



Achieve

All students should graduate from high school
ready for **college, careers and citizenship**

June 2014 Perspective Newsletter

Commentary

by Achieve President Michael Cohen

Is The Nation's Report Card "College and Career Ready"?

After nearly a decade of research, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) [released](#) in May the first outcomes of its efforts to use the results of the [2013 12th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) to report on the academic preparedness of U.S. 12th graders for college. It found that only 38% of 12th graders meet its preparedness benchmark in reading, and 39% meet its preparedness benchmark in math. NAGB's efforts to track college readiness in the United States is uniquely important as it has the only assessment program that reports on the academic performance of a representative national sample of high school students.



That said, the group that issues the Nation's Report Card deserves a grade of "Incomplete" for its work. Reading and math are obviously necessary indicators of academic preparation for college and careers after high school, but higher education and employers

say it's not enough. When it comes to the ability to complete college level work (and to being career ready), writing skills are essential. Yet, despite the fact that NAGB also administers a 12th grade writing test, it inexplicably chose not to include writing as an indicator of readiness.

If NAEP wants to remain the "gold standard" for assessment, NAGB must remedy this situation quickly. Postsecondary institutions and systems throughout the nation assess writing in order to determine whether students have the academic skills to succeed in first year courses. According to ACT, approximately one third of ACT test takers do not meet its readiness standard for English Composition. Recent data from Florida indicates that 32% of first year students are placed into developmental writing courses. Using preparedness indicators that do not include writing will not only provide incomplete information to the public but will send the wrong signal about the importance of writing for high school graduates. And states that assess writing need an independent external benchmark they can rely on, which NAEP has always provided with their reading and math assessments.

Unfortunately, the current NAEP 12th grade writing assessment, starting with the Writing Framework that guides the development of test items, will need substantial revisions to be a valid indicator of academic preparedness. One of the most important advances made through the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) English Language Arts/Literacy standards is the understanding that preparation for both postsecondary education and careers requires the ability to read texts of appropriate complexity and mobilize evidence from the text to make a clear and logical written argument. Achieve's earlier research with

states on college and career readiness for the American Diploma Project provides a strong foundation for expecting high school students to be able to write coherent arguments supported by evidence from credible sources. The CCSS are quite explicit on this issue, building the idea of "writing to sources" into the grade-by-grade progression of the writing standards. Focus groups of postsecondary faculty conducted by the PARCC assessment consortium powerfully underscored the importance of these skills.

While NAGB does not need to align its assessments and their frameworks to the CCSS, it does need to pay careful attention to the evidence upon which they rest.

A review of the 2011 NAEP Framework and sample items makes clear that the assessment does not address the ability of students to draw on evidence to make persuasive arguments. In fact, the released 2011 12th grade items do not come close to assessing writing to sources.

One item asks students to write an essay describing how he/she uses technology. It includes a prompt that presents survey data on how students use computers, but doesn't require use of or reference to the data in order to respond to the prompt.

12th Grade NAEP Writing Prompt

Write an essay for a college admissions committee about one kind of information or communications technology you use. Describe what it is and explain why the technology is important to you. Develop your essay with details so the admissions committee can understand the value of this technology. You may use information from the presentation in your essay.

Source: [NAEP](#)

NAGB's web site shows several sample responses, including one that was rated Effective (the highest score), one rated Competent, and one rated Adequate. None of those highly ranked essays made *any* use of the survey data presented in the question. Those data were window dressing. In short, *this item does not require students to read anything (except the question), nor to make an argument based on the evidence provided.*

Another item asks 12th grade students to write a persuasive letter to the local council on whether or not to build a discount store in the area. It too is also of limited value for assessing preparedness in writing. It asks students to read a contrived "newspaper article" regarding plans to build a store in the community. First, the text is considerably less complex than what 12th graders should be able to handle and even less complex than what would be found in many newspaper stories.

12th Grade NAEP Writing Item

The following article recently appeared in your local newspaper. Write a letter to the local council members arguing for or against the building of Big Discount in your area. Support your argument and defend it against the arguments the opposing side might make.



Source: [NAEP](#)

And while students are expected to marshal evidence to support their positions, the sample responses include assertions about evidence and facts, but with no sources cited, and no useful evidence provided in the article students were asked to read. Students could simply make up evidence for their response. That's

not the type of preparation for college we should encourage.

If NAGB wants to make a significant contribution to the national conversation about college readiness, it will have to quickly step up its game. Both multi-state assessment consortia, PARCC and SBAC, have developed assessments that incorporate "writing to sources" into their high school assessment programs, and many states will begin to administer them next year.

PARCC 11th Grade Sample Writing Task

Today you will read a biography of Abigail Adams, and then you will read two examples of correspondence between Abigail and her husband, John Adams, who served as President of the United States from 1797 to 1801. As you read these texts, you will gather information and answer questions that will help you understand John and Abigail Adams's relationship and opinions. When you are finished reading, you will write an analytical essay.

Question: *Both John and Abigail Adams believed strongly in freedom and independence. However, their letters suggest that each of them understood these terms differently based on their experiences.*

Write an essay that explains their contrasting views on the concepts of freedom and independence. In your essay, make a claim about the idea of freedom and independence and how John and Abigail Adams add to that understanding and/or how each illustrates a misunderstanding of freedom and

independence. Support your response with textual evidence and inferences drawn from all three sources.

Source: [PARCC](#)

Sending the right signal to the public and to state policymakers about the importance of assessing writing for college readiness is particularly important now as some states are contemplating buying off the shelf tests or creating their own.

In addition, if NAGB is serious about having a complete indicator of college readiness, they should revise the schedule for administering the 12th grade writing assessment. The last 12th grade writing assessment was given in 2011, and it is not scheduled to be administered again until 2017. Every six years simply isn't enough.

In the decade it took NAGB to conduct its academic preparedness research, states moved rapidly to make college and career readiness the mission of their K-12 systems, and a national priority. Today, every state has adopted college- and career-ready standards in literacy and mathematics, either the CCSS or their own state standards. And, states are working to develop and administer tests that measure college ready skills - and are honored by postsecondary institutions - to high school students statewide. Twenty states have raised course-taking requirements for high school graduation, and many are working to incorporate indicators of college-readiness into their accountability and reporting systems.

In short, the states are way out in front on promoting and

assessing college readiness. NAGB doesn't have a moment to waste.

News

Update from EQuIP

Over the past month, Achieve has partnered with a number of states and organizations to host trainings on the [EQuIP](#) rubrics and quality review process as well as the EQuIP Student Work Protocol. The EQuIP rubrics are designed to assist educators in evaluating the quality of lessons and units aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the EQuIP Student Work Protocol helps establish or articulate the relationship between student work and the quality and alignment of instructional materials.



In late May, Achieve partnered with the [California Department of Education](#) to host a two-day training on the EQuIP rubrics for mathematics and ELA/literacy and the EQuIP Student Work Protocol, as well as the recently released [EQuIP rubric for science](#). The EQuIP rubric for science measures the alignment of lessons and units to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

In June, Achieve partnered with the [North Carolina Department of Public Instruction](#) and the [Center for Teaching Quality](#) (CTQ) to host another two-day training in North Carolina on the EQuIP rubrics and Student Work Protocol. This training was attended by educators from North Carolina, including members of the

[Governor's Teacher Network](#), as well as CTQ teachers from Kentucky and Florida.

The [Maryland State Department of Education](#) conducted a training for teachers on the EQulP Student Work Protocol during the state's College and Career Readiness Conference in June at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland.

The full EQulP Peer Review Panel met in June to both re-calibrate their application of the EQulP rubrics as well as to evaluate lessons and units submitted to the Peer Review Panel. Additional information on the EQulP Peer Review Panel is available [here](#). There are now 30 lessons or units posted and available for download that have been identified as *Exemplar* or *Exemplar if Improved* by members of the EQulP Peer Review Panel. **If you are interested in having a lessons or units reviewed by the EQulP Peer Review Panel**, please visit <http://lessons.achieve.org> to register and submit materials aligned to the CCSS.

We are proud to share that Achieve's [EQulP webpage](#) has exceeded 65,000 unique hits.

Student Assessment Inventory Tool

Achieve has launched the *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts*, a tool which will enable district leaders to take stock of how many assessments are administered throughout a school year and for what purposes they give assessments. Designed from a student perspective, the tool can be used by education leaders to make decisions about what amount of testing is appropriate

and to be more transparent with parents about the testing in schools. It supports a process by which districts evaluate current assessments, determine the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes, and work to ensure that every district-mandated test is useful and of high quality.

Quality assessments are a critical component of improving college and career readiness in the United States. Educators rely upon consistent performance measures to monitor student progress and their own effectiveness. However, educators, parents, and students across the country have expressed concerns about the amount of time that testing is taking away from teaching and learning. School district officials have the opportunity to respond to these concerns about over-testing by leading a conversation among educators and the broader community that directly addresses the amount of testing and points the way toward a more coherent, educationally sound approach to assessment.

The Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts is available on the Achieve website at:

<http://www.achieve.org/assessmentinventory>

Statement on New York's agreement to continue implementation of the Common Core State Standards

Achieve President Michael Cohen issued a statement on New York's agreement to continue implementation of the Common Core State Standards, noting that, "Together with legislation enacted earlier this spring, state leaders have found an effective

way to maintain a focus on accountability for results, while being flexible enough to adjust policy details and implementation timelines to take into account the implementation challenges facing teachers, students, and their parents." [Read the full statement...](#)

News Clip

Public colleges and universities in New England signal support for competency-based, or proficiency-based learning

All public institutions of higher education in Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont have joined the New England Secondary School Consortium and three private institutions to endorse proficiency-based education and graduation. The Consortium's Collegiate Endorsement of Proficiency-Based Education and Graduation has now been signed by 55 colleges and universities across New England, including the public-university and community-college systems in five states and three private institutions in Maine. With some parents wondering about the effects that proficiency-based education will have on their children in the college-admissions process, the Consortium reached out to higher education institutions throughout the region and asked them directly about their support of proficiency-based learning, and the endorsements resulted from these conversations. Read and listen to the [Maine Public Broadcasting story](#).

New Resources

The Relationship between STEM Education and the Workforce

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) [reported](#) that both the number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees awarded and the number of jobs in STEM fields increased in recent years. The number of degrees awarded in STEM fields grew 55 percent from 1.35 million in the 2002-2003 academic year to over 2 million in the 2011-2012 academic year, while degrees awarded in non-STEM fields increased 37 percent. Since 2004, the number of STEM jobs increased 16 percent from 14.2 million to 16.5 million jobs in 2012, and non-STEM jobs remained fairly steady. The trends in STEM degrees and jobs varied across STEM fields. GAO examined (1) recent trends in the number of degrees and jobs in STEM fields, (2) the extent to which federal postsecondary STEM education programs take workforce needs into consideration, and (3) the extent to which federal K-12 STEM education programs prepare students for postsecondary STEM education.

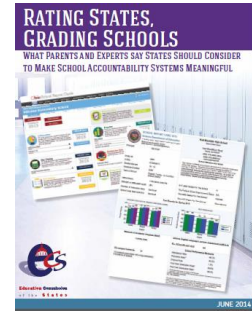
GAO
United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

SCIENCE,
TECHNOLOGY,
ENGINEERING, AND
MATHEMATICS
EDUCATION

Assessing the
Relationship between
Education and the
Workforce

Making School Accountability Systems Meaningful

Education Commission of the States (ECS) released a report on parents', researchers' and experts' thoughts on accountability and report cards across states. The report asked of researchers whether report cards are easy to find, of parents whether report cards are easy to understand and of experts what indicators are essential for measuring school and district performance. Researchers identified eight states with report cards that are easy-to-find, informative and readable: AZ, DE, IL, KY, LA, ME, MA and OH. Parents identified six report cards that were easy to understand: AR, DE, DC, IL, OH and WI. The five indicators selected by experts to be included in school accountability systems are: student achievement, student academic growth, achievement gap closure, graduation rates and postsecondary career readiness. The authors of the report identified ten states that are including and publicly reporting all five essential indicators in their school accountability systems: CA, CO, KY, NM, NC, OH, OK, PA, UT and WI. That report is available [here](#).



Career Opportunity

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