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Commentary

Rethinking Accountability in a College and Career-Ready World

Achieve has long advocated that K-12 accountability systems reflect the goal of college and career readiness for all students and measure and provide incentives for improvement toward that goal. A robust system focused on college and career readiness enables states to evaluate the effectiveness of their schools in preparing all students for success after high school. Accountability is a critical piece of the puzzle, a puzzle that starts with college- and career-ready standards, graduation requirements and assessments. With rare exceptions, current accountability systems are far from this ideal.

Designing an accountability system focused on preparing all students for success in postsecondary education and training must include a range of indicators. At a minimum, the system should include the percentage of students: graduating having completed the course requirements to earn a rigorous college- and career-ready diploma, scoring at the college-ready level on high school assessments anchored to college- and career-ready standards, earning college credit while in high school (through AP, IB, and/or dual enrollment), and, upon entrance to a postsecondary institution, the percentage of high school graduates who require remedial coursework in reading, writing, or mathematics.

Achieve's annual survey of states found that half of the states use at least one of these critical college- and career-ready indicators in their accountability system (see www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2011 for details). However, for an accountability system to truly reflect the goal of college and career readiness for all students it must use a rich, comprehensive set of indicators in multiple ways, including publicly reporting the data in a meaningful way, setting clear targets for schools to improve, and providing clear incentives and consequences that drive schools to improve performance and meet the established targets.

Despite some progress in states beginning to value college and career readiness in their accountability systems, for nearly half the states, federal accountability and state accountability are one in the same. That is, the state accountability system goes no farther than what the federal government requires. Given that reality, what the federal government requires for accountability matters. Current federal high school accountability, for example, requires state-set proficiency scores on state-developed, end-of-course or comprehensive reading and math

tests once in high school and a measurement of graduation rates. This requirement is essentially silent on the level of expectations and certainly does not value or incentivize states that are organizing their education reform efforts around college and career readiness. In fact, current federal requirements - with the mandate of all students be proficient by 2014 and the sanctions for those schools and districts that fall short - may undermine the efforts of leading reform states.

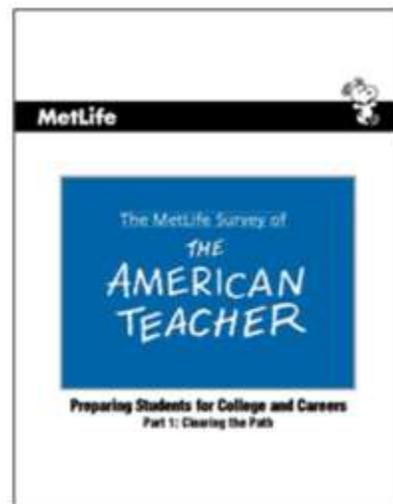
The recent push for college and career readiness as the new norm requires *state* and *federal* accountability systems to change. As talks heat up amongst the "[Big 8](#)" on how and when to revise ESEA, this juncture in time provides an opportunity to shift both *state* and *federal* accountability models to measure and value college and career readiness. In the long run, Achieve believes that *federal* accountability should be aligned with college and career readiness in a way that current NCLB/ESEA accountability is not. Any reauthorization of ESEA should include enough flexibility or incentives for states to commit to leveraging their accountability systems to value college and career readiness. Achieve highlights a number of emerging best practices among *state* accountability systems in this year's *Closing the Expectations Gap Report*.

And change is urgent. Absent a change to current *federal* accountability provisions, the continued use of a narrow set of indicators that cannot measure whether students are on track to graduate ready for life after high school has real potential to undercut the successful transition to college and career readiness—including to the Common Core State Standards and common assessments.

New from Achieve

Survey Results Show Broad Support for College and Career Readiness

The latest [MetLife Survey of the American Teacher](#) demonstrates that there is broad support for college and career readiness for all students being a national priority—and a recognition that some education after high school is a necessity in today's economy. Teachers, parents and students alike understand that a high school education isn't sufficient to prepare young people for today's careers. "The report is a call to action," said Michael Cohen, president of Achieve, as quoted in an [article](#) in *U.S. News & World Report*. "It is a reminder that our public schools can't prepare young people for postsecondary success unless our colleges and employers forge closer, ongoing ties with educators, students and their families." [More...](#)



Conceptual Framework for Science Education is a Step Closer to Publication

The National Research Council (NRC) has submitted the *Conceptual Framework for Science Education* for external review, a key milestone in the development of the Next Generation Science Standards. After going through a public review in July, the committee and staff of the NRC have been hard at work revising the document, based on the feedback received. The *Framework* is due to be published in the late spring of 2011. [More...](#)

The National Academies of Science, Achieve, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the National Science Teachers Association have embarked on the development of the Next Generation Science Standards. Once the NRC releases the final *Conceptual Framework for Science Education*, Achieve will use it to manage a state-led process to develop Next Generation Science Standards true to the Framework.

In preparation for its work on the Next Generation Science Standards, Achieve has added a member to its Science team. [Jennifer Childress](#), Achieve's new Senior Advisor for Science, joins Dr. Stephen Pruitt and Jean Slattery in coordinating the standards' development and other science initiatives. Dr. Childress comes to Achieve from the National Science Resources Center (NSRC), where she served as the Director of the Center for Building Awareness of Science Education, managing numerous partnerships to help implement science education research and best practices in school districts, states, and countries.

PARCC Builds Capacity

Achieve, the project management partner for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), recently named Jeff Nellhaus as the Director of PARCC Assessment, Doug Sovde as the Director of PARCC Instructional Supports and Educator Engagement, and Karen Rosenthal as the Director of Finance and Federal Reporting. "We are very excited to announce these three key additions to the PARCC team," said **Florida** Education Commissioner Dr. Eric J. Smith. "Given their extensive experience, they will ensure PARCC states ultimately have high-quality assessments that will allow us to compare our students' achievement with other states, countries, and expectations for postsecondary readiness. At the same time, they have committed to an affordable system that will support states' needs for accountability." [More...](#)

On Monday, April 4, Laura Slover, Senior Vice President, PARCC, will appear on a webinar hosted by the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Center for K-12 Assessment & Performance Management at ETS from 2-3 p.m. EST to discuss the PARCC design and development process. Bob Wise, president of the Alliance and former Governor of **West Virginia**, will place the consortia's work in a policy context. The webinar will also provide an opportunity for panelists to address questions submitted by viewers across the country. Register and submit questions for the webinar online [here](#).

Grad Nation

America's Promise Alliance, of which Achieve is a partner, recently released an [updated version](#) of its Grad Nation report. Grad Nation is a national movement to mobilize Americans to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare young people for college and the 21st century workforce. It's a call to action for concerned citizens, businesses, community leaders, policy makers, educators, and the nation.

In addition, America's Promise hosted the [Building a Grad Nation Summit](#), on March 21-23, 2011 in Washington, D.C. The three-day event was co-hosted by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Civic Enterprises, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University to inspire a national movement to reach the goal of a 90 percent national graduation rate by 2020. View summit [video clips](#).

Vice President Joe Biden delivered remarks on the importance of investing in education and the steps being taken to reach the goal for the U.S. to lead the world with the highest proportion of college graduates. He called on all governors to host a state college completion summit, released a "[College Completion Tool Kit](#)" from which states and governors can draw ideas, and announced a new grant competition focused on helping institutions of higher education boost completion rates. [More...](#)

This month, America's Promise also unveiled a new "[26 Seconds](#)" campaign designed to engage young people, underscoring the fact that every 26 seconds in America, a student drops out of high school. The campaign provides an online venue for youth to express feelings on the issue and creatively share thoughts and talents,

News Clips

1. Education Is Key

In *The Huffington Post* Melody Barnes, the President's Domestic Policy Adviser and the Director of the Domestic Policy Council, and Randall Stephenson, Chairman and CEO of AT&T Inc., write, "Our prosperity, America's standing in the world and our ability to grow our economy all rise or fall on the quality of education we provide." [More...](#)

2. President Calls for Tougher Standards

At a **Massachusetts** high school, President Obama called for tougher standards, reports *The Boston Globe*. He said too many students are dropping out of high school, or graduating without the necessary skills to succeed. [More...](#)

3. Community Colleges Help Meet Demand for "Middle-Skill" Workers

Medill Reports highlights an initiative called Skills for America's Future, aimed at encouraging public-private partnerships to create more retraining programs at community colleges. "The program looks to increase the number of employers who have partnerships with

encouraging them and their peers to make graduation a priority so they become more than a statistic. For more information, visit www.americaspromise.org.

community colleges so that those partnerships will better align curriculum with skills needed by employers in that community," said Karen Elzey, who runs the program for the Aspen Institute. [More...](#)

New Resources

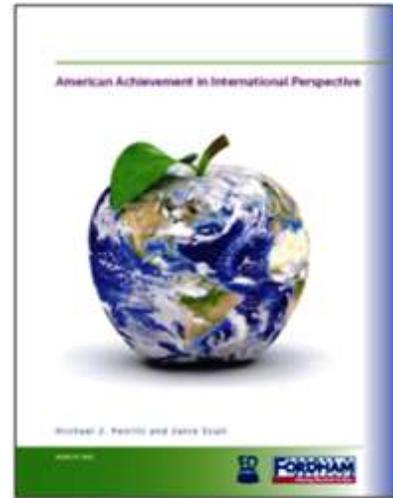
- During the National Governors Association Winter Meeting in February, the nation's governors discussed concrete actions that they can take to improve education in their states. The discussion, titled "[Global Lessons to Improve K-12 Education](#)," was held during the Education, Early Childhood and Workforce Committee meeting, and featured Sir Michael Barber, head of the Global Education Practice, McKinsey & Company; U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan; and Andreas Schleicher, head of the Indicators and Analysis Division, Directorate for Education, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Sir Michael Barber discussed how to produce better results for our nation by linking human capital development, economic growth and global competitiveness. Andreas Schleicher provided foundational data regarding findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam and its implications for the U.S. education system. A video of the discussion is [here](#). The PowerPoint presentation by Sir Michael Barber is [here](#). The "Lessons from PISA" PowerPoint presentation by Andreas Schleicher is [here](#).

- The Alliance for Excellent Education analyzed the economies of each state to determine the economic benefits of improving high school graduation rates. It calculated economic projections for each state, estimating the gross increase in state economic factors such as individual earnings, home and auto sales, job and economic growth, spending and investment, tax revenue, and human capital based on reducing by half the number of students from the Class of 2010 who failed to graduate on time. To see how cutting dropout rates in half would benefit the nation's economy as a whole, read the [national analysis](#). Access your



state profile [here](#).

- The Thomas B. Fordham Institute published an [analysis](#) of the PISA performance of the U.S. and thirty-three other countries in the OECD. It found that among other industrialized and advanced nations, the U.S. has the upper hand in one critical measure: size. In *raw numbers*, the U.S. produces many more high-achieving students than any other OECD nation—more high-achievers than France, Germany, and the UK *combined* (both in reading and in math). Yet, in *raw numbers*, the U.S. also produces many more low-achieving students (both in reading and in math) than any other OECD nation, including Mexico and Turkey.



- "[Schools in High Gear: Reforms That Work When They Work Together](#)" is a new paper authored by experts from five national organizations that serve as policy partners for the Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) Network: the Center for American Progress, the Center on Reinventing Public Education, Education Sector, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. In her introduction, PIE Executive Director Suzanne Tacheny Kubach notes that policy goals work best when implemented in conjunction with other change strategies.

- A new report, "[Across the Great Divide](#)," released by Corporate Voices for Working Families and Civic Enterprises, in association with the Institute for a Competitive Workforce, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Peter D. Hart Research Associates, examines the perspectives of business and college leaders on the state of America's higher education, the skills gap, and what's needed for the United States to be competitive in today's challenging global economy. More than three in four business leaders believe that increasing post-secondary completion will have a very positive impact on the U.S.



economy and workforce productivity.

Achieve Job Opportunity

Achieve has numerous career opportunities available. Go to www.achieve.org/careers.

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