

California State University Promoting System-Wide Alignment with K-12

Grown from a desire to promote system-wide alignment between K-12 education and higher education, the Early Assessment Program (EAP) in California is proof of what determination, collaboration and innovation can bring about when change is needed. For the first time in the state's history, the State Board of Education (SBE), the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California State University (CSU) system came together to develop an assessment initiative that would highlight and demonstrate the importance of alignment between high schools and postsecondary education and help establish strategic state-wide goals for public education for the next decade.

Bringing together these three entities was not an easy task. However, the CSU Board of Trustees adopted a goal in 1997 to reduce the need for remediation at the postsecondary level to 10 percent by 2007. At the time of the goal's adoption, half of admitted students still needed to take a remedial math and/or English language arts course upon arrival at a CSU campus. Not only did extensive remediation slow time to degree for CSU students, but the extra time in the classroom was dramatically impacting the budget for the state, the institutions and ultimately, the cost to the student.

In order to comprehensively address the concerns related to remediation and ultimately develop a clear and concise approach to alignment, the team of policymakers and higher education leaders developed a three-prong approach, including:

- Early testing;
- An opportunity for students to prepare for college in the 12th grade; and
- Teacher development in English language arts and mathematics.

Early Testing

The EAP early testing approach has received the most attention to date. Partners in the early testing initiative included the California State Board of Education, the California Department of Education and the California Offices of Education.

To begin, leaders from K-12 and members of the CSU faculty compared the CSU college placement standards and California's high school standards. It was determined that augmentation of the California Standards Test (CST) at the 11th grade English language arts and mathematics levels was necessary. The CST was already administered to every student and the test was part of the state's public school testing and accountability system. Students and their parents, teacher and administrators at the high school level, and higher education faculty and leaders were all familiar with the CST. To augment the CST, the faculty added 15 more multiple choice questions to both the English language arts and mathematics sections, and they instituted a new (required) essay writing sample.

After taking the test, students received notification as to whether they met the expectation for CSU and would be exempt from further placement exams, or whether they needed further preparation for college-level work. For students who required additional preparation, the faculty determined that students could use their senior year to prepare in the subjects in which their skills were lacking (see "*Opportunity to Prepare in the 12th Grade*"). In mathematics, CST results scored students as "Exempt", "Conditionally Exempt", or "Non-Exempt." In English

language arts, students were only scored as “Exempt” or “Non-Exempt.” Students who scored as “Conditionally Exempt” (in mathematics only) or “Non-Exempt” (in either subject) had the ability to employ a variety of diagnostic tests to determine their individual strengths and weaknesses, assisting with additional preparation and study.

By 2003, the augmented CST was ready to be piloted in 100 high schools. Later, in the spring of 2004, the revised CST was offered voluntarily to all high school juniors. Participation grew in 2004 from 150,000 high school juniors taking the English language arts assessment and 115,000 high school juniors taking the mathematics assessment to 380,000 taking the English language arts assessment and 300,000 students taking the mathematics assessment in 2008.

Participation with each of these assessments more than doubled in a five-year period. In 2004, 55 percent of tested students were ready for college-level math and 22 percent were ready for college-level English. Over the next four years, a similar trend emerged. In 2005, 56 percent of tested students were ready for college-level math and 26 percent were ready for college-level English. In 2006, 55 percent of tested students were ready for college-level math and 25 percent were ready for college-level English and finally, in 2007, 55 percent of tested students were ready for college-level math and 26 percent were ready for college-level English.

Implications for Other Aspects of the Alignment Agenda

Unfortunately, the impact of previous misaligned graduation requirements illustrates the difficulty California has in the area of mathematics preparation. CSU requires the completion of Algebra II before taking the CST. However, the state of California only requires two years of mathematics to graduate from high school. Students are able to meet the state’s graduation requirements in mathematics without ever completing Algebra II. California has not upgraded its high school graduation requirements to match Achieve’s recommendations for college and work readiness.

After nearly five years of student participation with the modified CST, education leaders and policymakers determined that the capacity of the state information system matters to the overall success of the initiative. Most important to the state information system are variables that track and measure course completion.

Initially, there was no mechanism for transmitting the student scores to the CSU. The California Department of Education (CDE) sponsored legislation to allow 11th graders to authorize the release of their results to CSU and for the CDE to release results to CSU; the legislation passed. Still today, California does not have the capacity to compare student results on the redesigned courses with pass rates on the CSU placement test or the students’ successes in first-year courses. The development of a statewide information system with unique individual student identifier, which is currently under development, will need to connect to postsecondary unit record systems in order to collect and retrieve this information readily.

Opportunity to Prepare in the 12th Grade

Every senior (and every high school teacher and guidance counselor) is intimately familiar with the “senior year slump.” California sought to address this common occurrence by making the senior year count. In partnership with CSU, the CSU Success website (<http://www.csusuccess.org>) was designed for students, and also used by teachers, to follow a



step-by-step personalized roadmap to postsecondary education. The site includes preparation tools, testimonial student videos, access to the student's EAP scores, and email reminders about milestones and deadlines.

In addition to the CSU Success website, K-12 and higher education leaders worked to modify and improve 12th grade high school courses by providing on-line English language arts and mathematics modules.

Since California students are required to take four years of English in order to graduate from high school, faculty put a new and more meaningful twist on the traditional English language arts class. Rather than the standard literature based English class for 12th graders, faculty redesigned the course and transformed it to an Expository Reading and Writing course, similar to college-level English work. This new course helps high school seniors strengthen their critical reading, analytic and expository writing skills, which will better prepare each student to more easily transition into college-level courses. The class consists of 14 assignments or "modules" with a sequence of integrated reading and writing experiments that last for no more than three weeks. The Expository Reading and Writing course was implemented statewide in 2004-2005 and in 2006; the course was approved by CSU and the University of California as satisfying their common college entrance requirements. In order to speed the adoption of the course, a \$600,000 federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant was awarded to the state. Not only have students successfully completed (and enjoyed!) the course, but high school teachers have found the course material to be simultaneously academically rigorous and engaging for their students; the materials enhanced instruction in meaningful ways; and students who have taken the newly-designed English course have scored higher on CSU placement exams than those who have not.

In mathematics, California requires students to complete two years of coursework before high school graduation and three years for those on a college-preparatory track. As with many states, California high school senior math course taking was low. Therefore, the EAP initiative includes a new professional development series for high school math teachers, which assists teachers to better prepare students before the 11th grade CST and assists students through on-line preparation exercises (please visit: <http://www.collegemathsuccess.org>). As the EAP initiative began to develop, it was apparent that the severe math teacher shortage in California would dramatically impact the state's ability to offer 12th grade math courses. With a shortage of teachers in the discipline, many high schools have been reluctant to offer the courses to their students and the math module has been slower to launch than the new Expository Reading and Writing course.

English and Math Teacher Development

As a way to facilitate greater teacher development in English language arts and mathematics at the high school level, the CSU held numerous EAP awareness sessions across the state for teachers of all backgrounds and experience levels. In addition to the sessions, an on-line workshop and an in-person seven hour session was held at various locations across the state, free of charge to teachers in mathematics. As part of the initiative, year-long reading institutes were offered for Academic Preparation, which serves high school teachers from all content areas. The goal of the summer reading institutes was to help teachers see how expectations for college-level work in English language arts align with the CA English-Language Arts Content



Standards. This first-hand exposure for teachers consists of direct study through workshop sessions, case studies of college-bound students, and collaborative sessions for school teams.

The CSU system prepares between 55 and 60 percent of California's new teachers. As such, the EAP initiative embeds information into professional development and pre-service programs for teachers and administrators. The information includes the standards most emphasized for college readiness, what college proficiency levels look like, and general EAP information.

Where is the EAP Today?

Over the long term, CSU is hopeful to obtain a system-wide commitment to the EAP initiative. In May 2008, the Board of Trustees adopted a strategic plan with goals to cut in half existing achievement gaps for college-going rates among high school graduates and improve first-year retention rates, transfer readiness, degree completion and graduate and professional school readiness. Toward that end, trustees are committed to deepening and extending the EAP through systematic partnerships with school districts across California.

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