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## Commentary

"For too many graduates, the American high school diploma signifies only a broken promise."

This opening statement from the 2004 report [Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts](#), the American Diploma Project (ADP) called attention to the critical gap between the then current expectations for high school graduates and what it took to be successful in college and careers. Since the release of *Ready or Not*, many state leaders have committed to the ADP agenda - adopting college- and career-ready standards, graduation requirements and assessment and accountability systems - as the centerpiece of their high school reform strategies.



To monitor the states' progress, Achieve has issued a report based on a 50-state survey every year since the 2005 National Education Summit, when the [ADP Network](#) was first launched. [Closing the Expectations Gap 2009](#) - Achieve's fourth annual report - shows that states have continued to make steady progress on adopting policies aimed at making the high school diploma more meaningful - particularly in the area of standards - though there is still considerable work to be done.

According to the report, all but six states have aligned, or plan to align, their end of high school standards in English and mathematics with college and career readiness expectations. Twenty-three states already have completed this work. At the time of the Summit, no state was reviewing their standards through the lens of college and career readiness; today, 44 states and DC have or plan to have aligned standards.

In addition, 20 states and the District of Columbia have set their graduation requirements at the college- and career-ready level, up from two states in 2005. Before 2006, only three states had P-20 longitudinal data systems and regularly matched student-level K-12 and postsecondary data to measure progress and

improve the transition from high school into college or the workplace. Now, 12 states have P-20 data systems, and all but one state are working to put such a system in place.

There has been less progress in the areas of assessment and accountability to date. Only 10 states have assessments rigorous enough to measure whether high school students have met college and career readiness standards that are also used by postsecondary institutions to determine whether students are ready for credit-bearing courses. This is a big step forward for students in these states, as they will not have to wait until they arrive on a college campus to find out whether they are ready for college level work and high schools can use the tests to help students fill in gaps in their learning before they graduate. Twenty-three additional states are planning to put college- and career-ready anchor assessments in place in their high schools in the next several years.

In most states, high school accountability systems are not anchored in the goal of graduating all students' college- and career-ready. Unless that changes, high schools will not have the information and incentives they need to make college and career readiness a priority for their students. States are beginning to develop more ambitious goals and broaden the indicators used to report on school progress and hold schools accountable for improvement, but the pace of this work is very slow. Achieve is helping states by providing recommendations on how to evolve their systems (see [Measures that Matter](#)) and assistance in putting new accountability models in place (read the [press release](#)). It is critically important for states to get their assessment and accountability systems right in order to meet the promise of college and career readiness for all students.

There is little question that states have made significant progress over the past four years, yet much work remains. Achieve is particularly concerned about the slow pace of change in some states that have been "planning" to adopt college- and career-ready policies for a number of years but have yet to take formal steps toward adoption. Planning is important, and there is no question that policy adoption and implementation is hard work, but planning alone does little to prepare students for the real world - and time is of the essence for our students.

Times are tough right now for states and there's a risk that the economy and competing priorities will make it difficult for some to remain focused on the college- and career-ready policy agenda. The good news is the recently enacted federal stimulus package will not only provide states with much needed fiscal relief, it will also provide serious incentives for them to aim higher for their students and make college and career readiness a priority. Specifically, the Secretary of Education will be administering \$5 billion in incentive grants that will be distributed on a competitive basis to states that most aggressively pursue higher standards, quality assessments, robust data systems and teacher quality initiatives. As more information becomes available on these funds and the application process to access them, we will be sure to make it available. This is critical work for states to engage in because investing in education now means being better positioned to succeed tomorrow. To read *Closing the Expectations Gap 2009*, go to [www.achieve.org/closingtheexpectationsgap2009](http://www.achieve.org/closingtheexpectationsgap2009). Watch a [video](#) of the report release press event.

**[President Obama Calls on All Americans to Commit to Postsecondary](#)**

## Education - New Research Supports the Call

In President Obama's first [address](#) to a joint session of Congress on February 24th he asked all Americans to commit to a least one-year of postsecondary education, at a community college, four-year institution or through a vocational training or apprenticeship program. This commitment reflects what Achieve's and others' research has found: high school graduates need the same level of preparation for college and careers in large measure because almost all growing careers - particularly those that offer a family-sustaining wage and opportunities for advancement - require some postsecondary education and/or training. (Read a related [news article](#).)

Just as President Obama was encouraging all Americans to take on more postsecondary study, new evidence was being released that supports his call. The first comes from a new analysis of the job creation in the federal stimulus package by Anthony Carnevale of Georgetown University's Center for Education and the Workforce. The analysis concludes that more than half of the estimated 3.7 million jobs that will be created or saved by the stimulus package will require at least a postsecondary certificate and that almost three-quarters of the remaining jobs will require employer-provided training and/or apprenticeship training. While the stimulus package has been referred to as a modern WPA, with its emphasis on infrastructure spending, the Carnevale study makes clear that 21st infrastructure jobs are not the unskilled or low skilled jobs of the WPA days. [More...](#)

Another new policy brief, "[The Future of Middle-Skill Jobs](#)," issued by Brookings also shows the growth of "middle-skilled" jobs, or jobs that require some education and/or training beyond high school, but less than a four-year degree. The brief cites data suggesting that nearly half of all job openings over the next ten years will be primarily categorized as middle-skill, while low-skill jobs - which require a high school diploma or less - will compose only a fifth of all job openings. In the words of President Obama, "A good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity - it is a pre-requisite." The challenge before all of us is to ensure that all high school students graduate ready to take advantage - without remediation - of the postsecondary education and training opportunities they will need to access those growing middle skill-and middle class-jobs. [More...](#)



The Future of Middle-Skill Jobs

Harry J. Holzer and Robert I. Lerman

For brochures highlighting the necessary math-based knowledge and skills in a sample of these "middle-skill" jobs, see [www.achieve.org/MathWorks](http://www.achieve.org/MathWorks).

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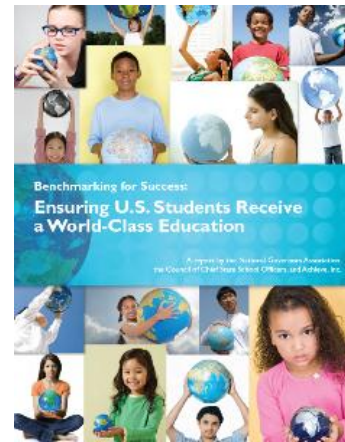
**New from Achieve**

## Governor Phil Bredesen, Governor Dave Heineman, Governor Deval Patrick, Prudential Vice Chairman Mark Grier Join Achieve Board

Achieve recently announced the addition of four new members to its Board of Directors: Governor Phil Bredesen (D-TN); Governor Dave Heineman (R-NE); Governor Deval Patrick (D-MA) and Vice Chairman of Prudential Financial Inc., Mark B. Grier. All of the new Board members bring to Achieve a strong track record of working to improve U.S. education so that all American students can compete and prosper in college and careers. "We are extremely pleased to add these well respected education leaders to Achieve's Board" said Mike Cohen, Achieve's president. "As Achieve continues to work towards making college and career readiness a national priority, their leadership and guidance will help ensure Achieve's success." More [here](#) and [here](#).

### Benchmarking for Success

"Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-class Education," released by the International Benchmarking Advisory Group, provides states a roadmap for benchmarking their K-12 education systems against those of top-performing nations. The report explains the urgent need for action and outlines what states and the federal government must do to ensure U.S. students receive a world-class education that provides expanded opportunities for success in college and careers. The Advisory Group was convened by three of the nation's leading education policy organizations - the National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers and Achieve - and consists of governors, state commissioners of education, representatives from the business community, researchers, former federal officials, and current state and local officials. Download the [report](#) and watch a [video](#) of the report release press event.



### Math Works

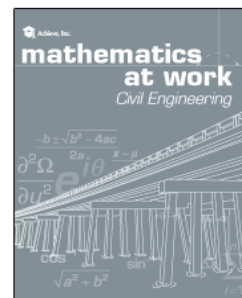
In September, Achieve launched the Math Works advocacy kit, a collection of materials that make the case for why all students - regardless of their plans after graduation - should engage in rigorous math course-taking throughout their high school experiences. Since then, Achieve has continued to add new materials to this kit, including a new fact sheet on "[Math's Double Standard](#)" that was highlighted in a [Washington Post](#) blog.

Achieve also released two additional Mathematics at Work brochures - presenting case studies drawn from

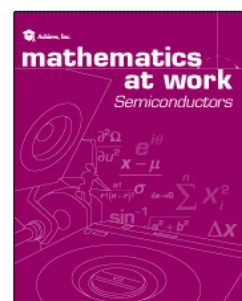


leading industries nationwide to illustrate the advanced mathematics knowledge and skills embedded in jobs that offer opportunities for advancement and require some postsecondary education, but less than a four-year degree.

The first brochure focuses on the vital role of highly-skilled [civil engineering](#) technicians in shoring up America's current infrastructure and building the next generation of roads, bridges and other public infrastructure. This brochure was developed in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Defense and explores the many civil engineering technology career opportunities in the civilian sector and across the branches of the armed forces.



The second brochure - highlighting [semiconductor manufacturing](#) - explores the importance of high-quality math and teamwork skills on the job at Texas Instruments in the construction of cutting-edge technology that makes cell phones and computers possible and widely accessible. Find 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.

### **ADP Assessment Consortium**

The Algebra II End-of-Course exam is now in its second year, while the Algebra I End-of-Course exam will be given for the first time this spring. Achieve's Web site features many useful resources for both exams, including content standards, expected knowledge documents and constructed response guidelines. Released items for the Algebra II exam are available now, and an Algebra I practice test will be released in late March 2009. [More...](#)

This summer marks an important point in the development of the Algebra II exam: the setting of performance levels. One of the key purposes of the exam is to indicate readiness for first-year, credit-bearing college mathematics courses; therefore, one of the performance levels will represent "college readiness" and will be based on research exploring what knowledge and skills students need to succeed in postsecondary mathematics courses. A number of studies are currently underway across the consortium states, and the results will be brought to bear in the standard setting process in July.

Achieve will release its second annual report of the results from the Algebra II exam in fall 2009.

More information about the ADP Assessment Consortium and the Algebra I and II exams is at: [www.achieve.org/ADPAssessmentConsortium](http://www.achieve.org/ADPAssessmentConsortium).

### **Gold Award for Multi-State Algebra II Exam Procurement Process**

The National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO) has awarded the 2008 George Cronin Gold Award for Procurement Excellence to the multi-state Algebra II End-of-Course Exam contract administered by the **Ohio** Department of Administrative Services for Achieve's ADP Assessment Consortium. The exam procurement was initiated through Achieve's American Diploma Project (ADP) network. Nine ADP states came together to work collaboratively on a common high-quality test that would offer cross-state comparable results at a lower cost than if the test had been developed state-by-state.

Ohio served as the lead state for the contract. The Cronin award recognized the exam procurement's innovation, transferability, service improvement and cost efficiency.

The multi-state Algebra II End-of-Course Exam procurement process was unique and complicated. At the same time, the process has shown the feasibility and cost efficiency of multi-state efforts in procurement of educational services. As a result, similar efforts may be possible in shared assessments in other subjects, curriculum development, text books and other instructional materials, and professional development services. More on the award can be read [here](#). In addition, [here](#) is an article that describes the entire process in detail and what led NASPO to select the project for the Cronin award.

### **Postsecondary Connection**

In summer 2008, Achieve released a new Web-based toolkit, Postsecondary Connection ([www.postseconnect.org](http://www.postseconnect.org)) which is designed to provide critical tools, data and strategies that higher education leaders need to help link high school preparation and college success. Postsecondary Connection was recently selected as "Web site of the Week" by *eSchool News* ([www.eschoolnews.com](http://www.eschoolnews.com)) and several state-level initiatives, including the **Indiana** Pathways to College Network and the **California** K-12 High Speed Network, have also publicized the site.

Achieve seeks your input, ideas, materials and links as it works continually to improve the Web site as an essential resource for leaders and their institutions and systems. Postsecondary Connection is maintained by Achieve in collaboration with our co-sponsors: American Council on Education (ACE); Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U); Data Quality Campaign (DQC); the Education Trust; National Association of System Heads (NASH); and State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). Please contact Nevin Brown, Achieve's Senior Fellow for Higher Education, at [nbrown@achieve.org](mailto:nbrown@achieve.org) with your questions and ideas.



In his State of the State address on February 9, Gov. Phil Bredesen's (D-TN) relayed a story: "I had an experience this past fall that I wish every eighth grader in **Tennessee** could share: I visited the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg, Germany - the mother ship. That visit was a concrete lesson for me about the factory of the future, and it's that glimpse of the future that I wish our students could see."

"The Wolfsburg factory is enormous - I was told it is the largest factory of any kind under one roof anywhere in the world - but my strongest impression was just how few people were actually on the factory floor."

"I visited one enormous hall where the drive trains and chassis were being joined. There were creaks and hydraulic noises and flashing lights - equipment and robots working - but very few people. They called it the 'ghost hall,' and I believe you could turn off all the lights and it would continue to churn out those Volkswagens just fine."

"The lesson here is not that factory work is obsolete; far from it. The Wolfsburg complex employs 54,000 people in good, high-paying jobs. But most of them don't position and bolt and weld. They invent, they design, they purchase, they contract, they do the logistics to make sure the machines have parts to work with, and they program those machines and fix them when they break. And yes, some of them still load parts and check results, but you can already see a future in which those jobs get fewer and farther between."

"What I'd like to show Tennessee's eighth graders is this: if you want to work in a factory and build things, that is a fine and honorable way to make a life for yourself and the family you'll

## News Clips

### 1. **Secretary Duncan Focuses on Reform**

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan aims to use the over \$100 billion in stimulus funding effectively. Among other things, he will encourage states to adopt standards that are aligned for college readiness and benchmarked to international standards. [More...](#)

### 2. **Advanced High School Math Courses Vary Widely**

*Washington Post* Staff Writer Michael Alison Chandler notes that there can be wide variations in what students learn in advanced high school mathematics courses. Those variations reflect, in part, differences in state government policy. [More...](#)

### 3. **Preparing All Students for Lifelong Success**

In *The Boston Globe*, Linda M. Noonan, Executive Director of the **Massachusetts** Business Alliance for Education Boston, notes that students "...all need and deserve an education that will prepare them with the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong success." [More...](#)

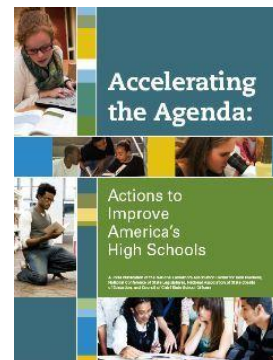
have someday. But the lesson from Wolfsburg is that you need a good education to play; you need more education than you think you do. In the years ahead, making things is something you'll do less and less with your hands and more and more with your minds. Stay in school. Take lots of math. Graduate. Go to college." Read the [full text and watch the video](#). Volkswagen recently chose to locate a new facility in Tennessee that will employ about 2,000 people. Read the *USA Today* [article](#).



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## New Resources

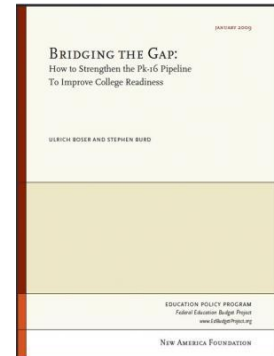
- Four organizations representing the major education stakeholders within each state - the National Governors Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of State Boards of Education, and Council of Chief State School Officers - have joined forces to publish "Accelerating the Agenda," a report that gauges state progress since the 2005 release of NGA and Achieve's [Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools](#). The report reiterates that the agenda for state action must continue to center on college and career readiness to maintain U.S. competitiveness. Topics include how state leaders can restore value to the high school diploma; improve schools by providing excellent teachers and principals; set goals, measure progress, and hold high schools and colleges accountable; and improve education governance by bridging K-12 and postsecondary expectation gaps through the formation of effective P-16 councils. [More...](#)
- The Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the Kingsbury Center at Northwest Evaluation Association released "The Accountability Illusion," exploring inconsistencies in states' accountability systems. Analysts took 36 schools (18 elementary, 18 middle) and "moved" them from state to state (28 states in all) to see how many would make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) under each state's No Child Left Behind rules. In some states, nearly all of the



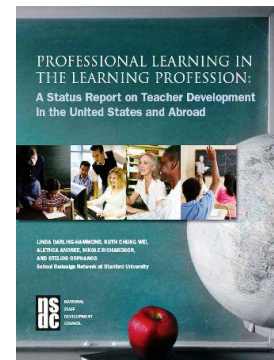


elementary schools would make AYP while in others practically none of them would. This report provides evidence that a school's AYP status depends at least as much on what state it resides in as on the performance of its students. The results demonstrate that there is such variability across states that the results of NCLB may tell us more about state policy choices than about the proficiency of students. [More...](#)

- The New America Foundation released "Bridging the Gap: How to Strengthen the P-16 Pipeline to Improve College Readiness," drawing attention to a problem that has been a focus for Achieve's work since its inception: far too many students leave high school unprepared for college and cannot succeed in college, reflecting "a massive failure of the pre-kindergarten through college system as a whole." The report calls on the federal government to create incentives for states to work together to develop and adopt national college and career readiness standards. The authors also recommend that the federal government work directly with states to foster partnerships between high schools and colleges. Additionally, they advocate for a stronger federal role in restructuring the current college remediation system. [More...](#)



- The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) released "Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad." Written by Linda Darling-Hammond and a team of researchers from the Stanford University School Redesign Network, the report examines what research to date has revealed about professional learning that improves teachers' practice and student learning. The paper seeks to provide policymakers, researchers and school leaders with a research base on teacher-development and marks the launch of a multi-year research effort to measure the effectiveness of professional learning at the state level. [More...](#)



- "Quality Counts 2009" is the 13th edition of *Education Week's* series of annual report cards tracking state education policies and outcomes. Drawing heavily on data from the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center's annual state policy survey, the report offers a comprehensive state-by-state analysis of key indicators of student success.



The State Highlights Reports assemble findings on each of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia and compare individual state data to national data. [More...](#)

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

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