

May 2010

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Commentary

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee recently began hearings on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or No Child Left Behind, as the law was nicknamed during its last reauthorization in 2002. The education landscape and conventional wisdom on what our education systems should be aiming for have changed significantly since then. Achieve has found, as documented in our annual survey of the states, [Closing the Expectations Gap](#), that in the last five years alone states have made significant progress on reforming their education systems to value college and career readiness, progress that has happened largely because of state leadership. When ESEA is reauthorized, it's important that the federal law supports - and not hinder - the work of leading states and incentivizes *all states* toward the shared goal of college and career readiness for all students. With the right level and types of support, states and districts will be better positioned to meet the higher expectations they have set in their schools, especially those serving the most disadvantaged students.

In early May, Achieve submitted recommendations to the Senate HELP Committee that stem from our belief that college and career readiness must be the central driver in ESEA reauthorization. Achieve recommended that the following be considered by Congress as it moves forward:

- Reorient ESEA so that the common end goal is high school graduates who are prepared for college and career.
- Encourage states to develop and sustain new assessment systems aligned to college- and career-ready standards.
- Include indicators of college and career readiness in evaluating high school performance.
- Provide schools with incentives to help students graduate college-and career-ready.
- Don't let the floor become the ceiling. Accountability system metrics need to ensure that all students - from those far below to those well above the standard - are expected to progress academically.
- ESEA should incentivize positive movement towards the goal of readiness for *all* schools and *all* students; positive incentives are important for creating an environment in which accountability goals are meaningful and motivate exemplary performance.
- Prioritize and dedicate resources to intervene in persistently low-performing schools.

As states raise standards to a more ambitious college- and career-ready level it will be critical for states to ensure that all students have access to supports to help them reach college-and career-ready expectations.

Achieve has been providing states with specific recommendations on how to develop public reporting and accountability systems aligned to these principles. We believe accountability systems must include a broader range of indicators that capture whether students are successfully completing rigorous courses, achieving on rigorous assessments that measure postsecondary readiness, and attaining meaningful high school credentials. Further, there needs to be better use of public reporting, positive incentives and rewards to create motivating conditions for college and career readiness progress and success. Sanctions are important but negative consequences alone will not motivate educators and students to aim higher. Of additional importance to the college and career readiness agenda are longitudinal data systems that provide schools and districts "early warning" information about individual students so that they can deploy supports, interventions and safety nets accordingly.

With a packed congressional calendar and mid-term elections this November, it's unclear whether Congress will find time to reauthorize ESEA this year. Still, as the discussion heats up and thought pieces, blueprints and draft bills are released, it is critical that the discussion focus on college and career readiness in ways the current law does not. A reauthorized ESEA should support the work of leading states and encourages states to move in the direction of college and career readiness for all.

Resources:

- Download testimony from the full Committee Hearing on May 4th regarding ESEA Reauthorization: Improving America's Secondary Schools [here](#).
 - Download testimony from the full Committee Hearing on April 28th regarding ESEA Reauthorization: Standards and Assessments [here](#).
 - Download the blueprint and watch the President's address [here](#).
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New from Achieve

Race to the Top Round 2 Update

37 states plus the District of Columbia have notified the U.S. Department of Education (USED) that they are planning to compete in the second round of Race to the Top, in which \$3.4 billion in economic-stimulus funds are still available. States that did not file their intent to apply with the Department by the deadline are: **Alaska, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Wyoming.** **Delaware** and **Tennessee**, as Round 1 winners, also did not file intents to apply.



Filing an intent to apply does not mean that states *must* apply, and not filing an intent does not mean that states cannot apply. In the first round, several states that did not signal their intent to apply ultimately ended up applying.

Applications for Phase 2 are due on **June 1, 2010**. USED offers a variety of resources to help States in developing their applications, including an updated FAQ and all peer reviewers' comments and scores on Phase 1 applications. The resources can be found on the USED [Web site](#).

Slides from the USED Technical Assistance Planning Workshop for potential applicants to Phase 2 of the Race to the Top grant competition workshop that was held in Minneapolis in April are posted in PDF format [here](#). At the workshop, leaders from **Delaware** and **Tennessee** discussed their reform agenda, implementation plans and approaches to building statewide collaboration.

Last fall, Achieve prepared [Race to the Top: Accelerating College and Career Readiness](#) guides to help state leaders take advantage of this exceptional competition.

Achieving the Common Core

Governors and state commissioners of education from [48 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia](#) have committed to developing a common core of state standards in English language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. It is anticipated that the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers will release the final common core standards in June at www.corestandards.org.

To help states and others interested better



understand the [draft](#) K-12 Common Core State Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts standards, Achieve has developed a range of materials, all available at 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. Achieve has also compiled current public opinion on the draft common core state standards. These resources will be revised to reflect the final standards and many more materials to help states better understand the final standards will be added.

On May 3 Achieve and the American Council on Education sponsored a Webinar for the higher education community. The Webinar included an overview of the common core standards and discussion of their potential implications for higher education. Featured speakers were: Michael Cohen, President, Achieve; Molly Corbett Broad, President, American Council on Education; and Lynne Weisenbach, Vice Chancellor for Educator Preparation and Innovation, Board of Regents of the University System of **Georgia**. A recording of the Webinar is viewable [here](#).

U.S. Education Delivery Institute Launched

The Education Trust and Achieve are launching the nonprofit [U.S. Education Delivery Institute](#) (EDI) with the support of McKinsey & Company under the leadership of Sir Michael Barber, founder and former head of Prime Minister Blair's Delivery Unit. EDI is dedicated to building the capacity in state public education systems to implement school reform effectively. EDI will help K-12 and higher education systems connect the dots between state policies and the schools and teachers that must implement them to ensure that they have their intended benefit and dramatically improve student outcomes. EDI will focus on providing states poised to make bold changes with the tools to translate intent at the state level into results at the student level. This work is already underway in **Louisiana** and **Tennessee**. In addition, nine public higher education systems are working with EDI to support efforts to halve the

News Clips

1. **Game Change in Education**

The New York Times Magazine looks at how Race to the Top and other factors are converging to bring change to public education. [More...](#)

2. **Massachusetts Adopts Plan to Track Student Achievement**

The Boston Globe reports that **Massachusetts** education officials approved a plan to change the way colleges and universities track student achievement data to better evaluate information from different demographic groups. The state will issue an annual

college-going and college-completion gaps for their low-income and minority students by 2015.

Georgia's State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox has resigned her post to become chief executive officer of EDI. According to Achieve President Michael Cohen, "EDI will fill a unique and wholly necessary niche in American education reform by helping state education systems deliver best-in-class implementation to match their aspirations. Kathy Cox will be superb in leading this new organization forward." [Read the full press release.](#)

report listing scores on seven achievement measures - including the number of high school graduates who enroll in college - that can be compared against other states. [More...](#)

3. **Tennessee Schools Prepare Students for New Industries**

The Chattanooga Times Free Press reports that schools in the Chattanooga, **Tennessee** area are stepping up efforts to prepare students for careers in new industries by overhauling and adding courses in engineering and technology. One high school is teaming up with the national group Project Lead the Way to increase the rigor of its engineering program. [More...](#)

New Resources

- Young adults are less likely to have earned a degree than their older counterparts, according to [State of Metropolitan America](#), a Brookings Institution report based on Census data. Though the percent of adults with a baccalaureate degree rose from 24 to 28 from 2000 to 2008, a smaller percentage of 25-to-34 year-olds than 35-to-44 year-olds held a degree in 2008. The reverse was true in 2000. The report focuses primarily on demographic trends in the country's 100 largest metropolitan areas. It highlights the likely "de-skilling" of the U.S. workforce as older generations



retire, unless there are major changes in policy and institutional incentives for completion. For instance, currently, colleges receive state funding based on student enrollment, not degree completion.

- The stereotype of the nation's lowest-performing high schools is that of large schools located in big cities, but a new brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education says this is not the whole story. [Prioritizing the Nation's Lowest-Performing High Schools](#) notes that the lowest-performing high schools are located in every state; in urban, suburban, rural, and small-town America; and can be both very large or relatively small. What does unite low-performing schools is the high number of poor and minority students attending them. In all, 28 percent of the nation's students of color are enrolled in one of these high schools, making minority students six times more likely to attend a lowest performer than their white counterparts. Eighty-four percent of these schools are high-poverty. In the view of the authors, "Effectively performing legislative triage now will yield economic benefit to the nation and to the millions of individual students who will graduate from high school with a diploma that prepares them for success in college, careers, and life."



- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Special Report, [Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters](#), focuses attention on the critical importance of achieving grade-level reading proficiency for all children by the end of third grade. Two out of every three fourth graders are not proficient in reading according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Four of five fourth graders from low-income families are also not proficient in reading. With reading being central to the demands of a global economy, addressing this trend is



crucial.

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