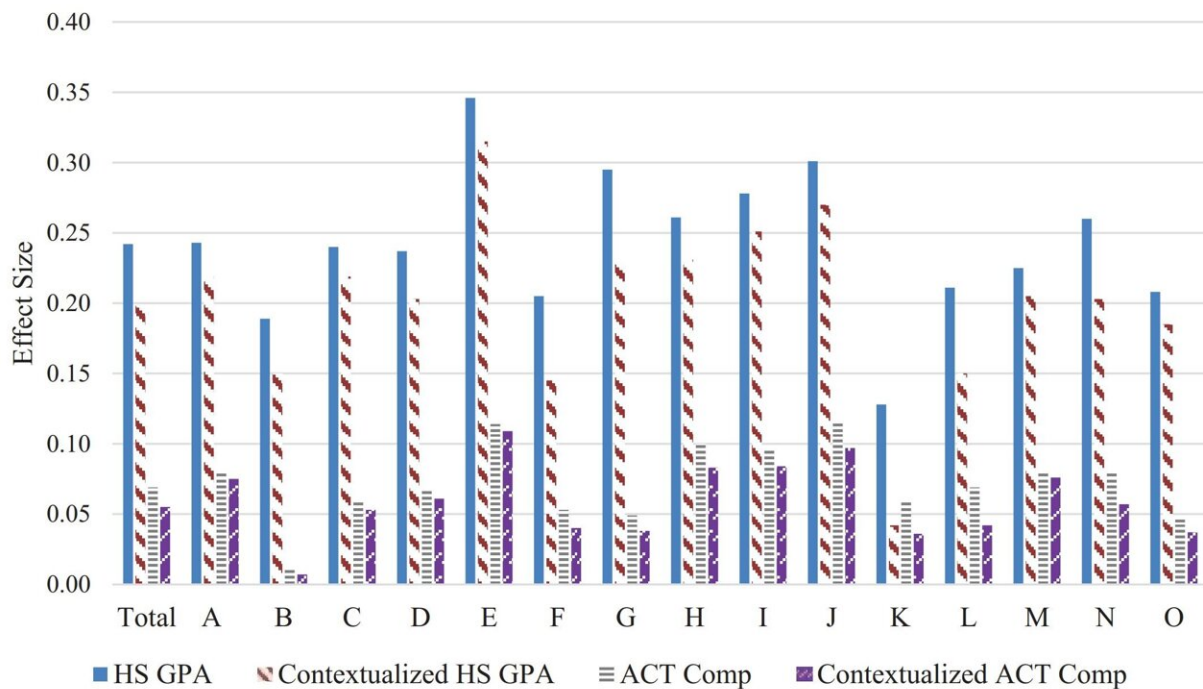


Admissions policies that consider grades in context of available opportunities linked to college success

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Effect Sizes for High School GPA and ACT Composite Scores on First-Year College GPA. Credit: *AERA Open* (2023). DOI: 10.1177/23328584231197413

Indicators of high school grades and standardized test scores that take into account the levels of school, neighborhood, and family resources available to students are strongly associated with those students' success

in college, according to new [research](#) published today.

The study, published in *AERA Open*, emerges against the backdrop of the recent Supreme Court decision to ban race-conscious admissions in higher education institutions.

The research was conducted by Michael N. Bastedo at the University of Michigan; Mark Umbricht at the University of North Carolina; and Emma Bausch, Bo-Kyung Byun, and Yiping Bai, all at the University of Michigan.

"Admissions officers, particularly at selective institutions, seek to review candidates in the context of their opportunities; prior to this study, we had no idea if that approach was linked with [student success](#) once enrolled," said Michael Bastedo, associate dean of research and graduate studies at the University of Michigan's Marsal Family School of Education.

"Our findings suggest that contextualizing high school grades and test scores may allow institutions to identify students from [diverse backgrounds](#) with strong academic achievement who will graduate," Bastedo said. "Not only is it a legally permissible way for institutions to promote equity, it also helps admissions officers identify students who are very likely to succeed."

To date, contextualized review has been adopted at a minority of colleges and mostly at selective institutions. The new study indicates that contextualized measures of high school performance could be useful at a much broader range of colleges.

"While 95% of selective institutions use some form of holistic review, less selective institutions may also have reasons to evaluate students in context, as a way to improve their retention and graduation rates,"

Bastedo said.

For the study, the authors used data drawn from an anonymous Midwestern state's [education](#) department database, which provided data from all public high schools within the state, the state's ACT test database, and the state's 15 public universities. Overall, the high school data cover 2.3 million [high school students](#). The state was chosen because its [education department](#) not only collected all high school transcripts for students graduating from high schools from 2010 to 2015, but also mandated the ACT test for all high school juniors during this period.

The findings indicated that contextualized high school GPA had a stronger relationship with success than contextualized standardized [test scores](#).

Bastedo and his co-authors are unaware of a similar quantitative, large-scale, statewide study that has examined the relationship between contextualized achievement and college success outcomes.

"These findings extend our knowledge of the relationship between students' contextualized high school performance and college success, which have so far mostly been limited to studies of class rank," said Bastedo. "This is particularly important as more institutions read applications in context as part of their holistic admissions practices."

Bastedo noted that future research should incorporate other measures to examine the contribution of students in a more diverse range of college and post-college outcomes, such as employment, contribution to communities, and participation in graduate and professional [school](#).

More information: Bastedo, M. N., et al, Contextualized high school performance: Evidence to inform equitable holistic, test-optional, and

test-free admissions policies, *AERA Open* (2023). DOI: [10.1177/23328584231197413](https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584231197413) www.aera.net/Portals/38/Bastedo_AERA%20Open_Final.pdf

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