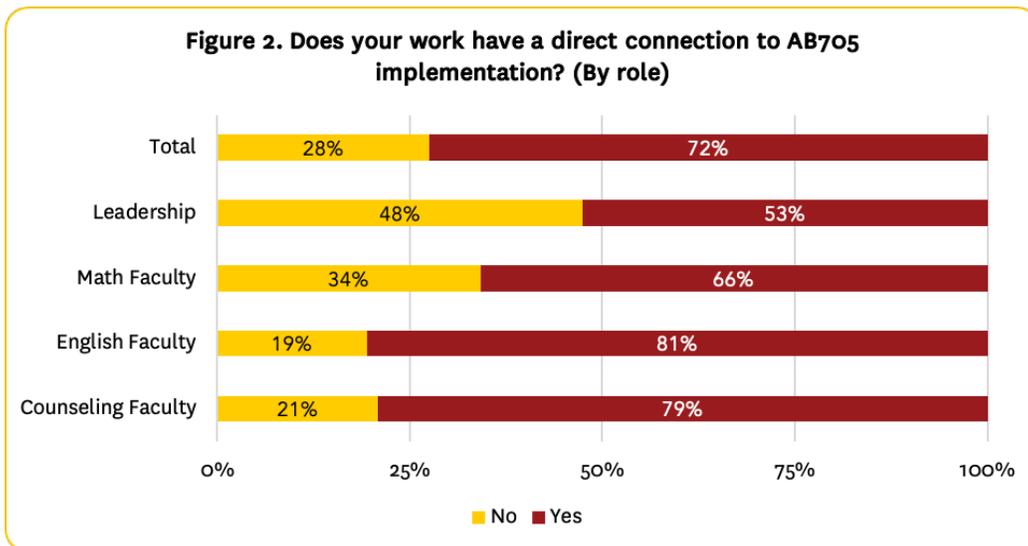
By role, only 2% of leadership, 7% of math faculty, 3% of English faculty, and 4% of counseling faculty reported that they were “unfamiliar” with AB705’s goals and mandates.



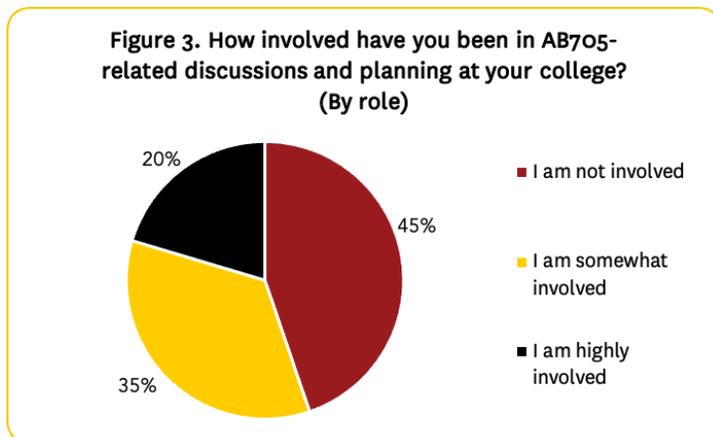
**Key Finding 2**

**Over 70% of respondents said their work had a direct connection to AB705, however only 55% said they were involved in AB705 discussions and planning.**

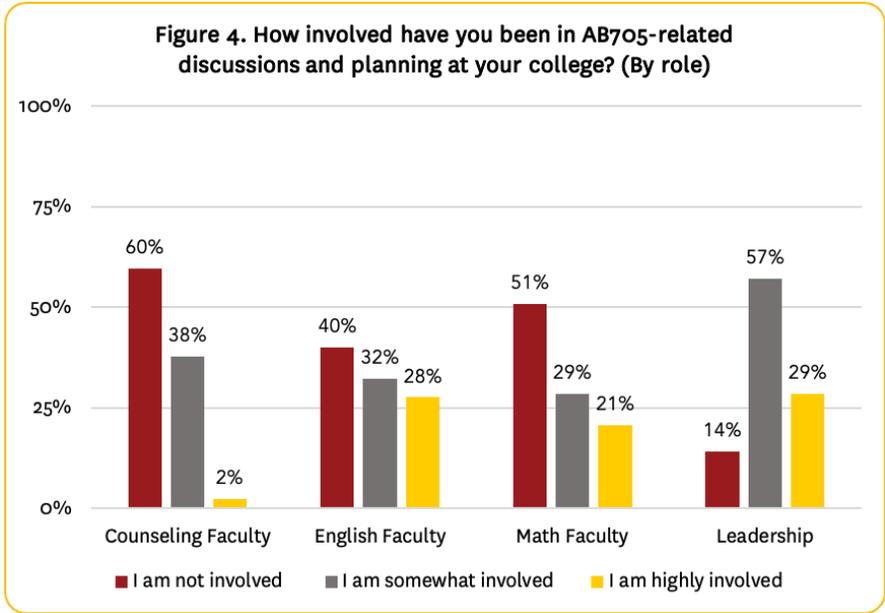
Over 70% of respondents said their work is directly connected to AB705 implementation. Higher percentages of math, English, and counseling faculty respondents were involved in AB705 discussions and planning, as compared to about half of leadership (Figure 2). Given that AB705 directly impacts core aspects of faculty work (e.g., curriculum, teaching, advising), it is notable that about one-third of math faculty and one-fifth of English and counseling faculty felt that their work was not directly connected to AB705.



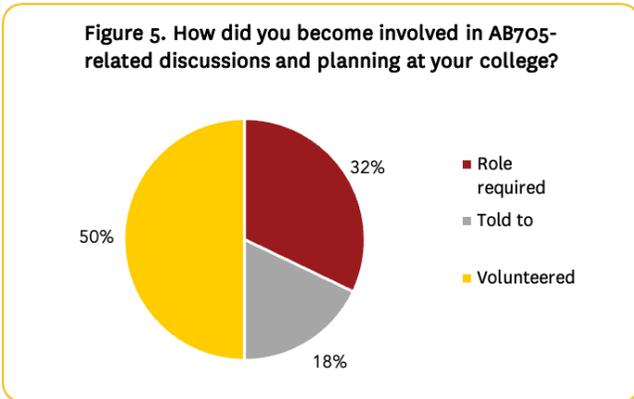
Of those who said their work has a direct connection to AB705, 20% said they were “highly involved” and 35% said they were “somewhat involved” in AB705 discussions and planning (Figure 3). This means that 45% reported not being involved even though their job is connected to AB705.



In addition, level of involvement varied by role. While most leaders said they were “highly” or “somewhat” involved in AB705 discussions and planning, only 40% of counseling faculty, 60% of English faculty, and 50% of math faculty reported the same thing (Figure 4). This suggests that a significant proportion of faculty respondents did not feel they were involved with AB705 implementation.



This may in part be due to the voluntary nature of involvement. While half became involved in AB705 discussions and planning because their role required it or because they were told to, half volunteered (Figure 5). Indeed, through our focal college interviews, we learned that English, math, and counseling



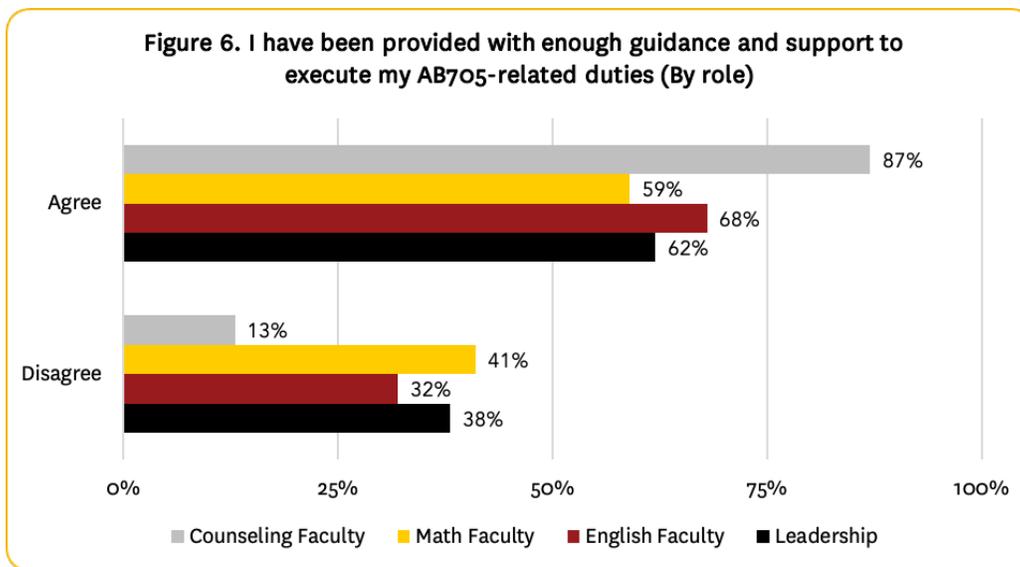
department chairs were for the most part highly involved in coordinating and planning their unit’s response to AB705. Many established working groups to address aspects of implementation (e.g., placement, new course development, coordination with tutoring services), and those working groups were staffed by faculty who chose to participate. On the one hand, relying on volunteers makes a lot of sense as these are individuals who are likely invested and have the time, capacity, and knowledge to prepare for AB705. On the other hand, if a sizeable

percentage of faculty did not feel like they were involved—as our survey results suggest—this raises questions: Was AB705 presented as and considered a collective responsibility at the department, and even at the college level? Were there ways that department chairs were able to gather feedback from those who were not involved in discussions and planning?

**Key Finding 3**

**Many respondents reported not receiving adequate guidance in executing AB705-related activities.**

Over half of all respondents felt they were given sufficient guidance and support to implement AB705, however, this varied by role (Figure 6). Most counseling faculty found AB705 guidance and support adequate, in contrast to over 30% of leaders and English and math faculty who disagreed.



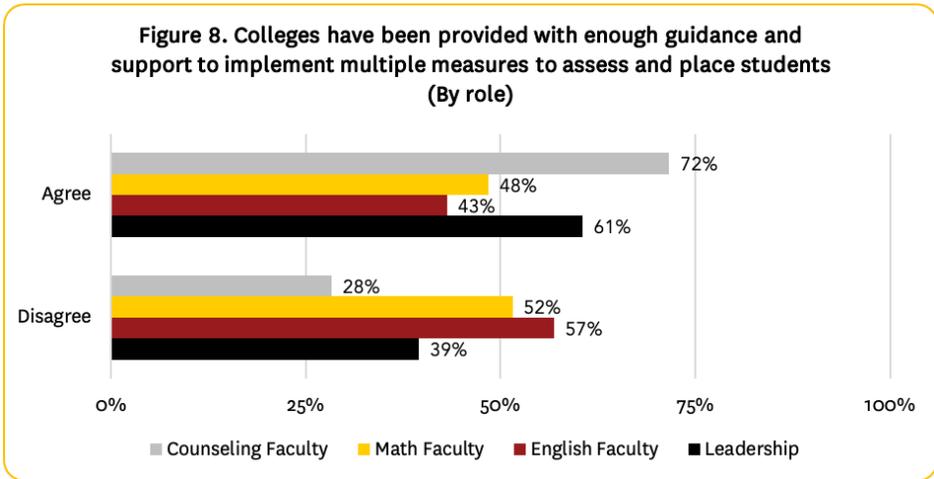
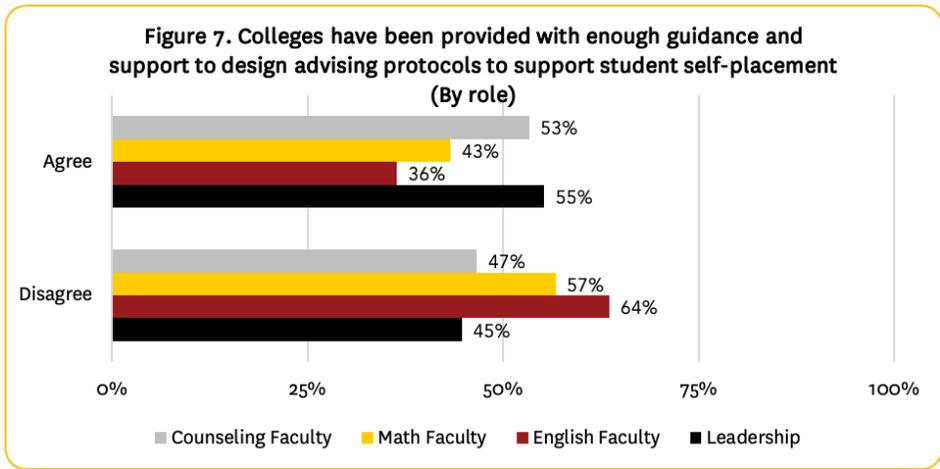
In our interviews, we heard faculty say that they had to make sense of multiple—and often, competing—messages from leaders, and that they did not receive enough information or professional development to implement AB705. For example, one faculty noted that many things got “lost in translation,” explaining that “[the state would give a broad statement about what is or isn’t possible” and then “the administrators would say another,” thereby leaving the faculty to “negotiate who is right.”

When asked about guidance and support for executing specific AB705-related activities (i.e., advising for student self-placement, multiple measures placement, revising curricula, developing co-requisite supports), responses were mixed.

**Assessment and Placement**

We asked respondents whether they felt that colleges were provided with adequate guidance and support for two aspects of assessment and placement: (1) designing advising protocols for student self-placement and (2) implementing multiple measures placement.

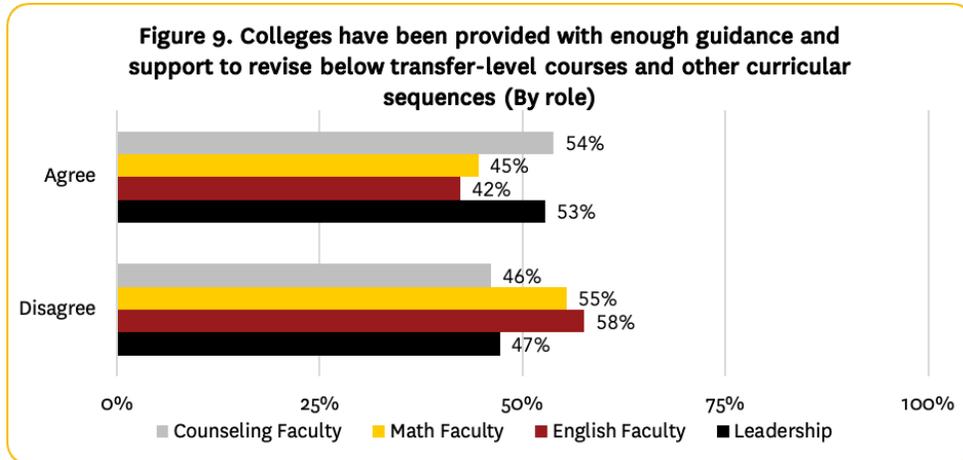
With self-placement, respondents were split on whether they thought colleges were provided with adequate guidance and support for creating advising protocols. Notably, English (64%) and math (57%) faculty were the least likely to perceive that they had sufficient support (Figure. 7).



With multiple measures placement, counseling faculty (72%) overwhelmingly felt colleges were given sufficient support for implementation, in contrast to English (43%) and math (48%) faculty (Figure 8).

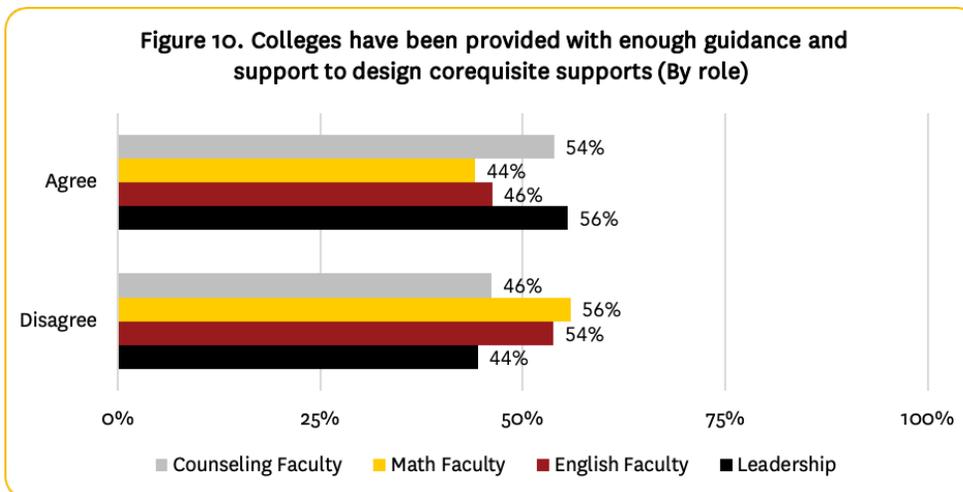
**Revising Developmental Education Curricula**

We also asked respondents whether they perceived colleges as having received sufficient guidance and support to revise developmental education course curricula. Respondents were mixed, with over half of English and math faculty saying that colleges were not given adequate guidance and support (Figure 9).



**Designing Co-requisite Supports**

Finally, respondents were roughly split in their views regarding whether colleges have received sufficient guidance and support to design co-requisite supports. Again, over half of English and math faculty said colleges were not provided enough guidance and support in this area (Figure 10).



*Note: In our survey, we defined co-requisite support as: Co-requisites are one way of reforming traditional models of developmental education, or below transfer-level courses. Co-requisites are meant to provide students with concurrent supports while they are enrolled in transfer-level courses. The concurrent supports are designed so that students will acquire the necessary skills, concepts, and/or information needed to increase their likelihood of passing the transfer-level course.*

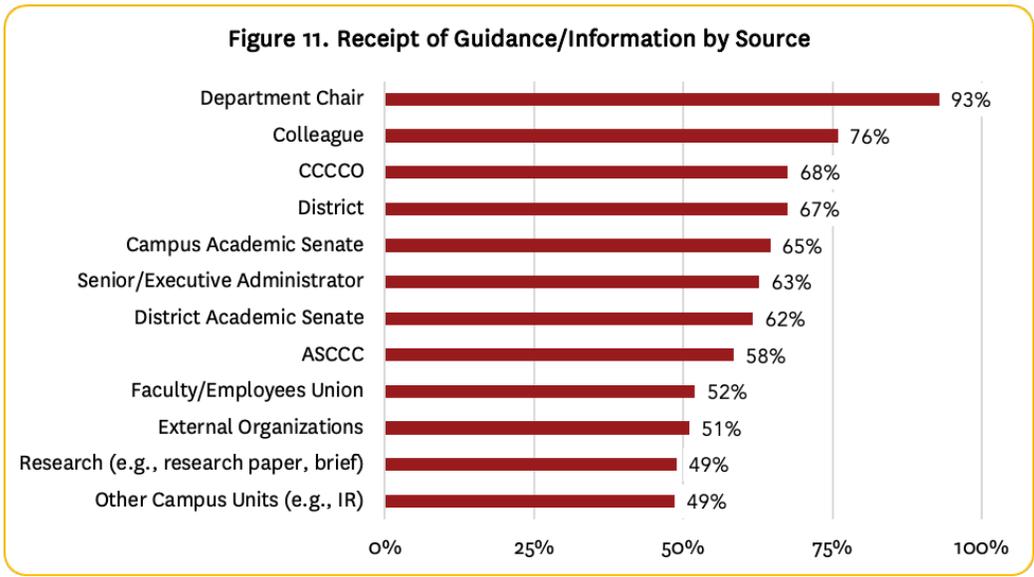
Indeed, our case study interviews suggest that faculty had a lot of questions when it came to developing co-requisite supports, not just whether they are allowed under AB705, but how to design and implement them. Questions included:

- Can students who need additional support, based on high school GPA, be required to enroll in a co-requisite class?
- Should the co-requisite be a traditional course or lab course?
- How many units should the co-requisite be?
- How should the co-requisite be designed so that it doesn't threaten existing articulation agreements?
- Should the co-requisites be taught by the same instructor or can they be taught by different instructors?

**Key Finding 4**

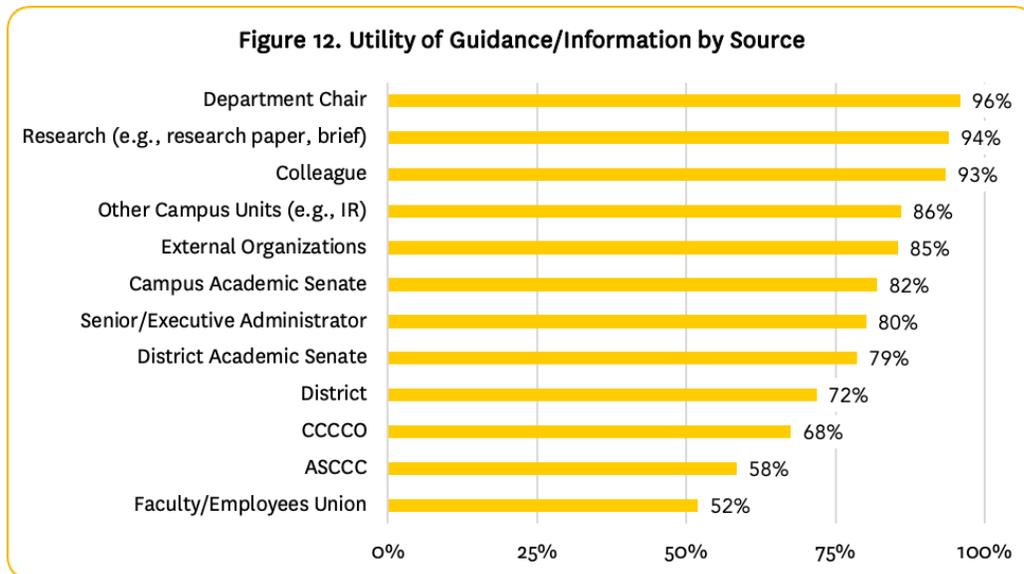
**Faculty and staff received information and guidance related to AB705 from different sources but perceived the utility of this information differently.**

Respondents reported receiving information from a wide range of sources, with 93% saying that department chairs, and 76% saying that colleagues, were sources of information (Figure 11). Over 90% who received information from these two sources found the information useful. Our interview data lends support to this finding. As noted, in most all English and math departments at our case schools, the chair and vice chairs lead the implementation work. It is no surprise, then, that they were a prime source of information and that their guidance was deemed useful.



***Our interviews suggest that access to research, especially research from institutional research offices, may depend on how those leading implementation efforts engage them.***

Also noteworthy is that while only 49% of respondents said they received guidance and information from research sources and other campus units, which includes institutional research, a high percentage of respondents found them useful (94% for research and 86% for other campus units) (Figure 12). This suggests that while research seems to be a valued source of information, access to research could be an issue.



Our interviews suggest that access to research, especially research from institutional research offices, may depend on how those leading implementation efforts engage them. At one college, an institutional researcher recalled that their department was invited to speak with the English faculty, but they were not aware about whether the math department extended a similar invitation.

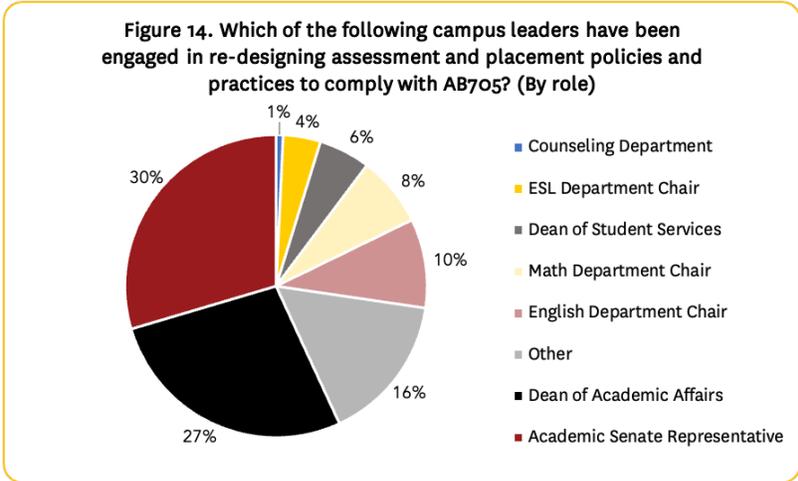
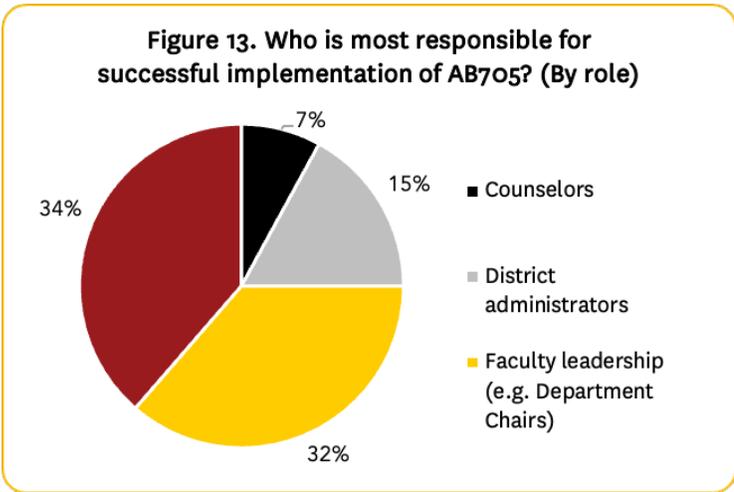
Another possibility is that institutional research offices have limited capacity. Across our case schools, access to AB705 data—even now that the policy is in effect—is a challenge. One administrator explained: “It’s not that there’s no data, it’s just that our researchers, they are pulled in so many different directions, because everybody needs data for everything. It just takes time. Eventually, we’ll get it. It’ll come rolling in.”

**Key Finding 5**

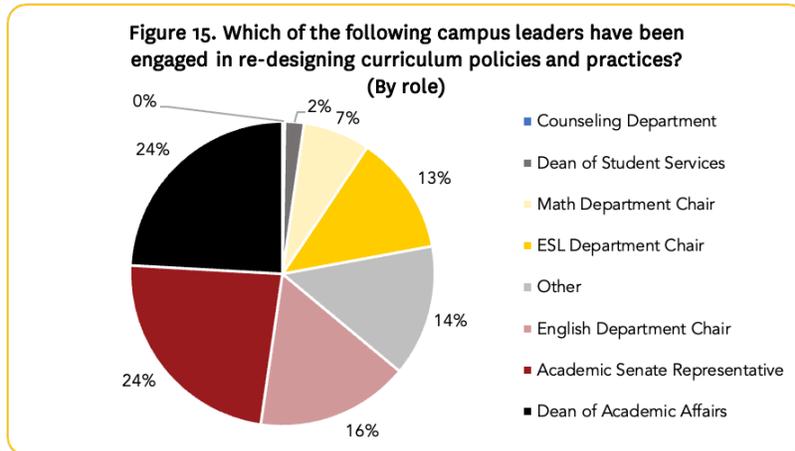
**Respondents saw administrators as responsible for planning for AB705-related changes and faculty as responsible for implementing AB705-related changes.**

We asked respondents who on campus they thought was most responsible for AB705 implementation. Faculty leaders such as department chairs (32%) and instructors (34%) were viewed as most responsible for successful AB705 implementation (Figure 13). This makes sense given that faculty have purview over the curriculum and AB705 has direct consequences for English and math courses.

The findings about faculty and department chair involvement are supported by what we learned from interviews. At our three focal colleges, English, ESL, and math faculty carried the lion’s share of the responsibility for planning and implementation. Faculty attended conferences and workshops to learn about the policy and established working groups to (a) determine AB705-compliant placement rules; (b) modify existing and develop new courses; and (c) work out the role of tutoring, supplemental instruction, boot camps, non-credit, and other supports.



A significant number of respondents said that academic senate representatives and deans of academic affairs were involved in redesigning assessment and placement and curricular policies and practices on campus to comply with AB705 (Figures 14 and 15).



*Note: Responses under "Other" included VP of Student Services, College President, Faculty, Tutoring Center, Assessment Center, among others.*

While we learned that some administrators, particularly at the dean level, were also involved, they tended to play a supporting role. This contrasts the perceptions that many respondents had that deans were engaged in redesigning assessment and placement and curricular policies and practices. One dean explained that it is better if implementation is “faculty-driven,” thus her involvement was “mainly supporting the department chair.” A dean at another college similarly explained that their role is that of a “cheerleader:”

*“Working with our professors, I try to make sure that we stay focused on what the students need, and they’re great at that. They know what the students need, and they also care a lot about the students and want to see the students succeed.”*

## II. CHANGES MADE IN RESPONSE TO AB705

As noted, AB705 required colleges to make two major sets of changes:

1. Adopt the use of multiple measures (e.g., high school or college transcripts, highest level of coursework completed in a subject area and corresponding course grade, attitudes surveys, holistic scoring processes and others) (see Glossary), along with either the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) Default Placement Rules (CCCCO DPR) or an alternative model designed by the college to maximize the chance that students are placed directly in transfer-level math and English with supports (see Glossary).
2. Engage in curricular re-design (including co-requisite courses) and development or expansion of academic supports (e.g., writing or math labs, tutoring) for students who were recommended to receive additional supports based on the CCCCCO DPR.

We asked respondents to describe the changes they saw across campus, and the extent to which these changes were supporting student success.

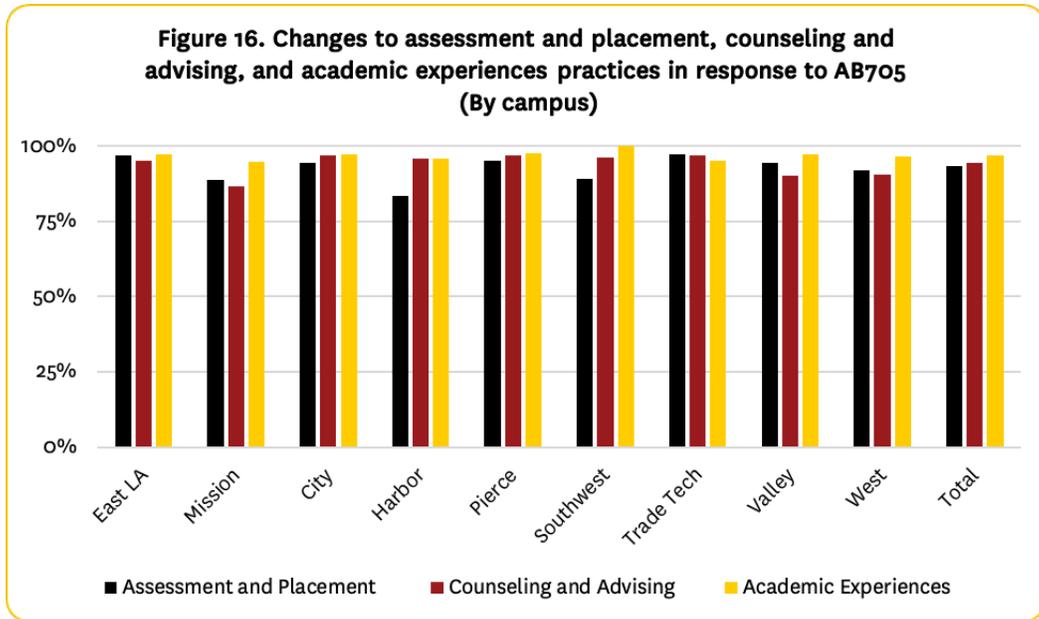
***At our case schools, curricular change was significant, with interviewees describing the elimination of many developmental education courses, the introduction of co-requisites and non-credit modules, and the development of “support” versions of existing courses, especially in math (e.g., Math 227S).***

**Key Finding 6**

**Respondents reported changes in assessment and placement, counseling and advising, and academic supports in response to AB705. However, over one-third said that counseling, advising, and academic support for students hasn't increased.**

***Changes to Assessment and Placement, Counseling and Advising, and Academic Supports***

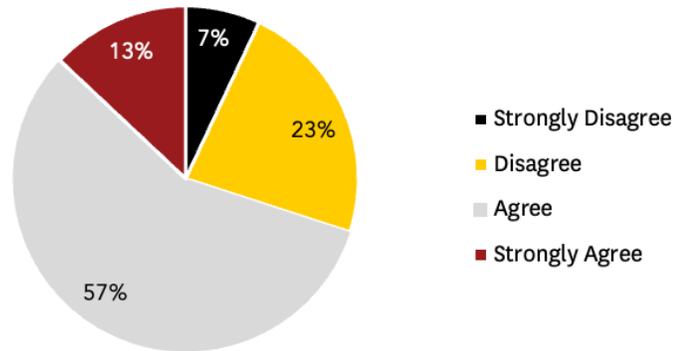
Nearly all respondents reported seeing changes within assessment and placement, counseling and advising, and academic experiences (Figure 16). At our case schools, curricular change was significant, with interviewees describing the elimination of many developmental education courses, the introduction of co-requisites and non-credit modules, and the development of “support” versions of existing courses, especially in math (e.g., Math 227S).



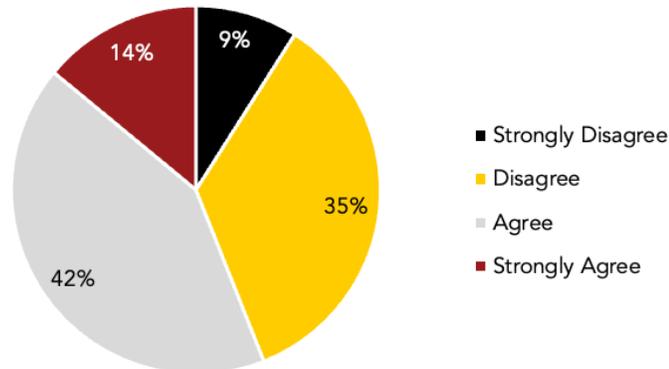
*Note: We defined academic experiences as course redesign, co-requisites and tutoring.*

Despite survey respondents reporting changes in various practices related to AB705, not all thought these changes increased academic, counseling, and advising support for students. Across roles, 30% of respondents disagreed that academic supports for students had increased and 44% of respondents disagreed that counseling and advising support for students had increased as a result of AB705 (Figures 17 and 18).

**Figure 17. As a result of AB705, academic support for students has increased**



**Figure 18. As a result of AB705, counseling and advising support for students has increased**



**Over 75% of faculty “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that AB 705 made them think differently about teaching.**

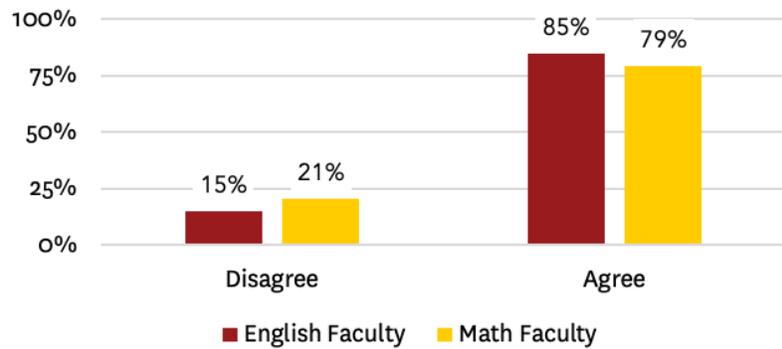
**Key Finding 7**

**A majority of math and English faculty agreed that AB705 has made them re-think how they teach and that AB705 led to departmental conversations about curriculum and pedagogy.**

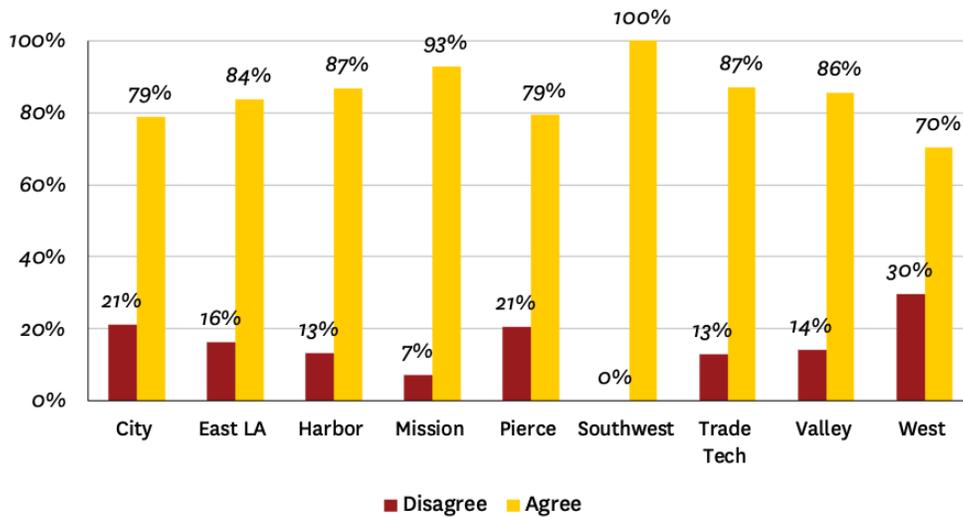
**Changes to Pedagogy and Curriculum**

Over 75% of faculty “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that AB 705 made them think differently about teaching (Figures 19 and 20). While there were some differences by college, overall, these findings suggest that faculty associated AB705 with curricular and possibly pedagogical changes.

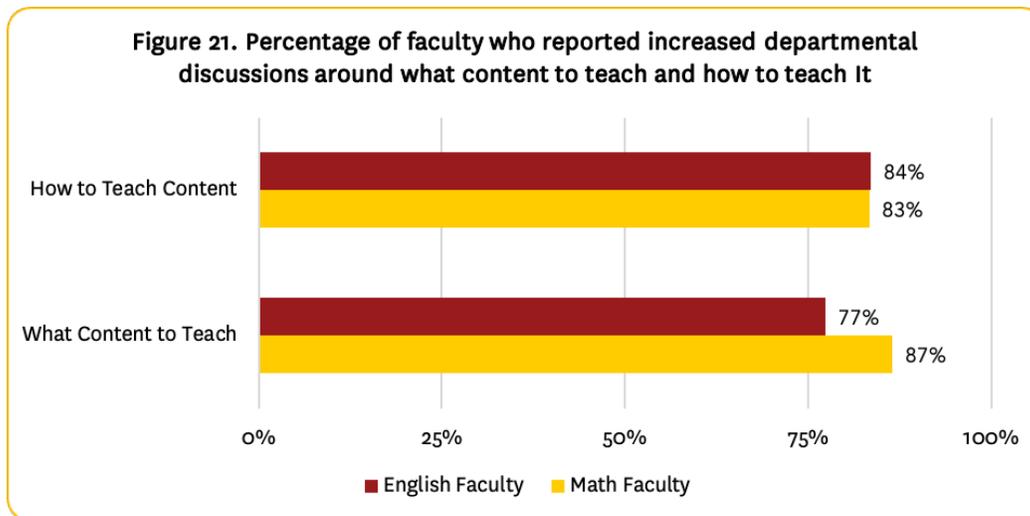
**Figure 19. AB705 has made me rethink how I teach my classes (By discipline)**



**Figure 20. AB705 has made me rethink how I teach my classes (By college)**



English and math faculty also largely agreed that AB705 led to increased conversations around course content and pedagogy. Eighty-two percent of faculty reported having increased departmental conversations about what content to teach, and 84% reported increased conversations about how to deliver that content (Figure 21). These findings were fairly similar across English and math.



These survey findings do not say anything about how faculty rethought curriculum and/or pedagogy, or what the department discussions were about. Here, our interviews offer some clues. For example, an English instructor shared:

*“...the idea of more equitable, open access to 101 challenges a lot more of the gatekeeping or barriers that are inherent to the instruction of the English language.... There’s a lot more faculty who are a little bit more open to like, well, if the student has some grammar errors or things like that in their writing, does that really mean they need a B? Or does that really be what should push them into a B paper into a C paper?”*

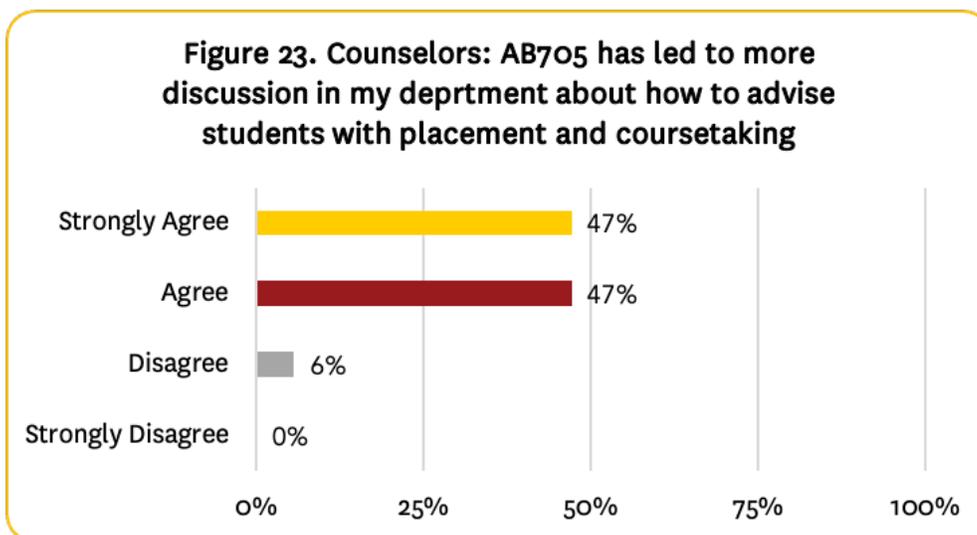
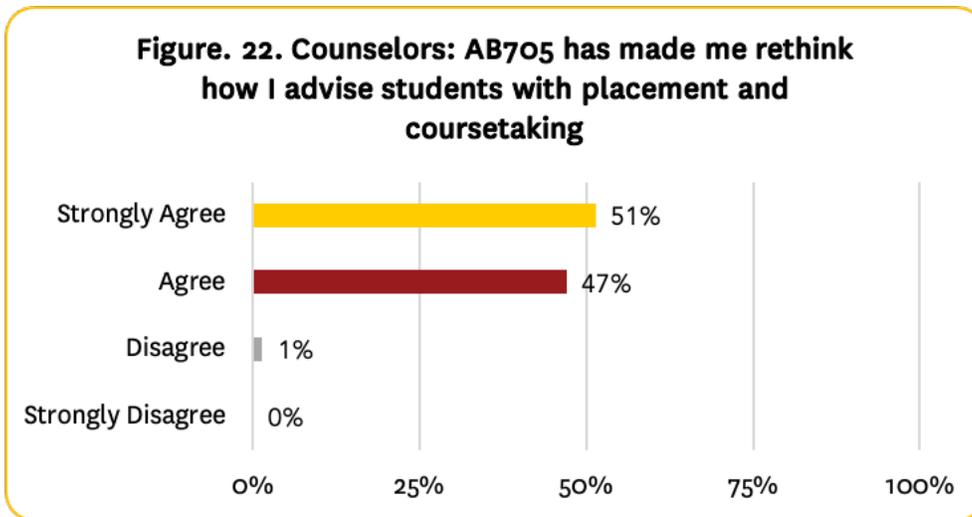
According to a math instructor, the assessment and placement changes AB705 mandated raised questions about how student capacity is judged. As they explained:

*“I do feel that students need to be sufficient in some skill level, but are you going to dictate that just based on one test? That maybe they didn’t have a good day, maybe they found out that it was a pandemic and they had to take their test the next day? There’s a lot of stuff that I feel like we just, we don’t really question.”*

**Key Finding 8**

**Counselors reported increased discussion with their own department regarding student placement and coursetaking, as well as increased collaboration with both English and math departments on determining student placement and coursetaking.**

All but one counselor said that AB705 got them to rethink their advising practices around placement and coursetaking. Nearly all (94%) counselors felt there was increased discussion in their department about how to advise students on course placement and coursetaking (Figures 22 and 23).



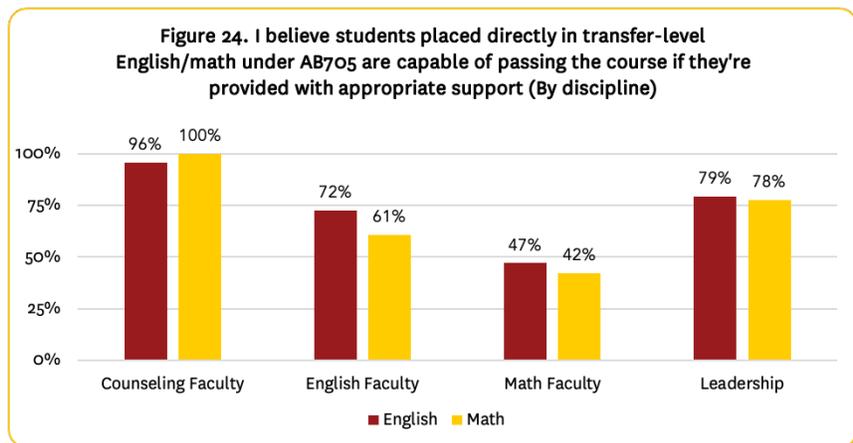
### III. BELIEFS ABOUT STUDENTS AND AB705

Our last section of findings focuses on respondent beliefs and attitudes about AB705-related issues. As noted, beliefs and attitudes are key factors in sensemaking, and how implementing actors make sense of a policy can shape implementation.

#### Key Finding 9

**There were substantial disciplinary differences in terms of beliefs about students’ capabilities under AB705.**

Counselors overwhelmingly believe students can pass transfer-level courses under AB705 with appropriate supports, followed by administrators (Figure 24). This finding aligns with what we heard from counselors we interviewed. For example, one shared:



*“AB 705 is saying, ‘Hey, everyone is capable.’ And here at [college], we have the resources that even if you feel like you’re not capable, we have tutoring and support that can aid you. And when you pass that class, you’re going to feel this surge of confidence and knowing that you can achieve anything. So I think that’s where the motivation and the empowerment comes in.”*

Math faculty respondents were the most skeptical about students’ ability to pass transfer-level courses, even with supports. Our interviews with math instructors suggest that this skepticism is in part related to the idea that students haven’t had the opportunities to get ready for transfer-level math. One math instructor explained:

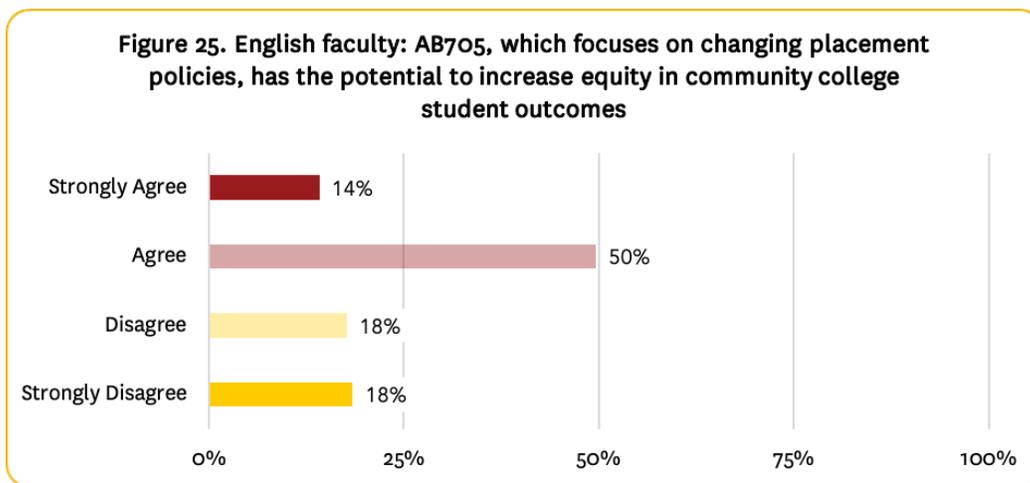
*“(Students) haven’t had that rigor, especially for math courses. So, even though that the students may now be able to take different courses, some of them may not be succeeding because they don’t have—they’re just— they’re not ready to begin at that level.”*

A higher percentage of both English and math faculty believe that students placed directly in transfer-level English should be able to pass the class with appropriate support, over those placed directly in transfer-level math.

**Key Finding 10**

**Overall, English faculty held optimistic beliefs in AB705’s goals and changes, but sometimes held beliefs about students’ abilities that contradicted the main goals and underlying changes brought about by AB705.**

Just under two-thirds of English faculty believe AB705 has the potential to increase equity in community college student outcomes, which means a little over one-third do not believe that AB705 is an equity-promoting policy (Figure 25).

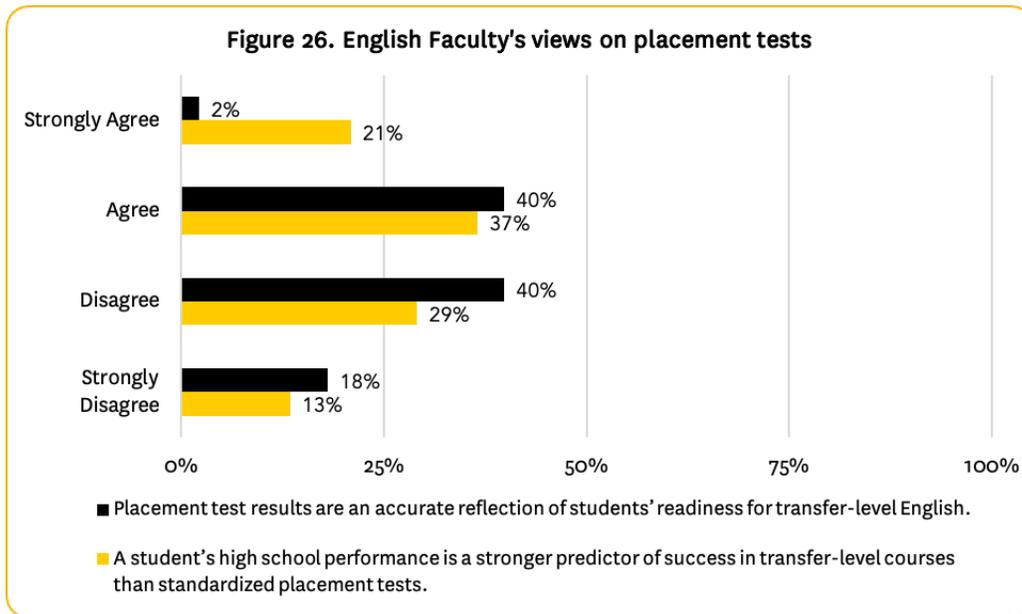


Interviews with English instructors offered some sense of the differing perspectives on AB705 and equity. Some instructors noted that, to date, the data suggest that AB705 has not narrowed outcome gaps. Hence, one said that AB705 has not “solved any of the equity issues,” another added that it has perhaps made things “worse because you’re taking students who are not actually prepared to be in college, in a college-level course,” and a third shared, “it’s not equitable to pass a student along without skillsets.”

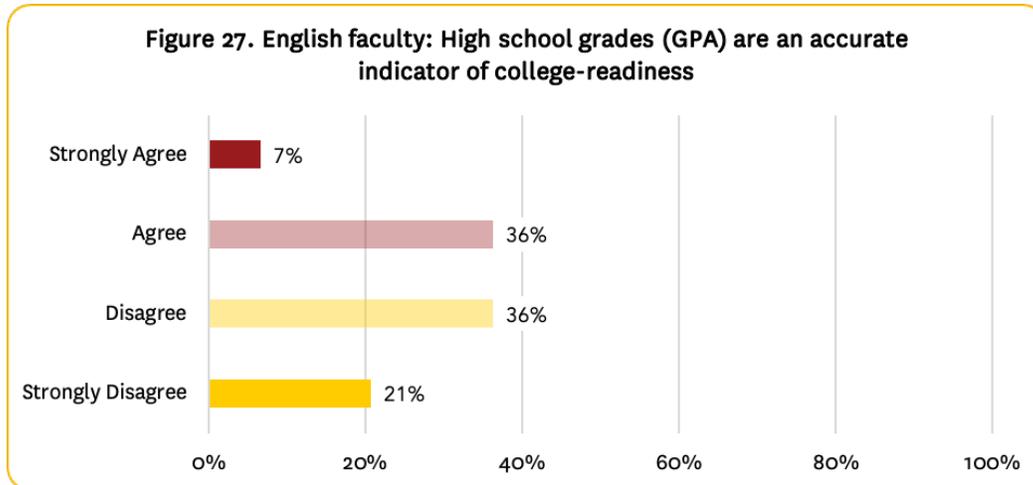
**Assessment & Placement**

One significant change under AB705 is that colleges can no longer use standardized assessment tests for placement. We asked English faculty whether they believe these tests accurately capture students’ readiness for transfer-level English. Fifty-eight percent said they “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” (Figure 26). While this constitutes the majority of respondents, it is noteworthy that 42% believe that standardized tests accurately measure student readiness.

Another significant change is that colleges must use multiple measures for placement, which include several metrics of high school performance like high school GPA and coursetaking. We asked English faculty whether they think that high school performance is a stronger predictor of student success in transfer-level English, over assessment tests. The same percentage who disagreed that tests are an accurate measure agreed that high school performance is a stronger predictor (58%) (Figure 26). Of that, 21% appeared to strongly favor high school performance.



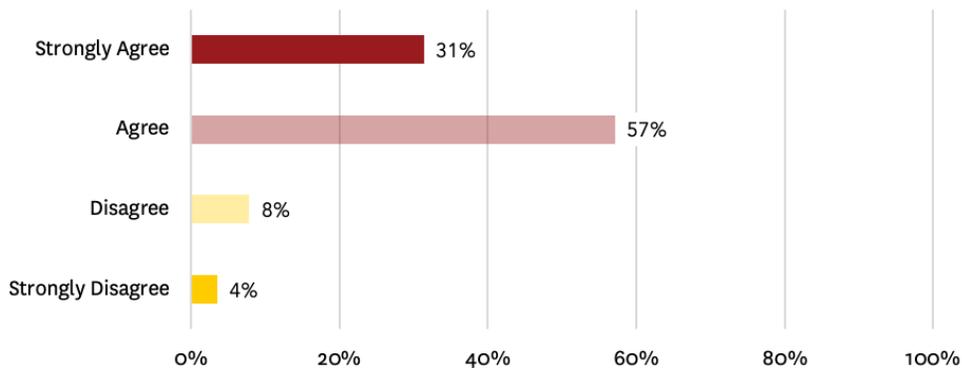
Under AB705, high school GPA has become a key metric for placement. In July 2018, Laura Hope of the CCCC and John Stankas of the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges (ASCCC) issued an AB705 implementation memo that outlined proposed “default placement rules” based on high school GPA. Many colleges have adopted these placement rules or modified them according to local research. Given the salience of high school GPA for AB705, we asked English faculty whether they believe it is an accurate measure of college readiness and found that over half of respondents (57%) do not believe that it is (Figure 27).



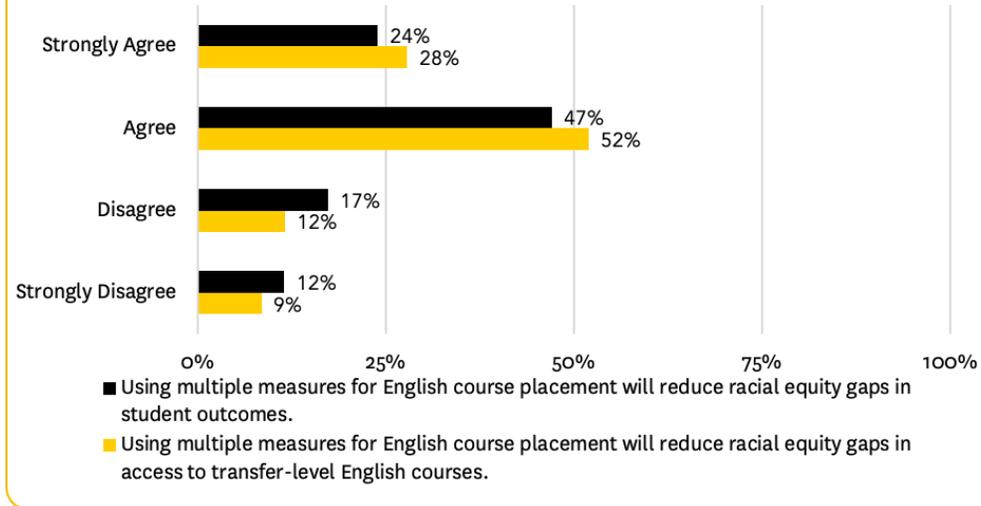
Again, our interviews provide some clues for the varied perspectives. For example, one instructor shared that relying on a standardized test alone doesn't work and that it is "fine to look at someone's GPA" because "if they have a high GPA you can reasonably assume they're going to do well or be somewhat prepared for a college classroom." Another instructor was more skeptical, admitting that they are "a little mixed" and perhaps "it doesn't really say that much." They reasoned that "[i]n some cases, sure, it's going to indicate maybe how well a student, what they can do, the work they're willing to put in," but it is equally plausible that GPA does not reflect a student's potential. They explained: "I've known, and I've gone to school with some geniuses who are getting straight Ds and Fs, and they became engineers at UCLA, but they were brilliant. They were geniuses. And they were just bored in high school."

Mixed beliefs about high school GPA aside, English faculty overwhelmingly supported (89%) the idea that using multiple measures to determine students' course placement is an important change (Figure 28). Moreover, 80% of respondents said that using multiple measures for placement should reduce racial equity gaps in access to transfer-level English courses, while over 70% of respondents agreed that it should reduce racial equity gaps in student outcomes like throughput (Figure 29). These findings suggest that a majority of English faculty respondents affirm AB705's goals regarding placement.

**Figure 28. English faculty: Using multiple measures to place students into college English courses is an important change**



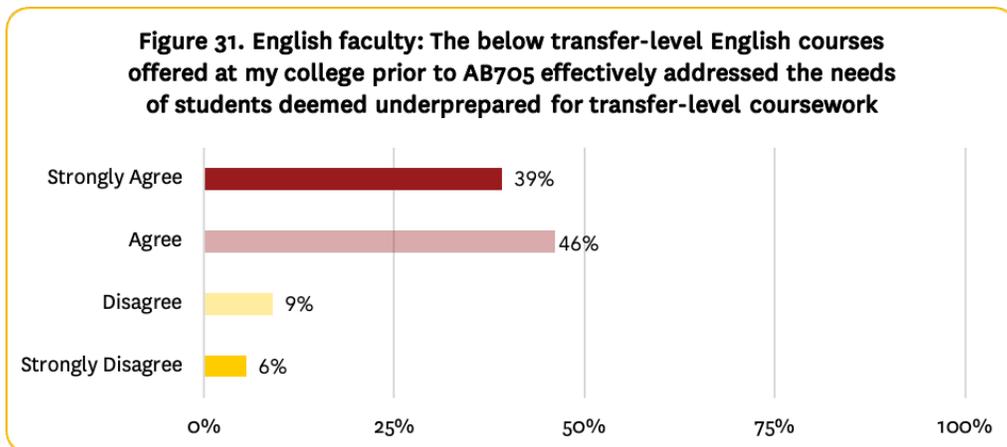
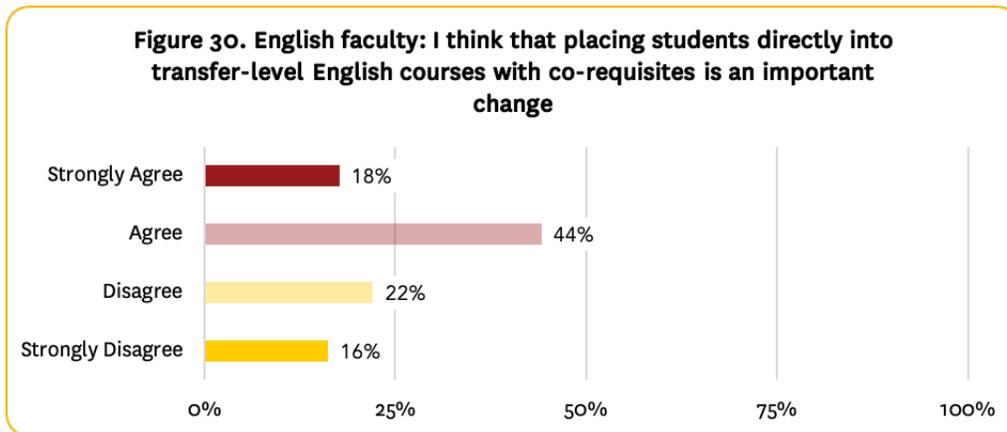
**Figure 29. English faculty's views on multiple measures**



***Mixed beliefs about high school GPA aside, English faculty overwhelmingly supported (89%) the idea that using multiple measures to determine students' course placement is an important change.***

**Curriculum and Support**

Turning to curricular and academic support aspects of AB705, we found that more than half of English faculty (62%) believed that providing co-requisite support for students placed directly into transfer-level English is an important change (Figure 30).



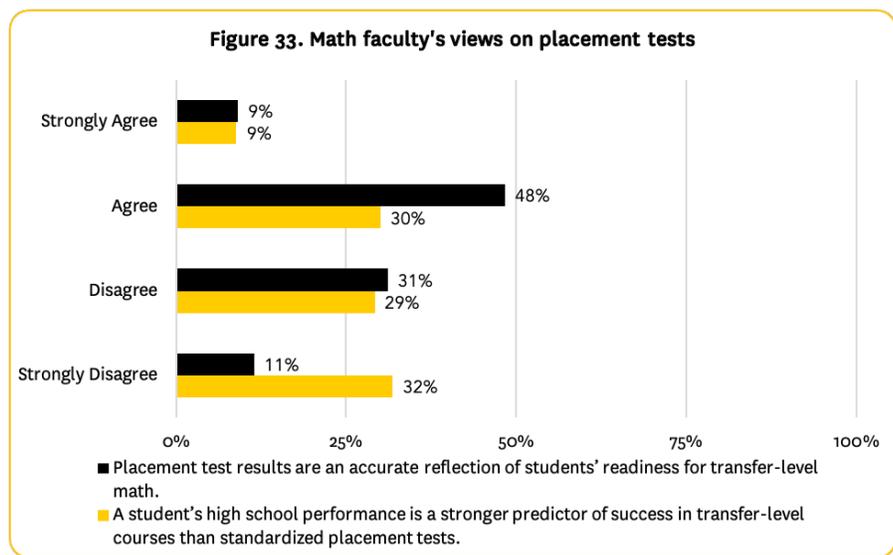
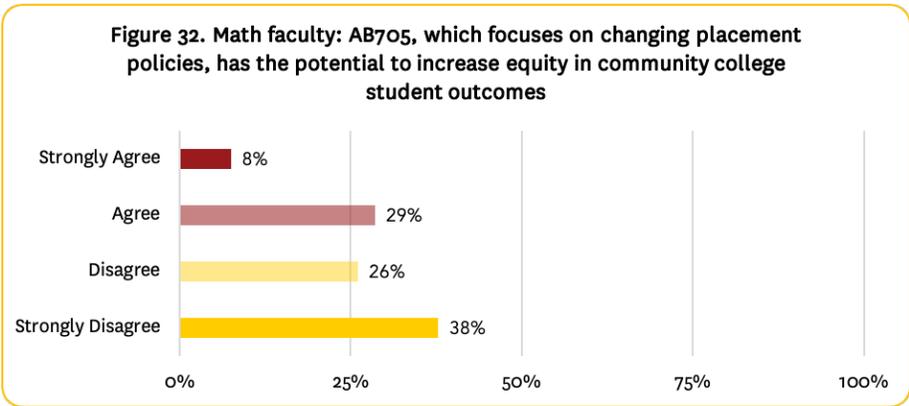
At the same time, 85% of respondents believed that existing developmental education offerings were needed to serve student needs (Figure 31). For example, according to one instructor, developmental English courses helped students “negotiate what was expected of them in [English] 101,” as well as cultivated their study and group discussion skills.

**Key Finding 11**

**Math faculty were less optimistic about the goals and potential of AB705 and were more skeptical of students’ ability. Their views on multiple measures were mostly mixed.**

Close to two-thirds of math faculty respondents did not see AB705 as a tool to improve equity in student outcomes (Figure 32). One instructor’s comments offer insight into how math faculty could be interpreting equity within the context of AB705. They recognized that “AB705’s goal was to

fix those equity gaps that were created” and to address the issue of the “mostly students of color that are stuck in these long, long sequences of math and English remedial courses.” Further, under AB705, they noted that “there [are] higher success rates and more people are going through.” However, with completion data suggesting that “there’s a lot more people failing than before” and that these students tend to be “largely students of color,” this instructor has concluded that “by making this change (i.e., AB705) around equity, we’ve created an inequitable system.”



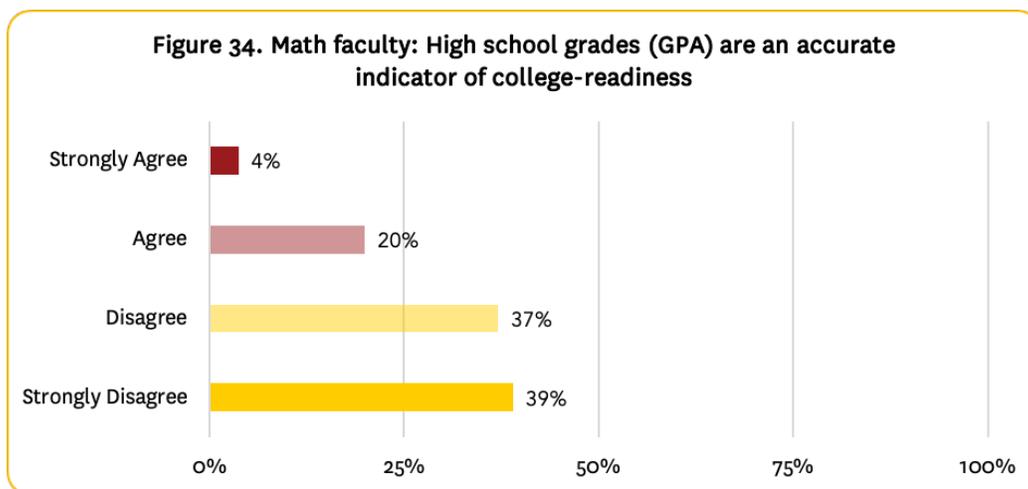
**Assessment & Placement**

More than half of math faculty respondents (57%) agreed or strongly agreed that standardized assessment tests accurately gauge students’ readiness for transfer-level math courses, while 39% felt that high school performance is a stronger predictor for success in these courses (Figure 33).

A math instructor holding the minority view about placement tests explained that while “students need to be sufficient in some skill level,” basing the assessment on one test is questionable at best. They explained that the conditions around taking the test could affect the outcome (“[M]aybe they didn’t have a good day, maybe they found out that it was a pandemic and then they had to take their test the next day”) and that if as an instructor, you want students to be able to explain the procedures, that is not something a test can gauge. As they said, “You don’t get that from a placement test.”

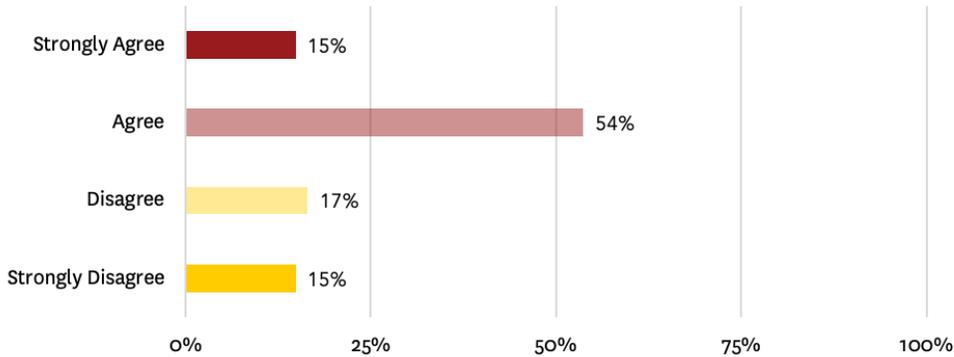
Given that over 60% of respondents said that high school performance is not a stronger predictor of success in transfer-level math, relative to assessment tests, it is perhaps no surprise that 76% do not find high school GPA to be an accurate measure of college readiness (Figure 34). Our interviews suggest that the mistrust in GPA stems in part from the idea that “different high schools have different standards and how they consider passing is different from college as well.” Further, one instructor said:

*“I do not think the curriculum of the same course is identical to what we have. For instance, the pre-calculus course in high school, they have less topic than the pre-calculus course in college. For our college, the pre-calculus course also include trigonometry, but high school does not.”*

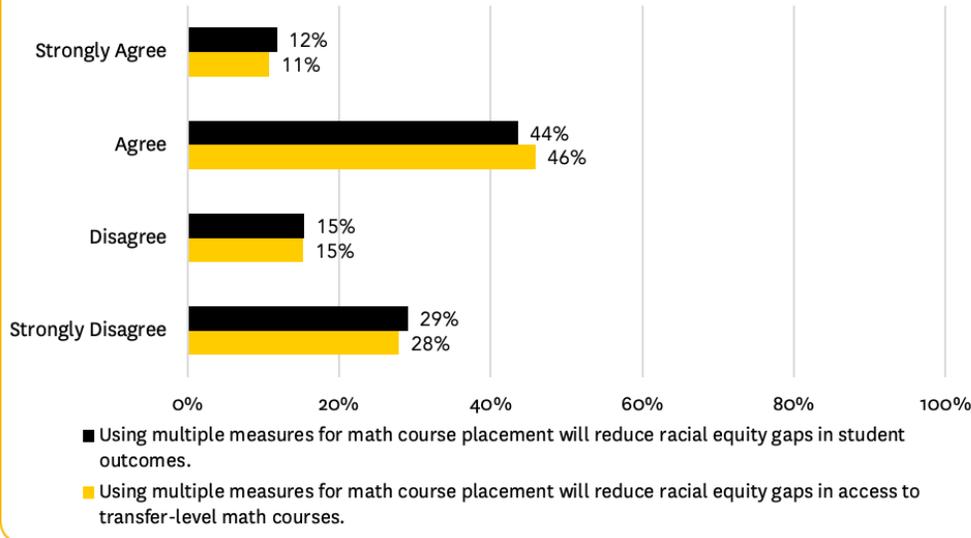


That said, just under 70% of respondents felt that using multiple measures for placement is an important change (Figure 35). Furthermore, despite a majority saying that AB705 is not a tool for reducing racial equity gaps, over half said that using multiple measures for placement should help reduce racial equity gaps in access to transfer-level courses and student outcomes (Figure 36). This suggests many respondents felt that multiple measures could coexist with developmental education.

**Figure 35. Math faculty: Using multiple measures to place students into college math courses is an important change**

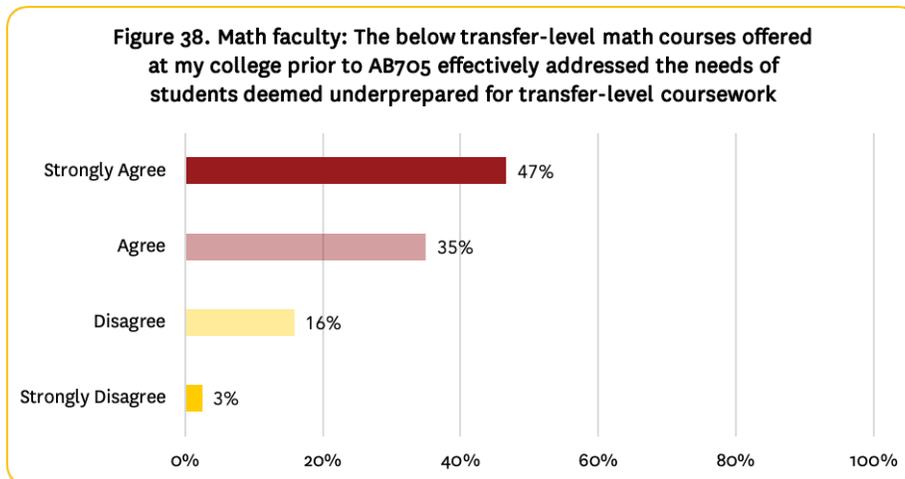
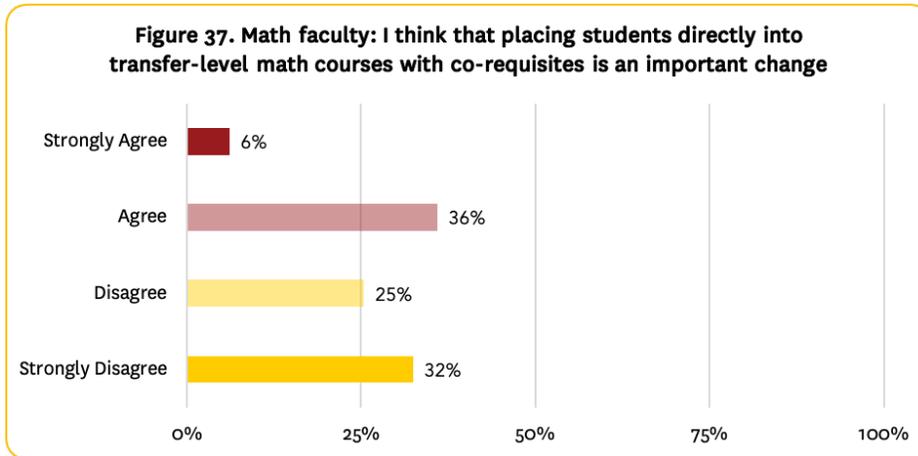


**Figure 36. Math faculty's views on multiple measures**



**Curriculum and Support**

Over half of math faculty respondents do not think placing students in transfer-level math with co-requisite support is an important change, while over 80% believed in the efficacy of developmental math courses to help students get reading for transfer-level math (Figures 37 and 38).



Some math faculty thought the curricular changes brought on by AB705 is going to have a negative impact on students and for equity down the line. They explained:

*“My real concern is how much are we degrading the curriculum that’s actually needed just so we can pass students to say that you know what, look at a great job we did, you passed and you got through, but yet you don’t have the skillsets to truly close that income and equity gap. That to me is the heartbreaking part, that’s where the real crime is....You can try to say, well, let’s modify curriculum, they don’t really need this anymore. It’s like, well, how do they get those jobs then? How do they demonstrate? How do they get those internships? Because the world isn’t kind to people who don’t have skillsets that they can bank on, at least that’s what I’ve seen.”*

## **SUMMARY & IMPLICATIONS**

AB705 has led to substantial progress in student outcomes and changes in practices across LACCD campuses. However, this study of stakeholder’s sensemaking about AB705, including their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the policy and about students, draws attention to additional ways that implementation can be supported.

### **Improve Policy Communication**

First, there is a clear need to improve communication about and understanding of policy goals, policy guidance, and policy successes. While the vast majority of respondents said they were familiar with AB705 goals, they were mixed in their appraisal of whether guidance for implementation was adequate. Our interview data suggests that faculty who were directly involved with implementation first had to negotiate different—at times competing—messages about what is and isn’t possible with AB705. Prior research on sensemaking in policy and reform implementation (e.g., Coburn, 2001; Kezar, 2013) tells us that this is a typical scenario, especially in the early days of implementation. Efforts to make sense of messages, streamline them into coherent guidance, and ensure that the guidance is shared widely are needed.

Also noteworthy is that research was cited as among the most useful sources of information about AB705 but just half of respondents reported receiving information from these sources. Additional support can be given to institutional research offices to increase communication. Research, in particular, analyses of student outcomes, is increasingly crucial for determining whether reforms like AB705 are achieving stated goals and monitoring progress towards those goals. To help ensure that colleges are on track with AB705, access to such research should be broadened, results widely disseminated, and practitioners provided with structured opportunities to make collective sense of outcomes. Research offices should be well-staffed and resourced to support this work.

### **Include More Stakeholders in Planning**

Second, state, district, and college leaders can also include more stakeholders in discussion and planning to work against feelings of alienation and increase buy-in and involvement at every level. Faculty are central players with AB705 and leaders can support their work by meeting them where they are while encouraging continued development, change, and accountability. Specifically, leaders can recognize that AB705 (along with other reforms like Guided Pathways) are fundamentally shifting business-as-usual in the CCCs and that change of this kind and intensity often generates feelings of ambiguity, disagreement, and frustration. They can recognize that despite these feelings, faculty have instituted changes they believe put the college in compliance with AB705, even as they have concerns about what these changes mean for curriculum, their pedagogy, and student learning. They can provide routine occasions for sensemaking, listening, discussion, and reflection about the state-of-affairs under AB705.

### **Address Practitioner's Beliefs**

Finally, survey results show that there is a disconnect between policy implementation and practitioner beliefs in the policy and in students' capacity. Although this may hinder policy compliance, fidelity of implementation, and overall success of the policy, past research shows that belief change may follow changes made in response to the policy (McLaughlin, 1987). It could be worthwhile, therefore, to periodically check-in (formally or informally) with practitioners on how their thinking about AB705 and students' capacity have evolved (if at all) and to discuss why this thinking aligns with or deviates from the letter and spirit of the policy.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Survey: Technical Note**

The survey had four interrelated goals: to (1) determine what stakeholders knew about the policy and implementation, (2) document sources of policy information, (3) identify faculty, staff, and leaders' beliefs as they relate to placement and preparation for college level work, and (4) understand perceived challenges with the policy. The USC-LACCD RPP worked together to draft survey items that captured these categories of information and to determine the survey population. The draft items were also shared with a survey consultant for external review. The final survey had 139 items.

The LACCD provided a list of emails for all English, math, and counseling faculty, and administrators in both academic and student affairs in the district. The RPP sent the survey to these 1,045 email addresses in February 2021. We sent nine reminders and offered incentives to increase the response rate. Each survey responded received a \$20 gift card. By May 2021, 486 individuals completed at least one item, for a response rate of 46.5%.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Glossary**

#### **AB705**

AB705 was signed into law by the Governor on October 13, 2017 and went into effect on January 1, 2018. AB705 requires community colleges to maximize the likelihood that students access and complete transfer-level English and math courses within a one-year time frame. In placing students, colleges are required to use high school achievement measures such as coursework, grades, and grade point average. Source: [California Community College Chancellor's Office](#)

#### **Co-requisite Supports**

In our survey, we defined co-requisite supports as: Co-requisites are one way of reforming traditional models of developmental education, or below transfer-level courses. Co-requisites are meant to provide students with concurrent supports while they are enrolled in transfer-level courses. The concurrent supports are designed so that students will acquire the necessary skills, concepts, and/or information needed to increase their likelihood of passing the transfer-level course.

#### **Default Placement Rules**

The default placement rules provide colleges with a prescribed statistical approach to comply with AB705. A college may implement an alternative placement approach that results in a greater likelihood of completing transfer-level course work than the default rules. If the default placement rules are not employed, local practices must be evaluated and must employ multiple measures and disjunctive placement models that include high school transcript data, as appropriate.

Source: [California Community College Chancellor's Office Memo, July 11, 2018](#)

#### **Multiple Measures**

Colleges must use one or more criteria in determining student placement under AB705. Multiple measures criteria include high school or college transcripts, highest level of coursework completed in a given subject, career/vocational aptitude surveys, education and employment history, military training and experience, specialized certificates or licenses, among others

Source: [California Community College Chancellor's Office](#)

### **One Year Throughput**

Colleges must ensure there are structures and guidance in place such that students can complete transfer-level English and mathematics/quantitative reasoning in two semesters. The new placement policies under AB705 should place most students directly into transfer-level courses, but under these guidelines, any student who is not placed into transfer-level coursework must still have access to curriculum that allows them to complete transfer-level courses within two semesters.

Source: [California Community College Chancellor's Office FAQ](#)

## About the Pullias Center for Higher Education

The world's leading research center on student access and success in higher education, the Pullias Center for Higher Education advances innovative, scalable solutions to improve college outcomes for underserved students and to enhance the performance of postsecondary institutions. The Pullias Center is located within the USC Rossier School of Education, one of the world's premier centers for graduate study in urban education.

Since 1995, the mission of the Pullias Center for Higher Education is to bring a multidisciplinary perspective to complex social, political, and economic issues in higher education. Our work is devoted to the key issues of college access, retention, and accountability for underserved students — and the effectiveness of the colleges and universities that serve them. Both directly and through our research, we engage with institutional leaders, policymakers and the community at large to address the major challenges in educational equity today. For more information, please visit: <https://pullias.usc.edu>

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