

**CONTACT:**

**Elizabeth Ganga, CCRC**

212-678-3394 | [ganga@tc.edu](mailto:ganga@tc.edu)

**John Hutchins, MDRC**

212-340-8604 | [john.hutchins@mdrc.org](mailto:john.hutchins@mdrc.org)

## **Study Finds More 'Remedial' Students Should Take College-Level Courses**

*Multiple Measures Assessment Leads to Better Outcomes, But the Real Key is Opening College-Level English and Math to More Students*

(New York City, October 21, 2020) — Most community colleges and many four-year institutions use standardized placement tests to determine if students are ready for college-level courses or need remedial help to catch up. But a [new study](#) found that combining the test results with high school GPA and other measures—called multiple measures assessment—allowed more students to go straight into college-level courses, and researchers found that those students did better than similar students left behind.

Regardless of whether they were predicted to succeed, students did better when they were allowed to start in college-level courses, researchers from the [Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness](#) (CAPR) found. The students bumped up into college-level courses using multiple measures assessment were able to complete college-level English and math courses at substantially higher rates than similar students in the control group who had to start in developmental, or remedial, courses. In fact, even students predicted by a multiple measures algorithm to need developmental courses did better as a group when allowed to start in college-level courses, the study found.

“We recommend that colleges default to placing students into college-level courses when they’re on the fence about whether or not they’re ready,” said Elisabeth Barnett, a senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center, which leads CAPR along with the independent research organization MDRC. “Our study adds to the evidence for putting a broader swath of community college students in college-level math and English.”

The report is [Who Should Take College-Level Courses?: Impact Findings From an Evaluation of a Multiple Measures Assessment Strategy](#), by Elisabeth A. Barnett, Elizabeth Kopko, Dan Cullinan, and Clive R. Belfield.

The study followed nearly 13,000 students for up to five semesters who entered one of seven State University of New York (SUNY) community colleges in fall 2016, spring 2017, or fall 2017. Students were randomly assigned to be assessed for college readiness using the standardized placement test alone or using an algorithm that weighted several factors—including the test scores and high school GPA—to predict success in college-level courses. The algorithm is one approach to multiple measures assessment.

Nationally, about two-thirds of community college students take at least one developmental course. [Earlier CCRC research](#), confirmed by the CAPR study, found placement tests are inaccurate and place too many students into developmental courses, costing them money and slowing their progress to a degree. Moreover, many students who begin college by taking developmental coursework never complete a college credential. Across the country, colleges are working to develop different strategies for helping students who may have difficulty with college-level work, such as corequisite courses and math pathways, and [other CAPR studies](#) are investigating some of those strategies.

### Key findings:

- The multiple measures system improved rates of placement into, enrollment in, and completion of college-level courses in English across all semesters studied for the overall study sample. Placement in college-level English jumped 34 percentage points, from 46 to 80 percent of students.
- In math, all of these metrics improved for the first semester, but impacts on enrollment and completion faded or disappeared by subsequent semesters.
- Multiple measures placement resulted in more students bumped up into college-level courses than bumped down into developmental courses, predicting that more students could be successful than their tests scores suggested. In math, 16 percent of students placed using multiple measures were bumped up to a college-level course; 10 percent were bumped down to a remedial course. In English, 44 percent were bumped up and 7 percent were bumped down.
- Students who were bumped up into college-level courses because of multiple measures were 8–10 percentage points *more* likely to complete a college-level math or English course within three semesters. Students who were bumped down into developmental courses were 8–10 percentage points *less* likely to complete a college-level math or English course within three semesters.
- All subpopulations looked at in the study (with the exception of men in math) had higher rates of placement into college-level courses using the multiple measures system. In English, Black students completed their courses at a rate 7.1 percentage points higher than comparison students, women completed at a rate 4.6 percentage points higher, and Pell recipients completed at a rate 4.5 percentage points higher.
- The alternative placement system saved students about \$160 in tuition and fees because they took fewer credits.
- Because multiple measures placement resulted in many fewer enrollments in remedial courses, the total cost was \$280 less per student.

This study sheds light on an important way to smooth the road for students entering college. Rather than using standardized placement tests alone, colleges can develop and deploy a multiple

measures placement system that does a better job of assessing students' readiness for math and English courses at a relatively low cost. The use of a multiple measures placement system, in tandem with other meaningful initiatives, can make a real contribution toward improving student success in college.

The SUNY colleges participating in the study are Cayuga Community College, Jefferson Community College, Niagara Community College, Onondaga Community College, Rockland Community College, Schenectady Community College, and Westchester Community College. A report planned for 2022 will provide outcomes of students in the study up to ten semesters following placement.

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*The Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR) is a partnership of research scholars led by the [Community College Research Center \(CCRC\)](#), Teachers College, Columbia University, and [MDRC](#) to study developmental education and provide evidence for promising reforms. The center is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305C140007 and Grant R305U200010 to Teachers College, Columbia University. IES provided \$13 million (92 percent) of funding for the center, and non-governmental sources provided an additional \$1.2 million (8 percent).*