

**Alternative Methods Placement in the Florida College System:  
Results from the Ad Hoc Data Collection  
August 2021**

## **Background**

In 2013, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill 1720, which made major reforms to advising, placement and instruction within the Florida College System (FCS). The bill exempted Florida standard high school diploma recipients who enter ninth grade in a Florida public school in 2003-04 and thereafter and active-duty military from being required to take a common placement test and to enroll in developmental education. The bill also required each FCS institution to develop an implementation plan for developmental education strategies, including local policies for evaluating documented student achievements, for advising students of enrollment options. At the time, FCS institutions reported implementing procedures to evaluate various combinations of alternative methods when advising students for placement. However, for nonexempt students, these alternative methods were to be evaluated in combination with common placement testing results and placement test results have remained the primary method by which nonexempt students are placed into coursework.

In 2020, the Florida Department of Education released DOE Order No. 2020-EO-02 in response to COVID-19, which provided FCS institutions flexibility regarding the method by which students could demonstrate college-level communication and computation skills. For summer and fall 2020 admissions, section VIII(e) of the emergency order suspended the provision in section (s.) 1007.263(1), Florida Statutes (F.S.), that required that admissions counseling “must use tests to measure achievement of college-level communication and computation competencies by students entering college credit programs.” To that end, the order expanded upon the methods by which students could demonstrate achievement of college-level communication and computation skills, in addition to or in lieu of common placement tests; including, but not limited to:

- Grade point averages (GPA);
- Work history;
- Military experience;
- Participation in juried competitions;
- Career interests;
- Degree major declaration; or
- Any combination of such achievements identified in s. 1008.30(5)(a)1, F.S.

The suspension of the common placement requirement affected both developmental education placement as well as initial dual enrollment eligibility criteria. Specifically, FCS institutions had the option of using alternative methods for developmental education placement in lieu of common placement tests; however, common placement tests were still an option for the institutions where testing disruptions were not a challenge. For student eligibility for initial enrollment in college credit dual enrollment courses, the emergency order prohibited colleges from using common placement tests, which made a 3.0 unweighted high school GPA the eligibility criteria. Pursuant to s. 1007.271, F.S., FCS institution boards of trustees may establish additional initial student eligibility requirements to ensure student readiness for postsecondary instruction. As a result, many institutions opted to use alternative methods for eligibility determinations.

Appendix A contains a sample of the specific alternative methods and minimum standards used.

## Ad Hoc Data Collection

In response to the temporary suspension of the common placement testing requirement, the Florida Student Success Center (center) in partnership with the Division of Florida Colleges (division) conducted a voluntary ad hoc data collection on alternative placement methods for dual enrollment eligibility and developmental education placement. The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of students placed using alternative methods in fall 2020 and compare students' first-term course outcome placed using alternative methods to those placed with the previous statutory requirements of a common placement test and 3.0 GPA. The research questions that guided this data collection and study were:

1. What are the characteristics of dual enrollment students who were placed using alternative methods as compared to those students placed using an approved placement test?
2. How do students, deemed eligible to participate in dual enrollment using alternative methods, perform in first-term coursework compared to students whose eligibility was determined using common placement tests?

Institutions volunteered to participate in this data collection process in July 2020 and submitted student-level files indicating placement methods to the Community College and Technical Center Management Information Systems. In total, seven colleges participated in the ad hoc data collection. Four institutions participated in the developmental education placement collection: Gulf Coast State College, Miami Dade College (MDC), Pensacola State College (PSC) and Tallahassee Community College (TCC). Three of these institutions also participated in the dual enrollment eligibility data collection (MDC, PSC and TCC) with three additional institutions: Eastern Florida State College, Palm Beach State College and The College of the Florida Keys.

The ad hoc data collection was completed in early 2021, with all institutions reporting their alternative placement methods files for summer and/or fall 2020 terms. After receiving the data, the division determined that the sample size for the developmental education alternative placement study was not large enough to continue the study. Thus, the findings focus on the dual enrollment eligibility results for placement methods and first-term outcomes only.

## Findings

Included in this report are summaries of the methods used to place dual enrollment students during fall 2020, which included using:

- Grade point average and scores earned on a common placement test (CPT), if the student had scores on file (GPA+CPT);
- GPA only (GPA); or
- GPA and one or more alternative methods. Alternative methods included:
  - Grades earned in accelerated and non-accelerated high school courses;
  - Preliminary SAT (PSAT) scores;
  - Florida Statewide Assessment (FSA) scores;
  - End of course (EOC) exam scores; and/or
  - Other methods.

Also included are the pass rates of dual enrollment students by race/ethnicity, free/reduced-price lunch (FRL) eligibility, and placement method. In total, 2,998 students were included in the findings related to placement methods.

In these findings, it is important to note that there are several limitations of this study. First, this was a voluntary ad hoc data collection, so the findings are not representative of all FCS institutions. Second, the temporary suspension of the

common placement testing requirement allowed for institutions to use alternative methods but did not prescribe which methods should be used. Third, due to the flexibility given to institutions during this data collection, it is important to note that one or two institutions may contribute more to certain outcomes due to the institution size and enrollment. Lastly, student performance in fall 2020 may have been affected by COVID-19, so the conditions for the comparison vary. When examining these findings, keeping these limitations in mind is encouraged.

### Placement Methods

System-wide, the method used to place the highest percentage of dual enrollment students was high school GPA and a common placement test (GPA+CPT), which was used by all six institutions to place 46 percent of students. However, the six institutions used this method to varying degrees. Half of the colleges used GPA+CPT to place a maximum of 2 percent of students using this method. Only one institution used GPA+CPT to place a higher percentage of students than high school GPA and at least one alternative placement method (GPA+Alt Method(s)). However, at all other institutions, the highest percentage of students was placed using GPA+Alt Method(s). GPA+Alt Method(s) was used by all six institutions to place 39 percent of students. GPA only (GPA) was used to place 65 percent of students at one college, but was not used for placement by any other institution.

	Percentage of Students Placed by Method		
	GPA+CPT	GPA	GPA+Alt Method(s)
College 1	1%		99%
College 2	44%		56%
College 3	43%		57%
College 4	92%		8%
College 5	2%	65%	33%
College 6	1%		99%
<b>Total</b>	46%	16%	39%

Note: Cells in light gray indicate the predominant method used to place students.

### Pass Rates

Across all races/ethnicities, pass rates in general education coursework, gateway math coursework and gateway English coursework were highest for students placed using GPA only. The pass rates in gateway math coursework were the same for students placed using GPA and GPA+CPT across all races/ethnicities. The gateway math courses included in the analysis are MACX105 College Algebra, MGFX106 Liberal Arts Math I, MGFX107 Liberal Arts Math II, and STAX023 Introduction to Statistics and the gateway English course is ENCX101 Freshman Composition. General education courses are courses in communication, mathematics, social sciences, humanities and natural sciences identified by the institution as meeting general education requirements pursuant to s. 1007.25, F.S. Pass rate is defined as the percentage of students earning a grade of 'C' or better, Passing 'P' or Satisfactory 'S' in a course.

For students eligible for FRL, pass rates in general education coursework, gateway math coursework and gateway English coursework were highest for students placed using GPA only. The pass rates in general education coursework were the same for students placed using GPA and GPA+CPT for students eligible for FRL. For students not eligible for FRL, pass rates in general education coursework and gateway English course were highest for students placed using GPA and pass rates in gateway math coursework were highest for students placed using GPA+CPT.

## General Education Coursework

### *Pass Rates by Race/Ethnicity*

Pass rates in general education coursework varied by placement type and race/ethnicity, with Black, White and other students having the highest pass rate from GPA placement. Hispanic students had the highest pass rates in general education coursework when placed using GPA+CPT. Overall success in general education coursework, regardless of race/ethnicity, was highest for students placed using GPA.

	Pass Rate for Gen Ed				
	All	Black	Hispanic	White	Other
GPA+CPT	90%	86%	91%	90%	91%
GPA	92%	100%	83%	91%	97%
GPA+Alt Method(s)	88%	87%	87%	88%	91%

### *Pass Rates by FRL Eligibility*

Pass rates in general education coursework for students eligible for FRL were highest and the same for students placed using GPA+CPT and GPA. Pass rates for students not eligible for FRL students were highest for students placed using GPA, though pass rates for students placed using GPA+CPT were only one percentage point lower.

	Pass Rate for Gen Ed	
	FRL	Non-FRL
GPA+CPT	88%	91%
GPA	88%	92%
GPA+Alt Method(s)	85%	89%

## Gateway Math Coursework (MACX105, MGFX106, MGFX107, STAX023)

### *Pass Rates by Race/Ethnicity*

Pass rates in gateway math coursework varied by placement type, with Black, Hispanic, and other students having the highest pass rate when placed using GPA only. White students had the highest pass rates in gateway math coursework when placed using GPA+CPT. Overall success in gateway math coursework, regardless of race/ethnicity, was the same for students placed using GPA+CPT and GPA.

	Pass Rate for Gateway Math				
	All	Black	Hispanic	White	Other
GPA+CPT	91%	85%	94%	91%	88%
GPA	91%	100%	100%	89%	100%
GPA+Alt Method(s)	89%	85%	93%	88%	93%

### *Pass Rates by FRL Eligibility*

Pass rates in gateway math coursework for students eligible for FRL were highest for students placed using GPA only. Pass rates for students not eligible for FRL were highest for students placed using GPA+CPT.

	Pass Rate for Gateway Math	
	FRL	Non-FRL
GPA+CPT	87%	93%
GPA	94%	91%
GPA+Alt Method(s)	86%	90%

### Gateway English Coursework (ENCX101)

#### *Pass Rates by Race/Ethnicity*

Pass rates in gateway English coursework varied by placement type, with Black, White and other students having the highest pass rate when placed using GPA only. Hispanic students had the highest pass rates in gateway English coursework when placed using GPA+Alt Method(s). Overall success in gateway English coursework, regardless of race/ethnicity, was highest for students placed using GPA only.

	Pass Rate for Gateway English				
	All	Black	Hispanic	White	Other
GPA+CPT	86%	83%	86%	87%	92%
GPA	93%	100%	81%	93%	97%
GPA+Alt Method(s)	87%	86%	88%	87%	89%

#### *Pass Rates by FRL Eligibility*

Pass rates in gateway English coursework were highest for students placed using GPA only, regardless of FRL eligibility.

	Pass Rate for Gateway English	
	FRL	Non-FRL
GPA+CPT	83%	88%
GPA	88%	93%
GPA+Alt Method(s)	85%	87%

### **Conclusion and Future Direction**

Overall, the temporary suspension of the common placement test requirement did not appear to negatively affect students in their first-term general education, gateway math, and gateway English courses. Black, Hispanic and FRL students placed with GPA+Alt Method(s) had the same pass rate or one percentage point less than those placed with GPA+CPT in gateway math and had higher pass rates than those placed with GPA+CPT in gateway English. Students placed with GPA only saw some of the highest pass rates, but those findings are limited to students at the one institution in the study that used GPA only for dual enrollment eligibility.

Senate Bill (SB) 366, which passed during the 2021 legislative session, institutionalized the use of alternative methods for assessing college-level computation and communication skills in the FCS. Specifically, SB 366 amended multiple Florida Statutes to expand the mechanisms institutions may use to assess readiness for college-level work.

- College Credit Admissions Counseling: SB 366 amends s. 1007.263, F.S., to add alternative methods for measuring achievement in college-level computation and communication for admissions counseling in college credit programs. The bill specifies that career education program advising must measure achievement in basic skills pursuant to s. 1004.91, F.S.
- College Credit Dual Enrollment Eligibility: SB 366 amends s. 1007.271, F.S., revising eligibility requirements to specify that students must demonstrate achievement in college-level communication and computation as provided in s. 1008.30, F.S. In effect, this revision allows approved alternative methods to be used in eligibility determinations. The usage of alternative methods includes public, private and home education students.
- Developmental Education and Meta-Majors: SB 366 amends s. 1008.30, F.S., authorizing FCS institutions to use alternative methods to assess student readiness as it relates to meta-majors and developmental education placement. Also related to developmental education, SB 366 eliminates annual developmental education accountability reporting requirements.

SB 366 requires the State Board of Education to adopt rules by January 2022 to develop and implement alternative methods for assessing communication and computation skills. The promising findings from this study, combined with feedback from FCS institutions, will inform the identification of the alternative methods and their associated standards/cut scores that will be codified in rule. The division will continue to monitor implementation of this provision and its impact on student access to and success in college-level coursework. Additionally, colleges can access resources developed and curated by the center to support implementation of alternative placement methods at:

<https://www.floridacollegesystemfoundation.org/fssc-covid19>.

**Appendix A: Alternative Method Placement – Sample Methods and Minimum Standards**

**ENC1101 Placement Methods Reported by Colleges**

	<b>ENC1101</b>	<b>ENC1101C</b>
PSAT	430+	
FSA - ELA Score	Level 4+	
Senior high school English course	B or higher	C (70-79%)
HS English 4	B or higher	
HS English 4 Honors	B or higher	
English AP	B or higher	
English IB	B or higher	
English Cambridge/AICE	B or higher	

**Mathematics (Intermediate Algebra and Gateway Courses) Placement Methods Reported by Colleges**

	<b>MATX033</b>	<b>MGFX107</b>	<b>MACX105</b>	<b>MACX105C</b>	<b>MGFX106</b>	<b>STAX023</b>
PSAT Math	480+	480+ 530+	530+	480+	480+ 530+	530+
FSA - Mathematics	Level 4-5	Level 4-5		Level 4-5	Level 4-5	
EOC Math – Algebra 1 or Geo	Level 4-5	Level 4-5		Level 4-5	Level 4-5	
HS Algebra	B or better	B or better				
HS Algebra I honors	B or better	B or better				
HS Algebra II	B or better	B or better	A or better B or better		B or better	B or better
HS Algebra II Honors		B or better	A or better B or better		B or better	B or better
HS Algebra III	B or better		A or better B or better		B or better	B or better
HS Pre-Calculus	B or better	B or better	A or better B or better		B or better	B or better
HS Calculus	B or better	B or better	B or better		B or better	B or better
HS Trig			B or better			
AP Math	B or better	B or better	B or better		B or better	B or better
IB Math	B or better	B or better	B or better		B or better	B or better
Cambridge/AICE Math	B or better	B or better	B or better		B or better	B or better