

February 2005

New from Achieve

High school graduates speak out. According to a new survey -- released today by Achieve -- as many as 40 percent of the nation's high school graduates say they are inadequately prepared to deal with the demands of employment and postsecondary education. More than 80 percent say that if they could do high school over, they would work harder, joining employers and faculty in calling for higher standards. For more information and complete survey results, visit the [Achieve Web site](#).



Commentary: If They Only Knew Then

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Readers by now are familiar with mounting evidence that large numbers of students leave high school unprepared for postsecondary education and work -- at precisely the time that a perfect storm of economic, demographic and social forces are making improved preparation an economic necessity and a moral imperative. Nationwide, for every 100 9th graders, only 68 graduate from high school on time, only 40 enroll in college, only 27 are still enrolled as sophomores and only 18 graduate from college on time. Our educational pipeline is hemorrhaging students at an alarming and unsustainable rate. And the picture is much grimmer for low-income and minority students.

Today, Achieve is releasing a new poll that adds fresh and compelling voices to the urgent call for high school reform. A survey of 1,500 recent high school graduates, 300 college instructors and 400 employers provides powerful new evidence that the preparation gap is real and must be closed.

Approximately 40 percent of recent high school graduates say they are not adequately prepared for the work they must do, whether in the college classroom or the workplace. Young people report gaps in their reading, math, science, research, communications and writing skills, with more than a third reporting significant gaps in at least one of these areas.

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. **Bar raising.** [Oklahoma](#) does not have a high-stakes graduation exam, but the state does print end-of-course test results on student transcripts. Now it may join 23 other states and make passing the battery of exams a graduation requirement. At the same time, [North Carolina's](#) State Board may replace the state's High School Competency Tests with scores from four of the five end-of-course tests students also currently take. Additionally, North Carolina may require students to complete a senior project to assess skills that cannot be evaluated with a paper-and-pencil exam. And [New Jersey's](#) education commissioner continues to try to close the loophole that allows a significant number of students to take an alternative, easier test to graduate.
2. **Expecting more.** In an effort to get more students to take

Employers and college faculty agree with and, in many cases, amplify this assessment. Employers estimate that 39 percent of the high school graduates they hire are not well prepared for entry-level jobs, and even more (45 percent) are unprepared to advance beyond the entry level. Only 18 percent of college faculty think high school students come to their classrooms extremely or very well prepared, while 70 percent of those who teach credit-bearing courses say they must spend time teaching skills students should have developed before coming to college.

High school graduates are unequivocal about the power of high expectations. Those who feel well prepared are much more likely to come from high schools that challenged them and held them to high standards. Compared to the other respondents, they took a far more rigorous math and science curriculum, including mathematics beyond Algebra II. Good writing also was stressed; graduates who feel well prepared were asked to write often and to revise their work several times to get it right.

Most telling of all, the vast majority of graduates (more than 80 percent) tell us that if they could do high school all over again, they would have worked harder and taken more rigorous courses. Unfortunately, they won't have that opportunity.

There is a lot of hard work ahead -- and much to learn -- to strengthen our high schools and help more students make a successful transition to postsecondary education and work. But young people right out of high school are telling us loudly and clearly that they would be better off had we expected more of them and given them the help and encouragement to achieve. The governors and business and education leaders who will convene at the National Education Summit on High Schools later this month should heed their advice.

tougher courses through their senior year and to create a more rigorous diploma, [Mississippi](#) officials want to make a challenging curriculum the norm for all students, which Arkansas, Indiana and Texas already have done. A state task force in [Missouri](#) likewise is calling for more coursework in the four core subjects in high school. Task force members also are considering an exit exam.

3. **Schooling the competition.** A strong focus on standards and urging students to take the Core 40 college-prep curriculum has caused [Indiana](#) to soar from 34th to 10th in the nation in percentage of high school students going to college.
4. **Scientific thought.** Realizing the important role that science education plays in college and workplace readiness, Governor Mitt Romney wants to add the subject to the [Massachusetts](#) exit exam, while [Georgia](#), which already tests students in the subject, is considering state-funded tutoring to boost science scores.
5. **Pay for performance.** [New York](#) Governor George Pataki has proposed that the state pay colleges \$500 for every student that graduates with a bachelor's degree on time. This is a small step in the right direction because only 54 percent of four-year college students across the nation finish their degrees within six years.

New Resources

[College Results Online](#), a new resource from The Education Trust, provides information to help improve student outcomes in higher education and close the achievement gap for low-income and minority students. This Web-based, interactive tool allows users to select any four-year college in the country and see how its graduation rates compare with those of other similar institutions. An accompanying report, *Choosing to Improve: Voices from Colleges and Universities with Better Graduation Rates*, provides a more detailed examination of why some schools are more successful than others.

A new **College Board** report reveals that more students are performing well on Advanced Placement (AP) exams -- and that performance gaps between white and minority students are closing. For more information, visit the [College Board](#) Web site. Or download a [PDF file of the report](#).

Did You Know?

United States Trails in High School Graduation Rates

Rank	Countries	High School Graduation Rate	Rank	Countries	High School Graduation Rate
1	Denmark	100	9	Italy	82
2	Norway	97	12	Czech Republic	81
3	Germany	93		<i>Country mean</i>	81
4	Japan	92	13	Belgium	79
5	Poland	90	13	Iceland	79
5	Switzerland	90	15	Ireland	77
7	Finland	85	16	United States	73
7	Greece	85	17	Sweden	72
9	France	82	18	Luxembourg	68
9	Hungary	82	19	Slovak Republic	61

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Education at a Glance 2004.

The dropout problem in the United States has been well documented over the years; viewed through an international lens, it is even more alarming. The United States lags behind most other industrialized countries in the percentage of the population that graduates from high school.

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.

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