



December 2009

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Commentary

Race to the Top

The U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top (RTTT) competition - and the \$4.35 billion attached to it - has captivated the attention of officials in nearly every state and, in many cases, accelerated their work on the college- and career-ready agenda. As states are hard at work designing their applications for the RTTT first round deadline of January 19, 2010, Achieve recommends state leaders keep in mind several ways they can build on the work they have already begun and maximize the new opportunities presented through RTTT.

Common Standards and Assessments

Common, internationally-benchmarked college and career readiness expectations should be the foundation for all strategies undertaken with Race to the Top funding. The Common Core Standards Initiative - led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with Achieve - continues its work with states to develop and validate common K-12 content standards that lead to college and career readiness by the time of high school completion. A complete draft of the K-12 standards will be released in early January, and the final standards are expected in early February 2010.

While the Race to the Top grants strongly encourage states to adopt common standards, the U.S. Department of Education will also sponsor a separate \$350 million RTTT Assessment Competition to enable one or more consortia of states to develop and administer common assessments based on the common, college- and career-ready standards. USED has released preliminary information on the RTTT Assessment Competition but the final RFP is not due out until March 2010.

Because of our role in helping to shape the common standards and our experience leading the ADP multi-state assessment consortium, Achieve has been talking to a number of governors, chiefs and key national organizations about forming a consortium.

The common assessment competition is a tremendous opportunity for a significant number of states to band together and achieve two goals that have previously not been met by their individual state assessment systems: 1)

creating high quality, forward looking, next generation assessments and 2) creating assessments that enable states to compare results against common, internationally benchmarked, college- and career-ready standards. Some think we need to choose between innovation and comparability. We believe we can and must find a way to do both.

For specific advice and promising practices for meeting the Race to the Top challenge on standards and assessments, see Achieve's *Race to the Top: Accelerating College and Career Readiness - Standards and Assessments* guide [here](#). For more information on the RTTT Assessment Competition, go to the U.S. Department of Education's [Web site](#).

Data Systems to Support Instruction

The RTTT competition gives states an unprecedented opportunity to build the tools to measure results; guide decision-making and investments; and provoke honest conversations about whether and how schools are on track for, meeting, and exceeding college and career readiness goals. The Data Quality Campaign recently released its annual progress report on state education data systems and found that every state is on track to have a longitudinal data system that follows student progress from preschool through college by 2011. However, the results also indicate that many states still lack key data system elements to inform critical policy decisions needed for RTTT reform plans, including key measures of college and career readiness and teacher effectiveness. Read the full report [here](#).

States serious about winning RTTT must make fully implementing the essential elements of a P-20 longitudinal data system a top priority. But data alone are not enough: To foster meaningful dialogue and make continuous progress towards meeting college- and career-ready goals, states should leverage their investment in a robust data system to shine the light on college and career readiness school by school across the state, making it a central feature of their public reporting system. Most states already use school, district and state report cards to share basic data about schools' performance with the public. In most states, however, the data used to report on high school performance are not sufficient indicators of readiness for success in postsecondary education and careers. To shine a light on the progress schools and systems are making towards preparing all students for college and careers, states should generate report cards that include performance against key indicators - focusing the attention of educators and fostering greater public discourse on the importance of all students meeting college- and career-ready standards. To read more, see Achieve's *Race to the Top: Accelerating College and Career Readiness - P-20 Longitudinal Data Systems* guide [here](#).

Great Teachers and Leaders

To make the dramatic improvements necessary to ensure all students are prepared for college and careers, as articulated in RTTT, states need thoughtful, intentional human capital strategies that get the right teachers in the right places in the right subjects. The need is especially acute in states that have or plan to adopt college- and career-ready academic standards and graduation requirements; they will need highly effective teachers - particularly in upper-level mathematics and science courses - capable of teaching rigorous content to all

students. Three recent publications provide policymakers with instructive guidance, including strategies for rethinking teacher preparation to increase the number of educators prepared to teach college- and career-ready content to all students:

- The National Council on Teacher Quality's "[Tackling the STEM Crisis: Five Steps Your State Can Take to Improve the Quality and Quantity of its K-12 Math and Science Teachers](#),"
- The Alliance for Excellent Education's "[Teaching for a New World: Preparing High School Educators to Deliver College- and Career-Ready Instruction](#),"
- The Education Trust's "[Fighting for Quality and Equality, Too: How State Policymakers Can Ensure the Drive to Improve Teacher Quality Doesn't Just Trickle Down to Poor and Minority Children](#)."

You can also learn more by reading Achieve's [Race to the Top: Accelerating College and Career Readiness - Teacher Effectiveness](#) guide.

Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

States seeking to prepare all high school graduates for college and careers need a strategy for responding to their lowest-performing high schools, which are responsible for a disproportionate number of students who drop out or graduate unprepared for what's ahead. Continuing to rely upon incremental change strategies will not lead to effective change in these schools. Instead, states need to build capacity to undertake dramatic improvement in these schools via turnarounds and fresh starts. At the same time, many individual students in better performing high schools do not graduate ready for college and careers. As a result, a complete state strategy must identify and segment schools by level of under-performance and mobilize different interventions to match each school's circumstances so that all students - no matter where they go to school - can graduate prepared for success in college and careers. To learn more, see Achieve's *Race to the Top: Accelerating College and Career Readiness - Low-Performing Schools* guide [here](#) and "[Graduating America: Meeting the Challenge of Low Graduation-Rate High Schools](#)," recently released by Jobs for the Future and Everyone Graduates Center.

Preparing for Sustainable Success

To win Race to the Top, states must articulate a comprehensive and aligned reform agenda designed to dramatically improve student achievement across the P-20 spectrum and ensure more students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, training and careers. By calling for systemic education reform, RTTT is rightly encouraging states to think about what policies, programs and practices need to be developed or that they already have in place that can be built on, improved upon or transformed into something more effective and efficient for students and the system as a whole. This type of long-term planning is critical in building a sustainable reform; states should take the time to consider how the policies they are putting in place *today* will be sustained *tomorrow*. To that end, there are several criteria included within the RTTT application that call for states to describe how they plan to sustain their proposed reforms, which Achieve discusses in its new brief [Sustaining the Race to the Top Reforms](#). The brief draws on Achieve's findings from *Taking Root: Strategies for*

New from Achieve

Governor Phil Bredesen (D-TN) Named Co-Chair of Achieve's Board

Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen has joined former Intel Corporation Chairman Craig Barrett as the new co-chair of Achieve's Board of Directors. Governor Bredesen will replace Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, who has served with Barrett as the Board's co-chair. Together, Governor Bredesen and Barrett will lead a board dedicated to Achieve's mission - ensuring all students graduate from high school college- and career-ready. "We're very pleased to welcome Governor Bredesen as co-chair of our board," said Mike Cohen, Achieve's president. "As a governor committed to advancing education reform in his state, he has made impressive progress in improving education in Tennessee. We look forward to working even more closely with Governor Bredesen as he assumes his new leadership role guiding the work of Achieve at this critical time." [More...](#)

Sustainability Resources

To help state leaders build strategies for sustaining their education agendas over the long run, Achieve recently launched [Taking Root: Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready-Agenda](#), generously funded by the GE Foundation. In the first phase of this project, Achieve issued four case studies that examine both the governmental and non-governmental strategies that were effective in making education reform last in **Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina** and **Texas** and a lessons learned paper that draws on and synthesizes the case studies' 10 overarching lessons and strategies for sustainability.



In November, Achieve released a new tool - a sustainability audit - for states to use to evaluate the strength of their political, social, and economic conditions within seven indicators, ranging from breadth of leadership to strength of implementation strategy, all of which are strongly associated with sustainable education reform. The audit offers key questions in each area with illustrative sample answers that represent strong or limited strategies for states to consider as they evaluate their own conditions. The goal of the audit is to highlight states' strengths and weaknesses and help them prioritize the areas in which they may need to devote additional time and resources to ensure they are well positioned to sustain the college- and career-ready agenda. States interested in using this audit with assistance from Achieve should [contact us](#). To see all of the products developed through Taking Root, see www.achieve.org/takingroot.

ADP Assessment Consortium Update

In late September, Achieve released the [American Diploma Project \(ADP\) End-of-Course Exams: 2009 Annual Report](#) containing state-by-state results on the ADP Algebra I and II End-of-Course Exams. The report captures the history of the Exams, a description of the test design and content, as well as a comparison of the exams to other rigorous tests and standards.

A description of the unprecedented standard setting process for the Algebra II exam that involved international benchmarking analyses, concurrent studies in student performance on the ACT and SAT, cross-sectional validity studies in which the exam was given to college students, judgment studies with math professors, and a syllabi analysis of college Algebra and pre-calculus courses is also contained in the annual report.

More information about the ADP Assessment Consortium and the Algebra I and II exams is at: www.achieve.org/ADPAssessmentConsortium.

The 2009 ADP Network Leadership Team Meeting Videos

In September, Achieve hosted the fifth annual American Diploma Project (ADP) Network Leadership Team Meeting in Washington, D.C. This meeting gave states a chance to address key challenges and opportunities associated with adopting, implementing and sustaining the college- and career-ready policy agenda. Videos of the plenary sessions, including an address by Joanne Weiss, Director of the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top Fund, are now viewable [here](#).

Educate to Innovate

On November 23, President Obama launched a new campaign, Educate to Innovate, designed to improve the participation and performance of America's students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The effort builds on the President's pledge to use his position to encourage students to study and consider careers in the STEM fields -- upon which America's future depends -- and elevate those students from the middle to the top of the pack, worldwide. At the kick-off event, the President announced five public-private partnerships that have committed to helping unleash the power of media, interactive games, hands-on learning and community volunteers to reach millions of students over the next four years:

News Clips

- 1. Business Groups Focus on Education**

Through a new initiative - The Springboard Project, the Business Roundtable is pushing for leaders to focus on education as a key issue in the time of economic recovery. Among its key recommendations are changes to the federal accountability system and that each of its members partner with at least one state, school district, or college to develop a program aimed at improving graduation rates

- [Discovery Communication's "Be the Future" Campaign](#)
- [Sesame Street's Early STEM Literacy Initiative](#)
- [Time Warner Cable's "Connect a Million Minds" Campaign](#)
- [National Lab Day](#)
- [National STEM Game Design Competitions](#)

The President also announced a commitment by leaders such as Sally Ride (the first female astronaut), Craig Barrett (Retired CEO/Chairman of the Board, Intel, and Co-Chair of Achieve's Board of Directors), Ursula Burns (CEO, Xerox), Glenn Britt (CEO, Time Warner Cable), and Antonio Perez (CEO, Eastman Kodak) to increase the impact of private sector and philanthropic support for STEM education. The White House will also hold an annual science fair, showcasing the student winners of national competitions in such areas as science, technology and robotics. For more, go [here](#).

Note: Secretary Duncan and John Holdren, Policy Director for the White House Office of Science and Technology, answered questions about Educate to Innovate online. For more, go [here](#).

or upgrading curriculum to modern standards. [More...](#)

2. **Louisiana Teacher Assessment Initiative**

The Washington Post reports that **Louisiana** is the first state to tie student test scores into a chain of evaluation that reaches all the way to teacher colleges. Those that fail to perform on this new metric could face shake-ups or closure. [More...](#)

3. **Preparing Connecticut Students for the Global Economy**

John R. Rathgeber, president and CEO of the Connecticut Business & Industry Association, notes in the *Hartford Courant* that, "Connecticut must strengthen its education system to anticipate and respond to employers' needs while emphasizing lifelong learning. That means more collaboration, greater coordination, better aligned curriculum and stronger awareness of the expectations of each level of education." [More...](#)

4. **Maryland Regents Pass Tougher Math Requirements**

Beginning with the graduating high school class of 2014, students seeking admission to any institution in the University of **Maryland** System will need to complete four years of mathematics and

take a math course in their senior year. This change seeks to lower the state's remediation rate by ensuring students enter college with stronger preparation in mathematics. [More...](#)

New Resources

- College Summit and the Center for American Progress released a white paper called "The Promise of Proficiency," which aims to help every high school in America learn how its graduates are doing, whether in four-year colleges, two-year colleges, vocational programs or apprenticeships, in a systematic and methodical way. It also stresses the importance of high schools using relevant data every day to make sound, strategic decisions to launch their students to postsecondary success. [Download the white paper.](#)

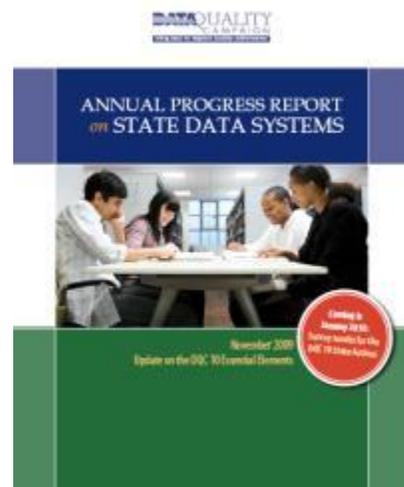


The Promise of Proficiency

How College Proficiency Information Can Help High Schools Drive Student Success

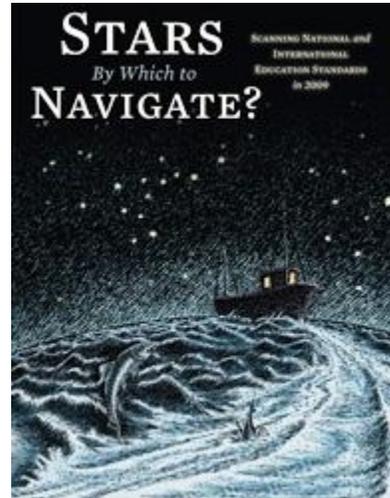
J.B. Schramm and E. Kinsey Zaleski December 2009

- The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) released the [results](#) of their 2009 survey of state progress on developing longitudinal data systems. States are clearly making progress; all but one state collect student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information or collect student-level graduation and dropout data. Eleven states have all ten of the DQC's "essential elements" - up from just six last year - and forty-nine states and the District of Columbia have at least five of the essential elements. However, many states still lack critical elements essential for



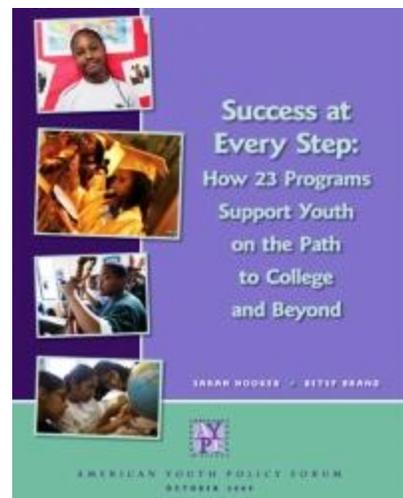
addressing college and career readiness and the impact that teachers have on student achievement. Less than half of states have a teacher identifier system in place with the ability to match teachers to students. Similarly, only 23 states have student-level course completion and transcript information. And there are still 19 states that lack the ability to match student records between P-12 and postsecondary systems.

The Data Quality Campaign has a number of interactive and useful web tools on their site, which let you [compare states](#) or view results for [individual states](#). [Download the report](#).



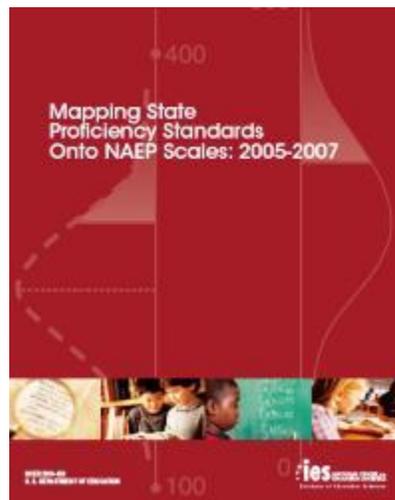
- In a recent Thomas B. Fordham Institute report - "[Stars By Which to Navigate?](#)"- expert reviewers appraise the Common Core draft standards in reading/writing/speaking/listening and math, in comparison to parallel frameworks in NAEP, TIMSS and PISA. This "benchmarking the benchmarks" analysis is essential reading for anyone interested in how the newly, proposed common standards stack up against these key national and international assessments. All three assessments and the Common Core standards receive letter grades in reading/writing and math. And earlier in 2009, Fordham published "[International Lessons about National Standards](#)," which examines the history and reality of national standards and testing in Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Russia, Singapore and South Korea.

- The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) released a compendium of programs that have been proven to help young people complete high school ready for success in postsecondary education and careers. "[Success at Every Step: How 23 Programs Support Youth on the Path to College and Beyond](#)," reviews a range of programs at the institution, state and national level, ranging from a district-level program in



Chicago ("After School Matters") and the Digital Bridge Academy in **California**, to national programs such as AVID, Early College High Schools, and GEAR-UP. The report also makes several national and state policy recommendations, with particular focus on creating a culture of high expectations, an environment for cross-system collaboration, effective use of data, and a long-term focus on college completion.

- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released "[Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto NAEP Scales: 2005-2007](#)," a report that statistically compares performance levels on state tests - the ones they report as "proficient" to the U.S. Department of Education for NCLB/AYP purposes - to those from other states, using NAEP 4th and 8th grade in reading and math as the yardsticks. The report presents a fairly normal distribution of state "proficiency" cut scores (what the report refers to as standards) against the NAEP, clustered around the Basic level (with most states at or about Basic with a few states significantly higher or lower). This pattern holds for all four tests with slight differences among them regarding how closely the center of the distribution matches the NAEP Basic level.



A subset of states produced quality performance data with a static assessment that NCES was able to use in a comparison for the years 2005 and 2007. NCES found that between 9 and 13 states had results consistent with NAEP for at least one of the tests; between 5 and 10 had results that appeared to be higher (statistically significant improvements) than their NAEP performance across the two years; and between three and six states saw their performance fall relative to NAEP (statistically significant declines).

Perspective is sent to you by Achieve, Inc., a bipartisan, non-profit organization founded by the nation's governors and CEOs to help states raise standards, improve assessments and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, careers and citizenship. Please feel free to circulate this e-newsletter to your colleagues.

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