

INCORPORATING COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS IN HIGH SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

As states adopt college-and career-ready expectations for all students, it is critical that they align their high school accountability systems to reflect these higher standards. To do this, states will need to rethink the indicators they use for high school accountability to ensure that they are valuing college and career readiness. At a minimum, states should include indicators such as: the cohort graduation rate; successful completion of the college- and career-ready course of study; achievement on college- and career-ready assessments; and earning college credits while in high school. There are several ways in which these indicators can be built into state accountability systems in order to measure and incentivize progress towards preparing all students for college and careers. The purpose of this brief is to focus specifically on ways in which states can build the successful completion of a college- and career-ready course of study into their own states' high school accountability system or systems.

SETTING STATEWIDE PERFORMANCE GOALS

In recent years, governors and other state leaders have become involved increasingly in setting statewide goals for educational achievement. Such goals can serve a valuable role in garnering support from decision-makers and they have the potential to redirect or align resource allocations. Goals set by governors can also serve to broaden the base of support beyond policymakers and foster dialogue with all stakeholders. But unless these statewide goals are translated into specific, meaningful goals for individual schools and districts, they will remain aspirational rather than becoming the expectation around which systems of instruction, support and resource allocation are aligned.

States should set a statewide goal for the percent of students who complete the defined college-and career-ready graduation requirements. From there, Achieve recommends that states work with schools to set individual targets and to build a trajectory of expected progress. Progress targets should reflect the expectation that all schools and students, regardless of where they stand relative to the goal of college and career readiness, should make gains. Those schools, groups and students starting farthest away from the target should make substantial and sustained improvement toward the goal, while those meeting the goal should progress beyond it. These goals should work in tandem with the state's overall cohort graduation rate goal. For instance, if a state's goal is 90% cohort graduation rate by 2020 we would encourage states to consider accompanying that with a goal that 80% of those students will have graduated having completed the state's college-and career-ready graduation requirements.

PUBLIC REPORTING

States should develop and implement meaningful public reporting on college-and career-ready indicators, including the successful completion of the college-and career-ready course of study. The percent of students who complete the college-and career-ready course of study should be built into each state's school-level report cards. By publishing course-taking patterns—disaggregated by income, ethnicity and special populations—as well as local graduation requirements and achievement results, state departments of education can help reduce disparities in the degree to which students get access to the learning opportunities needed for success after high school.

One step that states can and should immediately pursue is ascertaining a more nuanced picture of course-taking to determine both how many schools offer rigorous courses and how many (and which) students participate in these courses. A related and equally important issue is how to ensure that all students, regardless of where they attend school, have equal access to rigorous courses. These data will aid in the assessment of current teacher capacity as well as student access to challenging courses. The analysis could also help identify the amount of time necessary to phase in the requirements or more

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clearly focus the necessary ramp up. In addition, given the importance of identifying a district role in the accountability framework, this may provide a foundation to begin working with individual districts to close gaps.

ACCOUNTABILITY DETERMINATIONS

States should adjust their high school accountability formula to motivate schools to increase the overall percentage of students meeting the new graduation requirements by building a select set of college-and career-ready indicators into the accountability metric in order to measure and incentivize progress towards ensuring all students graduate college- and career-ready.

Ultimately, students who graduate, on time, having completed the college-and career-ready course of study will be included in the state's cohort graduation rate. However, states that have an opt-out policy should bring particular attention in their formula to those graduating students who have completed more rigorous expectations. Similarly, states may want to reward schools when students excel further and complete academic or technical honors endorsements that extend beyond the state's college-and career-ready graduation requirements.

States can also keep track of the number of students in the graduating cohort who are on-track to graduate on time having completed the college- and career-ready course of study. One option is for states to build annual credit attainment of core academic courses into their accountability determinations. Although course completion is the typical path to earning credit hours, there are other valued approaches often endorsed by innovative schools. Indeed, Carnegie units measure seat time, not performance, and performance is what matters. Some states are beginning to look beyond Carnegie units at other ways for students to demonstrate proficiency and satisfy college- and career-ready graduation requirements to provide districts flexibility to design and implement courses and curricula.

DEVELOPING INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Incentives are important to creating an environment in which accountability goals are perceived as something meaningful to work toward, not just something to meet to avoid sanctions. Districts, as well as schools, should have incentives to graduate more students college and career ready. States ought to either consider specific incentives for students who successfully complete the college-and career-ready course of study or build that into the eligibility criteria for such rewards. States should reward schools for increasing the percentage of students who complete this curriculum, especially low-income and disadvantaged students. For example, a state may consider recognizing a certain number of high schools that have made the greatest increase in students successfully completing the college-and career-ready course of study either through public recognition or financial reward.

STATE EXAMPLES

Achieve has identified examples of state strategies designed to increase successful completion of a college-and career-ready course of study that are useful for states to consider as they revamp their high school accountability systems to value college and career readiness.

Goal Setting

In January 2010, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted a set of revised and refined goals designed to measure and provide incentives for college and career readiness. Louisiana has published baseline data and identified numeric improvement targets for each goal. For

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example, Louisiana has set a goal to increase the percentage of high school graduates completing the optional college- and career-ready course of study (LA-Core 4) from 58.5 percent in 2006 to 72.5 percent in 2014.

Public Reporting

Hawaii's College and Career Readiness Indicators Report includes the number of high school graduates, the percentage of students earning the optional college-and career-ready-level Board of Education Recognition (Step Up) Diploma, the percentages of students enrolling in two- and four-year colleges, and the percentages of last year's graduates enrolled in remedial courses at the state's two-year community colleges. These two-page school-level reports include additional indicators around exceeding, meeting and approaching college and career readiness.

Accountability Determinations

The Florida Board of Education approved changes to the state's high school accountability system in September 2009. These changes move the state's accountability formula from one based purely on Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) assessment results to one that incorporates the high school cohort graduation rate, advanced high school course-taking and success, and performance on measures of college readiness. For the measures of college readiness, schools will earn weighted credits for the number of students scoring "ready" on the SAT, ACT and/or the state's College Entry-Level Placement Test (CPT). For the measures on accelerated courses, schools will earn weighted credits for the number of exams students take and the number of successful student outcomes (e.g. earning college credit, passing industry certification, etc.).

Public Recognition for Schools

In Texas, the Gold Performance Acknowledgment (GPA) system acknowledges districts and campuses for high performance on a set of college-and career-ready indicators, some that are used to determine accountability ratings and others that aren't. This is a school ratings and recognition system that does not include financial rewards. Some of the targets included within the GPA system are:

- The percent of graduates meeting or exceeding requirements for the Recommended High School Program/Distinguished Achievement Program is 85% or more;
- At least 70% graduates taking either the SAT or ACT and 40% or more of examinees scoring at or above the criterion score (SAT 1110; ACT Composite 24);
- 15% or more of 11th and 12th graders are taking at least one AP or IB examination and 50% or more of 11th and 12th grade examinees are scoring at or above the criterion on at least one examination (3 and above for AP; 4 and above for IB); and
- The Texas Success Initiative-Higher Education Readiness Component: Percent of grade 11 examinees with a scale score of 2200 respectively in Mathematics and English Language Arts and a score of 3 or higher on the essay.

Financial Incentives for Schools

The Arkansas Smart Core Incentive Fund provides financial rewards to schools in which 90% of the students have completed the Smart Core curriculum. To be eligible, schools must have maintained an overall graduation rate above the state average for the previous three years. The monetary incentives range between \$50 and \$125 per Smart Core graduate, depending on the percent of graduating

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students who have completed the Smart Core curriculum and been awarded the Smart Core diploma in the preceding year. This program is effect through 2020.

College and Career Incentives for Students

Working together, the Hawaii Department of Education, Board of Regents, University of Hawaii System, Business Roundtable and Hawaii P-20 Council have created incentives for students who successfully complete a college- and career-ready course of study (including completing four years of mathematics and meeting the state standard on a multi-state Algebra II end-of-course exam) linked to postsecondary opportunities as well as incentives for directly entering apprenticeship programs for the trades. For example:

- Students going on to higher education will qualify for the need-based college scholarship, the B+ Scholarship, and gain automatic admissions at two of the state's four public baccalaureate institutions.
- Students joining the apprenticeship program led by the state carpenters' union or for electricians through the public utility are able to waive the apprenticeship placement test. In addition, Hawaiian Electric, Maui Electric and Hawaii Electric Light companies have pledged to automatically invite candidates who apply for a Bargaining Unit job to the next step in the hiring process (job sample test or interview) after successfully passing entry level tests.