

English as a Second Language at California's Community Colleges

An Early Examination of AB 705 Reforms

November 30, 2022

Daniel Payares-Montoya, Olga Rodriguez,
and Laura Hill
with research support from Rogelio Salazar



Supported with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Sutton Family Fund



PPIC

PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

California's future is tied to the success of English Learners

- California Community Colleges (CCCs) educate a large number of English Learners with a wide range of goals
 - About one-third of all ELs intend to pursue a degree or transfer to a four-year college
- English proficiency is related to economic mobility
- Effective and equitable English as a Second Language (ESL) pathways at the CCCs are key
 - ESL placement policies and lengthy ESL course sequences can create barriers to degree- and transferring-intending students

Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705) mandates equity-centered reforms to ESL placement and curricula

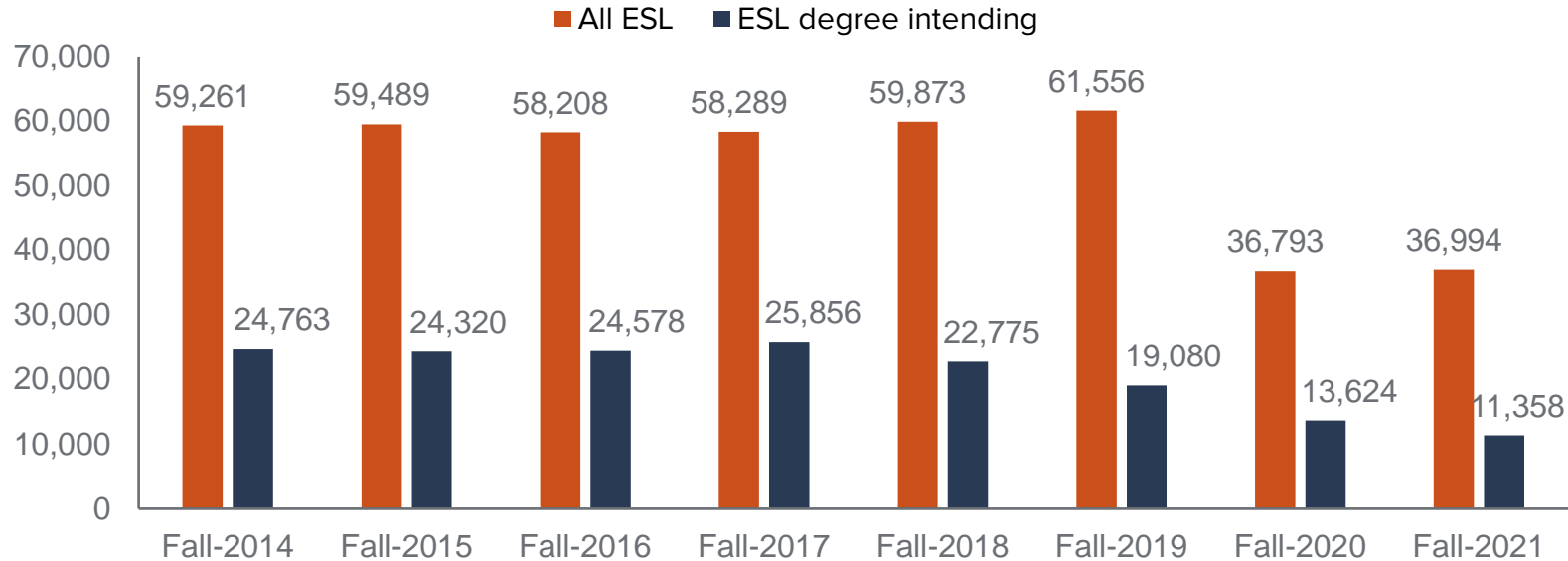
- Requires colleges to maximize the probability that ESL students complete transfer-level English within three years
- Requires colleges to use high school records as the primary criteria for ESL placement
- Clarifies that ESL is distinct from remediation in English
- Implementation of AB 705 ESL reforms began in fall 2021
 - Delayed for a year by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic

Examining early implementation efforts can improve ESL reform

- PPIC assessed changes to ESL placement and course sequences in the first year of AB 705 implementation
 - College websites and documents
 - Student-level data from all 115 colleges
 - Interviews with ESL faculty and department chairs
- We find that AB 705 has led to remarkable changes to placement and credit ESL course sequences
- However, it is challenging to disentangle the effects of the pandemic from the impact of AB 705

The pandemic accelerated pre-existing enrollment challenges

Number of students enrolled in the fall term



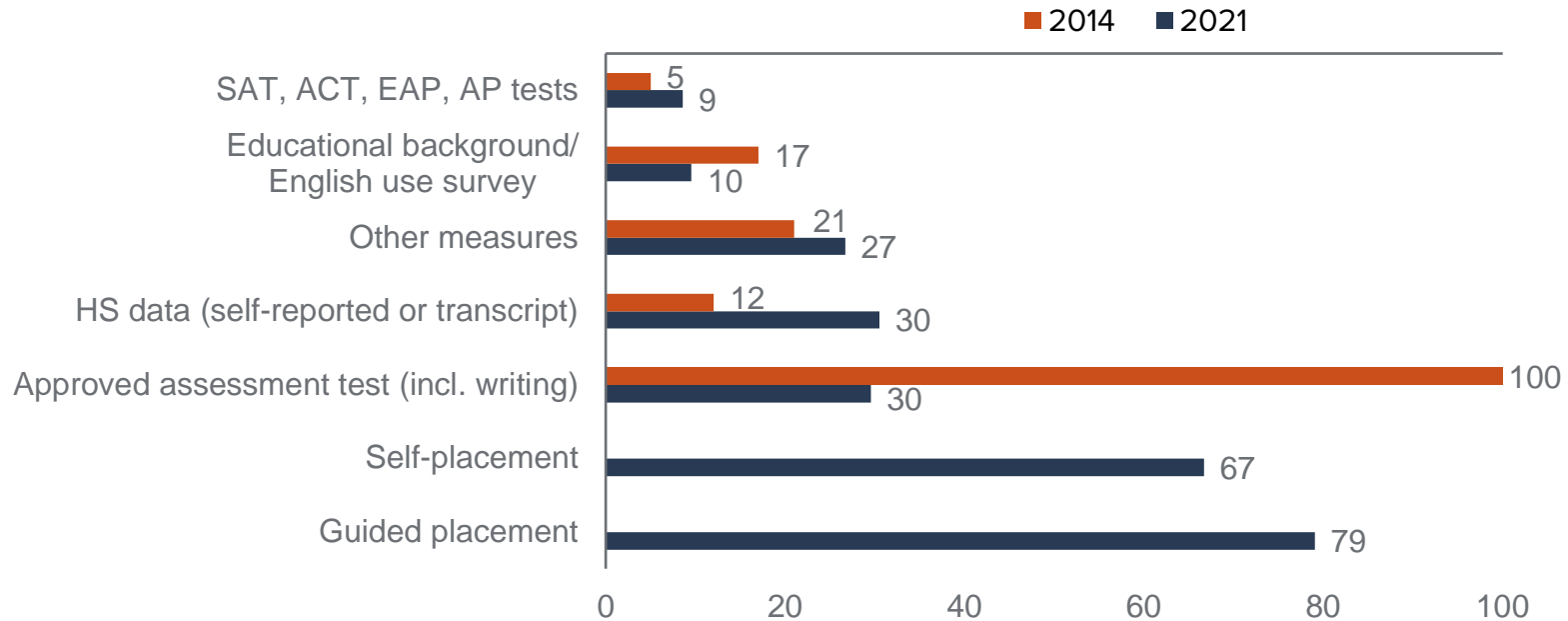
ELs have several pathways to college composition

- **Transfer-level English (TLE):** The lowest-level English courses that are transferable to the University of California and/or to the California State University systems, based on articulation agreements
- **Transfer-level English for ESL students (TLE-ESL):** Freshman composition courses offered by ESL departments and that also qualify as gateway courses
- **Transfer-level English for Multilingual speakers (TLE-Multi):** TLE courses designed to provide additional language support for ELs in the classroom or through corequisite courses

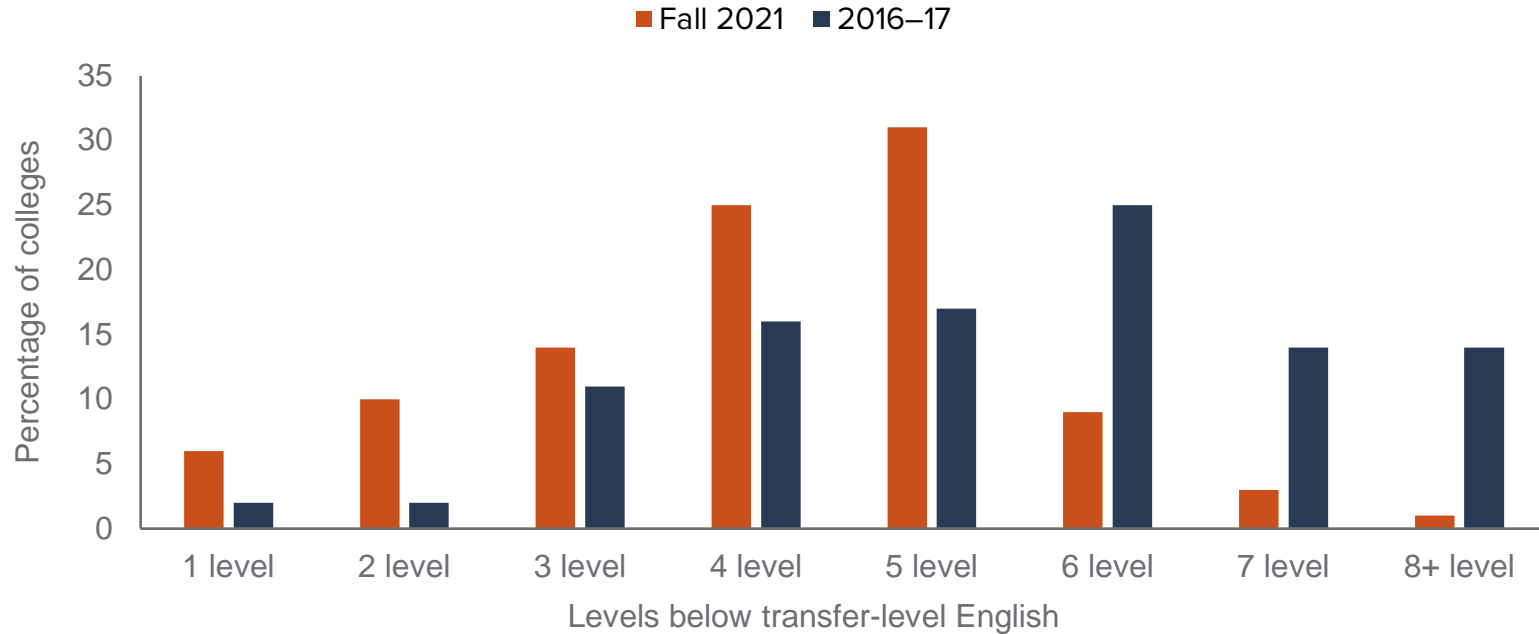
Colleges made great strides in implementing AB 705 despite COVID-19 challenges

Most colleges have moved away from standardized tests for ESL placement

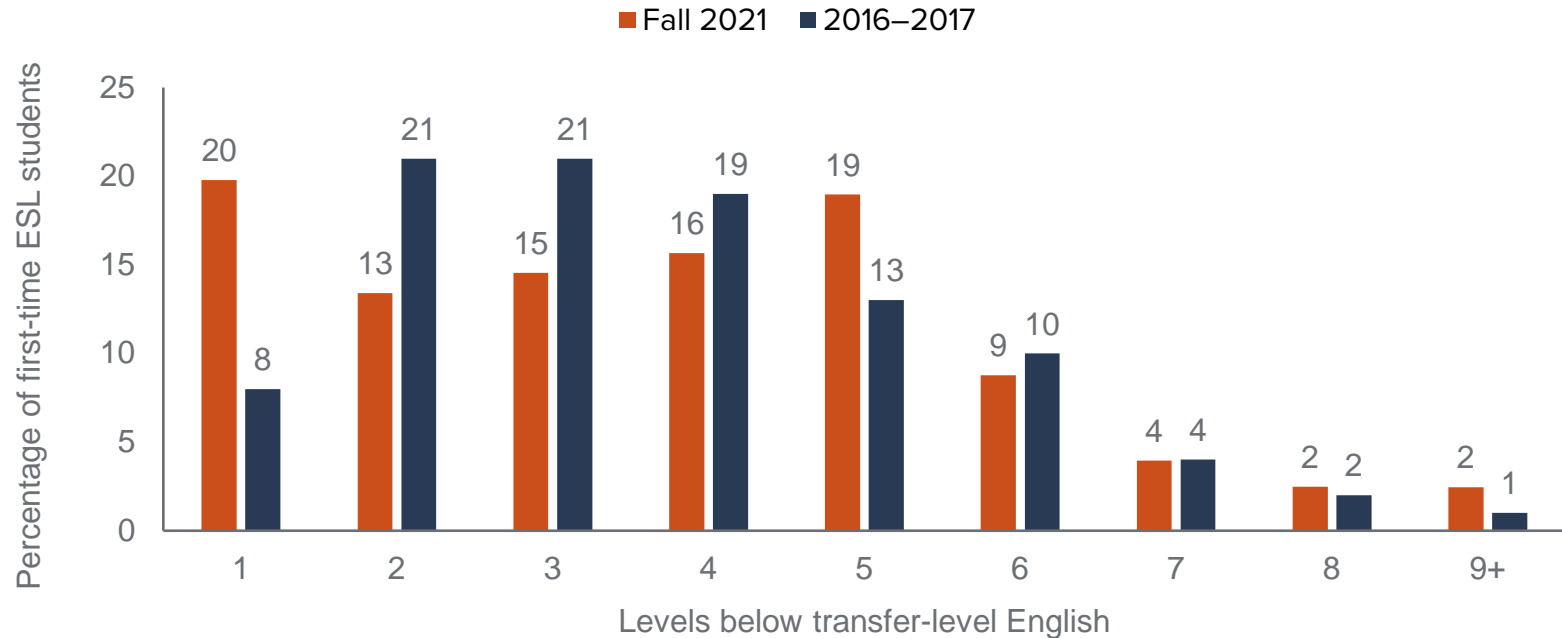
Placement policies used by community colleges



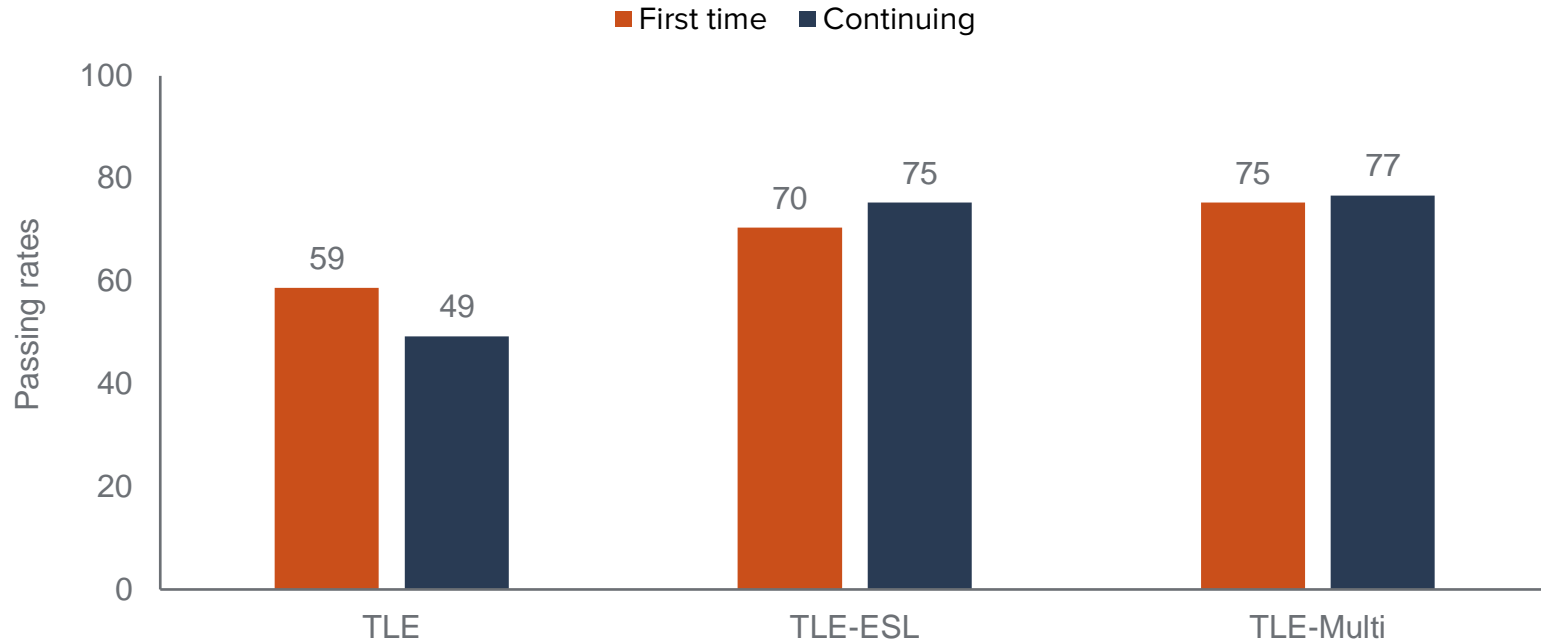
Most ESL course sequences are now four levels or less



Under AB 705, first-time ESL students are more likely to start one level below TLE

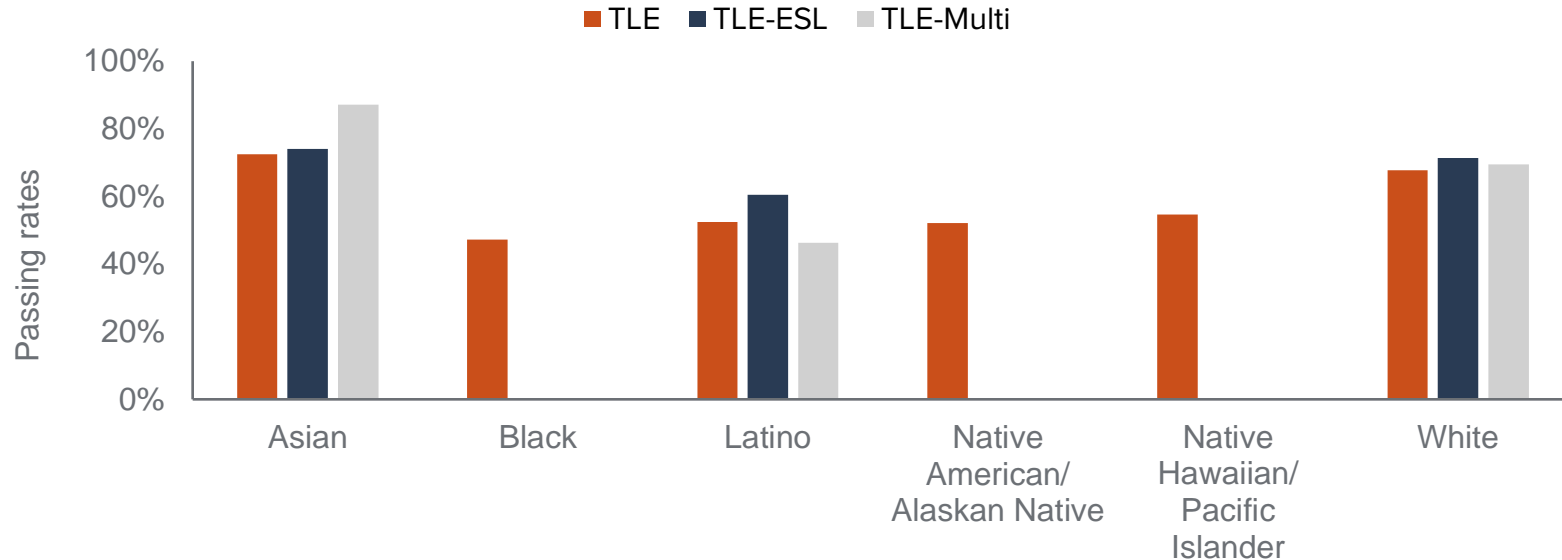


Passing rates are higher in courses designed for ESL or multilingual students



TLE-ESL passing rates are higher than TLE passing rates for all racial/ethnic groups

Passing rates for first-time students in transfer-level English



Outcomes vary across academic backgrounds and citizenship statuses

- US citizens are more likely to pass a standard TLE course
 - Passing rates are very similar for US high school graduates in TLE and TLE-ESL, and 7 to 8 percentage points higher in TLE-Multilingual
- Permanent residents and student visa holders are the most likely to pass TLE-ESL courses
- International high school graduates in TLE-Multilingual classes outperform those in TLE-ESL

Policy recommendations

- Expand access to college composition to all English Learners
- Monitor the validity and effectiveness of placement rules
- Make connections between ESL reforms and other systemwide initiatives
- Provide guidance and information to support ongoing implementation efforts
- Establish a longitudinal data system that identifies ELs across educational systems

Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

Olga Rodriguez (rodriguez@ppic.org)

Laura Hill (hill@ppic.org)

Daniel Payares-Montoya (payares@ppic.org)

Thank you for your interest in this work.