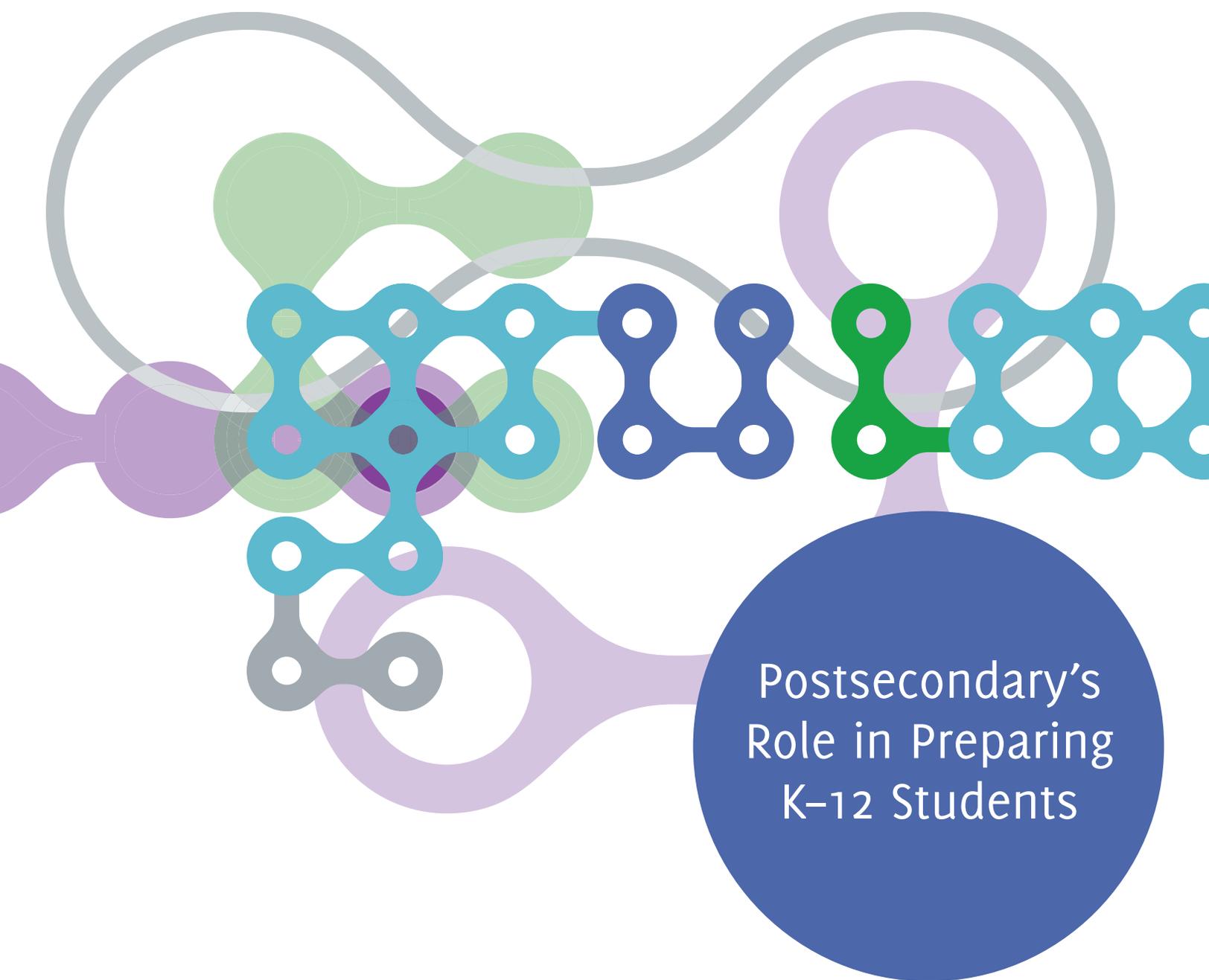


# CONNECTING THE DOTS



Postsecondary's  
Role in Preparing  
K-12 Students

# An Unprecedented Opportunity

A new era of educational equity and opportunity is dawning in America. The preparation needed for students to be ready for college and careers today requires an exceptional level of partnership between K–12 and higher education.

For the first time in our nation’s history, 46 states and the District of Columbia have agreed that all K–12 students will be educated along a common continuum of high academic expectations known as the **Common Core State Standards** (CCSS).

Having clear, consistent standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics will help ensure that all students, regardless of zip code, graduate fully prepared to succeed in college, careers and life.

In addition, 45 states and the District of Columbia also have committed to administering common assessments based on these standards, including 24 states participating in the **Partnership for Assessment**

**of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)**. PARCC will assess students to indicate whether they are on track as they progress through the grades and will signal the need for additional support.

The adoption of the CCSS and the development of the common assessments provide an unprecedented opportunity for the postsecondary community to work with K–12 to demonstrate what being college ready means and to connect the dots between K–12 expectations and first-year, freshman college courses.

Thus, the PARCC Higher Education Leadership Team, which consists of the primary postsecondary contacts for all PARCC states, created this document, and other forthcoming briefs, as a call to action for other postsecondary faculty, leadership and policymakers in our states.

Working together, K–12 and postsecondary can help ensure that students make successful transitions from high

school to college and reduce the need for remediation at the postsecondary level – ultimately bolstering higher education completion rates for certificates and degrees and ensuring a better prepared workforce for our nation to compete in the global economy.

## Leveraging the Opportunity for Change

Leveraging this opportunity to achieve a new level of educational equity and achievement requires postsecondary educators to engage meaningfully with our peers in our states’ K–12 systems to better understand how to create strong, sustainable change around the CCSS and common assessments. We can start by asking a few key questions:

- **How do we collaborate with K–12 leaders to design the common assessments** that measure the CCSS and serve as a valid and reliable indicator of a student’s ability to succeed in our first-year, credit-bearing courses?
- **How do we prepare teachers** who are well versed in the CCSS and in how to use the PARCC assessments to improve student achievement in our K–12 schools?
- **How do we engage high school teachers** in the review and creation of syllabi to ensure that our first-year, credit-bearing courses build upon the rigor of the CCSS?
- In the coming years, **how do we serve students** who have been educated with the CCSS and measured by the common assessments to ensure that our courses reflect and build upon the type of learning they are experiencing in K–12?

Some states have already started the process of actively involving faculty and administrators from their technical, two-year and four-year colleges and universities to begin tackling these difficult, but necessary, questions.

*The development of the CCSS and common assessments provides an unprecedented opportunity to connect the dots between K–12 expectations and first-year, freshman college courses.*

# State Engagement Strategies

Across states, postsecondary leaders, faculty and others are identifying key strategies to connect the dots and support K-12 and higher education working together to ensure that students who master the CCSS and succeed on common assessments such as PARCC are prepared for success in college.

## Establishing Mechanisms for K-12 and Postsecondary To Work Together on Standards and Assessments

### MASSACHUSETTS

A leader in establishing a framework for engaging the state higher education community, Massachusetts has linked PARCC to its own *Vision Project*, the central strategic initiative of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. Higher education leaders have developed a PARCC decisionmaking structure incorporating 29 campus-based PARCC engagement teams and six regional facilitative groups as well as a key resource group consisting of PARCC lead content faculty teams. [http://issuu.com/massdhe/docs/2011-10-28\\_parcc\\_conference\\_program](http://issuu.com/massdhe/docs/2011-10-28_parcc_conference_program)

### LOUISIANA

Louisiana has established PARCC Campus Leadership Teams that will come together for statewide discussions on core competencies for college readiness that will be assessed by PARCC. In addition, all two- and four-year institutions will have at least one faculty member involved in PARCC research activities to help ensure that the tests will serve as a valid indicator of college readiness.

*Working together, K-12 and postsecondary can help ensure that students make successful transitions from high school to college.*

### NEW MEXICO

A state team, including higher education representatives, worked together to develop the *New Mexico Common Core State Standards Implementation Plan*, a four-year phase-in plan that addresses key components of an implementation timeline. Higher education also plays a prominent role in the state's planned professional development activities. <http://newmexicocommoncore.org>

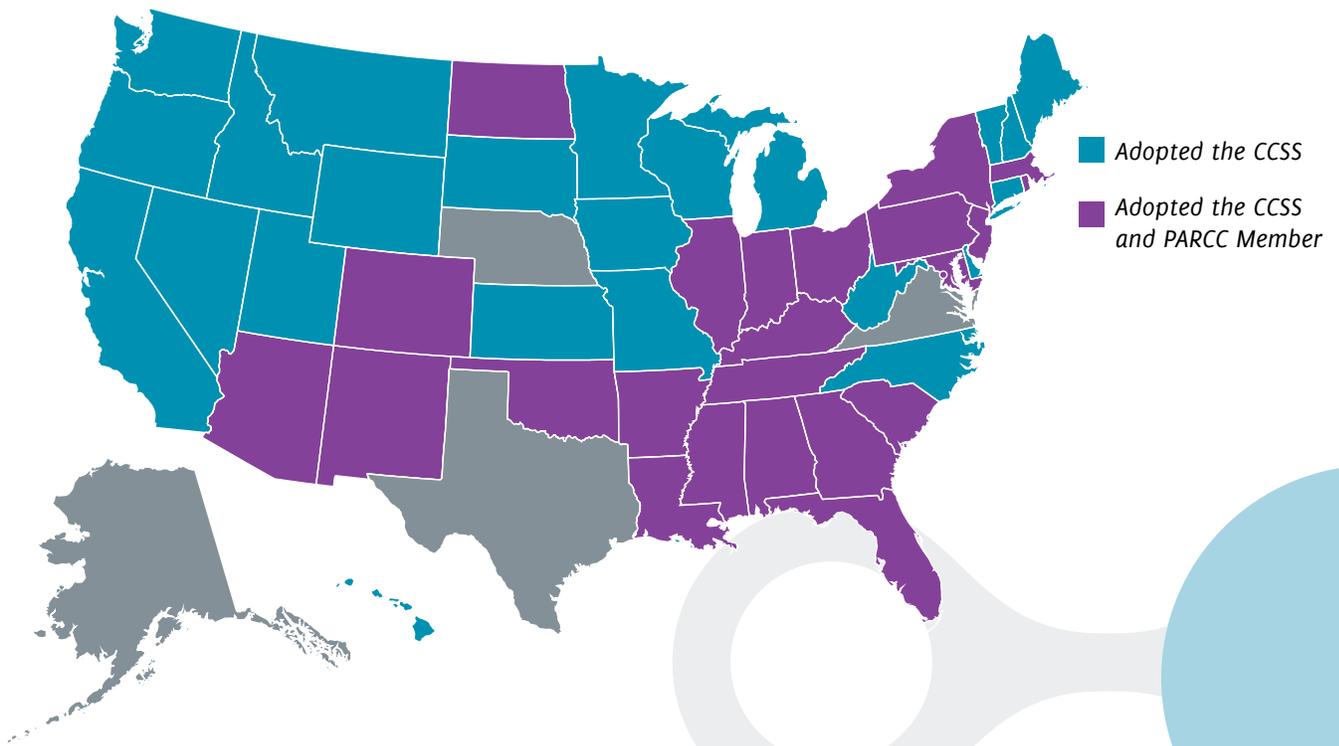
## Aligning Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Implementation of the CCSS and common assessments will require significant professional development for K-12 educators to help them align instruction to the new expectations and develop strategies to support students.

Several states have developed strong frameworks for supporting teacher pre-service and in-service needs. These leading states have recognized that teacher preparation is not just limited to colleges of education but must also include alignment between teacher preparation programs and professional development for in-service teachers.

### KENTUCKY

State policymakers, recognizing the critical role of higher education in teacher preparation and in-service, passed Senate Bill 1 in 2009 mandating that higher education institutions create professional development plans that focus now on integrating the CCSS. To date, more than 2,000 faculty have participated in online modules, face-to-face workshops and webinars created to outline the impact of the CCSS on general education, developmental education and college of education faculty; postsecondary coursework and curriculum; and classroom learning. More information on Kentucky's higher education institutions' plans may be found online, including a link to modules designed for faculty who teach freshman or introductory courses and



teacher education faculty who train future teachers.  
[www.kycorestandards.org/institutions.aspx](http://www.kycorestandards.org/institutions.aspx)

### OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma launched the REAC<sup>3</sup>H Network, which consists of 70 volunteer school districts that agreed to serve as coordinating agents for professional development, capacity-building efforts and feedback from parents and local community members. The REAC<sup>3</sup>H Network is advancing

the transition to college- and career-ready standards and integrating existing partnerships with postsecondary. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education has partnered with K–12 mathematics teachers, the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation and the State Department of Education to develop standards, curriculum and an accompanying examination for an elementary math specialist certification that will target implementation of the CCSS in elementary schools.  
[www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/ok.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/ok.pdf)

## Leading the Way: Florida

Florida higher education representatives worked closely with their K–12 counterparts to develop the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT). PERT is aligned with the CCSS and serves as both an 11th grade intervention tool and a placement exam for first-year, credit-bearing courses. Faculty and others have used PERT to develop mini-remedial classes to address student readiness issues. [www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2011\\_01\\_18/workshop.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2011_01_18/workshop.pdf)

### TENNESSEE

The state has launched two projects for teacher and principal training programs: (1) Integrating Common Core into Pre-Service Training and (2) Integrating the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System into Pre-Service Training. These efforts include developing a statewide curriculum for integrating the CCSS into pre-service training that will provide a common tool for all programs to use but will allow for enough flexibility so that it can meet the specific needs of individual programs and local education agencies. The Tennessee Department of Education and Tennessee Higher Education Commission are working collaboratively on these projects to ensure alignment and are executing this work by assembling a small team of deans of colleges of education to develop the plan for CCSS integration. [www.tn.gov/thec/Divisions/fttt/documents/Higher\\_Education's\\_Involvement\\_in\\_First\\_to\\_the\\_Top.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/thec/Divisions/fttt/documents/Higher_Education's_Involvement_in_First_to_the_Top.pdf)

# A Call to Action for Higher Education

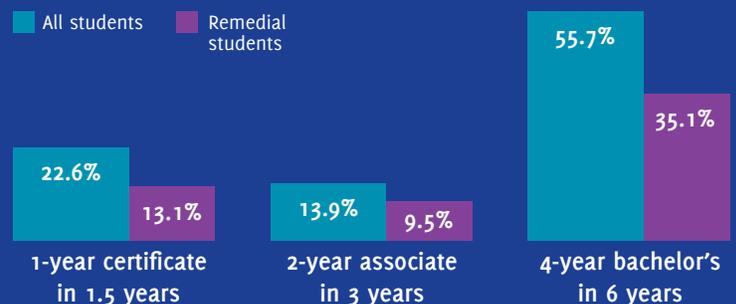
The development and implementation of the CCSS and common assessments such as PARCC provide a key opportunity for rich collaboration between higher education and K-12 that can lead to improvements in postsecondary access, persistence and retention. Several actions can aid success as we move forward, including:

- Higher education faculty members need to **act as content experts** in the development of K-12 curricula that will deliver the CCSS and the assessments that will measure them.
- Faculty from the arts and sciences, not just mathematics and English, can work with teacher education faculty to **create and distribute curricula for initial teacher preparation and for in-service professional development** as teachers transition to the new standards.
- In addition to aligning our own teacher preparation programs with the CCSS, higher education needs to **advocate for the alignment of certification and licensure requirements with clear expectations** for teachers at each grade level.
- Higher education institutions **need to support the use of technology** in school classrooms by providing information technology staff and sharing equipment. Even more important, the arts, science and teacher education courses that prepare students for careers in education and other fields must feature the use of technology.
- Higher education faculty **must be involved in validating the 11th grade PARCC assessments** as appropriate tools for entry-level course placement and then work with K-12 to **provide transitional or bridge courses** for seniors to close measured gaps in performance between high school and college.
- Also, higher education must **reform entry-level course placement and remediation practices** for students who come to postsecondary directly from high school and for returning adults who need additional preparation or are earning a GED.
- As students are taught from kindergarten using these new, more rigorous standards, colleges and universities will need to **adjust how mathematics and writing are taught** so that college coursework continues to add value for students. In the future, English composition may be a developmental course for those students who still need to learn how to write research papers. Also, writing and literacy could be taught as part of all courses so that students retain and improve their skills. Mathematics offerings may have more application to specific majors as recommended by proponents of various pathways.

## Graduating More, Better Prepared Students

Currently, too few of the students who enroll in our public institutions complete a certificate or a degree — a situation that is even worse for students who have to take remedial courses. Moving to the Common Core may be a game changer for higher education — the shifts in the standards will result in better prepared students and enable us to be more successful in helping them graduate ready for success in the global economy.

### Graduation Rates



Source: Complete College America. (2011). Time Is the Enemy. [www.completecollege.org/docs/Time\\_Is\\_the\\_Enemy.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy.pdf)

# Find Out MORE

## CCSS

[WWW.CORESTANDARDS.ORG](http://WWW.CORESTANDARDS.ORG)

In 2009, as part of a state-led effort, the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released the CCSS. The state-led English language arts/literacy and mathematics standards for grades K–12 were developed in collaboration with K–12 and higher education content experts, states, teachers, school administrators, and parents. The CCSS are:

- Aligned with college and work expectations;
- Clear, understandable and consistent;
- Rigorous and require the application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Built upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Informed by top-performing countries; and
- Evidence and research based.

During the development of the standards, the NGA Center and CCSSO received initial feedback on the draft standards from national organizations that represented teachers, two- and four-year college educators, civil rights groups, English language learners, and students with disabilities. The final standards were informed by nearly 10,000 public comments. To date, 46 states, the District of Columbia and two territories have adopted and are in the process of implementing the CCSS.

*The PARCC Higher Education Leadership Team (HELT) would like to thank the following individuals who contributed both content and expertise to this report: Chad Colby (Achieve), Deborah Grossman-Garber (Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education), Zakiya Lee (University System of Maryland), Karen Nicodemus (President Emeritus, Cochise Community College, Arizona), Callie Riley (Achieve) and Debra Stuart (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education). In addition, HELT would like to thank Kathy Ames and Emily Smith at KSA-Plus Communications, Inc., for their editorial and design contributions and the Lumina Foundation for providing generous funding for broader outreach and engagement with the postsecondary community across the PARCC states.*

## PARCC

[WWW.PARCCONLINE.ORG](http://WWW.PARCCONLINE.ORG)

In September 2010, the U.S. Department of Education awarded two assessment consortia, PARCC and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, grants through its Race to the Top assessment competition. Achieve, the project manager for PARCC, is working closely with the 24 PARCC states to develop a common set of K–12 assessments in English language arts/literacy and mathematics that will:

- Build a pathway to college and career readiness by the end of high school;
- Identify students' progress toward this goal starting in 3rd grade; and
- Provide teachers with timely data to inform instruction and support student learning and growth.

PARCC states are committed to developing a K–12 assessment system that also:

- Measures the complete range of the CCSS;
- Supports classroom educators;
- Incorporates the use of technology in assessments; and
- Increases accountability at all levels.

PARCC has enlisted assistance and feedback from K–12 and higher education experts during various phases of assessment development. Ultimately, passing the PARCC high school assessments will indicate that a student is ready for credit-bearing college coursework and the workforce. After the 2014–15 school year, the first year of full implementation of the assessments, PARCC states will adopt common performance standards. Upon completion, the PARCC assessments will yield major benefits for educators, policymakers, parents and, of course, the approximately 25 million students educated in PARCC states.

To download this PDF and forthcoming briefs, go to [www.achieve.org/connecting-the-dots](http://www.achieve.org/connecting-the-dots).