California Community Colleges

# Noncredit English Language Learners' (ELL) Transition to Credit Courses

Summary from a Mixed-Methods Analysis

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# Executive Summary

With support from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), Educational Services Division, the Research and Planning Group (RP Group) conducted a mixed-methods analysis of noncredit English Language Learners' (ELL) transition to credit courses, such as transfer-level English (TLE), to inform the work of a statewide committee to provide guidance for colleges on effective placement practices and curricular considerations for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

The report summarizes findings from a mixed-methods analysis conducted to examine the utility of Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) data to inform placement and identify districts with high rates of students transitioning to credit courses; then conducted interviews with 10 California Community College (CCC) districts showing high transition and throughput rates to identify similar features of a successful program. Results revealed a limited value on the utility of CASAS scores for predicting transition into a TLE for noncredit students due to a low percentage of Adult Education (AE) students achieving throughput at the two institutions with test score data. However, we found that enrollment in a credit English or ESL course did predict transition to TLE for these students. Starting level and whether the AE student enrolled in ESL programs were also significant predictors.

Interviews from 10 of the top performing districts provided a qualitative look at some of the effective practices across the state. In many places, curriculum is being revised to shorten sequences with fewer levels. Colleges have responded creatively to student needs with intentional focus on establishing academic rigor in noncredit courses and creating a transition or pathway to credit enrollment and employment. ESL counseling and comprehensive support services also appear to contribute to high transition rates across the state.

Based on the findings, the RP Group identified three areas of opportunities for community colleges. First, adult education consortia and community colleges need to work collaboratively to create clear noncredit to credit pathways across ESL and English sequences to increase students' probability of attempting and successfully completing TLE. Colleges engaged in curricular redesign note that shorter sequences have higher success. Second, community colleges need to consider more explicit integration of their noncredit and credit curriculum to ensure a seamless transition for students. Some examples are increased academic rigor and aligned standards across both credit and noncredit courses, with deliberate focus on longer term goals such as employment or a credential. Third, and final, community colleges need to consider contextualizing ESL curriculum to meet the needs of students whether their goals are life skills, vocational, or academic/transfer.

# Introduction

With support from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), Educational Services Division, the Research and Planning Group (RP Group) examined noncredit English Language Learners' (ELL) transition to credit courses, such as transfer-level English (TLE), to inform the work of a statewide committee to provide guidance for colleges on effective placement practices for English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

While high school transcript data have been found to be the most predictive indicator of course success,[1] California Community Colleges (CCC) serve a large population of students with no high school experience in the United States. Therefore, this study will focus on the pathways for students transitioning from adult education or non-credit course sequences to credit courses in English and ESL. Further, ESL is likely the most complex discipline to study at CCC given the great variation in both student backgrounds and college sequences, as well as the imperative to align with Adult Education (AE). High level analyses of statewide databases have offered some insights into planning redesigns of sequences and supports to comply with AB 705, but many questions still remain, including:

1. What sequence structures appear best suited to maximize throughput to transfer-level English?[2]
2. Is there a typology of students that can be developed to help educators provide guidance to students as to whether adult education, college noncredit, or college credit courses are the optimal pathway given their background (characteristics) and goals?
3. Can adult education assessments such as those used by Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) provide useful information in colleges' placements of ELL?
4. To what extent are colleges using guided self-placement for ELL and how effective are these efforts in maximizing student success?[3]

The current report spotlights key findings from a mixed-methods analysis to answer question 3, starting with a quantitative analysis examining potential measures for noncredit placement using CASAS test scores. Then, findings from interviews (question 4) with noncredit practitioners at colleges that appear to have high ESL throughput rates are included. Preliminary data from question 1 was used to inform the selection of interviews for question 4. Questions 1 and 2 will be further explored and addressed in a future report.

1 See reports from RP Group's Multiple Measures Assessment:
https://rpgroup.org/All-Projects/ctl/ArticleView/mid/1686/articleId/118/Multiple-Measures-Assessment-Project-MMAP

2 A quantitative analysis for this research question will be included in a larger statewide analysis examining throughput in credit and noncredit ESL pathways. Presented in this report is a summary of the interviews related to this question from CCCs with relatively high noncredit to credit transition and throughput.

3 See summary of existing guided self-placement practices in ESL and MMAP synthesis here:
http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/MultipleMeasures/Publications/ESLLitReviewFINAL.pdf

## Report Organization

The report starts with a descriptive analysis of the student data used to answer question 3, which includes counts of adult education students by starting program, by starting educational level, and the number/percent that transition to credit coursework and succeeded. This analysis is followed by three sets of quantitative analyses on potential predictors for placement that answer question 3 in a summary of the quantitative analyses. Next is a short explanation of how data from question 1 was used to identify districts to interview. Then, findings from those interviews identify eight best practices in successful ESL programs. The report ends with three key considerations for improving the transition and throughput of adult education and English language learners from noncredit to credit coursework.

Of special mention, the nomenclature within this report includes: English language learners as ELL, English as a second language as ESL, and transfer-level English as TLE. Adult education is frequently referenced as AE. The Chancellor's Office Management Information System (COMIS) is the data community colleges submit on student enrollments, while adult education consortia can report data via the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) TopsPro Enterprise data system.

# Description of Adult Education Students

In phase one of the quantitative analysis, CASAS data containing annual adult education attendance hours by program area were used to identify AE students in the CCC system. The original CASAS dataset contained 1,140,727 distinct students who received services at one or more of the 349 adult education agencies that reported attendance hours. A total of 452,097 AE students were matched (using last name, first name, and date of birth) with community college enrollment records (COMIS) from fall 2012 to spring 2018, resulting in an overall match rate of 40%.
See Table 1 for AE student enrollment rates by adult education agency type.

TABLE 1. AE STUDENTS ENROLLED AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES BY AGENCY TYPE* FALL 2012-SPRING 2018

| CASAS Agency Type | Number of Agencies | Number of AE Students with CASAS data | Percent of AE Students Matched to CCC Enrollment Records |
|---|---|---|---|
| Community College | 52 | 414,779 | 84% |
| Jail or CC Jail Program | 11 | 11,907 | 49% |
| County Office of Education | 24 | 14,184 | 21% |
| Career Center | 10 | 16,367 | 17% |
| Adult School | 83 | 281,430 | 16% |
| Unified School District | 164 | 432,860 | 15% |
| AEBG Consortium | 5 | 811 | 7% |
| **Grand Total*** | **349** | **1,140,727** | **40%** |

* Students may receive services at more than one AE agency and reported under more than one agency type.

Of the 452,097 AE students who were matched with community college enrollment records, sixty-four percent (290,508) enrolled in at least one college ESL or English course. Ninety-eight percent (284,940) of the students enrolled in an ESL or English sequence course, and 2% (5,568) enrolled in a college vocational or citizenship/civics course for ESL students. The majority (56%) of AE students entering the ESL or English sequence started in an ESL adult education program (see Table 2) below.

### TABLE 2. AE STUDENTS BY STARTING PROGRAM AREA*

| Starting AE Program Area | Started Enrolled in AE Program (n=1,140,727) | | Matched and Enrolled in CCC (n=452,097) | | Also took CCC ESL or English (n=290,508) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| English as a Second Language (ESL) | 506,583 | 44% | 171,956 | 38% | 163,623 | 56% |
| High School Diploma or Equivalency (HSD/HSE) | 246,386 | 22% | 68,625 | 15% | 26,305 | 9% |
| Career Technical Education (CTE) | 208,032 | 18% | 102,223 | 23% | 44,928 | 16% |
| Adult Basic Education (ABE) | 174,766 | 15% | 87,901 | 19% | 57,664 | 20% |
| Workforce Re-entry | 151,158 | 13% | 54,107 | 12% | 29,895 | 10% |

* AE program areas are not mutually exclusive; students may be counted in more than one program area.

# Quantitative Analyses

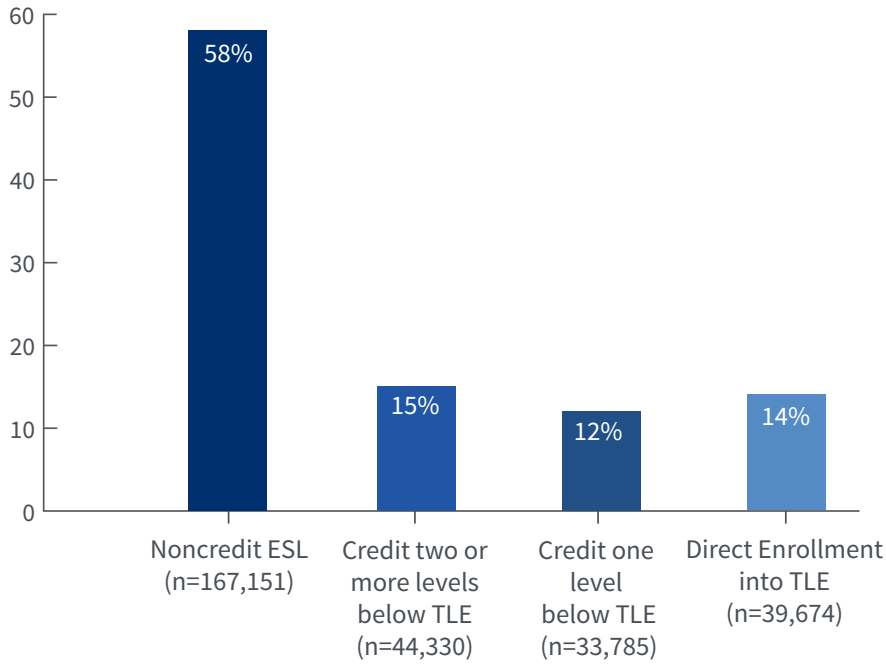
**3. Can adult education assessments such as the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) provide useful information in colleges' placements of ELL?**

To address question 3, the RP Group examined CCC adult education students with COMIS and CASAS data. Essentially, the statistical analyses were two-pronged. First, adult education students who enrolled at community colleges across the state were examined to determine whether annual AE attendance hours and AE program areas were related to students' starting placement level in the ESL and English sequence and transfer-level English throughput. In the second phase of the analysis, CASAS assessment data for two large community colleges with a high volume of adult education students were analyzed to determine whether the CASAS scale score can be used to effectively predict starting placement level and students' potential for successful completion of TLE.

## Phase One: AE Student Profiles and Progression

Adult education ESL and English enrollments were analyzed across four groups: (1) direct enrollment into transfer-level English (TLE), (2) starting one level below TLE, (3) starting two or more levels below TLE, and (4) starting in noncredit ESL at any level (see Chart 1). Note 5,568 students took courses not shown in Chart 1 because their first college course was not within the ESL and English sequence.

CHART 1. LEVEL OF FIRST COLLEGE COURSE IN ESL OR ENGLISH FOR ADULT EDUCATION



**Quantitative distinctions between and among these subgroups are described below.**

## Direct Enrollment into Transfer-Level English

- *Enrollment*. Direct enrollment means the students' first community college courses included transfer-level English immediately after adult education. About 14% (39,674) of the AE students enrolled directly into TLE and of those enrolled, 79% (31,196) completed TLE within three years.
- *Participant Hours and Age*. Students with direct enrollment into TLE had an average of 145 AE hours and 1.1 years in an AE program. Younger students were more likely to go directly from AE to TLE at the community college. The average age for direct placement into TLE is 24 years old, while it is 34 years for the entire AE population.
- *AE Participation*. Most students started in an AE CTE (32%) or basic skills program (31%), while 14% were in a high school diploma or high school equivalency program, 5% in a workforce re-entry program, and less than 2% started in an AE ESL program.

## Starting One Level below Transfer in Credit English or ESL

- *Enrollment*. Roughly 12% (33,785) of the AE students transitioned to the ESL or English sequence one level below transfer. Of those enrolled one level below, over 95% (32,225) enrolled in an English course and less than 5% (1,560) enrolled in an ESL course.
- *Three-Year Throughput Rate*. The three-year throughput rate for students who enrolled in one level below in English was 47% (15,090), compared to 26% (405) for students who started in ESL one level below transfer.
- *Participant Hours and Age*. Students who transitioned into English (one level below) had an average of 138 AE hours, 1.1 years in an AE program, and were 23 years old. Students who enrolled directly into ESL (one level below) had an average of 199 AE hours, 1.2 years in an AE program, and were on average 32 years old.
- *AE Participation*. Students enrolled one level below transfer originated in the following adult education programs: 37% (11,790) basic skills, 30% (9,769) CTE, 16% (5,483) high school diploma or high school equivalency, 5% (1,687) workforce re-entry, and 2% (690) from an AE ESL program. Only 39% of the students enrolled in a credit ESL course started in an adult education ESL program.

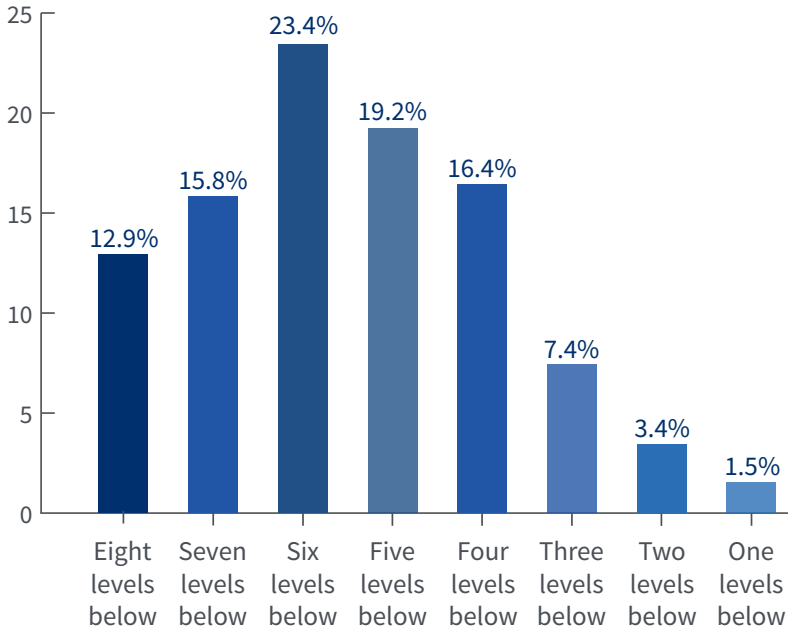
## Starting Two or More Levels below Transfer in Credit English or ESL

- *Enrollment*. About 15% (44,330) of the AE students transitioned to the ESL or English sequence in a credit course two or more levels below transfer level. Of those enrolled 2+ levels below, 63% (27,989) enrolled in an English course, and 37% (16,341) enrolled in an ESL course.
- *Three-Year Throughput Rate*. The three-year throughput rate for students who enrolled in an English course was 30% (8,455), compared to 12% (1,896) for students who started in an ESL course two or more levels below transfer.
- *Participant Hours and Age*. Students who transitioned into English (two levels below) had an average of 147 AE hours, 1.2 years in an AE program, and were on average 24 years old. Students who transitioned into ESL (two levels below) had an average of 214 AE hours, 1.3 years in an AE program, and an average age of 34 years.
- *AE Participation*. Approximately 57% (9,365) of the students that transitioned into ESL started in an adult education ESL program, compared to 4% (1,131) of the students who transitioned to a college English course.

## Starting in Noncredit ESL

- *Enrollment*. The majority (58%; 167,151) of adult education students' first enrollment in the CCC system was in a noncredit ESL or English course. Of these noncredit enrollees, 98% (163,808) started in noncredit ESL. Chart 2 shows noncredit ESL enrollments by number of levels below transfer.
- *Three-Year Throughput Rate*. The overall three-year throughput rate for students starting in noncredit ESL was less than 1% (1,380).
- *Participant Hours and Age*. Of the 2% of students who transitioned into college English, they had an average of 263 AE hours, 1.7 years in an AE program, and were 32 years old on average. Students who transitioned into college ESL had an average of 293 AE hours, 1.8 years in an AE program, and their average age was 40 years old.
- *AE Participation*. Approximately 91% (149,252) of the ESL students started in an adult education ESL program.

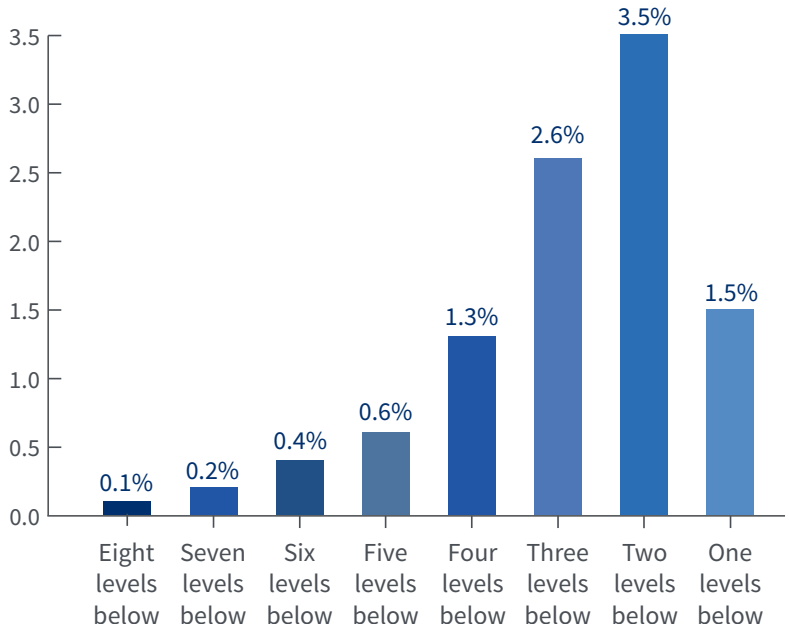
CHART 2. NONCREDIT ESL STUDENTS BY STARTING LEVELS BELOW TRANSFER LEVEL ENGLISH




## Phase One Findings

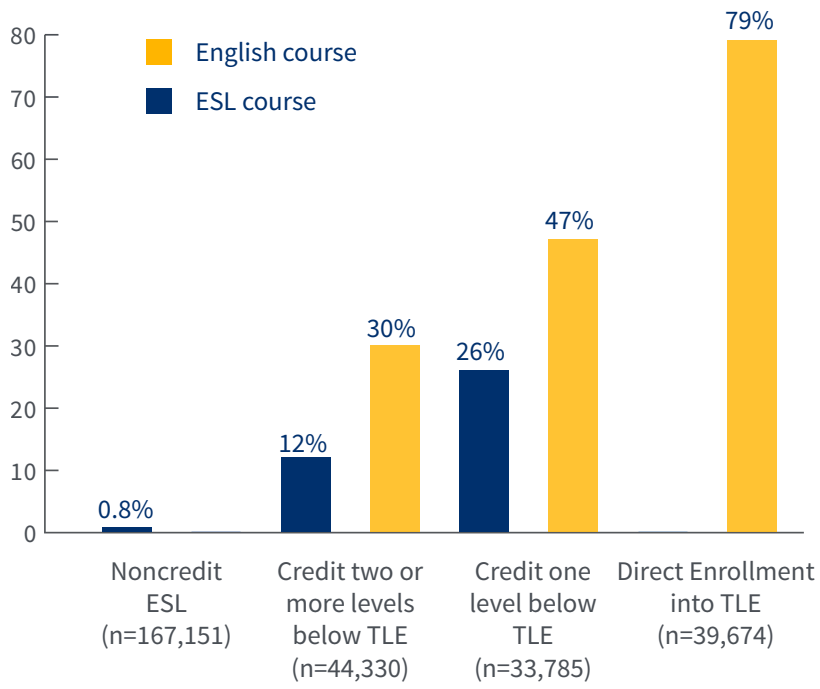
The results from phase one of the CASAS analysis found that AE attendance hours were not a significant predictor of starting level in the ESL or English sequence or students' potential for successful completion of TLE. The most significant predictors of TLE throughput within three years were starting placement level, course credit type, and whether the student was in an AE ESL program. Most students who start in noncredit ESL start six or more levels below transfer level and have an average throughput rate of 0.3%. Chart 3 shows three-year TLE throughput rates by starting level for AE students who first enroll in a noncredit ESL course.

## CHART 3. NONCREDIT ESL THROUGHPUT TO TLE BY STARTING LEVEL




Adult Education students who enrolled directly into transfer-level English had the highest throughput rate (79%) followed by students who enrolled in a one level below credit English course (47%). ESL students who enrolled directly into a one level below credit ESL course had significantly higher throughput rates compared to those who enrolled in a credit ESL course two or more levels below transfer (26% vs. 12%). The majority of AE students start in noncredit ESL and had an overall three-year throughput rate of 0.8%. The farther students start from transfer level, the less likely the students are to complete TLE within three years (see Chart 4).

CHART 4. TLE THROUGHPUT BY STARTING LEVEL AND COURSE AREA FOR AE STUDENTS



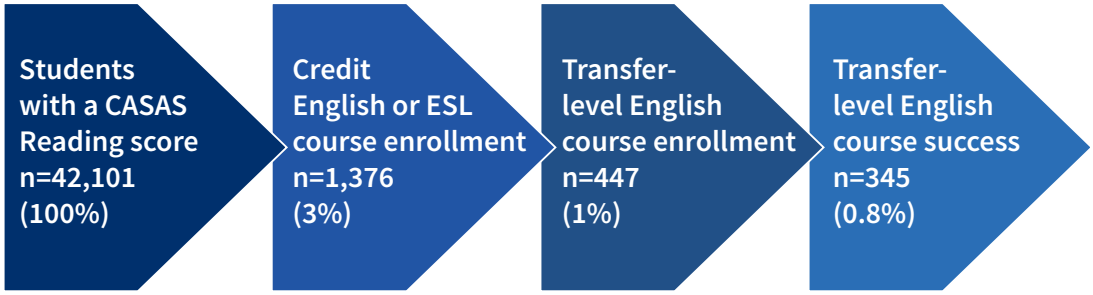

## Phase Two: CASAS Analysis

The second phase of the quantitative analysis focused on using CASAS assessment data to see if the CASAS scale score can be used to predict (1) students' starting placement level in the ESL and English sequence, and (2) students' potential for successful completion of TLE. Five years of CASAS assessment data were obtained from two large community colleges with a high volume of adult education students.

In general, ESL students complete the CASAS reading and/or listening assessments, while basic skills (ABE), high school diploma/equivalency (HSD/HSE), and career and technical education (CTE) students are more likely to complete the CASAS reading and/or math assessments. Over 93% of the students completed at least one reading assessment, almost 9% completed at least one listening assessment, and 7% completed a math assessment. In order to include the greatest volume of students, the focus of this analysis is on the predictive ability of the CASAS reading scale score on TLE throughput.

An initial review of the data reveals only a small number of students with CASAS reading scores ever attempt a credit ESL or English course (see Chart 5). Only 3% of students in the sample ever enroll in a credit English or ESL course, 1% attempt transfer-level English, and 0.8% are successful. Of those who attempt a credit English or ESL course, almost one-third attempt TLE and one-quarter successfully complete TLE with a grade of C or better. The overall success rate for students in the sample who do attempt TLE is 77%.

## CHART 5. STUDENT HEADCOUNTS FOR QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES




The following quantitative analysis will look at whether the CASAS reading scale score can be used to predict: (1) enrollment in a credit English or ESL course, (2) enrollment in TLE, and 3) successful completion of TLE. Table 3 includes the AE variables that were correlated with the three possible outcome variables to identify potential predictors for the regression model (see Pearson's correlation coefficients (r)). The correlations reveal that students' starting level in the ESL or English sequence has the strongest relationship (absolute value of r between 0.34 and 0.26) with the outcome variables. The negative sign for this coefficient indicates the farther students start from transfer level, the less likely the students are to enroll in a credit ESL or English course and to successfully complete TLE. Students who were in an AE ESL program are less likely than non-ESL AE students to attempt a credit ESL or English course and to attempt TLE. AE students in a high school diploma or high school equivalency program are more likely to attempt a credit ESL or English course compared to AE students who don't participate in a high school diploma/equivalency program. There is a weak relationship (absolute value of r between 0.18 and 0.13) between students' highest CASAS reading scale score and attainment of the outcomes. While the relationship is weak, it is a positive relationship, meaning students with higher scores are more likely to enroll in a credit ESL or English course compared to students with lower reading scale scores.

## TABLE 3. CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR PREDICTOR VARIABLES

| Adult Education Variables | Outcomes | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Credit English/ESL Enrollment | TLE Enrollment | TLE Success |
| Rank level of first ESL or English course (TLE=0) | -0.34 | -0.32 | -0.26 |
| ESL (yes=1, no=0) | -0.32 | -0.31 | -0.25 |
| HSD/HSE (yes=1, no=0) | 0.21 | 0.16 | 0.13 |
| Highest CASAS Reading Scale Score | 0.18 | 0.15 | 0.13 |
| CTE program area (yes=1, no=0) | 0.12 | 0.1 | 0.09 |
| ABE program area (yes=1, no=0) | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.05 |
| Age at first CASAS assessment | -0.1 | -0.09 | -0.08 |
| Years since last CASAS assessment | 0.08 | 0.04 | 0.03 |
| AE attendance hours | 0.09 | 0.002 | -0.004 |
| Gender (M=1, F=0) | -0.02 | -0.001 | -0.002 |

## Predicting Enrollment in Credit English or ESL

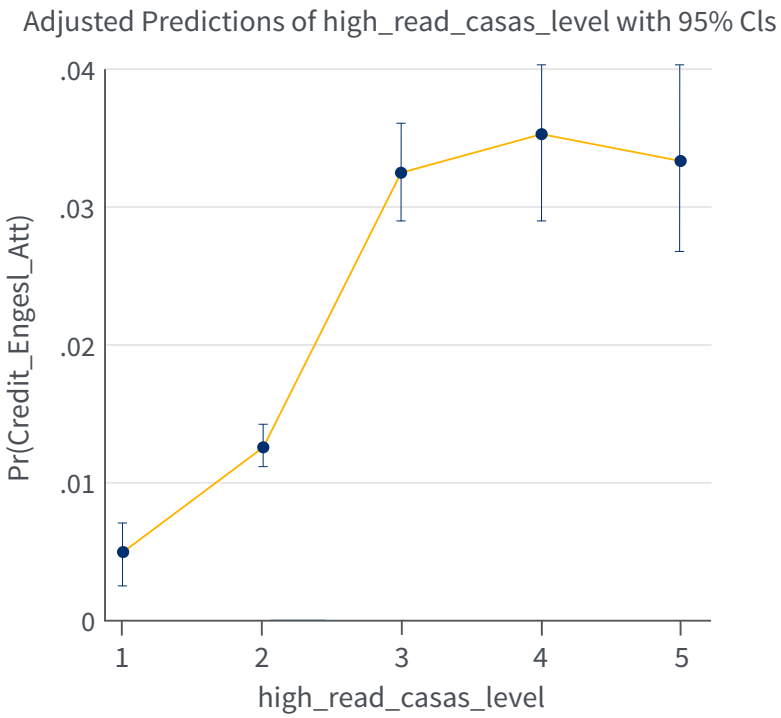
A logistic regression was conducted using Stata 15.1 to examine the relationships between students' highest reading scale score, ESL program, level of students' first ESL or English course, number of years since last CASAS assessment, and age at first CASAS assessment on attempting a credit English or ESL course. A total of 29,006 observations were included in the analysis and all predictor variables in the model were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). An examination of the marginal means shows the probability of a student attempting a credit ESL or English course is 1.8% when all predictor variables are set to their mean values. The average reading scale score is 217, average age at first CASAS assessment is 41 years old, and the average student first enrolls in a noncredit ESL or English course four levels below TLE. The probability decreases to 1.7% for ESL program participants and increases to 4.1% for non-ESL students. The probability increases to 2.4% for ESL and 5.6% for non-ESL students, if students start in a noncredit course three levels below TLE, rather than four levels below.

An increase in the reading scale score to 230 increases the probability of attempting credit English or ESL to 3% for ESL students and 6% for non-ESL students. Table 3 shows probabilities of enrolling in a credit English or ESL course by reading scale score ranges (based on existing levels) for ESL and non-ESL students. All other predictor variables are set to their mean values. Students with reading scale scores greater than or equal to 221 result in a statistically significant increase in the probability of the student enrolling in a credit English or ESL course. The overall probability of credit English or ESL enrollment by CASAS reading level with a 95% confidence interval are displayed in Table 4 and Chart 6.

### TABLE 4. PROBABILITY OF ENROLLING IN CREDIT ENGLISH BY READING LEVEL

| Reading Scores by CASAS Level | | | Probability of Enrolling in Credit English or ESL | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ESL Students | | Non-ESL Students | |
| Reading Scale Score Range | Level | Level Description | Probability | 95% CI | Probability | 95% CI |
| 0 - 200 | A | Beginning Literacy/ Beginning ESL | 0.40% | 0.2% - 0.7% | 1.10% | 0.5% - 1.7% |
| 201 - 220 | B | Beginning Basic/ Intermediate ESL | 1.30% | 1.1% - 1.5% | 3.30% | 2.5% - 4.1% |
| 221 - 235 | C | Intermediate Low/ Low Advanced ESL | 3.1%* | 2.8% - 3.4% | 7.6%* | 6.1% - 9.1% |
| 236 - 245 | D | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) Low | 3.4%* | 2.8% - 4.0% | 8.3%* | 6.3% - 10.3% |
| 246+ | E | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) High | 3.3%* | 2.5% - 4.0% | 8.0%* | 5.9% - 10.1% |

CHART 6. PROBABILITY OF ENROLLING IN CREDIT ENGLISH BY READING LEVEL




## Predicting Enrollment in Transfer-level English

To predict enrollment in TLE, a similar logistic regression was used to examine the relationships between students' highest reading scale score, ESL program, level of students' first ESL or English course, number of years since last CASAS assessment, and age at first CASAS assessment. A total of 29,006 observations were included in the analysis and all predictor variables in the model were statistically significant at $p<0.001$ except ESL, which was significant at $p<0.01$.

An examination of the marginal means shows that the probability of an adult education student in the sample attempting TLE is 0.8% when all predictor variables are set to their mean values. CASAS students in the Adult Secondary Education (ASE) levels (level D and E; reading scale score >= 236) are no longer considered basic skills deficient according to CASAS skills standards. ASE students have a 2.9% probability of attempting TLE (n = 2,755). While the difference between ESL and non-ESL students is no longer statistically significant, the probability of ESL students attempting TLE is 2.8%, compared to 3.5% for non-ESL students. Students whose highest CASAS level is ASE are on average slightly younger than students in lower CASAS levels (38 vs. 41 years old, respectively), and their first enrollment at the college tends to be in noncredit ESL or English courses two levels below transfer level. The typical student in the model enrolls in TLE within two years of completing their final CASAS assessment.

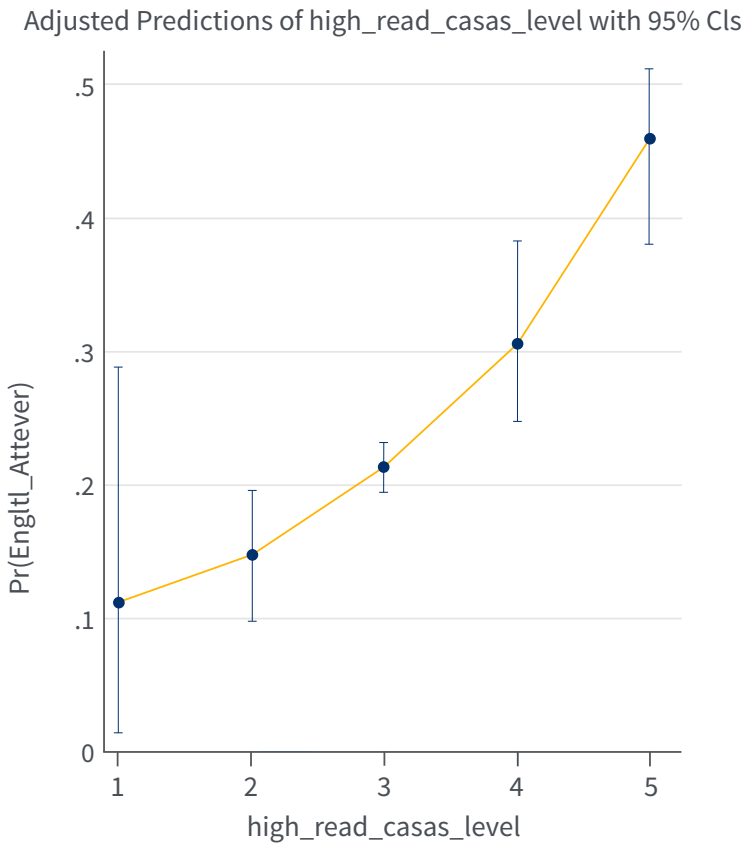
Using the same predictor variables, the RP Group conducted a second logistic regression to examine the probability of students attempting TLE, if the student attempts any credit English or ESL course (n = 1,376). The findings revealed that 24% of adult education students who attempt a credit English or ESL course will also attempt transfer-level English within 2.5 years (on average) of completing their final CASAS assessment (all other variables in the model are set to their mean values). The average reading scale score for students in the model is 230, average age is 35 years old, and the average starting level in the English/ESL sequence is credit (not degree applicable) English or ESL coded as four to five levels below transfer-level English. ESL was not statistically significant in this model. Table 5 and Chart 7 both show the probability of attempting TLE by highest CASAS level for students who attempt a credit English or ESL course.

### TABLE 5. PROBABILITY OF ATTEMPTING TLE BY HIGHEST READING LEVEL

| Reading Scores by CASAS Level | | | Probability of Enrolling in TLE after a Credit English or ESL Course | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Reading Scale Score Range** | **Level** | **Level Description** | **n** | **Probability** | **95% CI** |
| 0 - 200 | A | Beginning Literacy/ Beginning ESL | 16 | 12.0% | 4.3% - 28.5% |
| 201 - 220 | B | Beginning Basic/ Intermediate ESL | 256 | 12.2%* | 7.8% - 16.9% |
| 221 - 235 | C | Intermediate Low/ Low Advanced ESL | 683 | 18.3%* | 15.3% - 21.3% |
| 236 - 245 | D | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) Low | 228 | 26.7%* | 20.7% - 32.6% |
| 246+ | E | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) High | 193 | 34.0%* | 26.6% - 41.3% |

*Statistically significant, $p<0.001$

CHART 7. PROBABILITY OF ATTEMPTING TLE BY HIGHEST READING LEVEL




## Predicting Successful Completion of Transfer-level English

The outcomes of the logistic regression model used to predict successful completion of transfer-level English are similar to the initial outcomes in the model used to predict enrollment in TLE. All variables in the model are significant at p<0.001 level, except ESL (ns). When all variables in the model are set to their mean values, the probability of a student completing transfer-level English is only 0.2%. An inspection of the marginal means shows that all students in the model have a less than 1% probability of ever completing TLE, regardless of final CASAS reading level, if all other values are set to their means. Students who start adult education between the ages of 20 to 24 have a slightly higher probability of completing TLE than students in other age groups.

Another logistic regression model was used to examine the relationship between completion of TLE if the student ever enrolls in a credit English or ESL course. The overall probability of completing TLE is 23.6% (not shown) if the student enrolls in a credit English or ESL course and all other values are set to their mean (n = 1,376). See Table 8 for probabilities of each level.

## TABLE 8. PROBABILITY OF COMPLETING TLE BY HIGHEST READING LEVEL AFTER ANY CREDIT ENGLISH OR ESL COURSE

| Reading Scores by CASAS Level | | | Probability of Successfully Completing TLE after a Credit English or ESL Course | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Reading Scale Score Range** | **Level** | **Level Description** | **n** | **Probability** | **95% CI** |
| 0 - 200 | A | Beginning Literacy/ Beginning ESL | 16 | 12.0% | 4.3% - 28.5% |
| 201 - 220 | B | Beginning Basic/ Intermediate ESL | 256 | 12.2%* | 7.8% - 16.9% |
| 221 - 235 | C | Intermediate Low/ Low Advanced ESL | 683 | 18.3%* | 15.3% - 21.3% |
| 236 - 245 | D | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) Low | 228 | 26.7%* | 20.7% - 32.6% |
| 246+ | E | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) High | 193 | 34.0%* | 26.6% - 41.3% |

*Statistically significant, p<0.001

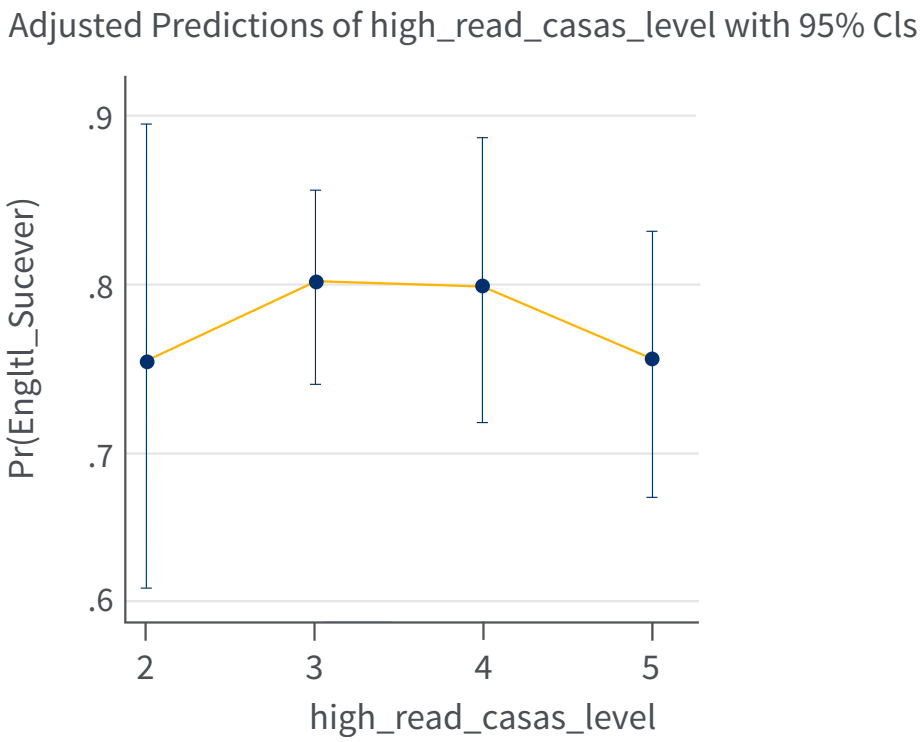
When the sample in the logistic regression model is limited to adult education students who attempt TLE (n = 445), the probability of TLE success is 78% (all other variables set at their mean values). The average student in the model is 25 years old, 44% are ESL, and the average starting level is a credit (non-degree applicable) English or ESL course one level below transfer-level English. On average, students in the model completed TLE within 2.6 years of their last CASAS assessment. See Table 9 and Chart 8 for the probability of TLE success for students who attempt TLE by highest CASAS reading level.

## TABLE 9. PROBABILITY OF COMPLETING TLE BY HIGHEST READING LEVEL WHEN ENROLLED IN TLE

| Reading Scores by CASAS Level | | | Probability of Successfully Completing TLE if Student Attempts TLE | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Reading Scale Score Range** | **Level** | **Level Description** | **n** | **Probability** | **95% CI** |
| 0 - 200 | A | Beginning Literacy/ Beginning ESL | 2 | -- | -- |
| 201 - 220 | B | Beginning Basic/ Intermediate ESL | 38 | 75.2%* | 60.7% - 89.6% |
| 221 - 235 | C | "Intermediate Low/ Low Advanced ESL | 177 | 80.2%* | 74.1% - 86.3% |
| 236 - 245 | D | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) Low | 97 | 79.8%* | 71.5% - 88.1% |
| 246+ | E | Adult Secondary Education (ASE) High | 133 | 75.7%* | 68.1% - 83.2% |

*Statistically significant, p<0.001

CHART 8. PROBABILITY OF COMPLETING TLE BY HIGHEST READING LEVEL WHEN ENROLLED IN TLE




## Phase Two Findings

The findings from this analysis reveal that very few adult education students who complete the CASAS reading assessment ever attempt a credit English or ESL course in the CCC system. While the CASAS reading scale score is a significant predictor of enrollment in a credit English or ESL course, the level of the students' first course in the ESL/English sequence had the greatest impact on whether students ever transition into credit coursework within the discipline. Enrolling in a credit English or ESL course has a significant impact on students' probability of attempting and successfully completing TLE. Adult education students who attempt TLE succeed at a rate that is similar to students in the CCC system who did not utilize AE services and programs.

The statistical tests on using CASAS reading scores to predict placement showed no significant results, as the overall probability of completing TLE from the sample students was less than 1%. While the CASAS reading scale score is a significant predictor of enrollment in a credit English or ESL course, CASAS levels did not differentiate between groups well enough to be a useful predictor for placement. The level of the students' first course in the ESL/English sequence had the greatest impact on whether students ever transition into credit coursework. Enrolling in a credit English or ESL course has a significant impact on students' probability of attempting and successfully completing TLE.

## Limitations of CASAS Analysis

The data used for these analyses did not include variables related to students' educational goals and background, such as the students' primary language, ethnicity, highest education level, and income level. Students in the CASAS assessment sample came from two community college districts in Southern California. A larger analysis could be conducted if CASAS assessment data can be obtained from additional colleges across the state to see if similar patterns happen statewide.

Consequently, the results from the CASAS analysis on question 3, there were not enough students identified who ever attempted a credit ESL or English course, making it difficult to determine the relationship between the reading assessment and the outcome variables. Further research is needed to answer question 2 to establish student typologies using data on student characteristics and educational goals.

# Qualitative Analysis

**1. What sequence structures appear best suited to maximize throughput to transfer-level English?**

Based on preliminary data for question 1, 10 colleges were selected to inform question 4 as discussed in the following section.

As noted, the quantitative analysis for question 1 will be included in a future statewide analysis examining noncredit and credit ESL pathways. However, a preliminary review of statewide data was conducted to identify colleges with high transition and throughput rates from noncredit to credit, especially from ESL to TLE. The analysis included a cohort of noncredit students enrolled in the first two years where data were available (2012-2013 and 2013-2014), unduplicated by community college district, for students with any credit enrollment (transition) and success (throughput) for the remainder of the data set to identify high performing colleges. Rates were calculated for each district cohort by counting any student found in the credit enrollments at any college statewide. As academic years move forward, rates were cumulative to count for all prior transitions and any new ones. The appendix includes a table with transition and throughput rates for two, three, and four years from the original cohort for all 70 districts with data and identifies colleges with high transition and throughput rates from noncredit ESL to TLE.

To further research best practices across the system, the RP Group conducted interviews with 10 of these identified colleges. We selected the first 10 from a preliminary list of colleges ranked by highest throughput rate (noncredit ESL students passing TLE). Our list was preliminary at the time we started interviews and represents colleges with high performance, but not necessarily the highest performing colleges. Selected colleges represent a diverse cross section of the CCC system, as they were also chosen based on student demographics and geography.

Gleaned from this study's preliminary quantitative research were the names of noncredit programs with notably higher transition and throughput rates from ESL to TLE. More specifically, two lists of colleges were ranked on:

1. Volume (i.e., highest number of students that transition)
2. Rates (i.e., percentage of noncredit students who started in 2012-2014 and succeeded in TLE by 2018).

From these two lists, the RP Group invited ESL programs for interviews in February 2019. Following the development of a semi-structured interview protocol, the RP Group interviewed key faculty and staff at the selected community colleges. A total of 25 faculty and staff from the following 10 colleges participated in the interviews:

1. Cabrillo College
2. Citrus College
3. Coastline College
4. Irvine Valley College
5. Mendocino College
6. Saddleback College
7. San Diego Adult School
8. San Jose City College
9. Southwestern College
10. Woodland College

# Key Themes from Interviews

Next, we examine what community college practitioners are doing, especially those with high throughput rates from noncredit ESL to transfer-level English. The interview protocol included questions that asked participants to share key characteristics about their programs' design. An analysis of the interview transcripts found eight key themes.

## **THEME #1**: Integration of noncredit and credit ESL programs

Of these 10 colleges, three colleges have noncredit and credit ESL programs where the same faculty teach both credit and noncredit courses. One college has faculty teach across all levels offered, while two others have a few teachers working in both types of courses. Six colleges have a dedicated faculty coordinator who provides leadership to the program and updates the curriculum to align with credit pathways. Four colleges use the same minimum qualifications for hiring ESL and English faculty across the credit and noncredit programs. Two colleges ensure equitable faculty compensation for both types of courses.

## **THEME #2**: Recently updated or revised ESL courses

Three out of the 10 colleges interviewed have reduced the number of levels, from eight down to four (or fewer). At five colleges, two types of noncredit ESL courses are offered: those for students working on literacy and life skills, and those for students ready for academic and vocational college-level programs. All of the colleges interviewed have created new courses to provide customized instruction for specific students to bridge life skills and academics (e.g., Introduction to Keyboarding, Introduction to Computing). Two colleges are offering new noncredit courses specifically designed for transition to transfer-level English, as well as transfer-level credit ESL courses.

## **THEME #3**: Smooth transitions and forward momentum for students without penalties

Four colleges interviewed have created integrated courses to support ESL students making the transition from noncredit to credit coursework and academic pathways. Two others accomplish these smooth transitions through standard grading policies used across the department. Three colleges stated they employ a pass/no pass grading option for all students, which according to one college, allows students to pursue challenging curricula and improve their English skills, while protecting them from receiving a low grade point average.

Three colleges use "mirrored courses" to provide flexibility for students. Mirrored courses are noncredit and credit students taking the same content with the same instructor in the same room. This approach allows students to repeat the noncredit course unlimited times, then move to the credit version when ready.

## **THEME #4**: Talented, dedicated, and loyal ESL faculty

Two colleges illustrated the quality and dedication of their ESL faculty. Interview participants noted the low turnover in faculty hiring. Two colleges spoke of the top talent they hire, who possess the same minimum qualifications as credit English faculty. Interviewees from three colleges described an example of the strong collaboration between credit and noncredit faculty. One particular institution described its cohesion as large, well-attended department meetings that include part-time faculty. Another institution depicted a robust committee structure that includes ESL counselors. Six colleges use ESL-designated faculty coordinators to support program revisions and implement ESL pathways. Three colleges are exploring acceleration within ESL.

## **THEME #5**: Reliance on evidence to inform policy and practice

Six colleges reported using local research to support evaluation and planning to investigate student progress and transition. Colleges rely on institutional research offices to provide data on student transitions and conduct surveys that drive evidenced-based decision-making. However, the interviews made clear that not all colleges have access to institutional research resources and support.

## **THEME #6**: Curriculum that allows students to explore their own personal and professional trajectories

Six colleges described a college- or department-wide philosophy underscoring student success. One called it a "transition to college" mentality. Another interviewee recounted "just selling college" at every opportunity. Interview participants at three colleges offered examples of classroom assignments related to investigating a college major or exploring a career pathway. Some spoke of classroom visits to credit courses and vice versa. Three colleges explained their trust in ESL students and their use of an asset (rather than deficit) perspective in their pedagogical approach. Across four colleges, there was a strong connection between ESL faculty and students. Regardless of college size, faculty intentionally tried to get to know their students and their stories.

## **THEME #7**: Broad support and support services in close proximity to ESL instruction

On one college campus, a new building allowed noncredit students to have full access to both instruction and support services. At one large, multi-campus college, ESL students were present on every campus. Regardless of how the college provided support, interviewees at two colleges spoke of the importance of providing comprehensive support in one location. At one college, noncredit students obtain college identification (ID) cards, similar to credit students, which allows them to receive the same benefits as their peers, including access to the library, healthcare services, career assessments, and transfer services.

## **THEME #8**: Vital role of counselors in the success and achievement of ESL students

Interviewees from eight colleges report that counselors dedicated to the ESL population in both credit and noncredit provide academic advising, educational plans, career exploration, and counseling for students throughout their academic career. These ESL counselors provide direct and straightforward counseling in and out of the classroom. One college provides ESL orientations and outreach that, as much as possible, include fluent speakers in the students' native languages. Three colleges report using staff or student advocates to offer assistance with completing CCC applications. Two colleges contend that they have developed a local, specific application for noncredit students. Where possible, at least two colleges provide support for ESL students using CCC Apply, which can be more cumbersome to complete for non-native speakers. Interviewees from one college assert there is an intentional customer service model with liberal hours of operation and an expectation that students will receive a response within one business day. Eight out of the 10 colleges have dedicated ESL or noncredit counselors. Two colleges used 'success' or transition coaches and were scaffolding multiple kinds of support, including special events on campus (such as bridge sessions), having students explore college pathways as research in their ESL course, and layering messaging about college into courses.

# Conclusions and Implications

All in all, results revealed limited value in the utility of CASAS scores for predicting transition into a TLE for noncredit students due to a low percentage of AE students achieving throughput at the two institutions with test score data. However, we found that subsequent enrollment in a credit English or ESL course did predict transition to TLE for these students. Starting level and whether the AE student enrolled in ESL programs were also significant predictors of throughput to TLE.

Interviews from 10 districts with high transition rates from noncredit to credit provided a qualitative look at effective practices. Colleges have responded creatively to student needs by shortening sequences to have fewer levels, placing an intentional focus on establishing academic rigor in noncredit courses, and creating a transition or pathway to credit enrollment and employment. ESL counseling and comprehensive support services also appear to contribute to high transition rates.

## Opportunities for Consideration

Based on the findings from the mixed-methods analysis, the RP Group identified three areas of opportunity for colleges to consider as they work to improve transition and throughput from adult education and noncredit to credit coursework based on the CASAS analysis and interviews with relatively high performing ESL throughput rates.

**Opportunity 1. Adult education consortia and community colleges should work collaboratively to create clear noncredit to credit pathways across ESL and English sequences**. Based on the CASAS analysis, CASAS reading levels were not effective predictors of student success or placement. Instead, the level of the students' first course in the ESL/English sequence had the greatest impact on whether students ever transition into credit coursework. In addition, enrolling in a credit English or ESL course has a significant impact on students' probability of attempting and successfully completing TLE.

**Opportunity 2: Community colleges should consider more explicit integration of their noncredit and credit curriculum to ensure a seamless transition for students**. Based on interviews with the colleges with relatively high ESL throughput rates, a common design of the ESL programs was the full integration of their noncredit and credit programs. There were colleges with faculty who split their time between noncredit and credit instruction and housing noncredit and credit programs in the same physical space.

**Opportunity 3: Community colleges should consider contextualizing ESL curriculum to meet the needs of students**. These revisions could include the use of mirrored courses that allow students the option of repeating noncredit courses with the same level of rigor and content as the parallel credit course. Colleges have found ways to shorten the sequence and reduce the number of levels offered, which in turn increases transition to credit and throughput. Colleges are also developing customized curricula that are specific to student needs such as (a) short-term grammar and vocabulary courses, (b) skills focused courses such as computer literacy or vocational ESL, and (c) transition focused courses, such as career exploration and college knowledge or freshman composition offered as ESL. The creativity and flexibility in developing content for ESL students continues to evolve. Highly successful programs are merging or blending the lines between credit and noncredit for ELL as they see a continuous pathway from adult education to employment.

# Appendix: TLE Cumulative Throughput Rates for Noncredit ESL Students by College

| College | Headcount | TL English 2Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 3Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 4Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 2Yr Throughput Rate | TL English 3Yr Throughput Rate | TL English 4Yr Throughput Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALLAN HANCOCK | 7,936 | 0.5% | 0.7% | 0.7% | 0.4% | 0.5% | 0.6% |
| ANTELOPE VALLEY | 447 | 3.6% | 4.0% | 4.0% | 3.36% | 3.8% | 3.8% |
| BARSTOW | 160 | 1.3% | 3.1% | 3.8% | 1.25% | 3.1% | 3.8% |
| BUTTE | 982 | 4.4% | 5.0% | 5.7% | 3.26% | 4.0% | 4.7% |
| CABRILLO* | 301 | 28.9% | 33.9% | 34.9% | 24.92% | 30.2% | 31.2% |
| CANYONS | 2,457 | 1.0% | 1.2% | 1.3% | 0.94% | 1.1% | 1.2% |
| CERRITOS | 2,630 | 1.2% | 2.1% | 2.7% | 1.14% | 1.7% | 2.4% |
| CHAFFEY | 1,034 | 2.8% | 4.0% | 4.6% | 2.42% | 3.6% | 4.3% |
| CITRUS* | 1,633 | 2.6% | 3.6% | 3.9% | 2.27% | 3.1% | 3.4% |
| COASTLINE* | 1,743 | 2.6% | 5.5% | 8.7% | 2.58% | 5.2% | 8.0% |
| COLUMBIA | 157 | 0.0% | 1.3% | 1.3% | 0.00% | 1.3% | 1.3% |
| COMPTON | 508 | 1.0% | 1.0% | 1.4% | 0.98% | 1.0% | 1.4% |
| COPPER MOUNTAIN | 211 | 2.8% | 4.3% | 5.2% | 1.90% | 3.3% | 4.3% |
| CUESTA | 1,875 | 0.2% | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.11% | 0.2% | 0.3% |
| CUYAMACA | 765 | 1.4% | 4.6% | 10.3% | 1.44% | 4.3% | 9.5% |
| DESERT | 5,529 | 0.6% | 0.9% | 1.2% | 0.60% | 0.8% | 1.0% |
| EAST LA | 4,622 | 2.0% | 3.9% | 5.1% | 1.60% | 3.4% | 4.4% |
| FEATHER RIVER | 268 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.00% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| FOOTHILL | 734 | 1.5% | 2.5% | 2.6% | 1.23% | 2.0% | 2.2% |
| GAVILAN | 2,495 | 0.6% | 0.8% | 0.9% | 0.44% | 0.6% | 0.8% |
| GLENDALE | 13,918 | 1.7% | 3.1% | 4.6% | 1.45% | 2.7% | 4.2% |
| HARTNELL | 202 | 2.0% | 2.5% | 2.5% | 0.50% | 1.0% | 1.0% |

| College | Headcount | TL English 2Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 3Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 4Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 2Yr Throughput Rate | TL English 3Yr Throughput Rate | TL English 4Yr Throughput Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IMPERIAL | 1,061 | 2.7% | 3.1% | 3.2% | 2.36% | 2.8% | 3.0% |
| IRVINE* | 814 | 19.5% | 20.0% | 20.6% | 17.81% | 18.3% | 18.7% |
| LA CITY | 21,647 | 0.7% | 1.0% | 1.1% | 0.61% | 0.8% | 1.0% |
| LA HARBOR | 519 | 2.9% | 3.9% | 4.0% | 2.50% | 3.3% | 3.5% |
| LA MISSION | 2,878 | 0.7% | 1.1% | 1.2% | 0.59% | 0.9% | 1.0% |
| LA SWEST | 7,961 | 0.7% | 0.8% | 0.9% | 0.58% | 0.7% | 0.7% |
| LA TRADE | 3,193 | 0.6% | 0.7% | 0.8% | 0.47% | 0.5% | 0.7% |
| LA VALLEY | 5,495 | 2.8% | 4.5% | 5.6% | 2.27% | 3.8% | 4.9% |
| LAKE TAHOE | 831 | 0.8% | 1.1% | 1.2% | 0.48% | 0.7% | 0.8% |
| LASSEN | 687 | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.15% | 0.1% | 0.1% |
| LONG BEACH | 3,639 | 1.5% | 1.9% | 2.1% | 1.18% | 1.5% | 1.8% |
| MARIN | 4,810 | 0.2% | 0.5% | 0.6% | 0.19% | 0.4% | 0.6% |
| MENDOCINO* | 1,138 | 2.7% | 3.3% | 3.4% | 1.76% | 2.3% | 2.5% |
| MERCED | 1,263 | 0.7% | 0.8% | 1.3% | 0.63% | 0.7% | 1.3% |
| MIRA COSTA | 5,019 | 1.0% | 1.3% | 1.5% | 0.82% | 1.1% | 1.2% |
| MISSION | 553 | 0.7% | 1.3% | 1.6% | 0.54% | 0.9% | 1.3% |
| MODESTO | 2,352 | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.34% | 0.4% | 0.4% |
| MONTEREY | 1,183 | 4.6% | 5.7% | 6.3% | 3.72% | 4.6% | 5.2% |
| MT SAN ANTONIO | 12,641 | 1.7% | 3.2% | 4.0% | 1.41% | 2.7% | 3.5% |
| MT. SAN JACINTO | 5,199 | 0.6% | 1.0% | 1.2% | 0.54% | 0.8% | 1.0% |
| NAPA | 860 | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.3% | 0.12% | 0.1% | 0.3% |
| NORTH ORANGE ADULT | 30,572 | 0.8% | 1.2% | 1.5% | 0.66% | 1.1% | 1.3% |
| PALO VERDE | 1,082 | 0.6% | 0.6% | 0.6% | 0.55% | 0.6% | 0.6% |
| PALOMAR | 7,223 | 0.3% | 0.5% | 0.8% | 0.19% | 0.4% | 0.7% |
| PASADENA | 9,054 | 0.9% | 2.0% | 2.7% | 0.76% | 1.8% | 2.4% |
| PORTERVILLE | 311 | 0.3% | 1.0% | 1.9% | 0.00% | 0.6% | 1.6% |
| REDWOODS | 597 | 2.7% | 2.8% | 3.5% | 2.18% | 2.3% | 2.7% |
| REEDLEY COLLEGE | 118 | 3.4% | 3.4% | 3.4% | 3.39% | 3.4% | 3.4% |
| RIO HONDO | 1,587 | 0.6% | 0.8% | 0.9% | 0.57% | 0.8% | 0.9% |
| SADDLEBACK* | 4,417 | 3.5% | 4.7% | 5.5% | 3.08% | 4.4% | 5.1% |
| SAN BERNARDINO | 106 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.9% | 0.00% | 0.0% | 0.9% |
| SAN DIEGO ADULT* | 44,208 | 4.0% | 4.6% | 5.0% | 3.66% | 4.2% | 4.6% |
| SAN FRANCISCO CTRS | 59,469 | 0.5% | 1.0% | 1.5% | 0.45% | 0.9% | 1.4% |

| College | Headcount | TL English 2Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 3Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 4Yr Attempt Rate | TL English 2Yr Throughput Rate | TL English 3Yr Throughput Rate | TL English 4Yr Throughput Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SAN JOSE CITY* | 237 | 16.5% | 23.2% | 24.9% | 14.35% | 20.7% | 22.8% |
| SANTA ANA | 35,490 | 0.4% | 0.7% | 1.0% | 0.30% | 0.6% | 0.8% |
| SANTA BARBARA | 1,425 | 1.0% | 1.0% | 1.0% | 0.84% | 0.8% | 0.8% |
| SANTA BARBARA CONT | 6,738 | 0.6% | 0.9% | 1.0% | 0.49% | 0.7% | 0.8% |
| SANTA MONICA | 4,201 | 2.2% | 3.6% | 4.6% | 1.86% | 3.1% | 4.0% |
| SANTA ROSA | 8,758 | 2.8% | 3.1% | 3.3% | 2.26% | 2.5% | 2.8% |
| SANTIAGO CANYON | 12,747 | 0.3% | 0.5% | 0.7% | 0.31% | 0.5% | 0.7% |
| SEQUOIAS | 1,816 | 0.9% | 1.4% | 1.9% | 0.72% | 1.2% | 1.6% |
| SHASTA | 890 | 1.2% | 1.5% | 1.9% | 1.01% | 1.1% | 1.3% |
| SIERRA | 157 | 0.0% | 0.6% | 1.3% | 0.0% | 0.6% | 1.3% |
| SISKIYOU | 3,615 | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.1% | 0.06% | 0.1% | 0.1% |
| SOUTHWESTERN* | 613 | 2.6% | 2.8% | 2.9% | 2.28% | 2.4% | 2.6% |
| TAFT | 263 | 1.1% | 1.1% | 3.0% | 1.14% | 1.1% | 2.7% |
| VICTOR VALLEY | 1,021 | 0.7% | 1.0% | 1.1% | 0.49% | 0.8% | 0.8% |
| WEST VALLEY | 116 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| WOODLAND* | 602 | 0.8% | 3.0% | 3.2% | 0.83% | 2.7% | 3.0% |
| YUBA | 574 | 3.3% | 5.1% | 5.7% | 2.79% | 4.4% | 4.9% |

*indicates colleges selected to interview

# Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The RP Group strengthens the ability of California community colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

## Project Team

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