

Assessment and Placement Q&A

Updated August 2017

This Q&A is a companion to the “Standards, Policies and Procedures for the Evaluation of Assessment Instruments Used in the California Community Colleges,” which is referred throughout this document as the [Standards](#). It is designed to help colleges implement their assessment programs, but does not address all issues related to assessment.

The document updates an earlier Q&A developed in partnership with the California Community College Assessment Association (CCCAA). Many thanks to the college faculty, staff, and administrators, Chancellor’s Office staff and consultants, the Buros Center for Testing, and the Chancellor’s Office’s Assessment Committee, in particular, Mark Samuels, who provided input to the original document and this update.

For more information on assessment and placement, including the most recent list of approved instruments, refer to the [California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office webpage on assessment and placement](#).

Chris Graillat
Student Services Specialist
California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office

CONTENTS

General Assessment, Testing and Placement	3
Multiple Measures	10
Early Placement Exam (EAP)	14
Assessment Instrument Approval Process.....	16
Validation	22
Guidelines for the Implementation of the Nursing Assessment/Readiness Tests	26

General Assessment, Testing and Placement

WHAT IS ASSESSMENT?

Assessment is a holistic, comprehensive process through which each college collects information about students in an effort to facilitate their success by ensuring their appropriate placement into the curriculum. Examples of this information include numerous measures, such as students' English and math skills, study skills, learning skills, aptitudes, goals, motivation, educational background/performance, grades, and the need for special services. Title 5, section 55522, requires that more than one measure must be used to assess a student for English, mathematics, or ESL placement.

Assessment is one of the key core services under the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) established by the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012. The goal of SSSP is "to increase California community college student access and success by providing effective core matriculation services, including orientation, assessment and placement, counseling, and other educational planning services, and academic interventions," or follow-up services for at-risk students.

CAN WE MANDATE ASSESSMENT?

Yes. Per title 5, sections 55520 and 55532, a holistic, comprehensive assessment process that includes more than one measure of assessment is required for all non-exempt students. In addition, to receive priority registration, incoming non-exempt students must participate in core SSSP services, which include assessment. Title 5, section 55532, lists the criteria for policies that colleges may develop to exempt students from assessment or other SSSP services. Title 5, section 55534, addresses student appeal policies and procedures. Assessment procedures and policies, including test preparation (e.g., sample tests), how assessment results are used in the placement process, and student ability to retest, must be clearly communicated to students (title 5, section 55522(b)).

ISN'T ASSESSMENT THE SAME AS TESTING?

Testing is just one means of collecting student information. Course placement recommendations must be based on a minimum of two measures, which may include a test and another measure, such as grade point average (GPA), or two other evidence-based multiple measures, consistent with title 5 requirements. See title 5, sections 55502(i) and 55522(a), for more multiple measures information. In addition, the white paper published by the Academic Senate in 2014 titled ["Multiple Measures in Assessment: The Requirements and Challenges of Multiple Measures in the California Community Colleges"](#) and the information provided by the [Multiple Measures Assessment Project \(MMAP\)](#) are useful resources.

CAN A COLLEGE ASSESS STUDENTS WITHOUT A TEST?

Yes, as stated in the previous response, a college may utilize other measures to assess students. Title 5, section 55502(i), lists a variety of potential measures, such as interviews, holistic scoring processes, attitude surveys, vocational or career aptitude and interest inventories, high school or college transcripts, etc. A number of colleges have chosen to assess and place students without employing traditional standardized tests. For example, some colleges utilize guided self-placement, in which students select their course placement based on a knowledge of course content and goals as well as a self-assessment of their individual skill levels. Colleges should closely document and validate all procedures used for course placement.

CAN A COLLEGE ADMINISTER ONLY A TEST AND THEN PLACE STUDENTS?

No. Course placement on the basis of a test score by itself is prohibited by title 5, section 55522(a). Research indicates that a test score alone is not as useful a predictor of placement as are [multiple measures of assessment](#). However, colleges may use more than one measure of assessment—that is not a test—for placement.

Any method used to place a student should be validated to ensure that students are correctly placed in coursework. [Validation](#) is addressed later in this document. In addition, the [Standards](#) include more information about the validation process.

HOW DOES OUR COLLEGE SELECT AN ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT FOR PLACING OUR STUDENTS?

The selection of assessment instruments should involve critical input from instructional faculty, admissions, SSSP committees, and/or curriculum committees. This collaborative approach will be most beneficial to selecting the most appropriate test for the college and the students. The following are some questions to guide the college in the test identification/selection process:

- What is the purpose of the assessment?
- What are we trying to measure (for example, prerequisite skills)?
- What population are we assessing?
- What are the enrollment implications?
- What other measure(s) can be used to provide more accurate placements?
- How will we measure and monitor disproportionate impact?

Colleges should refer to the process outlined by the [Standards](#) for more information.

IS ASSESSMENT REQUIRED FOR ALL LEVELS OF BASIC SKILLS COURSES?

The requirements for assessment are the same for all non-exempt students, regardless of course level.

ARE THE COLLEGES REQUIRED TO USE APPROVED ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS FOR THE PLACEMENT OF STUDENTS INTO NONCREDIT COURSES?

Yes. The legislation that created noncredit programs extended the provision of equivalent services to the noncredit student population. It was not intended to establish a different set of services or to allow exemption from the regulations governing the credit student population. Therefore, noncredit SSSP services must be provided in accordance with the Education Code, (e.g., section 78213) and title 5 (e.g., section 55522).

CAN WE LIST TEST RESULTS AS A COURSE PREREQUISITE?

According to the Guidelines for [Title 5 Regulations Section 55003: Policies for Prerequisites, Corequisites and Advisories on Recommended Preparation](#), a single test score, or any other single assessment measure, cannot be used as a prerequisite. However, one or more test scores may be used as part of a broader multiple measures approach for determining a student's readiness for a course. The guidelines refer to title 5, section 55003, which states that the determination of whether a student meets a prerequisite shall be based on successful completion of an appropriate course or on an assessment using multiple measures. No exit test may be required to satisfy a prerequisite or corequisite unless incorporated into the grading for the course.

CAN MY COLLEGE ACCEPT AN ASSESSMENT RESULT OR COURSE PLACEMENT FROM ANOTHER COLLEGE?

Colleges may accept assessment results or course placements from other colleges, as long as any test instruments employed are approved by the Chancellor's Office. It is also highly recommended that instructional faculty participate in the decision whether to accept these results. Some colleges follow a conservative approach, accepting only scores from the same tests used at that institution. However, the college should have evidence of validity for accepting the other institution's assessment scores. In addition, the college must still employ at least one other measure of assessment to comply with regulations governing multiple measures.

HOW LONG ARE PLACEMENT RESULTS CONSIDERED VALID? FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT IF A STUDENT WAS ASSESSED A YEAR AGO BUT DID NOT ENROLL IN A MATH OR ENGLISH COURSE?

The decision to implement an expiration date for assessment results is an institutional one. Colleges may want to consult the appropriate test publisher manual(s) for advice or review research regarding test recency. However, colleges are highly encouraged to develop flexible and realistic policies that facilitate, rather than hinder, the student's completion of education and career goals. For EAP scores, a two-year time limit following completion of the EAP in 11th grade is consistent with practices of the [California State University](#) and the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#).

CAN COLLEGES CHARGE STUDENTS A FEE FOR ASSESSMENT?

No. Under current law, a student may only be required to pay a fee if a statute requires it, (such as the enrollment fee) or if a statute specifically authorizes a district to require the fee; for example, a health fee. (CCC Chancellor's Office Legal Opinion M 02-31 issued December 31, 2002)

SHOULD WE CHECK STUDENTS' IDENTIFICATION AT THE TIME OF TESTING?

This decision is an institutional one; however, it would be best practice to require student identification. Students who have someone else take a test for them will not only hurt themselves in the long run, their actions will weaken the validity of the placement process.

CAN FACULTY HAVE ACCESS TO STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT RESULTS?

Faculty can only be presented with aggregate data at the section or course level, not with individual results. Confidentiality laws allow for sharing of assessment results only with those who have "a need to know." Further, the Academic Senate's document [Good Practice for the Implementation of Prerequisites](#) states:

Students have a right to privacy of their records except in cases in which the college employee needs to know the information for valid educational reasons. Instructors do not need to know students' assessment or placement results in order to teach them. Knowledge of assessment and placement information could open instructors to charges of discrimination if they treated some students differently than others.

Colleges should refer to the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) for additional guidance on maintaining student privacy.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A “PLACEMENT” TEST AND A “CHALLENGE” TEST?

Yes. A placement test determines the level for which a student is prepared to study. In addition to the test score, appropriate multiple measures are applied to ensure that a holistic “portrait” of the student optimizes the student’s placement in appropriate coursework.

Per title 5, section 55003, colleges may offer a clearly articulated challenge process to a student denied enrollment in a course for failure to meet the established prerequisite. A college may use a challenge test or may also allow a student to meet the prerequisite by demonstrating prior course completion, work experience, or a portfolio (collection of completed projects, art works, etc.) or other measures identified by the college. See [the related question below for more information on prerequisites](#).

CAN A PLACEMENT TEST ALSO DETERMINE COMPETENCY OR PROGRESS?

Yes. Assessment instruments designed for placement purposes can be used to determine competencies. Some grant programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) or the Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG), require the use of certain tests, such as CASAS, to assess student progress. If these tests are not used for placement, then the college can use tests that are not on the list of approved instruments from the Chancellor’s Office. However, prudent practices would indicate that the college should validate the use of these test scores to ensure they are appropriately measuring student progress.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMPUTER-ADMINISTERED TESTING AND COMPUTER-ADAPTIVE TESTING? DO DIFFERENT STANDARDS APPLY TO THEM?

Computer-administered testing entails the administration by computer of a fixed-form assessment in a standardized format to all students. The computer-administered test may be a simple transition from a traditional paper-and-pencil test to the computer medium or it may be a test designed specifically and exclusively for use on the computer.

In computer-adaptive testing, test items from an extensive test item pool are administered to each student. Thus, the sequence of test items administered to each student and the test items themselves will vary. The difficulty of test items presented to the student is automatically changed based on that student’s skill level estimated using the student’s previous answers. The test is untimed so the students work at their own pace. In addition, fewer test items are administered to students than with a fixed-form test.

The [Standards](#) are generally applicable to these tests. However, there are additional standards pertinent to computer-administered testing and to computer-adaptive testing. Refer to the [Standards](#) for specific information on any variances. Questions regarding the assessing students with disabilities or other special populations should be referred to the

college's Disabled Students Programs & Services (DSPS) or other appropriate office.

CAN A COLLEGE REQUIRE CERTAIN STUDENTS TO TAKE THE ESL ASSESSMENT INSTEAD OF THE ENGLISH ASSESSMENT?

A college should advise students regarding the appropriateness of the English and ESL assessments, but students should be free to choose which assessment they wish to take.

CAN A STUDENT BE PLACED INTO THE REGULAR ENGLISH CURRICULUM BASED ON AN ESL LANGUAGE TEST?

Most often, no. Title 5, section 55522(c)(2), states that colleges may not “use any assessment test in a manner or for a purpose other than that for which it was developed or has been otherwise validated.” Content-related validity evidence addresses the extent to which course prerequisite knowledge and skills are measured by the test for all courses in a sequence in which the test places students. An English course is typically not considered part of the ESL sequence. However, it may be a local (college/district) decision to permit such a placement, provided the content-related validity evaluation adequately documents the appropriateness and representativeness of the ESL test's items for the objectives of the English course.

It should be noted that even if the college validation determines that the ESL test is an appropriate instrument for placing students into the English curriculum, the test could not be used as the sole measure for placement purposes; that is, the college must employ multiple measures in making course placement decisions. Refer to the [Standards](#) for additional guidance on validation.

CAN A STUDENT BE REFERRED TO THE COLLEGE'S ESL ASSESSMENT BASED ON AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST?

Yes. The student can be referred to the ESL assessment but cannot be required to take it. The referral provided by the college should not be made solely on the English language test score, as the college must employ multiple measures.

CAN COLLEGES USE A WRITING SAMPLE OR AN ORAL INTERVIEW TO PLACE STUDENTS INTO ENGLISH AND ESL COURSES?

Yes. Title 5 and the [Standards](#) allow use of writing samples and oral interviews for placement. For example, a direct performance writing assessment would evaluate students' responses to a question, prompt, or task using a well-defined scoring rubric. The criteria for the evaluation of direct performance tests are explained in the [Standards](#). However, it is important to stress that the same writing assessment should not be used for placement into both ESL and English courses unless the test is validated for both. Again, multiple measures must be employed with all methods of providing course placement. In addition, when a performance-based assessment is used for placement, it must be submitted to the Chancellor's Office for approval.

CAN COLLEGES USE A READING ASSESSMENT TO PLACE STUDENTS?

Yes. If the intent is to establish a reading prerequisite that can be satisfied by the college's assessment process, then the college must utilize at least two measures of assessment to satisfy the requirement for employing multiple measures. If the assessment measures include a test, the test must be approved by the Chancellor's Office. For additional information on prerequisites, refer to the [Guidelines for Title 5 Regulations Section 55003: Policies for Prerequisites, Corequisites and Advisories on Recommended Preparation.](#)

CAN OUR COLLEGE USE A NATIONAL NURSING EXAMINATION TO ENROLL STUDENTS INTO THE NURSING DEPARTMENT?

Yes. Per title 5, section 55522(e), "a community college district may use an assessment test to select students for its nursing program, provided that:

- (1) the district complies with all other provisions of this subchapter;
- (2) the assessment test or other measures are used in conjunction with other assessment test, methods, or procedures to select students for enrollment in the nursing program; and
- (3) the Chancellor has determined that the assessment test predicts likelihood of success in nursing programs, has approved use of the assessment test for that purpose and has established statewide proficiency cut-off scores for that test pursuant to Education Code section 78261."

The "[Guidelines for the Implementation of the Nursing Assessment/Readiness Tests](#)" are provided at the end of this document for reference.

Multiple Measures

WHAT ARE MULTIPLE MEASURES?

Multiple measures comprise a variety of procedures and methods for gaining information about individuals or groups of students. These procedures may or may not include standardized testing. As stated above, title 5 requires the use of at least two different measures for placement purposes.

Examples of multiple measures listed in title 5, Section 55502(i), are:

- Interviews
- Holistic scoring processes
- Attitude surveys
- Vocational or career aptitude and interest inventories
- High school or college transcripts
- Specialized certificates or licenses
- Education and employment histories
- Military training and experience

Note that the title 5 list above is not exhaustive. Colleges have the discretion to use additional measures. Examples of additional evidence-based measures include the highest level coursework completed in a subject area and corresponding course grade.

The [Multiple Measures Assessment Project \(MMAP\)](#) is an effort under the Chancellor's Office designed to develop, pilot, and assess implementation of a statewide placement tool using multiple measures. The project's research has indicated that students' high school transcript information, most notably their cumulative high school GPA, provides substantive evidence of its utility in assessment of students' capacity to succeed in the California Community Colleges. This effort uses the evidence of student performance in California Community College courses throughout the foundational skills sequence and uses a relatively conservative standard of identifying students highly likely to succeed in those courses. As of fall 2017, over half of the colleges around the state are in various stages of implementing MMAP.

HOW DO WE DETERMINE WHICH MULTIPLE MEASURES TO USE?

The application of multiple measures is based on the premise that the more information available to inform the placement process, the better. The information used to holistically assess the student should contribute to the quality of the placement, and not serve merely to satisfy the mandate for placing students using more than a single test score.

Measures should be evidence-based and selected with input from counselors, advisors, faculty, assessment directors/coordinators and staff, researchers, and other relevant personnel. The process of selecting these measures should be documented, and the use of the measures must be validated.

[CCCApply](#) has also incorporated the questions below into its platform. Colleges have the option of incorporating these questions into their applications and their placement process as additional measures of assessment:

Have you completed the 11th grade?
What was your unweighted high school GPA (grade point average)? Please enter a value between 0.00 and 4.00. If unsure, please estimate.
What was the highest English course you took in high school?
What grade did you receive?
What was the highest math course you took in high school?
What grade did you receive?
What was the highest math course that you passed with a Pass or C- or better grade in high school?
What grade did you receive?

ARE COLLEGES REQUIRED TO INCORPORATE MULTIPLE MEASURES INTO ALL PLACEMENT DECISIONS?

Yes. To prevent discriminatory practices and arbitrary applications of placement information, per title 5, section 55502(i), multiple measures are a “required component of a district’s assessment system.” Further, title 5, section 55522(a)(1) requires the college to measure and monitor disproportionate impact on any group of students for “any assessment test, method, or procedure,” which includes multiple measures. See [the related question on disproportionate impact](#).

In addition, according to title 5, section 55003(k), “the determination of whether a student meets a prerequisite shall be based on successful completion of an appropriate course or on an assessment using multiple measures, as required by section 55521(a)(3).” See [the related question above for more information on prerequisites](#).

CAN A COUNSELING INTERVIEW BE USED AS A MULTIPLE MEASURE?

Yes. The interview itself is considered one measure of assessment because it serves as a potential source of information that could prove useful in the course selection/advisement process. However, the information a counselor elicits during the interview **must be consistently applied** to all students. It is therefore advisable that each college define the criteria and standardize the questions asked of all students to facilitate the course advisement process. In addition, the college is strongly encouraged to validate this method of placement to ensure accurate student placement, particularly in regard to disproportionate impact and general fairness. Refer to the [separate question on](#)

[disproportionate impact in this document.](#)

CAN TWO VALIDATED TESTS BE USED AS MULTIPLE MEASURES?

Yes. However, according to the [Standards](#), the scores for the two tests should **not** be highly correlated; that is, they should not measure the same skill set. Colleges should use the rule that a correlation of .75 and above would constitute high correlation. As an example, the scores from a test in reading and one in writing might be highly correlated because the two tests measure similar skills. However, the scores from a writing sample and a listening comprehension test would likely not be highly correlated because the two tests measure different skills. A key reason for using two tests is that one test alone may not comprehensively cover the necessary prerequisite skills; therefore, the second test would measure skills not covered by the first. Different tests also have different biases. Using multiple measures allows a student who may not fare well on one measure another opportunity to show their capacity for success in college work. Considerations may also include test mode or platform, item format (e.g., multiple choice, open ended, and performance items), and source of information (e.g., self-report vs teacher-report). The exceptions to the rule of correlation would be SAT, ACT, or EAP scores. A [July 2015 memo](#) from the Chancellor's Office indicates that EAP scores can be used to place students in transfer-level coursework, and SAT and ACT scores can be used as multiple measures.

WHAT MULTIPLE MEASURES ARE USEFUL IN PLACING STUDENTS INTO ESL COURSES?

As stated previously, the choice of which measures to use should be decided jointly by counselors, advisors, ESL faculty, assessment directors and staff, and research staff. ESL faculty should be able to describe the attributes for success at each course level.

To satisfy the multiple measures requirement, colleges should use multiple types or sources of information that are not highly correlated with one another. Examples include:

- Student's first/primary/native language
- Length of time living in the United States
- Years of schooling in native country
- Years of schooling in the United States
- Frequency of use of English in speaking, reading, and/or writing (outside the classroom)
- Student self-assessment of English speaking, reading, and/or writing abilities
- Student employment hours while enrolled at the college
- High school and/or adult education school ESL courses
- Parents' or spouse's proficiency in English

DO WE HAVE TO VALIDATE THE MULTIPLE MEASURES WE USE?

Sound educational and assessment practices dictate that such validation must be done,

particularly as more colleges participate in the MMAP or otherwise gravitate toward using multiple measures without an assessment test. Validating the assessment methods ensures students are being appropriately placed overall. Furthermore, Section 78214(a) of the Education Code requires colleges to perform research to “evaluate the effectiveness of the Student Success and Support Program...and of any other programs or services designed to facilitate students' completion of their educational goals and courses of study.” The Standards are currently being updated to include a process for validating multiple measures.

The RP Group has issued a research brief titled “[Validating Placement Systems Comprising Test and Multiple Measure Information](#),” which provides good information for local colleges' validation efforts. The Chancellor's Office, however, would like to note that, in addition to the validation methods described in this document, students' and instructors' ratings—that is, consequential validity—may be used to validate placement systems.

Additionally, in a [memo dated May 31, 2016](#), the Chancellor's Office stated:

Colleges must also gather data to determine if their assessment instruments have a disproportionate impact on particular groups of students. Any disproportionate impact must be addressed.

Addressing disproportionate impact is one way to ensure fairness in assessment methods. Title 5, section 55522(a)(1), requires the college to measure and monitor disproportionate impact on any group of students for “any assessment test, method, or procedure,” which includes multiple measures. See the related question on [disproportionate impact](#). The [Standards](#) also provide more complete information on disproportionate impact.

Early Assessment Program (EAP)

WHAT IS THE EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (EAP)?

The EAP is a collaborative effort of the State Board of Education, California Community Colleges, California Department of Education and the California State University. It provides opportunities for students to measure their readiness for college-level English and mathematics in their junior year of high school. It may also facilitate opportunities for them to improve their skills during their senior year. [Section 99301 of the Education Code](#) authorizes participating community colleges to use student EAP test results for placement into college-level English and math courses.

HOW DOES THE EAP DIFFER FROM THE CALIFORNIA ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS (CAASPP)?

The EAP was initially based on the Standards Testing and Reporting (STAR) accountability program for public K-12 schools. [AB 484](#), effective January 1, 2014, authorized the replacement of the tests for English language arts and mathematics with the computer-adaptive assessments developed by a multi-state consortium. AB 484 further eliminated the existing STAR accountability program and renamed the assessment system the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). The EAP is now embedded within CAASPP. For more information on CAASPP and the multi-state Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, visit the [California State University's website](#) and the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium's website](#).

HOW CAN EAP SCORES BE USED FOR PLACEMENT?

Per a [July 2015 memo](#) from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, the EAP may be used to place a student in transfer-level coursework. Colleges also have the discretion to use EAP scores as a "multiple measure" if they choose to. The Chancellor's Office maintains a [list of community colleges accepting EAP scores](#) and a [database of student scores](#) for students who have released their results. Colleges wanting to access student scores through this database, or through [the California State University's database](#), should submit a participation survey and administrator designation form, available on the [Chancellor's Office EAP webpage](#).

High school juniors who score "Standard Exceeded" on the new California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) are considered "college ready" for EAP purposes and are exempt from taking the CSU and participating California Community Colleges' placement tests for English and math. These students may directly enroll in transfer-level English and math courses. Grade 11 students who score "Standard Met" are considered "conditionally ready" on the EAP and may take additional coursework their senior year to be exempt from taking the placement tests for English and math required by the CSU and participating California Community Colleges. For example, high school students may be required to take an [Expository Reading and Writing Course](#) (ERWC) their

senior year to enroll in transfer-level coursework. Some colleges may also allow conditionally ready students to enroll in college-level or transfer-level coursework, provided certain conditions are met. Refer to the [list of community colleges accepting EAP scores](#) for more information on courses students may take at each college accepting scores. [Section 99301 of the Education Code](#) also provides guidance to the colleges on the use of EAP scores. Note that CSU accepts results no more than two years after a student has taken the EAP. Community colleges should note that this time limit is also consistent with practices of the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#).

The chart below indicates how EAP scores determine college readiness. The [list of community colleges accepting EAP scores](#) includes the courses for which students are eligible to enroll at each participating college.

Achievement Standards	EAP Status
Standard Exceeded	Ready for CSU and participating CCC college-level English/Mathematics coursework
Standard Met	Ready for CSU and participating CCC college-level English/Mathematics coursework – Conditional
Standard Nearly Met	Not yet demonstrating readiness for CSU and participating CCC college-level English/Mathematics coursework
Standard Not Met	Not ready for CSU and participating CCC college-level English/Mathematics coursework

Assessment Instrument Approval Process

WHAT TESTS CAN I USE? WHY DO I HAVE TO USE TESTS ONLY APPROVED BY THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE?

Title 5, section 55522(a), requires the Chancellor's Office to establish a list of assessment instruments approved for use in placing students in English, math, and ESL courses in the California Community Colleges. The list of approved instruments is published on [the Chancellor's Office's assessment webpage](#). The list is regularly updated at the end of each test review period, which is normally January/February and June/July of each year.

Section 55522(c) states that "community college districts shall not...use an assessment for placement which has not been approved by the Chancellor."

Section 55522(a) also requires the Chancellor's Office to establish a set of guidelines that colleges/districts and publishers must follow when seeking approval of assessment instruments. As stated above, these guidelines are more commonly known as the [Standards](#) and are frequently referenced in this Q&A.

HOW ARE TESTS PLACED ON THE CHANCELLOR'S APPROVED LIST? WHO REVIEWS AND APPROVES THE INSTRUMENTS?

The [Standards](#) outline the approval process for all assessments used by the California Community Colleges. Publishers and colleges wishing to submit a test for approval are highly encouraged to review the [Standards](#) thoroughly. It is also highly recommended to consult a psychometric expert in preparation for submitting the request for approval.

There are three categories for approval (second-party test, locally developed or managed test, and critical mass) as well as different levels of approval: full, provisional, and probationary. To gain any level of approval, at a minimum, an instrument must have evidence of validity and evidence that cultural/linguistic bias, insensitivity, and offensiveness have been minimized. To meet this initial validity requirement, second-party publishers submitting assessment instruments for approval must provide acceptable evidence of criterion or consequential validity plus specificity of test objectives and test content. Colleges wishing to submit a locally developed or managed instrument must provide acceptable content-related validity evidence. Full approval is not guaranteed until **all** criteria specified in the [Standards](#) have been met.

The Chancellor of the California Community Colleges approves or disapproves all assessment instruments used for placement purposes in districts/colleges. The Chancellor's decision is based on advice provided by the Chancellor's Office psychometric experts, who are charged with evaluating all submitted instruments, and on the recommendations of the Assessment Committee.

WHAT IS THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE?

In accordance with the Education Code, section 78213, the Assessment Committee advises the Chancellor's Office on statewide assessment issues, updates the [Standards](#), and conducts the review of assessment instruments submitted by the colleges and test publishers for Chancellor's Office approval. The committee works with the Chancellor's Office and the psychometric experts for the Chancellor's Office, who provide the first layer of review for the assessment instruments and other technical expertise as required.

The committee draws members from a cross section of the California Community Colleges constituent groups related to assessment and placement, as follows:

- Student Success and Support Program Advisory Committee (SSSPAC) members with a background in assessment
- Academic Senate to represent each content area – math, English (to include reading and writing), and English as a Second Language in credit and noncredit coursework.
- California Community Colleges Assessment Association
- Assessment coordinators/directors
- Classified Senate
- Chief Student Services Officers
- Research & Planning Group
- California Association of Community College Registrars and Admissions Officers
- Chief Instructional Officers
- Student Senate
- Academic Affairs Division of the Chancellor's Office
- Technology, Research & Information Systems Division of the Chancellor's Office

CAN A DISTRICT USE A SECOND-PARTY INSTRUMENT FOR WHICH THE COLLEGE HAS NOT YET EMPIRICALLY VALIDATED CUT SCORES?

Yes. Initial cut scores may be set using an empirical approach or a judgmental approach. The judgmental approach typically focuses on the initial setting of cut scores prior to test administration. However, should a college elect to provide only judgmental data, then the college must use a systematic procedure that can be found in the cut-score setting literature, and documentation of the qualifications of those involved in the process and the basis for setting cut scores should be maintained by the college.

The [Standards](#) reference some literature for taking a judgmental approach to set cut scores, and training [webinars recorded in 2014](#) address this approach as well. Some additional references include Cizek, G. J., & Bunch, M. B. (2007). "Standard setting: A guide to establishing and evaluating performance standards on tests" and Zieky, M. J., Perie, M., & Livingston, S. (2008). "Cutscores: A manual for setting standards of performance on educational and occupational tests."

WHAT IF OUR COLLEGE WANTS TO DEVELOP ITS OWN INSTRUMENT?

The college should follow appropriate psychometric procedures for test development and

adhere to the processes delineated in the [Standards](#). Keep in mind that the [Common Assessment Initiative](#) will offer tests for the colleges in English, mathematics, and English as a Second Language. [Education Code, section 78219](#), requires colleges to use these tests for placement—once they are available **and** if tests will be used for placement—in order to receive funding from the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP). Colleges would still receive SSSP funding if non-test multiple measures were used for placement.

CAN WE USE TEST INSTRUMENTS NOT ON THE CHANCELLOR’S APPROVED LIST TO PLACE STUDENTS?

No. Test instruments not on the approved list cannot be used for placement purposes in the community colleges. However, a college may administer these instruments for research purposes to collect sufficient data to help secure future approval for the test. While doing so, the college may not use the scores for placement decisions or provide scores to students, instructors, counselors, or advisors. In addition, colleges may use tests for purposes other than placement; e.g., to determine students’ eligibility under the Ability to Benefit [see title 5, section 55522(d)] and to fulfill requirements of the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) or the [Adult Education Block Grant \(AEBG\)](#).

WHAT DOES OUR COLLEGE DO IF ONE OF THE TESTS WE USE IS NOT ON THE APPROVED LIST?

A college cannot use the assessment instrument for placement purposes, even on an advisory basis, until it has been approved per title 5, section 55522. A test instrument cannot be used if it is in the process of undergoing approval or has been previously disapproved. An instrument that is not yet approved can only be used for research purposes—that is, to collect the necessary data as a means to obtain approval. A college may use a test instrument if it has attained approval status other than full approval—that is, provisional or probationary approval. Refer the [Standards](#) for more information.

WHAT IF THE CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE DOES NOT APPROVE OUR TEST?

The college will receive detailed feedback from the psychometric experts for the Chancellor’s Office who, along with the Assessment Committee, have evaluated the test instrument. A college/district may request a reconsideration of the decision within 30 days of notification that approval has not been granted. The college is not permitted to use the test instrument for placement purposes during this interim period. If the college does not seek an appeal or the appeal is denied, then the college may wish to collect data as suggested by the psychometric experts in an effort to garner future approval of the test, to consider other instruments on the Chancellor’s list of approved assessments, or to attempt to locally develop or manage another assessment. Refer to the [Standards](#) for more information.

HOW LONG CAN AN ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT BE MAINTAINED IN THE PROVISIONAL OR PROBATIONARY APPROVAL CATEGORIES?

The length of time colleges may use a test varies by level of approval. However, an instrument may only maintain Provisional Approval or Probationary Approval for no more than three (3) years in combination (see the chart below in the next question). At the end of the three-year period, failure by the test developer or local college to provide information sufficient to bring the instrument up to full approval will remove the instrument from the approval list, meaning the instrument may no longer be used by colleges for placement purposes. Colleges can continue to use the instrument only to collect data for research purposes for a future resubmission for approval. While doing so, the colleges may not provide scores to students, instructors, counselors, or advisors.

HOW LONG DO ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS RETAIN THEIR FULL APPROVAL STATUS?

The chart below shows the effective periods of the three levels of approval.

Level of Approval	Effective Period
Probationary	Two years
Provisional	One year
Full	Six years

Once any approval status is attained, an instrument—whether it is a second-party test or one that is locally developed or managed by a college—is “approved” for a period not to exceed six years.

To ensure assessment measures are maintained on the approved list beyond the six-year term, publishers and managers of instruments are highly encouraged to submit documents necessary for reconsideration one year before approval expires, thereby allowing ample time for review and evaluation. If after the six-year period no new supporting documents have been submitted and favorably reviewed by the Chancellor’s office for continued use, the instrument will lose its approval status. Refer to the [Standards](#) for more detail. Note that a [Chancellor’s Office memo dated May 31, 2016](#), announced the intent to extend the suspension of the review for approval of English, mathematics and ESL assessment instruments by the Chancellor’s Office until the colleges’ transition to CCCAssess.

WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DOES A COLLEGE HAVE WHEN USING AN APPROVED SECOND-PARTY INSTRUMENT?

Colleges’ responsibilities include the following tasks:

- Prepare evidence of content-related validity.
- Review the validity evidence provided by the test publisher.
- Review the relevance of test bias evidence provided by the test publisher to ensure

- that the results are generalizable to the student demographics at their colleges.
- Review the relevance of evidence of reliability provided by the test publisher to ensure that the results are generalizable to their colleges.
- Establish and validate cut scores using either a judgmental or empirical approach.
- Develop a plan to monitor [disproportionate impact](#) and address disproportionate impact when discovered.

These responsibilities are more fully addressed in the [Standards](#).

WHAT CONSTITUTES DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT?

Title 5, section 55522(a)(1), requires the college to have a plan to measure and monitor disproportionate impact on any group of students identified by the Chancellor’s Office for “any assessment test, method, or procedure.” Section 55502(e) defines disproportionate impact as “a condition where access to key resources and supports or academic success may be hampered by inequitable practices, policies, and approaches to student support or instructional practices affecting a specific group. For the purpose of assessment, disproportionate impact is when the percentage of persons from a particular racial, ethnic, gender, age, or disability group, who are directed to a particular service or course placement based on an assessment test or other measure is significantly different from the representation of that group in the population of persons being assessed.” For tests of English language proficiency used for the English learner population, the linguistic and cultural background of test takers must also be considered.

WHAT IS “CRITICAL MASS” APPROVAL?

The concept of “critical mass” refers to situations where the validity evidence for a specific test instrument has been collected by a minimum of six colleges from six different California Community College districts. If a test is approved through this method, it can be available for other colleges to use as a second-party test. The evidence can be submitted to the Chancellor’s Office by a collaborative effort or consortium of six or more colleges working together to gather the evidence necessary to secure the Chancellor’s Office approval. Note that a [Chancellor’s Office memo dated May 31, 2016](#), announced the intent to extend the suspension of the review for approval of English, mathematics and ESL assessment instruments by the Chancellor’s Office until the colleges’ transition to CCCAssess.

Refer to the [Standards](#) for more specific information on critical mass approval.

WHAT IS MEANT BY RENEWAL OF TEST APPROVAL?

The evaluation of an assessment instrument’s appropriateness and use as a placement tool should be ongoing. Because student populations and discipline/course content and purposes change over time, a test that has been approved for a six-year term must undergo a “renewal” process whereby the test publisher/manager submits new evidence to the Chancellor’s Office to renew approval. New evidence is defined as having been collected within the last three years; i.e., within the three-year period prior to the renewal

submission. Refer to the [Standards](#) for more information on renewal.

WHAT DOES A COLLEGE HAVE TO DO TO KEEP A TEST ON THE APPROVED LIST?

If a college is using a second-party test, the test publisher is responsible for submitting to the Chancellor's Office a request to renew approval.

If the college is using a locally developed or managed test, it must submit to the Chancellor's Office the renewal request along with the necessary content-related validation evidence, cut-score validation evidence, and disproportionate impact data. Again, [disproportionate impact](#) should be monitored on the campus for affected and potentially affected demographic groups every three years.

It is important to emphasize that all data supporting the renewal of a test instrument must be collected within the three-year period prior to the renewal submission.

To ensure an assessment instrument maintains its status on the approved list beyond its expiration of approval, the Chancellor's Office highly recommends that the supporting documents for renewal are submitted well in advance; for example, in year five of a six-year approval period. Submitting well in advance will enable continuity of use of the test and will allow the publisher or college to have enough time to seek remedies or alternatives in the event a test is not re-approved. Refer to the [Standards](#) for more information.

It should be noted that when changes occurred to the test instrument (e.g., changes in items, scoring method, and/or norms) or to the proposed instrument usage (e.g., different curriculum or course sequence), the test shall be reviewed as a new instrument rather than renewal.

CAN A TEST UP FOR RENEWAL EARN ANY LEVEL OF APPROVAL, OR IS THE TEST SIMPLY APPROVED OR NOT APPROVED?

An assessment undergoing "renewal" review may be placed in any one of the three approval levels: full, provisional, or probationary. If a test receives provisional or probationary approval during the "renewal" process, the timelines for attaining full approval status are the same as for an initial approval request.

Validation

WHAT DOES A VALIDATED SCORE OR VALIDATED TEST MEAN?

In psychometric terms, a valid test is defined as a test instrument that measures what it is intended to measure. Validity is the most fundamental concern when evaluating a test. Validity is demonstrated through a variety of evidence sources that support the specific interpretation of test scores and their use. It is important to point out that the test itself is not validated but rather the interpretation and use of the test score

Through the validation process, the college/district assures its use of test scores are appropriate and fair for all students based on the [Standards](#) developed by the Chancellor's Office with the assistance and direction of the Assessment Committee. These [Standards](#) apply to second-party instruments developed and maintained by publishers external to the California Community Colleges as well as to locally developed and managed tests by the colleges, including writing samples and other direct-performance assessments such as listening or speaking tests.

WHEN DO COLLEGES HAVE TO PERFORM TEST VALIDATION?

Test validation is an ongoing process, and validation at least every six years is required for renewal of approval for tests. Note that re-validation must be conducted with any change in the test content, course sequence, or course prerequisite skills.

Sound educational and psychometric practices oblige colleges to conduct ongoing evaluation and monitoring of their test instruments and placement methods. The key is to ensure that the test is indeed accurately placing students. Therefore, in addition to the requirement to validate tests at least every six years, conducting new validity studies, including content validity, would be necessary if the test content, course placement sequence, or course prerequisites change.

In addition, section 55500 of title 5 tasks colleges with the responsibility to provide “well-coordinated and evidence-based student and instructional services.” This responsibility certainly extends to such a fundamentally important core service as assessment. Colleges with questions regarding this issue should contact the Chancellor's Office for guidance.

WHAT VALIDITY STUDIES ARE COLLEGES REQUIRED TO CONDUCT?

Colleges must clearly demonstrate that the validity evidence provided when evaluating if the use of the test score is meaningful, appropriate, and useful for appropriately placing students. The types of evidence required are described below:

- **Content-related validity evidence** addresses the extent to which the test measures course prerequisite knowledge and skills for all courses relevant to the test.
- **Evidence addressing the adequacy of cut scores** may be demonstrated by either

a judgmental or empirical approach. A judgmental approach typically is used for initial setting of cut scores, but it can also be used as evidence to support the adequacy of cut scores. Empirical evidence can be of two types: criterion-related validity evidence or consequential-related validity evidence.

- **Criterion-related validity evidence** addresses the extent to which test scores are related to results of an appropriate measure of student ability; for example, final grade, midterm grade or test score, and instructor or student ratings of students' abilities to meet course requirements. This evidence is most appropriate when the test has not yet been used for placement.
- **Consequential-related validity studies** are most appropriate when scores on the test have been used for course placement purposes. These studies must address both an instructor evaluation of student readiness for the course material, and each student's evaluation of the appropriateness of his/her placement into that course.

Consult the [Standards](#) for further information on validity studies.

DO WE HAVE TO VALIDATE THE MULTIPLE MEASURES WE USE?

[Please see the question regarding validation of multiple measures above.](#)

WHEN VALIDATING A TEST INSTRUMENT, SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE VARIABILITY OF OUR FACULTY'S GRADING PRACTICES?

Colleges differ on their assessment/test validation strategies. Some colleges validate an assessment's scores based on final grades while other colleges use earlier criteria, such as a mid-term grade or student and faculty appraisals of the appropriateness of student placements. While all of these methods are acceptable, using student and faculty surveys about four to six weeks into the semester is the preferred methodology. These surveys comprise consequential-related validity and serve as better appraisals of the assessment's efficacy as a placement tool.

Grades can be used to measure if the assessment process is a good predictor of success in a course. While this methodology is not preferred, it is acceptable. However, colleges that employ validation studies based on grades should recognize that their ability to predict student success—and hence the predictability of the placement system implemented—may be impacted by faculty grading variances. Faculty involved should address questions over the validity of grades.

MY COLLEGE HAS HAD OUR ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS IN PLACE NOW FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS. WHY SHOULD WE CONDUCT A CONSEQUENTIAL-RELATED VALIDITY STUDY INSTEAD OF A CRITERION- RELATED VALIDITY STUDY?

In addition to the evidence provided by content-related studies, it is important to have empirical evidence. Continuing criterion-related validation approaches generally do not provide useful results that help discipline faculty validate the placement recommendations derived from test scores.

Consequential-related validity data speak directly to the impact of the assessment. After the test has been in use, this information indicates how the test is working to place students into their classes. If the data indicates that instructors feel students in their courses are prepared, then there is some strong assurance and inference that the placement test supports the instruction provided. A consequential-related validity study, then, provides information for adjusting test cut scores or for providing students with additional assistance, such as tutoring.

Finally, a consequential-related validity study also can be used to justify/explain findings from a disproportionate impact study. For instance, should a college's disproportionate impact study indicate that female students are placed into lower courses at a much higher rate than are male students, this finding could be justified if the college's consequential-related validity study indicates that instructor evaluations of female students and female students' self ratings supported appropriate placement .

WHY SHOULD WE ASK STUDENTS IF THEY ARE APPROPRIATELY PLACED WHEN THEY ARE UNSURE OF THEIR SKILL LEVELS?

Decisions from tests most directly and decidedly impact students. Reliance on student judgment seeks their input to the test evaluation process since student course placements are the direct consequence of the use of multiple measures including the test. While students may not be fully cognizant of their skill levels per se, it is nevertheless useful to identify whether or not they believe—given the rigor of the course material and the pace of the class—that they are in a learning environment in which they feel they can succeed.

Framing of the question(s) put to students must be precise with an adequate response scale. The central question for students is whether they are able to meet—and are being successful in meeting—the demands of the course in which they are enrolled. Capturing the data about four to six weeks into a class should provide a basis for judging the equity of the test with reference to the student as “user.” As with instructor judgments, the information garnered from students can help validate the use of scores from the test and perhaps suggest changes to existing cut scores.

CAN MY COLLEGE ESTABLISH TEST VALIDITY BY CORRELATING PLACEMENT TEST RESULTS WITH RESULTS FROM A UNIFORM FINAL EXAM?

It is possible, but there are several problems with this design. First, from the time the student takes a placement test, the result on that test is mitigated by other factors, such as learning style, grading criteria, multiple measures used in placement, academic interventions (tutoring, peer study groups, and instructor meetings), motivation, or major events in the student's life (illness, job status, family issues). Any number of these or other factors can enhance or detract from the student's ability to perform well on a final exam. Second, a final exam may not be the same across different courses. Therefore, research may result in very low correlations. Third, students who have dropped the course are not represented in the pool of students taking the final exam.

Still, individual researchers will likely have varying opinions on this issue, and it is ultimately a college/district determination to conduct such a validity study. However, should a college conduct such a study and it yields a weak correlation, then that correlation cannot be used to justify the validity or utility of the test.

HOW CAN SOME OF THE INSTRUMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN ON THE APPROVED LIST FOR MANY YEARS STILL BE CONSIDERED VALID AND USEFUL?

While some assessment instruments have been on the list of approved instruments for many years, no instrument remains on the list for more than six years without undergoing the renewal process, which reevaluates validity, bias, and utility. A college should not assume that a test's coverage remains adequate or acceptable, whether the test was produced by the college itself or a second-party publisher.

Over time, student populations change, focus of content in a discipline changes, and even the role or purpose of some courses may change. A periodic review of each test every six years will allow users to verify that the test is consistent with current course expectations.

Again, it is important to point out that the test itself is not being validated. Rather it is the test scores and the use made of that test information that is formally and periodically monitored and validated.

GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NURSING ASSESSMENT/READINESS TESTS

Developed by the California Community College Nursing Advisory Committee (Revised April 2016)

1. Advertise the use of the assessment/readiness test according to college policy, but for at least six (6) months.
2. Identify the pool of applicants that meets all properly established prerequisites and selection criteria for enrollment, except the assessment/readiness test.
3. Administer the assessment/readiness test to, at a minimum, the group of students who are qualified or elected to take the exam and any alternates you have identified. The cost of administering the assessment/readiness test to the pre-selected group shall be borne by the college.
 - a. Follow exam vendor specific instructions for administering the **proctored** exam, including the requirement for photo identification.
 - b. If the student presents with multiple test scores/results within one year, accept only the score from the first/earliest test unless the student presents evidence of acceptable remediation as described in 8c of this document.
4. Identify those students from the pre-selected group who have met the passing score established for the assessment/readiness test. These students are eligible for program enrollment. They have met the composite minimum score on the assessment/readiness test.
5. Enroll the pre-selected students who have met or exceeded the minimum score on the assessment/readiness test. Let them know this is the passing score for community college students and is not necessarily the score they need to apply to the CSU System or any other educational system.
6. Refer the prospective students who did not meet the composite minimum score to appropriate remediation. Also, offer remediation to those students who achieved low scores in any section of the assessment/readiness test, even if they have a passing composite score overall.
7. Collect data specified in subdivisions (g) and (h) of Education Code Section 78261 (see below for specific language) and report it to the Chancellor's Office annually. This data should also be used at the local level to facilitate ongoing review of selection procedures to detect possible disproportionate impact as currently required by Title 5, section 55512.
8. The college shall allow those students who scored below the composite minimum at

least one year, or longer, at college discretion, to remediate and demonstrate readiness. The period of remediation shall commence on the date the student receives his/her remediation plan for pre-entry coursework. Demonstration of readiness shall include one of the following:

- a. Successful completion of a remediation plan and successful retaking of the assessment/readiness test with a passing composite score, or
 - b. Demonstration of passing grades in college remediation coursework in the appropriate disciplines to address areas identified as needing improvement by the assessment readiness test, or
 - c. Documentation of successful completion of a remediation plan that satisfies the intent of assuring readiness for success in the nursing program and is approved by the Nursing Program Director.
9. Any student not meeting the remediation requirements within the college's designated timeframe will be required to restart the application process as a new student.
10. Students will not be able to take the TEAS 5.0 after August 31, 2016. ATI will exchange TEAS 5 tests for ATI TEAS. Students who took the TEAS 5.0 prior to August 31, 2016, and have been awaiting admission or application, e.g., on a wait list, shall be held harmless from re-taking the ATI TEAS test. Qualified students that have previously taken a TEAS assessment test at an outside location, shall have the responsibility to contact the test vendor and instruct the vendor to send his/her test results directly to the Nursing Program Director. Colleges should not accept unofficial copies of test results from students or other colleges.

Table of Community College Approved Nursing Assessment/Readiness Test Vendors

Instrument	Composite Minimum Score
Assessment Technologies Institute, LLC (ATI) ATI TEAS	62
National League for Nursing Preadmission Examination for Registered Nurse Programs (PAX-RN)	114
HESI Admission Assessment Exam (A ²) by Elsevier	70

Reporting Requirements Related to Assessment Testing

Education Code Section 78261, Subdivisions (g) and (h):

(g) As a condition of receiving grant funds pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (d), each recipient district shall report to the chancellor's office the following data for the academic year on or before a date determined by the Chancellor's Office:

- (1) The number of students enrolled in the nursing program.
- (2) The number of students taking diagnostic assessments
- (3) The number of students failing to meet proficiency levels as determined by diagnostic assessment tools.
- (4) The number of students failing to meet proficiency levels that enroll in preentry preparation classes.
- (5) The number of students who successfully complete preentry preparation classes.
- (6) The average number of months between initial diagnostic assessment, demonstration of readiness, and enrollment in the nursing program for students failing to meet proficiency standards on the initial diagnostic assessment.
- (7) The average number of months between diagnostic assessment and program enrollment for students meeting proficiency standards on the initial diagnostic assessment.
- (8) The number of students who completed the associate degree nursing program and the number of students who pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX).

(h) (1) Data reported to the chancellor under this article shall be disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity, and language spoken at home.