Math Placement Policy in California

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Math placement policies are central to student success

- Expanding access to rigorous high school math classes
  - Improves college readiness
  - Increases access to selective colleges
  - Closes the achievement gap

- District placement policies affect student participation

- Recent legislative efforts highlight need for improvement
California Mathematics Placement Act (SB 359) addresses equity, measurement issues

- New law intends to create a fair, transparent, and objective math placement process
- Districts must
  - Consider multiple objective measures
  - Remove teacher recommendations, unless they advance students
  - Use student data to ensure equity and efficacy
  - Address consistency between elementary and high school districts
Our report looks at several key issues

- Common measures used to place students
- Awareness of and compliance with the new law
- Evaluation metrics for district placement policies
- Challenges and concerns districts raised
- Policy recommendations
Overview

- Our survey
- Student performance measures
- District awareness, evaluations, concerns
- Recommendations
Our findings are based on a statewide survey

- We asked about placement protocols, evaluation metrics, other challenges
  - Survey took place April–June 2016
- We targeted unified and high school districts
  - 47% response rate
- Our sample is representative of the state population
We divided districts into categories

- High need districts: 55% of students are disadvantaged
- High performance districts: largest gains in a-g completion
- Rural and urban districts
- Small (less than 3,000) and large (more than 20,000) districts
Overview

- Our survey
- Student performance measures
- District awareness, evaluations, concerns
- Recommendations
More high performance districts had a policy

- High-need districts: 80%
- High-performance districts: 98%

86% (state average)
## Districts rely heavily on three measures of student performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>% Using Each Measure</th>
<th>% Also Thinking Each Measure Important (if used)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test scores</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math GPA</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher recommendation</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student attribute: academics</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student attribute: motivation</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental request</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student attribute—planning</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student attribute—goal</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall GPA</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student attribute—growth mindset</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student attribute—social emotional</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Districts use a variety of test score measures

# test scores used
- 0: 10%
- 1: 14%
- 2: 17%
- 3: 22%
- 4: 30%
- >4: 6%

% using each test score
- MARS: 12%
- Renaissance: 16%
- MAP: 18%
- CST: 26%
- MDTP: 33%
- Formative assessment: 44%
- District developed tests: 64%
- SBAC: 71%
Teacher recommendations rely on both academic and soft skills.
Overview

- Our survey
- Student performance measures
- District awareness, evaluations, concerns
- Recommendations
Awareness and compliance vary across districts

- High-need districts
  - Missing: 29%
  - Not familiar: 47%
  - Not yet, working on it: 20%
  - Already in compliance: 20%

- Rural districts
  - Missing: 13%
  - Not familiar: 69%
  - Not yet, working on it: 10%
  - Already in compliance: 19%

- Small districts
  - Missing: 20%
  - Not familiar: 55%
  - Not yet, working on it: 19%
  - Already in compliance: 18%

- Large districts
  - Missing: 10%
  - Not familiar: 18%
  - Not yet, working on it: 50%
  - Already in compliance: 25%

- High-performance districts
  - Missing: 0%
  - Not familiar: 21%
  - Not yet, working on it: 21%
  - Already in compliance: 52%
Grades and test scores are common evaluation metrics for district policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of year math grade</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% advancing to the next math course</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State assessment (e.g., SBAC)</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher feedback on student outcome</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher feedback on placement process</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District assessment</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment in specific math course</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent feedback</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student feedback</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Districts raised other concerns

- Unrealistic parental expectations
- Lack of evidence-based readiness measures
- Poor alignment and communication within and across schools
- Equity
- Teacher staffing
Rural districts most concerned by staffing shortages

- Rural districts: 54%
- High need districts: 34%
- Small districts: 38%
- High performance districts: 34%

24% (state average)
Overview

- Our survey
- Student performance measures
- District awareness, evaluations, concerns
- Recommendations
Policy recommendations

- Clarify the use of teacher recommendations
- Identify valid, objective, and reliable readiness measures
- Pinpoint measures that demonstrate district success
- Use student data to assess and revise placement guidelines
- Address capacity concerns
Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.