

March 2006

New from Achieve

Closing the Expectations Gap 2006. Just one year after the nation's governors joined leaders from education and business to make high school reform a national priority at the National Education Summit on High Schools, many states are making progress closing the expectations gap between what is demanded of students in high school and the skills they need to be successful in college and careers, according to Achieve's new survey. But the report also shows that there is still much more to be done. See "Commentary" below for more results or download a [PDF](#) file of the report.



ADP Network states' plans released. At the same time, Achieve released ADP Network states' [plans](#) for putting these reforms in place. The ADP Network states, which together educate more than 22 million students or 48 percent of all U.S. students, are committed to significantly raising the rigor of high school standards, assessments and curriculum and better aligning these expectations with the demands of postsecondary education and work.

Commentary: Closing the Expectations Gap

Bill Gates threw down the gauntlet before 45 governors last year when he told them their high schools are “obsolete,” graduates aren’t ready for work or college and the American dream is quickly slipping into memory. Apparently, the governors and education officials who attended the National Education Summit on High Schools were listening; in fact, they took up the challenge and have made incredible progress over the past year.

Forty-four states have taken steps to close the expectations gap, according to a new 50-state report by Achieve. The most significant changes have been made as states align academic standards with college and workplace expectations, raise

News Clips

Click on the links below to view articles of interest from the past month. Some publications require free registration to read articles.

1. **Closing the expectations gap.** Following are selected news stories about *Closing the Expectations Gap 2006: An Annual 50-State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Work*. Achieve released the report on the anniversary of the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools.
 - States Are Making Uneven Progress in Better Preparing Students for College, Report Says, [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)
 - Getting Students College-Ready Is Top State Goal, [Stateline.org](#)
 - States Acting To Raise Bar on

graduation requirements and commit to building longitudinal data systems that follow students from high school through college.

Academic Standards

High school standards traditionally have not been anchored in the real-world expectations of colleges and the workplace. Instead, they have been developed by K-12 educators largely in a vacuum, without clear signals from higher education and business about what is most important to them. That is beginning to change.

While only a handful of states had successfully aligned their high school standards with college and workplace expectations at the time of the Summit, **five** states now report that they have done this, and **30** additional states have a process under way. The states that have been most successful in redefining their expectations have done so with the full participation of the business and postsecondary communities. They have clearly articulated their expectations for incoming students and employees, and those skills have served as an anchor for the high school exit standards.

Graduation Requirements

There is overwhelming research that students need four years of rigorous English and mathematics through at least Algebra II to be successful in college or 21st-century jobs. One year ago, only **two** states -- Arkansas and Texas -- required students to take a college- and work-ready curriculum to graduate. Since the Summit, **six** additional states have raised or are in the process of raising requirements to that level -- Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New York, Oklahoma and South Dakota. **Twelve** more states report plans to do so

- H.S. Skills, [Education Week](#)
- High Schools May Pay For College Gap, [San Antonio Express News](#)
- US High Schools Bearing Down, Achieve Survey Finds, [Arkansas Democrat Gazette](#)

2. **Giving it the ol' college try.** Fifty-four percent of freshmen at [Kentucky's](#) state universities and community colleges had to take remedial classes. These unprepared students were twice as likely to drop out, and institutions spend a total of \$25 million a year -- \$14 million in state money and \$11 million in student tuition -- to teach students skills they should have learned in high school.

3. **The brains race.** The world is trading the arms race for the brains race, and the United States is quickly losing its grip on the title of the world's leader in science and technology. President Bush and our nation's business leaders are calling for us to beef up our math and science education. A [USA Today](#) article explores the need to make the sciences more attractive to U.S. students than vegetables and visits to the dentist are.

4. **Competing studies question AP's value.** The percentage of high school seniors passing Advanced Placement (AP) tests has increased in every state over the last half decade, yet a bevy of recent studies -- often with contrasting results -- have fired up debate over federal and state moves to provide the courses to more students. The studies focus on how effectively AP prepares students for college and how well it serves as a predictor of college graduation. The most encouraging results, from a study by Chrys Dougherty, Lynn

in the next few years, which would bring the total number of states with college- and work-ready diploma requirements to 20.

P-16 Data Systems

More states also are committed to building P-16 longitudinal data systems. **Three** states already have such a system in place, and **31** others report that they are planning to create one. Once states have the ability to match student records between the K-12 and postsecondary systems, they will be able to report back to high schools on how many of their students needed remediation and how many were successful in earning a college degree. This is very valuable information that high schools can use to improve curriculum and instruction.

Testing & Accountability

While we have seen real traction in states on standards, graduation requirements and data systems, less progress has been made with assessments and accountability. Very few states have high school tests in place that are rigorous enough to signal whether students are ready for college-level work, and even fewer have made college and work readiness a factor in their high school accountability systems.

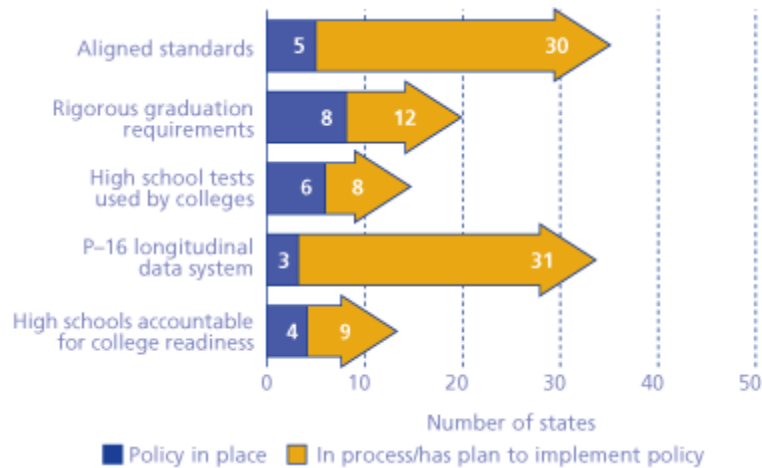
Most states have their priorities right -- standards should be redefined before better assessments can be developed. And until new assessments and data systems are in place, it will be hard to make college and work readiness the centerpiece of high school accountability.

In the year ahead, we expect the states that are most committed to this agenda will continue to move forward aggressively. We also hope the example these states are setting will spur other states into action.

Mellor and Shuling Jian, found that students who score a 3 or higher on one of the AP exams are more likely to graduate from college than students who score poorly or do not take the tests are. Articles in [*Education Week*](#) and [*The Washington Post*](#) provide perspective on each study's findings.

Did You Know?

Growing Number of States Have Policies To Ensure That Students Graduate College and Work Ready



Source: Achieve Survey/Research, 2006.

Since the National Education Summit on High Schools in February 2005, many states have taken action to restore value to the high school diploma and better prepare high school students for success in college or the workplace, according to Achieve's new [survey](#). See "Commentary" above for more details. Or visit Achieve's [Web site](#) for an overview of key findings from each state.

New Resources

- Almost half of U.S. students are graduating high school without the reading skills they need to be prepared for college and the workforce -- the lowest percentage in more than a decade, according to a new report by [ACT](#). Students who are not college and work ready often are unable to read complex texts, which has a ripple effect on their ability to master other subjects as well. The report recommends incorporating complex reading materials into all high school subjects, revising state standards to explicitly define reading expectations across the high school curriculum, and strengthening high school assessments to align with improved reading standards and instruction.
- State and education leaders, employers, and postsecondary faculty [agree](#) that high school curricula need to be more challenging to ensure that students graduate prepared to succeed in college or in well-paying jobs. Business and political leaders are particularly focused on improving math and science education to maintain the United States' leadership in the global economy. But their message may not have sunk in among parents yet. A recent [Reality Check 2006](#) survey by Public Agenda suggests that although parents generally support proposals to make high schools more rigorous, they have a misperception of the quality of the preparation students currently are receiving.
- The groundbreaking *Answers in a Toolbox* followed the high school class of 1982 to identify factors that contribute to student success at the postsecondary level. In the follow-up study one decade later, [The Toolbox Revisited](#),

researchers followed individual students from the high school class of 1992. The new research confirms many of the results of the original study, which found that students who take a more rigorous curriculum in high school, particularly math through at least Algebra II, are more likely to earn a bachelor's degree within five years of their high school graduation. The new study also emphasizes the importance of keeping students enrolled in school, even part time, and encourages postsecondary institutions to be involved at the secondary level, helping provide the higher-level coursework students need by offering them the chance to earn college credit through Advanced Placement courses and programs such as dual enrollment.

- Faced with increasing pressure to improve student achievement, many schools and districts are focusing on how to help students who are performing below grade level catch up. A study by [Mass Insight's](#) Keep the Promise initiative looks at high school remediation policies and practices in six focus schools in Massachusetts to identify what is working. Among the findings, educators are beginning to expand the scope of remediation by moving it into the school day and incorporating it into student schedules, offering course credit, better integrating remediation in school planning and mainstream curricula, and targeting instruction to individual student needs.

Perspective is sent to you monthly by Achieve, 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, work and citizenship. Please feel free to circulate this e-newsletter to your colleagues.

If you received this e-mail from a friend and would like to subscribe, [click here](#).

If you would like to unsubscribe, [click here](#).

If you would like to comment, [click here](#).

Copyright © 2006 Achieve, Inc.

Achieve, Inc. * 1775 Eye Street, NW * Suite 410 * Washington, DC 20006 *

www.achieve.org