



Peer tutor Josh DeSalles (left) assists student Jean Rago in the Columbia College Academic Achievement Center.  
*Photo by Gail Segerstrom*

# EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

**2015**

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office  
Brice W. Harris, Chancellor

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March 3, 2015

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
Governor of California  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

I am pleased to present the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office 2015 report on the Early Assessment Program.

The report is written in accordance with the Education Code, which requires the California Community Colleges to make a one-time report to your office and the Legislature concerning the implementation and results of the program.

The program began in 2004 and is a collaborative effort between the California Community Colleges, California State University, California Department of Education, and the State Board of Education to determine high school student readiness for college-level work and to provide students the opportunity to improve their academic skills in their senior year. This report details the work the program has done in pursuing those objectives and how the program has responded to the Common Core State Standards.

If you or your staff have any questions regarding the program, please feel free to contact my office.

Thank you for your interest in the Early Assessment Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brice W. Harris".

Brice W. Harris  
Chancellor



# EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Community Colleges serves approximately 2.1 million students each year and is the largest system of higher education in the nation. The state's 112 community colleges are charged with providing workforce training, basic skills education and preparing students to transfer to four-year universities. Currently, 78 of our 112 community colleges accept an Early Assessment Program college-ready result in English and/or math in lieu of their own assessments for placement into transfer-level courses.

This report is written in response to Education Code section 99301, which requires the California Community Colleges Board of Governors to make a one-time report to the governor and the Legislature on the implementation and results of the Early Assessment Program.

California's K-12 and higher education partners have made great progress in the past two years ushering in the Common Core State Standards and new assessments to better prepare students for college and careers. This effort has included the planning to transition the Early Assessment Program to the new assessments and standards.

The completion rates for community college students who come to our campuses prepared to do college-level work is 70 percent, while the rate for students needing remedial instruction is 40 percent. In order to continue to give early signals about their readiness for college-level English and math courses, the California Community Colleges intends to join the California State University in defining, for the purposes of the Early Assessment Program, Smarter Balanced Level 4 as college-ready, Level 3 as conditionally ready and Levels 1 and 2 as not ready.

### Background of Early Assessment Program

Implemented in 2004, the Early Assessment Program is a collaborative effort between the California State

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University, the California Department of Education and the State Board of Education to determine high school student readiness for college-level work in English and math and to provide students the opportunity to improve skills during their senior year. On Sept. 28, 2008, Gov. Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill 946 (Scott) enabling the California Community Colleges to implement the Early Assessment Program. The legislation required that the same standards used by the California State University to assess college readiness also be used by participating California community colleges. Currently, 78 of the 112 community colleges participate in the Early Assessment Program. Participating colleges accept a college-ready result in English and/or math in lieu of their own assessments for placement into transfer-level courses. Also, in many areas of the state there are local partnerships of K-12 districts, community college and California State University campuses using the Early Assessment Program to better align courses and advise students about readiness for college and career.

The Early Assessment Program was designed to build off of the state's Standards Testing and Reporting accountability program for public K-12 schools. High school juniors taking the California Standards Tests had the option of completing fifteen additional multiple-choice questions on both the math and English tests, as well as writing a separate essay. Students receive their test results during the summer before their senior year. Students who demonstrate proficiency for college-level coursework are exempt from taking the California State University and participating California community college placement tests for English and

math. These students move directly into college-level classes upon enrollment. Students who are identified as conditionally college ready in English or math will need to take an approved subject matter class and earn a “C” or higher in their senior year in order to be exempt from placement testing in those subjects upon entering the California State University. Individual community colleges will establish requirements for students to demonstrate readiness at their respective campuses.

### Legislative Changes

Assembly Bill 484 (Bonilla), effective Jan. 1, 2014, eliminates the existing Standards Testing and Reporting accountability program and establishes the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress System, which will include the Early Assessment Program. The foundation of the new assessment system is the Smarter Balanced computer-based assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Previously, only 11th grade students who were eligible to take the California Standards Tests for English–Language Arts and Algebra II or Summative High School Mathematics were eligible to participate. The transition to the new assessment allows for the Early Assessment Program to be embedded in the new exam with no additional questions required. This change allows all California 11th grade students to participate in the Early Assessment Program and receive early signals about their readiness for college-level English and math courses.

Senate Bill 490 (Jackson), also effective Jan. 1, 2014, aligns the Early Assessment Program to the Common Core State Standards. This bill also requires common standards of college-readiness for community colleges and the California State University. The required commonality of standards is consistent with efforts of the community colleges to communicate to high school students, parents and personnel that while community colleges are open to all students, entering a community college with basic skills deficiencies results in lost time and money to take courses that teach skills equivalent to high school grade-level standards. Data is clear that students who are unprepared for college-level work when they enroll are significantly less likely to complete a degree or certificate, or transfer. Data from the Student Success Scorecard

shows that for a cohort tracked for six years through 2012-13, students that are prepared have a completion rate of 70.2 percent compared to a completion rate of 40.5 percent for unprepared students.

### Common Core State Standards

Since 2010, a number of states across the nation have adopted the same standards for English and math. These standards are called the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards for K-12 in English-language arts and math were adopted by the State Board of Education on Aug. 2, 2010. The Common Core State Standards were developed through a state-led initiative to establish consistent and clear education standards for English-language arts and math that would better prepare students for success in the competitive global economy. The standards were created to ensure that all students, regardless of what state they are from, graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career and life. . Forty-three states, the District of Columbia, four territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity have voluntarily adopted the Common Core.

The California Community Colleges began its work on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards prior to Senate Bill 490. The California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force focused its first recommendation on working with the superintendent of public instruction and the State Board of Education to support implementation of the Common Core and new assessments, including the Early Assessment Program, understanding that the systems must work together to stem the tide of students graduating from high school who need remediation in college. The Chancellor’s Office Advisory Committee on College and Career Readiness and the Common Core was formed in 2012 to provide a forum for representatives from key California Community Colleges stakeholder groups to understand national and state efforts to implement the Common Core State Standards and accompanying K-12 assessments and to provide input on California Community Colleges alignment with K-12, definitions of college and career readiness and the transition of the Early Assessment Program.

## Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) is a state-led consortium working to develop next-generation assessments that accurately measure student progress toward college- and career-readiness. Smarter Balanced is one of two multistate consortia awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 to develop an assessment system aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The State Board of Education voted to join the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium in May 2011.

The Chancellor's Office and California community college faculty have invested significant effort in development of the Smarter Balanced 11th grade assessment, and beginning in spring 2015 will become the basis of the Early Assessment Program. Most of these efforts have been intersegmental and collaborative, with the understanding that California's objective is a common standard of career and college readiness that is aligned with 11th and 12th grade content standards.

Each Smarter Balanced state has identified a higher education lead to serve as a liaison between Smarter Balanced and their state's higher education institutions. Due to its size, California has three higher education leads, one representing each of its public higher education systems: the California State University, University of California and California Community Colleges. Higher education leads are involved in key design decisions with the goal that colleges and universities across Smarter Balanced member states accept an agreed-upon achievement level on the assessment as evidence that high school students are ready for entry level, credit-bearing coursework. Major areas of work for higher education have included:

- Expert advice from higher education faculty in the areas of educational measurement, math, English-language arts and special student populations, including students with disabilities and English language learners;
- Development of the Consortium's College Content-Readiness Policy;
- Design of resources on career readiness for voluntary use by states; and

- Development of Achievement Level Descriptors in English-Language Arts/literacy and math that provide detailed information on what students should know and be able to do at each of four achievement levels on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

The California Community Colleges had significant input on the Achievement Level Setting for the Achievement Level Descriptors that will become the new Early Assessment Program. Achievement level setting, also known as standard setting, is the process for establishing one or more threshold scores on an assessment, making it possible to create categories of performance. In April, Smarter Balanced Governing States approved a three-phase design for achievement level setting. An online panel allowed thousands of K-12 educators, higher education faculty, parents and other interested parties to participate virtually in recommending achievement levels. An in-person panel with educators and other stakeholders working in grade-level teams deliberated and made recommendations for the threshold scores of the four achievement levels. The Cross-Grade Review Committee, a subset of the in-person panel, examined recommendations across all grades to consider the reasonableness of the system of cut scores. California Community Colleges faculty participated in the in-person and online panel. More than half of California's online panel participants were California Community Colleges faculty.

## Early Assessment Program Implementation Data

Currently, 78 of the 112 community colleges participate in the Early Assessment Program. Dr. Michal Kurlander, of the University of California, Davis, conducted a systemwide California community college study on the Early Assessment Program, "Assessing the Promise of California's Early Assessment Program for Community Colleges." In the study, Dr. Kurlander matched Early Assessment Program and other test score data for California high school juniors to data from California community colleges to investigate the extent to which high school student participation in the Early Assessment Program predicts their college course placement and influences their future academic performance. The study shows that very few stu-

## Early Assessment Program (EAP) Participation and Performance among First-Time Freshmen Attending California Community Colleges

	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Participate in English EAP	26,688	45.94%	34,995	52.18%	42,686	58.58%	67,111	82.02%	72,312	85.55%
Exempt on English	3,973	14.89%	5,804	16.59%	6,912	16.19%	8,318	12.39%	9,849	13.62%
Qualified to take math EAP	26,187	45.08%	31,447	46.89%	35,589	48.84%	41,927	51.24%	45,733	54.10%
Participate in math EAP	18,737	71.55%	21,328	67.82%	25,475	71.58%	29,087	69.38%	31,594	69.08%
Conditional exempt on math	6,835	36.48%	8,211	38.50%	9,451	37.10%	10,918	37.52%	12,395	39.16%
Exempt on math	869	4.64%	1,055	4.95%	1,308	5.13%	1,710	5.88%	2,016	6.37%

The table above (Kurlander, 2014) shows that Early Assessment Program participation in English increased from 46 percent in 2005, the first year of the program, to 86 percent by the fifth year of the program.

Kurlander, D. M. (2014). Assessing the Promise of California's Early Assessment Program for Community Colleges. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 44-46.

dents enter the California Community Colleges ready for college-level work based on the Early Assessment Program exam.

### Conclusion

Over the last two years our system has collaborated with K-12, the two other public higher education segments and the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium to transition California to the Common Core State Standards, which includes the Early Assessment Program. The California Community Colleges intends to join the California State University in defining, for the purposes of the Early Assessment Program, Smarter Balanced Level 4 as college-ready, Level 3 as conditionally ready and Levels 1 and 2 as not ready. The new version of the Early Assessment Program, using the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessment, is completely embedded in the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress System. This change will allow all California 11th grade students to participate in the Early Assessment Program and receive information on their college-readiness levels. The California Community Colleges also intends to continue to look for ways to partner with the California State University, University of California and K-12 to improve the numbers of students achieving Levels 3 and 4, and to work with those who do not

demonstrate college-readiness during their senior year to avoid the need for remediation after graduation. The Board of Governors is again sponsoring legislation to expand opportunities for California community colleges to partner with their proximate school districts to provide options for students who score below Level 3, with the goal of raising their skill levels in the 12th grade. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office will continue to monitor California's transition of the Early Assessment Program and the implementation process at participating community colleges.





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