



# getting it right

A Practitioner's Guide to Developing  
Transparent and Fair Placement Practices

All students deserve the opportunity to fulfill their potential and determine their path. Classes that students take in high school determine whether they will be eligible for college. Placement in these classes matters, and it matters for life. This is especially true for mathematics. Schools' lack of consistent, transparent and objective placement criteria has resulted in many students being held back in mathematics – even if they have already demonstrated proficiency. Misplacement happens. With “Getting it Right,” a practitioner’s guide to developing transparent and fair placement practices, Silicon Valley Community Foundation intends to provide an educator-designed tool to assist school districts in creating policies that propel students forward, not hold them back.

# Eight Steps for Transparent and Fair Math Placement: A Timeline

## Fall – Year One

### STEP 1: Take a Stand

Start in the fall by providing information to parents and students about the importance of advanced courses to students' college and career choices. In November/December, involve teachers and administrative stakeholders in a focused study of research on the impact of placement practices and students' success.

## Winter/Spring

### STEP 2: State the Terms

In January/February, state the objective criteria that will be used for math placement in your district. Ensure that district and site leaders thoroughly vet the criteria as objective and reliable.

Create an easy-to-read placement policy. Define multiple measures that will be consistently and systematically used to come to one math placement result.

### STEP 3: Spread the Word

In March/April, prior to building the master schedule of classes, inform all the middle school counselors and math teachers who will be using the placement policy about how to use it. Demonstrate using diverse student profiles to show how placements are made using the policy. Let all high school counselors know that placements will be reviewed and adjusted as necessary prior to the first day of school. Ensure that no subjective recommendations are used to change a student's placement to a lower math course than performance data indicates.

## Summer

### STEP 4: Analyze the Data

During the summer, analyze the placement data by school. If any students have been placed incorrectly, disaggregate those students' data to discover any trends that would indicate the equal access goals addressed in the math placement policy have been compromised.

#### Acknowledgements:

SVCF thanks Morgan Marchbanks, former assistant superintendent of Sequoia Union High School District, and Steve Waterman, former superintendent of Brisbane and Bayshore Elementary School Districts, for their support in developing this guide.

#### Other sources:

Waterman, S. "Pathways Report: Dead Ends and Wrong Turns on the Path through Algebra," 2010.

Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of the Bay Area, "Held Back: Addressing Misplacement of 9th Grade Students in Bay Area School Math Classes," 2013.

Make lists that show the demographic distribution of the misplaced students, using categories such as ZIP code, middle school attended and ethnicity. Return the placement analysis to the high school site leaders to make scheduling revisions for any student for whom there is no documented exception on file. Give a deadline by which the math placement data will be re-examined prior to the start of school in the fall.

### STEP 5: Last Check

During the week before school opens, check that all math placements adhere to the math placement policy and that all students for whom an exception was made have documentation (e.g. parent request forms) on file and noted in the student information system.

## Fall – Year Two

### STEP 6: Share Success

During the first weeks of school in the fall, disseminate to staff a math placement accuracy document that celebrates the district's success in placing students by objective and reliable criteria.

### STEP 7: Check Progress and Intervene

Throughout the first semester, monitor student achievement quarterly. Ensure that struggling students have access to and participate in interventions before the end of the semester.

### STEP 8: Keep Evaluating Placement and Results

Collect data on semester grades and performance assessments. Look for progress and for areas where pedagogical and/or curricular revisions are needed based on the data.

### For More Information

[Gettingitright@siliconvalleycf.org](mailto:Gettingitright@siliconvalleycf.org)