

Download a printer-friendly version of this newsletter [here](#).

Commentary

What Is College- And Career-Ready?

It is commonly said that the goal of high school reform is to ensure all students graduate "college and- career-ready," a goal fully embraced by the 35 states in the [American Diploma Project Network](#) and, more recently, by President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan. But as often as the phrase is repeated, confusion remains over what it actually means. And in some cases, the confusion has led to skepticism or outright opposition to reforms that seek to raise standards for all students to the college and career readiness level.

Here are some of the questions Achieve gets asked most frequently:

What subjects are most important in defining "Readiness?" Much of Achieve's work to define college and career readiness over the past several years has focused on the content knowledge and skills high school graduates must possess in English and mathematics - including, but not limited to, reading, writing communications, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving. Achieve recognizes that readiness depends on more than knowledge and skills in English and math but these core disciplines undergird other academic and technical courses and are considered non-negotiables by employers and colleges alike. If high school graduates are not proficient and prepared in English and math, they will struggle to achieve postsecondary success.

Readiness in English and math may be necessary but it is not sufficient.

To be college- and career-ready, high school graduates must have studied a rigorous and broad curriculum, grounded in these core academic disciplines but also consisting of other subjects that are part of a well-rounded education. Students must also possess the skills or habits of mind that enable them to apply their knowledge in a range of environments and situations.

What do we mean by "College-Ready?" College today means much more than just pursuing a four-year degree at a university. Being "college-ready" means being prepared for any postsecondary education or training experience, including study at two- and four-year institutions leading to a postsecondary credential (i.e. a certificate, license, Associates or Bachelor's degree). Being ready for college means that a high school graduate has the knowledge and skills

necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses without the need for remedial coursework.

What do we mean by "Career-Ready?" In today's economy, a "career" is not just a job. A career provides a family-sustaining wage and pathways to advancement and requires postsecondary training or education. A job may be obtained with only a high school diploma, but offers no guarantee of advancement or mobility. Being ready for a career means that a high school graduate has the knowledge and skills needed to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for their chosen career (i.e. community college, technical/vocational program, apprenticeship or significant on-the-job training).

Does College-Ready = Career-Ready? In the last decade, research conducted by Achieve and others, such as ACT, has shown a strong convergence in the expectations of employers and colleges in terms of the knowledge and skills high school grads need to be successful, especially in English and mathematics. Economic reality reflects these converging expectations. The bottom line is that today all high school graduates need to be prepared for some postsecondary education and/or training if they are to have options and opportunities in the job market. As such, our education system should be preparing students for entry into middle and high-skilled jobs, which offer a higher wage and represent a broader set of opportunities in the workforce, rather than low-skilled jobs that pay less, have fewer benefits, and now account for only one-fifth of all jobs.

Being "college and career ready" ultimately means that students are prepared for their next steps, that all doors remain open to them as they continue to pursue their education and their careers. Sadly, that is not what a high school diploma represents in most states today.

To download a PDF of Achieve's fact sheet defining college and career readiness, go [here](#).

Race to the Top Funds

In recent weeks, leaders in states and communities across the country have started to see federal funds for education flowing from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This money presents an historic opportunity for schools, districts and states to invest in education to not only save jobs and prevent critical program cuts but also advance each state's college- and career-ready agenda.

Although the U.S. Department of Education has yet to announce key provisions around the \$5 billion discretionary Race to the Top Funds and the next phase of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, it's clear that many states in the [ADP Network](#) are well positioned to leverage these opportunities. An [article](#) in *The New York Times* sheds more light on how these funds will spur reform. *Washington Post* columnist David Broder also wrote an [op ed](#) on this topic, and Secretary Duncan discussed reform on [Charlie Rose](#) on PBS.

Later this year the U.S. Department of Education is likely to require states to

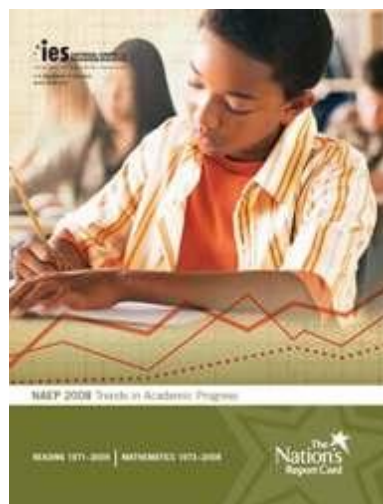
report publicly on key data that show how well their schools are meeting each of the assurances required in exchange for federal stimulus money. Achieve has compiled a number of key resources that may help policymakers and educators understand and track the implementation of ARRA [here](#).

The U.S. Department of Education's monthly TV show, "Education News Parents Can Use," focused its April show on how the new economic stimulus package will benefit families, students and educators by encouraging education innovation, incentivizing reform, and ensuring our nation's future competitiveness. The program was carried on the Dish Network, dozens of PBS stations and numerous cable outlets. Achieve's president Michael Cohen appears on the program. [Watch a video of the show](#).

NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessments Show Mixed Results

The results of [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) long-term trend assessments](#) in reading and mathematics were released in April. While from 1971 to 2008, 9- and 13-year old scores have shown impressive improvement, the flat performance of 17-year olds raises red flags.

"The NAEP results underscore serious concerns about whether we are doing enough to build on the elementary and middle school gains in reading and mathematics and truly preparing American high school graduates to meet the challenge of college and careers in the 21st century," said Achieve's president Michael Cohen. [More...](#)



IES State Longitudinal Data System Grants Update

In March the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) awarded its third wave of [State Longitudinal Data System \(SLDS\) grants to 27 states](#), including fifteen new states that had not received grants in previous cycles. All but three of these states either explicitly note plans to use this funding to build P-20 data systems that will match K-12 and postsecondary student-level records or are already matching records across systems. A number of states even include plans to link employment data to the student-level records to create more robust systems.

IES first awarded SLDS grants in 2005 (to 14 states) and again in 2007 (to 12 states and the District of Columbia) to encourage states to develop and implement K-12 longitudinal data systems. Through those two grant processes, only a handful of states leveraged this funding to develop longitudinal systems that matched student-level K-12 and postsecondary data, although some did use it to build the technical capacity necessary to match student records across systems. Developing P-20 data systems that can link K-12 and postsecondary systems - and include a range of college- and career-ready indicators - is crucial in order to measure students' progress towards and beyond college and career readiness.

Each year Achieve reports how many states match, or plan to match, K-12 and postsecondary student-level records on a regular basis. In [Closing the Expectations Gap: 2009](#), Achieve reported that 12 states now have the capacity to and do match K-12 and postsecondary records at least once a year and another 37 states and the District of Columbia plan to, including nine states that plan to operationalize their P-20 systems in 2009. With the support from these grants, Achieve believes states will continue to make steady process on this important component of the college- and career-ready agenda.



New from Achieve

Nebraska Joins ADP Network

In April Nebraska joined the [American Diploma Project Network](#), becoming the 35th state to join the effort designed to improve preparation of high school students for success in college and careers. Starting with only a handful of states, the Network now covers nearly 85 percent of all U.S. public school students. Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman (R), a strong proponent of a quality education for all children and high academic standards, is also on the Achieve Board of Directors.

ADP Assessment Consortium

In May, both the Algebra I and Algebra II exams will be administered across the consortium states. Although only in its first year of administration, five states and over 40,000 students are participating in the Algebra I exam. Over 130,000 students from 13 states are registered to take the Algebra II exam, which is in its second administration year. These administrations are particularly important because the results are being used to set the proficiency levels for each exam.

Two sets of released items have been posted for the Algebra II exam that can be used to prepare for the exam. A practice test has also just been released for the Algebra I exam to help students get ready. Solutions and commentaries about the mathematics in each item accompany all released items. To help teachers analyze the mathematics behind the items, Achieve has created a set of supplemental questions for teachers.

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.

Legislative Updates

On April 13th, **Arkansas** Governor Mike Beebe signed into law legislation ([Act 1481](#)) creating the Arkansas Smart Core Incentive Funding Program. This program will provide financial rewards to Arkansas schools relative to the percentage of students who graduate with a college- and career-ready Smart Core diploma each year. To be eligible, at least 90% of students at the school must have completed the Smart Core curriculum, and schools must maintain an overall graduation rate above the state average for the previous three years.

The **New Mexico** legislature enacted a bill ([SB 152](#)) requiring the state's public postsecondary institutions to create annual high school feedback reports about the first-year college outcomes of the state's high school graduates. Under this new law, the reports will include data on students' credit accumulation, grade point average, retention from first to second semester of their first year, and frequency and patterns of remedial courses taken.

News Clips

1. **Raising the Standard in America's Schools**

Aspen Institute president and CEO Walter Isaacson underscores in TIME magazine the need for common standards across the states, providing an historical perspective. He mentions that "...the [American Diploma Project](#)...establishes curriculum standards that align with what a graduate will need to succeed in college, the military or a career." [More...](#)

2. **Math for All**

In an op-ed in the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, Rich Haglund and Fielding Rolston, both of the **Tennessee** State Board of Education, point out that college readiness equals workforce readiness. "Whether headed to Chattanooga State or Volkswagen after high school, all students need the same level of competence in math and reading." [More...](#)

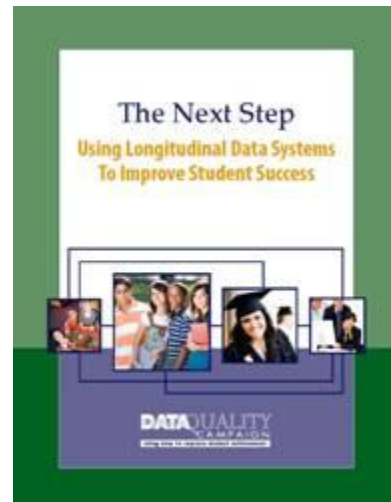
3. **Swimming Without a Suit**

Thomas L. Friedman writes in an op-ed in *The New*

York Times that America appears to be swimming buck naked. He refers to a [study](#) by the consulting firm McKinsey, entitled "The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools." [More...](#)

New Resources

- In "Better Late Than Never: Examining Late High School Graduates," The Center for Public Education examines the outcomes experienced by late high school graduates related to postsecondary education, work, civic participation and health, and compares the performance of these students to that of their peers who graduated on time, earned GEDs, or dropped out altogether. The study finds that graduating on time is the best scenario for young people. Nonetheless, young people who take five or six years to earn their high school diploma also consistently perform better than GED recipients and dropouts, showing that the extra effort by students and schools is worth the time and resources. [More...](#)
- To guide state and federal policymakers in building capacity of education stakeholders to understand and use longitudinal data in effective decision making, the Data Quality Campaign released "The Next Step: Using Longitudinal Data Systems to Improve Student Success." The guide provides ten action steps states need to take to move from collecting data for compliance to using data for improvement. These ten state actions ensure effective data use will expand the ability of state longitudinal data systems to link across the P-20 education pipeline and across state agencies; ensure that data can be accessed, analyzed, used, and communicated to all stakeholders to promote continuous improvement; and build the capacity of all stakeholders to use longitudinal data for effective decision making. [More...](#)



Q and A with Aimee Guidera, Director of the Data Quality Campaign

Question: What is phase 2 of the DQC campaign?

Answer: "Phase 2 is a celebration of the progress states have made in the past three years building longitudinal data systems. Phase 2 calls for a cultural shift to build the political will and take the practical steps needed to ensure that these data are accessed, shared, and used for continuous education improvement."

Question: What challenges are states facing?

Answer: "Since the launch of this campaign three years ago, states have been addressing concerns around funding, ongoing confusion around how [FERPA](#) applies, and the lack of political will and urgency needed to build these longitudinal data systems."

Question: What impact is the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) having on advancing this work?

Answer: "There is just an amazing opportunity right now given the progress states have made and the momentum that has continued to build across the country. The infusion of financial support provided through the stimulus will enable states to build out their data systems and also focus on the next generation issues that we highlight in "[The Next Step](#)," such as focusing on the critical linkages between K-12, postsecondary, early learning and workforce systems. At the same time, states need to ensure appropriate access to this information for all stakeholders and build capacity so that all of those stakeholders will know how to use that information effectively to improve student achievement and system performance. The stimulus is a galvanizing opportunity.

Making data one of the four assurances in the stimulus goes a long way towards providing the resources and helping build the political will necessary to advance and operationalize this work. It is clear that data systems serve a critical and foundational role in efforts to improve education across the P-20 spectrum. We are also heartened by conversations we are hearing that further guidance will be offered by the U.S. Department of Education to clarify much of the ambiguity that still exists around interpretations of federal privacy laws.

Question: What will it take for states to be successful in effectively using longitudinal data?

Answer: "This really comes down to leadership. When we look across states that have built systems that are both robust and usable, we see tremendous cross-sector leadership, involvement and ownership of the data systems. States need broad and deep leadership at all levels - from governors, legislators, chief state school officers, and equally important, from leaders at the local level. The role of leadership cannot be underscored enough.

The real message is that states are poised at this point to truly change the culture around data and make the investments needed to transform education into an information-driven sector. We are entering a game-changing era. The next two years has the potential to change everything."

Visit the DQC Web site at www.dataqualitycampaign.org for more information.

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.

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

Copyright © 2009 [Achieve, Inc.](#)