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Commentary

Over the past five years, the phrase "college and career readiness" has been used often by state and local policymakers, education foundations and non-profits, journalists, and, most recently, by President Obama, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of preparing all students for college, careers and life has become the driving force behind many education reform strategies at the local, state and national level. It is increasingly clear that the college-and career-ready agenda has taken hold across the country.



While policy and thought leaders in state capitols and Washington D.C. have embraced the agenda, it has always been less clear what the public thinks about the goal of graduating all students ready for college and careers and the specific policies necessary to achieve that goal, including college- and career-ready standards and rigorous graduation requirements. While states have made impressive progress on adopting and implementing college- and career-ready policies (see Achieve's annual [50-state report](#) for state-specific progress), state and local leaders understand that the progress will only continue if the policies — and the rationale behind raising expectations for all students — have strong public support. This is especially true in a year with 37 gubernatorial elections; the sustainability of college- and career-ready reforms cannot be taken for granted.

With this in mind, Achieve commissioned a first-of-its-kind national poll of American voters to determine their views on college and career readiness. The results of the survey show that there is overwhelming support for college-and career-ready policies — including common standards, common assessments and rigorous graduation requirements. This support is broad, deep and fully bipartisan with virtually no differences based on party affiliation, race/ethnicity, or geography. At a time when the political divide seems as deep as ever, on this

issue there is near universal consensus. For example:

- 89% of voters agree that "to really get ahead in life a person needs at least some education beyond high school, whether that means university, community college, technical or vocational school." 89% of Republicans, 90% of Democrats and 87% of Independents agree with this statement.
- 86% of voters support "college- and career-ready" graduation requirements, including over 80% of Republican, Democratic, Independent, rural, urban, suburban, White, Black and/or Hispanic voters.

The poll shows that American voters are keenly aware of the connection between education and the economy — and that raising expectations for ALL students is necessary. In many respects the poll indicates that voters are further out front on these issues than many policymakers. Policymakers and advocates should be heartened by these results and moving forward ought to:

Be Bold: An overwhelming number of voters agree that college- and career-ready policies are the right approach for preparing our nation's students. Leaders shouldn't shy away from discussing these policies' importance and how they fit into the reform agenda. Instead, leaders should recognize this as an opportunity to engage the public more fully about college- and career-ready reforms and find ways to ensure there is ownership over the agenda at the state and local level, and across party lines.

Acknowledge that Times Have Changed: The public clearly gets the link between education and both individual students', and our nation's, ability to compete in a global economy. There is widespread understanding that a high school diploma is no longer enough and that students will need to be prepared for education and training after high school to be successful in life. In an election year where "jobs, jobs, jobs" is the mantra, being explicit about the link between college and career readiness and economic success (both personally, as a state and country) is something voters understand.

Be Upfront about How You Are Supporting Students: One area where voters were divided was around whether college- and career-ready expectations would increase the dropout rate, with voters split in half on this issue. Still, this concern did not sway voters away from their overwhelming belief that college- and career-ready graduation requirements were the right thing for all students. Rather, it suggests that states, districts and schools need to be aware of the valid concern that some students will need additional support as expectations are increased, and be prepared to respond to it. Talking about the specific policies, programs and initiatives in place to support struggling students as part of the broader college- and career-ready agenda will only increase the public's comfort level and support.

Bottom line: Policymakers and advocates who support the college and career-ready agenda do so with widespread public support — and policymakers should press for change knowing that they are on the right track.

To view the survey results (either in Power Point or report form) see, www.achieve.org/AchievingthePossible.

New from Achieve

From Adoption to Implementation: News on the CCSS

More than two thirds of states have adopted the K-12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and mathematics that were released on June 2 by the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). For a current list of states who have adopted the CCSS, visit www.corestandards.org/in-the-states. This list is continuously updated as new states adopt the common standards.



To help states and others better understand the Common Core State Standards, Achieve has created a range of materials, available at www.achieve.org/AchievingCommonCore. The materials focus on the organization, content and evidence base used to support the standards, including fact sheets that describe the content areas and address frequently asked questions about the standards.

Over the past month, Achieve has released a range of new materials and resources around common core adoption and implementation including:

Content Briefs: With support from the Brookhill Foundation, Achieve reviewed the final mathematics CCSS and created content comparison briefs that compare and contrast the final version of the CCSS against a number of well-known and well-regarded benchmarks, including international comparisons, high-performing states and NAEP. Download the briefs [here](#).

Implementation Guide: To realize the full potential of the CCSS and ensure the new standards actually reach the classroom level, states will need to think through critical issues including (but not limited to): how to integrate the new standards into the broader college- and career-ready agenda; how to leverage budgets to support implementation; and how to best communicate about the new standards. Achieve has developed a series of implementation papers for states and districts to consider as they move from adoption to implementation of the CCSS. Over time, Achieve will update the guide as necessary, to cover new topics and dig deeper into existing topics. Download *On the Road to Implementation* [here](#).

Model Math Pathways: Achieve (in partnership with the CCSS mathematics writing team) convened a group of experts to develop Model Course Pathways in Mathematics based on the Common Core State Standards. Achieve recognized that the task of organizing the high school mathematics standards into courses is a daunting one and during the development of the standards many states and districts expressed an interest in seeing models about how this task could be

accomplished. Four model course pathways were created. Download the pathways [here](#).

Next-Generation Science Standards

A two-step process that will culminate in the development of Next-Generation Science Standards (NGSS) is well underway. The project, supported by the Carnegie Foundation, begins with the National Research Council (NRC) developing a conceptual framework for science education and ends with Achieve coordinating the development of the NGSS.

On July 12, the NRC released its conceptual framework for science education. The Framework was created by a committee of 18 experts convened by the NRC who represent expertise in the natural sciences, learning sciences, learning and teaching, curriculum, assessment, and education policy. The NRC draft conceptual framework is based on scientific research and science education and can be requested [here](#).

The NRC is committed to a transparent and collaborative process. In that spirit, the NRC accepted comments on the Framework through August 2. During the public comment period, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) reached out to scientists, science education faculty, and K-12 science teachers and administrators to solicit specific feedback on the Framework. In addition, the Council of State Science Supervisors (CSSS), the organization whose members are charged with the supervision of science instruction in the states, held feedback sessions across the country.

Once the final conceptual framework is released in early 2011, Achieve will develop — along with states and other interested stakeholders — Next-Generation Science Standards that are faithful to the NRC Framework, internationally-benchmarked, and rigorous. Achieve will engage states and other stakeholders in the development and review of the NGSS. For more information about next generation science standards, go [here](#).

Race to the Top Round 2 Update

On July 27 the U.S. Secretary of Education announced the finalists for more than \$3 billion available in the second round of funding in the Race to the Top program. The 19 finalists are: **Arizona, California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island** and **South Carolina**. Winners will be announced by USED by the end of September. [More...](#)

News Clips

1. **Obama: Education is 'the Economic Issue of Our Time'**

According to *USA Today*, in a speech in Austin on Monday, President Obama noted that the U.S. is 12th in global graduation rates for young adults. "At each and every juncture throughout our history," the president said. "we've always recognized that essential truth that the way to move forward, in our own lives, and as a nation, is to put education first."

[More...](#)

2. **Public Says Challenge Kids More**

The *San Antonio Express* reports that broad, deep and fully bipartisan public support exists for policies aimed at preparing all high school students for college and careers, according to a new nationwide survey of American voters released by Achieve.

[More...](#)

3. **Tennessee Prepares Students for Real World**

The Tennessee State Board of Education recently took the bold step of raising the bar on how Tennessee defines the proficiency of its students on state tests. In an [op-ed](#) in *The Tennessean*, Achieve President Michael Cohen notes that with tougher standards "Tennessee is on the right path." A related [column](#) underscores that the state's standards will usher in a new era of preparing students for future jobs.

New Resources

- [Setting Statewide College- and Career-Ready Goals](#), a new issue brief by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices provides direction for state leaders to collaborate with school districts, state education agency officials, nonprofits and business representatives to establish college- and career-ready performance goals. The brief outlines a five-step process to accurately measure student readiness: 1. Select performance indicators; 2. Collect, calculate and report baseline data for the indicators; 3. Set specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely goals; 4. Establish annual or biannual targets to meet the goals; and 5. Publicly report performance on the indicators annually. The brief details the specific performance measures states should collect including the percentage of students completing — or on track to complete — a college- and career-ready course of study; demonstrating proficiency on "anchor" assessments; and obtaining college credit or a career certificate in high school. States are also urged to track the four-year cohort graduation rate

and percentage of traditional, first-year students enrolling in remedial coursework at a postsecondary institution. For more information on building accountability systems that promote college and career readiness for all, see [Measures that Matter](#).

- Dual enrollment programs that allow students to earn college credits while they are still in high school may benefit students who are at risk, not just top students, according to a [report](#) commissioned by an independent group within the Blackboard education company. The researchers found that dual enrollment courses helped a range of students have a successful transition from high school to college, especially when student supports such as academic tutoring and teacher guidance were offered, and recommended that policies be created to increase access to the programs.
- The Thomas B. Fordham Institute released a report, "[The State of State Standards - and the Common Core - in 2010](#)." Fordham's State of State Standards report is the first — and perhaps the only — national analysis of state standards with state-by-state comparisons to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The high marks the authors give the Common Core State Standards (the math standards received an "A-" while the ELA standards received a "B+") surely have reinforced the decision made by now-35 states to adopt.

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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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