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ENGAGING HIGHER EDUCATION IN COLLEGE
READINESS REFORMS

| A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR STATES |



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Engaging Higher Education in College and Career Readiness Reforms: A Practical Guide for States

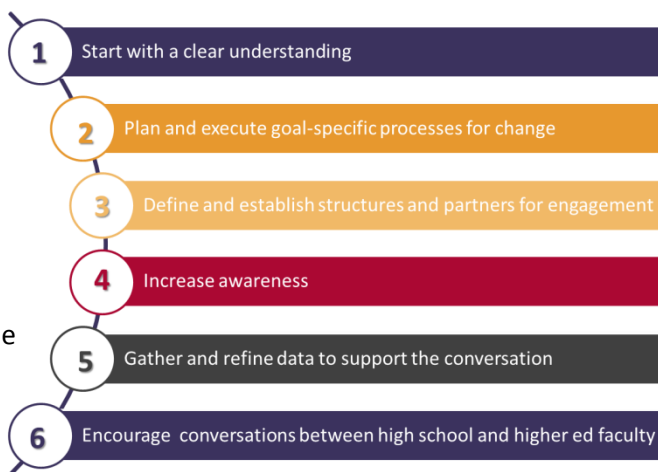
I. Introduction

The changing landscape of education has created an undeniable need for K-12 and higher education systems to collaborate and align their work to meet the needs of students, communities, states and the nation. In the past, the two systems typically have operated in isolation with few areas of overlap aside from teacher preparation programs. This isolation has created a gap between what K-12 systems require for high school graduation and what higher education expects of its incoming students, causing frustration among faculty and postsecondary leadership, undermining the value of a high school diploma, and posing real completion and cost challenges for students caught in the middle.

The recent development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and increased focus on “college and career readiness” have both raised the stakes and created a landmark opportunity for collaboration between these sectors. The development of the CCSS provided states the opportunity to set universal criteria for college and career readiness. Moving toward this common definition can set the stage for a range of other alignment activities between K-12 and higher education: involving faculty in how high school students are prepared for college; using the powerful lever of placement to create specific expectations for coursework; and developing processes across sectors that prepare students to meet those expectations.

In other words, as the hard work of implementing this fundamental change gets underway, K-12 and higher education collaboration will no longer be a choice, it will be a necessity.

This document provides a practical, six-step guide for states seeking to communicate with and engage higher education stakeholders in the important work of Common Core implementation and other college- and career-ready initiatives. The resources and case studies featured here speak specifically to K-12 and higher education alignment around a common definition of college and career readiness and using college-ready assessments as one component of the decision to place students into entry-level credit-bearing college courses.



II. College-Ready Standards: Landscape

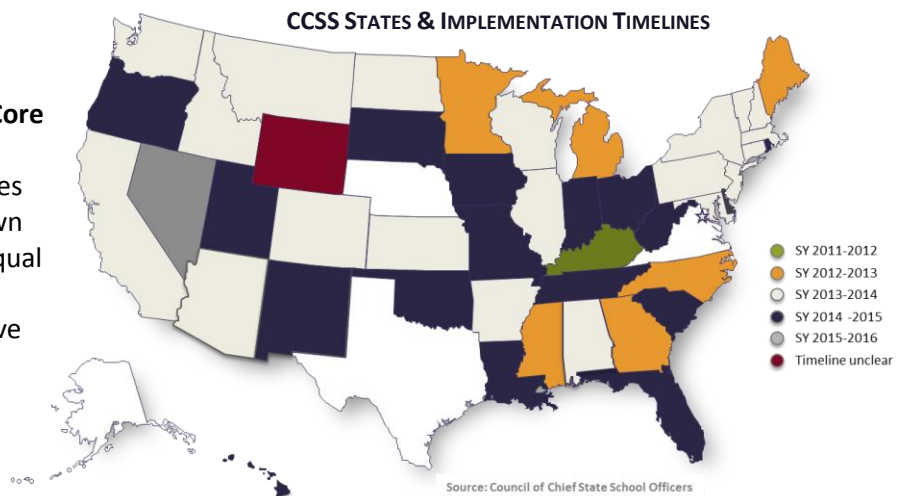
Recent research by the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce argues that “the United States has been under-producing college-going workers since 1980,” noting that this skilled labor shortage not only undermines our national competitiveness but has contributed to a precipitous growth

in income inequality.¹ In response to this urgent call for reform, significant changes are taking place across the entire education policy landscape to ensure that students graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in business, industry and government.

The Changing K-12 Landscape

Common Core State Standards

To date, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** in mathematics and English Language Arts. Several states not adopting the CCSS enacted their own standards of what they believe to be equal rigor, including Nebraska, Texas and Virginia². Figure 1 shows states that have adopted the CCSS and specifies their timelines for full implementation.



The Common Core is aligned with college and work expectations. The standards include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills and are evidence-based and informed by other top-performing countries. The instructional shifts of the Common Core will demand a significant increase in rigor. According to Student Achievement Partners, a nonprofit organization founded by three of the primary architects of the CCSS, these shifts include:

| Common Core Shifts for ELA/Literacy | Common Core Shifts for Mathematics |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction. - Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational. - Regular practice with complex text and its academic language. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focusing strongly on areas prioritized in the Standards. - Coherence: Thinking across grades, and linking to major topics within grades. - Rigor: In major topics, pursuing conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and application. |

Source: Student Achievement Partners, achievethecore.org

New Assessments Aligned to the CCSS

All adopting states are participating in one or both of the two national consortia developing multi-state assessment systems aligned to the CCSS. These assessments are designed to go beyond assessing proficiency to measure individual student growth, gauge progress toward college or career readiness and create a feedback loop to improve teaching and learning:

- 24 states (representing 25 million students) are members of the **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) Consortium**.

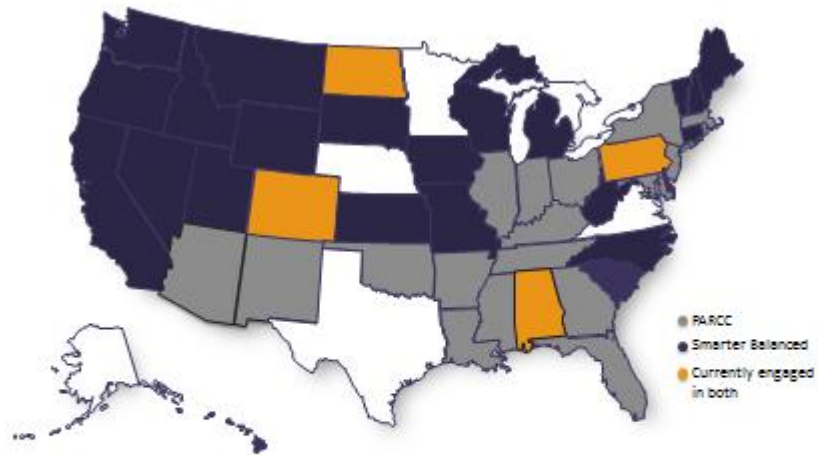
¹ Carnevale, Anthony P. and Stephen J. Rose. "The Undereducated American." Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. June 2011: <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/undereducatedamerican.pdf>

² Achieve, Inc., Closing the Expectations Gap, 2011: <http://www.achieve.org/files/AchieveClosingtheExpectationsGap2011.pdf>

- 27 states (representing approximately 22 million students) are members of the **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced)**.

CONSORTIA MEMBERSHIP

Each consortium is committed to higher education engagement and input. PARCC has developed an Advisory Committee on College Readiness (ACCR), a group of higher education experts from more than 20 states and associations that will provide input and higher education perspective (gathered from higher education engagement in each state) as part of the assessment development process. PARCC indicates that



755 colleges and universities – including many flagship universities and most of the largest state systems – have signaled their intention to ultimately use the new PARCC college-ready assessments as college placement tools. PARCC is also assembling postsecondary leadership cadres in each state to disseminate messages and solicit input on policy and practice issues around the new assessments.³

Similarly, Smarter Balanced, which encompasses 757 public colleges and universities in its member states, has targeted extensive collaboration with higher education through representation from key sector leaders on its Executive Committee and integration of higher education representatives in its advisory structure. Each Smarter Balanced state has identified a Higher Education Lead to act as a liaison between the consortium and state higher education institutions, and leaders from the postsecondary sector hold seats on the Smarter Balanced Executive Committee and key work groups.⁴ Aided by senior higher education leaders serving as regional advisors, the Higher Education Leads have established structures in their states to plan the integration of the Smarter Balanced summative assessment into campus or system placement policies.

³ Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. “Higher Education to Help Develop Assessments.” July 19, 2011. <http://www.parcconline.org/higher-education-help-develop-and-implement-new-assessments>

⁴ Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. “Smarter Balanced and Higher Education: Preparing Young People for Postsecondary Success.” 2012. <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Higher-Education-Factsheet.pdf>

The Higher Education Landscape

In higher education, major landscape changes also are afoot. Key initiatives and shifts are occurring in how postsecondary institutions approach their work. States, postsecondary institutions and their advocacy partners are addressing their challenges with college completion by reforming developmental education, targeting drivers of time-to-degree and identifying and focusing on articulation and transfer issues. This work has been catalyzed by major advocacy efforts such as Complete College America and Lumina Foundation's "Goal 2025."

A key point of leverage for addressing both cost and completion is developmental education, or remediation. These non-credit bearing courses present an often insurmountable obstacle to students entering higher education and do little to address students' academic needs. Research from Complete College America's partner states suggests:

- More than 50 percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities are placed in remedial classes.
- Fewer than 1 in 10 students placed in remedial classes graduate from community colleges within three years; little more than a third complete a bachelor's in six years.
- Students who skip their remedial assignments do just as well in gateway courses as those who took remediation first, but not even a quarter of remedial community college students (and less than a third of remedial four-year college students) ultimately complete college-level English and math courses⁵

Aligning high school curricula and assessments with college entrance tests is a first critical step to addressing the challenges and obstacles that developmental education poses to college completion. By improving rates of student placement into credit-bearing gateway courses, and obviating the need for remediation, collaboration on standards and assessments between K-12 and higher education can improve outcomes for huge swaths of students.

II. Alignment: Importance for Higher Education

Motivated by the dramatic challenges of developmental education and other student transition issues, policymakers and practitioners are paying increasing attention to the need to align K-12 and higher education, especially regarding standards and expectations for student learning and competencies.

The benefits of alignment for students, faculty, administrators and higher education generally include:

- For **students**, alignment provides a more seamless transition from high school to college. This leads to a smoother college experience for students with less frustration, a reduced likelihood of dropping out, and a greater likelihood of completion. It also decreases the need for remediation, which can result in a significant savings to the student.
- For **faculty**, the opportunity to teach better-prepared, college-ready students in credit-bearing coursework is a clear motivator for engagement. The Common Core standards will lead to

⁵ Complete College America Policy Deck, "Remediation." (2011).
<http://www.completecollege.org/docs/CCA%20Policy%20Deck%20Remediation%20Final%209-21-11.pdf>

students who are better readers and writers and who have greater skills in analysis and synthesis.

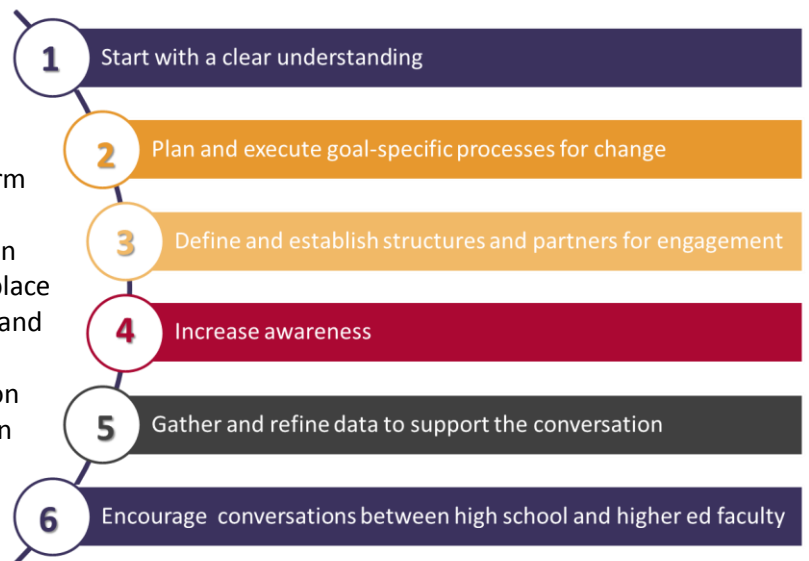
- For **administrators**, accelerating students' time-to-degree and entry into careers can improve institutional outcomes including persistence, retention and completion.
- For all **higher education stakeholders**, aligning expectations for student performance spells a greater focus on college-level content and learning instead of remediation – a vision central to the postsecondary mission. Higher education can better meet the labor market demand for more individuals with credentials and degrees.

The potential benefits for higher education alignment with K-12 are compelling, and the path to these goals is complex but steadily being cleared in states and networks across the country. This focus on alignment is reflected in major national initiatives like **Core to College**, a multistate grant program designed to promote strong collaboration in the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and assessments between higher education and the K-12 sectors. State- and local-level initiatives like **dual enrollment and early college high schools** represent major student-level programs to align high school completion and postsecondary enrollment.

Also emerging as part of the alignment work are initiatives that create highly localized collaborations – often between higher education institutions and high schools located in the same geographic area – that bring together high school teachers and college faculty to better understand the challenges of student transitions between the sectors.

III. Step by Step Guide for Engagement

Given the importance of alignment between K-12 and higher education on critical issues such as standards and transitions for students, meaningful engagement of higher education stakeholders is an essential foundation for reform work. Engagement of faculty and institutional leaders is a key building block – and should be an ongoing, very public, activity – that must be in place to establish the trust, communication channels and working structures that will support policy and practice shifts necessary to smooth the transition between K-12 and higher education. This section describes and provides guidance about key steps for realizing meaningful engagement.



One note: Engagement is not often linear.

This section presents a suggested sequence of steps, but users should anticipate that activities from multiple steps may occur concurrently or in a different order, especially as engagement moves into sustainable and regular patterns. The following set of recommendations is meant to be a guide, but users should remain flexible and respond to their unique needs as appropriate.

1 Start with a Clear Understanding

Questions to Consider

Overall

Is there a clear understanding of the purposes and context for the engagement work? Specifically:

- Have the goals and purposes of engagement and alignment been identified?
- What is the context of the state’s higher education landscape (goals, challenges, successes, threats, key initiatives, etc.)? What implications does this context have for the alignment work?
- What plans need to be developed in order to accomplish alignment goals? How should plans be aligned with plans for other key state higher education or K-12 initiatives (e.g., CCSS and assessment implementation, college completion, etc.)
- What structures and mechanisms are currently in place that could support the alignment work? Alternatively, what structures are needed?

College Readiness Definition

- Is there an understanding of what process is necessary to achieve a common college readiness definition among public institutions?
- Is there an understanding of prior state adoption of a college readiness definition?

Assessment Score Informs Placement

- Is there an understanding of what process is necessary to achieve a common adoption of a readiness score that would be used with other indicators to gauge a student’s readiness for first-level credit-bearing courses?
- Is there an understanding of previous state adoption of such scores?

The first step to successful engagement is to truly understand the purpose of the work as well as the context in which it will take place.

- A. **Clearly identify the purposes and goals of the engagement activity, and what is required to accomplish these purposes.** This guide has been developed to focus on two primary purposes at which engagement activity is aimed:

1. **Statewide definition of college and career readiness.**
The most effective alignment of the K-12 and higher education

Case Study: Achieving a Common College-Ready Definition

As a pilot state for the American Diploma Project (ADP), **Kentucky convened a cross-sector working group to undertake a gap analysis of existing standards and to articulate a college- and career-ready standard for the state.** The KY Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), a coordinating board and agency for the state’s eight public four-year institutions and the Community and Technical College System, asked the Chief Academic Officers of each of the public institutions to name a faculty member to represent the institution’s standards. The CPE also worked with the association of independent colleges and universities to secure representatives from these institutions.

The CPE charged these groups with developing a statewide placement policy for all of its public institutions; the ADP benchmarks provided a “discourse of standards” in English and mathematics at the postsecondary level. Only after faculty had agreed on what entering students should know and be able to do were they asked to identify ACT cut-scores that matched the college readiness expectations identified. Anchoring the discussion in content and standards rather than test scores kept the focus on student learning and facilitated consensus. The CPE also convened teams of representatives to agree on basic college readiness standards in English and math.

Postsecondary Connection. “Kentucky’s Approach to Alignment.” Achieve, Inc. Accessed 2012. <http://www.postseconnect.org/files/Kentucky%20study.pdf>

sectors occurs when there is a shared understanding of what is meant by “college- and career-ready.” Cross-sector working groups or committees are a good vehicle to get to a common definition of college readiness. These groups should draw from the state’s K-12, higher education and P-16 institutions and include representatives from four- and two-year institutions to provide multiple perspectives and contexts which will increase the credibility of the agreed-upon definition. Using existing benchmarks of college- and career-ready standards developed by third-party organizations (such as the American Diploma Project) or other states can be a helpful starting point for conversations about a common college-ready definition. Input from other stakeholders, such as the states’ major employers, also may be helpful to consider.

Kentucky’s experience in achieving common college-readiness standards (see sidebar above) indicates that a tight focus on standards, rather than on assessment cut scores, can help maintain an emphasis on student learning, better enabling cross-sector groups to reach consensus on a common definition.

2. ***Use of CCSS assessments by higher education to inform placement decisions.***

The Common Core State Standards have been designed to define college-ready knowledge and skills in English/language arts and mathematics. Once the consortia assessments (currently under development) are in place, higher education institutions should be able to use the information from those assessments to determine whether students are ready to take the entry-level credit-bearing English or math courses, and whether or not they have the requisite English and math skills to succeed in other entry-level credit bearing courses (an idea still under discussion in Smarter Balanced). State education officials from K-12 and higher education and leaders of targeted institutions should commit to using these assessments to inform their placement decisions to ensure that alignment conversations are not just intellectual exercises, but actionable reforms.

The work of reviewing existing assessments and making modifications requires a heavy lift from faculty and K-12 educator teams. Alignment activities and working groups focused on the use of assessments to inform placement must also be grounded in the content of the

Case Study: Using College-Ready Assessments for Placement

In California, the Early Assessment Program (EAP) engaged partners from the State Board of Education, the Department of Education and the California State University (CSU) system and individual faculty members in aligning high school and placement assessments. Teachers from the K-12 and members of the CSU faculty met to compare college placement standards and California’s high school standards, ultimately determining that the 11th grade ELA and mathematics California Standards Test (CST) required augmentation. CSU faculty developed 15 more multiple choice questions to both the ELA and mathematics sections and instituted a new essay writing sample.

The new assessments were designed so that after taking the tests, students received notification about whether they met the expectation for CSU and would be exempt from further placement exams, or whether they needed further preparation for college-level work. Students who required additional preparation were allowed to use their senior year to prepare in the subjects in which their skills were lacking.

Postsecondary Connection. “California State University Promoting System-Wide Alignment with K-12.” Achieve, Inc. Accessed 2012. <http://www.postseconnect.org/files/CalStateStudy.pdf>

assessments themselves – existing secondary assessments, forthcoming Common Core-aligned assessments from PARCC and Smarter Balanced, and existing placement exams.

States may have additional purposes beyond these that should be identified clearly and for which processes should be understood.

In defining the purposes and goals, it also may make sense **to define a small number of indicators or measures of success** to gauge the progress toward goal attainment.

- B. **Understand the context for the engagement work.** The engagement activity must be sensitive to the contextual issues that face the higher education and K-12 systems and the state generally.

While the higher education context will differ from state to state, the national context finds the higher education community challenged by a number of issues, including poor completion results among students, high costs and student debt burdens, a mismatch between student learning and the needs of the economy, declining productivity and a squeeze between declining state revenues and rising expenses. The future condition of higher education could depend greatly on its success in addressing these challenges and criticisms. Anxiety is high, but characterizations of faculty and institutional resistance to change often are overstated.

Higher education is rightfully protective of academic freedom and the sanctity of academia and the professorship. Survey research of postsecondary faculty completed by Public Agenda confirms that these stakeholders do not respond positively if they perceive they are being told what to do or what to believe. But faculty often are willing to engage in discussion that is backed by solid research and good data, and demonstrate a very high degree of interest and concern on the part of higher education for students and their learning, debt and well-being.⁶

Faculty are the most important stakeholders in the higher education community, and their awareness and understanding will be critical in any effort to promote alignment with the K-12 system. But it is important to recognize and acknowledge that they already may be stretched thin, and therefore reluctant to engage. Consider, as well, that the “front-line” educators teaching introductory English/language arts and mathematics courses may be adjunct and younger, rather than full-time and well-established, faculty; they may be more open to engagement, but also less well-networked into existing faculty structures.

The potential for missteps are great, but so is the payoff for engagement and true collaboration. According to Achieving the Dream, faculty engagement can help enable institutional change in many ways, including:

- Shedding light on critical obstacles to student success
- Leveraging faculty expertise in “what works” to inform, drive and sustain change
- Fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for change efforts
- Minimizing faculty resistance to, and improving implementation of, new practices
- Insulating new practices from common “derailers”⁷

⁶ Public Agenda. “Changing the Conversation About Productivity: Strategies for Engaging Faculty and Institutional Leaders.” 2010. <http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/changing-conversation-college-productivity.pdf>

⁷ Achieving the Dream and Public Agenda. “Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation.”

A state's political context also has bearing on the work. Understanding the extent to which issues surrounding the Common Core standards and assessments surface in the course of legislative debate, political campaigns and other overtly political activity can help those carrying out the work act in a manner sensitive to these realities. While states always reserve the right to change course, those that are currently committed to implementing the standards and assessments face critical deadlines for action and delivery. While making progress is important, implementers should be diplomatic and respectful of any debate currently underway in the state and avoid any deliberate political engagement. If certain aspects of the process require approval by the legislature or other politically oriented bodies, care should be taken in laying the appropriate groundwork for these situations.

Additionally, there is also the "politics" inside the higher education community and in the relationship between higher education and the K-12 sector. Understanding the elements of this political dynamic is also important. Again, implementers should be respectful of these dynamics and form their plans and approaches so as to not create friction or consternation.

C. **Understand the plans and activities around related work.** Initiatives on which K-12 and higher education are collaborating or that otherwise have a relationship to the purposes and goals should be connected and linked to one another, not implemented separately and without regard to each other. This is particularly true for implementing new assessments, which introduce a suite of new collaborative issues from placement decisions to data sharing, all of which are fundamentally interrelated. In order to ensure maximization of integration, state leaders need to understand:

- The state's implementation plan for the Common Core State Standards (and/or other like standards). In some cases, along with the Common Core, states may be implementing new standards in other areas such as science or social studies.
- The state's implementation plan for new CCSS-aligned assessments – PARCC, Smarter Balanced, or a state's own assessment system.
- State-wide initiatives requiring higher education faculty engagement. States may have efforts underway for Complete College America, Achieving the Dream, the Developmental Education Initiative, the American Diploma Project or other similar initiatives that have state- and even campus-level leadership groups engaged. States may have established multi-sector faculty working groups to support articulation and transfer systems or state-level redesigns of General Education curricula.
- Campus-level working groups dealing with issues similar to the purposes and goals for this initiative may already be in place. Campuses may also be engaged in localize higher education/K-12 alignment activity in their geographic area.
- Federal or Philanthropic Grant Projects. A number of federal grants, as well as grants awarded by foundations involve either collaboration between K-12 and higher education or higher education engagement or both. For example, a grant in Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – Improving Teacher Quality program – already is awarded to support higher education collaboration with K-12 teachers around professional development for teachers. Those faculty involved in ITQ grants typically are

deeply familiar with the CCSS and assessments – and are likely already engaged in very practical discussions with high school teachers.

D. **Understand existing structures and mechanisms that could support engagement activity.** Higher education in each state has structures and mechanisms that can be leveraged in the interest of promoting alignment work. These include, but are not limited to:

- Regular convenings of role-alike top level administrators (e.g., Presidents, Provosts, Admissions/Enrollment Directors, K-12 Initiative Directors, etc.). These convenings may be facilitated by independent advocacy organizations or by the state higher education agency.
- Annual meetings/conferences (regional or statewide) where state higher education organizations get together to share best practices, discuss emerging issues and learn from each other.
- Campus level structures. Most campuses have a Faculty Senate that serves as part of the institutional governance structure and reflects the collective faculty voice.
- Advocacy organizations. These may include associations of community colleges, private colleges and universities, public universities, discipline groups, etc. These also may include business groups that specifically advocate for higher education (such as Ohio’s Business Alliance for Higher Education and the Economy) or workforce issues, or simply state or local chambers of commerce.

2 Plan and Execute Goal-Specific Processes for Change

| Questions to Consider | |
|--|--|
| <p>Overall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a clear workplan been developed for the engagement work? Does the plan include deadlines, roles and responsibilities, and clear actions? ▪ Has a clear and specific communications plan for higher education stakeholders been developed? Does the plan include general deadlines, roles and responsibilities and key messages? ▪ Is there a periodic process defined for updating the plans as new information becomes available and new/revised actions are determined? ▪ Is the state using a rigorous “delivery” approach in order to implement high priority strategies in meeting goals? ▪ Are measures in place to assess progress? ▪ Have feedback mechanisms been established to track progress and identify challenges? | |
| <p>College Readiness Definition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the workplan/communications plan include specific steps and actions around the development of a college readiness definition? ▪ Has the action plan for adopting a college-ready definition been implemented? ▪ Are measures in place to assess progress? ▪ Have feedback mechanisms been established to track progress and identify challenges? | <p>Assessment Score Informs Placement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the workplan/communication plan include specific steps and actions around the desire to use assessment scores as part of placement decision making? ▪ Is the workplan relative to using assessment scores integrated with the workplan for the assessment consortium in which the state is a member? ▪ Has the action plan for adopting assessment |

readiness scores as one component of placement decisions been implemented? Is the plan aligned with the assessment consortium plan?

- Are measures in place to assess progress?
- Have feedback mechanisms been established to track progress and identify challenges?

Once a solid understanding of the purpose, context, related initiatives and structures is achieved, creating an engagement workplan and a communications plan can help drive first-stage thinking about how the work will unfold. First versions of these plans are likely to be rough; expect and plan to modify, refine and update plans over time, especially as lessons are learned and momentum builds.

Workplans

It is important that workplans be aligned with the workplans of other relevant initiatives. This will allow for seamless interaction as well as coordinated messaging; ad hoc engagement around a single initiative often does more harm than good for relationship building and collaboration with higher education stakeholders. Developing a sound plan for sustained engagement that “connects the dots” on multiple initiatives is a fundamental principle and an important consideration to a strong workplan.

The key elements of a good plan include the following:

1. **A set of strategies and action steps.** Thought should be given to the general strategies and detailed action steps that must be taken in order to reach the identified goal or purpose. In some cases, implementers may think about action steps in fairly broad terms. At other times, a plan that details each and every step is important.
2. **Timeline.** A good plan has a timeline that is aligned to the strategies and action steps. Often the timelines are constructed by working backwards from the desired end date. Timelines need to consider major holidays and breaks, and high workload periods (start of school, end of school, exams, etc.).
3. **Identification of roles and responsibilities.** Strong workplans have a clear indication of who will do what. The plan should serve a communications strategy to keep key players informed of expectations for their work.

Tools and Templates: Workplans and Communications Plans

A number of national organizations and partnerships have developed in-depth resources for planning the implementation of CCSS and assessments, and offer guidance on building communications resources. Useful templates and tools include:

- Achieve and Education Delivery Institute’s Common Core Implementation Workbook: <http://www.achieve.org/ImplementingCommonCore>. Chapter Four of the workbook offers templates for communications planning
- Achieve, EDI and Education First’s Common Core State Standards Implementation Rubric and Self-Assessment Tool: http://www.education-first.com/files/Achieve_-_CCSS_rubric_and_state_tool-FINAL-TOPRINT.doc
- PARCC and Achieve’s Engaging Educators Tool and Workbook: <http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/Engaging%20Educators%20Tool%20v%2010.pdf>
- Smarter Balanced’s Building a Plan for Higher Education to Implement the Smarter Balanced Assessment System: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Building_a_Plan_for_Higher_Education.pdf

4. **Identification of resources.** In many cases (but not all) a workplan should also address the required resources to do the work. Give deliberate thought to how you will ensure resources are in place to get the work done.

Some key questions that should be answered as you develop an engagement plan include:

- How will you engage all higher education sectors (two-year institutions, four-year, public and private)? How will the strategies for outreach to these groups differ, and how will they maximize the relative advantages and mitigate the challenges of each type of institution?
- How will the engagement be sequenced so that Presidents and Provosts are informed first about the work, followed by deeper level engagement activity with policymakers, campuses, stakeholders and the general public?
- What is the union context in your state, and what obstacles and opportunities does this context present?
- What work is already underway around college-ready alignment at these institutions? How will your engagement plan honor and reflect this existing work?
- Who are the higher education representatives to the CCSS assessment consortia in your state? How will you engage them and leverage their work?

Communications Plans

Messaging is a critically important element of engagement, and requires considerable forethought. Research done by Public Agenda resulted in observations about message resonance that are relevant to this work. For example, faculty express deep concern about their students' debt, making them sympathetic to messages about "student success" (such as the potential role of college-ready assessments in reducing remediation). Faculty members are keen to take a role in conversations about quality, and demonstrate a willingness to discuss quality in ways beyond just emphasizing smaller class sizes and traditional teaching methods, a relevant note for discussion about student preparedness.⁸

Selecting the right messengers is as important as developing a clear message. As Achieving the Dream and Public Agenda have noted, when campus leaders deliver strong reform messages with confidence and a sense of urgency, faculty feel more confident that improvement decisions are meaningful and well-informed.⁹ Additionally, research has shown younger faculty to be more open to responsibility for student success, more aware of the pressures and challenges to completion, and more open to new uses of technology.¹⁰ And although the standard approach to higher education engagement is to bracket out adjuncts, including adjuncts as a key constituency for engagement alongside full-time faculty can help sharpen thinking about faculty engagement and "highlight issues and opportunities that may be unique to the circumstances of adjuncts."¹¹

Similarly, Public Agenda recommends establishing routine systems for communications at the departmental level, to ensure that information and messages about reforms reach faculty at all levels¹²

⁸ Public Agenda. "Changing the Conversation About Productivity: Strategies for Engaging Faculty and Institutional Leaders." 2010. <http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/changing-conversation-college-productivity.pdf>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Achieving the Dream and Public Agenda. "Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation." 2011. http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/ATD_engaging_faculty_in_student_success.pdf

¹² *Ibid.*

while simultaneously seeking extra-departmental vehicles for engaging faculty (such as disciplinary associations and faculty councils) to reach them outside of their departmental “bubble.”¹³

Coordinating Work with State-Specific Processes for Change

Engagement efforts should be rooted firmly in the process and procedures for change. If the ultimate goal is to develop a common definition of college readiness between K-12 and higher education, how will this new definition be authorized? By legislation? By state agency policy action? Or must each campus or system adopt the definition? What is the process for formally replacing or supplementing current placement assessments with student scores on college-ready exams? Implementation processes will vary by state. In some systems, a state governing board will approve changes to higher education practice and policy; in others, each institution will be responsible for addressing its own policies and rules.

Implementation processes include the idea of goal “delivery.” While this guide focuses on “engagement” activity, such activity is typically one component of a larger effort to accomplish a particular goal. Accomplishing a particular goal or outcome is increasingly the subject of “deliverology” as championed by the Education Delivery Institute. Deliverology is “a systematic process for driving progress and delivering results in government and the public sector.”¹⁴ Among the key features of a good delivery program are the following:

1. **Develop a foundation for delivery:** This component involves identifying the aspirational change and putting into place the delivery infrastructure and leadership.
2. **Understand the delivery challenge:** This component involves gathering data about the current state and understanding the causes and drivers, as well as systemic issues relative to the current status.
3. **Plan for delivery:** This component involves identifying the reform strategy to be pursued in order to impact the desired outcome. It also involves developing a delivery plan and setting measurable targets and defining longer term trajectories of accomplishment.
4. **Drive delivery:** This component involves establishing the routines that drive implementation and allow for progress monitoring. These include feedback mechanisms and ways to keep leaders and others informed. It also requires a commitment to aggressive problem solving and to maintaining implementation momentum.
5. **Create an irreversible delivery culture:** This component involves striving for actual culture changes whereby the ideas and tools of delivery become ingrained as part of the normal course of business. It involves building strong relationships and engaging in consistent and regular communications.

Identifying – or creating if necessary – a state’s process for implementing the desired changes and developing an implementation plan that considers achieving the necessary buy-in and engagement will go a long way toward ensuring success.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Barber, Michael, Moffit, Andy and Kihn, Paul. *Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishers). 2011.

3 Define and Establish Structures and Partners for Engagement

| Questions to Consider | |
|--|---|
| Overall | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a structure been established to support the engagement work? Are there state-level elements to the structure (e.g., advisory committee, leadership committee, etc.)? Are there campus-level elements to the structure? ▪ Has care been taken to ensure that individuals with relevant knowledge, interest and passion have been recruited to serve on the various committees? ▪ Has the state identified at least one individual on each campus who is a highly committed and engaged partner in the alignment work? ▪ Are there special communications used with partners? Are they convened periodically? | |
| College Readiness Definition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there specific structures identified to guide the college readiness definition work? ▪ Are there a significant number of campus partners that have a high degree of awareness relative to college readiness and who can support engagement around this goal? | Assessment Score Informs Placement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there specific structures identified that guide adoption of assessment scores as part of placement decision making processes? ▪ Is there a significant number of campus partners with a high degree of awareness of the assessment consortium? Do they understand the readiness score-setting process? |

Establishing structures

In developing plans for alignment work, consider which structures will allow higher education stakeholders not only to receive information, but also to weigh in and give feedback on the college-ready definition and the use of college-ready assessments for placement. Ideally structures are tiered and include, at a minimum, state-level and campus-level groups. You also may want to include sub-levels within campuses (for example, within particular departments or a college of education). The PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessment consortia have provided guidance for member states in developing these structures (see examples in sidebar); there may be other campus-based or state-wide structures that can help you collect feedback while increasing buy-in for new standards, definitions and assessments.

Establishing Structures: the PARCC Example

PARCC member states are mobilizing postsecondary communities to provide input and partnership through a number of sector- and school-based structures, including:

- Dedicated higher ed membership on the In-State College Ready Assessment Steering Committee
- In-writing commitment from key postsecondary decision makers in the state to participate in the PARCC assessment process.
- Campus Leadership Teams who ensure that their administration and faculty understand the development and implementation of college-ready assessment and CCSS

The following reflect some issue to consider when defining and establishing structures:

- **State-level groups:** These working groups should provide high-level advice and broad initiative leadership. The members should have the ability to carry back messages to their colleagues and help create forward momentum around processes. State-level committees should have broad representation, but not be so large that meetings become overly cumbersome or prevent deep

discussion. State leaders, or high-level deputies, should be members of this group to make clear to participants that the work is a high priority for the state.

- **Campus-level committees:** State higher education offices should request the establishment of campus-level groups through an institution’s president or provost. The members of these groups should include faculty members who have credibility and respect among their peers, and who have prior positive experience with college readiness or K-12/higher education alignment work. People who know the issues and have a history of interacting around them are ideal. Again, representation by high-level campus administrators is important to reflect the importance and priority of the work.
- **Avoid unnecessary duplication:** Consider leveraging or supplementing structures that support other initiatives that are already underway. For example, some states already have campus-level committees or working groups addressing issues of college completion, developmental education reform, or general education course redesign. These groups may be appropriately constituted to engage in the work around college readiness. States also may have campus-level structures in place as part of their work with either the PARCC or Smarter Balanced consortia. These groups also could have an expanded role and go deeper into issues of college readiness.
- **Charge, roles and responsibilities:** As statewide planners establish new structures – or utilize existing structures – it is important to define clearly the charge of the group and the appropriate roles and responsibilities. This will help to ensure that there is a clear and shared understanding from the start. Members can get frustrated easily and lose interest if they do not see progress or have a clear sense of where the work is going.
- **Membership considerations:** States should avoid thinking about alignment as strictly the work of colleges of education. It is important to have strong connections to English and mathematics departments, but also departments whose courses reflect high-density, entry-level college enrollment like history or psychology. These disciplines should be the beneficiaries of the CCSS emphasis on improved writing and informational text reading skills.
- **Regular stakeholder gatherings:** Use other existing structures to provide simple updates to key stakeholders on the progress being made. Ask leaders of statewide and system-wide associations of presidents, provosts, college of education deans, placement office directors, admission directors, and the like to add an update on the college readiness and K-12/higher education alignment work, including progress on the assessment consortia work, as a standing item at regular meetings. Consider asking campus-level partners to provide regular updates at faculty senate meetings or appropriate departmental meetings.

Each state’s structures will be different. This is appropriate, as each structure must fit into the particular context and circumstances of the state. In the end, the best structures are those that ensure that the work gets done and that impacted stakeholders have a voice in the process.

Nurture campus-level partners and advocates

Among the most effective structures or channels for communicating with higher education stakeholders about college-ready initiatives are their peers: campus-level advocates and faculty or staff who have

developed strong support for the value and urgency of a common college-ready definition and use of college-ready assessments for placement.

States that have used campus-level advocates as an engagement strategy emphasize a context-specific approach that respects the state’s unique higher education landscape. Tennessee, a state with a strong centralized structure, found the state higher education agency to be a key path to engaging individuals. When a CCSS project or conference arose that normally involved participation by an agency staff member, the agency also invited a faculty member to participate so he/she could learn more deeply about the CCSS. In Louisiana, alignment leads approached higher education system presidents and then campus deans individually, empowering campus leads to develop their own campus project management plans to accomplish their own deliverables that will help inform the state-level work. In Massachusetts, a less centralized state, engagement work also is campus-based: alignment leads are planning to seed individual campus-based projects around college-ready standards and assessments.

In addition to the considerations discussed above, campus-level partners may identify themselves through the awareness-building work, or through prior participation in similar alignment or CCSS-related work. Bringing these individuals into planning and implementation work can help leverage their standing as effective liaisons with a campus community or a particular discipline-specific department. They can provide great value in testing ideas, reviewing outreach materials and identifying other faculty members for involvement.

4 Increase Awareness

| Questions to Consider | |
|--|---|
| Overall | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is awareness-raising activity taking place with each of the following groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Campus presidents ⇒ Provosts ⇒ Deans ⇒ Department heads ⇒ Developmental education faculty ⇒ Entry-level course faculty ⇒ General faculty ⇒ Adjuncts ⇒ Other stakeholders (associations, etc.) ▪ Are there measures in place to gauge the extent to which awareness is being increased? | |
| <p>College Readiness Definition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does awareness-raising activity include information about the CCSS, and how higher education was involved in writing the standards? ▪ Does awareness-raising activity include the idea of college readiness and how it may be defined? | <p>Assessment Score Informs Placement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does awareness-raising activity include information about the assessments (PARCC or Smarter Balanced or both) being developed around the CCSS? Is information included about the role of higher education in the development of the assessments? ▪ Does awareness-raising include references to the idea that a common readiness score could be used to define college readiness? |

A key step to building engagement is to **raise awareness** about the initiatives under development and to make a strong case for why they are important for higher education.

In order to lay the groundwork meaningfully for effective engagement across the postsecondary community around Common Core alignment, using college-ready assessments for placement and a common college-ready definition, awareness-raising must target multiple audiences, including:

- Higher education leadership
- Administrators and deans
- Faculty, including adjuncts and full-time

Consider how the messaging to faculty teaching credit-bearing courses should differ from your messaging to faculty who teach developmental education. Those who teach credit-bearing courses are more accustomed to having college-ready students in their classrooms; those who teach developmental education will be more familiar with the needs of non-college-ready students.

Specifically, consider how to raise awareness about higher education involvement in developing college-ready assessments and how to share concrete opportunities for involvement and input from interested faculty and leaders.

5 *Gather and Refine Data to Support the Conversation*

| Questions to Consider | |
|--|--|
| Overall | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is there state and institutional capacity to generate key data reports based on student unit record data? ▪ Are data reports generated (by the state or by institutions) that illustrate how ready high school graduates are for college credit-bearing work? ▪ Are data reports generated (by the state or by institutions) that help campuses identify strengths and weaknesses in helping college students succeed? | |
| <p>College Readiness Definition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is data being used to help inform the process of developing a definition of college readiness? | <p>Assessment Score Informs Placement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are data collection and analysis protocols being developed that can be used to test how well high school assessment scores predict student success in entry-level credit bearing college courses? |

Grounding outreach efforts and engagement conversations in student data not only increases credibility with higher education stakeholders but improves implementation outcomes. High-quality data also can be an important discussion point for cross-sector (high school and college) discussions about student readiness and outcomes. When thinking about using data, consider the following:

- **High-level high school outcome reports:** If a state’s higher education system does not already provide data to high schools and districts about the number of their students who arrive on

campus unprepared for credit-bearing coursework and the outcomes for those students, preparing this information is a good place to begin collaboration. In its publication, “Providing High School Feedback,”¹⁵ the Data Quality Campaign indicates that 49 states have the capacity to create such reports, and 39 states do so. DQC has information¹⁶ about what each state is doing, which can be a good way to benchmark a state’s present activity.

- **Campus-level reports:** Often, state data reporting lags by a year or more, thus making the information less than ideal for practical uses. Campuses are likely to have more current data, even as current as each semester. Work collaboratively with campus institutional research staff to identify useful formats for reports that can be used to inform conversations. Be prepared for discussion with campus-based staff about differences in data collection and actual numbers between the state agency’s data and the campus’s data.

- **Course-level data:** High school teachers and college faculty find that course-level analysis also is a useful way to identify areas for greater alignment attention. What if Mrs. Jones’ English students do better in Dr. Smith’s freshman composition class and not so well in Dr. Roberts’ freshman composition class? What differing expectations might exist? What steps can Mrs. Jones take to ensure her students are better prepared for both courses? What can Dr. Jones and Dr. Roberts do to ensure that expectations are more aligned?

Case Study: Using Data for Collaboration

“One state that has embraced all four “Ts” (transparent, thorough, timely and tailored) is **Hawaii**. The P-20 Council’s “College and Career Readiness Indicators” report, compiled through a partnership of Hawaii’s Early Learning Council, Department of Education, and University System, illustrates what transparent, thorough, timely, and tailored feedback for high schools could look like. Concise and informative, the report provides graduation rates, high school assessment scores, average SAT scores, college enrollment figures, and college remediation rates in English and math. The high school figures are compared to the state average, and, when possible, information is also included for students who attended out-of-state universities. High school principals and administrators, like Ronn Nozoe, who oversees three of Hawaii’s high schools, have wanted this kind of feedback for years. “It’s a real wake-up call for us,” says Nozoe. He and other Hawaii educators have responded to the feedback by pushing a more rigorous curriculum, promoting career pathway programs, and creating a college-going culture.”

Reproduced from: Hyslop, Anne. “Data That Matters: Giving High Schools Useful Feedback on Grads’ Outcomes.” Education Sector. November 2011.

<http://www.educationsector.org/sites/default/files/publications/HSFee>

- **Types of data:** States should give careful consideration to the types of data reported and used. Above all, data should be useful in helping guide decisions, policies and understanding. States may choose to start with simple analyses and develop more complex analyses over time. In their report, “Data That Matters: Giving High Schools Useful Feedback on Grads’ Outcomes”¹⁷ Education Sector suggests that data be transparent, thorough, timely, and tailored (the four “T”s; see sidebar). Reports can include data about enrollment, placement test scores, remediation placement, persistence, retention, credit accumulation, and success (graduation

¹⁵ Data Quality Campaign. “High School Feedback: An Analysis of States’ Current Efforts.” Updated December 2011. <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/HS%20Feedback%20Table.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Hyslop, Anne. “Data That Matters: Giving High Schools Useful Feedback on Grads’ Outcomes.” Education Sector. November 2011. http://www.educationsector.org/sites/default/files/publications/HSFeedback_CYCT_RELEASE.pdf

and credential attainment.) Education Sector also suggests that states explore using information about how well students perform in the workforce to supplement other indicators of readiness.

- **Data analysis capacity:** In thinking about using data, many states recognize that institutional research offices – both at the state and campus level – are strapped for resources. Much of their time and effort are spent on compliance reporting activity, or on data processing and analysis related to the business aspects of the organization (funding reports and computations, federal reporting, etc.). Identifying the time and resources needed to conduct student outcome research can be challenging, but well worth the effort. When it comes to data analysis, states always must be vigorously attentive in protecting privacy. Increasingly, however protocols for data sharing are becoming common and flexible, while still being FERPA compliant.

6 Encourage Conversations between High School and Higher Education Faculty

| Questions to Consider | |
|--|--|
| Overall | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have efforts been made to identify current collaborations that involve higher education institutions and high schools? Has information about these collaborations been collected in order to identify promising exemplars for other institutions? ▪ Have campuses been solicited for interest in engaging in deeper high school/higher education collaborations around students transitions and curriculum alignment? | |
| College Readiness Definition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have campuses been encouraged to engage in high school/higher education dialogues around what it means to be “college ready”? | Assessment Score Informs Placement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do high school and higher education faculty collaborations engage in discussions about the content and structure of the aligned assessments and the readiness score-setting process? Are such collaboratives engaged in other work related to the implementation of the assessments? |

As mentioned previously, successful engagement with higher education is not a discrete or one-off event; a strong engagement strategy must consider long-term sustainability. A good way to encourage sustained conversations between K-12 educators and leaders and higher education faculty is to use initial convenings between these two groups (a common Core to College activity) on a regional basis as the first step in an ongoing strategy to identify where collaborative activity is happening and to spotlight and disseminate the practices and lessons that are sustaining this collaboration. Regional convenings not only increase exposure and knowledge among higher education faculty and their regional K-12 counterparts, but can help surface interested and passionate advocates for the work in a region, or on a campus that may be interested in leading future meetings, regional cadres or work groups.

Even more powerful are deep and sustained localized interactions between higher education institutions and local high schools. These collaborations have shown to have powerful impacts on both high school and college faculty and lead to changes in curriculum and smoother transitions for high school students. In many Core to College states, localized activity is an important part of the overall work. Included in this type of activity are localized dual enrollment arrangements and early college structures. Other notable examples of this work are the following:

- **Cal-PASS** (www.calpass.org): High schools, community colleges and four-year higher education institutions share data and engage in rich discussions around student readiness and transitions. Often the results are better aligned and focused curricula and improved sharing of knowledge between the sectors. The Cal-PASS project is operated by the Institute for Evidence Based Change (IEBC).
- **National Writing Project** (www.nwp.org): The National Writing Project is a network of K-16 sites that create and leverage strong relationships between and among K-12 and postsecondary educators and administrators to mount programs that look at alignment and articulation in writing performance, placement and assessment.
- **EPIC South Carolina Course Alignment Project** (https://epiconline.org/south_carolina/): The Educational Policy Improvement Center brings together high school and two- and four-year institution faculty to create greater continuity between high school exit-level courses and entry-level college courses in English, mathematics, and science.

Hosting a Regional Convening

Throughout 2012, Core to College grantee states have hosted regional convenings to bring together higher education faculty and K-12 teachers and leaders. Some early lessons learned about effective cross-sector convenings include:

- Provide plenty of advance notice to the department leaders and seek their input and engagement before reaching out to faculty
- Ensure multiple means of communication for getting information about the meeting
- Use strong guest speakers and nationally recognized figures to increase attendance and enthusiasm for the event
- Include crosswalks and hands-on activities to engage attendees, rather than just “sit and get” sessions

V. Conclusion

This guide defines key steps for engaging higher education in alignment on college-ready issues. It is designed to be used to help shape thinking about next steps and potential tactics for your state’s engagement activities.

The work of engaging higher education faculty and leaders, and soliciting their collaboration, is difficult: activities or progress can move in circles, and the steps described here often will move as “one forward, two back.” This work – and these steps – is also essential. Successful adoption of college-ready standards and assessment requires that higher education stakeholders are not just informed of changes, but take ownership for their implementation. For a transitioning student, earning her college-ready label is only as meaningful as her professors believe its definition to be; PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments will not have real value to a student unless administrators are committed to using his score to place her into credit-bearing courses. These outcomes can be reached only when higher education stakeholders have a meaningful role in shaping these definitions and assessments and buy into the results.

Resources for Further Learning

- Completion by Design’s “Internal Stakeholder Engagement Workshop Toolkit”, created by Public Agenda:
<http://knowledgecenter.completionbydesign.org/sites/default/files/309%20Public%20Agenda%202012.pdf>
- Achieving the Dream and Public Agenda’s guide, “Engaging Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty in Student Success Innovation”:
http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/ATD_engaging_faculty_in_student_success.pdf
- Achieve’s “Postsecondary Connection” website, with tools, data and strategies for higher education leaders to help prepare students to enter and succeed in postsecondary education:
<http://www.postseconnect.org/>
- Achieve and the U.S. Education Delivery Institute’s Common Core implementation workbook, “Chapter 3: The Basics” and “Chapter 10: Inform Student Transitions to Higher Education”:
<http://www.achieve.org/files/Chapter-10-Feb29.pdf>
- Education Policy Improvement Center’s report, “Redefining College Readiness”:
<https://www.epiconline.org/files/pdf/RedefiningCollegeReadiness.pdf>
- PARCC’s “Connecting the Dots: Postsecondary’s Role In Preparing K-12 Students”:
<http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/Achieve%20HigherEd%20Monograph%20May30.pdf>
- Smarter Balanced’s “Building a Plan for Higher Education to Implement the Smarter Balanced Assessment System”:
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Building_a_Plan_for_Higher_Education.pdf
- Education Delivery Institute: <http://www.deliveryinstitute.org/>