

SECTION 2 | STATEWIDE REMEDIAL AND PLACEMENT POLICIES

Questions researched for the 50 states

1. Do statewide or systemwide policies for remedial education exist?
2. If yes, to which institutions do the remedial policies apply?
3. Does a statewide or systemwide common policy for placement into credit-bearing postsecondary courses exist?
4. If yes, to which institutions does the common placement policy apply?
5. Do states or systems that identify approved placement assessments also set minimal cut scores?

Increasingly, states are adopting policies to address the alarmingly high number of students who arrive on campuses unprepared for college-level coursework. Most of the recent attention and activity has focused on efforts to implement innovative instructional models. For example, several institutions are designing programs to accelerate a student's progress through remediation or allowing unprepared students to enroll in college-level courses with extra academic support.

The policies that determine whether recent high school graduates are placed into remedial or credit-bearing courses continue to impact students' transition to and success in college. Setting common policies on remedial education and course placement is one strategy states can use to communicate a consistent message about college readiness expectations.

An ECS analysis identified 39 states with statewide or postsecondary systemwide remedial education policies, which can range from general guidelines to specific requirements. In addition, 29 states have statewide or systemwide common policies for placement into remedial or credit-bearing courses. These states and systems also indicate approved placement assessments, but only a couple systems do not set minimum cut scores to direct students into different course levels. While not captured in the Blueprint database, more than a dozen states or systems allow institutions to use multiple measures (e.g., placement scores, high school curriculum or GPA) to determine the most appropriate course-level for incoming students.

POLICY GOALS

States and postsecondary systems that adopt a common remedial policy that includes fairly detailed guidance and establish common course-placement policies often strive to achieve the following objectives:

- ✦ Clearly communicating college readiness standards to students, K-12 schools, parents and the public.
- ✦ Encouraging high school students to improve their academic preparation before they enter college.
- ✦ Providing common and consistent expectations for college readiness across a state or postsecondary system to promote alignment between K-12 and higher education.
- ✦ Clarifying the role of various institutions to provide remedial courses and services.
- ✦ Ensuring that students with academic deficits receive the remediation they need to successfully progress to and through college-level math and English courses.

California and Georgia, the governing boards of different systems — typically two- and four-year — have adopted separate remedial policies. Through ECS’ analysis, it became apparent that community colleges in several states use common assessments and sometimes cut scores through agreements or faculty decisions, but not formal policies. These practices typically are driven by their governance structure or decision-making process. Examples include the District of Columbia, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Rhode Island and Wyoming.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS

As states pursue efforts to improve college readiness rates and the success of students who are unprepared for postsecondary education, some considerations might include the following:

- ✦ Adopt and regularly review common statewide or postsecondary systemwide minimum standards for placing students into remedial or credit-bearing courses, but allow a necessary degree of institutional flexibility.
- ✦ Create a council or leverage an existing entity to use the state’s college and career readiness definition to determine the criteria and standards for gauging a student’s level of preparation for college-level coursework.
- ✦ Establish multiple avenues to clearly communicate the standards for college readiness to a broad audience within K-12 and higher education.
- ✦ Encourage or require postsecondary systems and institutions to use multiple measures for determining readiness for college-level work and course placement.

ECS identified at least 14 states or postsecondary systems that allow, encourage or require institutions to use multiple measures — typically placement assessments, high school GPA and coursework — to gauge whether students are prepared for credit-bearing classes. Emerging research and informal evaluations have found that while a single cut score on an assessment may be an efficient measure, it provides only limited information about a student’s level of college readiness. Recent studies, for example, suggest that a student’s high school GPA is one of the most accurate indicators of performance in credit-bearing courses.^{1,2}

Under newly developed policies, for example, community colleges in California and North Carolina, and institutions within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system, will be required to select from a list of multiple measures for course placement. In other states, such as Florida and Nevada, institutions may rely on measures in addition to assessments to determine whether students should enroll in credit-bearing courses.

An increasing number of institutions are adopting differentiated math pathways to align coursework with a student’s degree program and avoid unnecessary placement into remedial courses, which typically are based on algebraic skills. Students pursuing a degree in psychology are more likely to need statistics than algebra, which is more appropriate for an engineering major. In addition, several systems and campuses are placing the majority of students into credit-bearing courses as the default and then offering additional academic assistance to ensure their success.

In a far reaching move, the Florida legislature enacted **Senate Bill 1720** in 2013 to address course placement and remedial instruction reforms. The policy allows most students to enroll directly in credit-bearing courses, regardless of whether their placement test scores indicate that they need remediation. Institutions may include additional measures beyond test scores to determine enrollment options. Students who opt to enroll in remedial courses can select from a set of instructional strategies, including the co-requisite model.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

State and postsecondary system leaders should be prepared to address a number of challenges and opportunities as they adopt and revise remedial and course placement policies. Each challenge is matched with opportunities for further study.

The Challenge: Lack of alignment between high school and higher education expectations

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Leverage an existing entity or create a P-20 work group to clarify college readiness expectations and ensure relevant high school and postsecondary policies are aligned.
- ✦ Use or establish a statewide college and career readiness definition as the basis for communicating expectations and determining the criteria for students' adequate preparation for college-level coursework.
- ✦ Develop or expand state and local strategies to identify and intervene with high school students, especially by the 12th grade, who are not on track to be college ready.
- ✦ Publicly report, on a regular basis, the extent of remedial needs by recent high school graduates.

The Challenge: Balance between consistency and flexibility in course-placement policies

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Adopt or review common assessments and minimum cut scores as the initial filter for determining students' preparation for college-level coursework.
- ✦ Consider the use of cut score ranges — versus a single score — to provide institutions with more flexibility for placing students into appropriate courses.
- ✦ Allow institutions to use secondary measures, such as diagnostic assessments and prior academic performance, to more accurately place students into courses.
- ✦ Provide institutions with the flexibility to direct most students into credit-bearing courses with additional academic support and align placement into math courses with a student's program of study.

The Challenge: Limited measures for determining students' readiness for college-level coursework

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Encourage or require institutions to use multiple measures to determine whether students are ready for college-level coursework or need remedial interventions. The measures might include standardized and diagnostic assessments, high school GPA and coursework, experiences outside the classroom and non-cognitive skill assessments.
- ✦ Engage high school and higher education representatives in selecting the multiple measures and ensure they are clearly communicated to students, advisors, teachers and faculty.
- ✦ Establish a method to evaluate the effectiveness of multiple measures to place students in the appropriate courses and improve their success in remedial and credit-bearing classes.

EXAMPLES OF STATE POLICIES

Approaches to consider

The state examples below provide insight into setting common policies that indicate minimum standards for placement into remedial or credit-bearing courses. Indiana and Ohio also allow the use of measures beyond a cut score on national placement assessments to determine a student's readiness for college-level coursework.

INDIANA

Set systemwide course-placement policies and use multiple measures

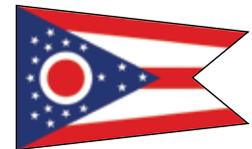


As a result of a 2010 **resolution** by the Indiana Commission on Higher Education, Ivy Tech Community College has become the primary provider of remedial education. Ivy Tech, which consists of 23 campuses, adopted a **policy** to use College Board's Accuplacer exam to evaluate the skills of first-time students and for course placement. The policy indicates that specified scores on other national assessments exempt students from the placement test and allows them to enroll in college-level courses. Campuses also can consider other **factors** to exempt students from the Accuplacer, including their high school GPA and the type of diploma they earn.

In addition, Ivy Tech has joined a growing movement to offer different **math pathways** for students based on their program of study. This approach is intended to prevent students from placement into — and potential failure in — remedial math courses based on their algebraic skills when other math competencies are better suited to their degree program.

OHIO

Set statewide course placement policies and use multiple measures



An Ohio **statute**, which was revised by the 2012-13 operating budget, required the Board of Regents to establish uniform statewide standards in math, reading, science and writing that students must meet to be considered in remediation-free status. Previously, institutions selected their own placement assessments and set standards to determine readiness for credit-bearing courses.

A College Readiness Advisory Council **report** spelled out the academic standards for each subject required for college-level coursework. The report also establishes minimum cut-score thresholds on the ACT, SAT and Accuplacer exams to indicate that students are able to enroll in credit-bearing courses. If a student scores below the thresholds, institutions may use other measures to determine course placement, including high school GPA, writing assessment and review of previous college work. The Ohio statute also places a limit on state subsidies to most four-year institutions for providing remedial services.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Judith Scott-Clayton, *Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?* (CCRC Working Paper No. 41) (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012), <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=1026>.
- 2 Clive R. Belfield and Peter M. Crosta, *Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts* (CCRC Working Paper No. 42) (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012), <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=1030>.

Additional resource: Mary Fulton, Matt Gianneschi, Cheryl Blanco, Paulo DeMaria, *Developmental Strategies for College Readiness and Success* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, April 2014), <http://www.ecs.org/docs/DevEdStrategies.pdf>.