

## Reviewing English as a Second Language (ESL) Guided Placement or Self-Placement Processes

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### PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to encourage colleges to conduct a self-review of their ESL guided placement (GP) and self-placement (SP) processes using evidence to determine the efficacy of those processes for students. This document defines GP and SP processes, presents a rationale for reviewing these processes, and outlines four steps for conducting a self (local) review of the GP and/or SP processes. The Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) was consulted and contributed to this requested review.

### DEFINING GUIDED PLACEMENT (GP) AND SELF-PLACEMENT (SP)

Section [78213](#) of the California Education Code clarifies that guided placement (GP) or self-placement (SP) into credit ESL courses should result in a placement and enrollment that maximizes the probability that students enter and complete transfer-level English coursework that satisfies a requirement of the intended certificate or associate degree or a requirement for transfer within the intended major within a three-year timeframe.

The Academic Senate of California Community Colleges confirms in *The Basics of Guided Self-Placement* (August 2018), that Guided Placement and Self Placement are processes used to benefit students by:

1. Encouraging students' personal metacognitive evaluation and self-determination as part of the placement process.
2. Providing students with basic information to determine appropriate placement based on educational goals.
3. Not challenging transfer-level placement but helping students integrate self-analysis with data and course expectations to optimize student investment, experience, and resolve.

Although the goals of GP and SP are similar, the definitions differ. Previous guidance outlined in [AB 705 Guided and Self Placement Guidance and Adoption Plan Instructions](#) (p. 2) illustrate the following distinction between GP and SP:

**Guided Placement:** A process or tool used to encourage a student to reflect on their academic history and educational goals that may include the student evaluating their familiarity and comfort with topics in English or mathematics (or ESL). After completing the process, students receive their course placement.

**Self-Placement:** A process in which a student chooses their placement after consideration of some form of self-reflection and other relevant factors.

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This guidance uses the two terms separately depending on whether the process is a guided approach or is student-directed rather than using the single term *guided self-placement*, which conflates those differences.

As per title 5, section [55522\(c\)\(1\)\(C\)](#): A district placement method may be based upon guided placement, including self-placement, if a student's high school performance data is not available or usable with reasonable effort. In addition, title 5 differentiates GP and SP from other types of skills-based assessments. “District placement methods based upon guided placement or self-placement, shall not: (i) incorporate sample problems or assignments, assessment instruments, or tests, including those designed for skill assessment, unless approved by the Chancellor; or (ii) request students to solve problems, answer curricular questions, present demonstrations/examples of course work designed to show knowledge or mastery of prerequisite skills, or demonstrate skills through tests or surveys.” Under title 5, if the adopted methodology incorporates sample problems or assignments, assessment instruments, or tests, including those designed for skill assessment, it requires Chancellor’s Office approval. Therefore, local colleges are to ensure their GP or SP processes follow the guidelines of title 5. If any assessments used in the ESL placement process involve skill assessment using sample problems or assignments as defined above, those measures require California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office approval as documented in the [2022 CCC ESL Standards](#).

Furthermore, GP and SP processes may be utilized more like a test than a guided or self-directed process when responses are evaluated, scored, and interpreted like a test. Tests are defined as “evaluative device(s) or procedure(s) in which a sample of an examinee’s behavior in a specified domain is obtained and subsequently evaluated and scored using a standardized process.” (AERA, et. al., 2014, p. 224). Therefore, if the information collected during the GP or SP process is scored and combined numerically for use in placement decisions, that process would also require Chancellor’s Office approval according to the [2022 CCC ESL Standards](#).

## USE AND REVIEW OF ESL GUIDED PLACEMENT AND SELF-PLACEMENT PROCESSES

Under title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, districts are required to use evidence-based multiple measures for placement into ESL coursework to ensure that course placement decisions based on those measures are beneficial to students.

Because colleges’/districts’ use of ESL placement assessments should only focus on ESL students without a U.S. high school diploma or U.S. high school data (e.g., international students, adult immigrants, refugees, and F1 Visa students), the review of ESL guided placement and self-placement processes should assess the effectiveness of these measures specifically for this group. All other students shall have direct access to transfer-level English ([ESS-22-400-008](#)).

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Title 5, [55522.5](#) further specifies that ESL students with a goal of transferring to a four-year institution or an associate degree should enter and complete a transfer-level English composition course or an ESL course equivalent to transfer-level English composition within three years of declaring a transfer- or degree-seeking goal. This expectation of using evidenced-based placement processes became more pronounced with the passing of Assembly Bill (AB) [1705/705](#) which states that assessment and placement practices in California Community Colleges (CCC) should maximize the probability that students who enter credit-bearing ESL course sequences complete degree and transfer requirements in English within three years and requires validation of these practices. In December 2022, the indicated in [Local English as a Second Language \(ESL\) Placement Assessments Assessment Advisory Committee \(AAC\) Review \(December 12, 2022\)](#) that the district's ESL guided placement or self-placement processes would be validated in the future and that the Chancellor's office would work with the AAC to design a review and validation process.

### REQUESTED ACTION

The AAC met twice in the spring of 2024 to discuss the review of ESL GP and SP processes and advise on a set of review guidelines. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and AAC recognize that GP and SP processes vary across colleges and are continually evolving as colleges evaluate and adjust those processes. Therefore, as an initial step in preparing for the validation of ESL placement, this guide will assist colleges in conducting a self (or local) review to validate their GP and SP processes and gather documentation for future reporting. Before conducting the GP/SP self-review process, colleges are encouraged to allocate research support and time for ESL faculty or staff to complete the review. At this time, colleges are not being asked to provide documentation from this review to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office or the AAC. Further guidance for validating ESL placement practices is anticipated to be shared with colleges in late Spring 2025.

Therefore, the purpose of this guide is to request local colleges to examine evidence to determine if their GP or SP processes are effective and whether those processes require further review or revision. The recommendations that follow are to be applied to any GP and SP processes used in ESL credit placement decisions. Note that in the case of the SP processes, although students not the college are making decisions about course placement, the college should ensure that the processes provide beneficial information to students as they make those enrollment decisions and adjust the process if evidence reveals concerns.

### GUIDE FOR SELF REVIEW OF ESL GP OR SP PROCESSES

Described below are four sequential, cyclical steps for conducting a self-review of a college's ESL GP or SP processes. The four steps involve an iterative process that uses evidence to revise, adjust, and improve the GP or SP process. Based on the requirements of title 5 and AB705/AB1705, the review and validation of GP and SP processes involves evidence from disproportionate impact and throughput studies.

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A comprehensive review of the ESL assessment process should ensure course placement decisions are equitable across ESL students from diverse demographic groups. The steps below encourage colleges to consider differences across demographic groups, including students from different linguistic groups. Because the linguistic group of ESL students is not typically collected at the college or CCC system level, the college should consider gathering that information at enrollment, at the time of the assessment, or retroactively if possible. ESL students could be asked questions such as: What primary language other than English do you speak at home? or “In what language did you receive most of your education?”

### Step 1: Describe and Document GP and SP Processes

- a. Identify GP or SP processes and measure(s) that are used to place students with a transfer- or degree-seeking goal into credit ESL courses or a transfer-level English composition course (or equivalent).
- b. Identify the population of students for whom GP and SP processes are used to make enrollment decisions.
- c. Describe the format of tools and types of items or questions used in the GP or SP process.  
**NOTE:** Ensure items or questions are not “skills-based” according to title 5. If they are, the college should use the [2022 CCC ESL Standards](#) (Section 3.1) to gather evidence about the validity, reliability, and fairness of the use of the process and measures.
- d. Describe how placement recommendations are made and shared.  
**NOTE:** If a number or value is used to score student responses for making placement recommendations or requirements, the college should use the [2022 CCC ESL Standards](#) (Section 3.1) to gather evidence about the validity, reliability, and fairness of the use of those scores.
- e. Indicate who makes the enrollment decision and how GP or SP results are used to make that decision.
- f. Record how GP or SP processes have changed over time and the rationale for those changes.

### Step 2: Gather data on GP and SP Placement Use and Results

- a. Identify the number of transfer- or degree-seeking students assessed with each GP or SP process. **NOTE:** If a small number of students (less than 30) are involved in GP or SP processes each term or year, you can collect this data over time to gather enough evidence for analysis.
- b. Gather demographic information for each student assessed including linguistic group. If linguistic group is not available it should be added to the GP or SP measure or matriculation process.
- c. Identify the course placement recommendation or requirement for each student assessed.
- d. Determine the final enrollment for each student assessed.

- e. Identify whether each student assessed enters and completes transfer-level English composition (or equivalent) within three years of declaring their transfer- or degree-seeking goal.

### Step 3: Conduct Validation Analyses

- a. Conduct a [Disproportionate impact \(DI\) study \(RP Group, 2017; 2022\)](#) of GP or SP placement recommendations/requirements of students from different demographic groups, including students from different linguistic groups. If linguistic group is not available it should be added to the GP or SP measure or matriculation process. **NOTE:** Because the course placement process often involves polytomous outcomes (placement into two or more course levels) a modified version of a Disproportionate Impact Calculator is available under *Resources* on the CCC Assessment Advisory website (<https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/assessment-advisory-committee>).
- b. Determine the throughput rate of students whose initial enrollment was based on the GP or SP process and examine whether throughput rates differ across different demographic groups, including students from different linguistic groups.

### Step 4: Conduct Follow-Up Evaluations of DI or Low Throughput Rates Resulting from GP or SP Processes

- a. If the placement of students from different demographic or linguistic groups is disproportionately impacted or the throughput rates of students from different demographic or linguistic groups are lower as a result of the GP or SP process, investigate the fairness of the GP or SP process. Approaches could include:
  - i. Conducting a fairness review of the GP or SP process by gathering a panel of students from the affected demographic group(s) and a panel of ESL faculty to identify any potential sources of bias. (See [2022 CCC ESL Standards](#) Section 3.1.a on how to conduct fairness panels.). This would include reviewing the wording and formatting of questions/items, instructions, and how the process is administered (time, steps).
  - ii. Conducting [cognitive interviews](#) or a [think-aloud protocol](#) with a sample of students from the affected demographic group(s) to gather information about their response formation when engaging in the GP or SP process. The goal is to verify whether students interpret the questions/items on the GP or SP measures as intended. This may be particularly important for students from subgroups who under place themselves because of misunderstandings, fear, or uncertainty about their skills.
- b. If throughput rates of students placed based on GP or SP processes are low, further evaluate the validity (accuracy) and reliability (consistency) of the GP or SP processes.

Some potential follow-up studies are listed below. We note that some studies might be more pertinent than others depending on the type of GP or SP process used.

i. Reliability:

Ensure that the GP or SP process produces consistent results for an individual student and across different students. This can be evaluated by asking students to complete the process on two different occasions or determining if the results of a process lead to students with similar language proficiencies being placed in the same or similar course level.

If someone other than the student (a rater) makes a subjective decision about the student's placement, investigate whether the decisions are consistent for a rater across students with similar experiences or whether the decisions for a student are consistent across multiple raters (see [2022 CCC ESL Standards](#), Section 3.1.f for more details on conducting reliability studies).

ii. Validity:

Analyze the extent to which the GP or SP process measures what it is supposed to measure. This can be evaluated by asking ESL faculty to review the content of the process such as items/questions and instructions to determine whether it aligns with entry-level skills for each credit ESL course and transfer-level English Composition (or equivalent) in the course outline of record. These reviews could also ensure that the process does not include more content or steps than are necessary to prevent cognitive overload for some students.

Another type of validity study would be to compare the results from the GP or SP process with another multiple measure used in the placement process (see [2022 CCC ESL Standards](#) Sections 3.1.c and 3.1.d for additional details on conducting validity studies).

Insights from Step 4 can help to inform whether and how to revise and improve the GP or SP process. If revisions are implemented, the college would want to repeat the four steps once they are implemented to document those revisions and determine if those revisions were effective. Colleges are encouraged to maintain a log of the revisions and the rationale for doing so along with supporting data and analyses.

## **REFERENCES**

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education. (2014). *Standards for educational & psychological testing*. AERA.

California Community Colleges. (2022). *Standards for assessment instrument review: English as a second language*. <https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/docs/ab705/ccassessmentstandardsfinal101822a11y.pdf?la=en&hash=235C1A6AEAC4BDC5F3CDCC3B2AC6E5E60F963E18>

California Community College's Chancellor's Office (Memo, December 12, 2022). [Local English as a Second Language \(ESL\) Placement Assessments Assessment Advisory Committee \(AAC\) Review](#)

AB 1705 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Webinar - February 7, 2023  
<https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/Files/Educational-Services-and-Support/ab-1705-faq-a11y.pdf>