

October 2010

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## Commentary

### Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

While many political pundits and analysts will likely be focusing on which party controls Congress in the upcoming mid-term elections, for those interested in the future of education reform, the many state-level elections are just as critical to watch. With 37 gubernatorial seats and many important down ballot races up for grabs, the results will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the future of reform.

Over the past 18 months there have been many encouraging developments on the college- and career-ready front. With 40 states having adopted the [Common Core State Standards](#), nearly every state committed to at least one of the two common assessment consortia, and the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition inspiring reform across many states – including those who did and didn't win awards – strong and committed state leadership has been and will continue to be crucial to the successful adoption, implementation and sustainability of college- and career-ready reforms in the years to come.

The 2010 elections are expected to result in political turnover on an unprecedented scale. According to The Cook Political Report, for example, up to seventeen of the 37 gubernatorial elections, as of this writing, are still considered "toss-ups," with no clear leading candidate or party emerging at this time. Only five elections with incumbents are considered "safe," while the remaining 32 elections range from "likely safe" to "unsafe" to "open." In addition, there are seven state K-12 superintendent elections this year, and broad speculation on how much turnover will occur within and across state legislatures (early predictions – a lot).

There is little question that political turnover can make it difficult for a state to sustain its education reforms, as history has proved time and time again. When leading reform advocates – governors, state education leaders, legislators or other high-level officials – leave office, their policy legacies may face scrutiny and be subject to changing priorities or even reversal. At a minimum, a transition can mean critical reforms slow as new leadership is sworn in and appointed. Gubernatorial transitions, particularly, can have a direct impact on other leadership roles within the education arena. In most states, a combination of Chief State School Officers (CSSO's), State Board of Education members and

State Higher Education Executives (SHEEO's) are appointed and may have term limits set in place by the governor. This creates deeply connected lines of political leadership, which may have consequences post-election.

So what does this all mean for the future of the college- and career-ready agenda, including common standards, common assessments, next-generation accountability and other policies and programs designed to ensure all students graduate high school ready for their next step?

While it may be too early to tell for sure (and thankfully, in the majority of races, it does not appear that candidates are running on platforms opposed to college- and career-ready policies) what we do know from Achieve's [Taking Root](#) research on sustaining education reform is that **leaders and champions outside the government are vital to any long-standing, successful reform effort.** External leaders – such as advocacy organizations and/or business and community leaders – help keep the state's attention focused on the policy agenda and help newly elected leaders understand its key goals, importance and how new leaders can make it their own. External champions are always important to keeping the agenda on track – but in election years they are critical.



If you believe every student should graduate from high school ready for postsecondary success then now is the time to get involved. There is much work to be done after votes are cast and newly elected officials prepare to take office; this is the critical transition time when agendas get set and key personnel are chosen. Now is the time to make sure that the impressive efforts over the past few years are continued and built upon. Not sure where to begin? Connect with your state's education advocacy community – organizations such as the ones represented within the [PIE Network](#) are a good place to start – to see how you can get involved. And remember, Achieve is always here to help you make the case for the college- and career-ready agenda with research and advocacy materials for all audiences.

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### New from Achieve

#### **Allison Jones to Join Achieve as Senior Fellow for Postsecondary Engagement**

Allison Jones, assistant vice chancellor of academic affairs at the **California** State University (CSU) system, will be joining Achieve on November 15 as the Senior Fellow for Postsecondary Engagement. In that role, he will be responsible for advancing Achieve's college- and career-ready mission through work with the postsecondary community, including leading the higher education engagement strategy for the Partnership for Assessment of



Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium.

"We are thrilled to have Allison join Achieve," said Michael Cohen, Achieve's President. "His knowledge of higher education and deep experience working with K-12 to implement college readiness policies and programs will be a huge asset as we embark on an historic effort to build common college-ready assessments across 26 states. As we know from over a decade of experience at Achieve, the promise of college and career readiness for all high school graduates is only possible with true postsecondary involvement every step of the way. Allison has been a national leader in this area." Read the [press release](#).

### More States Adopt Common Core State Standards

The number of states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) continues to rise. **Oregon, New Mexico** and **Kansas** adopted in October, and **Minnesota** adopted the ELA standards at the end of September. For a map of states that have adopted the CCSS, go [here](#). To help states and others better understand the CCSS, Achieve created a range of materials, available at [www.achieve.org/AchievingCommonCore](http://www.achieve.org/AchievingCommonCore).



### North Carolina Adopts New Accountability Model

The **North Carolina** State Board of Education approved a new student and school accountability model that focuses on college and career readiness set to be implemented by 2013-14. These changes are part of the state's [Career & College: Ready, Set, Go! plan](#). The new model – which has been under development for more than two years – has two primary purposes: diagnosing student learning to ensure students are on track academically and providing school accountability. Five indicators were approved for school accountability purposes: student performance (end-of-grade/end-of-course assessments), measures of college readiness, student academic growth, the five-year cohort graduation rate, and the rigor of

#### News Clips

##### 1. **Future Depends On Science, Math Education**

*The Washington Post* reports that President Obama said the U.S. is being outpaced by other countries and he wants American students to move from the middle to the top in science and math over the decade. [More...](#)

##### 2. **Tennessee's Higher Standards**

*The Tennessean* reports that the state, a member of

students' high school mathematics course selections.

To ensure students are on track academically, new types of ongoing, informal assessments will be in place to help teachers identify learning problems earlier and adjust instruction accordingly. The new model also will use some measure of college readiness, such as a college admissions test, at the 11th grade. This means that every student in North Carolina will take a college admissions exam at no cost to them or their families. Students in grades 8 and 10 will take some preliminary college readiness tests to ensure that they are on track for college and career readiness and to provide diagnostic information for their teachers. Students who are not college ready at 11th grade will have an opportunity to participate in an academic camp the summer before their senior year to boost their college readiness. Students in 12th grade also will take the COMPASS assessment, a placement test widely used at community colleges to evaluate entering students' skill levels.

"Our goal is to be sure that we prepare every student for success without remediation at the community college or at the four-year college and university level, as they choose," said State Superintendent June Atkinson. "That is our commitment to students and to communities in our state." Visit the state [website](#) for more information.

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the American Diploma Project Network, is raising the bar for student achievement with higher academic standards.

[More...](#)

### 3. **Back to School**

In an op-ed in *The New York Times*, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan writes: "Enhancing educational achievement and attainment – at home and abroad – is more a win-win game" given the shared benefits of innovation, competition, and collaboration among an international community of skilled workers and entrepreneurs. He also notes that the benefits will flow unequally to those in the U.S. with some education beyond high school, highlighting the goal of ensuring more Americans have access to and are prepared for college. [More...](#)

## New Resources

- A new report from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) urges states to place a major focus on increasing the numbers of students who earn college degrees and career certificates to meet the goal of 60 percent of working-age adults earning some type of high-quality credential by the year 2025. [No Time to Waste: Policy Recommendations for Improving College Completion](#) challenges states to become national leaders in increasing college completion. It includes 10 major policy recommendations for states to pursue including setting specific and ambitious goals for raising the numbers of each degree type and graduation rates at each institution, system, and statewide; using better measures of progress to show education attainment levels and how various groups of students are faring; more attention to college costs and targeted financial aid, high school students' readiness for college-level work, institutional practices that can help more students succeed; bringing many more adults back to college who did not finish degrees and certificates, and more.
- [State Test Score Trends Through 2008-09, Part 1: Rising Scores on State Tests and NAEP](#), a study by the Center on Education Policy, analyzes whether trends in NAEP reading and mathematics results contradict or confirm trends in state test scores. The study compares trends between 2005 and 2009 at grades 4 and 8 in the percentage of students scoring at or above the proficient level on state tests and the percentage scoring at or above the basic level on NAEP, focusing on the 23 states with comparable student-level data over that time period. In general, the majority of states with sufficient data showed gains on both their state test and NAEP, demonstrating there may be more agreement between trends on state tests and NAEP than is commonly acknowledged. The size of the gains, however, tended to be larger on state tests than on NAEP.
- The American Institutes for Research (AIR) has recently released a report that similarly highlights the issue of the wide range of proficiency standards employed by states across the nation. [International Benchmarking: State Education Performance Standards](#) uses a "chain-linking" approach to link state assessments to NAEP to the international assessments TIMSS (2007) and PIRLS (2006) in order to compare the proficiency standards in each state with international benchmarks. The report lends further support to the assertion that NCLB perversely incentivizes states to set low proficiency expectations on their state assessments in order to meet AYP goals: states with high levels of student proficiency are strongly correlated with low performance standards. The **Massachusetts** and **South Carolina** performance standards were most comparable to international competitors' performance standards in 4th and 8th grade assessments, while many other states saw large decreases

in the percentage of their students that would have been deemed proficient using a common standard.

- Across the country, legislative and policy changes have led to the rapid expansion of dual enrollment programs in recent years, which provide high school students with the opportunity to take college classes and simultaneously earn both high school and college credit. Concerns about dual enrollment course quality often follow periods of growth and expansion, particularly as many states embark on initiatives to raise the rigor of the high school experience. The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships has released [Promoting Quality: State Strategies for Overseeing Dual Enrollment Programs](#), which documents the strategies six states employ to ensure that college courses offered to high school students are of the same high quality and rigor as courses offered to matriculated college students. The report also highlights states' approaches to encouraging colleges and universities to align their dual enrollment programs with state and national standards. This report aims to help states identify ways to ensure the quality of these courses, a necessary factor to achieving states' goals to raise the rigor of the high school experience, increase access to college for students who are underrepresented in higher education, reduce the amount of remedial college coursework, and increase college completion rates.
- Fordham Institute's [Now What? Imperatives & Options for "Common Core" Implementation & Governance](#) addresses the questions of what needs to be done now that the Common Core State Standards have been developed and adopted, and who needs to do it. Two dozen education leaders were asked about implementation and governance of the new common standards. With the feedback they received, the authors lay out the ten major activities they believe are key elements to robust implementation. They then frame three possible models for governing this implementation process. In the end, they recommend a step-by-step approach to coordinate implementation of the new standards, and related policies and programs.

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### Career Opportunity

Achieve seeks a Sr. Associate, English Language Arts. For more, go [here](#).

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### **Connect with Achieve on Facebook**

*Perspective* readers are invited to 'Like' Achieve's [Facebook page](#). This page includes the latest Achieve blog updates on the Wall as well as photos from events.

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