

**READY OR NOT? CALIFORNIA'S EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM AND THE  
TRANSITION TO COLLEGE**

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**ABSTRACT OF PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO THE  
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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Despite the pressing need to ensure that more students obtain a postsecondary degree, we know surprisingly little about what leads to college readiness and degree completion. Although several studies have demonstrated that many students are relatively uninformed about what it takes to succeed in college, the question of how we might effectively enrich the information on which students base their postsecondary decisions remains daunting. Under Goal Three of the IES call for research proposals, our study investigates the efficacy of a fully developed state program intended to “improve access to, persistence in, or completion of postsecondary education.” Analyzing detailed individual-level longitudinal data, we apply a quasi-experimental design to tease out the causal impacts of a specific state intervention—California’s Early Assessment Program—developed to better support the transition from high school to postsecondary schooling. Results from our earlier exploratory research on this intervention (funded by IES under Goal One) reveal some promising findings. We find that participation in the Early Assessment Program (EAP), which provides students with information about their college readiness for the State University after their junior year of high school, reduces the average student’s probability of needing remediation by 6.2 percentage points in English and 4.3 percentage points in mathematics (Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky, 2009). These findings provide a fruitful starting point for our expanded investigation of the effects of the EAP on students’ educational choices and outcomes. However, our past work was limited to data from one campus of the California State University system. As a result, we were not able to sufficiently examine the effect of EAP across different contexts and with different sub-populations. Our aim with this proposed research is well aligned with IES’s intentions for Goal Three, mainly to determine whether California’s Early Assessment Program is equally effective for all types of students (e.g. by race/ethnicity, sex, parental education and English language ability), and across all high school contexts. We also move beyond documenting average and potentially heterogeneous effects of EAP to unpack the mechanisms by which EAP may affect the postsecondary careers of California youth. Access to statewide data now enables us to replicate our earlier study and extend it in important ways described in this proposal. The California Early Assessment Program has garnered national attention, but, as noted in the IES call for proposals to which we are responding, its true impact has not been sufficiently examined or understood.