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# Participation and pass rates for college preparatory transition courses in Kentucky

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## Key findings

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This study of Kentucky students who take college preparatory transition courses (voluntary courses in math and reading available to grade 12 students who test below state benchmarks on the ACT in grade 11) finds that:

- Statewide, the percentage of students in the approaching benchmarks category (the category recommended for transition courses) is higher in math (37.5 percent) than in reading (20.5 percent).
- Statewide participation in transition courses for students in the approaching benchmarks category is 28.1 percent in math and 8.0 percent in reading.
- Statewide pass rates for students in the approaching benchmarks category who take transition courses are 94.7 percent for math and 96.1 percent for reading.

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## Summary

In response to growing concerns about college readiness, the Kentucky legislature revised the state's assessment and accountability system in an effort to increase the number of students who are ready for college when they graduate. The Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education responded by redefining college and career readiness, articulating objectives and outcomes to measure progress, and establishing pathways to achieve those objectives.

### **Kentucky students scoring below state benchmarks on the ACT in grade 11 have the opportunity to take college preparatory transition courses in grade 12**

This study focuses on one of these pathways: college preparatory transition courses in math and reading for grade 12 students scoring below state benchmarks on the ACT assessment administered in grade 11. This study describes the types of students who take these transition courses, along with participation and pass rates. The study presents results separately for students falling into three state benchmark categories on the ACT:

- *Meeting state benchmarks:* scoring 19 or higher on the ACT math assessment and 20 or higher on the ACT reading assessment.
- *Approaching state benchmarks:* scoring 16–18 on math and 17–19 on reading.
- *Performing below state benchmarks:* scoring 15 or lower on math and 16 or lower on reading.

The Kentucky Department of Education provides curricula for one math college preparatory transition course and one reading course, though schools and districts may choose their own curricula. The department recommends that students in the approaching benchmarks category receive college preparatory interventions (such as transition courses), but participation is not mandatory or restricted to students approaching benchmarks, and not all schools offer both courses.

### **Data on transition courses can inform efforts to increase college readiness**

The Southeast/South-Central Educational Cooperative (SE/SC Coop), a research alliance partner with Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, worked with a local college to develop its own curricula for these transition courses. The SE/SC Coop wants to know which students participate in the transition courses, how these students perform, and how students in SE/SC Coop district schools compare with other students in the state.

The analyses of the participation and pass rates are based on the population of grade 12 students in Kentucky public schools in 2011/12. The results for the SE/SC Coop districts are compared with results for a set of districts in Kentucky with similar characteristics (the matched comparison districts) and with results for the state as a whole. Results are also disaggregated by student and school subgroup. These comparisons can help the SE/SC Coop districts set measurable goals for increasing the college readiness of their students. The disaggregated results will allow the SE/SC Coop to identify gaps in performance across subgroups and work to reduce them. The findings can also inform the SE/SC Coop's broader research agenda.

**While a majority of Kentucky students do not enroll in transition courses, regardless of their ACT performance, statewide pass rates are higher than 90 percent for those who do enroll**

The study finds that:

- *Participation in transition courses for all students (regardless of ACT performance) is higher in SE/SC Coop districts than in matched comparison districts and in the state as a whole.* Participation in math transition courses for all students is 26.7 percent in the SE/SC Coop districts, 19.1 percent in the matched comparison districts, and 18.7 percent in the state as a whole. For reading, participation is even lower, at 7.5 percent in the SE/SC Coop districts, 2.4 percent in the matched comparison districts, and 5.4 percent in the state as a whole.
- *More students are in the approaching benchmarks category in math than in reading.* These are the students that the Kentucky Department of Education recommends for transition courses. The percentage of students in the approaching benchmarks category is nearly twice as high in math (40.0 percent in the SE/SC Coop districts and 39.0 percent in the matched comparison districts) as in reading (20.5 percent and 21.5 percent). Statewide, the gap is similar, at 37.5 percent in the approaching benchmarks category in math and 20.5 percent in reading. The percentage of students in the performing below benchmarks category is lower in math (21.3 percent statewide) than in reading (35.5 percent statewide).
- *Most students in the approaching benchmarks category do not enroll in college preparatory transition courses.* Statewide participation in transition courses for students in the approaching benchmarks category is 28.1 percent in math and 8.0 percent in reading. These are lower-bound estimates, as schools could be offering transition courses that cannot be identified by state course codes or course names.
- *For students in the approaching benchmarks category, participation in transition courses is greater in SE/SC Coop districts than in matched comparison districts and in the state as a whole.* For students in the approaching benchmarks category, participation in math is 39.8 percent in the SE/SC Coop districts, 26.4 percent in the matched comparison districts, and 28.1 percent in the state as a whole. Participation in reading is lower than in math: 17.3 percent among SE/SC Coop districts, 2.8 percent in the matched comparison districts, and 8.0 percent in the state as a whole. Participation in both math and reading is lower for students in the meeting benchmarks and performing below benchmarks categories than for students in the approaching benchmarks category.
- *In both math and reading most students who take college preparatory transition courses pass them.* Pass rates for students in the approaching benchmarks category are 98.0 percent for math and 88.8 percent for reading in the SE/SC Coop districts, 96.1 percent for math and 100 percent for reading in the matched comparison districts, and 94.7 percent for math and 96.1 percent for reading in the state as a whole.