



July 2009

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## Commentary

### ***Creating College-Ready Assessments***

As states look to raise high school standards and align them with postsecondary expectations, creating meaningful assessments that signal to students their readiness for postsecondary study - while they are still in high school - is key. And the only way such an assessment can be meaningful to students is if it is also meaningful to higher education institutions. Because of its promise on both these fronts, we have been carefully watching the development and implementation of California's Early Assessment Program (EAP).

The EAP is the result of a partnership between the California State Board of Education, the California Department of Education, and the California State University (CSU) System. These systems worked together to augment the existing California Standards Tests (CSTs), which are administered to all 11th graders, so that they would measure the knowledge and skills CSU faculty members consider essential for success in first-year, credit-bearing courses. The EAP consists of fifteen additional questions and a 45-minute essay added to the CST in English-language arts and fifteen additional questions in mathematics. Students take the EAP portion of the exam on a voluntary basis.

Students who take the EAP receive one of two messages prior to their senior year. With respect to English, if their score exceeds the upper threshold, they are informed that they are "ready for college" and exempt from the CSU placement exam and remedial coursework upon enrollment. Students who score below the threshold are told that they "did not demonstrate college readiness." They are advised about what courses to take their senior year and directed to additional resources to improve their college readiness. The mathematics EAP includes both of these levels and a third, middle level where students are informed that they are "ready for college-conditional," so long as they complete certain mathematics courses during their senior year and receive a grade of "C" or better. CSU has also partnered with school districts in California to implement special curricula and professional development for teachers aimed at serving students in their senior year who need additional support to be ready for college.

The EAP was piloted in 2003, and first offered to all high school juniors in 2004. Participation has grown significantly since then. In 2004, 150,000 high school juniors took the English-language arts assessment and 115,000 juniors took the

mathematics assessment. In 2008, 356,169 juniors - or about 76% of all 11th graders taking the state mandated CST exam - voluntarily took the English and/or mathematics EAP.

The big question, of course, is whether the EAP is making a dent in college remediation rates in the nation's largest public postsecondary system - rates that everyone in California agrees are far too high. A new study offers promising signs that the strategy is indeed working.

The study led by Michal Kurlaender, an assistant professor of education at UC Davis, and researchers at California State University, Sacramento and the University of Minnesota, looked at remediation rates at Sacramento State, one of CSU's largest campuses. The researchers found that students participating in the EAP exam in English are, on average, 6.2 percentage points less likely to require remediation compared to similar students who graduated from high school before the EAP was administered. Likewise, students completing the EAP exam in mathematics are, on average, 4.2 percentage points less likely to need remediation. The decline in remediation did not appear to be due to an increase in the number of unprepared students who opted not to apply to college, according to the researchers.

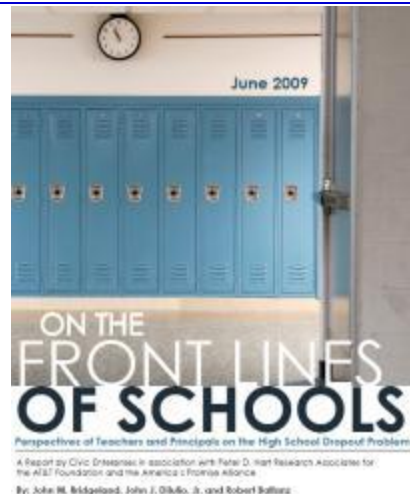
While these results are early and apply only to one campus in the vast CSU system, they suggest a number of lessons for other states to consider as they strive to make college and career readiness the goal for all of their students. First and foremost, states should not overlook the important role state high school assessments can play. They can be a critical signaling device and motivate students to make their senior year more meaningful, but only if they are created with college readiness in mind. Sadly, the vast majority of high school assessments that states administer today are not challenging enough to measure college readiness. States are measuring minimum standards, not college-and career- ready standards.

The California example also reminds us that tests alone are insufficient. The tests in the Early Assessment Program are part of a larger strategy to improve student preparation that includes specialized curricula, teacher training and student supports. It is that larger strategy that all states should be striving for. Download a PDF of the full study: "[Postsecondary Preparation and Remediation: Examining the Effect of the Early Assessment Program at California State University](#)." Read more about the EAP in a [case study](#) as well as in Achieve's [Measures that Matter](#) high school assessment report downloadable as a [PDF](#).

### **Meeting the Drop Out Challenge**

A new report by Civic Enterprises, "[On the Front Lines of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem](#)," - a follow-up to a 2006 survey, "[The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts](#)" - explores why educators and school administrators think students drop out and the strategies they believe could curb the drop out problem. The report reveals a significant disconnect between student and educator perspectives on this important issue.

For example, while two-thirds of dropouts agreed they would have worked harder if more was demanded of them, such as higher academic standards or more studying and homework, less than one-third of teachers believe that schools should expect all students to meet high academic standards and graduate ready for college-level work. In addition, while 60% of teachers and 70% of principals cited student boredom/lack of interest as a factor in why some students drop out, 42% of teachers thought this was just an excuse used by students. Principals were more likely to recognize student engagement as a key element of dropout prevention, which is critical as 70% of dropouts reported that they were not motivated or inspired to work hard before they left school. Educators and students alike cited the influence of friends who were not interested in school as a serious issue.



Overall, teachers and principals strongly support a number of promising reforms - such as alternative learning communities, expanded college-learning opportunities and better linking of classroom learning with real-world relevance - none of which are truly possible without high academic standards and a culture that supports all students graduating ready for college and careers. As the authors note, "We clearly need a national dialogue among teachers, administrators, students and parents around these findings to ensure continued progress in meeting the dropout challenge."

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## New from Achieve

### Jeffrey Wadsworth Joins Achieve Board

Dr. Jeffrey Wadsworth, President and CEO of Battelle Memorial Institute, has joined Achieve's Board of Directors. Dr. Wadsworth leads the world's largest independent research and development organization with a history of scientific discoveries in the fields of energy, security, health and life science that can be found in everyday products such as copiers, bar codes and airplane de-icers. Battelle reinvests its profits into advancing the quality of education through unique public/private partnerships with educators, school districts, foundations and state educators across the United States to accelerate the spread of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education. [More...](#)

## New Math Works Materials on Math and Drop Out Rates

Last September, Achieve launched the Math Works advocacy kit, a collection of materials that makes the case for why all students - regardless of their plans after graduation - should engage in rigorous math course-taking throughout their high school experiences. Since then, the Math Works kit has grown to include seven Mathematics at Work brochures - presenting case studies drawn from leading industries nationwide to illustrate the advanced mathematics knowledge and skills embedded in jobs that offer opportunities for advancement and require some postsecondary education, but less than a four-year degree - and a range of fact sheets, PowerPoint presentations and additional resources on key issues. In May, Achieve released a new [fact sheet](#) and accompanying [PowerPoint presentation](#) on "Exposing the Myth: Advanced Math Does Not Increase Drop Out Rates." Find this and all of the Math Works resources at: [www.achieve.org/MathWorks](http://www.achieve.org/MathWorks).



Have you used any of the Math Works materials? If so, please let us know using our [feedback form](#) how and when you used them and how they were received. Any and all feedback is welcome!

## Focus on Community Colleges

Starting with the President's call asking all Americans to commit to at least one-year of postsecondary education, the Obama Administration has placed the role of two-year colleges front and center in the nation's aspiration to raise postsecondary access, retention and attainment. This is evidenced, for example, by the appointment of a community college president to the second-highest position in the U.S. Department of Education, as well as the highlighting of the central educational role of community colleges in new reports from major organizations such as [Brookings](#) and [Jobs for the Future](#).

Two-year colleges are particularly well-positioned to serve students from underserved populations and, therefore, to become integral partners in every state in which ADP's college- and career-ready alignment work is underway. Community colleges have traditionally maintained an "open door" policy; they have a primary focus on teaching (particularly entry-level, credit-bearing courses as well as developmental courses); and they have a long history of responding to the workplace through associate degree and certificate training, while also offering opportunities for transfer to four-year degree programs.

Achieve's Web-based toolkit for higher education leaders, [postsecconnect.org](http://postsecconnect.org), features the contributions of two-year institutions to college- and career-ready standards, assessments and other initiatives around the nation. We plan to feature even more examples of community college work on the Web site in the future, and welcome inquiries and submissions from our two-year college readers

and users. Please be in touch with Nevin Brown, Achieve's Senior Fellow for Postsecondary Engagement, about highlighting the work your two-year institution, district or system is doing to advance college and career readiness in your state. Contact Nevin at (202) 419-1565 or via the [feedback form](#).

### **Achieve Web Site Refresh**

Achieve recently upgraded its [achieve.org](#) Web site to make it more user-friendly, with more buttons, a wider screen size and better navigation. New to the homepage is a blog-like section called "From the OverAchievers," where you'll be able to easily access the latest newsletter commentary and timely updates. Visitors can also now subscribe to news feeds via RSS and join Achieve's Facebook page. Look forward to more improvements over the summer.

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### **New From the States: Communicating the College- and Career-Ready Agenda**

In 2007, the Tennessee Alignment Committee - a consortium of government, business, and education leaders from across the state - launched the **Tennessee Diploma Project** (TDP) to build public and stakeholder support for raising education standards and graduation requirements. In 2008, TDP proved to be successful as the State Board of Education adopted standards and graduation requirements aligned with the expectations of the postsecondary and business communities. Since then, TDP has continued its outreach, particularly to educators and employers. The TDP was recently bolstered by the creation of the **Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education** (SCORE), a new group committed, in part, to "jumpstarting the reforms that will help Tennessee schools, teachers, and students meet the bar" set by the TDP. For more on SCORE, go [here](#).

The **Tennessee School Boards Association** recently created a brochure explaining the need for and the key components of the new college- and career-ready graduation

### **News Clips**

- 1. Two-Diploma Proposal Puts Michigan's CTE Students at Risk**

In an op-ed in the *The Detroit News*, Patricia Cantu, director of the Office of Career and Technical Education for the Michigan Department of Education, dispels the notion that high school CTE students shouldn't be expected to meet the state's new graduation requirements. [More...](#)

- 2. Postsecondary Education Goes to Work**

Georgetown University's Anthony P. Carnevale writes in *Inside Higher Ed* that expanding Pell Grant eligibility "may well be the long overdue down payment on a grand strategy to build a 21st Century work force development and

requirements, adopted in 2008 to be implemented in 2009-10. This brochure, which was distributed to the TSBA's members throughout the state, demonstrates the power of coalitions and communications as states adopt the college- and career-ready agenda. [Download the PDF](#). For more information on the Tennessee Diploma Project, go [here](#).

In May, **Expect More Arizona** - a public-private partnership dedicated to increasing awareness about the importance of strengthening education in Arizona first conceived by the Governor's P-20 Council - was launched. At the heart of this campaign is [ExpectMoreArizona.org](http://ExpectMoreArizona.org), a robust Web site that provides key information about Arizona's education system and what can be done to improve it. The campaign also includes a significant public awareness element, with television, radio, print and out-of-home advertising to bolster support for education reform.

If you have communications tools or resources you'd like to share with others, please let us know via the [feedback form](#).

adjustment system."  
[More...](#)

### 3. **The Economic Necessity of College**

An article in *The New York Times* highlights the post-high school plans of 2009 high school graduates in the Dayton, Ohio region, who are part of "Generation R" - Generation Recession. Increasingly these young adults are enrolling in community colleges, as good jobs that require only a high school diploma disappear. [More...](#)

### 4. **The Push for Higher Math**

*The Washington Post* notes that schools are immersing middle school students in algebra and toughening high school math requirements so graduates can compete for technical jobs. [More...](#)

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## New Resources

- The Carnegie Corporation of New York - Institute for Advanced Study released "[The Opportunity Equation: Transforming Mathematics and Science Education for Citizenship and the Global Economy](#)." The study sets out four priorities for ensuring high-quality science and math education: higher levels of math and science learning for all students; common standards that are fewer, clearer and higher, coupled with aligned assessments; improved teaching



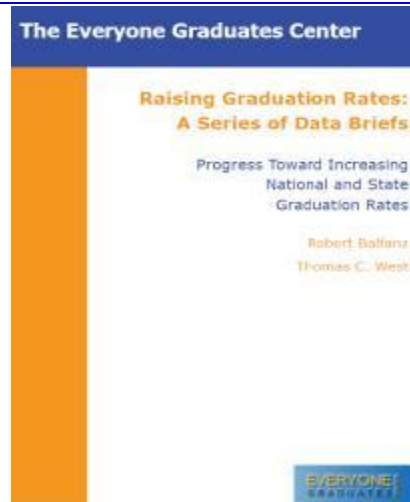
and professional learning, supported by better school and system management; and new designs for schools and systems to deliver math and science learning more effectively. The report calls for support for the Common Core State Standards Initiative, in which Achieve is playing an important role. A number of distinguished individuals have lauded the report, including U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Governor Donald Carcieri of Rhode Island, and Harold Varmus, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist. The report is available at [www.opportunityequation.org](http://www.opportunityequation.org). Achieve was one of over fifty organizations to endorse the report's recommendations; read our [press release](#).

- The American Institutes for Research (AIR) released "[The Second Derivative: International Benchmarks in Mathematics for U.S. States and School Districts](#)," linking - and assigning letter grades to - the fifty states' NAEP scores with the scores of countries that took the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Massachusetts, the top state, scored a B, while a small handful of other states score in the B/B- range. A grade of "B" translates to the proficient level on NAEP. High-scoring Asian nations typically score at the B+ or B levels. Don't miss their [Web tool](#), which allows you to compare your state to the countries in the study. [Download the report](#) (PDF).

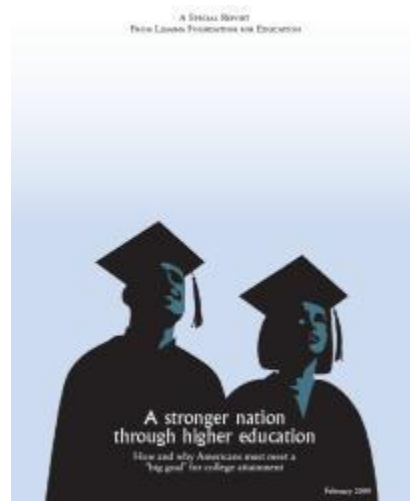


- Changes by the U.S. Department of Education last fall to the way states must calculate, report and hold schools accountable for graduation rates under the No Child Left Behind Act are an important step towards meaningful graduation rate accountability. But, as the Alliance for Excellent Education shows in a series of state-by-state briefs, current policy in many states still falls short of the new federal regulations. As states implement the new guidelines, they must make meaningful changes to their definitions of which students count as graduates, transfers, and dropouts; set long-term goals and annual growth targets that will encourage schools to show real progress; shine the light on the graduation rates of all student subgroups; and continue building robust longitudinal data systems that provide the technical capacity to report accurate graduation data. [More...](#)

- In "[Progress Towards Increasing National and State Graduation Rates](#)," Robert Balfanz and Thomas C. West analyze changes in national and statewide graduation rates and student promotion rates from 2002 to 2006. They find that, nationally, the graduation rate remained flat at about 74%, and only about one-third of states saw the percentage of students graduating from high school increase over that time period. In 12 states, however, gains were substantial - particularly in Tennessee, where the graduation rate increased 11 percentage points in four years. Variation in the types of policy reforms adopted by the leading 12 states makes it difficult to identify common factors driving their success, but the diversity of the states' size, geographic region and 2002 graduation rate underscore the potential for progress when leaders commit to tackling the dropout crisis. This report provides critical evidence that states can raise standards and accountability and still see more students graduate. [More...](#)



- The Lumina Foundation for Education is making a major commitment to increasing college attainment rates. In a recent report, "[A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education](#)," the foundation has embraced a goal "to increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials from 39 percent to 60 percent by the year 2025." The report notes that the nation faces a range of social and economic challenges that will require educating far more Americans beyond high school. Given that college attainment rates in the U.S. have remained stagnant while they continue to rise in most other industrial and post-industrial nations, attainment to degree or certificate - not just access to programs - must be the nation's postsecondary priority if American workers are to have a reasonable chance to reach a middle class standard of living.



The report recommends greater national attention to college readiness in high school; increased investment in community colleges; more focus on postsecondary access, affordability, and quality; and improved data quality and measurement of institutional effectiveness based on student success. The report includes state-by-state college attainment data, with additional state-level data available on the [Lumina Web site](#). It



encourages readers to use the Web-based comparative data resource developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS): [www.higheredinfo.org](http://www.higheredinfo.org). [Download the report...](#)

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### **Achieve Job Opportunities**

Achieve seeks a Director of State Leadership and Policy Development as well as a Vice President for Management, Finance and Operations. For more, go [here](#).

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