



# Navigators of Critical Reform

## California Community College Counseling Faculty as Agents of Change in Implementing AB 705

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**THE ENACTMENT OF ASSEMBLY BILL 705** marked a pivotal moment in community college policy in California. Before this landmark legislation took effect in 2018, the great majority of students enrolling in the California Community Colleges (CCC) were required to take exams to determine their English and mathematics course placements. Many, predominantly students of color, were placed in developmental, non-credit coursework that slowed or stalled their progress to degree. AB 705 ended the use of high-stakes tests in favor of multiple measures to make college-level placement as the default. Early outcomes indicate that more students are now enrolling directly – and succeeding – in credit-bearing, transfer-level English and math.<sup>1</sup>

Given their role in guiding first-time student course selection, CCC counselors have played a critical part in institutional adaptation to meet the requirements of the new law. This brief provides an overview of findings from research examining the experiences of CCC counselors as they implemented AB 705. Drawn from in-depth individual interviews with 30 counselors from 16 Hispanic-serving community colleges (HSCC), this research informs our understanding of how counselors navigated this major statewide restructuring of course enrollment processes. It also provides a rare opportunity to witness a significant state policy shift in motion through the eyes of key players who sit at the fulcrum of adaptation.

### AB 705: Background and Context

In January 2018, AB 705 took effect in the California Community College system. The evidenced-based bill requires all community college CEOs to maximize the likelihood of a student completing transfer-level math and English coursework within a year of enrolling. The bill also requires that counselors use multiple measures (such as high school coursework)

#### TOPLINES

- > The availability of research-based recommendations and data on student outcomes supports both counseling and academic faculty in understanding and embracing the need for the changes required by AB 705.
- > Collaboration among counseling, math, and English faculty facilitates the implementation of changes required by AB 705, but levels of collaboration vary considerably by campus.
- > Community college CEOs are instrumental in fostering collaborative and equity-minded efforts because they establish and model asset-based expectations.
- > Counseling faculty vary in their attempt to contextualize individual student needs when advising students about enrollment in math and English. This underscores the need to ensure that counselors advise through an equity-minded approach.
- > When colleges establish institutional resources to support students, such as robust tutoring centers and in-class tutoring, the colleges facilitate both the advising process and students' ability to complete college courses.



as opposed to assessment test scores to place students in English and math courses.<sup>2</sup> Before AB 705, students in California community colleges likely completed their first semester and often their first year without receiving any guidance from counselors.<sup>3</sup> Multiple research studies indicated that students were enrolled in developmental courses erroneously.<sup>4</sup>

The positive impact of AB 705 on course completion is clear. However, if a counselor determines that a student would be better supported by enrolling in a course that is below college level math and/or English, the counselor can advise the student as such, if the college continues to offer non-credit courses. The Public Policy Institute of California found that colleges that followed the default college-level course placement rules have a 62% rate of one-term throughput, meaning students complete the courses in which they are enrolled with a passing grade.<sup>5</sup> Colleges that adopt stricter placement rules have a lower throughput rate: 57%. Furthermore, racialized equity gaps persist in both math and English; Black students who enrolled in mathematics for the first-time had 27% one-term throughput rates, Latino students had 33%, white students had 49%, and Asian American students had 57%.<sup>6</sup> Prior to AB705, throughput rates ranged from 9% to 30% even after three years of math enrollment in pre-college level courses. Today, as implementation of AB 705 is underway, much work is needed to better understand the placement process and equity implications of AB 705.

## The Critical Role of Counselors

Counseling faculty play an instrumental role in supporting students with enrollment, course selection and transition to community college – a role that has increased in influence under AB 705.<sup>7</sup> Student interactions with counselors have a long-term impact on their interactions with faculty and overall academic adjustment.<sup>8</sup> In particular, Latina/o/x students tend to meet with counselors instead of academic faculty.<sup>9</sup>

One study showed that, when enrolling students who had graduated from an under-resourced high school, community college outreach counselors steered students into career and technical education pathways but did not provide guidance about transfer pathways, which the majority of students had hoped to pursue.<sup>10</sup> Another study showed that, prior to AB 705, counselors at a Southern California community college engaged in racial sorting based on deficit beliefs that Latina/o/x students have lower abilities than their white counterparts.<sup>11</sup> Because counseling faculty play an essential role in enrolling and establishing pathways for students, it is vital to examine their perspectives and experiences with implementing AB 705. Their pandemic-context approaches to AB 705 implementation are also important to understand.

### DATA AND METHODS

The study on which this brief is based draws data from semi-structured interviews with 30 counselors who work at 16 different Hispanic-serving Community Colleges (HSCC) throughout California. Given student demographics in the California Community Colleges and the increasing number designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), the study focused on CCCs that are designated as HSIs. Data for this study included semi-structured interviews with 30 counselors. Initially, the study aimed to be a comparative case study with intentional recruitment at four community colleges. Due to limited participation, the study expanded to include counselors from all Hispanic Serving Community Colleges. Participants were recruited through snowball and network sampling. Participation flyers were shared through professional networks and on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

The experience levels of participating counselors ranged from being in the apprenticeship stage when AB 705 was being implemented to working for more than 20 years as a tenured counseling professor. Five participants were part-time counselors. One was dean of the counseling department and

had been a counselor previously. Three were serving as chairs of the counseling department at the time of the interview. Data were transcribed by Rev.com and Zoom transcripts; transcripts were shared with the participants to ensure trustworthiness.<sup>12</sup> The transcribed interviews were read thoroughly both to understand the connection with pre-determined codes that aligned with both the focus of the study and to document codes that emerged from the data.<sup>13</sup> This process entailed developing a codebook, which included emotion coding, process coding, values coding, and versus coding, among others. For example, versus coding is particularly helpful for policy studies and relevant when outcomes contrast one another,<sup>14</sup> which supported the comparison in enrollment processes before and after AB 705. Data were then categorized based on emergent themes. In this brief, pseudonyms are used to present counselor quotes that exemplify key approaches that various counselors took to meet student needs when assessing for placement in mathematics courses delivered primarily online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, key concerns are highlighted from equity-minded counseling faculty who aimed to meet student needs.

Because counselors in this study were equity-focused, they emphasized the importance of faculty maintaining an asset-based perspective of students in departments across campus.

## Findings

### Access to Data Informed the Sensemaking Process

Counseling faculty emphasized the importance of understanding student success data prior to implementing AB 705. Having access to data helped counselors negotiate their personal understanding of developmental education and provided the evidence for eliminating the institutional obstacle of high-stakes assessments that hindered the pathways to postsecondary success.

*We get information emailed through the Chancellor's Office. We've also gone to conferences and workshops, and we knew... this was coming. I remember the uproar...in 2015 or 2016... Oh my gosh, some counselors were vehemently against, what, asking questions instead of an assessment? Well, little did they know, that I actually skipped that process in the 1990s. We still [had students take]... an assessment but it was just recommended prerequisites. We could skip [students], all the way to college level and I actually did that because I have a math phobia.*

College CEOs, deans, and department chairs influenced faculty perceptions, with leaders in a position to broker information to faculty and ease deficit-minded concerns. Campus leaders also influenced faculty collaboration across departments by addressing faculty fears that students would not be prepared to complete college-level math and English courses. Thus, faculty learned about the potential success rates that could be achieved through the changes required by AB 705, which helped soften initial pushback and facilitated a collaborative process to implement the required changes.

*We didn't get too much pushback, and the pushback that we did get, we were able to go, "Here's why." Our math faculty and ... English faculty all went to those AB 705 workshops with counselors and we were able to provide them with the data for your hardcore data nuts. We were able to thrive with a little more of the student story for your pull-on-the-heart-string nuts. We were able to cover most of our bases, but yeah, amazing math and English faculty at (my college). It was a big group effort.*

For (math) faculty, having access to data and colleagues, deans, and department chairs who challenge deficit perspectives were particularly important. Through the use of data, faculty were able to make sense of the needed changes and the approach required by AB 705. The initial resistance to what felt like drastic changes subsided once the data consistently reinforced that AB 705 was beneficial to student outcomes.

*There was definitely some pushback from the math department, there was some pushback and some showing displeasure and unease with, "Oh, what's going to happen to my full load?"... There was obviously concern at the very beginning, "Well, how the heck are we going to cram all of that into a semester?"... I think once the core folks got together and started to look at and design the curriculum a little bit more, they didn't have a choice, the folks that were showing pushback. They had no choice. They had to figure it out...Now that things are clearer, now that the dust has settled, now that there's more data...we can look at trends, we can look at patterns, we can better understand those. I think now it's, "Okay, this is what's in the best interest of students."*

### Collaborations Among Math, English, and Counseling Faculty Matter

Counselors from five campuses emphasized their negative experiences with faculty in the mathematics department. Counselors believed that math faculty expressed deficit concerns about students not being academically prepared to engage in college-level courses. Because counselors in this study were equity-focused, they emphasized the importance of faculty maintaining an asset-based perspective of students in departments across campus. The interactions between counselors and academic faculty with deficit perspectives signal the perceptions that students likely encounter in the classroom. Some counselors believed such deficit perspectives were primarily held by faculty who had been teaching in the college for years, not by faculty hired recently. A counselor at a rural HSCC elaborated on the tensions with math faculty:

*A lot of times...they see us [counselors] as less than faculty. In my mind, it's almost as if the instructors have the ultimate decisions of what happens at the college...A lot of them, they didn't feel that students could. Especially, these are more of the ones who are, I want to say, seasoned, for lack of better word. The ones who have been around for a long time were the ones who were basically saying that, "This isn't going to work. These students are going to fail out of these courses, they're not going to be successful." The newer instructors were a little bit more on board and they've been working on creating videos and doing workshops with students to help them be successful.*

Equity-minded faculty, deans and department chairs invested in collaborations to develop and implement curricular changes aligned with AB 705. Another counselor reinforced the importance of leaders and faculty maintaining asset-based perceptions. Having equity-minded individuals in positions of power throughout various levels of the institution facilitated the process of implementing AB 705:

*We had a group of new faculty, staff, and administrators coming in, replacing the ones who had been here for a while. In fact, my dean just retired. She's been at (this college) for 40 years...These new instructors, these new staff and some new administrators and new counselors are very much on board of being quite innovative because we are a smaller campus... Our math and English department rocked it. They made our job easier as counselors. Like I said, they were very smart. They were very non-siloed, which is amazing.*

The equity-minded approach enhanced the development of co-curricular support coursework when implementing AB 705. As such, instead of allocating the remaining developmental courses to adjunct faculty, department leadership ensured that faculty who were passionate about teaching would be assigned such courses.

*There were concerns about, "Well, what happens if students can't do well in English 101?"...Our chair of English...He was like, "The English department is operating under the policy that we believe every student can be successful in college composition..." It was a very "students first" approach. Of course, we did put in English 101 with support, and we did offer a few of our pre-baccalaureate English classes for those students who felt they really needed it. Those were taught by faculty who have a real big passion for students, with a record for having passion for students...*

*Our English department and our math department selected to build up that confidence to build those skills. Like I said, we're really fortunate, considering that we have those connections with English and math that really greeted AB 705 with open arms. There wasn't too much discussion about this in Academic Senate rather than just "How are we going to make it work?"*

## Campus Culture Facilitated Policy Implementation

Counselors noted that campus culture also influenced their efforts to collaborate with math and English faculty. Two counselors from a small suburban campus featured student-centered faculty in various positions, from the classroom to the faculty senate to the administration. As such, the collaboration and capacity to understand data allowed for the implementation of AB 705 from an asset-based and equity-minded perspective. Thus, faculty understood and addressed the need to institutionalize student support systems to ensure they were not reproducing different inequities when implementing changes.

Within larger colleges, fostering collaborative relationships was even more important to facilitate the process of implementing AB 705. Building relationships outside departmental silos facilitated collaboration between counseling and academic faculty. However, at one college, the collaborative culture was established only between the English and counseling faculty and did not include the mathematics department:

*Part of the reason why I think we have a better relationship with the English department is that even...before the pandemic... I remember one time we went bowling, which seems super silly, but to have community outside of a workspace, I think is helpful. I think that would be super helpful if we ever did that with the math department...I think some of the friction that we have with the math department definitely impacts how we help students. Any friction across any department...I think if we all just had more community on campus, that would really help. And if people actually knew each other by first name and stuff like that, that would help a lot to ensure that we are helping students... (this college) overall is a really great place to work, but I think that that community, I think especially because we've been away, has been lost a little bit, even amongst us counselors.*

An interim dean of counseling focused on sharing data with faculty early in the process after learning about AB 705. Through a meeting between math, English, and counseling administrators, the college determined the best course of action. Unlike other colleges represented in this study, instead of easing the transition by slowly reducing the number of developmental education sections, this college agreed to eliminate the sections at once and move forward with meeting requirements before the AB 705 implementation deadline:

*I sent the information to all of the members of the committees, so that all of the stakeholders would know...I kept tracking the progress on the bill. Then in fall of that year, every month I would give updates as part of the agenda on the meeting... The counseling chair would then forward that information to the counseling department to let them know what was going on. In January of the following year...I pulled together the dean of English, the dean of math, the chair of English, the chair of math. I happened to be over assessment, the chair of counseling. Brought them together, and we sat together and talked about the legislation and how we might address it at (this college). We all sat, discussed and really, we negotiated with each other and determined that at (this college) moving forward, we would lift all prerequisites of all courses all at once.*

However, not having equity-minded institutional agents in various areas of the college resulted in challenges to developing student-centered changes in alignment with AB 705. In such cases, equity-minded individuals had to advocate for the negotiated changes. Moreover, the implementation of changes in alignment with AB 705 did not result in enhancing equity-minded perspectives. The general assumption for math faculty at one campus was that students would fail college-level math because they would not have access to developmental courses. In other words, math faculty did not believe that students at their college, 66% of whom identified as Latina/o/x, were academically capable of passing college-level math:

*I remember being in that room for a couple hours, going back and forth...it was quite dramatic...Myself and an assessment staff member went to the Academic Senate Executive Committee and basically said, "Hey, this legislation passed...We all met and this is what we are recommending. We need your support, and these are other reasons why we want to move forward." The Senate then took that to the actual senators and they all voted unanimously...*

*In some ways, on some occasions it almost felt like some math faculty were like, "Well, they're going to fail anyway. We'll keep getting the courses out. They're going to have to come repeat it anyway." Which is terrible, I mean, I literally have heard that verbally communicated publicly.*

## Individual Student Needs and Context Also Mattered

Equity-minded faculty also resisted changes required by AB 705, as evidenced by attempts to ensure that English Learner students, first-generation students, and foster youth would continue to have access to institutional resources, even if pre-college-level coursework was reduced or eliminated. Prior to AB 705, some colleges had established professional development opportunities for faculty who taught developmental education courses. Counselors did not want AB 705 to eliminate existing practices that benefited students. In particular, counselors were fearful that existing support systems would be dismantled. When college faculty worked collaboratively across the English, math, and counseling departments, both students and faculty could be informed about what courses and support systems were available to students. Such proactive collaboration addressed both faculty and student concerns during such an immense transition. While co-curricular coursework was developed, counselors had to trust that the support would be enough for specific student populations. Another counselor provided further insight into the tensions experienced by faculty:

*For students who were English learners, it was like, "We're forcing them to go into this."...It was a tough transition...I was the co-chair of the basic skills committee, (we) ...made sure that we offered support and that support could come in a form of... different type of training so that (instructors) could do different activities with their students to try to increase their math and English levels. Being part of that committee and hearing like, "Oh, no, we're going to just shut all this down?"...I worked for a program specifically with counseling that focuses on first-generation low-income foster youth...There was a lot of concern that our students would start to get lost in the shuffle because they couldn't keep up with starting at college-level English or college-level math. There was a lot of pushback in the beginning and we were pretty nervous, but all we could say is, "Well, we have these support classes in place."*

Another concern centered on students with disabilities. Every counselor interviewed iterated the importance of serving students adequately, particularly if they had a learning disability. While counselors could refer students for accommodations, online learning modalities exacerbated the concerns. When counselors had experienced developmental education as community college students themselves, they were able to reflect on their hardships, consider the student success data, and accept AB 705 as a helpful change that had to be contextualized. A counselor at a rural HSCC explained that a data-informed decision-making process aimed to account for students with disabilities. She recalled:

*The reaction wasn't really positive because we were thinking about our students who might have learning disabilities and may need that extra help. Sometimes putting them into a higher level may be a disservice to them, but they were sharing the data that a lot of students do end up passing, and then it minimizes the years that they're there. I remember when I was there, I was at the lowest level, that's why it took me three years to graduate, but I can see that. I can see that they're trying to get students to just take the math and English and seeing if they could pass and, if not, then retaking it. But that was what we were seeing is maybe it would've been at disservice to a lot of students that maybe had a learning disability or needed that extra assistance. Then with everything being virtual, it's a whole different story.*

## A Global Pandemic Spurred Differing Approaches to Math Enrollment

An approach that many counselors took when advising students during the pandemic was to acknowledge the context and address students' potential fears. By demystifying the support available at the college, the counselors could also destigmatize student use of resources meant to support academic success. A tenure-track counselor at a rural HSCC explained her fear for students when AB 705 was implemented and how she advised them:

*I was fearful for the older student. Just because it's been a long time...So we always talk about the support, the tutoring. We encourage them, like, "It's okay to ask for help. It's natural. These are some of the subjects that most people struggle in. It's not just you, it's a lot of students have the similar experience. But since we have to take this course, hopefully you help yourself pass it. That way you could have that one class done, out of the way, and move onto your next course."*

Counselors also noted that students had an unmet need for support in mathematics courses. Due to this need and their inability to ask questions on the spot (i.e., for asynchronous courses), counselors engaged in differing approaches when advising students regarding math course enrollment. For example, a tenured counselor at an urban HSCC explained that the transition to online learning resulted in reduced access to support for students in math courses:

*During the pandemic, it's a little different. There are technically those same resources in place. But given the fact that everything is online, a lot of students feel as though "I'm pretty much teaching myself." There is no instant raise my hand, "I got a question on number three." That doesn't exist anymore. It's let me shoot you an email. Let me wait 'til you respond. Hopefully you'll respond while I'm still in math mode.*

One approach that counselors took when advising students during the pandemic was to have them postpone enrollment in mathematics. By advising students to postpone, counselors aimed to support students to focus on courses that may be easier for them to complete in the online format. This approach aimed to retain students during the pandemic so they would stay enrolled and make progress toward the degree:

*Sometimes I tell a student, look, right now if they can afford to, if their major is sociology or psychology or something that's not math focused, math based. They can skate without taking a math class right now. I tell them, "Don't even stress yourself out about math. Just focus on what you need to focus on. And when things get back to normal, then you can jump into math class."*

## Counselors Experienced Stress as Change Navigators

By contrast, other counselors worried about the potential consequences of a student delaying math enrollment. Counselors considered the research studies that emphasize the importance of students not having a lapse in math enrollment because they will have difficulty remembering the concepts they had learned before. Thus, counselors treaded lightly between providing informed guidance and not pressuring students who had to consider what it meant to take online college courses during a global pandemic. A tenured counseling professor at a large urban HSCC highlighted the stress and emotional labor that counselors shouldered in trying to advise students and support their postsecondary pathways:

After two years of AB 705, counselors were able to present college-level math and English courses as the institutional norm and expectation, which eased student discomfort.

*I think there's still some hesitation...I'm finding that sometimes I meet with students who are saying, "I was going to wait to take math until it's in person again." That was challenging for me because I know that, from what I understand, is the sooner they take the math, the more likely they are to finish it, especially if it's a brand-new high school student. If they wait a year or two to take it, then now they're further removed from having taken math in high school. So, for me, that's been a little bit of a stressor, trying to figure out, not to pressure students, but also to give them the guidance of, "Okay, well I know that this is not the way that you wanted the math class to be delivered, but you're also losing momentum by not completing this math class online."*

Counselors also explained that they experienced stress when advising returning adult learners. Such experiences highlight the emotional labor<sup>15</sup> that counselors engaged in when advising students during the placement process. When adult students had been away from formal schooling, they wanted to begin at a lower math course because they felt that they needed to prepare for college-level mathematics. While the majority of interviews occurred prior to the Fall 2022 deadline for colleges to eliminate courses below college level, the majority of counselors expressed the need for one optional non-credit course that such students could take, which would not hinder students planning to earn 60 units to transfer and would not extend their time-to-degree by much. For instance, a tenured counselor at a large urban HSCC talked about the importance of having proper coursework in place to provide an option for returning students.

*It's hard for them and they're like, "Is there anything lower? I just need to reteach myself, relearn this stuff" or learn it because some of them, we don't know what their high school experience was. I mean, there was a year in high school where I feel like I didn't learn any math at all. I think that for them, they need the support. I know we have non-credit classes, but they're very short. I wish there was a non-credit class that was highly promoted for our returning students and for students who just struggled in math, maybe they weren't the best high school students and they didn't really pay attention, so they don't have any math skills.*

## Institutional Resources Fostered Student Completion

After two years of AB 705, counselors were able to present college-level math and English courses as the institutional norm and expectation, which eased student discomfort. For students who stopped out when they were required to complete developmental education courses and came back after AB 705, the changes were a welcomed reprieve. Counselors expressed that students appreciated being able to make progress toward their postsecondary goals:

*I'm not hearing any discomfort with AB 705 today like when it initially was rolled out. It's the new norm that when you come to community college you start in college level math and English. If you need to take these support classes and you feel you need to do it, do it...Now that we have a little bit of time to look back, students are doing well in math and English and appreciate not having to do a bunch of remedial education. This becomes apparent when I meet with a student who hasn't been here since 2019 and they're returning. I've never had a student say "Oh man, I really wish I could take remedial classes." It's more gratitude, "Okay, great, so we don't have to do that anymore, we can just start with what we need."*

Counseling faculty noted that serving first-generation students should include addressing student insecurities around completing a degree. However, having access to institutional resources benefited students on various levels, including by appeasing such fears. For example, counselors from one campus emphasized that the college had a robust assessment center prior to AB 705. The required changes included replacing the assessment center with tutoring resources for students. By investing financial and human resources in tutoring, students benefited both cognitively and metacognitively:

*The concerns are very much the same, like “Can I, can I do this? Can I get a degree? There is even more concern with math and English now that remedial education isn’t a requirement. Once you let them know they don’t need to do remedial education there they’re on board with it. If any express insecurity I let them know about the Tutoring Center. I tell them we have a bigger tutoring resource than we’ve ever had before...The institution has poured a ton of money into tutoring. Maybe once we had a robust Assessment Center, now we have a robust Tutoring Center. We’ve hired a Director of Tutoring. We’ve given them offices. It’s not an abstract idea, like go meet with a tutor somewhere and sit at a computer, there’s a department now, with robust tutoring hours for math and English and other subjects...before it wasn’t as abundant...I think that helps students.*

Additionally, one counselor noted the disconnect between success rates from previous studies that informed AB 705 and the approaches colleges implemented. She explained that the student success data provided was based on students receiving additional support while in the mathematics course, not as additional tutoring hours or as an additional mandatory co-curricular course. Providing support in class addresses the limitation of time, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, rural students, student-parents, and returning students who likely have to work and commute to college. Counseling faculty possess student-centered expertise because they work closely with students, but the majority of participants noted that their expertise was overlooked by academic faculty in various ways.

*Rather than using the model that (was put) forward...the math department was like, “Well, we’re just going to offer tutoring.” I’m like, “No, no, you, you’re in the math department, you know how to read data, don’t try to act like you can’t see the signs here...” We tried to give them our input (as counseling faculty) and the math department was like, “We welcome your input,” but they didn’t mean it. Our voice was ignored... I know that’s not realistic for a lot of these students, they don’t have the kind of resources that allows them to have that time outside of class...(Now) everyone is going to start in a transfer level math and English class, and we’re going to provide in-class support rather than making the students go to tutoring, which is always underutilized.*

Regardless of campus size and location, the majority of study participants shared the emotional labor that came with counseling students and the implications of having a low number of counseling faculty available to meet with students. Large caseloads resulted in counselors having to be intentional about not overworking to avoid burnout. The counselors also noted a lack of connection between counseling faculty and campus leaders. Despite the importance of a counselor’s role in supporting students as they enroll in community college and as they pursue a postsecondary pathway—particularly for first-generation college students and post-AB 705—the counseling department continues to be understaffed. A tenured counselor at a rural HSCC shared his perception of the campus leadership not investing appropriately in the counseling department:

*I’m familiar with the research, I know how impactful the community college counselor is (as a) frequent contact. I think that’s the biggest challenge; I often describe our department as a skeleton crew and sometimes I feel like I know what the solution is to help our students and that’s to invest in our college counselors...I’m booked up two weeks out every day...You know we have resources when it’s an emergency but I show up to work and my calendar is booked two weeks out from today, literally. It’s 12:30 right now, at one o’clock my one o’clock will open up two weeks from now and that’ll fill. I think that’s the biggest challenge...the college counselor resource not being valued for what it is and how impactful it can be for student success.*

## Recommendations for Community College Leaders

From the experiences and voices of the 30 counselors interviewed for this study, the following recommendations have emerged as critical if the goals of AB 705 are to be fully realized:

### Counseling Faculty Need Equity Mindsets.

Community college CEOs must ensure that counselors maintain equity-minded perspectives and view students from an asset-based perspective. This recommendation entails leaders recalibrating hiring practices to elevate new counseling applicants who are equity-minded. In addition, because counselors earn tenure as faculty in the California Community College system, it is also important that leaders offer tailored professional development to current counselors so they may continue enhancing their understanding of equitable practices.





## Collect and Share Data with Faculty.

Every counselor noted that, even if they supported AB 705, there was hesitation and initial concern about what it meant for contextualized student needs. Access to data helped justify the need for AB 705 and eased concerns. CEOs should collect, disseminate, and discuss data in a consistent and continuous manner to keep all faculty updated on student success. Counselors found student outcome data particularly helpful but continued to have questions regarding specific student background characteristics. As such, it is essential to share and discuss disaggregated student outcome data that addresses specific student populations, including students with disabilities, students of color, English Learners, foster students, and returning students. CEOs should also emphasize research-based best practices to address equity gaps in outcomes and provide all faculty with the opportunity to discuss equity-oriented practices to reduce disparities in outcomes.



## Bridge Departmental Silos.

College leaders should develop opportunities for faculty to build a community within and outside their department. Doing so fosters a collegial campus culture in which faculty know and can communicate effectively with one another. Faculty developing trust and building relationships with colleagues can also provide an opportunity to center student success because they can then collaborate on new initiatives. This concern was emphasized in two key instances. The first was when counselors navigated politics that did not recognize them as faculty. Only counselors from two smaller college campuses felt they were respected as faculty, but the majority of participants explained the ways in which their expertise was often disregarded. The second was due to the disconnect between counseling and English faculty with mathematics faculty. By creating opportunities for collaboration, the entire college can benefit from the student-centered expertise that counseling faculty possess because they work closely with students.



## Institutionalize Student Support Systems.

Ensure that adequate campus resources, such as robust tutoring centers, are available to support all students. Such resources must be conceived or adapted to ensure that students from rural areas, students with disabilities, and English Learners also have proper access. Establishing these systems at the college level can provide both academic and metacognitive benefits for students. Thus, students can access concrete resources while also receiving the message that the college is invested in helping them meet their postsecondary goals.



## Ensure that Student Support Systems are Accessible.

In alignment with the previous recommendation, counseling faculty emphasized the need to contextualize the changes brought on by AB 705. Counselors understand the social contexts that community college students have to navigate, in addition to academic contexts. Because students from low-income backgrounds, rural students, student-parents, and returning students likely have to work and/or commute to college, time becomes a luxury. Thus, requiring or recommending students to attend tutoring—outside of class time—proves to be an obstacle for students who have to prioritize working, commuting, and parenting. Providing additional support in class addresses the limitation of time and ensures that students have access to institutional resources.



## Decrease Counselor-to-Student Ratios.

CEOs must dedicate the resources necessary to hire more tenure-track, full-time counselors who are equity-minded. As indicated by the majority of the participants, AB 705 increased the workload for counseling faculty because they are expected to guide students through enrollment without the use of assessment scores. Thus, counseling faculty need to spend more time advising students and understanding their educational background and goals. Without an adequate number of full-time counseling faculty at each college, current counselors will not be able to provide quality advising sessions for students. Instead, students will continue to experience long wait times to be seen and have their questions answered. The lack of counseling faculty has larger implications, considering the reduced enrollment rates across community colleges. Longer wait times can have negative impacts on student enrollment, engagement, and persistence.



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