

Multiple Measures Improve Student Placement

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Janet Fulks, Bakersfield College, shares multiple measures data with representatives from African-American Success Through Excellence and Persistence (ASTEP).



At Bakersfield College, 1,600 students were placed in classes this year based on their high school transcript information rather than a single placement test. The approach is already showing promise for future student placements.

Bakersfield College is a pilot site for the California Community Colleges (CCC) [Common Assessment Initiative \(CAI\)](#) and the associated Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP). Multiple measures are means of placing students using a combination of relevant information to determine the courses in which they will be most successful.

“The students placed using the MMAP models are performing even better than expected,” said Janet Fulks, a microbiology professor at Bakersfield College. “These students saved over 4,000 semesters of unnecessary work because the multiple measures tend to place students higher than the current assessment test alone.”

Integrated Placement Data

The CCCAssess tool being developed by CAI, with MMAP models fully integrated into the platform, will result in a better student placement, according to John Hetts, Senior Director of Data Science at Educational Results Partnership, which is assisting the CAI with data analysis.

“Over 50 colleges are piloting the MMAP models and contributing to a system wide re-evaluation of how we place students,” Hetts said. “Colleges will have full local control to develop their own placement models using both tools. The MMAP models, combined with the new assessment, will give us a holistic, comprehensive and far more accurate understanding of students’ capabilities, leading to more effective evaluation and placement.”

The statewide MMAP models utilizing high school transcript data for placement are expected to be seamlessly integrated into the new assessment system, explained Jennifer Coleman, CAI Statewide Program Director.

“Placement will, of course, remain a local decision and colleges can choose which approach best serves their students,” Coleman said. “The statewide model will seamlessly populate CCCAssess student and counsellor reports for local course placement recommendations.” High school transcript data will come from a variety of sources, including self-reported GPA for those students who may not be coming straight from local California high schools.

Multiple Measures Within CCCAssess

The pilot colleges are collecting and examining self-reported high school achievement data, data provided on high school transcripts, and other non-cognitive measures of students’ capacity. Though many additional methods have been examined, measures with demonstrated predictive relationships with student performance in community college courses were:

- A student’s overall high school grade point average
- The most recent class taken in the discipline
- The grade in that most recent discipline-specific course
- Other courses completed in the discipline
- Scores on the most recent standardized test in the discipline

Encouraging Pilot Experience

Early results from Bakersfield College and research that looked at many student data points in predictive analysis are very encouraging, according to Fulks.

“All 6,000 of our new students will be placed using the MMAP models next year,” she said. “Student performance in multiple classes in high school with a variety of teachers turns out to be an excellent predictor of college success.”

MMAP with CCCAssess will provide more data to put students where they will be successful and help them achieve their educational goals, Fulks explained. “The conversations that we are having are brilliant. Every college can have access to high school data and can use it for more accurate placement that increases students’ ability to complete college. With CCCAssess, faculty will have a better diagnostic tool to understand students’ skills as well as specific feedback that can be provided to feeder high schools,” she said.

Planning For Positive Impact

Ken Sorey, Senior Executive Vice President of Educational Results Partnership, has been helping colleges plan for adoption of the multiple measures models and CCCAssess. “Improving placement is a very inclusive process and different at every campus,” he said. “It is critical to have the right people at the table. Everyone involved should have a say in the plan. The process must be transparent so those who will be affected understand the changes. It is also important to convey that changes to the placement model are completely under the college’s control.”

Sorey added that colleges need to discuss the changes with high schools. “Use of the MMAP models and CCCAssess should open up new and productive discussions with high schools on feeder patterns,” he said. “There are opportunities for better curriculum alignment, preparation of students and co-designed coursework.”

“The bottom line is that a student’s past performance, as indicated in high school transcript data, is a more reliable measure to accurately place a student than an assessment test alone,” Sorey said. “The research shows that many students will save a semester or two, speeding them to graduation. When you take that to scale, 2.4 million students could benefit.”

How To Get Started

With this potential, Hetts said there is no reason to wait. “Your college can start using the MMAP models now,” he said. “You don’t have to wait for your CCCAssess adoption semester. In fact, some colleges have gone from consideration of multiple measures to execution of their more comprehensive use in placement for students matriculating in the next term in less than a month.”

Fulks agreed that colleges should be looking at the statewide models now. “Way too many students have been placed one or more levels below where they should be when you look at the high school data,” she said. “We have real data that shows the multiple measures high school transcript model is an accurate predictor of success. It could save a student a whole year and enable faster completion of college.”

To help colleges adopt the MMAP models, the CAI offers [regional professional development sessions](#) with breakouts on both multiple measures and CCCAssess, listed on the website. Upcoming sessions include:

- June 10 — Ontario
- July 29 — Southern California
- August 26 — Butte College in Oroville
- September 16 — Fresno

The [Multiple Measures Assessment Project website](#) offers information packets, planning exercises and webinars. Both Ken Sorey and John Hetts can be reached by calling 916-498-8980.

Upcoming Presentations

There will be presentations on CCCAssess and Multiple Measures at these two upcoming conferences:

- May 13 — [CCCAA Southern Region Conference](#), Yucaipa
- June 16-17 — [Online Teaching Conference](#), San Diego

The [CCCAssess college adoption schedule](#) and the [CAI Implementation Guide](#) can be viewed on the CAI website at [CCCAssess.org](#). For more information on CCCAssess, please contact Jennifer Coleman, CAI Statewide Program Director, by [email](#) or by phone at 530-879-4165.