



# Kansas Placement/Assessment Guidelines

## A Best Practices Guide for Assessing and Placing Students in Developmental Education Courses at Public Postsecondary Institutions

Updated by the Placement/Assessment Committee of the Developmental  
Education Working Group, October 2021

## INTRODUCTION

The Kansas Board of Regents is committed to *Building a Future*, a strategic agenda for the state's public postsecondary education system. *Building a Future* aims to ensure that higher education remains affordable and accessible to Kansans, while continuing to help graduates achieve success. Without effective developmental education, many students would not have access to higher education, higher education would be less affordable, and many students would not be able to attain a credential. One means by which to increase the attainment of postsecondary credentials is to implement standardized procedures for the placement and assessment of students so the state has a common definition of college readiness.

## PURPOSE STATEMENT

Developmental education is offered in recognition that some students enter college unprepared in the core areas of mathematics, reading, and writing to succeed either in college or the workplace. For the college or university, this means those students require additional preparation and fostering in some subjects to be successful at the college level. [Data](#) show that nearly a third of Kansas students who undertake developmental education fail to complete it, and of those who do successfully complete, most fail to graduate.

Developmental education has always been crucial to the success of some students. Emerging research and better data have revealed, however, that many underprepared students are not well served by existing developmental education policies and practices. This is of concern to Kansas. Aside from its potential benefit to individual students, improved outcomes for students enrolled in developmental education is critical to the success of the Board of Regents' *Foresight 2020* goal of increasing higher education attainment. We must also decrease the high costs of developmental education both in terms of actual costs and opportunity costs.

State guidelines provide the necessary foundation for consistency across the public postsecondary system. These guidelines establish that common exams and common requirements for placement/assessment are essential to provide a statewide definition of college readiness. Common exams and requirements also make it more feasible for the system to track developmental education outcomes.

The Kansas Board of Regents offers these guidelines to Kansas public universities and community/technical colleges. Each public university and college in Kansas is encouraged to use the guidelines to establish, document, and regularly update policies for placement and assessment of students in developmental education.

## DEFINITIONS

The list below is provided for convenience and is not intended to be exhaustive. Kansas institutions may consider adopting these common definitions for their own communications, policies, and internal purposes to simplify and improve the student-user experience.

**ACCUPLACER** – a suite of tests created by the College Board to assess a person's college readiness in reading, writing, math and computer skills.

**ACT** – a standardized college entrance exam created by ACT, Inc. with four sections: English, Reading, Math, and Science.

**ACT Engage** – a noncognitive assessment created by ACT, Inc. that seeks to identify students who are more likely to struggle with academics, timely graduation, and college entrance requirements.

**Cut Score** – a score, or a score range, on the ACCUPLACER which represents sufficient knowledge and skills for placement in a credit-bearing college course.

**Developmental Education** – courses designed to increase the likelihood of student success in entry-level college courses. The content of developmental education courses is at a level below that normally included in the first- and second-year college-level curricula. Such courses do not fulfill any degree requirements. (Also referred to as remedial education.)

**ETS Success Navigator** – a noncognitive assessment tool created by ETS measuring a holistic view of the student including factors such as academic development, commitment, self-management, and social support.

**GED** – a four-subject high school equivalency test that measures skills required by high schools and requested by colleges and employers.

**Multiple Measures** – at least two college readiness indicators used to place students either into developmental education or credit-bearing college courses.

**Noncognitive Assessment Tools** – exams designed to measure skills like temperament or personality characteristics such as attitudes, preferences, interests, or values that contribute to a person’s success in college and the workforce.

**Placement Test** – an exam used to assess a person’s college readiness in reading, writing, math, and/or computer skills.

**SAT** – a standardized college entrance exam created by the College Board measuring mathematical and verbal reasoning, and others measuring specific subject areas.

**Smarter Measure** – an assessment tool used to measure a student’s readiness for learning in distance education or technology-rich courses.

**Wonderlic Assessment RISK Profile** – a general assessment tool to identify potential risk factors, including academic and noncognitive, that contribute to a student’s decision to leave school.

## **BACKGROUND**

An area of significant concern for developmental education is the mechanism used to determine whether students should be placed in developmental education. In September 2013, the Board initiated a study of development education calling for “a set of recommendations for redesigning developmental education across the system.” It charged a working group with three actions in response to its goal of initiating a study on developmental education in the higher education system in Kansas:

To assess the level and types of developmental education at state community and technical colleges and make recommendations about:

- (1) state level policy and actions to promote effective remediation;
- (2) appropriate state level goals and local performance measures; and
- (3) strategies that may be implemented locally, at the discretion of individual institutions.

The Developmental Education Working Group, which consisted of twenty faculty and staff from fifteen universities, community colleges, and technical colleges, presented its [final report](#) to the Board of Regents in June 2014. The report provided data about the state of developmental education at public colleges in Kansas, outlined national initiatives to improve developmental education, and recommended state and local policies, actions, and goals. Recommendations included the study of placement assessment test options, how scores are tied to prerequisite courses, and identification of additional appropriate measures to be used in conjunction with test scores to promote accurate and appropriate placement of students. The Placement/Assessment Policy Committee, a subcommittee of the Developmental Education Working Group, further studied these issues and recommended that in addition to the use of additional measures for placement, that test options and cut-off scores be standardized statewide.

## **STANDARDIZED TEST FOR PLACEMENT/ASSESSMENT**

To increase consistency among two-year colleges in Kansas and reduce the number of over- or under-placed students, the Kansas Board of Regents (the Board) recommends placement assessment test options be standardized statewide.

ACCUPLACER is the primary placement assessment exam available nationwide and the Board recommends the use of ACCUPLACER as an institution's primary basic skills assessment test. The Board negotiated a contract with College Board through June 30, 2022 to allow public postsecondary institutions in Kansas to take advantage of substantially discounted pricing (\$1.95 vs. \$2.30 per unit test) for ACCUPLACER exams.

## **STANDARDIZED CUT SCORES FOR PLACEMENT/ASSESSMENT**

To also increase consistency among two-year colleges in Kansas and reduce the number of over- or under-placed students, the Board recommends cut-off scores be standardized statewide. The Board's recommendations for standardizing cut scores that place/assess degree or certificate-seeking students should be conducted as follows.

1. Institutions should administer placement tests prior to student enrollment.

In researching state policies, twenty-seven states reported policies in place requiring community colleges to administer a placement test at the time of enrollment as best practice (Collins, 2010).

2. Institutions should communicate the high-stakes nature of placement testing to students.

The high stakes of placement testing can create unnecessary barriers to completion. Students are often unaware of how the results of placement testing will impact their course choices and that poor results may add additional semesters and cost to their completion (Venezia, et al., 2010).

3. Institutions should have published re-test policies.

Students are often unaware of re-testing policies or confused by the variation of re-take policies among institutions. Having ready access to re-test policies eliminates confusion and may diminish test anxiety for students by removing the panic of “one shot and done” testing (Venezia, et al., 2010).

4. Institutions should promote and provide test and re-test preparation materials.

Students improve their placement accuracy by preparing before they take or re-take placement tests. Students often do not know how to access preparation resources and/or do not recognize that they should prepare. Fifty percent of students who complete a review course gained one level in reading and English (Hodara, et.al., 2012).

5. To assess reading, writing, and math skills, institutions should use one or more of the following:

- College admissions tests, e.g., ACT or SAT
- Transcript(s) of transfer courses
- ACCUPLACER
- GED® 2014 Test
- High school grades in relevant courses
- High school cumulative GPA

For technical programs (certificate and/or AAS levels), institutions should use one or more of the following to assess the reading, writing, or mathematics skills as required by the technical program students intend to pursue. If students change programs, they should be required to take any additional placement portions required.

- High school grades in relevant courses
- High school GPA
- ACCUPLACER
- College admissions tests, e.g., ACT or SAT
- Transcript(s) of transfer courses
- GED® 2014 Test

Students who enter with college-ready ACT, SAT or GED College Ready® scores as defined by the test publisher, or are transferring in passed credit from Gateway Courses (College Algebra, English

Composition I, etc.), should not take a placement test. These students should be placed directly into college-level courses.

6. Institutions should follow the testing procedures given by the test publisher to increase the likelihood of accurate placement.

Following testing procedures as documented increases the accuracy of the test. Test reliability increases as students may test at one institution and transfer their scores to enroll at other institutions. Validity studies rely on accurate and consistent testing procedures as published.

7. Institutions should use the cut-scores below for placement in the courses listed.

Placement into	ACCUPLACER Subtest	Score Range
Intermediate Algebra	Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, & Statistics	250-262
College Algebra	Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, & Statistics	263+
College Composition I	Writing	255+
College level reading	Reading	255+

The Developmental Education Working Group recommends statewide standardized cut-scores for placement. As noted in the Developmental Education Working Group Report, placement scores amongst two-year colleges in Kansas vary widely. A survey given by the Placement/Assessment committee confirmed the findings from the Working Group. Inconsistency in cut-scores creates confusion for entering students and in preparing students for college (Jaggars & Hodara, 2011). Standardized scores assist students with seamless transfer and provide a consistent definition for high schools of “college-ready.” Developing a common understanding among Kansas two-year institutions was a noted recommendation from the Developmental Education Working Group report.

8. **Institutions should use at least one other measure in addition to placement testing before placing students in developmental instruction<sup>1</sup>.**

A growing body of research shows that, used alone, placement tests are poor predictors of student success in college-level math and English courses, and that use of multiple measures improves placement accuracy. High school GPA is the strongest predictor of college readiness and may be combined with placement testing and/or other measures such as non-cognitive assessments. Institutions should study current research regarding this as they set and revise their placement practices.

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<sup>1</sup> See attached list of Nationally Recognized Measures of Student Readiness.

## **COREQUISITE PROGRAMS**

Corequisite remediation refers to the placing of students who have been designated as underprepared directly into college level courses, and providing necessary additional supports to help them effectively engage with the college level course work. National and state research shows that students enrolled in corequisite programs succeed at significantly higher rates in college-entry courses than students enrolled in traditional developmental programs--and they move to college-level courses much sooner. Two types of corequisite courses in our system include:

- **Corequisite developmental course** – Includes mostly or solely developmental content, designed to be taken concurrently (paired) with a gateway course. An example is English Composition I and a developmental English course.
- **Corequisite combination course** - A single course designed to include both developmental and college-level content (often referred to as courses “with review”). Examples include College Algebra with Review and English Composition I with Review. This includes non-credit instruction and non-credit labs that a student enrolls in.

## **INFORMATION DISSEMINATION**

Institutions should publish on their websites full information regarding their placement/ assessment policies to students. The KBOR website should include links to all institutions’ web pages.

## **PLACEMENT/ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES REVIEW**

The Kansas Placement/Assessment Guidelines should be reviewed by the System Council of Chief Academic Officers and updated or revised as needed. The Board Academic Affairs Standing Committee should review and approve the Placement/Assessment Guidelines in preparation for the Board of Regents. KBOR will regularly audit adherence to the Placement/Assessment Guidelines.

## SOURCES

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## APPENDIX A

### NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED MEASURES OF STUDENT READINESS

These measures are nationally recognized for placement in postsecondary coursework and should be used in addition to a single placement test score:

#### Skills Assessment Tools

ACCUPLACER sub-tests not named in the placement assessment policy, e.g., *Write Placer*, *Arithmetic*, or *College-Level Math*

#### ACCUPLACER *Diagnostics*

Standardized tests used for college admissions, e.g., ACT or SAT

College grades from accredited institutions

High School GPA

Grades in relevant high school courses

Military records

Score of 165 or above on relevant GED® sub-test

#### Noncognitive Assessment Tools

*ETS Success Navigator*

*ACT Engage*

*Smarter Measure*

*Wonderlic Admissions Risk Profile*