



September 2010

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## Commentary

### A Moment in Time

For those of us focused on standards-based education reform, this past year has brought a remarkable amount of positive change. Over thirty-five states and D.C. have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and more are planning to do so in the months ahead. Because the K-12 CCSS are anchored in college and career readiness, this means that *all* schools in adopting states will be expected to help *all* students meet expectations that were previously only for high performers or those who were deemed "college bound." This is a real shot in the arm toward the goal of making all high school graduates college- and career-ready.

Adoption of the standards is, of course, only the first step. States will need to invest energy and resources to fully implement the standards so that the promise of the standards reaches every student, in every classroom. So far, most states that have adopted the CCSS understand this and are organizing themselves to take on the challenge. There will be many partners prepared to help them along the way, Achieve included.

Part of fully implementing the CCSS requires having new assessments designed to measure the new standards. That effort received a huge boost a few weeks ago when [Secretary Duncan announced the winners of the Race to the Top Assessment Competition](#). The Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium were each awarded sizeable grants to develop multi-state, next generation assessment systems grounded in the mathematics and English language arts common standards. Like the standards, these assessments will be developed by the state-led consortia and will enable cross-state comparisons.

Achieve is honored to be helping to coordinate the work of the PARCC consortium. The PARCC states have come up with a forward thinking design that moves state assessment systems ahead. Some key features of the [PARCC proposal](#) include:

- K-12 assessments anchored in college and career readiness, with higher education helping to establish the college-ready measures that will anchor the system;
- Performance measures that move away from reliance on multiple choice questions and tap students critical thinking, reasoning, writing and problem solving skills;

- Through-course assessments that measure student performance at key points during the school year rather than waiting for one big test at the end; and
- Computer-based assessments to take maximum advantage of advances in technology to measure higher standards, to reduce costs and to speed up the turnaround time for getting results back to teachers in classrooms.

All of these elements are meant to provide teachers, parents and administrators with better and timelier information to adjust instruction and ensure students are on track to meeting the standards.

There is a sense among the state leaders in both consortia that they are at a critical moment in time, faced with a once in a generation opportunity to design together something that none of them has the resources, expertise or political support to do alone. Their excitement and commitment is palpable, and so are the challenges to getting it right. As states approach this opportunity, they will need to work hard to achieve consensus on key design, policy and cost issues. They will need to push the assessment field to innovate and create higher quality products. And they will need to engage all stakeholders, particularly educators, in the work of building the new system, so that they and their students become its greatest beneficiaries...and advocates.

Download the PARCC press release in [PDF format](#).

Read the U.S. Department of Education's [announcement](#).

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### New from Achieve

#### **American Diploma Project Network Leadership Team Meeting**

Achieve convened state education leaders earlier this month at the 6th annual American Diploma Project (ADP) Network Leadership Team Meeting which took place September 1-2, 2010 in Alexandria, Virginia. The meeting gave states a significant opportunity to address key challenges and opportunities associated with advancing and sustaining the college- and career-ready policy agenda. Approximately 250 leaders from the 35 ADP Network states, including governors, K-12 chief state school officers, governors' senior policy advisors, higher education system and institutional leaders, business leaders, state board of education members, state legislators, and other stakeholders attended. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan gave the Keynote Address at the meeting, addressing the urgent need to improve K-12 statewide assessment systems - aligned to the CCSS - so that they more validly measure a broader range of student knowledge and skills, support good teaching, and lead to college and career readiness for all



students. Read the transcript of his speech [here](#) or watch the video [here](#).

Participants engaged with national experts, learned from colleagues in other states, and met in state teams to plan next steps in ongoing efforts to advance the ADP policy goals. Topics discussed included CCSS implementation, strategies for aligning the college readiness and college completion agendas, STEM education, and ESEA reauthorization. View the plenary session videos [here](#).

After the full meeting, Achieve held a post-meeting workshop on sustaining college- and career-ready policies in the face of political transitions, attended by leaders from 14 states. View Achieve's Sustainability Planning Tool [here](#).

### **NBC's Education Nation**

Education reform is in the spotlight this week. NBC (and all of its platforms and affiliates) has been broadcasting "Education Nation," a week-long event focusing on the state of U.S. education and ways in which to encourage policy changes and community involvement.

The Education Nation website - [www.educationnation.com](http://www.educationnation.com) - includes a [scorecard](#) that Achieve worked with GreatSchools and other partners to create. The Education Nation Scorecard provides families with easily understandable and accessible information about how well their local schools are performing, as well as their districts, states, and the nation as a whole.

### **Common Core State Standards**

Last month, Achieve President Michael Cohen was a guest on *The Kojo Nnamdi Show*, produced by WAMU 88.5 public radio in Washington, D.C. ([Listen to the program](#)). He discussed the CCSS in English language arts and mathematics that were released in June by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). For a current list of states that have adopted the CCSS, go [here](#).



To help states and others better understand the CCSS, this summer Achieve created a range of materials, available at [www.achieve.org/AchievingCommonCore](http://www.achieve.org/AchievingCommonCore). Included are fact sheets that describe the content areas and address frequently asked questions about the standards and "[On the Road to Implementation: Achieving the Promise of the Common Core State Standards](#)," a guide for state leaders to use as they think through the major challenges of implementing the common core and related policies.

Achieve recently added new content briefs that compare and contrast the CCSS

in English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects against a number of well-known and well-regarded benchmarks, including international comparisons, high-performing states and NAEP. Download these briefs, along with the previously released mathematics-focused briefs, [here](#).

## Race to the Top

**Tennessee** Governor Phil Bredesen, co-chair of Achieve's Board of Directors, discussed the [Race to the Top](#) program and the bipartisan successes of adopting education reform in an NBC Nightly News Web-exclusive [video](#). **Tennessee** and **Delaware** won grants in the first phase of the Race to the Top competition. In late August the U.S. Department of Education chose nine states - **Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island** and the **District of Columbia** - for the second round Race to the Top competition grants designed to raise student learning and close the achievement gap.

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## Changing the Equation in STEM Education

On September 16 President Obama announced the launch of [Change the Equation](#), a CEO-led effort to dramatically improve education in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), as part of the [Educate to Innovate](#) campaign.

Within a year, Change the Equation plans to replicate successful privately-funded programs in 100 high-need schools and communities such as efforts to allow more students to engage in robotics competitions, improve professional development for math and science teachers, increase the number of students that take and pass rigorous Advanced Placement (AP) math and science courses and exams, increase the number of teachers who enter the profession with a STEM undergraduate degree, and provide new opportunities to traditionally-underrepresented

### News Clips

1. **White House Advisers Call for More Funds for Science Education**

The President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology calls for close to \$1 billion in new spending on STEM education at the precollege level. That would nearly double the government's current STEM budget for K-12 education. [More...](#)

2. **Standards Reflect Raised Expectations for Students**

In an op-ed in the *Knoxville News Sentinel*, Knox County Schools

students and underserved communities. It will also create a state-by-state "scorecard" to highlight areas for state-level improvement, and help companies increase the impact of their own engagement in STEM education.

The initiative was founded by former astronaut Sally Ride, former Intel Chairman and Achieve Board Co-Chair Craig Barrett, Xerox CEO Ursula Burns, Time Warner Cable CEO Glenn Britt, and Eastman Kodak CEO Antonio Perez. Dr. Barrett is serving as Chairman of the Board. He was interviewed on CNBC about this initiative; watch the interview [here](#). For more, go to [www.changetheequation.org](http://www.changetheequation.org).

superintendent Jim McIntyre comments on increased standards and more rigorous and honest assessments, saying, "If we want all of our children to receive an outstanding public education, to be competitive in this increasingly global economy and to have the opportunity to be successful and fulfilled in their lives, then we must resolutely continue on this bold path of innovation in public education." [More...](#)

### 3. When an A Isn't Enough

*The Columbus Dispatch* notes that despite earning good grades and taking honors courses in high school, many students still find themselves ill-prepared for college. [More...](#)

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## New Resources

- Lumina Foundation for Education released its second annual report, "[A Stronger Nation](#)," which provides a detailed look at the progress the nation and individual states are making towards Lumina's "Big Goal" - 60 percent of Americans holding a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2025. The report explores what is needed to meet this goal and why reaching the goal is essential. Also included are individual profiles for all 50 states with current education attainment data by county and race/ethnicity, jobs and education requirement projections for the



state, and the number of degrees needed for the state to do its part in reaching the "Big Goal."

- States have taken important steps over the last decade to improve high school graduation rates and stem the dropout crisis, but according to two new reports from Jobs for the Future (JFF), they still have an enormous amount of work to do to address these problems. The reports - "[Six Pillars of Effective Dropout Prevention and Recovery](#)" and "[Reinventing Alternative Education](#)" - lay out model policy elements for dropout prevention and recovery as well as policies that would drive alternative education as a pathway to college for struggling students. The reports assess the extent to which recent state policy aligns with model policy elements, and feature states that are exemplars for their implementation of each policy. Based on JFF's extensive state-level research, the reports contain checklists of dropout and alternative education policies that states should enact in order to prevent at-risk students from dropping out, help returning dropouts recover credits, and reinvent alternative education programs as a vibrant pathway to college for struggling students.



- Focusing on efforts in **California**, a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education examines how blending academic and career-focused instruction can improve teaching quality. "[The Linked Learning Approach: Building the Capacity of Teachers to Prepare Students for College and Careers](#)" argues that aligning teacher education with high school reform efforts is the best way to ensure students are prepared for the rigors of postsecondary education. Policy recommendations include investing in college- and career-focused education for teachers and administrators; adopting school-level strategies equally supportive of college and career instruction; and creating incentives that promote partnerships between school districts, postsecondary institutions, local industry, and policymakers. [More...](#)
- The College Board's new report detailing the personal and public benefits of higher education - "[Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society](#)" - argues that despite the expense of tuition and other costs associated with attending college, the investment in postsecondary education pays off extremely well over the course of a lifetime. The report provides policymakers a wealth of data to

make the case that investing in higher education improves the quality of life for individuals, makes state economies more efficient, and creates a more equitable and civil society.

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### **In Memoriam**

Dr. Robert F. Sexton, the longtime executive director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, passed away August 26. He was a tireless education leader who served on the board of the Education Trust, the Education Commission of the States and numerous other organizations. Gene Wilhoit, executive director of CCSSO and former **Kentucky** Commissioner of Education, [said](#) of Sexton, "He was a consistent voice for education reform over numerous years and numerous administrations. He was a champion, with the ability to present harsh truths and never back away from them. The reforms he helped put in place will live on as a tribute to his life." Visit the [tribute page](#).

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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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*Perspective* is sent to you by Achieve, an independent, bipartisan, non-profit education reform organization based in Washington, D.C. that helps states raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments and strengthen accountability. Please feel free to circulate this e-newsletter to your colleagues.

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