

# College and Career Readiness

With proper preparation,  
all students can be successful in their post-secondary endeavors.

To take their places as independent adults and informed citizens, graduating high school students must be adequately prepared to enter post-secondary training or employment, without the need for remediation. As it stands, 4 of every 10 new college students, including half of those at 2-year institutions, take remedial courses, and many employers believe that high school graduates are inadequately prepared to join the workforce. To address these circumstances, the Federal Government and states have made college and career readiness a top educational priority.<sup>1</sup>

## What Is the National Policy Context Shaping College and Career Readiness?

Career and college readiness is a significant focus of recent education reform policies. For example, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009,<sup>2</sup> participating states committed to ensuring that their students are prepared for success in college and the workplace. College and career readiness is the key outcome expected of our education system in the reauthorization plan for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.<sup>3</sup>

## Where Does Our Nation Stand?

*Achieve*, a non-profit organization focusing on improving education, identified five key college- and career-readiness policies: (1) Aligning Standards, (2) Graduation Requirements, (3) Assessments, (4) P20 Data Systems, and (5) Accountability. *Achieve* conducts an annual survey measuring states' progress on these key policies. The 2011 results are represented in the graphic below.<sup>4</sup>

## What Are States Doing in Response?

In the Appalachian region, all states have expressed their commitment to improving college and career readiness, and have implemented various policies and programs to that end.

- **Kentucky** is expanding access to dual credit opportunities and rigorous high school courses that carry future credit at most colleges (i.e., Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate); developing transitional coursework; implementing the Individual Learning Plan and comprehensive advising programs; and encouraging post-secondary persistence through bridge programming, accelerated learning opportunities, and student support and intervention systems.<sup>5</sup>
- **North Carolina** is implementing the *Career & College: Ready, Set, Go!* initiative, which supports the work of educators through professional development, technology, and new standards and assessments.<sup>6</sup>
- **Tennessee** has committed to increasing reading and math proficiency in the middle grades, assessing students on college-ready benchmarks in high school, and helping more students earn post-secondary credit prior to high school graduation.<sup>7</sup>
- **Virginia** is redefining state college- and career-ready performance expectations, developing elective “capstone courses” to support students who need additional instruction, providing targeted and professional development to educators, and aligning state assessments with more rigorous standards.<sup>8</sup>
- **West Virginia** is developing assessments around the Common Core State Standards and establishing guidelines for 12th-grade transitional courses to address the needs of students who are not meeting core college-readiness standards.<sup>9</sup>



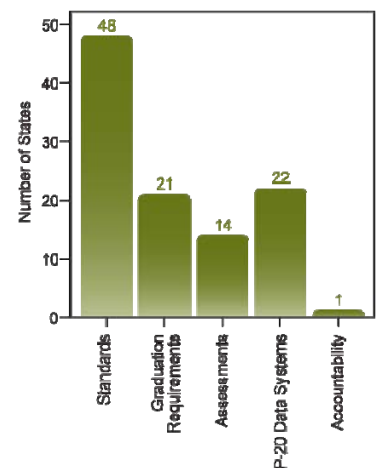
### What Is

### College and Career Readiness?

“College and career readiness” refers to the content knowledge and skills high school graduates must possess in English and mathematics—including, but not limited to reading, writing, communications, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving—to be successful in any and all future endeavors.”

(As defined by Achieve,  
American Diplomas Project Network:  
<http://dpi.wi.gov/oea/pdf/ccready.pdf>)

### State Progress on Adopting College and Career-Ready Policies



Source: *Closing the Expectations Gap 2011: Sixth Annual 50-State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Careers.*  
Achieve American Diploma Project Network

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### About ICF International

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## What Remains to Be Done?

Next steps for states include aligning their new, more rigorous standards into domains such as graduation requirements, assessments, and public reporting protocols. States may also focus on developing instructional improvement systems and professional development initiatives that support educators as they adapt to new curricula, and on reporting and analysis tools that help teachers identify early those students who are not on track for a successful college and career path and who require intervention.<sup>10</sup>

## What Does Research Say About College and Career Readiness?

- Evidence suggests that certain strategies help orient students to post-secondary academic expectations. For example, before students even enter high school, educators should communicate clearly with them and their families about what constitutes a college-ready curriculum, including the courses required for college admission. Secondly, high schools need to monitor whether students are completing the required core classes. One approach is to develop a 4-year course trajectory outlining the recommended timing and sequence of college-ready classes for students; this strategy offers a curriculum students can use to guide their selection of classes each year.<sup>11</sup>
- Early College High Schools allow students to earn both a high school diploma and up to 2 years of college credits while in high school. Some research indicates that this model improves student post-secondary preparation and immediate college enrollment after high school graduation;<sup>12</sup> it also enhances the engagement and academic success of minority student populations typically underrepresented in post-secondary institutions.<sup>13</sup>
- Contextualized instructional models show evidence of helping students who are not meeting college- and career-ready indicators. Improving these underprepared students' basic skills within the context of particular academic or vocational disciplines, may enable them to engage more quickly within their field of interest.<sup>14</sup>
- Another model for accelerating the progress of underprepared students is to divide a traditional semester-long course into discrete learning units, or modules, that are designed to improve a particular competency or skill. Once students demonstrate competency in the basic modules, they will move on to more advanced modules. Modularization gives students the skills they need to complete college work, but at their own pace, so that they do not become discouraged in their pursuit of a degree.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/faq/college-career.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/06/06082009.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/college-career-ready.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Closing the Expectations Gap, 2011, <http://www.achieve.org/files/AchieveClosingtheExpectationsGap2011.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/instructional+resources/secondary+and+virtual+learning/college+and+career+readiness+unified+plan.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/readyssetgo>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/goals.html>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/college\\_career\\_readiness/resources/introductory\\_briefing.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/college_career_readiness/resources/introductory_briefing.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.sreb.org/page/1520/college\\_and\\_career\\_readiness\\_in\\_wv.html](http://www.sreb.org/page/1520/college_and_career_readiness_in_wv.html)

<sup>10</sup> Closing the Expectations Gap, 2011, <http://www.achieve.org/files/AchieveClosingtheExpectationsGap2011.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice\\_guides/higher\\_ed\\_pg\\_091509.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/higher_ed_pg_091509.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Le, C. & Frankfort, J. (2011). "Accelerating College Readiness: Lessons from North Carolina's Innovator Early Colleges." *Jobs for the Future*, pp. 1–28.

<sup>13</sup> Berger, A, Cole, S., Duffy, H., et al. (2009). "Fifth Annual Early College High School Initiative Evaluation Synthesis Report." *Six Years and Counting: The ECHSI Matures*. American Institutes for Research, pp. 1–171.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/601/full.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/601/full.pdf>