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College Readiness of California's High School Students

The State Can Better Prepare Students for College by Adopting New Strategies and Increasing Oversight

Background

With nearly 1.8 million high school students enrolled in 420 California public high school districts and predictions of an increasing number of jobs requiring at least a bachelor's degree, college readiness has become a priority for the State. The University of California (UC) adopted uniform academic standards for high school college preparatory courses—referred to as *a-g courses*—that students must pass as a prerequisite for admission to both the California State University and the UC systems. High school courses must be certified by the UC to qualify as an *a-g course*. We were asked to audit college preparatory coursework at a selection of high schools from three school districts.

Key Recommendations

To ensure grade nine students are prepared for college preparatory coursework, the Legislature should:

- Require Education or another state entity to coordinate statewide college readiness efforts to increase completion rates and require County Offices of Education to monitor districts' performance in preparing students for college.
- Reallocate resources for additional educational efforts beginning in kindergarten through grade eight.

To increase students' completion rates, districts should:

- Implement a process to identify and intervene when students are at risk of failing to complete grade-level college preparatory coursework.
- Create a robust and stable network of credit recovery options such as offering summer school and evening courses.

To ensure students receive sufficient access to college preparatory coursework, Education should provide additional training and guidance to districts on how to measure student access to courses.

Key Findings

- While the three school districts—San Francisco, Stockton, and Coachella Valley Unified School Districts—we reviewed offer a-g courses, only San Francisco aligned its graduation coursework requirement with the coursework needed for admission to California's public universities.
- All three districts provide support services for struggling students but San Francisco has also implemented a system to provide timely interventions for students who fall off track.
- If students fell off track at any point during their high school careers—especially in grade nine—they were unlikely to complete all necessary college preparatory coursework by the end of high school.
- The high schools we reviewed appear to provide their students sufficient access to college preparatory coursework for certain years; however, the districts' data were limited for other years.
- The California Department of Education (Education) has provided very little oversight related to college preparatory coursework.
- The reports school districts prepare annually to provide metrics to measure student achievement contain outdated information and are inaccurate and uninformative.

College Preparatory Coursework Completion Rates Vary Significantly in the Three Districts We Reviewed

