



Preparing Today's
High School Students for
Tomorrow's Opportunities



*A partnership of Achieve, Inc.; The Education Trust; Jobs for the Future;
the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation; and The Charles A. Dana Center,
University of Texas at Austin.*

Twenty-six states. Representing more than half of all public school students in the United States. Governors, state superintendents of education, business executives, and college and university leaders committed to working with parents, teachers, principals and community groups to strengthen America's high schools so that all students graduate ready for success in the 21st century.

Together, they have formed the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network, which grew out of the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools, where governors and business, K–12 and higher education leaders from 45 states embraced an action agenda to revitalize American high schools.

Through the ADP Network, states will:

- ❶ make their high school standards, assessments and curriculum more challenging;
- ❷ make them more relevant and engaging by better aligning them with the real-world demands of postsecondary education and work; and
- ❸ hold high schools and postsecondary institutions accountable for improved performance.

Changes such as these are just the start. They will provide a firm foundation for a more comprehensive set of urgently needed reforms in our high schools, including improved preparation and support for teachers and principals; targeted interventions for low-performing schools; and the creation of new, innovative high schools in which academic rigor is matched with students' interests and aspirations.

The world has changed, high schools must change.



AN URGENT NEED

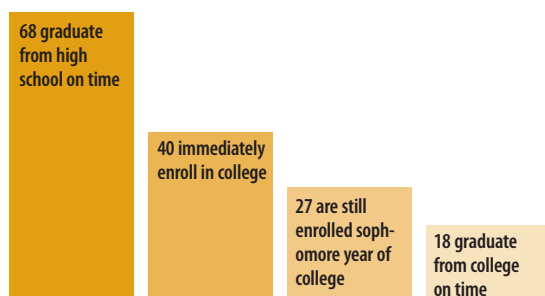
► Nationally, for every 100 9th graders, only 68 graduate from high school in four years, only 40 enroll immediately in college, only 27 are still enrolled in their sophomore year, and only 18 graduate from two-year colleges within three years or four-year colleges within six years. The percentages are lower for African American and Latino students.

For state-by-state data, go to www.achieve.org.

► More than two-thirds of jobs will require some postsecondary education. The jobs requiring the most education and offering the best pay are the fastest growing.

Few Students Make It through the Education Pipeline

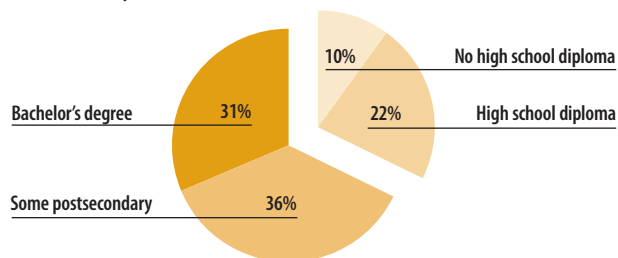
For every 100 9th graders ...



Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Policy Alert*, April 2004. Data are estimates of pipeline progress rather than actual cohort.

More Than Two-Thirds of New Jobs Require Some Postsecondary Education

Share of new jobs, 2000–2010



Source: Carnevale, Anthony P., and Donna M. Desrochers, *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K–12 Reform*, Educational Testing Service, 2003.

More Learning Translates into Higher Earnings

Education	Average Annual Earnings	Average Lifetime Earnings
High school dropout	\$22,000	\$1.1 million
High school diploma	\$31,000	\$1.4 million
Associate's degree	\$38,000	\$1.8 million
Bachelor's degree	\$50,000	\$2.5 million

Source: Baum, Sandy, and Kathleen Payea, *Education Pays 2004: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*, College Board, 2004.

“America’s high schools are obsolete Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today’s computers on a 50-year-old mainframe. It’s the wrong tool for the times.”

■ ■ Bill Gates, co-founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Strengthening Their Systems in Four Major Ways

In 2004, the American Diploma Project (ADP), a partnership of Achieve, The Education Trust and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, published detailed English and mathematics benchmarks describing the knowledge and skills that American high school graduates need to succeed in college or the workplace. The benchmarks are the result of two years of research conducted in colleges, universities and high-performance workplaces across the country. They are accompanied by workplace tasks and postsecondary assignments that vividly illustrate what high school students will actually encounter in good jobs or in credit-bearing first-year college courses.

These real-world ADP expectations are significantly more rigorous than current high school standards, which helps explain why many high school graduates now arrive at college or the workplace with major gaps in their preparation.

Achieve has been using the ADP standards and research to help states close the gaps. The ADP Network will further advance this mission. Participating states have committed to taking four actions:

1

ALIGNING HIGH SCHOOL STANDARDS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS REQUIRED FOR SUCCESS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL. Most current state standards represent a consensus among specialists in each subject area about what is desirable for students to learn. But these standards seldom are aligned with the skills employers and colleges say are needed for success in their institutions. ADP Network states have agreed to change this situation, aligning high school, college and workplace standards so that all graduates are prepared for the real world.

This means that state postsecondary systems and institutions will have to define clearly the knowledge and skills necessary for enrolling in credit-bearing courses, and employers will have to be clearer about the skill sets necessary to succeed in a global knowledge economy. The K–12 system then will need to align its standards and assessments with those expectations.

“The United States now stands in immediate danger of losing its edge. Each of the nation’s 16 million high school students must master complex skills and knowledge to be able to compete in the global economy.”

■ ■ Craig R. Barrett, chairman of Intel



“We know the more you learn, the more you earn. It is vital that we prepare our youth for the opportunities they will face upon leaving the classroom and instill in them that a college education is a life necessity.”

■ ■ Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm

2

REQUIRING ALL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES TO TAKE CHALLENGING COURSES THAT ACTUALLY PREPARE THEM FOR LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL.

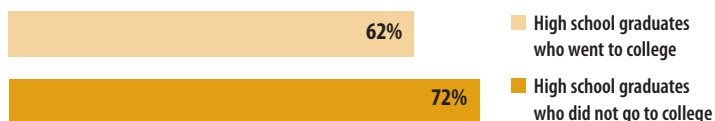
The ADP research found that there is a common core of knowledge and skills, particularly in English and mathematics, that students must master to be prepared for college or careers. Currently, schools tend to have a special track for college-bound students and a less rigorous curriculum for everyone else, which leaves many students ill prepared for either college or work.

In contrast, we must provide all students with a curriculum that will give them real options, including postsecondary education and well-paying jobs. ADP calls for four years of grade-level English (including literature, writing, reasoning, logic and communications skills) and four years of math (including Algebra I and II, geometry, data analysis, and statistics). Currently, only 10 of the nation's 50 states have high school graduation requirements at the ADP level.

States in the ADP Network have pledged to raise their requirements over time, either by specifying the high-level courses students must take to earn a diploma or by working with school districts to raise their local requirements.

Most High School Graduates Would Have Taken Harder Courses

Knowing what I know today about the expectations of college/the work world, I would have taken more challenging courses in at least one area



Source: Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies, *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* prepared for Achieve, Inc., 2005.

STREAMLINING THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM SO THAT THE TESTS STUDENTS TAKE IN HIGH SCHOOL ALSO CAN SERVE AS READINESS TESTS FOR COLLEGE AND WORK. Currently, colleges and employers generally ignore the exams students take in high school and instead administer their own hiring and placement tests. This sends mixed signals to students about what is important. Better aligning high school tests with college and employer expectations will:

- ▷ provide students with an early indicator of college and work readiness, allowing them to fill any learning gaps before leaving high school;
- ▷ provide incentives for students to take high school curriculum and assessments seriously by providing a clear connection to college and careers;
- ▷ save students, their parents and taxpayers from the wasteful expense of paying for remedial college courses that cover the same material students should have learned in high school; and
- ▷ be more efficient by reducing the overall number of tests students must take.

Systems such as California State University’s already offer promising models for how to incorporate “college-ready” assessments into high school testing systems. Some Texas colleges will accept a higher-level score on the state’s high school graduation test to place students into credit-bearing courses. The City University of New York will accept higher scores on selected NY State Regents exams in the same manner. Illinois and Colorado incorporate the ACT into their state high school testing programs, and other states are considering a similar option.

“Improving high schools one school or one state at a time is not moving fast enough.”

■ Arthur F. Ryan, chairman and CEO of Prudential Financial and Achieve co-chair

HOLDING HIGH SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE FOR GRADUATING STUDENTS WHO ARE READY FOR COLLEGE OR CAREERS, AND HOLDING POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS ACCOUNTABLE FOR STUDENTS’ SUCCESS ONCE ENROLLED. In most states, high schools are held accountable for student performance on tests that typically measure 8th, 9th or 10th grade skills. They are rarely held accountable for ensuring that students achieve the higher standards necessary for success in college and 21st-century jobs. At the college level, the focus has been almost exclusively on admissions; colleges generally are not held accountable for ensuring that the students they admit actually graduate with a degree and a productive set of knowledge and skills.

To promote more successful transitions from secondary to postsecondary education, ADP Network states will establish strong accountability systems that provide incentives for high schools to increase the number of students who graduate ready for college or careers. They also will develop more sophisticated data systems that follow the progress of students from kindergarten through postsecondary education — including developing accurate and consistent measures of dropout and graduation rates — to shine the spotlight on school performance at all levels.

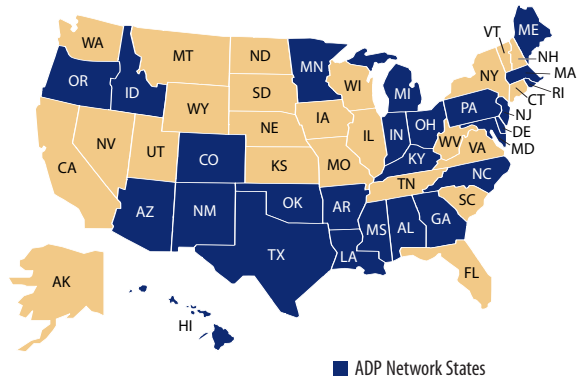


Working Together To Develop Solutions

Participation in the ADP Network requires commitment to a common policy agenda, but it does not require a one-size-fits-all approach. States are expected and encouraged to take different approaches to address this agenda.

Achieve and its partners will work with the ADP Network states to:

- ▷ help build public understanding and support for why these sweeping changes are needed;
- ▷ develop model high school standards and curriculum in English and mathematics that states can use as benchmarks for their own work;
- ▷ better understand what is measured by college admissions and placement exams and employer exams for hiring, and align their high school tests accordingly;
- ▷ identify data-driven education practices that can help reduce dropout rates while increasing achievement and graduation rates; and
- ▷ convene leaders from ADP Network states to share lessons learned and develop solutions to shared challenges.



“This is the biggest step states can take to restore the value of the high school diploma.”

■ Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, Achieve co-chair

Did You Know?

SKILL REQUIREMENTS ARE RISING

- ▷ Employers and colleges say they are looking for the same basic skills: Graduates should be able to write and speak clearly, analyze information, conduct research, and solve difficult mathematics problems, according to the American Diploma Project.

AMERICAN STUDENTS ARE NOT WELL PREPARED

- ▷ Internationally, America's high school graduation rate is comparatively low (16th of 20), especially when compared to major competitors such as Germany, Japan and France, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Moreover, even though the United States has one of the highest college enrollment rates in the world, we trail most developed countries in college graduation rates (14th of 20).
- ▷ Each year, American taxpayers pay an estimated \$1–2 billion for remedial college education. Deficits in basic skills cost businesses, colleges and underprepared graduates as much as \$16 billion annually in lost productivity and remedial costs.
- ▷ College instructors estimate that more than four in 10 high school graduates are not ready for college courses, according to Achieve's February 2005 survey. Employers estimate that 45 percent of high school graduates do not have the skills to advance beyond entry-level jobs. Recent high school graduates agree: 39 percent of those now enrolled in college and 46 percent of recent graduates not currently in college believe they have gaps in their preparation.

EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS ARE LOW

- ▷ Only 24 percent of graduates say they were significantly challenged in high school, according to Achieve's 2005 survey.
- ▷ Sixty-five percent of college students and 77 percent of students who did not go to college wish they had worked harder in high school, according to Achieve's survey. Four out of five graduates say they would have worked harder if their high schools had challenged them with tougher standards and higher expectations.

Achieve, Inc., created by the nation's governors and business leaders in 1996, is a bipartisan, non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, work and citizenship.

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