



Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

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# **2019 Common Assessment Policy**

Implementation Guide and FAQ

Last Updated: Summer 2019

## Introduction

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The 2019 Common Assessment Policy (CAP) marked a major milestone in developmental education reform in Massachusetts by replacing a 21-year old policy that mandated the use of a single assessment tool, Accuplacer. The 2019 CAP recommends institutions use multiple measures – including high school GPA – to make placement decisions, adopt multiple mathematics pathways, and implement co-requisite support. The policy also establishes statewide goals to increase the number of students completing gateway-level English and mathematics courses during the first year of enrollment. Institutional progress towards statewide goals will be tracked under the new Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS).

After years of closely following national research and monitoring results of local institutional pilots, the Department of Higher Education (DHE) is advising institutions of higher education to use high school GPA to assess college-readiness and place students into credit-bearing English and mathematics courses. There is little evidence to support the continued use of a high-stakes standardized exam for assessment and placement. Studies show how placing a student into a developmental course serves as an act of academic invalidation and can ultimately lead to these students stopping out. Research also suggests the use of high school GPA as part of a multiple measures approach to course assignment improves the accuracy of the placement process and better facilitates student progression into and through college-level coursework.

Additionally, there is little evidence to support the effectiveness of traditional remediation. In order to meet statewide goals, institutions will need to adopt the co-requisite model and implement multiple mathematics pathways. The co-requisite model allows students who would benefit from additional support to receive just-in-time remediation while receiving academic validation by being placed directly into a college-level course. Additionally, implementation of multiple mathematics pathways will ensure students complete the appropriate mathematics course for their major.

We can no longer afford to inaccurately assess college readiness and place students into the traditional developmental education sequence. Our system of public higher is at a critical juncture where our institutions must shift the focus from college-ready students to becoming student-ready colleges and universities. We must better equip ourselves to support today's students once they enroll in our postsecondary institutions. The onus is on us to ensure students who enter our institutions leave with a postsecondary credential.

The purpose of this implementation guide is to closely examine the CAP and provide an analytical response to a series of frequently asked questions garnered from the field. The policy is broken down into three sections, with each section containing a subsection of the questions and answers. Updates to this guidance document may occur because of the CAP review schedule and/or policy developments made by the Board of Higher Education.

Please send any comments, questions, or feedback regarding this document or the CAP to Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Chief of Staff and Assistant Commissioner for Academic Policy and Student Success at [equiroz@dhe.mass.edu](mailto:equiroz@dhe.mass.edu).

## Mission and Goals

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The Department of Higher Education (DHE) has adopted a three-pronged approach to reduce remediation and increase student success:

1. Assess students properly for credit-bearing courses using multiple measures;
2. Ensure students are completing the appropriate math for their major;
3. Provide students who require remediation access to co-requisite courses in mathematics, reading, and writing.

Institutions of public higher education are encouraged to adopt this approach at scale.

The Board of Higher Education has set the following goals for institutions of public higher education:

- *At community colleges*, 50% of first-time, degree-seeking students will successfully complete a college-level English and mathematics course appropriate for their major and within one year of initial enrollment/before earning 24 credits unless specified differently in their course of study by AY2020-2021.
- *At state universities and University of Massachusetts campuses*, 75% of entering first-time degree-seeking students will successfully complete a college-level English and mathematics course appropriate for their major within the first year of initial enrollment/before earning 24 credits unless specified differently in their course of study by AY2020-2021.

It is important to note the goals above apply to all students in public postsecondary institutions and progress towards goals will be monitored using the Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS). Data in the PMRS will be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender to ensure students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds are being well-served by reforms in developmental education.

# The 2019 Common Assessment Policy and Related FAQ

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## Section 1. General Questions

### 1. How should high school GPA be calculated?

High school GPAs do not need to be recalculated for assessment and placement purposes. Institutions may use the high school GPA as indicated on the transcript. If institutions choose to recalculate high school GPA, they must use the recalculation method outlined in the *Admissions Standards Reference Guide* and indicate that high school GPAs will be recalculated in the institutional placement guidelines. Both the [Admissions Standards Reference Guide](#) and [GPA calculator](#) are available on the DHE's website.

Please see Question 4 for guidance related to the use of GPA for high school students enrolled in dual enrollments courses or participating in Early College programs.

### 2. Is the DHE mandating the use of high school GPA for placement into college-level courses?

The DHE is not mandating the use of high school GPA for placement into all college-level English and mathematics courses. As previously mentioned, the DHE firmly believes high school GPA to be a stronger indicator of success than Accuplacer, which is known to misplace students. Institutions are required to submit placement guidelines to the DHE. In some cases, changes to institutional placement guidelines might be suggested in order to improve student outcomes. Institutions that submit guidelines which continue to rely solely on Accuplacer for assessment and placement will not be accepted.

### 3. Can our institution have a higher or lower GPA standard for placement?

No, if the institution elects to use high school GPA for placement, they must use the standards in the CAP.

### 4. What placement standards can be used to assess readiness for high school students?

Institutions must use consistent placement standards for high school students enrolled in dual enrollment courses and students who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent. Institutions that use measures not specified in the CAP must contact the Department and request prior approval.

To request prior approval, institutions should contact Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Assistant Commissioner for Academic Policy and Student Success, and describe which placement standards they would like to use and provide justification for using standards outside of the CAP. The Department will provide a response within 15 business days.

**5. Are there set cut scores for placement into developmental courses?**

No, the CAP does not identify cut scores for placement into developmental courses. The CAP is intended to identify standards institutions can use to place students directly into college-level coursework.

**6. Can my institution use a different placement method other than the Accuplacer or GPA (e.g. SAT scores) to place students into a college level course for mathematics?**

Institutions that wish to use measures not listed in the CAP must contact the Department and request approval. All requests should be sent to [Elena Quiroz-Livanis](#), Assistant Commissioner for Academic Policy and Student Success, and should include a description and justification for using standards outside of the CAP. The Department will provide a response within 15 business days.

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## Section 2A. Placement Standards – English

### Standard A: GPA Standard

Students who have graduated from high school within the past ten years and have earned a 2.7 high school GPA do not have to complete an Accuplacer and/or Writeplacer exam.

### Standard B: SAT Standard

Students who score over 500 on the SAT I-Verbal exam are exempt from the reading test. Students who score over 600 on the SAT I-Verbal exam are exempt from both reading and writing tests.

### Standard C: Accuplacer/Writeplacer Standard

For students who are not deemed eligible under the above standards, there are two options for using Accuplacer and/or Writeplacer to assess students.

1. Option 1 for Placing Students into Composition I:
  - Students who score a 5 on the Writeplacer.
  - Students who score a 5 on the Writeplacer and a 245 on the Reading Accuplacer.
  
2. Option 2 for Placing into Composition I:
  - Students who score a 4 on the Writeplacer and meet state university and University of Massachusetts admission standards.
  - Students who score a 4 on the Writeplacer and a 259 on the Reading Accuplacer.

Unless the student is entitled to an accommodation, they should have no more than one hour to complete the Writeplacer exam.

## Section 2B. Frequently Asked Questions: Placement Standards – English

### **7. If a student graduated more than ten years ago, can they be placed into a college-level English course with GPA?**

Yes, the Department will not restrict the use of high school GPA as a placement standard for institutions that choose to apply the standard to students who graduated high school more than ten years ago. All institutions that elect to use the GPA standards must report the year of high school graduation in all Higher Education Information Resource System (HEIRS) reports.

### **8. Can community colleges use the following option for placement: Students who score a 4 on the Writeplacer and meet state university and University of Massachusetts admission standards.**

Yes, any institution can use any of the placement standards outlined in the CAP.

### **9. Do students who score exactly a 500 or 600 meet the exemption policies outlined in Standard B?**

Yes, students who score exactly 500 or higher on the SAT I-Verbal exam are exempt from the reading test. Students who score exactly 600 or higher on the SAT I-Verbal exam are exempt from both reading and writing tests.

### **10. Can an institution provide more than one hour for the Writeplacer exam?**

No, unless the student is entitled to an accommodation, they should not have more than an hour to complete the Writeplacer exam.

### **11. Does the GPA exempt students from taking the Reading Assessment?**

Yes, the use of the GPA standard places a student directly into college-level English.

### **12. Does the policy include an option for using only Accuplacer Reading scores for placement into college-level English?**

No, there is no standard that relies solely on the Accuplacer Reading exam for placement.

### Section 3A. Placement Standards – Mathematics

The following placement standards recognize efforts to implement and scale multiple mathematics pathways. The four mathematics pathways are Calculus, Elementary Education, Quantitative Reasoning, and Statistics.

#### Standard A: GPA Standard

Students who have graduated from high school within the past three years, have earned a 2.7 high school GPA, and will enroll in a college-level Quantitative Reasoning or Statistics, do not have to complete an Accuplacer exam and may be placed directly into a Quantitative Reasoning or Statistics course.

Institutions may also use the 2.7 HS GPA standard to place students into other gateway college-level mathematics courses below the level of calculus or any mathematics course in the elementary education pathway.

#### Standard B: Accuplacer Standards by Mathematics Pathway

##### *Quantitative Reasoning and Statistics Mathematics Pathways*

- If a student is not deemed to be eligible under Standard A they must score at least a 262 on the Next Generation Accuplacer – Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, and Statistics exam to place directly into a college-level Quantitative Reasoning or Statistics course. Institutions may set a higher cut score up to 268.

##### *Elementary Education Pathways*

- If a student is not deemed to be eligible under Standard A, they must score at least a 268 on the Next Generation Accuplacer – Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, and Statistics exam in order to be directly placed into the first course in the Elementary Education mathematics pathway sequence.

##### *Calculus Mathematics Pathways*

- If a student is not deemed to be eligible under Standard A, they must score at least a 268 on the Next Generation Accuplacer – Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, and Statistics exam in order to be directly placed into a College Algebra/Introduction to Functions course.
- If a student is not deemed to be eligible under Standard A, they must score at least a 237 on the Next Generation Accuplacer – Advanced Algebra and Functions exam to place directly into Pre-Calculus. Institutions may set a higher cut score up to 243.
- Students must score at least a 250 on Next Generation Accuplacer – Advanced Algebra and Functions exam to place directly into Calculus. Institutions may set a higher cut score up to 263.

In an effort to reduce the amount of time a student is being tested, institutions should carefully review multiple factors when determining whether a student needs to complete an Accuplacer exam. If required to complete the Accuplacer exam, students should complete the test that will place them directly into the mathematics course appropriate for their major.

### Section 3B. Frequently Asked Questions: Placement Standards – Mathematics

#### **13. If a student has graduated more than three years ago, can they be placed into a college-level course with GPA?**

Yes, the Department will not restrict the use of high school GPA as a placement standard for institutions that choose to apply the standard to students who graduated high school more than three years ago. All institutions that elect to use the GPA standards must report the year of high school graduation in all Higher Education Information Resource System (HEIRS) reports.

#### **14. Are the four pathways required for our institution?**

Yes, if applicable. These four pathways and their respective gateway courses can fit a variety of programs, from the behavioral and social sciences to humanities and fine arts to sciences and technology. In some cases, campuses might be able to offer more than four pathways. Institutions that are able to offer more than four pathways in order to further contextualize mathematics courses to meet the needs of students and ensure they are sufficiently prepared for success in their majors are encouraged to do so. Institutions that do not offer degrees in Elementary Education are not required to offer the Elementary Education Mathematics Pathway, but are encouraged to consider its adoption for students in Early Childhood Education programs.

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### Section 4A. Institutional Placement Guidelines

Institutions of public higher education will submit to the Department placement guidelines no later than December 1, 2019. Placement guidelines should include the following elements:

- A detailed plan which outlines how the institution is going to meet the goal set by the Board for percent of first-time, degree-seeking students completing college-level English and mathematics courses by the end of their first year/before earning 24 credits. This should include:
  - Standards for assessing students' readiness for college-level coursework that include multiple measures (i.e. Accuplacer scores, high school GPA, and SAT scores);
  - Plans for scaling the co-requisite course offerings in reading, writing, and within each of the four mathematics pathways.
  - Plans for addressing racial disparities in completion of gateway English and mathematics courses. Please note the goals stated at the beginning of the policy will

be presented in both the aggregate and disaggregate forms in the Performance Measurement Reporting System.

- Examples of advising materials related to placement options for students and families.

Department staff will work closely with institutions of public higher education to monitor progress towards statewide goals. In some cases, changes to institutional placement guidelines might be suggested in order to improve student outcomes.

## Section 4B. Frequently Asked Questions

### 15. How will the Department of Higher Education evaluate submitted guidelines?

Institutional guidelines will be evaluated based on their thoroughness and must address the following questions:

- What placement standards are used to assess academic preparedness and to place students into college-level mathematics courses?
  - Standards for placement into developmental reading and writing courses;
  - Standards for placement into Composition I with co-requisite support;
  - Standards for placement into Composition I;
  - Standards for placement into developmental mathematics courses;
  - Standards for placement into gateway mathematics courses with co-requisite support; and
  - Standards for placement into gateway mathematics courses.
- Justification for use of assessment standards in placement decisions.
- How will the implementation of multiple placement measures, co-requisite support, and mathematics pathways help the institution meet statewide goals?
  - Disaggregate the data to show elimination of disparities in the following areas:
    - Disproportionately high rates of students of color enrolled in developmental coursework in English and mathematics; and
    - Disproportionately low rates of students of color successfully completing college-level coursework in English and mathematics.

Initially, institutions will be asked to submit a survey as a means to collect data on placement practices across the states. Staff will use the survey responses to develop a table outlining which standards are being used at each institution. Institutions will also be required to submit copies of local assessment and placement guidelines by December 1. The table described above and institutional assessment and placement guidelines will be posted on DHE website, which will serve as a central repository.

The Department will work with the Developmental Education Advisory Board institute an annual update process to ensure the information on the DHE website is accurate.

**16. When will the Department notify institutions regarding assessment and placement guidelines?**

The Department will provide written feedback to the institutions by February 1. Institutions will have 20 business days to respond.

**17. How will progress towards statewide goals be measured?**

Institutional and statewide progress towards goals will be measured using the PMRS. The PMRS added new metrics to evaluate institutional performance: timely completion of gateway course in mathematics and English. The metric will examine the percent of first-time, degree-seeking students completing college-level math and English classes by end of first academic year and by the end of second academic year. The metric will examine completion rates by initial cohort. Data in the PMRS will be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender to ensure students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds are being well-served by reforms in developmental education.