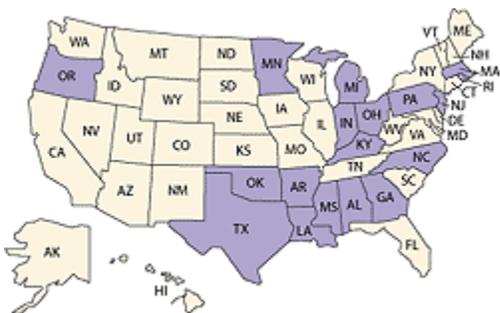


June 2005

Five New States Join ADP Network



We first reported on the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network in March, when 13 states announced the formation of the alliance at the National Education Summit on High Schools. Since then, five more states have signed up: Alabama, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina and Oklahoma. The 18 states collectively educate about 40 percent of American high school students.

Commentary: Rolling Up Their Sleeves

During the recent inaugural meeting of the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network, representatives from 18 states spent two days discussing how to strengthen American high schools. The focus was on dialogue, problem solving and priority setting.

The sessions were short on show-and-tell and long on the nitty-gritty of action planning, with representatives from all the right sectors -- governors, chief state school officers, business groups, higher education institutions, K-12 educators and state board members -- discussing changes in policy and practice that will ensure that all students graduate high school ready for college, work, the military or other postsecondary endeavors.

In state teams and across states, the groups zeroed in on a series of challenges that must be addressed. For instance, how can we better clarify workplace and college expectations? Are they the same in Ohio as they are in Oregon or Oklahoma? Are the skills needed for work really the same as those needed for college, as the 2003 ADP report suggests? If so, how do we make a better case to the public, which remains skeptical about the skills convergence?

How can states build tests of college and work readiness into their high school assessment systems? Should states add a college

News Clips

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1. **Raising expectations in math and English.** [Georgia](#) state officials, concerned about U.S. students' performance on international math assessments, recently approved an integrated math curriculum based on a Japanese model that weaves together algebra, geometry and statistics. Meanwhile, [Oregon](#) lawmakers are expected to ratchet up graduation requirements to include four years of English and three years of math. As we noted in last month's issue, this is a move in the right direction. Next, the state will need to go beyond the number of courses students must take to specify the core knowledge and skills students need to learn in those courses to be ready for college or the world of work.
2. **Holding the line on exit exams.** An editorial in *The Mercury News* encourages [California](#) not to relax or delay the exit exam requirements, citing public opinion research

component to their existing high school tests, as California has done in partnership with California State University? Should they develop end-of-course tests in each subject or a single test covering all of them? Can current college tests, such as the ACT or SAT, be modified to double as high school exams? Should states pool their resources to develop higher-quality assessments than they can on their own?

If we raise graduation requirements, how do we simultaneously guard against higher dropout rates? Among the priority challenges: What can be done to improve teacher quality, support struggling students and low-performing schools, and strengthen the pipeline starting in elementary school? Representatives from the three states that already have adopted ADP-level course requirements -- **Arkansas, Indiana and Texas** -- shared what they have done and the many implementation challenges that remain.

These are difficult questions that cannot be answered overnight. Yet the states also bring a keen sense of urgency to this work. By this fall, each state will release publicly its detailed action plan for addressing the ADP priorities. Their willingness to make such shared, public commitments represents a very important milestone ... and bodes well for the ultimate success and staying power of these state teams and our national coalition.

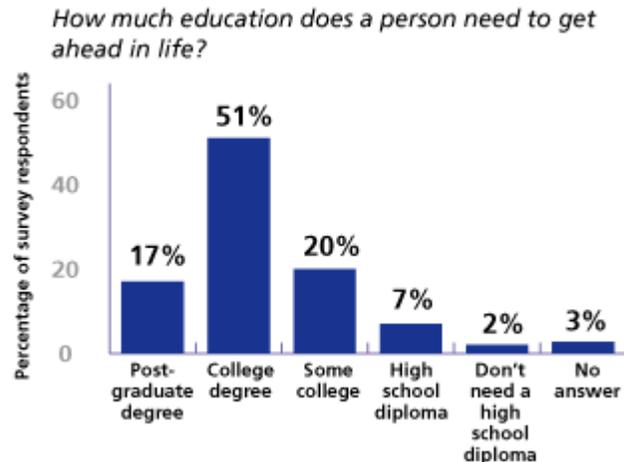
The real beneficiaries will be high school students who say they are not being challenged enough, parents who worry that their children will not go to college or get a good job, employers and college faculty who bemoan the low skill levels of recent high school graduates, and political leaders who are concerned about their states' ability to retain and attract high-quality jobs in a hypercompetitive global economy.

showing that Californians support the exam. Meanwhile, the state board of education in [North Carolina](#) has decided to upgrade the rigor of its high school graduation tests, moving from an 8th grade exam to a series of high school end-of-course tests. The state board in [Arizona](#) has moved in the opposite direction, lowering the score students need to reach on the state test to graduate.

3. **Abbott goes to high school.** The [New Jersey](#) school reform effort -- the result of *Abbott v. Burke* -- is being extended to middle and high school. The four low-income districts in the pilot program will personalize students' education experience and increase the rigor of coursework. If successful, the model will be implemented in other high-need districts.
4. **Tracking graduation and dropout rates.** As states make improving the transition from high school to college a priority, the [U.S. Department of Education](#) is considering the creation of a federal database that might make it easier to follow the performance of students from the K-12 system through higher education. The database would include individual records for college students, enabling them to be tracked from state to state and institution to institution. The proposal is raising privacy concerns, but if those concerns are successfully addressed and the database is aligned with the K-12 system, it could provide valuable information on the performance of both high schools and postsecondary institutions.

Did You Know?

Public Believes Some Education Beyond High School Required for Success



Source: The New York Times, "How Class Works," May 2005.

Less than 10 percent of respondents to a New York Times poll believe a high school diploma is all you need to be successful in life, while an overwhelming majority said you need at least some college. This recent poll further illustrates the need to better prepare high school students for life after graduation.

New Resources

- A new report from the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, [High Achieving High Schools](#), finds that Kentucky high schools need to be fundamentally redesigned to adequately prepare students for life after graduation. The report includes a series of policy recommendations for improving student achievement.
- Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services sets out to dispel the myths about urban education in [Fact or Fiction: Data Tell the True Story Behind America's Urban School Districts](#). Among the report's findings: Many of the country's urban schools and school districts are making greater gains in reading and math test scores than their respective state averages, and white students are failing key academic measures in greater numbers than their African American and Latino classmates.
- Most high school students say they plan on going to college. Yet the new [High School Survey of Student Engagement](#) (HSSSE) reveals that they fail to put in the necessary time and academic effort before graduation to succeed when they get to college. These results are consistent with the findings from Achieve's [poll](#) of high school graduates earlier this year, which found that the vast majority would have worked harder and taken tougher courses in high school if they could go back and do it over again.
- The achievement gap between African American and Latino students and their white and Asian peers narrowed in math between 1972 and 1992, according to a new study by the RAND Corporation, [Examining Gaps in Mathematics Achievement Among Racial-Ethnic Groups](#). The closing of these gaps corresponds to improved socioeconomic conditions for Latino and African American students, suggesting that welfare and other social policies may play an important role in improving student performance.

New from Achieve

- **Aligning core content with standards and tests.** When faced with having to

assess students at additional grade levels to comply with No Child Left Behind, **Pennsylvania** took a novel approach. Rather than attempting to measure everything in the state standards, officials decided to prioritize the core content and skills from its academic standards and target the most important concepts on the grade-level assessments. The state asked Achieve to provide an independent review of the prioritized standards and the new assessments in reading and math. In [*Measuring Up 2005: A Report on Assessment Anchors and Tests in Reading and Mathematics*](#), Achieve sizes up the state's efforts to date.

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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