DRAFT – NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Background Paper on the Development of the

Recommendations of the Illinois Community College Chief Academic Officers (ICCCAO) & Illinois Community College Chief Student Services Officers (ICCCSSO) on Placement Methods and Scores

During fiscal year 2018, the Chief Academic Officers (CAOs), Chief Student Services Officers (CSSOs), and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) Academic Affairs staff engaged in a discussion about the development of a multiple measures framework for placement into college credit bearing courses, particularly in math and English language arts, heretofore referred to as the "Recommendations." After negotiation with the Illinois Math Association of Community Colleges (IMACC), the collective groups, proposed a framework to the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents (ICCCP) for consideration. On June 1, 2018, the ICCCP adopted this framework, with the following assumptions:

- The document recommends that colleges use multiple measures for placement. At this point, it is not a mandate, but a system wide agreement. Many more steps are required to reach full implementation and complete consistency.
- The recommendation suggests a list of valid measures to choose from, including the scores on those measures.
- The recommendation charges the ICCB with doing further research about the validity of those measures.
- The recommendation charges the ICCB with putting together a working group to go over implementation issues. This working group must come from a cross-section of stakeholders in the Illinois community college system.
- The document demonstrates that the Illinois Community College system is aware of disparities in placement across the state and is actively working to correct those disparities in a collaborative manner.
- The ICCB has supported this effort, has been involved in high-level conversations about this work, and has worked to balance local control issues with the need for more statewide consistency on this issue.

In developing this set of negotiated recommendations, led primarily by the CAOs, the conversation drew upon the extensive knowledge base of the CAOs involved, and, where possible, on specific data sources. In doing this, the placement group chose to go first to the testing vendors themselves for evidence. For example, ACT® set of college readiness benchmarks that have been in place for some time, with the benchmark for English (English Composition I) being 18, and the benchmarks

for Math (College Algebra) being 22. Note that these benchmarks represent the minimum score for a student to be successful in the identified college courses.

The data derives from an extensive database, maintained by ACT. ACT recommends using these benchmarks for college placement. Recommendations were based populations of students across a number of institutions and institution types. The scores reflect the actual performance of college students. ACT last updated their scores in 2013. Those who met the benchmark were less likely to take remedial course, more likely to enroll in college immediately after high school graduation, were more likely to persistence in college, and were more likely to earn a college GPA of 3.0 (Allen & Radunzel, 2017). The Illinois scores are set at 19 for English (one point higher than recommended—reflecting negotiations) and 22 for Math.

Similarly, the College Board, which produces the SAT, sets college and career readiness benchmarks as a standard part of the metrics for their exams. The college readiness benchmarks are set based on a 75% likelihood that a student will achieve at least a C grade in the first semester, credit-bearing college course in a related subject. In the case of the mathematics benchmark, a score or 530 would place students in courses such as algebra, statistics, pre-calculus or calculus. With the Evidence-based reading and writing benchmark, a score of 480 would provide placement in history, literature, social science or writing. College Board also published a comprehensive document, Test Specification for the Redesigned SAT (2015), available on their website. The Illinois Recommendations are consistent with these scores.

ACT and College Board both normed their data based upon real populations of students who took the exam, attended college following high school graduation, and actual performance at college.

In the case of the GPA setting, the final recommendations include compromises agreed on by IMACC, CAOs and CSSOs. Initially, there was some conversation about matching the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE's) 2.8 GPA threshold adopted as a part of their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. However, through conversations with IMACC (see attached letter of support from IMACC), the group settled on the 3.0 GPA.

There is significant research that supports using the GPA as a placement measure going back a number of years. For example, Noble and Sawyer (2002) found that a student's GPA in high school as well as the ACT Composite score (they were ACT researchers) were both effective at predicting first year GPA in college, with high school GPA being more predictive at some levels, though the effect diminished beyond 3.0 in college. Geiser and Santelices (2007) concluded that High School GPA strongly and consistently predicted four-year outcomes and was less adverse on disadvantage and minority populations. The University of Chicago's *The To&Through Project,* provides a compelling statement to back up this fact:

> A good ACT or SAT score isn't a slam dunk for college success. While ACT/SAT scores matter for college access, grades (GPAs) are much more predictive of college success. In fact, strong grades—earning As and Bs in high school—are the strongest indicator of college readiness and are much more predictive of college graduation than any test score. Students with an ACT score of 21-23 have about a 50 percent chance of graduating college if their high school GPA is between 2.5 and 2.9. Yet students with ACT scores in the same

range of 21-23 but with high school GPAs between 3.0 and 3.4 graduate college at rates of nearly 70 percent (https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/UChiToThrough_Mythbusters_vWeb.pdf, p. 4).

The list below provides additional, more recent research that demonstrates the ability of GPA to predict college success.

- Bahr, Fagioli, Hetts, Hayward, Willett, Lamoree, Newell, Sorey, and Baker (2017). Improving Placement Accuracy in California's Community Colleges Using Multiple Measures of High School Achievement

- Belfield and Crosta, (2012). Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts.

- Burdman, P. (2012). Where to Begin? The Evolving Role of Placement Exams for Students Starting College.

- Hetts, J. (2018). Let Icarus Fly: Multiple Measures in Assessment and the re-imagination of student capacity [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from https://www.dropbox.com/s/co53ve3zd9trit2/Reducing%20Remediation%20Workship%20Multiple%20Measures%20Placement%20Presentation%2009242018.pdf?dl=0

- Hodara and Cox (2016). Developmental education and college readiness at the University of Alaska

- Hodara and Lewis (2017). How well does high school grade point average predict college performance by student urbanicity and timing of college entry?

In Illinois, under the traditional model of placement, only 23 percent of remedial math students were completing gateway courses within one academic year and for first-time, full-time students, that number only rose to 25 percent. What data shows is that students are typically placed using standardized assessment given that does not really reflect their ability or previous real performance. "Student Scores above or below cutoffs on relatively short, standardized math and English assessments" (Community College Research Center, 2015). This method misplaces many students that could be successful, either under placing them or over placing them (Cullinan, et al., 2018)

Multiple measure placement strategies are being used across a number of states to address issues of equity and completion. In California, the Multiple Measures Assessment project has been used to develop a framework for the state community college system—the Common Assessment Initiative—to validate the measures that were used. The project looked at unweighted GPA, Advance Placement credit, standardized exams, placement exams and coursework pattern. In this framework, a disjunctive approach was used, allowing for an either/or approach to placement. The initial framework included 380,000 students matched with community college and K-12

performance data (The RP Group, 2018). In New York, they found that using multiple measures showed that 14 percent of students placed higher than just a single assessment (Smith, 2018).

Finally, there are a number of reasons to provide for a consistent approach to multiple measure placement:

- **Fairness & Equity:** Students who can be successful should be able to avoid spending time and money in remediation.
- **Motivation:** Persistence is discouraged when a student is labeled as "not ready" (Cullinan, et al., 2018; Hetts, 2018).
- **Positive Impact:** Emerging research suggests that the use of multiple measures can have a positive effect on student outcomes (Cullinan, et al., 2018).
- **Consistency:** Consistent courses should have consistent placement requirements.
- **Smoother Transitions:** Students have more seamless transition to the community college or the university.

References

Allen, J. A. and Ruadunzel, J. (2017). What are the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks? Retrieved from https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/pdfs/R1670-college-readiness-benchmarks-2017-11.pdf.

College Board (2018). The college and career readiness benchmarks for the SAT suite of assessments. Retrieved from https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/educator-benchmark-brief.pdf.

College Board (2015). Test specifications for the redesigned SAT. Retrieved from https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/test-specifications-redesigned-sat-1.pdf#page=1.

Community College Research Center. (2015). Improving the Accuracy of Remedial Placement.

Cullinan, D., Barnett, E., Ratledge, A., Welbeck, R., Belfield, C. & Lopez, A. (2018). Toward Better College Course Placement.

The RP Group (2018). Multiple measures assessment project – FAQs. Retrieved from https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/MultipleMeasures/Webinars/MultipleMeasuresAssessmentProject-FAQs.pdf.

Smith, A. (2018, September 20). New report encourages use of multiple measures for student placement. *Inside Higher Ed*.