



PRESS RELEASE

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Study Provides More Evidence for Expanding Access to College-Level Courses

CAPR Long-Term Study Shows Students Deemed Underprepared Succeed at Higher Rates When Community Colleges Use Multiple Measures Assessment for Course Placement

(New York City, October 24, 2023) — Figuring out who needs remedial help has long been a tricky problem for community colleges, which serve students at a wide range of academic levels.

A [long-term study](#) of an alternative approach to determining if community college students need developmental (also called remedial) courses has found that this approach allows many more students to succeed in their college-level math and English courses, part of the puzzle to bolstering the overall success of community college students.

Students moved from remedial to college-level math and English under the alternative system—multiple measures assessment or MMA—were 9 percentage points more likely to pass a college-level course in nine terms than students with the same scores who were randomly assigned to stay in remedial courses. Students moved down from college-level to remedial courses were less likely to pass than their peers, indicating that access to college-level courses—even for students deemed not college ready—is the key to higher success rates.

A brief, [The Long-Term Effects of Multiple Measures Assessment at SUNY Community Colleges](#), reports the study findings. An [accompanying working paper](#) provides more detail on the research. The researchers discuss the research [in a CAPR podcast](#). All are available at postsecondaryreadiness.org.

The Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR), a developmental education research center led by the [Community College Research Center](#) and [MDRC](#), has [studied MMA in seven State University of New York community colleges](#) since 2014. MMA is an alternative to the reliance on standardized placement tests like ACCUPLACER as the sole measure of whether a student needs extra academic support. In an MMA system, colleges use a combination of two

or more measures, including high school GPA, placement test scores, high school math and English course performance, and other measures, to determine placements. Using a broader set of measures that capture performance over time avoids some of the downsides of standardized testing.

Many community colleges and college systems are adopting MMA and it gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic when colleges were unable to conduct in-person placement testing.

The results of the study reinforce findings from studies of corequisite remediation and other developmental education reforms that students do better when allowed to start in college-level math and English. MMA was initially designed as a way to place students more accurately. But the evidence from this study suggests that the benefit comes from moving students into college-level courses. Even when MMA scores indicate that students need academic support, they are less likely to complete college-level math and English when placed in prerequisite developmental courses. Given the findings, the authors recommend that colleges design their MMA systems to maximize the placement of students into college-level math and English.

The CAPR study randomly assigned students to be placed using MMA or ACCUPLACER alone. Looking at students whose placements changed due to MMA (called bumped-up or bumped-down students), the study found that after nine terms bumping students up led to higher levels of enrollment in and passing college-level math and English:

- MMA gave bumped-up students a 14–15 percentage point advantage in **enrollment** in college-level math and English.
 - In math, 69% of bumped-up students enrolled in a college-level course, compared with 54% of comparison students.
 - In English, 78% of bumped-up students enrolled in a college-level course, compared with 64% of comparison students.
- MMA gave bumped-up students a 9 percentage point advantage in **completing** college-level math and English.
 - In math, 48% of bumped-up students completed a college-level course, compared with 39%.
 - In English, 55% of bumped-up students completed a college-level course, compared with 46%.

Bumping down students led to worse outcomes, even if MMA predicted that they would benefit from a developmental course.

- Students bumped down by MMA saw a 16 and 12 percentage point decrease in college-level math and English **enrollment**, respectively, after nine terms.
 - In math, 62% of students bumped down to a developmental course had **enrolled** in a college-level course, compared to 78% of comparison students placed directly in college-level.

- In English, 71% of bumped-down students **enrolled** in a college-level English course, compared with 83% of students in the comparison group.
- Students bumped down by MMA saw a decrease of 5–6 percentage points in college-level course **completion** after nine terms.
 - In math, 40% of students who were bumped down **completed** a college-level course, compared with 45% of students whose placement was not changed.
 - In English, 39% of students who were bumped down **completed** a college-level English course, compared to 45% of students whose placement was not changed.

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 research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305C140007 to Teachers College, Columbia University.