

October 2005

*Editor's Note: We apologize if you have received this e-newsletter twice. Due to a computer glitch, some readers were not able to see the version that was sent out earlier this week. We currently are working to correct this problem.*

## Commentary: Missed Opportunity with HEA

With a growing number of governors and state education leaders poised to raise standards in high school to get more students ready for college, it would be a real shame if Congress reauthorized the Higher Education Act (HEA) without addressing this issue. Yet that's the path we may be on.

The House Education and Workforce Committee approved a bill this summer that covers the traditional areas that HEA addresses (college access and financial aid), but it missed a golden opportunity to connect the dots to the work states are doing to strengthen high school requirements and align them with the demands of college and work. The Senate committee bill, completed a couple of weeks ago, goes a bit further, encouraging the "dissemination of best practices" in aligning high school and college expectations and allowing schools to use Gear Up funds for these purposes. It is unlikely, however, to spur real changes in state policy.

What could Congress do to support state leaders who are ready to make K-16 alignment a priority? Imagine a voluntary grants program to help states align their high school standards, curricula and assessments with college entry and placement standards. The grants could be used to convene postsecondary and high school faculty to create academic standards for college readiness, as states such as Kentucky and Washington have done; to re-examine high school standards and coursetaking requirements, as Indiana and Oklahoma have just done; to build new high school assessments that better measure college readiness -- California has done this; and to

## 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. **Ohioans ready for a challenge.** A [poll](#) on high school reforms showed that most Ohioans think that their high schools are not challenging enough. But [Ohio's](#) governor, Bob Taft, has big plans to make the high school diploma a certificate of readiness for college or the workplace. As a member of the ADP Network, the state is committed to putting in place standards and assessments that create a seamless transition from high school to college or the workforce.
2. **Hard work paying off in Massachusetts.** In [Massachusetts](#), four out of five high school sophomores (80 percent) passed both the English and math MCAS tests last spring on their first try -- up from 75 percent for the class of 2003. Education Commissioner David Driscoll credits the reforms launched in 1993 for this successful trend.
3. **Putting your money where the future is.** Concerned that Asian countries are rising to the top of the global marketplace, particularly in the engineering and technology industries, more and more business and political leaders are complaining that U.S.

design better data systems to track students from high school through postsecondary education -- Florida is leading the way here.

If Congress were to create this new K-16 alignment fund, would states take advantage of it? We think they would, and it wouldn't necessarily take a lot of money. Just look at what happened when Gates and a few other foundations offered grants to states willing to embrace the action agenda from the National Education Summit on High Schools. More than 30 states applied to the National Governors Association (NGA) for grants ranging from \$1 to \$2 million. There were only enough funds for 10 states. But imagine the impact Congress could have if it allotted even \$50 million to help states align high school and postsecondary expectations. Such a shrewd investment would be an inexpensive way to protect the much, much larger investment Congress is making in the nation's higher education system.

A quarter of college freshmen in the U.S. today take remedial courses in reading, writing or math; the figure is nearly 50 percent in community colleges. Even more disturbing, a majority of students who take remedial courses drop out of college without earning a degree. Just think of the potential savings to families and taxpayers if more students arrived in college ready for college-level work.

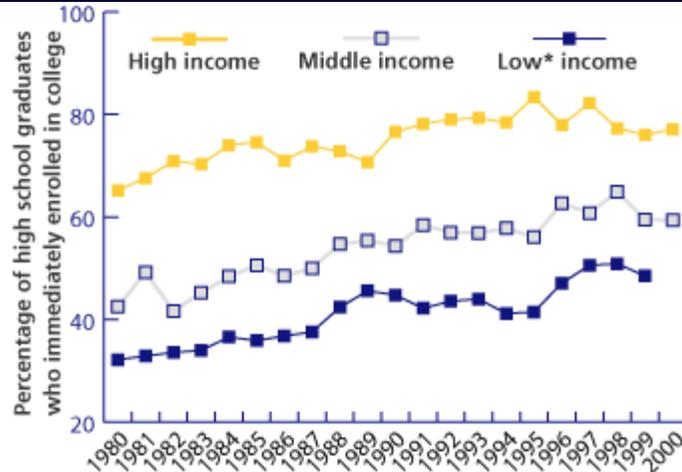
Twenty-two states have joined the American Diploma Project and committed to aligning their high school standards, tests and course requirements with the demands of college and work. These states recognize that to increase access and success in higher education, they must start much earlier to influence the courses students take and the standards to which they aspire. They are poised to open the doors of college to many more students who otherwise may have aimed too low and to increase their chances of success once they get there. Is Congress listening?

### **Did You Know?**

**More High School Graduates at All Income Levels Going to College**

schools are not producing enough capable math and science graduates. In response, [IBM](#) has unveiled an innovative program to financially support employees who leave the company to become math and science teachers, a move aimed at raising the level of achievement of U.S. students to match and exceed their international peers.

4. **High school reform on the road.** [Idaho](#) and [New Jersey](#), both members of the ADP Network, recently held statewide education summits that focused on raising expectations and achievement in high schools. Leaders in Idaho want to increase expectations in math and science, provide more electives that focus on careers, and offer high school students more opportunities for college credit. In New Jersey, the summit focused on concrete steps the state can take to implement the action agenda from the National Education Summit on High Schools that Achieve and NGA hosted earlier this year.



\*Due to small sample sizes, three-year averages are used for low-income category.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, October Current Population Surveys, 1972-2000, in U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2002*, p. 166.

*Studies show that a college degree increasingly is a prerequisite for a job that pays well and offers opportunities for advancement. The good news is that more students of all income levels are enrolling in college. The bad news is that far too few students, particularly low-income students, finish. Approximately 60 percent of 26-year-olds from high-income families and only 7 percent of 26-year-olds from low-income families earn a college degree. Many students are forced to drop out because they are not prepared for college-level work.*

### New Resources

- More and more students are planning to attend college, but far too many do not understand what it takes to succeed in postsecondary education and are not prepared when they graduate from high school. To help ease transitions between K-12 and college, Partnerships for Student Success, comprising the Institute for Educational Leadership, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research, has completed a study analyzing K-16 educational governance and policies. [\*\*The Governance Divide: A Report on a Four-State Study on Improving College Readiness and Success\*\*](#) focuses on four policy levers that states can use to create meaningful and lasting K-16 reform: aligning courses and assessments, creating a K-16 finance system, developing a K-16 data system, and connecting accountability systems across the K-12 and postsecondary divide.
- The Consortium for Policy Research in Education recently released a study examining the impact of new accountability policies in 48 low-performing high schools. [\*\*Holding High Hopes: How High Schools Respond to State Accountability Policies\*\*](#) finds that increasing accountability can have a powerful impact, but success depends not only on creating high stakes but also on the capabilities, knowledge, resources and motivation of schools and staffs.
- In its newest study, Jobs for the Future examines 725 jobs to determine which ones provide the best opportunities for low-skilled workers. The study looks at which jobs are projected to grow, offer good starting wages and the potential for advancement, and are accessible without a four-year degree. [\*\*The Right Jobs: Identifying\*\*](#)

[Career Advancement Opportunities for Low-Skilled Workers](#) takes a closer look at the six professions the study identified as the most promising. The report also offers comprehensive public policy strategies that, if implemented, will make these jobs more accessible to the workers who need them.

- Calling on policymakers and education leaders to ensure that every student has the opportunity to attend a public school with a common, coherent and challenging core curriculum, [Core Knowledge](#)'s new report presents evidence from the organization's 15 years of work in schools that a rigorous core curriculum can help all students, particularly the most disadvantaged, improve achievement.
- In its annual update on international education performance, [Education at a Glance 2005](#), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development highlights the results of the 2003 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which shows that the United States trails most developed countries in student performance, particularly in math. The report also compares countries' performance in a number of other areas, including high school and college graduation rates, teacher working conditions, investment in education, and economic benefits of education.
- Nationwide, remediation rates are a critical concern and show that far too many students are graduating high school without being adequately prepared for college-level work. States have taken a number of different steps to address this problem, but gauging their effectiveness is difficult because information on remediation rates at the state level can be hard to find. Not so in Minnesota. In [Getting Prepared: A 2005 Report on Recent High School Graduates Who Took Developmental/Remedial Courses](#), the Minnesota postsecondary system shows how valuable it can be to publicly report remediation rates at its state colleges and universities and the University of Minnesota.

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### New from Achieve

- **Achieve launches alignment institutes.** One of the priorities of the ADP Network states is to align their standards in high school with the real-world demands of postsecondary education and work. To help states accomplish this goal, Achieve is providing ADP Network states with a series of alignment institutes. Over 10 to 15 months, states will receive training, tools and technical assistance to help them develop academic standards in English and math that define the knowledge and skills students need to enter and succeed in college and work. States also will develop practical options for high school assessments that align to these college- and work-ready standards and that postsecondary institutions will use in placement decisions.

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*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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