# Embracing Change: A More Equitable Statewide Approach to College Placement in Arkansas

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# Measuring Students' Skills and Abilities

- Students arrive at college with **different levels** of academic preparation

- Colleges need a **simple** and **efficient** process to determine what students can do and to place them in the right courses

- Historically, colleges have relied on **standardized tests**
  - Accuplacer and Compass
  - SAT and ACT
  - "Home grown" tests

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# A lot can go wrong with standardized testing

- Students may have **test anxiety**

- Students may be "**rusty**," especially if they have been out of high school for a while

- Students may not appreciate the **consequences** of a poor test score

- Tests may **reinforce** cultural and racial **bias**

- Material on tests may **not align** with what students need to know for their chosen majors and careers

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# But there is an alternative: MMA

- **Multiple**: more than one indicator is used to assess student readiness for college-level courses in math and English
- **Measures**:
  - most commonly High School GPA
  - traditional placement tests
  - background questions
  - course-taking history
  - other assessments
- **Assessment**: course placement is usually determined by cut-off scores or combinations thereof

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# Project Description

- With support from Ascendium Education Group, CAPR aimed to facilitate the statewide expansion of the use of MMA in Arkansas and Texas through:
  - Helping stakeholders understand the **predictive utility** of available college-readiness measures;
  - Documenting conditions that facilitate or hinder successful **implementation** of MMA; and
  - Assessing **costs** of MMA

- We partnered with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Arkansas Division of Higher Education, Arkansas Community Colleges, and 13 open-access institutions

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# Predictive Analysis: Data

- **Data sources**:
  - 13 data colleges' transcript files and other available measures
  - Additional measures from ADE Data Warehouse (Arkansas) and Education Research Center (Texas)

- **Sample**:
  - All students at data colleges who enrolled in college-level math in last five years
  - All students at data colleges who enrolled in college-level English in last five years

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# Predictive Analysis: Takeaways

- The predictive utility of placement measures is **similar** in Arkansas and Texas to that found in **other** states and systems
  - High school GPA is the **best single observable predictor** of success in college-level English and math courses without additional supports
  - Using multiple measures in addition to high school GPA only **marginally** improves those predictions
  - These findings are **robust** across most subgroups

# Implementation and Cost Findings

# Implementation Research: Questions and Data

- How are colleges **adopting** MMA practices? What conditions **facilitate** or **hinder** the implementation of an MMA system?

- **Data Collection Activities:**
  - Attended planning meetings with states and colleges
  - Reviewed action plans and process maps
  - Conducted 22 interviews and/or focus groups at 12 of the 13 participating colleges across Arkansas and Texas

# Implementation Research: Findings

- **Challenge:** Faculty and staff often raise questions about the reliability of high school GPA and other indicators as measures of college readiness

- **Solution:** Dissemination of context-specific information about the predictability and accuracy of MMA generated buy-in among faculty and staff

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# Implementation Research: Findings

- **Challenge:** Incorporating additional data points into placement practices often requires college to develop new procedures for collecting, storing, and accessing relevant data, and can introduce new and unanticipated challenges

- **Solution:** Proactively liaising with high schools and automating aspects of the placement system facilitated the collection and use of alternative measures

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# Implementation Research: Findings

- **Challenge:** Implementation is time consuming and requires multiple staff

- **Solution:** Collaboration between departments and flexibility of faculty and staff helped colleges implement MMA

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# Cost Research Questions & Methods

- **In each state, what is the average cost, per college, of expanding and implementing MMA systems at the time of the implementation study?**
  - CAPR weighted reported hours by reported wages plus overhead and categorized these amounts by faculty and staff members' role in implementation.

- **What is the average cost by personnel category?**
  - These costs were then averaged in each state by personnel category to provide insight into the typical levels of effort by role in each state.

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# Cost Analysis: Results

- Personnel expenses were the **predominant cost** of MMA implementation, but the staff members involved—and the amount of time they contributed—varied by state.

  - In Arkansas, the **registrar** had the **most important role** in the process, with the greatest time commitment to MMA implementation.

  - In Texas, the bulk of the work was carried out by **administrators** and **advisors**.

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# Cost Analysis: Results

- Data systems and state policy may create conditions that require different staff members to **change the processes** underlying course placement.

- In both states, costs were **relatively low**, especially when considering the large number of students going through the placement systems.

- Given the positive evidence base for MMA from previous studies, these costs are likely **justified** by improved student outcomes.

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# Activity

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# Turn and Talk

- Turn to those around you and discuss the following:

  - What **challenges** or **hurdles** might be faced in the adoption of MMA as an alternative placement system?

  - What **benefits** or **opportunities** do you associate with MMA?

# Panel

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# Panelists



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# Q&A

# Thank you!