



Achieving the Benefits of K-12/Higher Education Alignment

I. What Does K-12/Higher Education Alignment Mean?

Why does alignment matter?

Our day-to-day lives rely on many organizations that collaborate to succeed: the restaurant and the produce supplier, the manufacturer and the parts supplier, and the insurance company and the sales agency, to name a few. In each of these examples, the success of one relies on the success of the other—and when both succeed, the customer benefits. When circumstances change, partners must change and adapt to ensure ongoing success.

The same dependency exists between the primary and secondary education (K-12) and higher education sectors. The idea of better aligning and coordinating activity between these two sectors is nothing new. A number of state P-20 councils (e.g., Hawaii and Maryland) have effectively supported collaboration for many years. Legislation enacted in Kentucky in 2009 explicitly called on the two sectors to coordinate efforts to improve student outcomes.

Even with these efforts, evidence still exists of a disconnect in policies and practices between the sectors. Teachers complete an educator preparation program and become licensed but are not ready to teach in the classroom. Educators in each sector are not fully aware of the academic requirements of the other sector. Students earn a high school diploma but struggle with college-level work. They wade through unclear admission and placement requirements, ineffective and disconnected remedial courses, or out-of-date instruction. In the end, many students do not reach the ultimate goal of earning a credential or degree.

These disconnects are a real problem with real consequences for students. Fortunately, today's increased and widespread emphasis on college and career readiness, including the adoption of new standards and assessments, creates an opportunity for even deeper, more meaningful cross-sector synergy. States are realizing that specific alignment strategies focused on new standards and assessments have the potential to help increasing numbers of students reach their academic goals more easily and effectively.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF AN ALIGNMENT AGENDA?

This series of briefs provides an introduction to important areas for K-12/higher education collaboration and alignment. Each brief includes basic information, practical advice, vignettes based on real state experiences and a list of resources for additional information:

BRIEF 2: DEFINING COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS. This brief provides an overview of college readiness definitions, processes for their development and ideas for how they can be used. Such definitions often form the basis of a broader K-12/higher education college readiness improvement agenda.

BRIEF 3: ADOPTING NEW COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY ASSESSMENTS. This brief addresses the dual issues of assessment development and use, including a discussion of placement policies that use new assessments.

BRIEF 4: DEVELOPING AND USING COLLEGE READINESS COURSES. This brief provides basic information about transition and college readiness courses, as well as approaches to their development.

BRIEF 5: ALIGNING GATEWAY COLLEGE COURSES. This brief provides information about how to initiate an effort to build on college readiness standards to align first-year college courses to high school graduation requirements.

BRIEF 6: REDESIGNING EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS. This brief addresses the issue of aligning teacher and leader preparation programs to support college readiness goals.

K-12/higher education alignment is essential to state and institutional efforts to improve both college and career readiness and postsecondary completion. This series of briefs, exploring a host of alignment issues, is intended for K-12 and higher education policymakers, administrators, practitioners and advocates. The briefs draw on the experience of leading states working on alignment between these two sectors primarily through the national networks of [Core to College](#) and the [College and Career Readiness Partnership](#).

What are the benefits of aligned education systems?

Improved alignment between K–12 and higher education can produce many benefits.

Student success benefits: Alignment and collaboration can increase student success—in both reaching college and career readiness and persisting in and completing college. Research shows that many students who have not learned the right material before entering postsecondary education and must take even one remedial course in college do not persist to the second year.¹ More than 70 percent of these students will never earn a college credential, and those who do require far more time to reach the finish line. In contrast, in aligned systems, like those emerging in Colorado, Florida and Kentucky, students develop an understanding of the pathway to success. High school students have a clear understanding of what they should know and be able to do by graduation; once they get to college, they benefit from knowing what to expect and from entering a system that is ready to receive them. Increasing the proportion of students entering college adequately prepared for the challenges of higher education translates into more students persisting to a credential or degree—in less time and at a lower cost.

Financial benefits: Any process that operates more efficiently creates a financial benefit. When K–12 and higher education are aligned, students and their families benefit the most. Students make progress and reach success more quickly, reduce wasted time and effort, and emerge having spent less money and with less debt. For institutions, a strong, focused and aligned college readiness and college success agenda translates into higher enrollments, improved retention, improved rates of completion and likely lower loan default rates. Enrolling more students who complete their studies without remediation and without wasted time and effort is ultimately more cost-effective for students, higher education institutions and taxpayers.



Institutional accountability benefits: States hold K–12 schools and districts—and increasingly, higher education systems—accountable for achieving results. Collaborative initiatives can improve academic outcomes for students and thereby improve how schools and districts perform. Fewer dropouts, more students prepared for college, improved course passage rates and higher test scores can reflect well on K–12 school districts through accountability systems that measure these attributes. From the higher education point of view, a greater proportion of well-prepared students enrolling in college results in better institutional outcomes: higher first-year success rates, increased year-to-year retention rates, more on-time graduations and increased graduation rates. These results are particularly important in light of the recent national focus on increased postsecondary accountability, including greater emphasis on performance funding strategies that tie state funding allocations to measurable outcomes.

II. Key Elements of K–12/Higher Education Alignment

Nationwide networks of states, such as Core to College and the College and Career Readiness Partnership, have focused on alignment activities between K–12 and postsecondary stakeholders. A number of key elements fundamental to a collaborative alignment agenda emerge from the experiences of these leaders and form the basis for the five other briefs in this series. The strategies presented in these briefs, outlined below, do not need to be addressed in a prescribed order. Instead, state leaders wishing to reap the benefits of increased cross-sector alignment can begin simply by identifying a couple areas of shared interest and then working together to take action.

1. A clear, shared definition of college readiness, including college and career readiness standards in key academic content areas

A consistent, statewide definition of college readiness sets the stage for alignment across sectors in curriculum, college readiness assessments, educator preparation and development, and remediation policies. A number of states, including Colorado, Hawaii, Massachusetts and North Carolina, have brought together the K–12 and higher education communities to develop a shared definition. The result: Both sectors emerge with a better understanding of what students need to know and be able to do by the end of high school and how the sectors can work together to create the conditions for a successful transition to college. A state's higher education institutions also emerge with a shared perspective on "college ready," which accommodates unique institutional differences, including differences in admission policies, but brings consistency to the idea of "remediation free." This is the subject of **Brief 2: Defining College and Career Readiness**.

2. High school assessments that have meaning for both K–12 and higher education and consistent placement policies that leverage the assessments

Historically, statewide assessments have been the purview of the K–12 system, and higher education institutions have rarely found them useful. Now, with the emphasis on assessing all students for college readiness, higher education's involvement is critical. Colleges and universities can use the results as part of placement decisions. Higher education faculty and administrators should participate in the development and testing of assessment tools to ensure that they align with college readiness definitions and expectations. This holds true whether states adopt one of the exams aligned to the Common Core State Standards that have been developed by the two assessment consortia (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers or Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium), modify their current state assessments, or adapt an existing national exam (such as the ACT or SAT).

NETWORKS OF STATES FOCUSING ON ALIGNMENT

CORE TO COLLEGE is a multistate initiative designed to improve student academic outcomes and college readiness and success through collaboration between the higher education and K–12 sectors on various strategies, including the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and aligned assessments. A network of 10 states (Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee and Washington), Core to College supports activities to define college and career readiness; determine how assessments aligned to college readiness standards could support placement decisions; and further align K–12 and higher education in areas like teacher preparation, transition course implementation, course sequences and use of data.

THE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS PARTNERSHIP is an initiative of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers to promote postsecondary engagement in implementation of the new CCSS. Seven states (Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee and Wisconsin) established cross-sector collaborative networks to address issues that reside at the intersection of the K–12 and higher education systems. Primarily, this work included addressing what is needed for successful use of the CCSS and common assessments of student achievement, both to improve college readiness in K–12 and to make effective use of these assessments for placement and other decisions in postsecondary education.

Building the assessments is not enough. Many postsecondary systems and institutions are examining and aligning policies for admission thresholds, course placement and remediation to reflect new assessments and the statewide definitions of college readiness with the goal of reducing remediation and improving persistence and success outcomes. Effectively communicating these policies to teachers, counselors, students and parents is important so that they have a shared understanding of what a student needs to do academically to enter college remediation free. This is the subject of **Brief 3: Adopting New College- and Career-Ready Assessments.**

3. College readiness courses in high school that ensure that students who are not on track in their junior year have an opportunity to reach readiness by the time they graduate from high school

New common assessments will allow students, their teachers and district administrators to know whether students are on track to college readiness at the end of their junior year. High schools and higher education institutions can collaborate to design and deliver transition courses for use during the senior year to increase the likelihood that students will reach readiness. States also can implement dual enrollment strategies and programs like Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate in high school to further support student readiness goals. This is the subject of **Brief 4: Developing and Using College Readiness Courses.**

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4. Curricular alignment between high school and higher education

Once a state establishes and accepts a working definition of college readiness, the opportunity arises for postsecondary faculty to examine entry-level, nonremedial math and English course curricula to ensure that the courses build on and leverage the college readiness standards implemented in high school. The same alignment should extend to entry-level course curricula in history, social studies and science. This type of alignment is the most visible to the student and contributes significantly to a successful transition from high school to college. The student feels comfortable in the aligned college class because it reflects a logical progression building on what he/she learned in high school. A successful transition is key to student persistence and completion. This is the subject of **Brief 5: Aligning Gateway College Courses.**

5. Preservice and in-service teacher professional development that improves teaching and learning

Teachers are the most important in-school contributors to student learning. States adopting standards that reflect the knowledge and skills necessary for students to be college ready are also working on providing support and training for preservice and in-service teachers on how to implement those standards. Postsecondary partners can help by working with their K–12 colleagues to align teacher preparation programs and professional development options to the expectations of the new standards, including the emphasis on college readiness. K–12 leaders can work with their postsecondary colleagues to ensure that teacher preparation programs include the knowledge and skills that allow new teachers to hit the ground running. This is the subject of **Brief 6: Redesigning Educator Preparation Programs.**

III. Practical Advice for Improving K–12/Higher Education Alignment and Collaboration

Alignment requires collaboration, and collaboration requires fully engaged partners. If both partners commit, up front, to a set of alignment goals and a process by which to reach them, then creating a successful college readiness and student success effort becomes less complicated. The following advice emerges from the work taking place in leading states.

- **Get together; foster a culture of collaboration and shared, committed leadership.** The first step is to find a way to get K–12 and higher education together to identify the shared nature of the challenge and commit to doing something about it. In some states this step is already happening through existing steering committees or system-level partnerships; in others, it may take some effort. Both sectors need to come prepared to share the responsibility for making a difference.

Getting together can either reflect a unique new “college readiness” initiative or leverage and build upon other initiatives currently under way. For instance, Massachusetts created a special joint initiative of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the State Board of Higher Education to prepare a definition of college and career readiness and drive discussions related to system alignment. Many states have existing P–16 or P–20 councils responsible for driving collaboration and shared decision-making to improve student outcomes. Louisiana leveraged already existing campus engagement teams to raise awareness about new state standards and college readiness initiatives. In addition, states may choose to go beyond education players and include representatives of business, the legislature and the community.

State K–12 and higher education leaders can set the example of collaboration and inspire activities at many levels. District superintendents and college presidents can engage with each other to understand specific issues facing their local communities and devise strategies to improve student outcomes. High school teachers and faculty who teach introductory college courses can join together to review syllabi, assignments and student work to gain a better understanding of what is happening in classrooms and how students experience the transition from high school to college.



- **Set goals and create a plan.** Collaborations work best if there is a shared vision for the desired results and the ways to make them happen. Once partners have convened, a good first step is to use data to establish measures of progress and set goals reflecting the benefits of alignment. Shared goals then lead to the creation of a plan for how to make progress toward the desired results. After the enactment of key college readiness legislation (S.B. 1 in 2009), the Kentucky Department of Education and Council on Postsecondary Education created a unified strategy—covering such issues as providing targeted interventions to students who are not college ready and increasing access to and the quality of college and career readiness advising—that has guided their work ever since. The strategy contains key goals, including increasing the percentage of students who are college ready when they graduate from high school and reducing the percentage of students requiring remediation in college. The legislative mandate ensures that the various state agencies work together and serves as an accountability mechanism to ensure commitment and action.

While Kentucky developed an expansive scope of work around the key legislation, it is generally not necessary for partners to take on the whole range of issues right from the start. Successful collaborations start by finding one or two areas of focus that the partners are interested in pursuing. Building comfort around collaboration can come through identifying priorities that can attain early and measurable success, such as establishing a common definition of college readiness across sectors or identifying ways to collaboratively expand dual enrollment statewide.

- **Establish an implementation infrastructure.** The experience of current leaders in K–12/higher education alignment shows that the work is challenging and difficult and requires significant attention to reach success. Having leadership and staff that focus every day on the agenda and the work needed to forge alignment is essential. The Core to College project supports alignment directors in each of 10 states to lead the alignment and collaboration work. Directors play essential roles in conceptualizing the work, planning specific strategies, convening partners, leveraging networks and achieving results. A dedicated infrastructure is also key to ensuring that engagement and communication activity happen regularly and effectively.



- **Seek out promising practices.** A lot of interesting activity is happening across the country that states could adapt to their particular contexts and circumstances. Many states find examples of strong and successful collaboration right in their own backyards—between school districts and local colleges/universities, for example. State examples and case studies in various policy and practice areas are being written up and disseminated. In response to member demand, a variety of national organizations (e.g., American Association of Community Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Education Commission of the States, State Higher Education Executive Officers, etc.) are sharing information and featuring presentations at conferences. Other sources of information can include discipline-based organizations with both K–12 and higher education members (e.g., the Conference Board of the Mathematical Sciences, Modern Language Association, National Council of Teachers of English and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) and advocacy organizations such as Higher Education for Higher Standards.

- **Educate and engage stakeholders; communicate broadly and frequently.** The cross-sector tasks involved in improving college readiness and student success—defining college readiness statewide, revamping teacher education programs, determining college readiness scores on high school assessments—are complex. They require connections within and across multiple sectors (K–12 and higher education), multiple systems within the sectors (networks of districts and systems of postsecondary institutions) and multiple levels within the systems (districts, schools, institutions and disciplinary departments). Networking a critical mass of individuals in a range of key constituency groups is important to developing strategies and building buy-in. Critical among stakeholder groups are high school teachers, college faculty who teach first-year courses, and the administrators or leaders who work with them. As first implementers, they must be involved in decision-making around cross-sector alignment strategies.

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Effective networks include faculty and leadership, practitioners, and policymakers. For example, Massachusetts asked each public higher education institution to convene discussion groups around its college readiness definition. The input from these groups was important in crafting the state's definition and also created strong interest in improving college readiness outcomes. Massachusetts used an online survey to solicit input and comments around its definition. Tennessee had campuses convene groups of high school teachers and college faculty to work on the alignment of college courses to the state's college readiness standards. Louisiana had teams on every campus with members from the college of arts and sciences as well as the college of education.

Engagement beyond education stakeholders also matters. Business, political and community leaders and the general public need to know the effort's goals and aspirations and have opportunities to shape the work. Engagement includes creating opportunities to educate stakeholders on the latest research and key strategies. K–12 and higher education leaders, and particularly college and university presidents, can be important and credible voices helping to emphasize and build support for the need to focus on improving readiness. Their emphatic support can also help reduce the anxiety that often accompanies changes to current practices and expectations. Not everyone can be at every table at the same time; however, the network needs to consider how to engage all pertinent voices.

People want to know what is happening and when. To support and coordinate the work, states can use existing communication mechanisms or develop new ones—newsletters, e-mail news blasts, etc.—and integrate key alignment messages into a broader communications strategy. Some states, such as [Louisiana](#) and [North Carolina](#), launched websites specific to their college readiness agendas. The websites include key policies and updates on initiatives and provide the latest data on progress and outcomes. States can also host special statewide or regional convenings to engage in deeper conversations about college readiness. Such convenings extend the work to more and more communities and campuses where local college readiness initiatives can help more students succeed.

- **Use available data, and strive to have better data.** States possess vast amounts of data that can shed light on the college readiness and student success challenges. Colorado, for example, is using data to generate "District at a Glance" reports for each district and high school that show performance on key college readiness and success metrics. In some cases, states are finding that they need different data to better inform their work—data that focus on key questions rather than simply fulfill compliance reporting obligations. Data can help stakeholders understand the nature and size of the challenge, build awareness, identify improvement strategies, and measure progress. States also want data that can actually help teachers and schools identify concrete steps to help students. Ultimately data can show whether states are moving the needle—especially if states set targets and goals for what they want to accomplish as part of their planning processes.

Endnotes

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Resources

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This series of briefs was written by Paolo DeMaria, Anand Vaishnav and Katie Cristol of Education First and Sharmila Basu Mann of the State Higher Education Executive Officers. They are made possible by Core to College, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.



Defining College and Career Readiness

I. What Is a Common Definition of College and Career Readiness?

Why does a common definition of college and career readiness matter?

In daily life, we often take for granted the importance of a shared understanding of commonly used terms. For instance, when a grocery store sells a pound of butter or a gallon of milk, shoppers have little doubt as to how much they will get. Imagine the confusion that would ensue if the meaning of "a pound" or "a gallon" were different among buyers or between buyers and sellers. Yet this is not far from what we encounter when we discuss the meaning of "college ready."

An ACT study illustrates the problem.¹ When ACT asked college faculty whether incoming freshmen were college ready, only 26 percent said "yes." Yet when ACT asked the same question of high school teachers, 89 percent said the same students were ready. The study shows a troubling disconnect across sectors about what it takes to be college ready. This disconnect contributes to the fact that, every year, a significant percentage of high school graduates discover only after enrolling in college that they need to enroll in remedial courses before they can take a credit-bearing, college-level class.

What drives this gap? Historically, the K-12 and higher education sectors have not come together to develop a shared vision of what it means to be college and career ready. Over the past 30 years, K-12 systems have adopted statewide standards and assessments and have defined what it means for students to be proficient in various subject areas at each grade level. But achievement of the ultimate credential of K-12 completion—the high school diploma—does not necessarily signify that a student is college ready, at least by higher education standards. In 2005, the American Diploma Project Network, initiated by Achieve, began to examine policies that could give real meaning to the high school diploma as a credential of learning.² David Conley, leading scholar and head of the Educational Policy Improvement Center, has published results of similar research on an ongoing basis since 2007.³ The results of these efforts point to the real need for K-12 and higher education to develop a shared vision of college and career readiness.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF AN ALIGNMENT AGENDA?

This is the second in a series of briefs that provide an introduction to important areas for K-12/higher education collaboration and alignment. Each brief includes basic information, practical advice, vignettes based on real state experiences and a list of resources for additional information. The other briefs are:

- BRIEF 1: Achieving the Benefits of K-12/Higher Education Alignment.
- BRIEF 3: Adopting New College- and Career-Ready Assessments.
- BRIEF 4: Developing and Using College Readiness Courses.
- BRIEF 5: Aligning Gateway College Courses.
- BRIEF 6: Redesigning Educator Preparation Programs.



K-12/higher education alignment is essential to state and institutional efforts to improve both college and career readiness and postsecondary completion. This series of briefs, exploring a host of alignment issues, is intended for K-12 and higher education policymakers, administrators, practitioners and advocates. The briefs draw on the experience of leading states working on alignment between these two sectors primarily through the national networks of [Core to College](#) and the [College and Career Readiness Partnership](#).

Achievement in English and mathematics is at the core of most higher education course placement policies. Improving college readiness starts with implementing strong K–12 standards in these two content areas, whether through the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other rigorous college and career readiness standards. For many states, the CCSS in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics have formed the foundation of a college readiness definition. Designed with input from both high school teachers and higher education faculty, the CCSS are aimed at ensuring that students reach college readiness by the time of high school graduation.

While strong standards in English and mathematics are a good start, students need more to be ready for college. The sidebar “Components of a College Readiness Definition” contains a more comprehensive list of components to consider in developing a state definition of readiness.

Today, many states are not only developing and adopting definitions of college and career readiness but also using those definitions to drive a multifaceted strategy to improve student readiness for success. A common definition, developed collaboratively across sectors, creates both a unifying foundation among educators and a common language and focus about how best to prepare students for college. To students and parents, a common definition provides a consistent and understandable signal about the importance of getting ready for college. Getting more students ready for college before they enter a postsecondary education program can have a tremendous impact on academic success and college completion—key areas of focus for higher education. Such efforts can then have a substantial payoff when more students graduate from college with meaningful credentials and degrees, adding to the quality of the workforce.

What is higher education’s role in defining college and career readiness?

Institutions of higher education know firsthand the student experience—what happens when students are ready for college, and what happens when they are not. They are an essential voice in developing a definition of readiness and signaling what students need to do to get ready. They can also illustrate the importance of readiness to degree or credential completion. Increasingly, higher education leaders are stepping up to join their K–12 colleagues to take ownership of the challenge of getting more students to readiness. Higher education can serve as a convener and active participant in definition discussions, bringing research expertise to the table, as well as the perspectives of faculty who teach entry-level courses. Higher education can support data collection and analysis and inform state and institutional policy strategies that set a state’s college readiness agenda. Higher education can be more involved in students’ high school experiences through dual enrollment and transition courses, both of which can help students reach readiness and better understand the rigors of the college experience. Higher education can also play a role in broadly communicating readiness requirements and recommended steps for students to ensure that they are ready when they graduate from high school.

COMPONENTS OF A COLLEGE READINESS DEFINITION

Definitions of college readiness vary by state, but most draw from a subset of the following components:

- **ACADEMIC CONTENT KNOWLEDGE**—defined by rigorous standards in core content areas such as English, math, science and social studies and measured by:
 - High school course-taking requirements;
 - High school grade point average; and
 - State assessments and national college-entrance exams (ACT, SAT).
- **COGNITIVE STRATEGIES**—problem formulation, research, collaboration and communication skills.
- **META-COGNITIVE SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES**—persistence, self-awareness, motivation and help-seeking.
- **TRANSITION KNOWLEDGE**—skills for succeeding in the postsecondary context, such as understanding norms and values, applying for admission and financial aid, etc.
- **EARNING COLLEGE CREDIT BEFORE ENTERING COLLEGE**—Advanced Placement, dual enrollment and International Baccalaureate.

II. Practical Advice for Defining College and Career Readiness

A number of states have moved down the path of developing college readiness definitions. The following advice, based on the experiences of some of these leading states, can inform and support the efforts of states seeking to establish their own college readiness definitions.

1. Create and support an inclusive and collaborative process to develop a definition; learn from other states' experiences.

The real power of developing a shared definition is in the collaborative nature of the work. States can design processes that bring many voices to the definition development process and allow broad input. States do not have to start from scratch. They can use the work of other states and the definitions that have been adopted as a starting point for discussions. Through the development process, both K–12 and higher education sectors, as well as other key stakeholders, take ownership of a shared statewide definition and emerge with a better understanding of how they each can contribute to the overall goal: more students graduating college ready. For states such as Colorado, Hawaii, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Oregon, the initial collaboration around the development of the definition later grew into efforts to identify strategies and actions to help more students reach readiness. Those involved in the work also become natural advocates for a state's readiness agenda.

2. Broadly and authentically engage stakeholders and the public, beginning with high school teachers and college faculty who teach entry-level courses.

For a definition to take root and spur change, policymakers and educators need to view college readiness as a community goal and a shared aspiration. It is especially important to engage high school teachers and college faculty; they will respectively prepare and receive the students in question. As part of their definition development processes, Hawaii and Massachusetts conducted regional discussion groups, creating opportunities for teachers and faculty to interact. This type of process can lead to a number of benefits beyond the development of the definition, including localized collaboration around the needs of students in a specific community. Moving beyond the education sectors, the process can also engage the business community, social service organizations, nonprofits, parents and the general public. This engagement ensures that more people are able to contribute and to see how their work connects with the larger goal. The greater the buy-in, the more likely efforts among various stakeholders will align with the shared goal of increased readiness for postsecondary work.

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3. Do not view the definition as the end product. Consider how a definition could drive strategies and actions to improve readiness outcomes.

States should not create a definition simply as a task to complete and check off as done. The definition serves as a foundation for strategies and actions that K–12 and higher education systems can develop and deploy jointly and that can lead to improving student readiness. After Hawaii adopted its definition in 2013, its P–20 Council began to use it to inform other collaborative work, including the development of transition courses and the reform of teacher preparation. When designing a definition, it helps to consider some of the ways in which states might use it, such as:

Transition strategies:

- High school transition (or readiness) course design and implementation;
- Early-college high school and dual enrollment expansion;
- Service learning initiatives;
- Higher education placement policy; and
- Higher education developmental education reform and gateway course redesign.

System improvement strategies:

- Local high school-higher education campus collaboration;
- Accountability systems focused on college readiness (college readiness report cards);
- Statewide transfer and articulation policies;
- Teacher preparation and in-service professional development; and
- Communications strategies for college readiness, access and success information.

4. Once adopted, communicate the definition broadly and in ways people can easily understand.

Successful states develop and implement communications strategies around the content of their definition, why it matters and how people can support it. States can weave such a communications strategy into other communications efforts that focus on college access, success and even financial aid. Aspects of the communications strategy should address specific audiences—college faculty, high school teachers, counselors, parents, students, business leaders, the general public, etc. Separate messages and messaging strategies allow state leaders to specifically target the information needs of each audience.

III. Actions in States: Colorado and Massachusetts

Colorado

In Colorado, the State Board of Education and the Commission on Higher Education jointly adopted a statewide postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR) definition in June 2009. The term "postsecondary and workforce readiness" is Colorado's chosen phrase to reflect the concept of college and career readiness. The state's definition has served as a North Star for developing and aligning a number of critical reforms.



The Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K)—bipartisan legislation enacted in 2008—required the development of a common definition. The intent of CAP4K was to improve Colorado's public education through alignment of preschool through postsecondary expectations, policies and practices. In response to the legislation, the two departments jointly convened 13 regional meetings around the state between November 2008 and June 2009. The purpose of these meetings was to engage local communities and businesses in conversations about the skills and competencies students need to succeed after high school.

Based on this input, state staff created a draft definition and invited stakeholder groups and the public to review and comment on the draft. By the end of June 2009, both the State Board of Education and the Commission on Higher Education had adopted the final PWR definition.

The PWR definition has had a broad impact on a number of features of education policy in Colorado, including:

- Forming the foundation for Colorado's PWR endorsement on the state's high school diploma (documentation of a graduate's readiness to enter postsecondary education or the workforce);
- Supporting the state's Individual Career and Academic Plan process, available to all high school students;
- Informing the state's high school graduation guidelines and accountability system; and
- Providing the foundation for the state's higher education placement and remediation policy.

Massachusetts

In 2011, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Higher Education began a process to define college and career readiness. This work was part of the state's effort to improve college and career readiness outcomes for its students, as well as a component of its participation in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium. The two departments appointed a statewide coordinating council to oversee the development of a definition. All public colleges and universities established campus engagement teams composed of P–16 educators. The council charged each team with developing a statement on college readiness and submitting a report of their collective progress and product to the statewide coordinating council.

State staff synthesized the input from the engagement teams into a draft definition and then released it for public feedback and input. More than 1,360 Massachusetts citizens took part in an online survey about the definition. Their comments led to a modified draft definition, and in early 2013, the state conducted another round of public review and comment. After final revisions, each board adopted the definition in spring 2013.

The essential learning competencies in the Massachusetts definition focus on ELA/literacy and mathematics, which are the specific academic areas that will be assessed by PARCC and then used in the postsecondary environment to help determine placement into entry-level, credit-bearing courses. This focus creates a unity among the definition, the assessments and postsecondary placement policy, which clearly signals to students and parents what is required to enter college remediation free.

“The process itself is almost more important than the words that end up on the paper. The process required collaboration between K–12 and higher education. Conversations and understandings shared back and forth (across the sectors) are what make the words actually work.”

—**Sue Lane**
Senior director of alignment and engagement
Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

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This series of briefs was written by Paolo DeMaria, Anand Vaishnav and Katie Cristol of Education First and Sharmila Basu Mann of the State Higher Education Executive Officers. They are made possible by Core to College, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Adopting New College- and Career-Ready Assessments

I. Why Are New College- and Career-Ready Assessments Necessary?

Why should K–12 and higher education systems be aligned regarding new assessments?

Since 2010, the vast majority of states—motivated by the desire to ensure that students are prepared for college and career by the time they complete high school—have adopted new academic content standards in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics. These new college- and career-ready standards mean little without a yardstick to determine how students are faring. Providing that yardstick is the role, in part, of assessment systems that exist in every state.

Traditionally, colleges and universities paid scant attention to state K–12 assessment results for good reason: The results did not provide a reliable indicator of college readiness and could not be used to determine placement in credit-bearing coursework. Even when assessments were a condition for high school graduation, states often set proficiency cut scores at or below 10th-grade levels, and the results had little or no bearing on postsecondary placement or admission decisions.¹ As a result, colleges and universities continued to use a variety of basic skills or placement tests, which informed their placement decisions. In many states there is wide variability among institutions about what scores constitute college ready. Not only were K–12 assessment results highly variable and unusable, colleges and universities sent inconsistent signals to students and K–12 educators about what it meant to be prepared for college.

Across the country, the movement by dozens of states toward college- and career-ready standards and aligned assessments is upending this long-standing pattern. States are betting that the alignment between the new standards and new assessments—and the quality of the assessments themselves—will provide the opportunity for K–12 and higher education systems to approach the task of ensuring college and career readiness jointly. The sectors are working together as never before with assessment developers on the quality of test items that authenticate college and career readiness and on determining the performance levels (or “cut scores”) needed for placement into credit-bearing, first-year courses without remediation.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF AN ALIGNMENT AGENDA?

This is the third in a series of briefs that provide an introduction to important areas for K–12/higher education collaboration and alignment. Each brief includes basic information, practical advice, vignettes based on real state experiences and a list of resources for additional information. The other briefs are:

- BRIEF 1: Achieving the Benefits of K–12/Higher Education Alignment.
- BRIEF 2: Defining College and Career Readiness.
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- BRIEF 5: Aligning Gateway College Courses.
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K–12/higher education alignment is essential to state and institutional efforts to improve both college and career readiness and postsecondary completion. This series of briefs, exploring a host of alignment issues, is intended for K–12 and higher education policymakers, administrators, practitioners and advocates. The briefs draw on the experience of leading states working on alignment between these two sectors primarily through the national networks of [Core to College](#) and the [College and Career Readiness Partnership](#).

What is the K–12 assessment landscape?

It is difficult to overstate how much the ground has shifted for K–12 and higher education regarding state assessments—and how much it keeps moving. As recently as 2009, all states developed or at least adopted their own approaches to K–12 testing, generally relying on one of the many private research firms and publishers serving these markets. But changes came rapidly and are continuing. By 2011, 45 states and the District of Columbia had agreed to participate in one of the two consortia of states developing new, higher quality assessments. However, political considerations prompted many states to rethink their decisions. By 2015, the pendulum swung back as some states began pulling out of the consortia and returned to developing their own individual assessments. The assessment marketplace remains in flux as states weigh whether to stay in one of the two consortia or take a different path:

State assessment consortia: In 2010, two national consortia of states—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced)—received federal funding to develop high-quality assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in ELA/literacy and mathematics. The number of states in each consortium giving the test during 2014–15 has fallen (from 26 to 11 states in PARCC and from 21 to 18 states in Smarter Balanced) as elected officials in some states heed constituents' calls for locally developed tests. Some states, such as Louisiana, are administering PARCC exams in elementary and middle grades only, while others, like North Carolina, maintain their membership in Smarter Balanced but are abstaining from administering the exams while state leaders explore other opportunities.

College admissions tests: Research by the two dominant college admissions testing organizations, ACT and College Board (creator of the SAT), has long documented the large gap between typical high school preparation and what students actually need to know and be able to do to be ready for college-level coursework. Accordingly, both companies are making changes to their tests in the coming years that some commentators say will make them more in step with college-ready standards. (The SAT, for instance, will ask students to back up their answers with evidence and solve multistep word problems, mirroring some of the CCSS' instructional shifts.²) Both testing organizations have various products for lower grades, although not to the extent of the two consortia assessment systems. ACT also partnered with Pearson to create ACT Aspire, a test for grades 3–8 and high school that is designed to assess the CCSS and is meant as

an alternative to the PARCC and Smarter Balanced tests.³ (It is separate from ACT's college-entrance exam.) As of early 2015, five states administered the ACT college-entrance exam as their high school assessment, and one state planned on using ACT Aspire in high school, although how universities in those states will use the results for placement will vary.⁴

State-developed assessments: As of March 2015, 19 states were part of neither consortium, opting to design their own tests. These states have to ensure alignment to their own standards and engage their higher education institutions in validating that assessments appropriately gauge college readiness. Texas, for example, initiated development of its own college readiness standards and assessments several years before the CCSS. Kentucky uses state-created tests at the lower grades and the ACT college-entrance exam in high school. Another four states retained their consortium memberships but opted to design their own tests for the 2014–15 school year.⁵



Comparison of PARCC, Smarter Balanced and ACT Aspire

	PARCC	Smarter Balanced	ACT Aspire
Subjects tested	English language arts (ELA)/ literacy, including writing, and math	ELA/literacy, including writing, and math	English, reading, writing, math and science
Number of member/ participating states	11 participating states and D.C. administering PARCC in 2014–15 New York is a governing PARCC state but is not administering PARCC in 2014–15.	18 participating states administering Smarter Balanced in 2014–15 Iowa, North Carolina and Wyoming are affiliate states but are not administering Smarter Balanced in 2014–15.	2 states administering ACT Aspire
Summative assessments	Each grade 3–11	Each grade 3–8 and 11	Each grade 3–8 and 9 or 10 (“early high school”); does not include the ACT college admissions test
Optional, nonsummative assessments	Grades K–2 formative Grades 3–11 speaking and listening, diagnostic and mid-year assessments	Grades 3–12 interim assessments, and formative assessment resources for teacher use	Grades 3–12 classroom-based (five-item tests) and periodic (interim) assessments
Use of performance tasks	Summative performance-based ELA/literacy and math assessments in each grade 3–11	Performance tasks included in summative and interim ELA/ literacy and math assessments in each grade 3–8 and 11	Includes constructed-response items and brief writing exercises but no extended performance tasks

As the assessment landscape shifts, states have seized the opportunity to create collaborative structures and networks to encourage greater K–12 and higher education engagement in the alignment and use of these new tests. At the same time, the two assessment consortia have involved higher education extensively in item development and review panels; standard-setting and achievement-level decisions; and the development of libraries of assessment items, performance tasks, and instructional and professional development resources for teachers. In a growing number of states, these new, more collaborative structures and practices are an essential step toward higher education institutions agreeing to use or incorporate high school assessment results into placement policies and practices at their campuses (already taking place at 50 institutions across PARCC states and another 201 across Smarter Balanced states).

Two big challenges lie ahead. First, as assessment results in Kentucky, New York and Tennessee already have demonstrated, higher standards and more rigorous assessments mean that greater proportions of 11th graders will be found not yet college ready. States have warned teachers and families to expect such results given the higher bar students face, particularly during the initial years of implementation and use. Many states, including Delaware and Maryland, have created “hold harmless” provisions or delayed the point at which assessments can be used for student or school accountability and educator evaluations.

A second big challenge is that the new standards and assessments will take time to validate in a real-world environment. Although the two consortia started developing their assessments in 2010 and underwent national field tests in spring 2014, the assessment results cannot be validated to confirm that high-scoring students are succeeding in credit-bearing courses for several years. As the research firm WestEd (evaluator of the Core to College network) noted, such validation studies may slow down the use of results for placement.⁶ Still, that has not deterred hundreds of institutions from modifying placement policies to accommodate the new assessments and working on data-sharing agreements with K–12 systems while leaving the door open to changes pending validation results.

II. Practical Advice on Using the New Assessments To Support K–12/Higher Education Alignment

A number of states have engaged in efforts to achieve greater higher education involvement in the development of new assessments and greater alignment around how the assessments are used. The following advice, based on the experiences of some of these leading states, can inform and support those seeking to promote such efforts in their own states.

1. Use assessment results for planning the 12th-grade year.

The responsibility of ensuring college and career readiness no longer can rest with K–12 systems alone. In the past, states and districts set one expectation of college and career readiness for students through high school graduation requirements, course planning and course content. Meanwhile, higher education institutions set different expectations, as defined by entry-level course content and placement exams.

The gap between expectations of the two systems is stark: More than 50 percent of high school graduates who enter two-year colleges and 20 percent of graduates who enter four-year institutions still need remedial classes in core subjects to prepare for college-level work.⁷ With common standards and assessments, states now have the opportunity to be transparent with educators, students and families about not only what it takes to enter college but also what students must do to place into and succeed in credit-bearing college courses.

Students taking the new assessments will learn their college readiness status in 11th grade. Based on their results, they may need extra support to ensure a productive 12th-grade year. K–12 teachers and higher education faculty can collaborate on planning 12th-grade course-taking maps for 11th graders who are not college or career ready (according to the assessments and other data) to help them prepare for first-year college courses. And higher education faculty and K–12 teachers can collaborate on designing 12th-grade courses that meet college readiness expectations, as is occurring in seven Smarter Balanced states (California, Delaware, Hawaii, Nevada, South Dakota, Washington and West

Virginia).⁸ This effort is similar to what California has done for years through its Early Assessment Program as part of the California State University System. Indeed, some states and assessment developers, including the two consortia and ACT Aspire, aim to have their score reports provide information about whether students are moving toward college readiness well before 11th grade. (Read more about college readiness courses in **Brief 4** of this series.)

On the flip side, for a student who exceeds college readiness by the end of 11th grade, higher education institutions can offer dual enrollment or other opportunities to accelerate learning, such as taking a college class for credit in the 12th-grade year. All 50 states have dual enrollment policies, though they vary in scope, cost to the student and program quality.⁹

With common standards and assessments, states now have the opportunity to be transparent with educators, students and families about not only what it takes to enter college but also what students must do to place into and succeed in credit-bearing college courses.

2. Use assessment results for postsecondary course placement.

The most significant use of assessment results by higher education is to determine if students need remediation and to place students in the correct course commensurate with their abilities. Given the importance of this function, one would think that current placement tests must be highly reliable and valid. Research shows, in fact, that the most commonly used placement assessments are not particularly effective. In one study, researchers found that one commonly used assessment leads to significant overplacement and underplacement mistakes.¹⁰

But change is hard. Higher education institutions can be reluctant to let go of current, but known, practices in favor of lesser known alternatives. Fortunately, a number of states, including California, Hawaii, Illinois, Oregon and Washington, have taken on the challenge of incorporating the new and more rigorous high school assessments into placement policies. Such policies signal preliminarily that the new assessments are at least as good as if not better than current approaches. The policies also demonstrate the value that higher education places on the assessment results and send a consistent statewide message to students and parents about what is required to be placed into college courses.

Key to modifying placement policy is the involvement of higher education stakeholders at the front end. Working groups or committees of higher education faculty, registrars, administrators, state assessment leaders and K–12 representatives can become deeply acquainted with the new assessments and understand their value in gauging readiness. They can work out the many technical details for exactly how the assessments will be incorporated into placement policies. When Illinois community college presidents agreed to use PARCC scores to determine course placement at their institutions, they worked with the Illinois State Board of Education as well as the Illinois Community College Chief Academic Officers, Illinois Council of Community College Chief Student Services Officers and the Board of the Illinois Mathematics Association of Community Colleges.¹¹

Students, and the counselors who advise them, should not have to sort through a myriad of different requirements from one institution to the next to understand what is required to enter college remediation free.

States also are considering the merits of establishing consistent statewide "remediation-free" placement policies. Students, and the counselors who advise them, should not have to sort through a myriad of different requirements from one institution to the next to understand what is required to enter college remediation free. States like Colorado and Ohio already have policies that apply to all public higher education institutions. Consistent policies about what constitutes "remediation free" do not affect individual schools' unique admissions policies. Statewide placement policies help to reinforce a state's college and career readiness definition and provide a consistent signal to students about what they must achieve.

Smarter Balanced set its cut score for college readiness in 2014, and PARCC will follow suit in 2015, likely enabling more institutions in PARCC states to adopt aligned placement policies. The new assessments, however, are not meant to provide fine-grained information about course suitability for incoming freshmen. Institutions may therefore choose to use the assessment results as a preliminary "cut": Those scoring above college ready will be placed in credit-bearing courses but may be required to take further placement tests to determine the level of course in which they will be placed (e.g., college algebra or advanced first-year calculus).

A bigger question yet to be answered is how, for example, a PARCC state with a PARCC-aligned placement policy will use an out-of-state student's Smarter Balanced score for placement. This is known as "comparability": Will a college-ready score of "5" on the PARCC exam, with five levels, mean the same thing as a college-ready score of "4" on the Smarter Balanced test, which has four levels? States and the consortia have been discussing this issue for a few years, but no official agreement has emerged.

3. Jointly communicate to inform expectations for assessment outcomes.

New assessments generate a lot of anxiety when they are introduced. They often generate even more anxiety when the first scores are released. As reported in research by Achieve (a nonprofit that advocates for higher standards and aligned assessments), many states' tests provide misleading representations about whether students are proficient.¹² The new assessments will be more accurate and will show that more students are not well prepared. But as new academic standards continue to be implemented and the education system becomes more familiar with the new assessments, scores will go up. K–12 and higher education can collaborate to develop and implement a communications plan for the general public, policymakers and key stakeholders that helps to establish realistic expectations about what test scores are likely to show—and what they mean. Prior to administering new assessments, Kentucky communicated an estimate that proficiency rates would drop by 36 percentage points.¹³ The state was able to claim success when actual scores showed a drop of only 30 points. By communicating early and deliberately, and emphasizing that staying the course will ultimately lead to more students reaching a truly proficient level, Kentucky was able to minimize the anxiety over the first reported results of the state's new assessments.

4. Develop appropriate and secure cross-sector data-sharing agreements.

States have come a long way in the last decade with data sharing across K–12, higher education and workforce development agencies. In many states, however, rules and regulations continue to make viewing K–12 student data, such as assessment results, difficult for higher education institutions, even when those results have direct bearing on

By linking student progress in college courses with state assessment scores, states and institutions will know whether those exams predicted student readiness accurately.

postsecondary decision-making. For effective data sharing across the sectors, K–12 and higher education institutions should negotiate a transparent process by which higher education institutions can see their own incoming students' state assessment results and 12th-grade course-taking information while following federal rules and all relevant privacy restrictions. Postsecondary institutions would then be able to use assessment results as part of their placement decisions, streamlining the process for students. Such broad sharing is possible through organizations that house and analyze the data, such as the Hawaii P–20 Partnerships for Education, the state's P–20 council.

Higher education institutions, although not necessarily community colleges, already have access to vast amounts of data on their incoming students—transcripts, college-entrance exam scores and Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate results, among other sources—to help determine course placement. State assessment results that are part of an aligned system of standards and assessments should be no different. In addition, access to a state college readiness exam score within a student's college profile will be essential for conducting validity research for assessment results. By linking student progress in college courses with state assessment scores, states and institutions will know whether those exams predicted student readiness accurately.

5. Participate in cross-sector validity research.

Forthcoming research by the two national assessment consortia will be more general than what states, with their own data, can produce. This space is ripe with opportunity for additional research that could guide more student-specific intervention strategies. Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences announced grants of up to \$5 million for states and partners (colleges or research firms) to study the effect of college- and career-ready standards and assessments.

Higher education and K–12 systems can create agreements to set up in-state validation studies (perhaps led by higher education research centers) to investigate the many questions that the use of new assessments brings to mind. The most obvious one is whether students' high school assessment scores truly predict college readiness. Other questions include: What kinds of course combinations in 12th grade work best to increase college readiness? Are high school students who score at a college-ready level and go into dual enrollment succeeding in their postsecondary courses? In which postsecondary courses are college-ready students most successful? Where are they continuing to struggle?

III. Actions in States: Washington State

Bringing higher education to the assessment table

Washington state is an unlikely candidate for illustrating higher education engagement and alignment with K–12 on preparation for new assessments. Public higher education in Washington is decentralized, with a gubernatorially appointed board for the state's community and technical colleges, a P–20 coordinating agency called the Washington Student Achievement Council, and six four-year institutions run by their own boards. The state's Transition Math Project, college readiness math test and system placement reciprocity agreement gave leaders a foundation from which to coordinate, according to Bill Moore, who serves as the Core to College alignment director for the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges. But it was relatively new to have an agreement among all colleges to use a single common assessment, Smarter Balanced, to inform placement.

Part of Moore's charge was to secure agreement from two- and four-year colleges and universities to use students' results on their 11th-grade Smarter Balanced tests to inform their placement in credit-bearing, first-year courses. He began by forming a steering committee of leaders from key statewide K–12 and higher education organizations to introduce the idea and gather support at the state policy level. Next, a 50-member faculty steering committee (25 from mathematics and 25 from ELA, with additional K–12 experts on the CCSS) came together to do a "deep dive" into the standards and the Smarter Balanced assessment to build the case from an academic perspective. Finally, a smaller, 20-person group of higher education and state policy stakeholders helped draft a placement agreement.

All three groups not only helped spread the word about the standards and Smarter Balanced in their own organizations and campuses, but they also helped Moore identify and avoid land mines where support lagged. When Moore visited campuses and spoke with faculty, he referred to the work of the three committees—particularly the 50-person faculty committee—to reassure skeptics that faculty and higher education policymakers around the state were assisting with the effort.

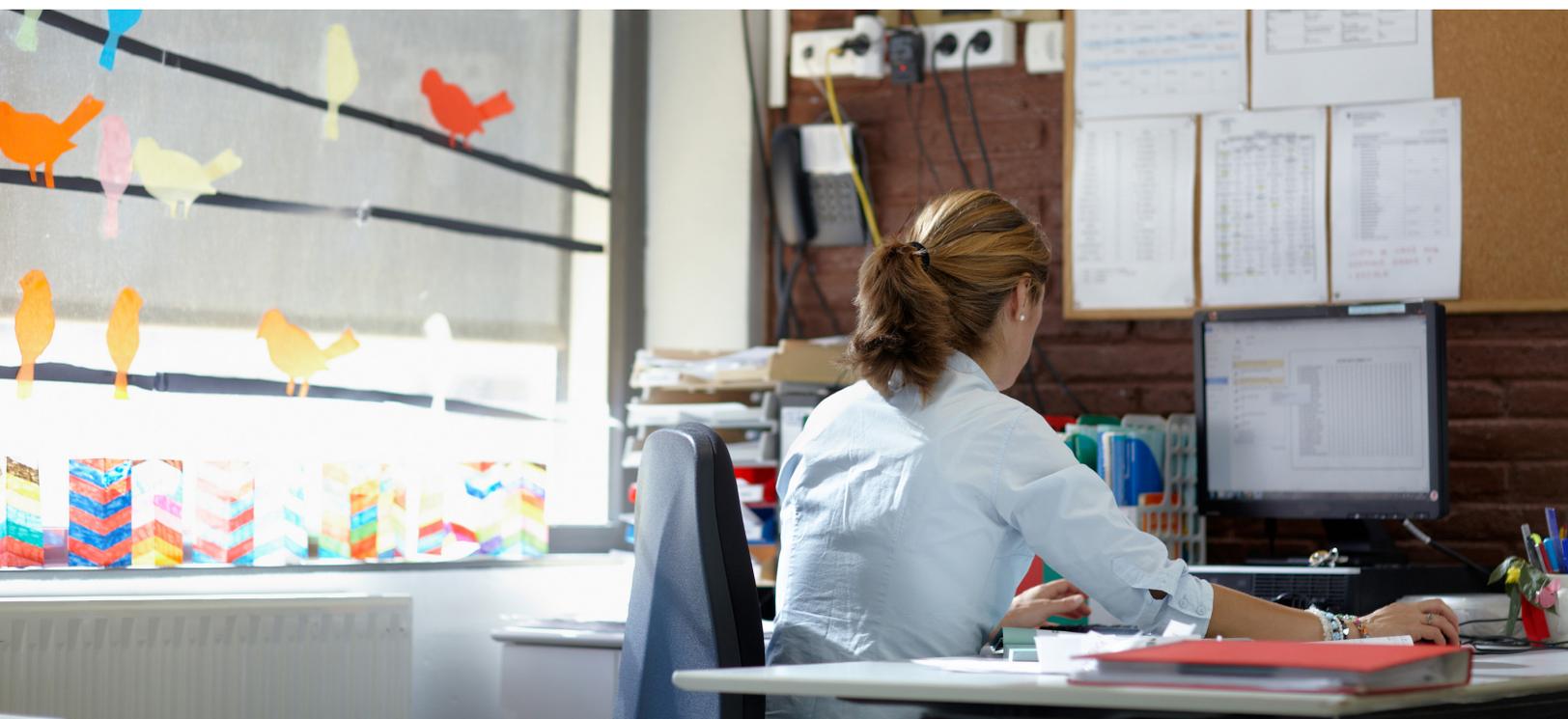
In May 2014, the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges approved the use of assessment scores to inform placement into credit-bearing, first-year courses in their institutions, beginning with the class of 2016. (The policy will be reconsidered in 2018 on the basis of student performance data.) In October, the state's four-year institutions followed suit, including all but one of the private institutions. Washington is one of seven states in the Smarter Balanced consortium to have such placement policies (the others are California, Delaware, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon and South Dakota). Moore sees the adoption of the placement agreement in Washington as a first step to increasing alignment between K–12 and higher education. Further steps may include curriculum alignment between high school and college-level courses and/or improving developmental education.

What Washington learned: takeaways to date

Moore said he tried to **"overcommunicate" by tailoring messages to different campuses and understanding the different needs and cultures** of two- and four-year institutions regarding placement. One key difference that affected his approach was that remediation is less of an issue at four-year colleges than at two-year colleges. In addition, Moore found that even though he felt he had spread the word about the placement policy, some campuses still were surprised at having to sign off on a statement committing them to the work.

Some higher education faculty in Washington also worried that tying college course placement to an 11th-grade assessment score would weaken what universities offered first-year students. But having a **committee composed entirely of faculty and K–12 experts in the CCSS** who had studied the standards and assessments deeply helped counter opposition. This committee became the voice of faculty and K–12 teachers about the value of the standards and assessments.

Leveraging existing relationships also helped build support. Previous projects in transition mathematics courses, for example, or statewide gatherings of district K–12 superintendents and community college presidents, served as opportunities for leaders who had worked together on other issues to come together once again to discuss assessment and placement.



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Developing and Using College Readiness Courses

I. What Are College Readiness Courses?

What purpose do college readiness courses serve in high school?

Imagine if a major car manufacturer had to significantly retool many of the auto parts provided by its suppliers before they could be used in the production of vehicles, then passed that cost on to the consumer. If consumers found out what was happening, they would likely think, "What a waste!" And they would think twice about supporting that company with their purchasing dollars.

Unfortunately, a similar phenomenon happens all the time in education. According to Complete College America, 50 percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities are unprepared to engage in college-level work in reading, writing and mathematics.¹ These students waste valuable time (and money) on remedial classes before they can enroll in credit-bearing courses.

Tracked into semesters or years of remedial coursework, students who assumed that their high school diploma and college admission attested to their readiness become disheartened and never make it to credit-bearing courses. Fewer than one in 10 students who start in remedial courses graduate from a community college within three years, and slightly more than one-third complete bachelor's degrees in six years.² These statistics are even worse for minority and low-income students. By contrast, when a student reaches college readiness by the end of high school, he/she enters college with a significantly greater chance of ultimately completing a credential or degree program.

Just as automobile manufacturers have figured out how to work closely with suppliers so that they produce auto parts to exacting specifications, many state K-12 and higher education systems are jointly designing and implementing readiness courses. Readiness courses are courses that are delivered in high school and designed specifically to help students who are not yet college ready reach readiness before they start college. Getting more students ready before their first day on campus can have a life-changing impact on collegiate success and completion—and students' long-term prospects.

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K-12/higher education alignment is essential to state and institutional efforts to improve both college and career readiness and postsecondary completion. This series of briefs, exploring a host of alignment issues, is intended for K-12 and higher education policymakers, administrators, practitioners and advocates. The briefs draw on the experience of leading states working on alignment between these two sectors primarily through the national networks of [Core to College](#) and the [College and Career Readiness Partnership](#).



The promise of authentic implementation of college- and career-ready standards, such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), is that many more students will move from kindergarten through 12th grade on a trajectory that ensures college readiness by high school graduation. But it will take time to reach this goal, and fulfilling it requires major efforts by both K–12 and higher education stakeholders. In the meantime, designing and implementing effective readiness courses will be an important strategy for increasing the number of students who enter college ready to do college-level work.

What is higher education's role in the work?

Higher education institutions are taking a more active and collaborative role with their K–12 colleagues in high school strategies supporting readiness. Postsecondary leaders recognize that helping students achieve college readiness prior to high school graduation ultimately increases college retention and completion rates. Postsecondary involvement often begins with collaborating on defining readiness and then contributing to the development of readiness assessments. The two national consortia supporting assessments aligned with the CCSS have worked with higher education faculty and administrators to ensure that the tests are rigorous and that scores are set to appropriately reflect college readiness.

Even deeper involvement is surfacing across the country as higher education institutions are working hand in hand with K–12 teachers on designing and delivering readiness courses in high school for students who have not yet tested as college ready. Higher education can bring to the partnership the expertise of faculty who teach first-year courses to help ensure that readiness course content is aligned to what students will need to succeed. Higher education can also endorse the courses and promote their use in high schools. This collaboration can extend to jointly implementing dual enrollment programs and expanding Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) offerings. Higher education can support the necessary professional development related to the delivery of the courses, monitor the outcomes of the courses, and participate in the refinement of courses based on pilots and experience. Through the process of designing and delivering these courses, high school teachers better understand what is necessary for students to reach readiness, and college faculty emerge more familiar with the realities of the high school experience. Both are better equipped to ensure the successful transition of students into and through college gateway courses.

COLLEGE READINESS COURSES: MULTIPLE APPROACHES

Different types of college readiness courses (sometimes called transition or bridge courses) meet differing needs:

- **COLLEGE READINESS/TRANSITION**—courses offered in high school, usually during the senior year, to help students who have not already met a readiness standard achieve readiness prior to high school graduation.
- **ADVANCED PLACEMENT/INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE**—courses/programs offered in high school allowing students to explore college-level content. The courses/programs are accompanied by recognized assessments. At certain score levels, student can often qualify for college credit.
- **DUAL/CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT**—courses offered through collaboration between high schools and colleges for college credit. These courses give high school students a taste of the rigors of college coursework.
- **REMEDIAL/DEVELOPMENTAL**—courses generally offered in college and sometimes in high school, usually for no college credit, providing underprepared students a pathway to credit-bearing courses.

II. Practical Advice for Developing and Implementing a Readiness Course Strategy

A number of states have made progress in developing and implementing a readiness course strategy. Colorado has focused on numerous policies that attack the readiness issue in multiple ways, including by promoting dual enrollment, expanding AP and IB offerings, designing and developing readiness courses, and redefining developmental education. The following advice, based on the experiences of leading states, can inform and support the efforts of states seeking to establish their own readiness course strategies.

1. Create a team, comprised of high school teachers who teach upper-level courses and higher education faculty who teach entry-level gateway courses, to lead the selection or design of college readiness courses to be used in high school. Engage teachers and faculty broadly during the process.

Teacher and faculty ownership of the courses is critical to their success, and efforts to create these courses must ensure that educators are involved at all stages. Teachers and faculty members on a team dedicated to the development and implementation of the courses not only support the work but also become powerful advocates for it among their colleagues. The team should be willing to explore existing readiness courses (see examples in Section III on page 4) as well as the option of designing something new.

2. Clearly identify the students who will be able to benefit most from each type of course.

As described in the sidebar on page 2, different varieties of college readiness courses meet different needs. States should identify those students who will benefit the most from each type and, perhaps in some cases, limit participation to targeted groups of students. For example, some states, like Tennessee, limit participation in readiness courses to students who are within a certain number of points of readiness as measured by a specific exam. Some states, like Colorado and Ohio, limit participation in dual enrollment based on a student's readiness to do college-level work. In this way, states hope to ensure both that students who are already at a high level of college readiness do not waste their 12th-grade year and that students who are behind receive the more intensive intervention they need rather than being frustrated in a class that they are not able to tackle.

3. Ensure that courses count toward high school course-taking requirements. Make students (and parents) aware that courses are rigorous and designed to lead to college readiness.

One way to ensure the success of readiness courses is to specify that they count toward meeting high school course-taking requirements. If schools offer a readiness course as an elective that does not qualify as meeting a graduation requirement, students are unlikely to take it seriously. This problem is worse for targeted students, such as those assessed below readiness levels at 11th grade. These students need every motivation to enroll and succeed in the transition course, including assurance that the course fulfills their senior-year requirement. Making such a course mandatory for the students who need it also may be useful. In addition, to manage student expectations, the course should be billed as rigorous preparation for college-level work. If students think that the course is remedial in nature, they may enroll thinking that it will be easy and then have difficulty succeeding.



4. Align courses to the state's college and career readiness standards. Be willing to ensure that successful course completion will result in a student entering college remediation free in the specific subject.

If a state has adopted college and career readiness standards (either the CCSS or other state-specific readiness standards), then the course materials should align to the standards that are most relevant to the course. The value of a readiness course, if properly aligned to college readiness standards, lies in its ability to serve as an indicator that the student is ready for college-level work. Ideally, college placement policies in an aligned system should explicitly specify that those who successfully complete a readiness course are not required to take remedial courses or even be retested in that content area. For example, students who score "conditionally ready" on the California State University (CSU) Early Assessment Program (EAP) can be fully ready by taking and passing the appropriate readiness course in their senior year.

The value of a readiness course, if properly aligned to college readiness standards, lies in its ability to serve as an indicator that the student is ready for college-level work.

5. Design and deliver quality professional development for teachers who deliver the readiness courses.

Just as high schools and postsecondary systems need to design and implement readiness courses carefully, they also need to ensure that those who teach them receive appropriate professional development. Here, too, is another opportunity for cross-sector engagement: K–12 and higher education faculty can work together to develop and deliver high-quality teacher professional development specifically aligned to the selected or created readiness courses. Robust professional development is a key component of the implementation of readiness courses, including those developed by CSU and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

III. Actions in States: California, Tennessee and Southern Regional Education Board

California State University Early Assessment Program

In the early 2000s, California passed legislation that sought ways for higher education institutions to take advantage of the large investment that the state was making in K–12 testing. In response, the CSU system developed its EAP by taking the basic California high school assessment and adding selected questions in English and mathematics aimed at determining college readiness. These additions allowed the assessment to meet criteria established by CSU faculty, making the test a more reliable measure of college readiness.

Additionally, the EAP project engaged faculty in developing an expository reading and writing course for delivery in high school, intended to improve students' English knowledge and skills directly related to success in college. The course is designed to meet the needs of students who test as "conditionally ready" on the EAP assessment, with an emphasis on nonfiction texts and a focus on expository, analytical and argumentative reading and writing. Early research shows that the course increases student skills in reading comprehension, expository writing and independent thinking; students taking the course are also scoring higher on the CSU English placement test.

CSU recognized that the success of the course depended on the skills of the teachers delivering the content. Accordingly, CSU faculty developed the necessary teacher professional development program and materials, which are now offered in collaboration with the county offices of education. More than 600 high schools in California are currently using the course; more than 9,500 teachers were trained in course delivery between 2004 and 2013.

Tennessee: Bridge Math and SAILS

In Tennessee, all students take the ACT in their junior year. However, multiple years of test data showed that, as a whole, Tennessee students systematically performed substantially below the national average in meeting the ACT definition of college readiness. In response, Tennessee adopted legislation requiring four years of math as a high school graduation requirement and designated the Bridge Math course to meet the criteria for the fourth-year course. The Bridge Math course was adopted in 2010 and targets 12th-grade students who score 19 or below on the ACT.

Beginning in 2011, the state integrated the content of the Bridge Math course with the MyMathLab online education software program.³ This integration parallels the state's use of MyMathLab in remedial education at community colleges. The integrated, online approach is known as SAILS (Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support) and was originally developed by Chattanooga State Community College in collaboration with Red Bank High School in 2010. State policy specifies that students who successfully complete the five competencies of the integrated course are considered college ready. High school students who complete the SAILS course are eligible to take dual enrollment courses. College students who complete it earn college credit for their work. The SAILS program is now available to high schools statewide. During the 2014–15 academic year, it is expected to serve more than 13,000 students.

Southern Regional Education Board readiness courses

The SREB readiness courses are designed to assist students in the middle range of readiness—those 11th graders who are neither several grades behind nor prepared for postsecondary studies. In 2011, SREB began working with five states to develop two courses to address the readiness gap: Math Ready and Literacy Ready. To develop the courses, SREB established teams of K–12 teachers, higher education faculty, state agency personnel and national experts. The teams worked to draft the course units, which were circulated to 16 states and additional experts for review and comment. After multiple rounds of review, pilot testing and revisions, the teams finalized and SREB published the courses in October 2013. Additional field testing in more than 150 high schools was conducted in 2014–15.

SREB is working with Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina and West Virginia to implement the courses statewide in 2015–16. Other states, including Texas and Washington, have also used the courses, in some cases creating their own versions of Math Ready and Literacy Ready. SREB offers teacher training for schools interested in implementing these courses through the Readiness Courses Institute each summer. The courses have been adopted by high schools throughout the nation and are available as a free download from the SREB website (www.SREB.org/Ready) or on iTunes U.



Endnotes

1. Complete College America. (April 2012). Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere. www.completecollege.org/docs/CCA-Remediation-final.pdf.
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Aligning Gateway College Courses

I. What Are Gateway Courses that Build on College-Ready Standards?

Why consider redesigning gateway courses?

The promise of new college- and career-ready standards is that the students who master them are better prepared to succeed in postsecondary education or work. These students can go deeper with mathematical concepts in college algebra, statistics, and other math and science courses, and they have the reading and writing skills to engage with complex texts in English composition and humanities courses. The implication for postsecondary faculty is exciting: Students can start on day one equipped with the knowledge and skills to succeed with college-level content.

Helping faculty visualize how teaching and learning in their "gateway" (i.e., entry-level) college courses could change with the arrival of better prepared students can build support for K-12 college- and career-ready standards. It also can help faculty see links between new K-12 standards and state and institutional efforts to improve degree and credential completion at the postsecondary level.

At the same time, redesigned college gateway courses can smooth a student's transition from K-12 to higher education without "watering down" college-level coursework. Although gateway courses cannot align with college- and career-ready standards (because the standards are for grades K-12), the lessons and assignments in these courses can build on what students educated under the standards know and can do. In many cases, this rethinking can improve the quality of postsecondary classes. For example, a Tennessee faculty team recently redesigned gateway math courses to reflect mastery of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); the team writes that "in the age of Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, students expect mathematics courses to be focused on problem-solving, modeling of authentic contexts, and conceptual understanding, yet many of our College Algebra topics are taught without these considerations."¹ For these math faculty, better integrating such skills into college gateway courses offers an opportunity to improve both students' K-12 to higher education transitions and the quality of the math courses they teach.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF AN ALIGNMENT AGENDA?

This is the fifth in a series of briefs that provide an introduction to important areas for K-12/higher education collaboration and alignment. Each brief includes basic information, practical advice, vignettes based on real state experiences and a list of resources for additional information. The other briefs are:

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K-12/higher education alignment is essential to state and institutional efforts to improve both college and career readiness and postsecondary completion. This series of briefs, exploring a host of alignment issues, is intended for K-12 and higher education policymakers, administrators, practitioners and advocates. The briefs draw on the experience of leading states working on alignment between these two sectors primarily through the national networks of [Core to College](#) and the [College and Career Readiness Partnership](#).



WHAT IS A GATEWAY COURSE?

This brief uses the definition of a gateway course established in a [joint statement by leading college completion advocacy organizations](#): “the first college-level or foundation courses for a program of study. Gateway courses are for college credit and apply to the requirements of a degree.”

Gateway courses are distinct from developmental (also called remedial) courses, which are not credit bearing and are designed to prepare students for successful completion of gateway courses.

To a general audience, gateway courses are more recognizable by their course names—frequently titles like English Composition or College Algebra—or by informal descriptions like freshman English.

Reflecting the flexibility and campus autonomy of most states’ higher education systems, gateway courses are often determined locally and may therefore not be universal across institutions or campuses.

What is the current landscape of gateway course redesign?

Research shows that gateway course completion is a critical milestone for students’ postsecondary progress toward degrees. A set of reforms known collectively as the “completion agenda”—aimed at increasing graduation rates and degree attainment—has brought gateway courses into greater focus. In January 2014, the White House introduced more than 100 new commitments from institutions and campuses to “expand college opportunity,” including 22 state commitments to improve gateway course success.²

Postsecondary educators often discuss gateway courses, the first credit-bearing courses in a program of postsecondary study, in relation to the noncredit-bearing developmental or remedial college courses that precede them. Fewer than a quarter of community college students, and only a third of four-year students, placed in remediation will ever go on to complete their gateway courses.³ Because remediation is such an obstacle to degree completion, many initiatives across the country seek to eliminate separate remedial courses and address students’ remedial needs in the context of the gateway course itself through the use of co-requisite models and other similar approaches. These approaches provide students the support they need to succeed and significantly improve student persistence.⁴

II. Practical Advice for Approaching Gateway Course Redesign

A number of states have made progress toward redesigning gateway courses. The following advice, based on the experiences of some of these leading states, can inform and support the efforts of states and institutions seeking to engage in gateway course redesign.

1. Understand the context for the work.

The process of how institutions of higher education create syllabi and course content for gateway courses is not a mystery. Disciplinary departments, chairs of English and mathematics, faculty members, and faculty associations are all involved in content development. Entire states or clusters of institutions likely already have in place articulation agreements that equate certain courses and ensure that a student who takes a course at one institution can get credit for it at another. These agreements allow alignment efforts to focus on key courses that can be identified as being offered on a widespread basis across multiple campuses. These are the courses, like Freshman English and College Algebra, that almost all students take early in their college careers. They are the courses that, if properly redesigned, can lead to greater success among the students that take them. Alignment initiatives should draw from the people and associations that typically engage in the process of course development.

2. Integrate multiple policy goals in the redesign work.

College- and career-ready standards are not the only change with consequences for gateway courses and the faculty who teach them. Examples of other policy and practice shifts and mandates that might influence gateway course redesign and faculty buy-in include:

- **Co-requisite remediation:** Allowing students who participate in remedial coursework to receive additional support concurrent to—rather than as a prerequisite for—their gateway coursework.
- **Alternate math pathways:** Rethinking mathematics prerequisites and requirements for degrees in different disciplines (e.g., replacing College Algebra with statistics/quantitative reasoning).
- **Competency-based adaptations:** Redesigning general education requirements broadly in the context of competency-based models.

States' or institutions' redesign processes, and resulting resources, should be both informed by and respectful of these other expectations—particularly those mandated by the state or system—for gateway course faculty.

3. Secure faculty leadership.

Faculty who teach gateway courses are the most likely to experience both the challenges of underprepared students and the pressure to improve gateway course outcomes in the interest of supporting increased college completion. Any gateway course redesign should ensure that these faculty lead and support the efforts. Institutions can identify faculty who support new college- and career-ready standards and who understand the benefits of higher expectations for K–12 students. Faculty in many states are already involved in alignment efforts, such as serving on committees to prepare for the new aligned assessments. These engaged faculty are prime candidates to lead gateway course redesign.

4. Create incentives for adopting redesigned syllabi and materials.

Academic freedom is a tradition at higher education institutions. In the context of gateway course redesign, it usually means that the state, system or institution cannot mandate a syllabus for postsecondary courses. In other words, redesigned gateway course materials are resources, not policy. Model syllabi, lessons and other materials need to be attractive and easy to implement for faculty to adopt at scale. A good course redesign plan will consider ways to create incentives or ease the path for faculty adoption, possibly by offering professional development sessions to accompany the materials or stipends for faculty willing to pilot redesigned syllabi and materials and share thoughts to improve them. As the first adopters begin to see and share their success with the new materials, they will become the most effective marketers.

Institutions can identify faculty who support new college- and career-ready standards and who understand the benefits of higher expectations for K–12 students.

5. Productively address faculty interest in the new standards.

In general, and certainly with regard to gateway course redesign, postsecondary faculty want to know what they can expect from graduates prepared under the CCSS or similarly rigorous college- and career-ready high school standards. This interest creates an opportunity for faculty to delve more deeply into the standards. States and institutions should be thoughtful about identifying the right opportunity to introduce faculty to the new standards. In some cases, K–12 (particularly secondary) teachers with expertise in college-ready standards may be natural collaborators; in other cases, faculty may be more receptive to other faculty—possibly from institutions outside their own—or to national experts, like the authors of the standards or other consultants.

6. Plan for the evolution of materials.

The relevance of redesigned gateway courses will grow over time as more students arrive on campuses having increased experience with and mastery of higher K–12 standards. Success, in terms of what faculty see from incoming students, will not appear right away; immediate implementation of gateway course materials that assume student mastery of college-ready standards may not work. It may be more appropriate to create feedback loops for faculty and departments to communicate about how the implementation of new syllabi and resources is going. Institutions can elicit faculty feedback on which lessons and texts generate good discussion and student work versus those that fail to support learning in their courses, as well as how these materials work with different student populations (including those receiving co-requisite remedial support, for example). Consider these tools living and evolving documents as new cohorts of students enter postsecondary classrooms.

III. Actions in States: Tennessee

Building new materials and buy-in: examining the process

For Tennessee, redesigning gateway courses represented an opportunity to build understanding and expertise about, as well as ownership of, the state's college and career readiness standards among key faculty stakeholders. The gateway course redesign effort resulted in a set of common resources for the state's nine public universities and 13 community colleges.



Beginning in spring 2013, Tennessee's Core to College project leader, based at the state's Higher Education Commission, convened teams of three mathematics and three English faculty from different campuses. Over a year, in a series of in-person meetings, these faculty learned about the state's English and mathematics standards from experts at Achieve (a nonprofit that advocates for higher standards and aligned assessments), considered the implications of the instructional shifts reflected by the standards for their gateway courses, and authored sample syllabi and model lessons for two courses common across Tennessee campuses: English 1010 (a composition course) and College Algebra.

After designing the materials, the faculty leads and the Core to College leader embarked on a multilayered engagement process across the state. They sought and received reviews and endorsements of the materials from internal evaluators across 10 different campuses, presented to the Tennessee Council of the Chairs of Mathematics, and coordinated "prepilots" at two major campuses. Faculty leads used feedback from all of these sources to adjust the content of the redesign materials. In spring and early summer 2014, the faculty leads began running professional development sessions on campuses throughout the state, walking their colleagues through these materials and explaining how they might be used in gateway courses affected by other state reforms (such as co-requisite remediation). In fall 2014, participants in the professional development sessions began a full pilot of the course redesign materials.

Seed money and project management from Core to College in Tennessee supported the development of the model syllabi and sample tasks (including stipends and meeting expenses for the faculty teams), as well as the initial professional development. In the long run, the state-level resource hub of [TNCore.org](https://www.tn.gov/core) will house model syllabi and tasks, and pilot faculty are expected to become advocates for the redesigned gateway courses.

What Tennessee learned: takeaways to date

Using experts (in this case, from Achieve) to deliver faculty workshops on the instructional shifts in the standards and aligned assessments helped the faculty writer teams gain a deeper understanding of what a college-ready student prepared under the new college-ready standards will know and be able to do. This understanding was critical to both faculty buy-in and their ability to redesign curricula. For example, math faculty members were pleasantly surprised by a sample problem from the PARCC assessment that highlighted expectations that college-ready students feel comfortable with messy, real-world data in response to mathematical inquiry.

At the same time, however, Core to College leaders learned to be careful about overemphasizing the influence that the standards themselves should have in college classrooms. Tennessee has been a leading state on K–12 implementation of college-ready standards, so it was easy to lapse into K–12 language and messaging about college readiness. However, facilitators and faculty leads quickly learned to **be thoughtful about communications**, finding that what works for a K–12 audience can rub a postsecondary audience the wrong way. For example, “13th-grade” branding, appealing to K–12 teachers, can offend postsecondary faculty. Similarly, the faculty redesign team behind the English 1010 model syllabus preferred to describe the course design as “aligned to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Framework for the Common Core”—NCTE is an association that includes college faculty—rather than simply “aligned to Tennessee’s college-ready standards.”

Finally, careful as the team has tried to be about communications, the course redesign materials have gotten **bogged down in other tensions around postsecondary reforms**. For example, Tennessee’s Board of Regents (which supervises state universities and community colleges) recently mandated that remediation be delivered in a co-requisite model, to the frustration of some faculty. The faculty rumor mill has, in a few cases, lumped the gateway course syllabi in with these mandated reforms. In this difficult situation, the faculty redesign team members again proved to be critical ambassadors for the project: They explained in peer-to-peer conversations (including those conducted in closed-door, faculty-only meetings) that the redesigned materials are an optional, not required, resource.



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1. Tennessee Core to College. (Draft 2014). *Course Profile, Core-Aligned College Algebra*.
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Redesigning Educator Preparation Programs

I. Why Redesign Educator Preparation?

Why do new college- and career-ready standards demand changes in teacher preparation?

Our society desires and expects professionals to keep up to date with the latest developments and emerging knowledge in their fields. We want our doctors to know the latest techniques and treatment protocols. We want our lawyers to be familiar with new laws and precedents. We want our auto mechanics to know how to handle the computers and new technology in our vehicles. We want them all to be able to accommodate changes that are almost constantly unfolding.

We want the same thing for teachers. As states implement college- and career-ready standards with the expectation that greater numbers of K-12 students will graduate ready to enter and succeed in postsecondary education or the workforce, they understand that teachers play an essential role. No one is more important—teachers are central to the work. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), along with many other state-based college- and career-ready standards initiatives, ask that current and future educators be ready to prepare K-12 students to a new, higher benchmark of academic success.

The essential role of teachers has focused a great deal of attention on the quality of teacher preparation programs. Are graduates of these programs ready to effectively teach students? Survey research suggests that most principals believe that teachers are not well prepared for what they will encounter in classrooms.¹ Interestingly, the same finding applies to preparation program graduates themselves. Policymakers and stakeholders have been asking for better information about the effectiveness of preparation programs. Early efforts by the federal government to require states to report on the quality of preparation programs focused on inputs. An inputs approach, however, did not fully reflect how graduates were actually performing with students. The federal government is now proposing a shift to a more outcomes-based approach recognizing that a teacher's performance in the classroom is the ultimate measure of a teacher preparation program. Separately, the National Center for Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is annually publishing results of a much-debated ranking system of teacher preparation programs.² While the rankings show few programs meet the highest standard of performance defined by NCTQ, they have stimulated significant conversations around program and policy redesign.

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DECIPHERING THE ALPHABET SOUP OF EDUCATOR PREPARATION INITIATIVES

Multiple complementary initiatives have arisen in the last five years that affect the delivery and structure of educator preparation. A few of the most significant are described below.

- **INTERSTATE TEACHER ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT CONSORTIUM**—a consortium of state education agencies and national educational organizations, organized by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), dedicated to the reform of the preparation, licensing and ongoing professional development of teachers.
- **COUNCIL FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF EDUCATOR PREPARATION (CAEP)**—the single accreditation body for educator preparation programs in the United States, formed by merging two prior bodies, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council. CAEP’s accreditation standards focus on clinical preparation of preservice teachers and outcomes of preparation programs.
- **NETWORK FOR TRANSFORMING EDUCATOR PREPARATION**—a seven-state initiative organized by CCSSO to implement the recommendations of its 2012 report with National Governors Association and the National Association of State Boards of Education, *Our Responsibility, Our Promise*, identifying needed changes in three key policy areas: licensure, program approval and data use.

At this time of greater scrutiny, many educator preparation programs are examining their current practices and making adjustments to better prepare educators to address the new standards and the pedagogical shifts taking place in classrooms. Entering teachers need to employ advanced teaching techniques to help all students meet college- and career-ready standards; understand and use technology to enhance learning; set achievement goals, design classroom assessments, and gather and interpret student data from many kinds of assessments to continuously inform teaching and reteaching and to personalize learning for each student; address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population; and take on building leadership roles, such as coaching and leading instructional improvement in collaboration with other teachers.

The question is not whether educator preparation programs should adapt but how and when they will. Two national organizations have developed new standards for educator preparation. The Council of Chief State School Officers’ (CCSSO) newly revised Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Model Core Teaching Standards and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation’s Accreditation Standards move beyond content and pedagogical knowledge and include expectations for clinical practice, partnerships with higher education, the performance of teachers in the classroom and measuring the impact program graduates have on K–12 student learning. Many states are beginning to align educator program requirements to these new standards, and increasing numbers of preparation programs are engaged in the process of redesign.

What is higher education’s role in the work?

Educator preparation has traditionally been the purview of higher education, and transforming teacher preparation is the clearest of the responsibilities of higher education in this era of K–12 education reform. A recent American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education study shows that more than 80 percent of all teacher preparation program completers in the United States came through higher education-based programs.³ Moving the needle on preparation programs at postsecondary institutions can make a significant difference to the quality of educators nationwide and can affect the learning of millions of students.

The higher education role is most clearly defined in developing the structure and content of the educator preparation programs themselves. In aligning to more rigorous college- and career-ready standards, programs should prepare educators not only to master a higher level of content but also to teach it effectively (pedagogy). Furthermore, programs need to embrace

the context in which teachers will practice their profession and help them master the use of technology, understand and use differentiated instructional strategies, understand and use assessment tools, and make use of data to improve teaching and learning.

Higher education also must foster collaboration with colleagues from the K–12 sector. K–12 educators have direct insight into the implementation of college- and career-ready standards in their classrooms, their own preparation and professional development needs, and the needs of their students. School principals deeply understand what skills and capacities are essential to classroom success. To successfully address the changing needs of educator preparation, working together across sectors is not an option; it is a necessity.

Finally, higher education can play a role in discussions about changes to state laws and requirements, such as those for licensure and program approval. Here, too, K–12 and higher education leaders have an excellent opportunity to work together to increase the effectiveness of the state’s educator preparation programs and related policies and structures.

II. Practical Advice for Redesigning and Aligning Educator Preparation

A number of states and institutions have redesigned their educator preparation programs to align to new college- and career-ready standards and the realities of the focus on helping all children succeed. The following advice comes from the experiences of some of these leading states and institutions and is presented here to support the efforts of states or institutions planning their own redesign initiatives.

1. Build public commitment to the redesign initiative from postsecondary leadership.

The success and sustainability of a redesign initiative depends on buy-in and support from institutional leadership. The support of presidents, provosts and deans can mean the difference between a well-intentioned but short-lived set of changes and a systemic redesign effort that the institution as a whole supports administratively and financially. State postsecondary leaders can generate high-level support through direct communications with institutional leadership about the critical role of educator preparation programs in statewide implementation of higher standards. Committed institutional leaders then carry the message to faculty, teachers, communities and other stakeholders about the importance of higher standards, improving college readiness outcomes and the role that well-prepared teachers play in helping students succeed.

2. Engage postsecondary faculty from both education and arts and sciences, and foster cross-college alignment.

In most postsecondary educator preparation programs, instruction in core content areas (math, science, history) is the purview of the college of arts and sciences, while the pedagogy, methods and clinical practice components are taught through the college of education. Collaborative partnerships across the colleges of education and of arts and sciences can lead to a common understanding of new expectations for teachers and how to meet them and ensure that educator

preparation programs emerge with a more integrated approach to preparing new teachers. Collaborating to deeply understand the new K–12 standards and assessments is a good first step. Kentucky facilitated this type of collaboration by creating a set of easily accessible online modules about the state's new standards for use by teacher preparation faculty.⁴

Institutional leadership can support this work by establishing collaborative governance structures, in which faculty and leadership from both departments work together to provide guidance to the institution's teacher education program, and an academic culture that supports and rewards such collaboration.

3. Engage K–12 teachers and leadership.

Current K–12 teachers and administrators can serve as invaluable partners to higher education in the redesign of educator preparation programs. As the employers of new graduates, the implementers of new state standards, and those held accountable for meeting new state and federal requirements, K–12 educators and leaders can provide great insight into the needed knowledge and skills of incoming teachers. Postsecondary leaders and faculty can build on existing partnerships with local K–12 schools to establish cross-sector working groups focused on program redesign. They can also collaborate to identify and implement more and better clinical experiences that expose candidates to real-world teaching earlier and more intensely.

4. Address content and pedagogy elements of new standards in program redesign, as well as new assessment approaches and evaluation frameworks.

New teachers should understand content in a framework that allows them to effectively teach that content to students. New college- and career-ready standards often require new emphases within content areas; for instance, the CCSS require students to be adept at close reading of complex text and the application of key mathematical practices. Using active learning principles, programs can incorporate opportunities for candidates to model these behaviors within their coursework, as well as during their student teaching.



Many states are developing and implementing educator evaluation systems that set clearer and higher expectations and are linked to statewide student assessments. These systems are motivated by the desire to make a clear connection between strong teaching practices and improving student outcomes. Future educators who become familiar with state K–12 assessments and evaluation systems have a better understanding of the expectations for teaching practice and the practical realities of being a successful teacher.

5. Ensure a strong clinical preparation component.

Possibly the most critical part of educator preparation is hands-on experience for candidates. New expectations for preparation programs, including emerging state and federal accountability structures and accreditation requirements, encourage or require more significant classroom experience prior to licensure. Student teaching in a real classroom setting, once relegated to the final year (or semester) of preparation, is frequently being infused throughout a much longer period in many preparation programs.

Postsecondary institutions need to work with K–12 colleagues to reassess strategies for placement and supervision of preservice students during their student teaching.

Postsecondary institutions need to work with K–12 colleagues to reassess strategies for placement and supervision of preservice students during their student teaching to ensure that preservice students gain the fullest benefits of practical experience. It is important that experiences take place in high-quality settings and that mentor teachers can guide candidates' growth and development. Preparation programs can use surveys of their graduates to determine which parts of clinical experiences helped them the most or were the weakest. Georgia has initiated regional collaboratives among preparation programs and K–12 districts with the purpose of creating stronger partnerships to support more and better clinical opportunities.

6. Provide in-service professional development that reflects content and pedagogy changes.

Many colleges of education play an important role in in-service teacher professional development. Colleges should leverage this role to help drive alignment of professional development to new standards and new pedagogical demands. A highly regarded presence in providing high-quality in-service professional development can strengthen the contribution of higher education to the successful implementation of the new standards and to improvements in student outcomes. The most effective programs are developed in close collaboration with K–12 partners based on identified needs. Kentucky supports Partnership Academies, which link higher education institutions to K–12 partners, and focuses professional development on areas for which assessment data show that improvement is needed. Sharing data and engaging in joint data analysis can be a helpful strategy in efforts to design more effective in-service professional development.

7. Use state policy levers to align and codify structural changes.

State leaders are often concerned about how to make effective practices systemic and sustainable. Changes to state laws and regulations, while not always necessary, can solidify a state's commitment to structural changes. In the case of educator preparation programs, these policy levers include program approval, educator licensure, and assessment and certification requirements. If a state is already in the process of revisiting laws and policies, it may make sense for state leadership to consider how to align such revisions to new college- and career-ready K–12 content and teaching standards. By presenting a united front to state legislators, K–12 and higher education leaders can more convincingly advocate for changes to regulations that will ultimately increase the effectiveness of the educator workforce.

8. Collect and analyze data related to program effectiveness.

Increasingly states and the federal government are turning to data-driven approaches to gauge the success of educator preparation programs. Colleges of education should similarly embrace a data-driven perspective, identify valid metrics, and collect and analyze appropriate data. Such data collection and analysis can help drive efforts to continuously improve program structures and preservice experiences.

III. Actions in States: Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts and Tennessee

Georgia

In Georgia, the Department of Education, the University System of Georgia and the Professional Standards Commission, along with the Georgia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, work closely to support a comprehensive reform of teaching practice. The state's Race to the Top grant drove the development of new educator effectiveness systems, new teacher and principal induction guidance for districts, and new measures to gauge the success of teacher preparation programs. These changes were accompanied by a transformative revision to the state's teacher preparation program regulations, which required assurances that teacher candidates be prepared to implement the state's new standards and the new educator effectiveness system. The regulations required preparation providers to maintain formalized partnerships with P-12 schools focusing on continuous school improvement and student learning and growth and called for more robust teacher field and clinical experience. The state also adopted edTPA (a content-specific, performance-based assessment for teachers developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity). All of these changes were highly aligned and integrated.

The state also benefited from participation in the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation (NTEP), developed and supported by CCSSO. Participation in this initiative deepened the state's focus and actions on teacher preparation and licensure, program approval, and tracking teacher candidate performance in the classroom.

State agencies jointly provide support to preparation providers in adapting to these changes. The support is based on the results of a state survey of institutional needs for technical assistance. A process guide and self-assessment tool were developed to ensure that the differentiated support the agencies provide meets those needs. Significant electronic resources are available to support the work. The state also supports a regional structure to help broker improved P-12/preparation provider partnerships and foster regional sharing of information and collective problem solving.



Maryland

Maryland's approach to improving teacher preparation features the Governor's P–20 Leadership Council playing a significant policy formulation and coordination role. The state's work represents a collaboration among the Department of Education, the University System of Maryland, the Higher Education Commission, the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, and the Maryland Independent College and University Association.

In October 2013, Maryland convened a Teacher Education Summit hosted by the University System of Maryland. The goal of the convening was to "conduct a comprehensive review of the major issues and components of teacher education in Maryland in order to identify common challenges, themes and priorities to meet the changing needs of students and society." One outcome of the summit was the formation by the Governor's P–20 Leadership Council of a Task Force on Teacher Education to develop a set of recommendations to advance the quality of teacher education programs. In May 2014, the task force presented a draft report with some initial recommendations. The task force presented an action

plan based on some of the recommendations to the P–20 Council Executive Committee in September 2014 calling for the state to institute a three-year residency program that would reflect a scaling up of teaching responsibilities during pretenure years. It also called for embedding continuous improvement and accountability into educator preparation programs and educator career advancement structures. These recommendations led to a legislative briefing in 2015 to the Maryland General Assembly and a request from the General Assembly for an implementation plan by 2016.

One area of focus for Maryland has been teacher induction. Maryland is developing creative and sustainable strategies that focus on the quality of the induction process. This work includes exploring a regional approach that supports new teachers regardless of the institution where they received their education. Maryland hopes to create benefits not only for new teachers but also for teacher preparation faculty who will receive increased feedback about the quality of preparation programs and school systems, which will benefit from a greater presence of teacher preparation faculty.

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Massachusetts

Massachusetts also initiated its focus on teacher preparation with a statewide summit in September 2013. The Advancing Educator Preparation in Massachusetts convening highlighted the issues of aligning teacher preparation programs to state standards and education system needs. The summit focused on three goals:

- Comprehensive integration of the CCSS in Massachusetts' educator preparation programs;
- Embedding the goal of an effective educator in every classroom and school; and
- Advancing collaborative work around educator preparation, standards and assessment.

Like Georgia, in October 2013 Massachusetts also joined the NTEP. As part of this effort, the state outlined an ambitious action plan that touches issues of licensure, program approval, data systems and the realignment of subject matter knowledge requirements for teacher preparation programs.

Massachusetts has continued to use statewide summits to promote reform. For example, in May 2014, the state convened a summit entitled Unpacking the New Curriculum Standards to create greater understanding of the state's new standards as well as best practices for the use of data for program improvement and enhancement.

Over the next several years, educator preparation programs will be working in Alignment Working Groups to develop and implement action plans for program changes. The work will include assessing current conditions and planning needed changes (phase 1) for initial implementation, program monitoring and plan adjustments (phase 2), and completing full implementation, including the use of teacher performance assessment for all candidates (phase 3). The state is also exploring whether it should require educator preparation programs in public institutions of higher education to hold national accreditation.

Tennessee

In Tennessee, the success of teacher preparation reform hinges on voluntary collaboration among the state's teacher preparation programs. The Institutions of Higher Education Advisory Board was created by the state to assist institutions in coordinating their efforts to align to the state's new standards and improve the overall quality of new teachers. The work of the advisory board is coordinated by the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation at Lipscomb University and is supported by the state Department of Education and the Higher Education Commission.

The enactment in 2007 of legislation requiring the creation of a report card to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs catalyzed the state's teacher preparation reform efforts. The report cards include data on the academic profile of completers, placement and retention rates, licensing exam pass rates, and the effectiveness of each program's graduates based on Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System results. The state's successful federal Race to the Top grant application in 2010 included a commitment to use the report card information as a factor in educator preparation program approval.

The Ayers Institute has developed a number of useful resources to support reform efforts. These include self-assessment instruments that allow teacher preparation programs to examine their own practices and curricula and plan for changes and improvements. A video library illustrates various practices and provides examples of model lessons in each grade level and subject area. Videos also address coaching, collaboration, data use and other related topics. A series of online courses provide an introduction to the standards as well as educate teacher candidates in student engagement, instructional strategies that capture the pedagogical shifts in the standards, and planning and assessing for learning.



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This series of briefs was written by Paolo DeMaria, Anand Vaishnav and Katie Cristol of Education First and Sharmila Basu Mann of the State Higher Education Executive Officers. They are made possible by Core to College, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, with funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.