

October 24, 2017

TO: Chief Executive Officers  
Chief Business Officers  
Chief Instructional Officers  
Chief Student Services Officers

FROM: Eloy Ortiz Oakley

SUBJECT: Common Assessment Initiative Reset

Dear Colleagues,

Over the last several weeks, the Chancellor's Office team has been thoroughly reviewing the progress of the Common Assessment Initiative (CAI) to include the findings from an independent project review. In addition, the team has also considered the ramifications of recent legislation that will directly impact the assessment and placement process for all students attending a California Community College. I am writing to provide an update on the CAI and the decision I am making that will impact the initiative. Based on the recommendation from the Chancellor's Office team, I have determined that the best course of action for students and taxpayers is to terminate the CCCAssess project, a component of the CAI that set out to design and develop a set of standardized assessment tools for the California Community College system. The project has faced repeated delays and implementation challenges, and a preponderance of evidence demonstrates that standardized assessments are no longer seen as an effective placement strategy. We will now refocus CAI in a manner that will implement recent legislation and foster effective use of multiple measures for purposes of placement.

As our understanding of the efficacy of standardized assessment tests has developed, it has become clearer that standardized assessment skills tests are not well-suited to accurately assess California's community college students as they often result in inappropriately low placement recommendations. Early findings from colleges piloting the Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP) also suggest that the use of noncognitive variables and high school transcripts can help facilitate more accurate placement and ultimately student completion of college-level coursework. These changes in our understanding of assessment effectiveness has led to calls for using multiple measures for student assessment and subsequent course placement.

In prior Chancellor's Office memos and communications, we have advocated the use of multiple measures for student assessment to allow for greater flexibility and accuracy in assessment and placement. In conjunction with Governor Brown's signing of Assembly Bill 705, which requires the use of high school information for assessments and placements, the Chancellor's Office no longer advocates the use of standardized skills exams as the primary tool to place students in college courses.

The movement away from standardized assessment tests is also based on an extensive and careful review of CCCAssess by a team of independent project evaluators that examined: 1) its progress to date, 2) its likelihood of timely completion, and 3) its likelihood of developing valid

and reliable standardized assessment tests that can be used across colleges and a diverse student body. After reviewing the evaluators' findings, the Chancellor's Office has decided to stop further work developing math, English, and English as a Second Language placement assessments.

The decision to terminate the CCCAssess project was made after several months of analysis and deliberations, and is based on evidence that the likelihood of success does not justify continued effort and funding. The evaluation of the CCCAssess development process found that the probability of validating testing efforts was in jeopardy, and the project would not meet intended deadlines and timelines while exceeding budgeted expenditures. Despite concerted and diligent efforts by the project team and a wide range of stakeholders, these factors created a situation in which success, as the project was originally conceived, was unlikely to be achieved.

The decision to stop further work on CCCAssess does not mean that the effort has not produced valuable and tangible products. In fact, several aspects of the program have been successful and will be used in future efforts, including the extensive work that has gone into designing, developing, and testing the IT platform upon which the CCCAssess tests would have resided. Additionally, valuable MMAP data resulted from these efforts, fortifying the use of high school GPA in the future. Finally, faculty developed curriculum maps that can be leveraged to support other aspects of the state and local completion work.

### **Next Steps**

The Chancellor's Office realizes that the decision to terminate CCCAssess may contribute to uncertainty within and across the system, especially for those colleges that have participated in pilot and field testing of the CCCAssess tools. The Chancellor's Office is currently developing options for colleges to follow as they prepare to select assessment measures that are one part of an assessment model increasingly based on a multiple measures approach. Future Chancellor's Office memos will specify these options in detail.

With the enactment of AB 705 and the termination of CCCAssess, California community colleges have an opportunity to re-evaluate their assessment and placement practices that fundamentally affect how students begin their educational journey. In doing so, we can accelerate efforts for the system to eliminate achievement gaps that begin when students are placed into long developmental courses sequences. To advance this work, the Chancellor's Office will be assembling an AB 705 implementation team to assist with the guidance and practices associated with the legislation to assure that we can meaningfully engage the implications together.

The Chancellor's Office is committed to ongoing support for colleges and keeping colleges informed about training and technical assistance available for successful multiple measures approaches, including providing information to explain how to access the training and technical assistance for upcoming assessments. For now, additional information and background resources for various aspects of multiple measures and their use can be found in the August 2, 2016, September 30, 2016 and October 4, 2016 Chancellor's Office memos posted on the Chancellor's Office [website](#).

## **Contact Information**

Comments or questions about the Common Assessment Initiative can be directed to Mia Keeley at [mkeeley@cccco.edu](mailto:mkeeley@cccco.edu).

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