Introduction

Between 24 and 33 percent of students are misplaced when entering college, and therefore required to complete unnecessary developmental education courses that hinder postsecondary completion.\(^1\) More specifically, nearly 40 percent of community college students enrolled in these courses fail to progress to credit-bearing coursework, let alone earn a degree or credential.\(^2\)

There is growing recognition that assessing students using a single, standardized measure may contribute to this misplacement, and that more appropriate decisions can be achieved by using more than one measure of student readiness.\(^3\) In response, postsecondary systems across the country have implemented, are developing, or are considering policies that require or encourage two- and four-year institutions to use more than one measure to determine student course placement; for the purposes of this brief, these policies, both enacted and emerging, will be referred to as *multiple measures*. Even in systems where no such policy exists, many individual institutions are developing placement practices using multiple measures as well.

Data Collection Methodology

Research for Action conducted a national policy scan to determine whether and how states and two- and four-year postsecondary systems use multiple measures to place students. Three data collection methods were used:

- **Survey**: Based on previous research on multiple measures policies, an online survey was developed and then administered between June and July 2015 to identify postsecondary systems across the country with such policies. Systems that did not initially respond to the survey received at least two email and telephone follow-ups. For systems where a respondent still could not be reached, initial

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Document reviews were conducted to develop an understanding of relevant policy. In all, RFA examined 69 postsecondary systems across all 50 states through the online survey. Once states and systems with a multiple measures policy were identified, additional research activities were conducted.4

- **Document Analysis:** A more extensive review of policy documents was conducted in each of the states with a multiple measures policy either in place or being piloted. Documents included state statute, regulation, system policy documents (e.g., academic and student affairs handbooks), and agreements across multiple institutions within a state.

- **Telephone Interviews:** Interviews with state and system postsecondary policymakers from states with a multiple measures policy in place or in the pilot stage were conducted between September and November 2015 to verify survey data and expand our understanding of policies. In all, nearly 30 interviews were conducted.

In the summer of 2016, draft profiles for each of the systems with multiple measures policies were sent to the contacts in each of the states for verification and updating. The data shared in this brief reflects the information verified by all but three of the systems.

**Findings**

**A. The Scope and Spread of Multiple Measures Policy**

**The majority of states have at least one system implementing, piloting, developing or considering a multiple measures policy.** Over half of the states (30) have at least one system (2- or 4-year) implementing, piloting, developing or otherwise considering a multiple measures policy; see Figure 1. More specifically, half the states (26) have a multiple measures policy in at least one system:

- Twenty-three (23) states have multiple measures policies in place for fall 2016 in at least one postsecondary system.
- Three (3) states are piloting multiple measures policies in at least one postsecondary system.
- Eighteen (18) states with policies in place or being piloted apply those policies to both the two- and four- year sectors, seven states have policies for the two-year sector only, and one state has a policy in the four-year sector only.
- Systems or postsecondary state agencies also reported considering policies (Kansas and Louisiana) or developing policies (Idaho and Wisconsin).
- The remaining states reported, or were identified through document review, as not having any systems with multiple measures policies.

4 While in some cases multiple data sources were used for a given system, 60 percent of systems provided data through the survey (41 systems). The remaining data collected was based on document review (21 percent (15 systems)), or through phone and email contact (19 percent (13 systems)).
The spread and implementation of these policies has occurred in relatively short order. As can be seen in Figure 2, most (69 percent) multiple measures policies were developed since 2011. In 2015 alone, seven of the policies were developed or significantly changed. The fact that these policies are relatively new limits the amount of data available on their impact on student outcomes; much of the research that does exist in this area is from California, where all three systems have had policies in place for over a decade.
B. Policy Tools

States and systems have taken different paths enacting multiple measures policies. Ten (10) states have systems with multiple measures policies based on state statute and/or regulation. Thirteen (13) of the states that have at least one system implementing or piloting multiple measures base the policy only on directives from the system office, without enabling statute or regulation. In five states, institutional agreements to use additional measures for placement have been jointly developed among presidents or academic officers (see Figure 3).

NOTE: N=28 because in California, the four-year systems have policies that were developed at the system level while the policy for community colleges is based on statute and the policies used in the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges have been developed through both statute and institutional agreement.
Among states with a multiple measures policy based on statute, regulation, or system policy, 18 currently require institutions to accept multiple measures for placement decisions. The remaining states encourage it but implementation is optional.

C. Degree of Flexibility

**States and systems with multiple measures policies most commonly provide institutions some flexibility in selecting measures for placement.** Twelve states have at least one postsecondary system with a uniform sets of measures to be accepted across campuses, the majority (16) of states include a postsecondary system that allow for variation in the measures accepted for placement (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4. Variation and Uniformity in Multiple Measures Policies*

Policies provide for this flexibility in several ways in multiple states:

- **Allow institutions to determine all placement measures:** In both the California Community College system and the Connecticut State Colleges and University system, no specific measures are required; the state or system simply requires that more than one measure be used for placement.

- **Allow institutions to select from a set of approved measures:** The Missouri Department of Higher Education requires institutions to use an array of assessments to place students “including—but not limited to—SAT or ACT scores, high school grade point average, high school end-of-course examination scores, or an institutional-created assessment instrument.” An institution using one of the assessments, however, must use the statewide placement score in making placement decisions. Similarly, Maryland’s Community College Council of Presidents has determined a set of cut scores for particular measures from which institutions can choose.
• Allow institutions to determine measures to use during a secondary placement process at the institutional level: States and systems will often allow individual institutions to develop and implement a secondary placement process for students who do not meet the cut scores on an initial set of placement measures. In some cases, institutions have total discretion in the selection of these measures; in other cases, selection occurs from an approved list of measures. For example:

- In Ohio, high school students earning a score on one of the series of measures that meets the threshold recommended by the Ohio Board of Regents may be considered “remediation-free” without taking an additional placement test. Students scoring below the threshold score are subject to institutional placement procedures to enroll in credit-bearing courses.

- In the Florida College System, institutions are required to designate additional measures from those approved by the state for students who do not meet the cut scores on the initial set of placement measures; these measures can include: high school GPA (overall or in a specific subject area), work history, military experience, participation in juried competitions, career interests, degree major or meta-major declaration, and achievement on any other subject tests.

D. Multiple Measures Policy by Academic Subject Area

While not uniformly true, most multiple measures policies include placement in reading, writing, and mathematics. Figure 5 illustrates by sector which subject areas are included for the states with multiple measures policies.

Figure 5: Multiple Measures Policies, by State, Postsecondary Sector, and Subject

![Multiple Measures Policies Graph]

NOTE: N=27 because in California, one four-year system only uses multiple measures for writing; the other two use multiple measures for both English and math.
• Twenty-five (25) of the states with, or piloting, multiple measures policies use the measures for English and mathematics course placement; in most of these states (17), the policy applies to institutions in both sectors, while in seven states, the policy applies to two-year institutions only and in one state, the policy applies only to four-year institutions.

• The remaining two states with, or piloting, policies apply them to placement in only math (1) or writing (1).

E. Types of Measures Utilized

By definition, multiple measures policies encompass a wide range of metrics. However, some are more common than others. Below, we provide an overview of where and how each type of measure is used.

1. Standardized Tests

**Standardized tests are the most commonly used assessment tool in multiple measures policies.** All but 3 states (Connecticut, Massachusetts and Missouri) implementing or piloting multiple measures policies require institutions to accept at least one standardized test in the placement process. Many states include more than one standardized test in the policy. Figure 6 shows utilization, by state and sector, of four common types of standardized assessments as placement measures: the SAT or ACT, high school standardized tests, placement tests, and AP/IB exams.

Figure 6: Standardized tests required to be accepted in Multiple Measures Placement

- The SAT and/or ACT are used as additional measures for placement in 19 of the states with multiple measures policies or pilots.
High school standardized tests, including both state-developed and assessment consortia tests (i.e., Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) are used in at least one system in 15 states, primarily in both sectors.

Placement tests, whether developed by the state or system or commercially (i.e., Accuplacer and COMPASS) are included in multiple measures policies in 17 states: both sectors in nine states, the two-year sector in seven states, and the four-year sector in one state.

Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Exams were identified in two states (three systems).

The utilization of standardized assessments is commonly paired with specific, state- or system-established cut scores. As seen in Figure 7, 27 systems or postsecondary state agencies with, or piloting, multiple measures policies set cut scores for placement purposes for tests such as the SAT. In most cases, these cut scores apply to institutions in both sectors. The two systems or states not setting cut scores do not specify the measures to be used in placement.

Figure 7: State/System-Determined Cut Scores for Multiple Measures Assessments

2. Variation in Cut Scores

In at least eight states, cut scores and placement measures vary based on students’ course-taking plans. More specifically, in order to enroll in more advanced courses, the policies require students to meet higher standards in one of the following ways:

- **Meet higher cut scores on one or more measures:** For example, Indiana’s Ivy Tech Community College system has multiple math pathways requiring different placement measure scores based on...
the level of coursework required. Students who want to take more advanced coursework are required to meet higher cut scores on at least one of the placement measures. While less specific, Ohio policy also states that students deemed remediation free may be subject to additional placement testing requirements for more advanced academic programs.

- **Take a placement test for which they would otherwise have been exempt**: The City University of New York (CUNY) system allows students to be exempted from taking the CUNY Assessment Test if they meet the cut score on the SAT, ACT or state Regents Test. However, to earn entry into more advanced math courses, students must take the CUNY Assessment Test. The South Dakota Board of Regents has developed a similar policy, stating that placement into advanced math courses requires both the approved Math Index score and an appropriate ACCUPLACER Calculus score, even if they would be excused from placement testing if enrolling in lower level math courses and making the cut score on other measures.

- **Meet the cut score on an assessment as well as successfully complete 12th grade math coursework**: The institutional agreement developed by University of Hawaii campuses states that students scoring a 3 or better on the math portion of the Smarter Balanced assessment must complete a “calculus pathway” math course in the 12th grade if pursuing a STEM major. Similarly in Washington, the State Board for Community and Technical College's institutional agreement states that students scoring a 3 or better on Smarter Balanced are eligible for pre-calculus if they earned a B or better in a “calculus pathway class” as a high school senior.

In addition, a student's intended course of study or degree may be considered in course placement in the Florida College System and the Nevada System of Higher Education.

3. High School Achievement

States also differ in how high school achievement measures—such as high school grade point average (GPA), course grades, and course completion—inform placement decisions. While development of multiple measures policies has been based, in part, on research showing that high school GPA is a better indicator of college success than a traditional placement test, the use of this metric is still rare. Figure 8 displays the number of states and system that include GPA and other high school measures in their policy.
Only eight states have systems with policies that include high school GPA as a placement metric. In the case of South Dakota, the use of high school GPA only applies to math placement.

The completion of specific high school courses or college preparatory coursework is included in policies in nine states, often in combination with another measure. For example, the North Carolina Community College System’s policy states that students may be placed directly into college-level courses if they have an un-weighted high school GPA of 2.6 or above and have taken four math classes in high school, one of which required Algebra II is a prerequisite.

Grades in specific courses, such as English or Algebra, are also used in five states.

Note: While in some cases, states and systems require that institutions make placement decisions based on specific measures for every student, in others, states and systems only require that institutions accept specific measures for placement if they are provided by the student applying for admission. As a result, some students in states with multiple measures policy may in fact be placed using a single placement exam if the other measures are not provided by the student.

Most systems that include high school standards-based tests as a placement measure use assessments developed by one of the national assessment consortia. Thirteen states include standards-based assessments aligned to the Common Core as required or optional measures in the placement policy. In all but one case, these policies rely on one or both of the national assessment consortia tests (see Figure 9).
Examples of how each test is used are as follows:

- **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC):** The California State University's Early Assessment Program (EAP), which measures whether 11th grade students are ready for college level coursework, has transitioned from the California Standards Test to the SBAC.\(^5\) The West Virginia General Summative Assessment is based on the SBAC as well. The South Dakota Board of Regents added the SBAC to the existing set of measures that can be used for placement. In Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington, all public institutions in both the two- and four-year sectors have agreed to allow students to use SBAC scores as evidence of readiness for credit-bearing courses.\(^6\)

- **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC):** Community college presidents in Illinois, Maryland and New Jersey have agreed that scores on the PARCC can be used in placement decisions, with the understanding that individual institutions will continue to use placement tests as well.\(^7\)

- **Both PARCC and SBAC:** Placement policies for the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education and the Nevada Higher Education System include cut scores for both PARCC and SBAC in English and math placement.\(^8\)

The Regents Exams in New York was developed by the state department of education but is also aligned with the Common Core. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities will now be required to include college-ready benchmarks from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) in the course

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\(^5\) [https://www.calstate.edu/eap/transition-faq.shtml](https://www.calstate.edu/eap/transition-faq.shtml)


\(^8\) In late December 2015, the Colorado Department of Education announced that students will no longer take the PARCC exam at the high school level, instead taking the SAT: [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/high_school_and_beyond/2015/12/colorado_dumps_parcc_in_favor_of_sat_as_high_school_test.html?Intc=main_mpnsve](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/high_school_and_beyond/2015/12/colorado_dumps_parcc_in_favor_of_sat_as_high_school_test.html?Intc=main_mpnsve)
placement process, starting in the next couple of years; while the state academic standards are aligned to the Common Core in English/Language Arts, they are not aligned in math. Florida’s non-aligned FCAT 2.0 Reading assessment can still be used for placement, and Texas includes a number of high school standards-based assessments in its policy, but has not adopted the Common Core or aligned assessments.

Importantly, many of the states and systems utilizing PARCC and SBAC have only just begun to do so. For instance, in such as Hawaii, Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington, scores from the PARCC and/or SBAC have only been used since 2016. In California and South Dakota, the tests were used for the first time in the spring and fall of 2015, respectively. At the same time, states such Colorado and Illinois have shifted to the SAT as their high school assessment, so that the inclusion of the consortia assessments will have minimal use moving forward.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NON-COGNITIVE MEASURES FOR PLACEMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-cognitive measures are used to gauge more intangible characteristics of student readiness. At least three states or systems have specifically included such indicators in multiple measures placement policies as an option for institutions for students that do not meet initial state or system established criteria for college-level course placement:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Florida College System:</strong> Colleges may decide to designate in their Developmental Education Implementation Plan various non-cognitive measures for students not already identified as exempt from placement testing including work history, military experience, participation in juried competitions and career interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning:</strong> Students who do not meet initial criteria for college level placement participate in an on-campus process involving consideration of “special interests and skills as well as other non-cognitive factors.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board:</strong> For the placement of students who are not exempt from placement testing based on previous measures, institutions consult, along with other measures, “non-cognitive factors (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy) and family-life issues (e.g., job, childcare, transportation, finances).”</td>
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### Multiple Measures Policy Framework

Our analysis of multiple measures policy has allowed us to develop a framework to describe the ways in which the measures relate to one another and inform student placement. WestEd’s evaluation of the Core to College initiative served as the foundation for this framework. However, the policy framework used for this analysis revises and expands the categories included in WestEd’s evaluation, in part due to the larger number of states included in the analysis.

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F. A Flexibility Continuum

Multiple measures policies vary along a continuum that ranges from significant institutional autonomy to centralized, highly specified system or state-wide policy. As can be seen in Figure 10, below, we identify five general policy categories. The left end of the continuum consists of more decentralized models, in which institutions have greater flexibility to select the measures included in the placement process, as well as the process itself, but may require policy implementation with more limited support from the state or system office. Policy categories become increasingly more centralized and specific moving to the right of the continuum, which facilitates the rapid scale-up of such placement designs.

**Figure 10: Multiple Measures Policy Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTINUUM OF INSTITUTIONAL FLEXIBILITY IN STATE/SYSTEM MULTIPLE MEASURES POLICIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decentralized Placement Policies</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Selection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The state or system requires use of multiple measures but does not specify the types of measures to be included; <strong>institutions have total discretion in selecting measures.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One and Done</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The state or system identifies a number of measures that may be included in placement decisions; if a <strong>student meets the cut score on any one of these assessments, they are to be placed in college level courses.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement Formula</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The results of state- or system-specified assessment measures generate an index score used to determine course placement.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11 below details which of the policy frameworks are most common overall and by sector.
In over one-third of states (ten) that have multiple measures policies, more than one framework was identified in the analysis. This was most often the case in states where at least one system falls into the “below the threshold” framework (see Figure 12).

Figure 11: Multiple Measures Framework Frequency by State and Sector (n=26 states)

- Below the Threshold
- Exemption from Placement
- Institutional Selection
- One and Done
- Placement Formula

Number of States

Figure 12: Below the Threshold Framework
In these instances, the state or system identifies measures as the initial indicators of college readiness using either an “exemption from placement testing” or “one and done” process. After this initial placement process takes place, however, if a student still falls “below the threshold” based on the cut scores for these measures, policy specifies that individual institutions still have the opportunity to make the final placement decision based on their own institutionally selected measure(s) and placement processes. For example, the Colorado policy allows students scoring below state-established cut scores to pursue an institution-specific “secondary evaluation.”

The University System of Georgia, South Dakota Board of Regents and the State Board for Technical and Community Colleges in Washington are outliers in this group of systems with more than one framework. In the case of the Georgia and South Dakota; these systems are implementing a placement formula that would exempt students from placement testing, and was therefore categorized in both of those frameworks. The State Board for Technical and Community Colleges in Washington, on the other hand, is charged with “encouraging colleges to use multiple measures” for placement decisions, allowing for institutional selection. More recently, however, all of the system’s individual institutions formally agreed to accept the Smarter Balanced assessment cut scores as the first placement measure; students scoring below the threshold are placed based on campus-specific processes.

Examples of these frameworks, in order of frequency from highest to lowest, include the following:

- **Exemption from Placement Testing:** The use of multiple measures to exempt students from taking a placement test is the most common technique, and can be found in 15 systems. For example, the North Carolina Community College System requires that students be placed directly into credit-bearing courses if they have a high school GPA of 2.6 or above and have taken four math classes in high school, one of which required Algebra II is a prerequisite. Students who do not meet the GPA requirement can submit their ACT/SAT scores to demonstrate readiness for college-level courses. Students who graduated from high school more than five years before, or who do not meet the GPA or ACT/SAT cutoffs, must take a placement test. Students may be exempt from the California State University’s English and math placement tests through the Early Assessment Program (EAP), a test for 11th grade students (Smarter Balanced). If the EAP does not exempt them from placement testing, SAT, ACT, and AP test scores will be considered before placement testing as well.

- **Below the Threshold:** Ten states and systems offer additional measures to students scoring below a minimum cut score threshold on one or more measures. In Nevada, students who have not met the English or mathematics college readiness assessment scores on one of the placement tests or who have not taken any of the tests will be placed through the process developed by the individual institutions. This placement policy may use multiple measures, including, but not limited to placement exams, high school GPA, course selection and performance in the senior year of high school, and intended postsecondary program of study. New Jersey’s community colleges are encouraged to use a “decision zone” below the cut score on the ACCUPLACER to allow more flexibility in the placement process. Students scoring below the cut score, but within the “decision zone,” would be considered for college-level courses, based on other measures.
• **One and Done:** Eight states and systems allow students to become eligible for college-level coursework by passing any one of a number of measures. For example, in West Virginia, students cannot enroll in credit-bearing coursework without academic supports unless the minimum score is earned on the ACT or SAT, ASSET, COMPASS, ACCUPLACER or another assessment approved by the Chancellor. Similarly, in Indiana’s Ivy Tech Community College, meeting the cut score on any of the following measures will allow a student to register for college-level coursework: Graduation from high school with a cumulative GPA ≥2.6, SAT scores, PSAT scores, ACT scores or ACCUPLACER scores.

• **Institutional Selection:** Systems in four states reported selecting from state-approved measures or proposing measures approved by the state. For example, California community colleges are required to use multiple measures of their choice to place students in developmental courses. Connecticut requires that students’ placement be based on multiple measures; the measures included are selected by the institution. Similarly, the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges is charged with “encourage[ing] colleges to use multiple measures to determine whether a student must enroll in a precollege course” and in Missouri, placement of students into appropriate college-level courses must be based on multiple assessment measures, but the measures are not specified.

• **Placement Formula:** Finally, two systems reported using a formula to generate a score for placement; it is currently being pilot tested and is scheduled to be required across the system in 2017 in the University System of Georgia (USG) and was recently added to the math placement process by the South Dakota Board of Regents. In the USG placement process, students with an English Placement Index (EPI) or Math Placement Index (MPI) equal to or greater than the minimum college placement index scores are placed into appropriate gateway courses. The EPI and MPI are based on calculations using SAT/ACT scores, high school GPA (HSGPA), and the Compass placement test. In South Dakota, the Mathematics Index score will be used to determine placement into the initial mathematics courses for students with valid ACT scores and high school GPA.

Although not developed as a result of state or system policy, the use of algorithms to determine placement have been piloted in institutions in California and New York as well. Based on the work done at Long Beach City College, the California Community College System is supporting the Multiple Measures Assessment Project, a collaborative effort of the RP Group and the Educational Results Partnership. Researchers involved with the project have worked with institutions in the system to develop placement models that include measures such as high school GPA, course completion and course grades, as well as standardized measures for entry level math or English courses. Course content is the same as the traditional credit-bearing course but additional required attendance/instruction and/or participation in academic support structures is required for successful completion of the course. Source: [http://www.wvhepc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Series21-SOS-Public-Comment-Rule-2015-08-10.pdf](http://www.wvhepc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Series21-SOS-Public-Comment-Rule-2015-08-10.pdf)

11 West Virginia uses co-requisite courses instead of development education courses. They are designed for students who did not meet admission requirements for entry level math or English courses. Course content is the same as the traditional credit-bearing course but additional required attendance/instruction and/or participation in academic support structures is required for successful completion of the course. Source: [http://www.wvhepc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Series21-SOS-Public-Comment-Rule-2015-08-10.pdf](http://www.wvhepc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Series21-SOS-Public-Comment-Rule-2015-08-10.pdf)
test scores. Similarly, the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness has generated placement algorithms for seven community colleges in New York State.

**MULTIPLE MEASURES IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT: CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY (CSU)**

States and systems often provide limited if any resources to support campuses in designing or implementing multiple measures placement policies; CSU is an exception. Every CSU campus has an Early Assessment Program (EAP) coordinator who provides training for their campus administrators. CSU administrators meet with EAP coordinators twice a year. Campuses receive funding from the system to further support these efforts.

**Use of Multiple Measures beyond State and System Policy**

It is important to recognize that institutions also act individually to determine if students are ready for college-level work. Indeed, many of the systems considering (e.g., Kansas, Louisiana) or developing policies (e.g., Idaho, Wisconsin), as well as those with no policy currently in the pipeline (e.g., Arkansas, Iowa), recognize that individual institutions in their state already utilize more than one piece of evidence when assessing incoming students.