

Report: Taking 12th grade math opens door to higher education

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Students who take math in the 12th grade improve their chances of

enrolling and continuing in higher education, according to a [new report](#) by the Los Angeles Education Research Institute at UCLA.

In partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District, the institute's researchers followed the educational journeys of nearly 27,000 students beginning in the 11th grade. Those who took a full year of math in the [12th grade](#) were more likely to enroll in a four-year college and return for a second year, compared with academically similar peers who did not take math, the study found.

The report yields several findings that can inform current debates over [education policy](#) in California, said Meredith Phillips, co-founder of the institute known as LAERI, which is housed at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.

One key takeaway is the importance of a robust curriculum that allows all students to continue their math education into their senior year, said Phillips, whose research focuses on the causes and consequences of educational inequality.

"School staff, parents and other adults would be wise to encourage students to take these courses, which open up college opportunities and a path to longer-term social and economic mobility," she said.

The University of California and Cal State systems recommend but do not require a fourth year of high school math for freshman applicants. However, those who take math in the 12th grade may have an advantage in a competitive admissions process, particularly on campuses that no longer consider SAT or ACT test scores, the researchers noted.

"Enrollment in 12th grade math may also expose students to a [peer group](#) that is more college-focused, motivating them to pursue [higher education](#)," said Leonard Wainstein, a visiting assistant professor at Reed College

who served as the report's lead analyst.

About a quarter of the students in the study did not take math in 12th grade. To determine whether specific groups of students were less likely than their peers to enroll in these courses, the researchers examined differences by gender, ethnicity, English proficiency and socioeconomic status. The findings can be used to inform L.A. Unified staff about whether particular types of students need more encouragement to take math or more access to 12th grade math courses.

The study, which followed [high school students](#) who were academically similar at the end of their junior year, identified benefits from taking any kind of math class in 12th grade, including traditional offerings such as precalculus or alternatives such as statistics or data science.

Even though [students](#) who took 12th grade math experienced a very slight reduction in their overall grade point average, the researchers identified positive effects on college enrollment and persistence.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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