

Bridge to College Summary Update: March 2023

Background

The initial framework and original design for Washington’s “transition courses”—*Bridge to College English* and *Bridge to College Math*—grew out of the state’s involvement in the national *Core to College* initiative, funded in part by the Gates Foundation. Based on that framework, [College Spark Washington](#) then agreed to support the development and implementation of the *Bridge to College* transition courses in math and English, beginning with pilot work in 2014-15. The courses are designed to provide high school seniors not yet ready for college-level work a targeted opportunity to prepare for success in college-level work in math and/or English language arts. “Transition courses” are now defined in Washington statute as courses with a placement agreement attached to them, with Bridge to College being the only statewide example of such courses. The agreement, recently renewed and extended through the high school graduating class of 2027, means that students who earn a B grade or above in Bridge to College courses are eligible to enroll in college-level math and English at all participating Washington higher education institutions (currently the CTC system plus Eastern Washington University).

Collaboratively designed and developed by higher education faculty, high school teachers, and curriculum specialists from multiple colleges and school districts, the Bridge to College courses are grounded in essential career and college readiness expectations reflecting Washington’s K-12 state learning standards.

The Bridge to College English curriculum was originally adapted by Washington educators, initially drawn primarily from the California State University Expository Reading and Writing Course ([CA Curriculum Materials](#)). Over the past several years, Washington high school teachers and college faculty have refined the available modules and developed new ones for use in the course. For more general details about the course and its source materials, see the [Introductory Materials](#).

The Bridge to College Math curriculum was originally adapted from the open-source [Math Ready course developed by the Southern Regional Education Board](#). Washington educators have refined and improved the material significantly in the decade since the initiative began, and in particular created extensive assessment resources for teachers that were not available in the original material.

Level of Participation in Bridge to College

As noted in the table below, there was a steady increase in Bridge to College participation after the initial 2014-15 pilot year. As a result of legislative action in the 2018 session designating

Bridge to College courses as one of two course-based alternatives to the high school assessment graduation requirement, there was a significant jump in district, school, and particularly teacher participation in 2018-19. Participation has been down but relatively stable since that time, even though the original College Spark grant has ended and the program is fully self-supported through fees the districts pay to support the required professional learning for their Bridge to College teachers.

School Year	Districts	High Schools	Teachers	English	Math
2015-16	74	114	210	104	106
2016-17	97	154	276	136	140
2017-18	89	138	247	121	126
2018 -19	111	188	430	196	234
2019-20	121	203	485	222	263
2020-21	121	202	419	183	236
2021-22	115	188	423	210	213
2022-23	108	174	394	202	192

Major Recent Program-related Activities

- We completed a substantive revision to Bridge to College Math: decreasing the emphasis on the quadratic unit and shifting that time to the statistics unit, moving the statistics unit to early in the course, starting a process of infusing a statistics connection in other units where appropriate, and revamping the focus on social-emotional learning in the opening unit of the course as well as throughout the other units.
- We developed several new modules for Bridge to College English with a specific focus on adding more diverse perspectives and voices and are revamping the professional learning opportunities for teachers to emphasize strategies for addressing equity issues in the classroom.
- For the first time since the beginning of the pandemic we were able to have the summer teacher institute in-person in 2022. As we expected, the number of participants was down from the last in-person institute we held but those who attended greatly appreciated the opportunity for real-time in-person learning about the courses.
- We produced a summary overview of the Bridge to College program (drawing from the BERC Group evaluation work as well as our own analyses) to share with key college system groups as background for their consideration of the system-wide placement agreement for the courses, which expired with the high school Class of 2022. Based on a presentation and discussion at their Fall 2022 meeting, the Articulation and Transfer Council for the community and technical system has proposed that the agreement be extended for 5 more years; the Instruction Commission will vote on that proposal during their upcoming Winter 2023 meeting.

Ongoing Challenges

- The external evaluations have highlighted that there are quite a few students who earn a “B or better” who do not transition directly into college, so a future focus is to work on identifying and reducing barriers that keep students from moving directly into college.
- Additional work is needed to connect Bridge to College Math (BTCM) with the shifting focus on high school math pathways, including the new “modernized” Algebra 2 course, and continuing to refine the BTCM curriculum to meet the needs of the specific population of students enrolling in the course.
- Getting information to schools and students about how to access the placement agreement continues to be challenging. Students often register for college before they have access to their senior-year transcript reflecting the “B or better” grade in Bridge to College.
- Given the ongoing post-pandemic issues for teachers and districts we have reduced the total number of hours of required professional learning for new teachers as well as the amount of in-person learning expected. We have resisted staying all-virtual for these efforts given that teachers are back to offering the class face-to-face and we believe the in-person teacher learning is essential, but we continue to have challenges with some districts around finding subs for the in-person meetings.
- Bridge to College teachers are struggling in the 2022-23 school year with the lingering consequences of the pandemic in terms of student capacity to do the work expected in the courses.