



June 2010

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### Commentary

#### **Opening Doors: College- and Career-Ready High School Graduation Requirements**

Five years ago when Achieve first started tracking progress on the college- and career-ready policy agenda, there were only three states that had set their high school graduation requirements at a level that would ensure college and career readiness for all students. Today, that number stands at 21 states, covering more than half of the students in the U.S.

The states that have college- and career-ready graduation requirements are: **Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas** and **Washington** - and the **District of Columbia**. These states have made the commitment to ensure that all students have access to a well-rounded, rigorous curriculum that will prepare them for success in life after high school. To see more specifically each state's high school graduation requirements view this [comparison table](#).

But what do "college- and career-ready" graduation requirements actually mean? Simply put, "college and career readiness" refers to the core foundational knowledge and skills high school graduates must possess to be prepared for further education or training after high school. One way states can ensure students gain these knowledge and skills is by requiring them to take a well-rounded, rigorous curriculum in order to earn a diploma. Achieve's research suggests that for high school graduates to be prepared for success in postsecondary settings, they need to take four years of challenging mathematics - including content at least through Algebra II or its equivalent - and four years of rigorous English aligned with college- and career-ready standards. Taking such a rigorous course of study in high school aligned to college and career expectations is one of the strongest predictors of whether a student ultimately will meet his or her postsecondary goals.

Earlier this month Achieve hosted a convening for states that have raised their graduation requirements or are in the process of doing so. Teams included representatives from state departments of education, governors' offices, higher education, legislators, and business and advocacy organizations. The meeting focused on the most significant implementation challenges states are facing,

including academic supports for students, teacher capacity, the availability of quality curricular pathways, strategies for increasing graduation rates, alignment with postsecondary placement standards and first year courses, and communications and outreach strategies. Time was also spent on strategies for sustaining the graduation policies through political transitions, as many of the states may experience turnover in governors or other key officials as a result of the 2010 elections. Meeting PowerPoints, resources and related materials are available [here](#).

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## New from Achieve

### PARCC Applies for Race to the Top Assessment Funds

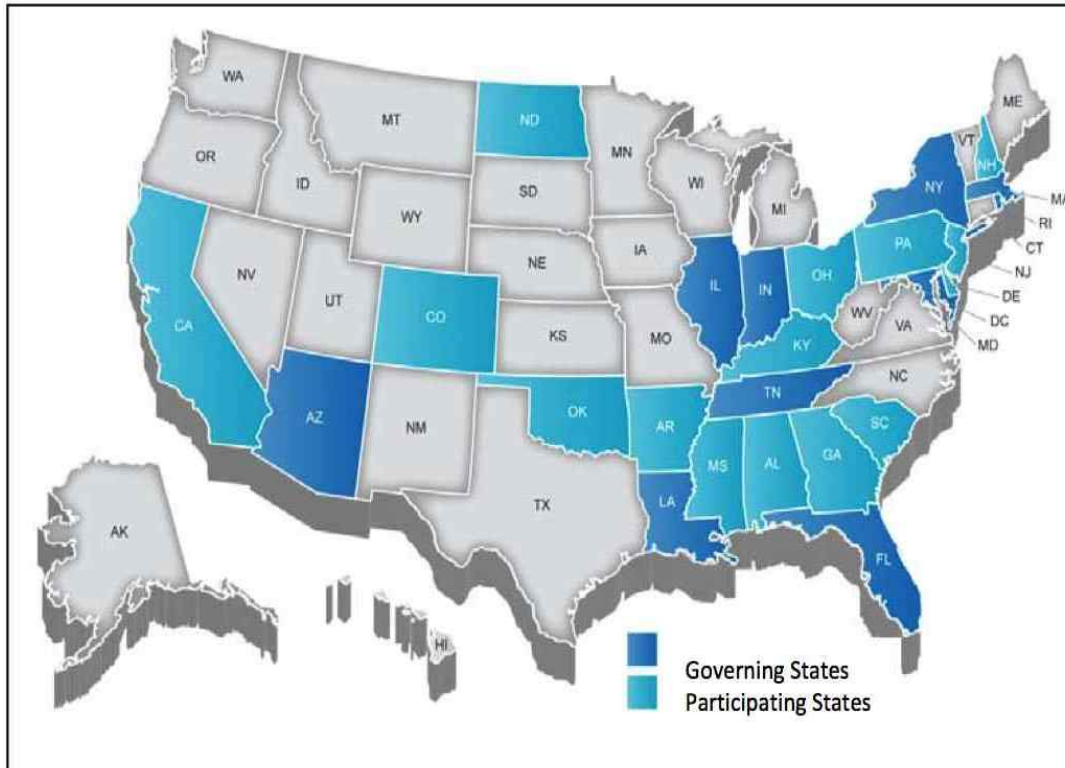
On June 23 it was announced that twenty-six states have formed the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC or Partnership) to create a next-generation assessment system that will ensure students across the country are expected to meet common, high standards that will prepare them for their futures. On behalf of the Partnership, Florida submitted an application to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) as part of the \$350 million "Race to the Top" comprehensive assessment grant competition. For a summary of the proposal, visit [www.achieve.org/PARCCsummary](http://www.achieve.org/PARCCsummary).

Governing states that will lead the assessment development effort for the Partnership include: **Arizona, the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island and Tennessee**. Additional participating states are: **Alabama, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina**. The PARCC states selected Achieve to coordinate the work of the Partnership.

States in the Partnership share one fundamental goal: building their collective capacity to dramatically increase the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for success in college and the workplace.

The proposed assessment system will be computer-based and students will take parts of the assessment at key times during the school year, closer to when they learn the material. Because the assessments will be developed by states in partnership with one another, they will provide a common metric for measuring the performance of their students; for the first time, meeting standards in one state will mean the same thing as in others.

To ensure the assessment system is anchored in what it takes to be successful in college and careers, higher education systems and institutions in all PARCC states will participate in the development of the new high school tests. Over 200 higher education institutions, including some of the largest in the country, have agreed to participate. The goal will be for those institutions, and the nearly 1,000 campuses they represent, to honor the results of the new assessments as an indicator of students' readiness to take first year credit-bearing courses.



## Final Common Core State Standards - and New Achieve Resources - Released

On June 2, 2010, the final K-12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English and mathematics were released by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The CCSS are the result of a voluntary, state-led effort to establish a shared set of internationally-benchmarked, college- and career-ready K-12 standards in English Language Arts and mathematics. The final common core standards are posted at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).



Achieve was actively involved in helping to shape the CCSS standards over the past year. After their release, Achieve President Michael Cohen stated that, "Achieve encourages states to adopt and fully implement the Common Core State Standards as part of their college- and career-ready agenda. That means aligning graduation requirements, curriculum materials and instructional tools, educator preparation and professional development, assessments, accountability indicators and data systems with the Common Core State Standards so that the whole system - down to every classroom - is geared toward the same end goal: all students graduating, ready for college, careers and life." Read the [press release](#).

States are moving at a fast clip to adopt the CCSS standards. To date, 16 states

have adopted the standards - **Arizona, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, West Virginia, Wisconsin** and **Wyoming**. How and when states adopt depends on the laws of each state. Some states will adopt the standards through their state boards of education, while others will adopt them through their state legislatures. To help states and others interested better understand the Common Core standards, Achieve has created a range of materials, all available at [www.achieve.org/achievingcommoncore](http://www.achieve.org/achievingcommoncore). The materials focus on the organization, content and evidence base used to support the standards, including fact sheets that describe the content areas and address frequently asked questions about the standards.

One resource that a number of states are already using is the Common Core Comparison Tool (CCCTool), designed by Achieve and funded by JP Morgan Chase. The CCCTool allows states to compare their existing state standards with the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. State teams can match their state standards to the CCSS, indicate the strength of the match and answer questions critical for adoption and implementation insofar as curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessments are concerned. While Achieve designed the CCCTool, the data generated are the result of judgments made by the members of the state team who complete the process. [Contact us](#) for more information.

### **Race to the Top Round 2 Update**

35 states plus the District of Columbia met the June 1 application deadline for the second round of Race to the Top competition, in which \$3.4 billion in economic stimulus funds are available. The U.S. Education Department will select the Round 2 winners over the summer using the same process as was used in Round 1. Depending on the size of the winning states, 10-15 states could win Race to the Top grants. Winners will be announced by the end of September. [More...](#)

### **International Education Summit**

On September 13-14, Sir Michael Barber and Michael Fullan are co-chairing an international education summit in Toronto, Canada designed to stimulate ideas, invoke creativity and foster innovation. *The Building Blocks for Education: Whole System Reform* international summit will examine four key areas related to creating successful reform in education systems: standards and targets; assessments and use of data; capacity building and the development of the teaching profession; and, leadership development and sustainability. Confirmed speakers include U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, Julia Gillard, Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Minister for Education, Timo Lankinen, Director General Finnish National Board of Education, Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defense, Singapore, and Andreas Schleicher, Special Advisor on Education Policy, Directorate for Education Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). [More...](#)

## The Unsung Heroes of the CCSS

The K-12 Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics are the result of nearly a year's worth of work by numerous individuals and groups. Their collective efforts resulted in a well-received set of standards that have already been adopted by 16 states. CCSSO and NGA provided the overall leadership, but the unsung heroes of this unprecedented effort are the lead writers and their teams who worked closely with the participating states every step of the way, through multiple rounds of feedback and thousands of public comments and ultimately drafted the final standards that states are now adopting.

The ELA team was led by Sue Pimentel, an independent consultant who has been part of Achieve's American Diploma Project (ADP) team since 2003, and included David Coleman, President of Student Achievement Partners and Jim Patterson, Senior Program Development Associate in Language Arts at ACT. The math team was led by Bill McCallum, Head of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Arizona and also a member of Achieve's ADP team since 2003, and included Jason Zimba, Professor of Mathematics and Physics at Bennington College and co-founder of Student Achievement Partners, and Phil Daro, who works with America's Choice and the Strategic Education Research Partnership. These team leaders, as well as all the members of the working, feedback and validation committees did a masterful job in creating standards that will ensure that students will graduate ready for college and careers in the 21st century. [See a list of team members.](#)

## News Clips

### 1. States Adopt Common Core State Standards

Achieve President Michael Cohen told *The Christian Science Monitor*, "If a significant number of states adopt by August, and another significant number by the end of the year, that will help create some momentum for more states to do it. States will be watching some of the bellwether states to see what they do." [More...](#)

### 2. Core State Standards Will Lift Georgia

In an op-ed in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Wanda Barrs, Chair of the **Georgia** Board of Education, writes that, "by collaborating on the Common Core State Standards, working together we can take the next step to move Georgia's schools from great to world-class." [More...](#)

### 3. The Next Generation of Science Standards

*District Administration* reports that a framework to guide new science standards is getting closer. An ad hoc committee - led by the National Research Council - is working to design a new conceptual framework that will be used by Achieve, in partnership

At Achieve, we had a chance to watch these two teams in action. They worked 24/7 for nearly a year, bringing considerable vision, expertise, talent, dedication and patience to their task. Each team produced a set of standards that are a significant advance over existing state and national standards. They've earned our respect and admiration, and we all owe them our deepest thanks.

with states, to draft next-generation state science standards. [More...](#)

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### New Resources

- The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce published [Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018](#), a report that points out that the United States is "on a collision course with the future" as far too few Americans earned postsecondary degrees. By 2018, the economy will have jobs for an estimated 22 million new workers with colleges degrees, yet there will be a projected shortage of up to 7.7 million workers - including a shortage of 3 million workers with a postsecondary degree (associate or higher) and of 4.7 million workers with a postsecondary certificate. "This shortfall will mean lost economic opportunity for millions of American workers," according to the report.
- NCES published [Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2007-08](#). According to this annual report from the National Center for Education Statistics, one out of four U.S. high school students fails to graduate on time, The number is even higher - 40 percent - among African-American and Hispanic students. Male students are slightly more likely to fail to graduate than female students. The on-time graduation rate in the U.S. has hovered between 70 percent and 75 percent since 1990. In addition, Education Week and Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center recently released [Diplomas Count 2010](#), an annual report on the nation's, states' and even districts' graduation rates. *Diplomas Count* found that the national graduation rate has dropped by a small margin this year, but has essentially remained stagnant for over a decade.
- [The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2009 Trial Urban District Assessment, National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) at Grades 4 and 8](#) shows that the reading achievement of students in our largest cities has increased over time. Yet cities still have significant work to do, as the

increases since 2007 weren't statistically significant in 4th grade. Overall scores of cities are lower, and the achievement gap in the urban districts is larger, than the national average. The report shows that several cities are leading the way; of the cities that have participated since the urban district assessments started in 2002, Atlanta and Los Angeles have produced significant increases in reading achievement in both 4th grade and 8th grade. Boston also has significant increases since it first participated in the assessment in 2003.

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