

October 2004

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Perspective*, a monthly e-newsletter with news and views from 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.

Commentary: Must Reading

You know the Amazon.com feature that suggests a book is better if read in conjunction with another? That came to mind as we read the third annual report card on higher education, *Measuring Up 2004*, published recently by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Reading this study alongside our American Diploma Project (ADP) report, *Ready or Not*, provides the right context for considering K-12 school improvements: They are part of a much broader continuum of efforts required to ensure that all American students are prepared for work and life in the 21st century.

Measuring Up shows where each state stands both in terms of strengthening high school (the news is encouraging) and in providing a high-quality, affordable, postsecondary experience to its citizens (in most states, the picture is decidedly bleaker). *Ready or Not* shows what it will take for high school graduates to be academically prepared for these postsecondary experiences — whether they are in college or high-wage workplaces. And it suggests how states can dramatically improve the preparation of high school graduates.

According to *Measuring Up*, compared with a decade ago more high school students are enrolling in courses that prepare them for college, including 8th grade algebra and upper-level math and science courses, and more 8th graders are scoring at or above "proficient" on 8th grade national math exams. But as we celebrate this progress, we also must keep our eyes on the prize. As ADP forcefully underscores, being proficient in 8th grade math and taking one to two upper-level math and science courses does not mean students are close to being prepared for postsecondary

News Clips

Click on the links below to view articles of interest from the past couple of months. Some publications require free registration to read articles.

1. **Testing progress.** [Massachusetts](#) shows that learning and student performance improve when a state commits to high expectations. Despite dire predictions from naysayers in [Virginia](#), few students are failing to graduate solely because of the exit exam.
2. **Industry's case for higher skills.** An excellent report from [The Washington Post](#) profiles how tough it is for manufacturing companies from Florida to California to find enough employees with even the basic skills needed for the New Economy.
3. **Making high school meaningful.** The [National Governors Association](#) is planning a year-long effort to redesign high school and make the senior year meaningful for both college-bound and career-bound students.

education or the workplace.

Unfortunately, few states demand much more before handing students a high school diploma. **Unless efforts to reform high schools are accompanied by an aggressive effort to redefine what it takes to earn a high school diploma, we may be selling our students and schools short.**

Some states already have recognized that changing high schools begins with changing expectations for student learning. **Indiana** has revamped its high school standards to better align them with the expectations of colleges and employers; **Arkansas** and **Texas** have made a college-ready course of study the default high school curriculum (**Indiana** has proposed a similar policy); **Massachusetts** and **Virginia** have instituted challenging graduation exams and have proven that nearly all students can pass them if they are provided the supports; higher education institutions in **California** and **Texas** are lending credence to the states' new high school assessments by using the results to place students in freshmen courses.

Measuring Up shows how far we need to go to better prepare youngsters for postsecondary success. *Ready or Not* provides a roadmap for getting there.

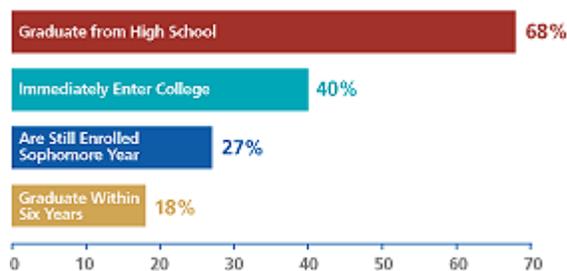
New Report

Like *Measuring Up 2004* (see above), the Center on Education Policy's (CEP) new report on [high school exit exams](#) is best read in conjunction with a [report](#) from Achieve on the same topic.

The CEP report is a good resource for finding out which states administer exit exams and what their policies are, but it takes a neutral stance on the value of exit exams. We feel that these exams are a critical component of a strong high school assessment system. Our research confirms that they can be improved, but they are a key step in the right direction.

Did You Know?

Large Percentages of Students Drop Out of Education Pipeline
Success Rate of Ninth Graders at Each Transition Point (2002)



Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Policy Alert, April 2004.

Most jobs today require some form of postsecondary education, but more than 80 percent of students drop out of the education pipeline before earning a college degree. Students drop out for many reasons, but one reason is that they are not prepared to succeed in college because high school graduation requirements are not linked to postsecondary expectations.

For state-by-state results, go to [Achieve's Web site](#).

New from Achieve

- **Data partnership.** Achieve is joining with other education organizations to provide national guidance on using data to strengthen the preparation of high school graduates. Working with the Council of Chief State School Officers, Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services and CELT, an IT architect and systems integrator, Achieve will explore how states can build more seamless data systems at the high school and postsecondary levels to better track both student and institutional performance. The partnership is funded by the Broad Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- **Report on state course-taking requirements (coming soon).** Building on our study of six states' exit exams, [Do Graduation Tests Measure Up?](#), Achieve this

fall will release a report examining what courses are required for graduation in all 50 states. The report will include recommendations to guide states as they develop a common core of courses that will prepare students for life after high school.

- **Updated Web site.** We have given our site a facelift to help you find the information you need more easily. Visit www.achieve.org to download Achieve's groundbreaking reports and get information on state efforts to improve student performance.

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