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# Development and Implementation of Multiple Measures for College Placement across States and Systems

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## *Phase I and Phase II Report Summary*

Prepared by Research for Action • February 2015



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## Introduction and Summary of Findings

Research shows that between 24 and 33 percent of students are misplaced when entering college, and therefore required to complete unnecessary developmental education courses that hinder postsecondary completion.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, nearly 40 percent of community college students enrolled in these courses fail to progress to credit-bearing coursework, let alone earn a degree or credential.<sup>2</sup>

There is growing recognition that assessing students using a single, standardized measure may contribute to this misplacement, and that more accurate decisions can be achieved using Multiple Measures of student readiness.<sup>3</sup> Such measures can include both academic and non-cognitive forms of assessment that offer a more complete picture of a student's ability.<sup>4,5</sup>

To examine how states, systems, and institutions are approaching the use of multiple measures for student placement, Research for Action (RFA) conducted a two-phase, year-long study in three states. This document summarizes the findings from that work.

## Phase I: Tracing the Development of Multiple Measures for College Placement across States and Systems: Analysis of Three State Systems

The Phase 1 report examines three states—California, North Carolina, and Wisconsin—that have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, Multiple Measures reforms with the ultimate goal of increasing college completion rates. Table 1 provides a brief description of approaches to Multiple Measures in each state.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott-Clayton, J. (2012). *Do high-stakes placement exams predict college success?* (CCRC Working Paper No. 41). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

<sup>2</sup> Complete College America. (2012) *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*.




<sup>3</sup> Belfied, C. and Crosta, P. (2012) *Predicting Success in College*:

*The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts*. (CCRC Working Paper No. 42) New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

<sup>4</sup> Academic measures are assessments that can generate a score or scores based on academic skills, such as standardized tests, grade point average or a writing sample with a scoring rubric.

<sup>5</sup> Non-cognitive measures are instruments, such as student surveys or interviews, which show non-academic levels of interest and experience.

Table 1: A Summary of Multiple Measures Policies across States

	<p>The California Community Colleges System has been at the forefront of Multiple Measures reform since 1986—longer than any other state. Regulations passed that year required more than one piece of evidence in placing students in introductory-level classes, but gave colleges considerable discretion in selecting which measure to use.</p>
	<p>This fact—coupled with the longstanding decentralized nature of system governance, history of campus leadership, and lack of formal accountability mechanisms—has led to significant variation in implementation across campuses.</p>
	<p>Legislation passed in 2011 and 2012 would have ushered in greater uniformity via a standard, common assessment system to be used as one of the placement measures. However, funding constraints have slowed progress, and the assessment has not yet been developed.</p>
	<p>North Carolina adopted its Multiple Measures policy very recently in 2013. However, with a structured approach and aggressive timeline for rolling out the policy, the initiative will reach all 58 colleges in the state by fall 2015.</p>
	<p>The policy establishes a hierarchy of measures through which students are exempted from developmental education courses if they graduated from high school in the last five years and satisfy at least one of the following requirements: 1) A high school GPA of at least 2.6 and demonstrated completion of four high school math courses, 2) ACT/SAT scores that meet specific score thresholds, and 3) Placement test scores that meet specific score thresholds. The hierarchy works as follows: Administrators first check students' high school transcripts to see if they meet GPA and course completion requirements. If students do not meet these standards, administrators consult ACT/SAT scores. Students who do not qualify for credit-bearing courses based on either of these measures then take placement tests.</p>
	<p>Unlike the formal policies in both California and North Carolina, Wisconsin has relied on pilot programs and gradual implementation via the English Department of the University of Wisconsin College system (UWC) that traverses the state's two-year college system. Multiple Measures reform began at the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County in 2007, and had expanded to seven additional campuses by 2012-13.</p>
	<p>Prior to 2007, students in the UWC College system were placed in first-year writing courses based only on the Wisconsin English Placement Test. This test is still required across colleges in the system, but can be augmented by additional measures on a voluntary basis. As of 2014, the UWC English Department has recommended a standard set of Multiple Measures for campuses adopting the reform; however, adoption of these recommendations is voluntary.</p>

Based on document analysis and interviews with state postsecondary leaders between October 2013 and January 2014, the Phase 1 report provides background on the postsecondary landscape in the three study states and systems, provides a common framework for looking across these states, and explores key factors influencing Multiple Measures policies: 1) catalysts of reform; 2) policy development; 3) assessment measures; 4) assessment data use; and 5) assessment cut scores. Table 2 outlines the primary cross-state findings for each of these factors.

Table 2. Summary of Policy Factors and Findings

POLICY FACTORS	SUMMARY FINDINGS
<b>Catalysts of Reform:</b> Factors supporting the development of Multiple Measures policy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal to the State</li> </ul>	In all three states, Multiple Measures policy reform has emerged primarily through stakeholder groups and initiatives from <i>internal</i> state postsecondary structures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External to the State</li> </ul>	External influences have played a more limited role in two of the states, but have still been a factor in initiating policy development in all three.
<b>Policy Development:</b> Processes and vehicles to develop and support Multiple Measures reform	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involvement in Policy Design</li> </ul>	All systems included campus stakeholders in policy development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy Mechanisms</li> </ul>	Only California has passed legislation or regulation around Multiple Measures; Wisconsin and North Carolina aligned reforms to curricular initiatives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy Implementation</li> </ul>	California and Wisconsin provide support to campuses on Multiple Measures implementation, while North Carolina had not at the time of the study.
<b>Policy Characteristics:</b> Elements of state or system approach to Multiple Measures placement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy Scope</li> </ul>	California and North Carolina have developed mandatory Multiple Measures policies in both math and English and across their systems. Wisconsin's policy is voluntary and applies only to English.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic Measures</li> </ul>	Academic assessment measures are used in all three states to varying degrees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-Cognitive Measures</li> </ul>	Measures which show non-academic levels of interest and experience (e.g., student survey) are common in California and Wisconsin but not currently required in any of the three study states.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special Needs/Exemptions</li> </ul>	The level of accommodations for special needs students, creation of ESL assessment versions, and Multiple Measures exemptions vary across the study states.
<b>Assessment Data Use:</b> Collection and use of Multiple Measures data for placement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data Collection</li> </ul>	At the time of the study, all three states were in the process of developing data collection systems for Multiple Measures placement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data Access</li> </ul>	Access to high school and college assessment data used for placement are limited in all three states.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placement Process/Appeals</li> </ul>	Placement and appeals processes are determined at the campus level in all three systems.
<b>Assessment Cut Scores:</b> Development of decisions around assessment cut scores for placement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cut Scores</li> </ul>	Policies vary across the systems.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Score Development</li> </ul>	The process for developing cut scores varies widely as well.

# Phase 2: Lessons from Multiple Measures Reforms across Six Two-Year Colleges in Three States

The Phase 2 report builds on the state-level work to examine implementation challenges that emerge as Multiple Measures policies are interpreted at the institution level. For each study state, RFA selected two campuses for in-depth study and conducted site visits in the spring of 2014. The sample campuses were selected because of their roles as early implementers and pioneers of Multiple Measures reform while also accounting for the geographic and demographic diversity of the institutions in each postsecondary system.

Our examination of the work underway at these colleges is organized into four sections, and summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Findings on Multiple Measures Implementation

<b>I. Overarching Findings across Systems and Institutions</b>
While Multiple Measures reforms are operationalized in a variety of ways across states and colleges, certain measures are used consistently, such as placement tests and overall high school GPA.
Multiple Measures reform is still in the early stages of implementation and has yet to be scaled across all of the colleges and systems; student outcomes show early signs of promise but further analysis is needed.
<b>II. System Level Influence on Implementation</b>
The degree of policy centralization influenced the level of reform scale-up and campus buy-in in the study sites. Mandatory policy led to lower levels of campus buy-in but faster adoption, while the opposite was found as a result of voluntary policy.
System-wide policy is not predictive of system-wide supports, such as professional development or data collection systems.
<b>III. Institutional-Level Implementation Challenges</b>
The complexity of Multiple Measures reform requires increased institutional capacity, due to logistical challenges and new and varied assessments for placement. Increased student advising and training and support for faculty and staff are also needed.
<b>IV. Challenges to Instructional Practices and Supports</b>
Multiple Measures has meant changes in the composition of both developmental education and college level classrooms. Specifically, increased concentrations of students with the lowest skill levels are reported in developmental education courses, while the diversity of skill levels has grown in college level courses.

## Recommendations

Based on our analysis of implementation in the six case study sites, we offer the following set of recommendations:

- **State and systems** need to: 1) develop resources to facilitate access to and interpretation of high school transcript data that has become central to Multiple Measures placement; 2) pilot Multiple Measures reforms with a cohort of institutions before scale-up, allowing for course corrections; and 3) provide professional development to institutional administrators on Multiple Measures implementation.
- **Colleges and campuses** need to: 1) encourage collaboration across departments and offices involved with student placement as a way to expedite reform; 2) build relationships with feeder districts to facilitate access to high school data; and 3) provide additional counseling and information to students so they understand their course placements and plan their course schedule to meet academic goals.
- **Classroom instruction and supports** can be improved through: 1) the use of assessment data not just for placement, but also for diagnostic purposes to identify areas of greatest academic need; and 2) additional professional development to faculty on addressing individual student needs as the student composition of classrooms change.

While all three states in our study have made real progress in reforming college placement through use of Multiple Measures, this work is just beginning in several important respects—and especially at the institution and classroom levels. As reforms continue to roll out, it will be critical to continue to track progress; identify challenges; and understand how colleges, campuses, and faculty and staff react to stages of the reform as it comes to scale.