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Commentary

Getting the Word Out on College and Career Readiness

Most young people have big dreams and plans for their future: Ninety-two percent of seventh and eighth graders surveyed indicate that they will definitely or probably attend college, and 93 percent said there was no chance that they would drop out of high school. Unfortunately, there are big disparities between their aspirations and reality, particularly for low-income students and those who would- be first generation college goers. How can we ensure that more students' aspirations become reality?

States that have raised graduation requirements to a college and career ready level have taken an important first step. By setting expectations at an appropriately high level, they have communicated to all the importance of taking rigorous courses in order to be prepared for the real world. Having the right policies in place is critical, but then it's just as important to get the word out to students, parents and the public. And not just about what the requirements are but why they are so essential.

This is where the voices of college leaders and employers are critical. Only the postsecondary and business communities can articulate what they expect of high school graduates and what it means to be prepared for credit bearing postsecondary course work or a good job. When they talk, people listen.

One way for higher education to show that higher expectations in high school are needed is to change their policies to align with the new standards and graduation requirements in states that have raised them to the college and career readiness level. In Indiana, for example, the state's four-year institutions raised minimum admissions requirements to align with the Core 40 course of study once it became a high school graduation requirement. The two systems are now sending common signals.

In addition to policy efforts, the higher education and business community can use their bully pulpit to reinforce the importance of rigorous standards in high school. A good example of this in the business community is the [State Scholars Initiative](#), which encourages high school students to complete a rigorous course of study very similar to what many American Diploma Project states are putting

in place for all students. More recently, the American Council on Education and the Lumina Foundation launched a series of [public service announcements](#) for their [KnowHow2GO](#) campaign that challenges students to take tough classes such as Algebra II, biology and foreign language in order to be prepared for college.

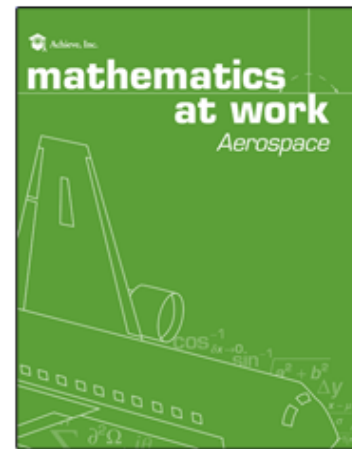
Given the resources behind these and other national campaigns, they will undoubtedly make a difference. But their impact could be increased dramatically if their messages could more directly reinforce efforts in states to raise high school expectations. State education policy leaders should find ways to align their messages and leverage the resources these initiatives have to offer.

These national initiatives, however, cannot substitute for a state's own business and higher education efforts to get the word out. Leaders in these sectors need to speak out and take broader ownership of the higher expectations that states are putting in place for high school students. Without the voice of higher education and business, K-12 leaders will face an uphill battle in motivating students to aim higher and in sustaining public support for the important policies they are putting in place.

New from Achieve

Math at Work Brochures Available

Building upon the work of the American Diploma Project, Achieve has produced a series of "Mathematics at Work" brochures to examine how higher-level mathematics is used in today's workplaces. The brochures present case studies drawn from leading industries such as health care, manufacturing, construction, information technology and aerospace, to illustrate the advanced mathematics knowledge and skills used in jobs that are accessible to high school graduates. The series underscores the value of a rigorous high school curriculum in mathematics. All high school graduates - regardless of whether they enroll in college, join the workforce or enter the military - benefit from acquiring a comprehensive knowledge base and skill set in mathematics. To download the PDFs or to obtain printed copies go [here](#).



Building Blocks for Success Policy Brief

A new Achieve policy brief, *The Building Blocks of Success: Higher-Level Math for All Students*, explores the intellectual and practical benefits to all students of taking higher-level mathematics courses during high school, focusing on college access and success, workplace- and career-readiness, and personal and U.S. competitiveness. Download it [here](#).

Achieve Calls Mathematics "Gateway" to College and Career

Last month Achieve was invited to provide testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor as part of a hearing on the National Mathematics Advisory Panel Report. In the testimony, Achieve Vice President Laura Slover emphasized the importance of higher level mathematics to success in postsecondary education and the workplace and highlighted progress being made in the states toward raising mathematics expectations. "Achieve and others have found that Algebra II is a gateway course for higher education and teaches quantitative reasoning skills important for the workplace," stated Slover. Read the full [testimony](#) and see a [video clip](#).

Mathematics Benchmarks K-12 Website Launched

Achieve and the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin have jointly launched new web-based tools to help states, districts and schools establish mathematics coursework aligned with entry requirements for higher education and the workplace. The online resource provides benchmarks and tools to ensure that mathematics education is streamlined and connected from grade to grade as students progress toward high school graduation. Also included are classroom and workplace tasks that illustrate the practical application of the benchmarks, model course sequences for integrated and traditional middle and high school courses and fourth year capstone courses and evaluation tools. The "Mathematics Benchmarks, Grades K-12" [website](#) makes the tools available at no charge to educators nationwide.

ADP Multi-state Assessment Consortium: Algebra I and Algebra II Update

The first operational administration of the American Diploma Project (ADP) Algebra II End-of-Course Exam was given to more than 114,000 students this spring. Currently fourteen states are part of the ADP Algebra II consortium, the largest multi-state effort ever undertaken to develop a common assessment based on common standards. A cross-state report of the first exam administration will be published in early fall.

The next administration of the ADP Algebra II End-of-Course Exam will be at the end of the winter semester, December 2008-January 2009. During the fall/winter administration, several validity studies will be undertaken to ascertain the degree to which the ADP Algebra II Exam assesses students' readiness for credit-bearing, postsecondary mathematics coursework.

There are a number of resources currently available with respect to the ADP Algebra II exam, including a set of released items, which has information for teachers and students on what to expect on the exam, a fact sheet that answers frequently asked questions, such as information on the core test content and how states can become members of the consortium. Go [here](#).

A subset of the ADP Algebra II Consortium states are developing a common Algebra I End-of-Course Exam, similar in nature to its Algebra II counterpart. The Algebra I Exam Content Standards will be finalized in late summer. This exam

has been developed so that it aligns with and supports the purposes of the Algebra II End-of-Course Exam. A field test will be administered in Fall 2008 and the first operational exam will be in Spring 2009.

Achieve's Website Earns Recognition

Achieve's [website](#) was recognized in June by the editors of *District Administration*, a magazine for K-12 school superintendents and other district education leaders. The site was added to the [Site of the Week](#) online archives and to daily announcements.

Alabama Changes Diploma Requirements

On May 8th the Alabama State Board of Education unanimously approved changes in the state's high school graduation requirements that will enroll many students in a tougher curriculum. Beginning in the fall of 2009, all high school students will automatically be placed on an advanced diploma track, also known as the "college" track that requires them to pass two years of foreign language courses plus Algebra II with trigonometry. Students will not be able to switch to the less demanding "regular" track without parental/legal guardian's permission.

Alabama State Superintendent of Education Joe Morton recommended the changes as part of a package called the "First Choice Diploma," which he [outlined](#) in *The Birmingham News*. According to the Alabama State Board of Education, the package is intended to better prepare high school graduates for career readiness and educational experiences beyond high school.

Caroline Novak, president of the [A-Plus Education Foundation](#) in Montgomery, praised the move. "This is an important step that communicates to students and their parents what children will need to be successful in

News Clips

1. New AP Poll: More Math Please!

A majority of Americans think schools are placing too much emphasis on the wrong subjects, and more than half think they're doing just a fair job in preparing children for the work force or giving them the practical skills needed to survive as adults, according to an Associated Press poll. What subjects do Americans think schools should focus on? More than one-third said math and 21 percent thought English. [More...](#)

2. Most States Move Toward Uniform Graduation Rate Reporting

The Minneapolis *StarTribune* reports that many states are adopting more accountable graduation rate systems "based on real math." U.S. Secretary of Education

today's workplace or in college. The challenge now is for educators and communities to ensure that more students succeed in high school and are well-prepared for the future." (Read her [opinion piece](#).)

The decision makes Alabama the 19th state to take this move to ensure that more students are prepared for college and the workplace. Read the [full text](#) of the board resolution and [documents](#) related to this change. [The Press-Register](#) also covered this as well.

Margaret Spellings has called for new rules that will require states to accurately track students. [More...](#)

3. **Michigan's Tough New Math Requirement**

An editorial in *The Detroit News* notes that Michigan is one of more than 33 states moving toward requiring students to take challenging math classes. "Access to rigorous high school classes is the great equalizer of 21st century." [More...](#)

New Resources

- The Center on Education Policy (CEP) has issued a new report, "Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002? State Test Score Trends Through 2006-07." It examines whether reading and math achievement has increased since NCLB's enactment and whether the achievement gap among subgroups of students has narrowed. All 50 states responded to CEP's request for state and NAEP data, though not every state for every grade was able to satisfy the study's parameters requiring 3 years or more of comparable data.



Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002?

State Test Score Trends Through 2006-07

The report focuses on the percentage of students deemed "proficient" or above for grades 4, 8, and 10 (where available) and also computes effect sizes to increase the robustness of the study's analysis. Generally, trends on state tests and NAEP correlate positively and achievement gaps narrowed more often than widened among subgroups. Given the variation in how states define student proficiency and cut scores, however, it is difficult to quantify proficiency gains with much certainty. The full report and individual state data (including state-specific trends for different grades and subgroups) are available [here](#).

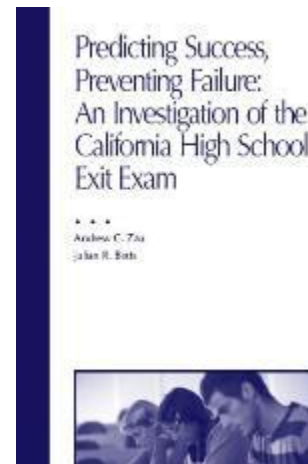
- The Thomas B. Fordham Institute released "High-Achieving Students in the Era of No Child Left Behind," a two-part report focused on how high-achieving students are performing under NCLB compared to low-achieving students and what lessons teachers can provide about how schools address the needs of high- and low-achievers.

The first part of the study reports relatively strong growth for the bottom decile of scorers on the 4th grade math and reading and 8th grade math NAEP exams between 2000 and 2007 and steady but more modest progress for the top decile that predates NCLB.

In the second part of the report, eighty percent of teachers surveyed reported that struggling students in their schools were most likely to get one-on-one attention whereas only five percent said academically advanced students were, a finding that is not unexpected since NCLB was designed to encourage schools to get kids over the proficiency bar. [More...](#)

- The Public Policy Institute of California published a report analyzing individual student data - including grades, test scores, and non-cognitive behaviors - to determine when students at risk of failing the high-stakes California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) could be identified. Examining student records from the San Diego Unified School District for the first cohort required to pass the 10th grade CAHSEE, the report, *Predicting Success, Preventing Failure: An Investigation of the California High School Exit Exam*, found that students' grade 4 data predicted CAHSEE passage nearly as well as did grade 9 outcomes, raising questions on the most appropriate time to intervene.

The researchers urge policymakers to develop a reliable early warning system using statistically based methods that will enable districts, schools and teachers to identify at-risk students and target intervention funds accordingly prior to the "11th hour" when high school graduation is at stake. [More...](#)



- The education policy research organization MDRC released the results of a fifteen-year evaluation of the impact of Career Academies on the education and labor market outcomes for motivated students in urban high schools. More than 1,400 young people - including more than 1,100 minority students - who sought rigorous preparation for college and careers were followed throughout high school and for eight years beyond graduation to explore how the small learning communities and career-focused curriculum of the Academies impacted students.



The Academy attendees and their similarly-motivated peers reached nearly identical levels of educational attainment in terms of on-time high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and college degree completion. The real impact of the program is revealed in the differences in labor market outcomes between these two populations. Eight years after high school, graduates of the Career Academies showed sustained earnings gains of nearly \$2,100 per year, and young men's earnings gains were particularly large, at more than \$3,700 annually. [More...](#)

- Students often face conflicting signals as they prepare to transition to college. While high schools require one set of courses and tests to graduate, colleges often have another set of expectations. *Diplomas Count 2008* - a report by *Education Week* and the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center - examines states' efforts to forge stronger connections between precollegiate and postsecondary education. [More...](#)



- The Alliance for Excellent Education points out in an updated brief, *The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools*, that, "if the high school dropouts from the Class of 2008 had instead earned diplomas along with their classmates, the nation's economy could have benefited from an additional \$320 billion in wages, taxes, and productivity over these students' lifetimes." [More...](#)

Achieve Job Opportunities

Achieve seeks a Policy Analyst and a Mathematics Associate. For more

information, go [here](#).

Perspective is sent to you by Achieve, Inc., 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, careers and citizenship. Please feel free to circulate this e-newsletter to your colleagues.

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