

# Math Placement Policy in California

November 17, 2016

Niu Gao, Sara Adan

---

Supported with funding from the Applied Materials Foundation  
and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation



**PPIC**

PUBLIC POLICY  
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

# 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

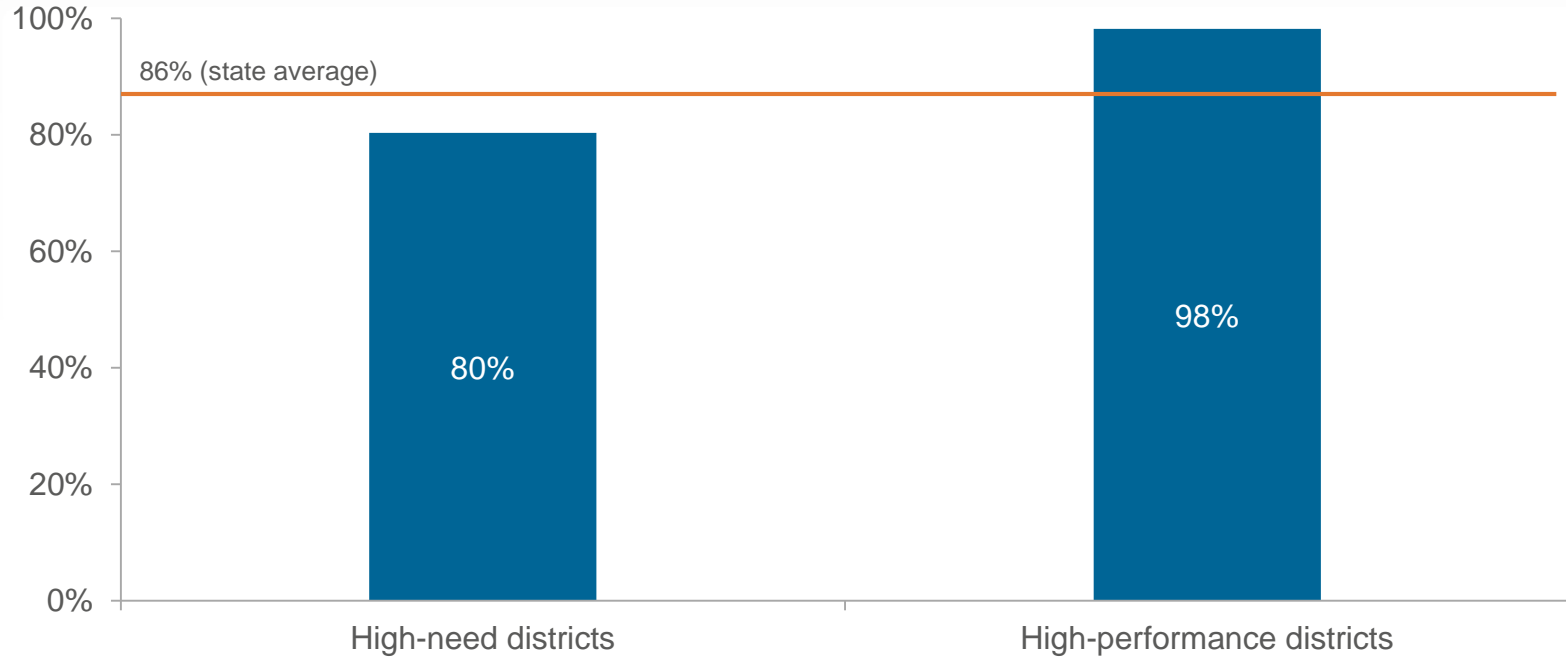
- High need districts: 55% of students are disadvantaged
- High performance districts: largest gains in a-g completion
- Rural and urban districts
- Small (less than 3,000) and large (more than 20,000) districts

# Overview

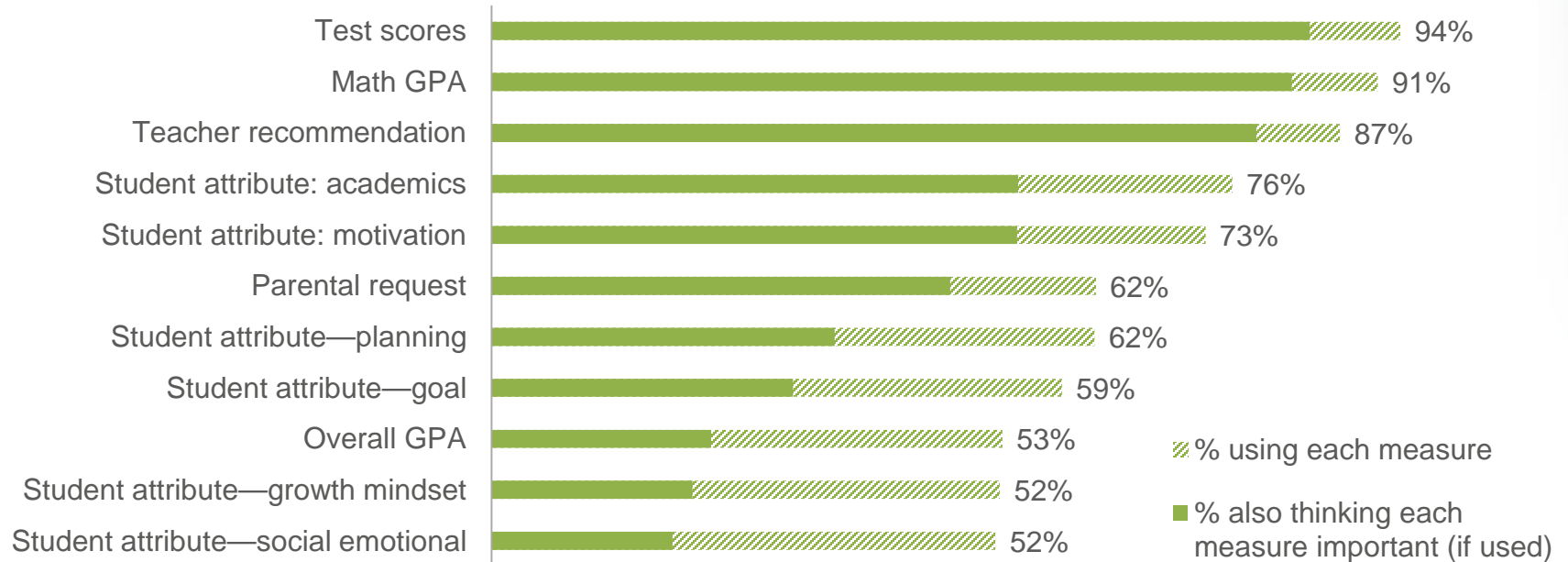
- Our survey
- Student performance measures
- District awareness, evaluations, concerns
- Recommendations



# More high performance districts had a policy

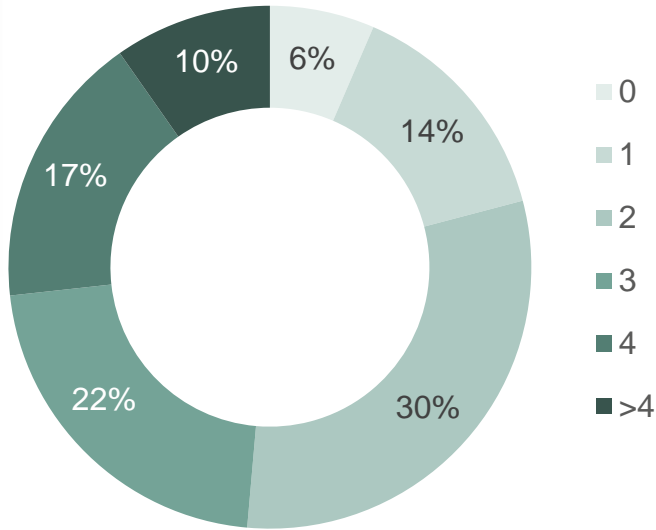


# Districts rely heavily on three measures of student performance

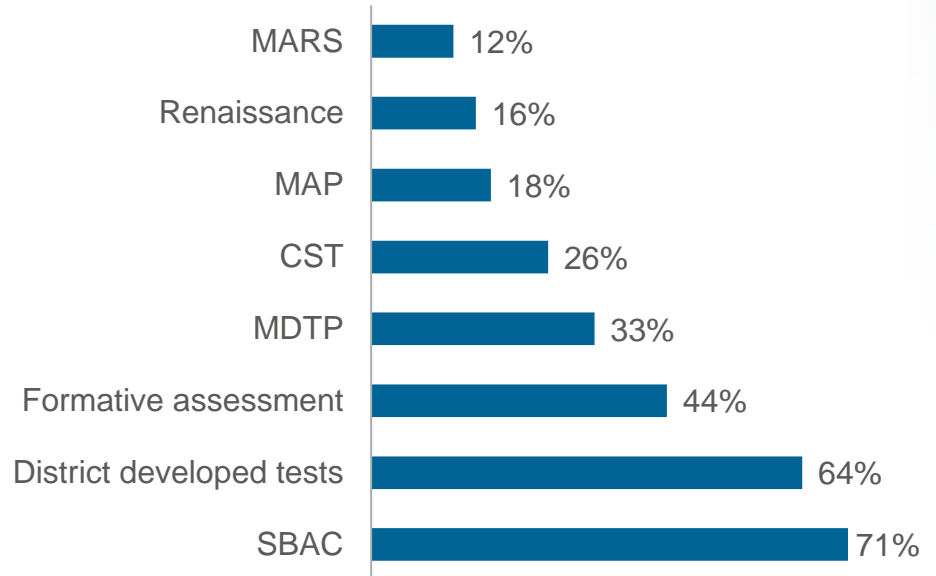


# Districts use a variety of test score measures

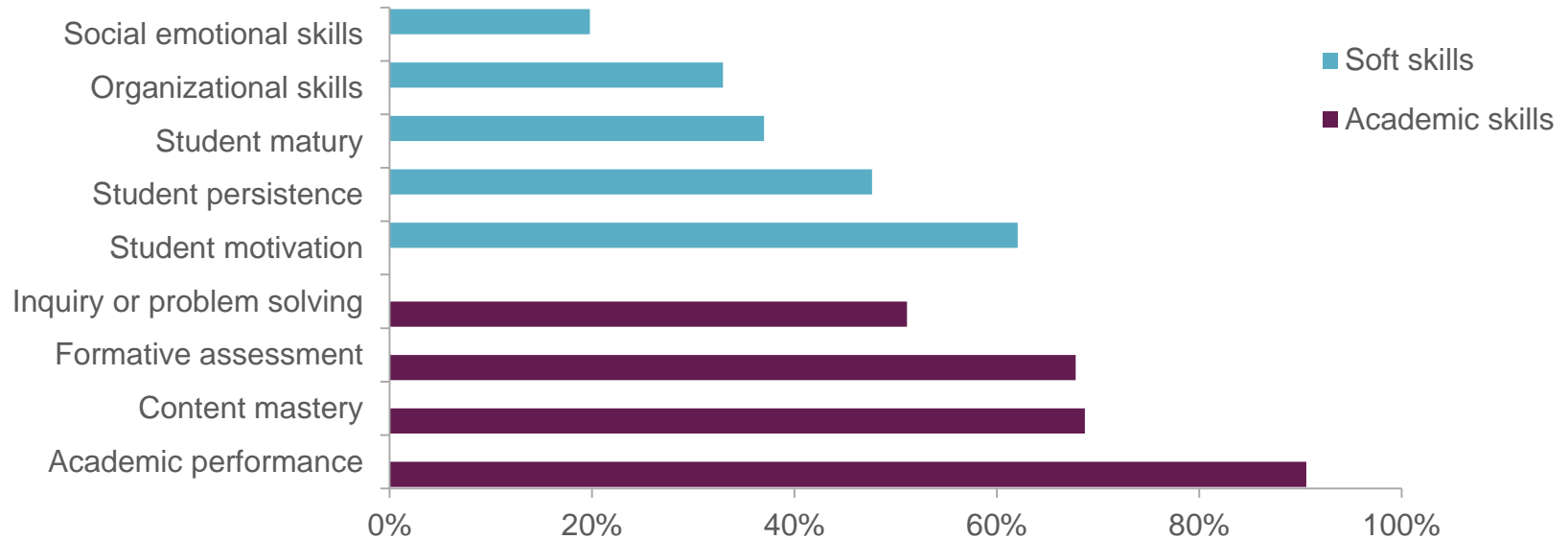
# test scores used



% using each test score



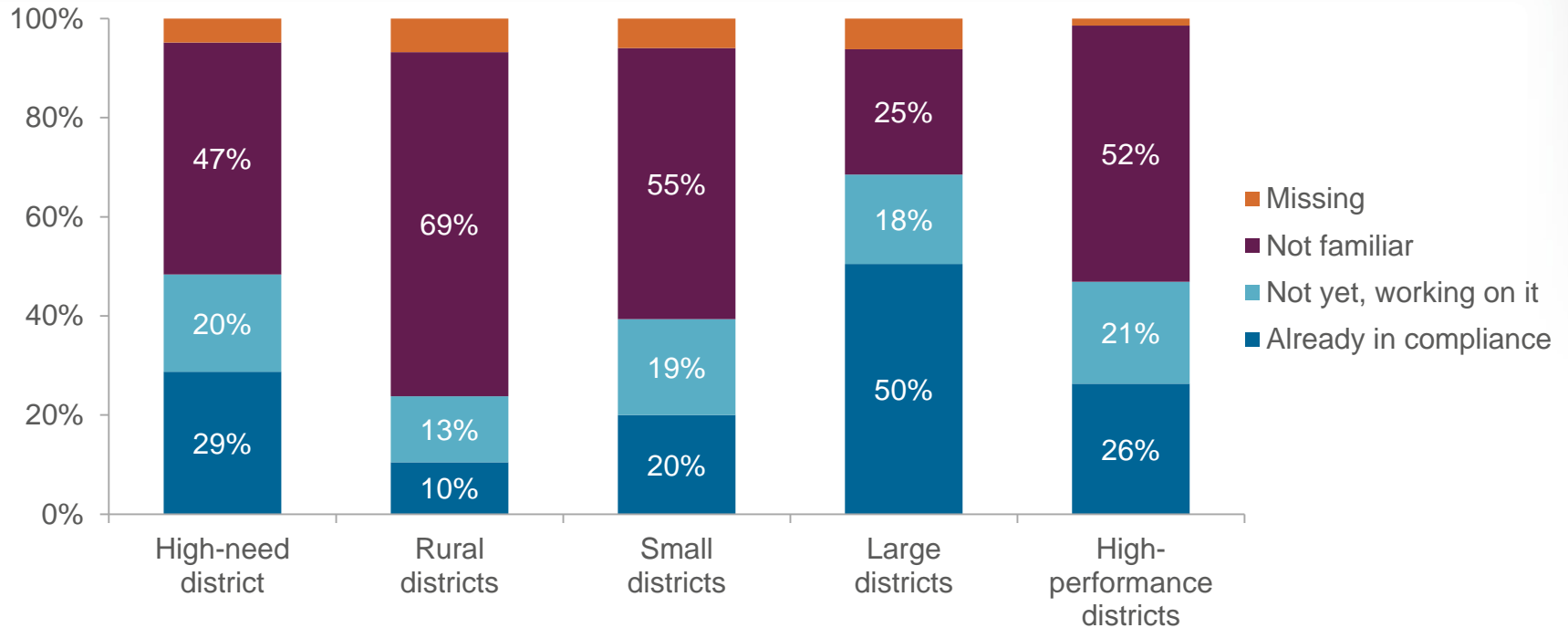
# Teacher recommendations rely on both academic and soft skills



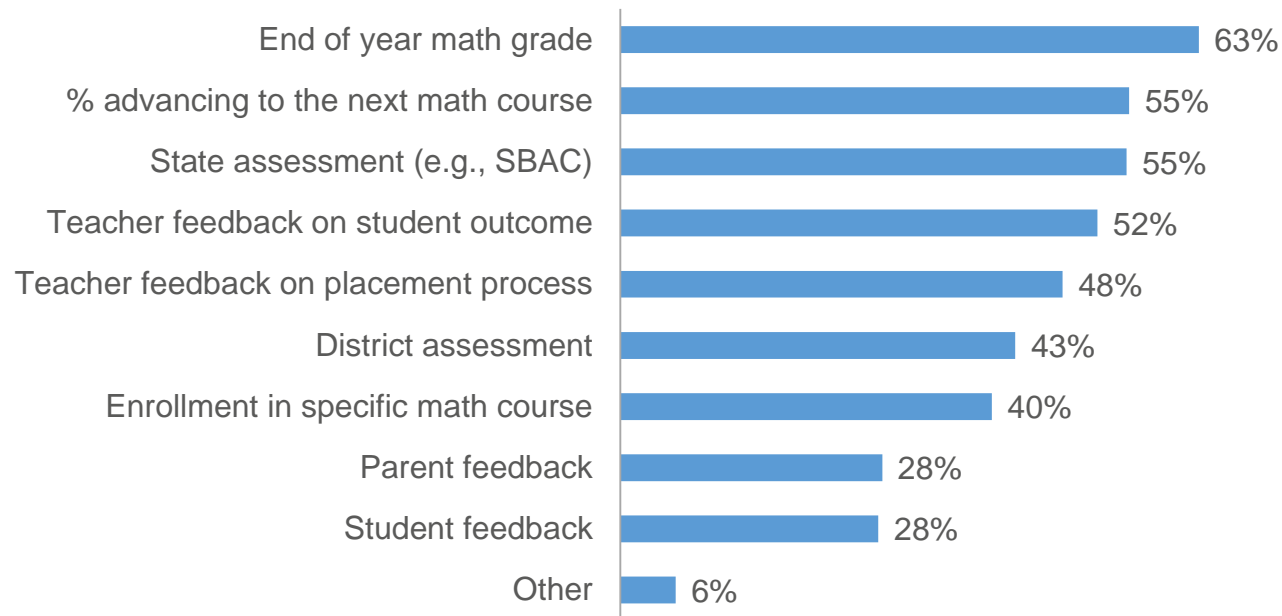
# Overview

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

# Awareness and compliance vary across districts



# Grades and test scores are common evaluation metrics for district policies

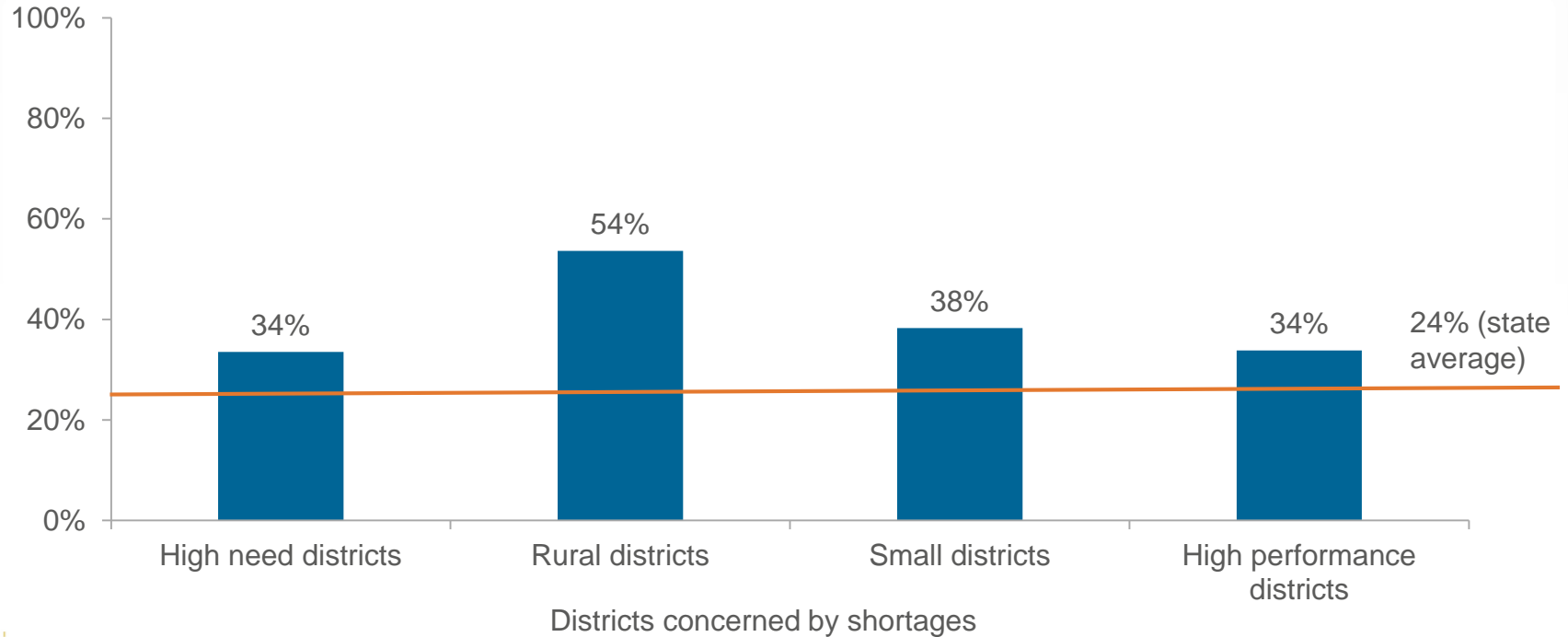


# Districts raised other concerns

- 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



# 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

# Math Placement Policy in California

November 17, 2016

Niu Gao, Sara Adan

---

Supported with funding from the Applied Materials Foundation  
and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation



**PPIC**

PUBLIC POLICY  
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

# 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:

Niu Gao (gao@ppic.org; 415-291-4491)

Thank you for your interest in this work.