

Applying Multiple Measures Assessment to Today's Developmental Education Challenges

By DeShawn Preston and Julie Rubin

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This issue focus is designed for college practitioners who are interested in learning more about evidence on the effectiveness of multiple measures assessment (MMA), a placement approach that uses indicators like students' high school GPA instead of (or in addition to) test scores to place students in courses. This issue focus provides specific recommendations for colleges that adopt corequisite remediation—in which underprepared students enroll in a college-level course and concurrently receive related academic support—on how to implement an MMA placement system.

Main Lessons

- Recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic have caused college leaders to readjust and reconsider their placement practices. More and more students are now placed in college-level courses that are paired with corequisite support.
- An MMA system that incorporates high school GPA to determine student course placement remains a better predictor of student outcomes in college-level math and English courses than test-only placement systems.
- Causal evidence indicates that using MMA to place students with a cumulative high school GPA of 2.7 or higher directly in college-level English courses—instead of college-level courses with corequisite support—can lead to higher early credit attainment and similar levels of success in college-level English.



- While placement criteria evidence is limited for math courses, causal evidence indicates that using MMA to place students in college-level math courses with corequisite support is still a better option than placing them in prerequisite math courses.

Background and Overview

Over the last decade, researchers from the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness (CAPR)—led by MDRC and the Community College Research Center—have conducted rigorous evaluations demonstrating that MMA placement systems can more effectively determine which students are ready for college-level math and English courses than traditional, test-only placement methods.¹ However, in recent years, a couple of events have caused college leaders to reconsider MMA placement practices. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the academic performance of K-12 students and has been associated with grade inflation.² As a result, many college faculty members question whether high school GPA still predicts student performance.

At the same time, many colleges across the country are phasing out prerequisite courses (non-credit-bearing developmental courses that students must take *before* they can enroll in college-level courses) and adopting the corequisite model. [A survey from CAPR](#) found that, between 2016 and 2023, there was a 22 percentage point increase in the number of colleges that offer corequisite courses in English and a 49 percentage point increase in the number of colleges that offer them in math.³ This finding shows that the landscape of developmental education practices has fundamentally changed since the original MMA studies were conducted, which raises an important question: Is an MMA placement process that incorporates high school GPA still relevant, and if so, how should the process function now?

Using MMA in the Current Developmental Education Context

- **#1: MMA placement systems that take cumulative high school GPA into account (among other measures) remain the best predictor of student outcomes in college-level math and English courses.**

MDRC has conducted several studies on the use of MMA as a placement tool among schools that offer prerequisite courses. [These studies](#) have consistently found that high school GPA is the strongest individual predictor of how well students perform in college-level math and English courses.⁴

Even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a study from ACT Education Corp found that GPA was a good predictor of student performance.⁵ The study found that while ACT test STEM scores and high school GPA can each individually predict cumulative GPA for first-year STEM majors, high school GPA is generally a stronger predictor. When considered together, the two measures are a stronger predictor than test scores or GPA alone.

- **#2: Causal evidence indicates that using MMA to place students with a cumulative high school GPA of 2.7 or higher directly in college-level English courses — instead of college-level courses with corequisite support — can lead to higher early credit attainment and similar success levels in college-level English.**

In 2024, MDRC conducted a randomized controlled trial in Texas to examine the effects of using MMA placement in a corequisite context.⁶ The study found that students who were “bumped up” — in other words, students who would have been placed in a corequisite support course using a test-only placement system but were instead placed in a college-level course using the MMA placement system — were just as likely to pass a college-level English course and tended to earn more college credits in their first semester when compared with students who were not bumped up.

Broadly, that study suggests that some students who were placed in a support course using a test-only placement system could also have succeeded in a college-level English course without the corequisite course. In addition, students who were placed in the college-level course had more room in their schedules to earn additional college credits when compared with students who also enrolled in corequisite courses. Students who take courses within their major as early as possible can see improved success and retention rates.⁷

- **#3: While there is limited causal evidence about which placement criteria are the best predictors of success in college-level math classes in a corequisite context, causal evidence indicates that the corequisite model is still a better option than prerequisite courses in math.**

Rigorous studies in [New York](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Texas](#) found that corequisite models had positive effects on students in math courses when compared with prerequisite remediation. On average, students were more likely to complete a college-level math course when offered a corequisite course than when offered a prerequisite course. In one study, the positive effects extended to degree completion and earnings.⁸

Resources for Implementing MMA Today

The CAPR [MMA Toolkit](#) is a resource that colleges can use to incorporate multiple measures into their placement policies. While the toolkit focuses on how colleges can implement an MMA placement system alongside prerequisite courses, implementing MMA while using a corequisite model requires much of the same work, such as setting up appropriate data management practices, making faculty engagement a priority, and communicating policy changes to staff members and students.

As you begin to examine and change your placement system, remember that cumulative high school GPA continues to be a predictive measure, not all students need to take corequisite courses to be successful, and most students who do need additional support will have better outcomes (such as increased course completion and credit accumulation) if they take a corequisite course rather than a prerequisite course.

Notes and References

1. MDRC, “Multiple Measures Assessment Project,” (website: <https://www.mdrc.org/work/projects/multiple-measures-assessment-project>, 2025).
2. National Center for Education Statistics, “NAEP LongTerm Trend Assessment Results: Reading and Mathematics, 2022” (website: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ltt/2022/>, 2022); Dan Goldhaber and Maia Goodman Young, *Course Grades as a Signal of Student Achievement: Evidence on Grade Inflation Before and After COVID-19* (CALDER, 2023).
3. Sophie Litschwartz, Dan Cullinan, and Vivianna Plancarte, *Multiple Measures Assessment and Corequisite Courses: Alternate Ways to Place and Prepare New College Students* (MDRC, 2023).
4. High school GPA is a stronger predictor of how well students perform in college math and English courses than any other measure or combination of other measures, including a student’s standardized test scores, time since graduation, or the high school attended. See Sophie Litschwartz, Dan Cullinan, and Colin Hill, *College Course Placement Based on Multiple Measures Assessment: A Synthesis of Two Experimental Evaluations* (Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness, 2024).
5. Edgar I. Sanchez, *Predicting STEM Achievement: A Comparative Study of ACT Scores and High School GPA* (ACT Education Corp, 2025).
6. In a randomized controlled trial, individuals or groups are randomly assigned either to a program group that is eligible to participate in the intervention or to a control group that is not eligible to participate. By comparing the outcomes of the two groups — which are not systematically different in any way (and, in large samples, very similar in all ways) — a study can estimate the impact of the intervention without bias. See Dan Cullinan, Lena Novak, Liam Tsao, Gilda Azurdia, and Sukanya Barman, *Placement Matters: Evaluating Multiple Measures Assessment in the Texas Corequisite Context* (MDRC, forthcoming).
7. Alexandra W. Logue, Daniel Douglas, and Mari Watanabe-Rose, “Corequisite Mathematics Remediation: Results over Time and in Different Contexts,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41, 3 (2019): 294–315.
8. Florence X. Ran and Yuxin Lin, “The Effects of Corequisite Remediation: Evidence from a Statewide Reform in Tennessee,” CCRC Working Paper No. 115 (Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2019); Akiva Y. Meiselman and Lauren Schudde, “The Impact of Corequisite Math on Community College Student Outcomes: Evidence from Texas,” *Education Finance and Policy* 17, 4 (2022): 719–744; Daniel Douglas, Alexandra W. Logue, and Mari Watanabe-Rose, *Community College Students Assessed as Needing Mathematics Remediation: Seven-Year Impacts of Corequisite Remediation with Statistics* (Dana Center Mathematics Pathways, 2021).