Closing the **Expectations Gap**

2014 ANNUAL REPORT on the Alignment of State K–12 Policies and Practice with the Demands of College and Careers

Achieve

Achieve is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit education reform organization dedicated to working with states to raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability. Created in 1996 by a bipartisan group of governors and business leaders, Achieve is leading the effort to make college and career readiness a priority across the country so that students graduating from high school are academically prepared for postsecondary success. When states want to collaborate on education policy or practice, they come to Achieve. At the direction of 48 states, and partnering with the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, Achieve helped develop the Common Core State Standards. Twenty-six states and the National Research Council asked Achieve to manage the process to write the Next Generation Science Standards. Achieve has also served as the project manager for states in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, which are developing next generation assessments. And since 2005, Achieve has worked with state teams, governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders and business executives to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning key policies with the demands of the real world so that all students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to fully reach their promise in college, careers and life. For more information about the work of Achieve, visit www.achieve.org.

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Contents

Introduction

Since Achieve and the National Governors Association convened governors, business leaders, and state K–12 and higher education leaders at the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools, policymakers and educators in every state have been working hard to prepare our young people, and our nation, for a successful future. They have adopted and begun to implement college- and career-ready (CCR) academic standards, graduation requirements and assessments and to include performance indicators in accountability systems to make sure that a high school diploma provides students with a passport to opportunities rather than a ticket to nowhere — and provides our country with a well-educated citizenry that is prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

One of the historical functions of high schools has been to sort students into different postsecondary destinations, including preparation for higher education, vocational training or participation in jobs that require hard work but low skills. The world these high schools were designed for is gone, replaced by a global knowledge-based economy in which careers require some postsecondary education or training beyond high school. Today's economy demands that *all* young people develop high-level literacy, quantitative reasoning, problem solving, communication and collaboration skills, all grounded in a rigorous, content-rich K–12 curriculum. Acquiring this knowledge and these skills ensures that high school graduates are academically prepared to pursue the future of their choosing.

When Achieve started this work, too many students completed high school poorly prepared for further education, training and employment. Thirty percent of 9th graders did not even complete high school. Of those who graduated and entered two- or four-year colleges, about one-third were required to take one or more remedial courses. And those who needed to take remedial courses were half as likely as their better prepared peers to ever earn an associate or bachelor's degree.[1] A decade ago, Achieve's surveys of recent high school graduates, the employers who hired them and the college faculty who taught them in credit-bearing courses reinforced these statistics. Roughly 40 percent of recent graduates reported that they had significant skill gaps that affected their ability to meet the demands of the college classroom or the workplace. And faculty and employers agreed — they separately estimated that approximately 40 percent of the students they taught in first-year courses lacked the skills needed to succeed and that approximately 40 percent of the high school graduates they hired lacked the skills needed to advance in their workplaces.[2]

Not surprisingly, Achieve's research in 2004 also found that in every state, high school students could meet the requirements for earning a high school diploma but could not demonstrate that they had the knowledge and skills needed for postsecondary success. At that time, no state had intentionally aligned its math and literacy standards with the knowledge and skills needed to enter and succeed in first-year college courses and in careers. Only two states — Arkansas and Texas — had adopted policies that required students to take and pass an advanced algebra course to earn

a high school diploma. The high school exit exams that many states directed students to take required only 8th grade math skills to pass. Students planning to attend postsecondary institutions also had to take separate college admissions tests and, upon enrollment, additional tests to determine if they would be required to take remedial, noncredit-bearing courses. No state had performance indicators in its accountability system that revealed the proportion of students who graduated college and career ready or took a curriculum that would arguably give them the skills they needed.

In short, too few students were graduating and of those who did, far too many were unprepared for the demands of college and careers. While there may be many reasons why any individual student graduated unprepared, Achieve's research revealed that states' failure to set end of high school expectations aligned with the expectations of the real world created an "expectations gap" that tripped up high school graduates — limiting employment opportunities, including entry into the military and competitive career pathways, and leading to high rates of remediation at two- and four-year colleges. Closing the expectations gap became Achieve's mission.

Since 2005, Achieve has, therefore, annually tracked states' progress in adopting CCR policies: specifically, the adoption of CCR standards in the foundational subjects of English language arts/literacy and mathematics, graduation requirements that ensure that students have access and exposure to all standards, assessments that test whether students have attained the academic knowledge and skills they need to be prepared, and accountability systems that value college and career readiness.

These policies matter because they work. In states such as Indiana and Texas that automatically place 9th graders into a college- and career-preparatory course of study (allowing those with parental permission to opt out and pursue a less rigorous path), significantly more high school graduates, and in particular significantly higher percentages of low-income and minority students, have completed a rigorous course of study than have students in states that require students to opt into rigor.

We have seen positive results in local districts as well. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) launched an intensely data-driven initiative in 2007 to ensure that students in 9th grade — a critical transition year — stayed on track to high school graduation. The district initiative promoted the use of data to monitor students' level of dropout risk throughout the 9th grade year, allowing teachers to intervene before students fell too far behind. As a result, the CPS on-track rate has improved from 57 to 82 percent.[3] Further, the college degree attainment index of Chicago 9th graders has almost doubled — rising from 8 to 14 percent, largely as a result of the increase in high school graduation and college enrollment rates.[4] This rate is not far behind the 18 percent national degree attainment index.[5]

As this year's annual report shows, states have made substantial progress in some areas but still have a long way to go. More than half of the states still have not made completing a college- and career-preparatory course of study, fully and verifiably aligned with state standards, a requirement for high school graduation. High school assessment systems in many states are in a period of transition. It is not yet clear that most states will ultimately have a coherent and streamlined assessment system that both measures how well students are meeting state standards and lets high school students and postsecondary institutions know whether students are ready to enter and succeed in college courses without the need for remediation. In addition, few states fully have in place the performance indicators, data systems and regular public reporting that will tell policymakers, educators, parents and the public at large the extent to which high school students are graduating college and career ready. Until states have coherent systems of standards, course-taking requirements, assessments and performance indicators in place, students, educators, parents, policymakers and the public will not know whether the system is preparing all young people for postsecondary success.

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A Policy Framework for College and Career Readiness

Since Achieve began its work with states nearly two decades ago, the mission of K–12 education has evolved. States no longer focus only on internal operations of the K–12 system to improve student and school performance. Now they do this work with a keen focus on the rapidly changing skill demands of the environment their graduates will enter and with a clear goal in mind: All students will graduate from high school ready for college, careers and citizenship.

To meet this goal, states must have the necessary policy framework in place, including college- and career-ready (CCR) standards, graduation requirements that ensure that all students are exposed to a course of study that teaches all of these standards, assessments that are aligned to the standards, and accountability systems that value college and career readiness. For nearly 10 years, Achieve has been surveying states to determine whether they have the necessary policy pillars in place to serve as a foundation for their K–12 education system to fulfill the promise of college and career readiness for all students.

Much of the policy work for the past decade has focused on ensuring that state K–12 standards in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics, the foundational academic subjects, meet the expectations of employers, the military and higher education so that graduates leave high school prepared for their next steps. In fact, today all states have CCR standards. Having these standards is an important advance, but standards alone are insufficient to close the expectations gap — the gap between what it takes to earn a diploma and what the real world expects graduates to know and be able to do.

States must have a comprehensive approach to college and career readiness and ensure policy and practice alignment across the pillars — graduation requirements, assessments and accountability systems — to graduate all students ready for their next steps. This year's *Closing the Expectations Gap* report highlights states' progress on each of the policy pillars with a special focus on graduation requirements.

States must have a comprehensive approach to college and career readiness and ensure policy and practice alignment across the pillars to graduate all students ready for their next steps.

And states are making progress. For example:

- **23 states** and the **District of Columbia** require all students to take math and ELA/literacy courses that deliver all content standards (whether mandatory for all students or as a default course of study that students can opt out of).[6]
- **15 states** publicly report at the school level how many graduates have completed a CCR course of study. Many of these states offer students a CCR course of study but do not require students to complete it to graduate.
- **40 states** verify course content and rigor in some way, most often through end-of-course assessments, but do not assess all students — typically because all students are not required to take the courses that deliver content found in the states' end of high school CCR standards.
- **22 states** will administer to all eligible students a CCR assessment aligned with state standards that may be used for postsecondary placement into first-year, credit-bearing courses in math and ELA/literacy. This number includes a variety of states that are phasing in these more rigorous assessment requirements over the next few years.
- **17 states** administer a college admissions assessment to all students (i.e., the ACT or SAT). Historically, many of the students who take these tests and attend postsecondary institutions must also take placement tests to see, in part, if they are ready for credit-bearing work in ELA/literacy and math or must take remedial classes. In most of these states, individual institutions determine placement policies for first-year, credit-bearing courses in math and ELA/literacy.
- **Six states** publicly report and include in their state accountability formulas at least two CCR indicators.

Graduating Students College and Career Ready

Having a policy framework focused on college and career readiness for graduates means increasing the number of students who leave high school prepared for their next step, but what does graduating from high school college and career ready mean precisely?

From an academic perspective, college and career readiness means that a high school graduate has the knowledge and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing postsecondary coursework without the need for remediation — or to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for his or her chosen career (i.e., community college, university, technical/vocational program, apprenticeship or significant on-the-job training).

To be college and career ready, high school graduates must have studied a rigorous and broad curriculum that is grounded in the core academic disciplines but also consists of other subjects that are part of a well-rounded education. CCR expectations include the ability of students to communicate effectively in a variety of ways, work collaboratively, think critically, solve routine and nonroutine problems, and analyze information and data. The knowledge and skills needed to excel in academics, technical settings and life overlap significantly, largely because these skills cannot be gained absent content — and content is not very useful without the skills necessary to transfer and use that knowledge in a range of settings. Academic preparation alone is not enough to ensure postsecondary readiness, but it clearly is an essential part of readiness for college, careers and life in the 21st century.

While CCR standards define the academic knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary success, they are not self-executing. The standards need to be translated into courses and learning experiences for students. There are many different ways to pull the standards together to create engaging, aligned and rigorous courses for students. The courses can be traditional, applied or integrated, or they can take on particular thematic interests and still align to the standards. **Exposing all students to the full range of CCR standards by requiring students to complete a course of study in high school aligned to the full set of CCR expectations is one of the most important ways states can help ensure that graduates will be academically prepared for their next steps after high school.**

ESTABLISHING CCR GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Achieve considers states' mathematics and ELA/literacy high school graduation requirements to be at the CCR level if students **are expected** to complete a course of study aligned with state-adopted CCR standards. Of course, readiness for college and careers depends on more than the mastery of ELA/literacy and mathematics content and skills, but these two content areas serve as a foundation for the study of other academic disciplines and contextualized learning.

In states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), students will need to take at least three years of mathematics to reach the "CCR line" identified in the standards. The CCSS also presume that students will take four years of ELA/literacy (which is a nearly universal requirement in states) and that ELA/literacy courses will be aligned with the CCSS. States and districts will also need to integrate the literacy standards across all other disciplines, including history/social studies, science and technical courses.

State Progress

A decade ago, when Achieve began surveying states, only **Arkansas** and **Texas** had adopted statewide CCR graduation requirements. And in 2014, the following states still do not have any form of statewide graduation requirements that require or even suggest (as states with opt-in CCR courses of study do) that students take particular courses (or the content) so they can graduate college and career ready: **Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont** and **Wisconsin.** These states, all of which have adopted CCR standards, undoubtedly have gaps between the content and skills articulated in the standards and the courses currently required for a high school diploma.

On the other hand, **23 states** and the **District of Columbia** have raised their course requirements in ELA/literacy and mathematics to the CCR level. They have structured the requirements in one of two ways:

MANDATORY: The most direct approach is to establish mandatory requirements that result in students earning a high school diploma only if they complete the required courses or content. **Ten states** and the **District of Columbia** have set mandatory course requirements.

DEFAULT: An alternative approach is to automatically enroll all students in the "default" CCR curriculum but allow students to opt out of the requirements if their parents sign a waiver. States have established a default diploma in one of two main ways:

Minimum diploma: States offer a separate minimum diploma for students who opt out of the default CCR curriculum. **Four states** have adopted default CCR diplomas and offer students the ability to opt out and pursue a less demanding set of requirements.

Personal modification: States allow students to opt out of individual courses — typically advanced-level mathematics or science courses — but award students the same diploma as those who complete the full set of CCR graduation requirements. **Nine states** have adopted default CCR diplomas and offer students an option to modify (i.e., lessen) the requirements (typically in mathematics or science) and still earn the same diploma as those who complete the CCR course of study.[7]

The opt-out provision available in these states provides a safety valve for students, but it also may encourage tracking — some schools or educators may counsel struggling students prematurely out of the rigorous courses rather than provide these students with the support and encouragement needed to aim higher and succeed. This tracking is a particular concern for disadvantaged students and others who have traditionally been held to lower expectations and is one of the many reasons why all states should monitor and publicly report students' course-taking data.

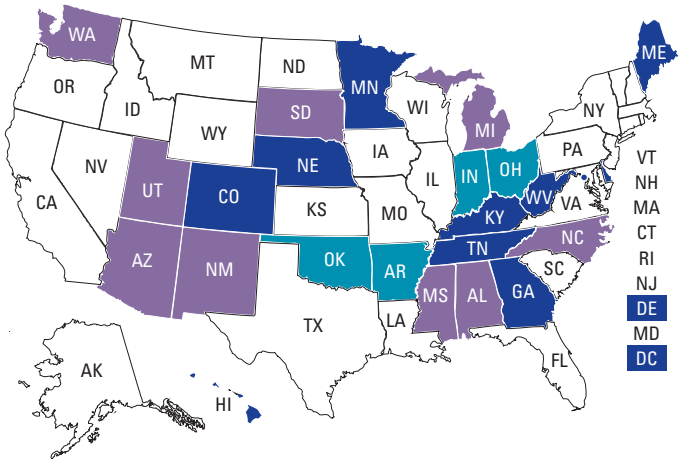
MEETING THE NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

Just as states need to revise their ELA/literacy and math course requirements when they adopt or revise academic standards, so too should they revise science course requirements when they adopt new science standards. Currently, much like states' ELA/literacy and math course requirements, which vary in their content and rigor, states' graduation course requirements in science range from two units of unspecified science to four units of science, including biology, chemistry, physics and one additional course. State-specific graduation course requirement details are available at www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2014. The Next Generation Science Standards include various sample course maps for middle and high school science courses to show models of how states and districts might organize different types of courses to help students reach the standards. States and districts can use these models as a starting point for developing their own course descriptions and sequences.*

*See Appendix K of the Next Generation Science Standards for more information: www.nextgenscience.org/sites/ngss/files/Appendix K_Revised 8.30.13.pdf.

CCR Graduation Requirements by Type of Requirements

- Mandatory CCR Diploma (11)
- Default CCR Diploma with Minimum Opt-Out (4)
- Default CCR Diploma with Personal Modification (9)



Three states this year, **Colorado, Maine** and **West Virginia,** deserve to be highlighted because they made significant advances in aligning their CCR standards in ELA/literacy and mathematics with their graduation requirements. While their end goals are the same, each state took a unique approach to ensuring that students are exposed to the state's CCR standards before they graduate from high school.

ENSURING THAT STUDENT OPT-OUTS ARE THE EXCEPTION, NOT THE RULE

States with opt-out policies must consider a number of factors as they craft policies that allow students to modify, substitute and/or opt out of courses to ensure that students will still have the foundational skills they need for postsecondary success:

- **Course specifics:** States should define which and how many courses students may modify or substitute so that students still receive instruction in almost all of the state's CCR standards.
- **Monitoring:** States should keep track of how many students modify their course of study and which courses students are modifying. If that is not the role of the state, states should work with districts or schools to monitor and compile this information. Additionally, states should report the number and percentage of students who pursue an opt-out provision.
- **Timing:** States should require students to complete lower-level high school courses and permit students the opportunity to opt out of only clearly defined advanced courses to ensure that all students receive foundational knowledge in all subject areas. States should also consider requiring students to attempt a course before being permitted to opt out of it.

- **Colorado** does not have course-specific statewide graduation requirements; however, new state guidelines require districts to align requirements for all students with the state's academic standards, including the state's CCR standards in ELA/literacy and math. Beginning with 9th graders in fall 2017, Colorado school districts will implement revised local high school graduation requirements that meet or exceed the graduation guidelines approved by the Colorado State Board of Education; align with the Colorado Academic Standards, Colorado English Language Proficiency Standards, and the Colorado Career and Technical Education Standards; and align with the postsecondary and workforce readiness definition and description adopted by the State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in 2009. The CCR demonstrations are based upon competency and mastery demonstrations, which for ELA/literacy and mathematics will include student assessment using the full suite of Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) assessments (English 9–11 and Algebra I/Integrated Math I, Geometry/Integrated Math II and Algebra II/Integrated Math III).
- Beginning in 2020, students in **Maine** will need to demonstrate proficiency in the full set of the state CCR content standards in ELA/literacy and mathematics to receive a high school diploma. This demonstration may be accomplished through multiple pathways and multiple types of evidence. Students must be engaged in mathematics and ELA/literacy experiences throughout each year of their secondary school enrollment. With district approval, students may bring demonstrations of proficiency from a variety of other pathways, including but not limited to courses. The new diploma requires proficiency in CCR standards at a level of rigor that prepares students for postsecondary choices without the need for remediation. The department is working to build capacity and common criteria for proficiency across the state through a variety of mechanisms. State assessments for ELA/literacy, mathematics and science will provide a check on locally designed proficiency-based systems and assist in monitoring progress toward proficiency within schools and across the state.
- **West Virginia** redesigned Policy 2510 and raised its graduation course requirements to be at the CCR level in ELA/literacy and math. The state also took the additional step of organizing the standards into courses. Beginning with the entering freshman class of 2014–15, all students in West Virginia will be expected to complete a series of courses that deliver the new West Virginia Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives (which include the CCSS).

An additional **11 states (California, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New York, Texas, Virginia** and **Wyoming)** offer other diplomas, courses of study or endorsements or have established college-preparatory curriculum or course sequences aligned with postsecondary admissions requirements that are at the CCR level, but students must individually choose to opt into them. These states' minimum graduation course requirements for a diploma are still below the CCR level, but with CCR options, the state has signaled to students, parents, educators and the public what course of study will better prepare students to be college and career ready. But because students must opt into them, fewer students, particularly lower-income and under-represented minorities, likely will complete the CCR course of study, and it may be more challenging for all schools to offer CCR courses if the state does not require them for all students.[8]

While each of the approaches above has benefits and drawbacks, these states have taken a step in the right direction by acknowledging and valuing a CCR course of study.

BASING GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS ON PROFICIENCY RATHER THAN SEAT TIME

Although most states offer some flexibility for students to attain credit toward graduation through competency-based methods rather than seat time, several states, including **Maine, New Hampshire** and **Vermont,** are leading the way by basing graduation requirements on student proficiency or mastery of CCR standards.

A number of other states, while not requiring graduation requirements based on proficiency or mastery of standards, do allow or encourage districts to offer students the opportunity to demonstrate that they have learned CCR standards and earn credit toward high school graduation without regard for seat time in class. Many states, in fact, do not have seat-time requirements built into state policy and define "credit" for required courses in terms that emphasize that students have mastered the standards (e.g., **Indiana** and **Washington**), successfully demonstrated a unit of study **(Maryland)** or mastered the applicable subject matter **(Minnesota).** Several states that do have seat-time requirements use state policy to provide flexibility to districts to award credit based on demonstrations of learning rather than seat time. For instance, several states offer seat-time waivers to specific districts or allow all districts to adopt performance or mastery-based credit policies — typically tied to advanced scores on end-of-course or other assessments (e.g., **Alabama** and **Texas**).

These states also have an important role in ensuring that results are transparent to the public. As states advance opportunities for students to earn credit through proficiency or mastery versus seat time, or actually adopt graduation requirements that focus on proficiency or mastery, they should closely monitor student performance through the transition and provide timely reports to the public. They should report, at the school level, on leading indicators (e.g., student engagement, attendance and behavior) that can give early indications of student responses to the new policies. They should also ultimately report on student success in postsecondary pursuits. States that are making more transformational changes to CBP should consider how to report timely information about student progress through the CBP system from kindergarten through high school.

State Networks To Advance CBP

A number of states are learning from and encouraging one another as they move away from seat time and toward more personalized CBP to ensure college and career readiness for all students. Through its CBP State Partnership, Achieve facilitates support for **12 states — Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island** and **Vermont** — that have committed to making changes to graduation requirements, assessments and accountability systems to encourage and help districts and schools in implementing CBP systems that support CCR goals and expectations. These states include some that have been leading the way for many years, such as New Hampshire, as well as others that are just beginning the journey, such as Delaware. Many states have also joined together through the Council of Chief State School Officers Innovation Lab Network to develop strategies and take concrete actions to advance personalized, next-generation systems, often including CBP.* In addition, states have adapted this network approach within their borders, fostering communities of practice across innovative districts and schools to help them share strategies and lessons learned as well as collaborate on work such as the development of common performance assessment and curriculum materials.

*See www.ccsso.org/What_We_Do/Innovation_Lab_Network.html.

Defining Competency-Based Pathways (CBP)

CBP can help all students reach CCR standards through the following principles:*

- Students advance upon demonstrated mastery.
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
- Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
- Students receive rapid, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge.
- The process of reaching learning outcomes encourages students to develop skills and dispositions important for success in college, careers and citizenship.

By high school graduation, all students need to learn (at a minimum) the full continuum of a state's CCR standards, and states need to take seriously their role in illuminating patterns and trends about students' journeys along the way.

*This definition is adapted from the working definition offered in an iNACOL report. See Patrick, S. & Sturgis, C. (July 2011). *Cracking the Code: Synchronizing Policy and Practice to Support Personalized Learning.* iNACOL. www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL_CrackingCode_full_report.pdf.

STRIVING FOR TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC REPORTING

Every state, regardless of its graduation requirements, should monitor and report on the implementation and effectiveness of its graduation requirement policies — especially states that do not require **all** students to complete a CCR course of study. More specifically, states should collect the data necessary to enable them to analyze course-taking patterns of high school students, including career and technical education pathways or programs of study, so they can address and report publicly the answers to basic questions, including:

- How many students in each 9th grade cohort have completed a CCR course of study when they graduate?
- Are there significant gaps in successful participation in and completion of CCR courses of study based on race, ethnicity, gender, family income, English language learner status and special education status? Are the gaps closing?
- Are the students who have completed CCR courses of study better prepared to enter and succeed in credit-bearing courses in postsecondary institutions and the military? Are they less likely to need remediation? Are there significant differences in the impact and benefits of CCR courses of study across demographic groups?
- In states where students can opt out of, modify or opt into the core CCR course of study, what course and course sequences do students who do not complete the CCR course of study take instead? Are they enrolled in coherent courses of study that align with postsecondary pathways and/or technical training programs leading to career opportunities?
- Are there pathways and courses of study that disproportionately leave students poorly prepared for postsecondary success — and with less successful postsecondary outcomes?

Data that address these questions should be widely available and reported at the school, district and state levels. However, with a few exceptions, states do not report how many of their students are graduating having completed a CCR course of study. States are, for the most part, neither monitoring nor publicly reporting how many students earn which diploma, complete which course of study, or modify or substitute required courses. One step that states can and should immediately pursue is obtaining a more nuanced picture of course-taking to determine both how many schools offer rigorous courses and how many (and which) students participate in these courses.

All states should monitor how many students in each demographic subgroup are opting out of course sequences or modifying their course of study by opting out of specific courses that would ensure that they graduate college and career ready — whether the state requires a CCR course of study to earn a diploma or otherwise. It is especially important for states that award a single diploma and permit students to opt out of, or substitute for, particular courses to know whether this policy provides an appropriate but infrequently used safety valve or a gaping loophole.

State Progress

This year, **32 states** reported that their state's data systems can or will enable them to conduct an analysis of high school students' course-taking patterns across districts to identify the type and series of courses that best prepare students for college and career success. An additional **eight states** responded that they were planning for their systems to be able to complete such an analysis.

And though most states indicated that they have the ability to analyze course-taking data, very few have completed a comprehensive analysis of their data. Some states responded that they are in the early stages of collecting course-taking data as their state data systems have only recently become operational. Still others indicated that they were struggling with the accuracy of the course data being submitted by the districts and were working toward implementing consistent and accurate data collection.

Among the small number of states that indicated that they have conducted or will conduct an analysis of students' course-taking patterns and success, a few are worth noting for their different approaches and goals:

Every state, regardless of its graduation requirements, should monitor and report on the implementation and effectiveness of its graduation requirement policies.

- In **Colorado,** new legislation, HB 1376 (2014), requires the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to collect data on students' course-level participation (e.g., basic, general and enriched levels) and analyze how students enrolled in each core course level fare on statewide assessments (if available), all disaggregated by student subgroups. Beginning no later than 2016–17, the CDE will publish a report on these data on its website. Another piece of legislation, HB 1219 (2013), requires the CDE, beginning in the 2014–15 academic year, to collect annually student-level course completion data (one step beyond course-taking). This legislation also directs the department to create a definition of course completion that may be consistently understood.

- In March 2014, Regional Education Laboratory Appalachia released a study of **Kentucky** high school students who voluntarily enrolled in college-preparatory transition courses (courses in math and reading available to grade 12 students who test below state benchmarks on the ACT in grade 11).[9] The study examined statewide participation rates in transition courses for students approaching the state's ACT benchmarks. The study revealed that participation varied across subgroups, a majority of students recommended for transition courses were not participating and participation rates were higher in math than reading. The first formal study of transition courses in Kentucky, these data provide a baseline for the state to begin answering questions about which interventions, including transition courses, best prepare students to be college ready.

- In **California,** higher education is playing a key role in helping schools and students understand their course-taking data, allowing for student supports prior to graduation and for diagnostic assessment of where students are falling short of the courses needed for admission to the state's university system. The Transcript Evaluation Service (TES) is an initiative founded by the University of California's (UC) Office of the President. Designed to inform both students and schools on the progress made toward completing courses required for entry into the California State University (CSU) or UC systems, TES reports for students outline current completion of courses from the state "a-g" curriculum and offer guidance for meeting college entrance requirements. For participating high schools, TES provides roster reports with individual student and summary reports that aggregate data on a-g completion to give guidance on where the school should improve its a-g offerings. In the schools that have used this data tool, TES has helped increase a-g completion. At the school level, the data available through TES have helped schools report CCR graduation rates more accurately and recognize where courses need to be added.[10] In addition, thousands of California high school juniors and seniors fall short of meeting the a-g sequence criteria by only one or two courses each year; some of these students, identified by TES data, participate in the state's SummerUp program, which focuses on helping students complete the college-preparatory math courses required for UC and CSU admissions.

PUBLIC REPORTING OF STUDENT MATH COURSE-TAKING

In **Massachusetts,** the state has the ability through the student course schedules data system to track the highest level of mathematics completed by students. Further, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education publicly reports the number of 12th graders who successfully complete math coursework through the District Analysis, Review, & Assistance Tools (DART) at the school level; the data can also be disaggregated by student subgroup. This robust data system allows schools and districts to conduct their own analyses of students' progress on a variety of indicators throughout the school year, both within and across schools, as well as over time.

North Carolina publicly reports at the school level the percentage of high school graduates who have completed and passed Algebra II/Integrated Math III/Math III and includes this percentage as one of the key indicators in the state's performance reports for school accountability.

No other states report student course-taking data and results in this way.

Ensuring Equal Access

In addition to knowing how many schools offer rigorous courses and how many (and which) students participate in these courses, states should take on the equally important issue of ensuring that all students, regardless of where they attend school, have equal access to rigorous courses.

Data from the Office for Civil Rights indicate that students, especially minority students, do not have access to the coursework that is often considered a prerequisite for college and careers.[11] Only 81 percent of high schools offer Algebra II, a course considered a requirement for earning a CCR diploma. A quarter of high schools with the highest percentage of black and Latino students do not offer Algebra II. Access to science courses, in general, is also limited, with 87 percent of high schools offering biology but only 75

Table 1: State Progress on Data Collection and Public Reporting

● Yes ○ Plan	Data system allows for course-taking analysis	Has completed analysis of course-taking patterns	Publicly reports the #/% of students completing a CCR course of study at the school level	Collects district/ school requirements
AL	●			
AK				
AZ	●			
AR	●			●
CA	●		●	
CO	○	○		○
CT	●			
DE			●	
DC			●	
GA	●		●	
HI	●	●	●	●
ID	●			
IL	●			
IN	●		●	
IA	●	●		
KS	●			
KY	●	●	●	
LA	●			●
ME				
MD	●	○	●	●
MA	●		●	
MI	●			
MN	●			●
MS				
MO	○			
MT	○			
NE	○	○		●
NV				
NH	●			
NJ	●			
NM	●			●
NY	●		●	
NC	○			
ND	●			●
OH			●	
OK	○		●	●
OR	●			
PA				
RI	●			○
SC	●			
SD	○			
TN	●		●	
TX			●	
UT	●			
VT	●			
VA	●	●	●	●
WA				●
WV	○			○
WI	●			●
WY	●	●		●
TOTAL YES	32	5	15	13

*Florida chose not to participate in this year's survey; the state's data are not reported in this table.

percent offering chemistry and 63 percent offering physics. (See charts below.)

Achieve asked states whether they collect individual districts' or schools' graduation course requirements (e.g., through handbooks), as well as whether this information is reported publicly. Just **13 states** responded that they collect course requirements. **Thirty-three states** responded that they do not collect district requirements, and **four states** responded that they plan to collect requirements. Only **three states — Maryland, Washington** and **Wisconsin —** publicly report the number of credits by subject area by district. No state publicly reports the specific courses required by districts.

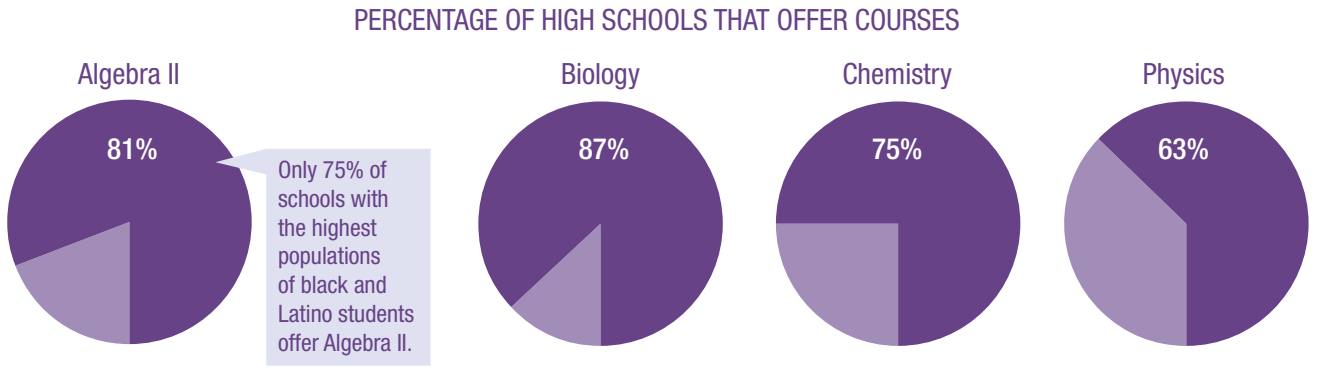
Understanding how course requirements differ by district also paints an important picture about how students' access to courses differs across each state. States — especially those without mandatory CCR diplomas — need to know if any districts are setting the bar low and if there is significant variation among districts' requirements based on the demographics or geography. Alternatively, districts may require more rigorous courses than the "floor" the state sets for students to graduate. Knowing and understanding districts' high school course requirements can help states assess how wide the gap is between the state and district course requirements and the CCR standards they have adopted for all students — as well as the lift required to fully implement the CCR standards in all schools and districts. Knowing districts' specific course requirements can also help states surface where a high bar is set and being met — and which districts can serve as a model that may be worth replicating across the state.

Reporting on College and Career Readiness

As states implement college and career readiness expectations, they need to clearly and publicly report how many of their students are not just graduating, but graduating college and career ready. **Nineteen states** and the **District of Columbia** have adopted CCR graduation requirements and have cohorts of students graduating with these requirements (**four additional states** will have cohorts graduating in the near future with their more rigorous requirements). But the reality is that states provide enough alternatives and options for students (modifications, personal opt-outs, etc.) to adjust the graduation requirements that unless they report who is completing what CCR courses, very little is known about which students graduate having taken courses that deliver the CCR standards.

- **13 states** have adopted default CCR diplomas and offer students an option to opt out or modify coursework. Of these states, only **one — Indiana —** publicly reports at the school level the percentage of students graduating having earned the state's CCR diploma and how many opted out to the state's minimum diploma. Indiana reports these data by subgroups of students as well.
- Additionally, **seven states** that offer opt-in CCR diplomas or courses of study **— California, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Texas** and **Virginia —** publicly report how many students graduate having completed a CCR course of study at the high school level. **Five of these states** take the additional step to report these data by subgroups of students.

Many Students Do Not Have Equal Access to CCR Courses



Source: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (College and Career Readiness), March 21, 2014.

Ten states with default or opt-in CCR diplomas or courses of study publicly report the percentage of students completing a CCR course of study at the state level. These states should be recognized for providing transparency about the number of students completing a CCR course of study. This action sends a strong signal about what students need to be able to know and do to be prepared for their next steps after high school.

Table 2 on page 15 identifies these states. However, the data are not comparable across states and require several notable caveats. In addition to completing a specific course of study to earn a CCR diploma, some of these states have additional graduation requirements, such as attaining certain benchmarks on state summative assessments or earning a minimum grade point average. In addition, some states report their data as the percentage of graduates rather than percentage of the 9th grade cohort (a more conservative calculation). Finally, the nature of states' requirements and the mechanism for collecting and reporting these data vary across states.

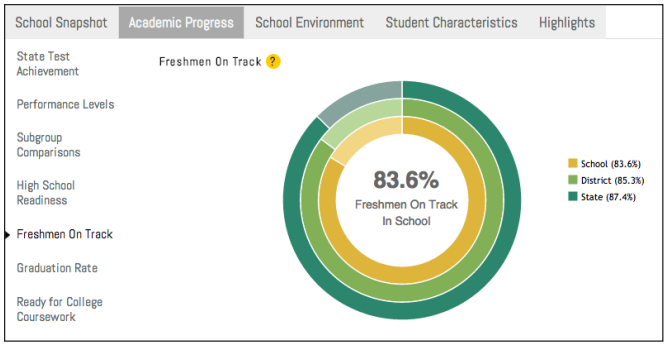
Putting the Data to Use

Timely credit accumulation along a CCR course of study is a leading indicator of students' progress toward high school graduation, an indicator of meeting college and career readiness expectations once a CCR course of study has been completed, and an indicator of how students with and without certain course sequences fare in life after high school.

Several states have begun to include "on-track" indicators in their school-level reporting to get a sense of how students are doing academically as early as middle school.

- **Illinois** has started including a freshmen on track metric in its school report cards. By definition, "students identified as 'on track' have earned at least five full-year course credits (10 semester credits) and have earned no more than one semester 'F' in a core course (English, math, science, or social science)."
- **Massachusetts** includes in its school-level data system the 9th to 10th grade promotion rate (for first-time 9th graders only) as well as the percentage of 9th grade students completing and passing all courses.
- **New Jersey** school-level performance reports for middle schools include the percentage of 8th grade students taking Algebra I, as well as the percentage of those students scoring a C or better in the Algebra I course.
- **Oregon** school report cards include the percentage of freshmen on track to graduate within four years, defined as students earning by the end of their first year of high school (within 12 months of entering 9th grade) six or more credits that count for their district's graduation requirements.[12]

Snapshot: Illinois School Report Card



Snapshot: Oregon School Report Card

OUTCOMES	WHAT ARE STUDENTS ACHIEVING IN HIGH SCHOOL?	School Performance (%) 2010-11	School Performance (%) 2011-12	School Performance (%) 2012-13	School Performance (%) 2013-14	Oregon Performance (%) 2013-14	Like-School Average (%) 2013-14
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS	Students preparing for college and careers.						
	Freshmen on track to graduate within 4 years	NA	NA	NA	78.7	78.5	76.8
	Students taking SAT	45.4	41.0	36.9	46.0	33.3	33.0
		School Performance (%) 2008-09	School Performance (%) 2009-10	School Performance (%) 2010-11	School Performance (%) 2011-12	Oregon Performance (%) 2011-12	Like-School Average (%) 2011-12
GRADUATION RATE	Students graduating with a regular diploma within four years of entering high school.						
	Overall graduation rate	75.4	75.6	74.2	72.6	68.7	73.9
COMPLETION RATE	Students receiving a regular, modified, extended, or adult high school diploma or completing a GED within five years of entering high school.						
	Overall completion rate	80.9	85.4	84.9	81.4	81.5	79.4
DROPOUT RATE	Students who dropped out during the school year and did not re-enroll.						
	Overall dropout rate	1.7	1.9	2.5	4.4	4.0	2.0
	Note: Dropout methodology change in 2012-13.						
		School Performance (%) 2008-09	School Performance (%) 2009-10	School Performance (%) 2010-11	School Performance (%) 2011-12	Oregon Performance (%) 2011-12	Like-School Average (%) 2011-12
CONTINUING EDUCATION	Students continuing their education after high school.						
	Students who enrolled in a community college or four-year school within 16 months of graduation	67.1	77.4	72.2	73.9	54.7	57.2

Table 2: Percentage of Graduates Who Have Completed a CCR Course of Study

Diploma/CCR course of study name	% of students earning each diploma/ course of study	Denominator	Hispanic or Latino, of any race	African American, not Hispanic	White, not Hispanic	Low income	Assessment requirement(s) above/ beyond those required for standard diploma	Grade point average (GPA) requirements
California "a-g" Curriculum (courses required for UC and/or CSU entrance)	39.4%	2013 graduates	29.1%	29.2%	47.1%	30.0%	No	Earn a C in each a-g course
Hawaii Board of Education Recognition Diploma	15.0%	2013 high school completers	Not reported				Must meet standards on Algebra II EOC, ACT (22), or SAT (510) math	Cumulative GPA of 3.0
Indiana Core 40	49.8%	2013 graduates	59.7%	65.1%	47.0%	Free meals: 58.9% Reduced-price meals: 54.7%	No	No
Indiana Core 40 with Honors	33.9%	2013 graduates	23.3%	14.2%	37.2%	Free meals: 15.8% Reduced-price meals: 25.7%	Complete one requirement from list related to course-taking	Earn a C or better in courses that count toward diploma; have a GPA of a B or better
University System of Maryland Course Requirements	61.2%	Graduating class of 2013	Not reported				No	No
Massachusetts MassCore course of study	70.2%	2013 graduates	55.5%	50.5%	75.3%	56.8%	No	No
New York Regents with Advanced Designation Diploma	31.0%	Entering fall 2009 cohort (2013 graduates)	12.0%	9.0%	43.0%	Not reported	Pass 2 or 3 Regents math exams, 1 additional Regents Exam in science, and 2 additional units of a language other than English and the associated Regents exams (score requirements as well)	No
Ohio Honors Diploma*	14.0%	Students in 2013 four-year graduation rate	6.1%	2.4%	16.6%	3.8%	Composite score of 27 on ACT (excluding writing test) or combined score of 1210 on SAT (excluding writing)	Overall high school GPA of 3.5 on 4.0 scale
Oklahoma Regents' College-Bound Curriculum	85.3%	2013 seniors	Not reported				No	No
Texas Recommended High School Program Diploma/ Distinguished Achievement Program‡	83.5%	Entering fall 2009 cohort (2013 graduates)	83.7%	76.7%	84.6%	Not reported	No	No
Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma	50.6%	Entering fall 2010 cohort (2014 graduates)	39.4%	33.2%	57.5%	29.2%	Need 9 verified credits instead of 6, including 1 additional in math, science, and history and social sciences; also requires foreign language	No

Note: See pages 7–8 for additional information on how these states' graduation requirements are classified (i.e., default or opt-in). An additional four states — Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee — and the District of Columbia have adopted mandatory CCR course requirements for all students and are graduating students with these requirements. These states' graduation rates should be equivalent to the numbers of students graduating having completed a CCR course of study.

*Ohio defaults all students into a CCR course of study with a personal modification opt-out for Algebra II. Ohio offers an even more rigorous Honors Diploma. Data for the students earning this more rigorous diploma are included in this table.

‡ In 2013, the Texas Legislature passed HB 5, which replaces the CCR-level Recommended High School Program with the Foundation High School Program as the default course of study, which is not at the CCR level. The Distinguished Achievement Program, which sets the bar even higher than the CCR level, is being replaced with the Distinguished Level of Achievement. Beginning in 2014–15, students entering grade 9 will be defaulted into the courses to complete the curriculum requirements for the Foundation High School Program and at least one "endorsement." Students in the classes of 2015, 2016 and 2017 will be given the option of continuing with one of the current graduation programs or switching to the new program.

ENSURING THE RIGOR AND CONSISTENCY OF A CCR COURSE OF STUDY

As states align course requirements to their CCR standards, they need to put safeguards in place to ensure that courses taught in high schools throughout the state are consistently rigorous and aligned with the state standards. Otherwise, the content or instruction of courses bearing the same name may vary widely or even become watered down as more students are required to take them.

States can take different approaches to ensure this consistency and alignment, including identifying and analyzing the array of courses currently taught; producing course-level standards; creating criteria, guidance or a process to validate locally developed courses; or pursuing end-of-course testing. Particularly as states' course-coding systems and abilities to analyze these data evolve, one of the earliest questions to raise is whether the titles actually reflect the states' standards consistently. Achieve surveyed states on which mechanism(s) they use to ensure the rigor of courses and found that **40 states** have at least one mechanism in place:

- **35 states** use of end-of-course exams to help ensure rigor and consistency statewide. However, these end-of-course assessments often fall short of measuring higher-level ELA/literacy or advanced algebra content (e.g., the highest level end-of-course exam administered by the state is English 10 or geometry). See pages 21–23 for a more detailed discussion.
- **17 states** have a course approval process to review and validate locally developed courses:
  - For example, in **Arkansas,** when schools/districts want to offer a course that is not already approved, they must submit a course approval request to the Department of Education, which is then reviewed by the course approval committee. For each course requested, schools/districts must submit a course outline with specific connections to the appropriate curriculum framework and student learning expectations. They also must submit a list of instructional materials, teaching resources and equipment to be used for the course among other rigorous criteria, including providing assurance that students enrolled in the course will participate in appropriate end-of-course or grade-level assessments and that students will be well prepared to demonstrate proficiency on state assessments.[13]
  - In **Utah,** the State Board of Education established minimum course description standards and objectives for each course in the required general core. Course descriptions for required and elective courses are developed cooperatively by local education agencies and the Utah State Office of Education with the opportunity for public and parental participation in the development process. Additionally, mastery is emphasized rather than seat time.[14]
- **10 states** audit district or school curricular or instructional materials to ensure the rigor and consistency of courses.
  - For example, in **Delaware,** Administrative Code requires that all school districts annually provide evidence to the Department of Education that their school district curricula are aligned with the state's content standards. Evidence of alignment includes unit plans, lesson plans and assessments that may be subject to review by the department. Included in the documentation is a description of the method and level of involvement in the alignment process by building administrators, teachers and specialists.[15]

As states align course requirements to their CCR standards, they need to put safeguards in place to ensure that courses taught in high schools throughout the state are consistently rigorous and aligned with the state standards.

ADVANCED TECHNICAL DIPLOMAS, HONORS AND ENDORSEMENTS

A number of states, including **Indiana, North Carolina** and **Ohio,** all offer graduation requirements at the CCR level but also offer additional technical diplomas/endorsements for students who have gone above and beyond the core graduation requirements. States with advanced technical diplomas incorporate both CCR academics and career-focused coursework and experiential learning. These states are demonstrating the importance of college *and* career readiness by requiring rigorous academics along with a combination of career and technical education coursework and work experiences.* Advanced technical diplomas/endorsements typically require the following:

- **Additional career and technical education coursework —** through an articulated program of study or career and technical education "concentration" — is the most common requirement of an advanced technical diploma, helping students explore career pathways.
- **Work-based learning requirements** introduce students to real-world, on-the-job experiences.
- **Professional certifications** also enhance students' readiness for careers. Because most careers now require some form of postsecondary training beyond high school, these requirements encourage students to gain appropriate (and often stackable) credentials in areas of interest while still in high school.
- **Earning college credit** while in high school also ensures that students graduating with advanced career-technical diplomas leave high school with all options — including entry in two- or four-year college or on-the-job training — open.

*The Association for Career and Technical Education released a brief called *What is Career Ready?* that defines career readiness as mastery of core academic skills; employability skills (such as critical thinking and responsibility); and technical, job-specific skills related to a specific career pathway. See www.acteonline.org/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2114.

Assessing Students' Readiness for College and Careers

When Achieve started its work with states to adopt CCR policies, high school students typically took a wide variety of assessments for different purposes, which were often disconnected from one another. For example, students in half the states took high school exit exams that were required for graduation, but the results were not valued or used by postsecondary institutions — no surprise since these assessments mostly tested early high school knowledge and skills.

Similarly, students in many states and districts took final exams or end-of-course exams that factored into their course grades (sometimes both state- and/or district-developed exams for the very same course), but the assessments did not signal a student's readiness for postsecondary coursework. In every state students also took state-required high school assessments used for school accountability. Virtually none of these tests produced information about student learning that was of interest or use to postsecondary institutions or employers.

Students with college aspirations also took an additional series of tests, such as the ACT or SAT college admissions exams, PSAT, Advanced Placement exams, and International Baccalaureate exams — the list goes on. Many of the students who attended postsecondary institutions also had to take placement tests to see, in part, if they were ready for credit-bearing work in ELA/literacy and mathematics or whether they had to take remedial classes first. The bottom line is that high school students and graduates participated in two distinct and disconnected assessment systems. One, presumably aligned to K–12 standards and curriculum, was used to make determinations about K–12 students and schools. The second, often intentionally *not aligned to K–12 standards,* was instead oriented toward postsecondary education institutions and was used to make decisions about college admissions and, in some cases, placement into first-year, credit-bearing courses.

In short, high school students confronted an incoherent assessment "system" that by design was costly, inefficient and duplicative. The assessments that mattered for students — the ones that had currency in higher education and with employers — rarely factored into school accountability, and the ones that mattered for schools often did not matter to students. Additionally, most state tests were not especially useful for teachers who wanted to evaluate student progress during the year to assess student understanding and make mid-course corrections to instruction.[16] Such a system not only was inefficient and costly but also sent mixed messages to students, teachers, school leaders and parents about what was important and which assessments mattered. Furthermore, state tests given in high school did not historically measure college and career readiness adequately.[17] As a consequence, students who did well on them were not necessarily prepared for their next steps. College-bound students learned this the hard way when they arrived on a college campus, took placement tests and were told they were not ready for college-level work, even though they likely passed all the tests they were given in high school and may have taken the courses their state recommended or required.

More testing is not the answer. Smarter testing is.

CREATING A COHERENT SYSTEM

Over the past decade, states began to address this issue. California's Early Assessment Program led the way. The CSU system supplemented the California 11th grade math and ELA/literacy exams with a small number of additional items so the tests would measure CSU's standards for readiness for credit-bearing courses. Eleventh graders who met the standards were notified that they would automatically be placed into credit-bearing courses, without the need to take an additional placement exam, if they enrolled in a CSU campus.

The widespread adoption of CCR standards over the past five years — including but not limited to the CCSS — holds the promise of larger-scale streamlining of high school assessments so that one set of assessments can both be aligned to high school standards and provide information about the likelihood that individual students could enter and succeed in credit-bearing courses.

It remains to be seen if this promise will be realized. This is an extraordinary year of transition for most state assessment systems. In many states, uncertainty about the future of assessments arises from recently enacted legislation or other policy decisions. Many also face ongoing pressure from governors and some legislators to walk their state back from decisions that had already been made with respect to the adoption of the CCSS and/or commitments to use the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium exams that the state helped develop. Concerns are also being expressed in states over the amount of time testing takes away from student instruction, often leading to calls for a reduction in testing. These politically motivated decisions threaten to undo years of work by teachers, principals and other administrators and leave teachers and parents uncertain about what should be taught and what will be tested.

In addition to political pushback, some states are encountering resistance to new assessments in math and ELA/literacy as teacher evaluation systems are operationalized. There are concerns that teachers will be held accountable for student results on tests that are new in content and format for both teachers and students. And while some states have delayed when their teacher evaluation systems will take effect, there continues to be concern about new assessments because of their impact and weighting in teacher evaluations. As states phase in and continue the implementation of their evaluation systems, they face a variety of challenges, including:

- Which assessments are being included in teacher evaluations and who has the authority to determine which assessments are being used (i.e., states or districts);
- How heavily assessments are being weighted within an evaluation system and whether that weight will increase over time;
- What school year's assessment administration will be the first to be incorporated into teacher evaluation ratings; and
- How many years of assessment data are necessary before they are factored into teachers' evaluations.

Despite these and other concerns, most states will be administering newly operational assessments in grades 3–8 and high school in math and ELA/literacy. However, states' assessment plans are very fluid, and it is difficult to confirm states' plans for:

- Which assessments are being administered;
- Whether all students are taking all of the state's assessments (for states administering end-of-course assessments);
- How the assessments are being used for students (as part of course grades, as a requirement to graduate, etc.);
- How the assessments are being used for schools (weighted as part of accountability formulas); and
- How teachers will be affected by the inclusion of assessment results in states' educator evaluation programs.

This year's report focuses on a small subset of the issues complicating the work of students, teachers, parents and principals, among others, as they operate in a new assessment landscape.

The widespread adoption of CCR standards over the past five years holds the promise of larger-scale streamlining of high school assessments so that one set of assessments can both be aligned to high school standards and provide information about the likelihood that individual students could enter and succeed in credit-bearing courses.

PARCC AND SMARTER BALANCED: THE BASICS

In 2014–15, a significant number of states will administer one of two state-led assessment consortia exams — PARCC or Smarter Balanced. These consortia are committed to creating high-quality assessments designed to measure whether students are actually on track for college or careers, a sharp contrast to most state high school tests that historically measured only lower-level skills.

The multistate consortia represent two different state-led efforts to design high school assessments that are carefully aligned to the CCSS; provide instructionally relevant and timely information to teachers; meet state school and teacher accountability requirements; and with the participation of postsecondary faculty and leaders, can be used to make determinations of readiness to enter and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in postsecondary institutions. States that administer these tests will take a big step toward improving the quality of their assessments and creating a more seamless transition for students from secondary to postsecondary education.

Although PARCC and Smarter Balanced are both assessing students in ELA/literacy and mathematics, their approaches differ in a few notable ways:

- States administering the Smarter Balanced assessments will administer two 11th grade assessments — one in ELA/literacy and one in math — regardless of the courses the student has taken in high school. A CCR benchmark will be set on each exam.
- PARCC states have developed a suite of end-of-course assessments that students will take upon completion of the requisite coursework. A CCR benchmark will be set for the Algebra II/ Integrated Math III and English 11 end-of-course exams.

The new consortia assessments are designed to make student progress toward meeting the demands of college and career readiness clearer. Transparency of results is a critical component of systemic change — and importantly, of closing achievement gaps. States participating in either the PARCC or the Smarter Balanced assessments will be able to compare performance and progress with other states administering the same assessment. Though states are free to set their own passing scores (for student stakes, school accountability, etc.), the consortia will set the CCR benchmarks. Therefore, for the first time, states will be able to compare results on PARCC or Smarter Balanced. This comparability will be a powerful advancement in understanding how many students are graduating college and career ready in ELA/literacy and mathematics.

PARCC and Smarter Balanced member states are actively engaging with postsecondary education in a variety of ways to ensure that the tests will be validated and used as an indicator of college readiness. Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate readiness for credit-bearing courses while still in high school. It also means that the states working toward a college-ready determination will provide students with a portable signal — a common indicator of college readiness accepted by public institutions in multiple states, not just a student's home state.

PARCC
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers
www.parcconline.org

Smarter Balanced
Assessment Consortium
www.smarterbalanced.org

With assessments that produce results that are actually used by colleges, state assessment systems can be truly anchored to college and career readiness expectations and become powerful tools to strengthen student preparation. Assessing students against a standard that has been benchmarked against readiness by high school graduation gives parents a clear signal of whether their children are prepared for their next steps, and it gives schools a chance to close any gaps in students' academic skills before they graduate.

ASSESSING STUDENTS IN 2014–15

This current school year is a time of transition and, in some states, of unusual and unfortunate uncertainty about assessments. Many — though not all — states are in the process of transitioning their ELA/literacy and math assessment systems to assessments that can measure the full range of content in the CCSS or their state's CCR standards in ELA/literacy and math.[18] These assessments have been under development in collaboration with state leaders and educators for more than four years.

While some amount of uncertainty and unease is inherent during any transition, some states have less clarity as to what their new assessments will be, the types of the items the assessments will contain and how well the assessments will be aligned to state standards — particularly states where the standards are open to review and revision. In a few states that were once planning to administer consortia-developed tests and in states that have recently changed their academic standards, vendors to develop state-specific tests for use this school year have only recently been selected. And while the vendors are now known, assessment development is just getting under way; little else about the resulting tests is known to educators, students and their parents.

Twenty-eight states and the **District of Columbia,** through PARCC and Smarter Balanced, are administering assessments that have been explicitly designed to align with the CCSS. These states will administer these assessments in 2014–15 (see www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2014 for more details).[19]

Seventeen states — including a number that will administer PARCC or Smarter Balanced — will administer a college admissions test such as the ACT or SAT to all students (typically in the 11th grade) in addition to the other statewide assessments. These assessments, while not explicitly designed to align with the CCSS, reflect each organization's own CCR standards.

The remaining states have developed/are developing their own assessments aligned with their CCR standards — whether the CCSS or otherwise. Regardless of the assessment they administer, all states should secure independent reviews from external experts to evaluate state assessments for alignment to the standards and make the results of these reviews public.

Table 3: States' 2014–15 High School Advanced Math Assessments

Despite all states having adopted CCR standards for all students, state math expectations (as expressed through assessment and course requirements) for all students are very different. In this year's survey, Achieve specifically asked states about the most advanced high school math assessment they would administer in 2014–15, as well as which assessments would be administered to all students. Achieve also asked states to report all of the assessments they would administer in math, ELA/literacy and science in grades 3–8 and high school (see www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2014 for more details).

Achieve found that only a handful of states will both require all students to take content through Algebra II/Integrated Math III *and* assess students on that content (either using an end-of-course exam or a comprehensive assessment). The rest of states fall short in one of four ways:

1. **Some states require all students to have the underlying CCR coursework but do not administer assessments tied to these courses.** Assessments of early high school content are highly unlikely to be able to indicate students' college readiness.

2. **Some states assess all students on advanced math content** (e.g., using the PARCC Algebra II/Integrated Math III end-of-course exam or Smarter Balanced 11th grade math comprehensive assessment) **without requiring them to have the underlying coursework.** Though these states will administer to all students assessments capable of generating a CCR score, states that do not require aligned coursework (e.g., Algebra II or Integrated Math III) will be testing some students on content for which they have not received instruction.

3. **Some states administer end-of-course assessments in Algebra II/Integrated Math III through PARCC or state-developed assessments. However, these states will not require all students to take this assessment** — so not all students will benefit from clear information about readiness for entry-level, credit-bearing courses in mathematics, and comparisons of performance within and across states will be less clear than in states where all students are tested using the same assessment.

4. **Some states neither require all students to have the underlying coursework through Algebra II/Integrated Math III nor administer the assessment that ties to it** (e.g., the highest level math end-of-course exam delivered to all students is Geometry or Algebra I). These assessments are highly unlikely to be able to indicate college readiness.

For this current school year, the combination of state graduation requirements and state tests, including last-minute test development under way, is unfortunately continuing to result in incoherent and unclear signals about the math skills students need to be college and career ready. Relatively few states are creating more streamlined systems of high school assessments that are both aligned with state standards and provide actionable information about readiness for credit-bearing courses. However, it should also be noted that for many states this is still a period of transition; assessment and graduation requirements policies will continue to evolve over time.

	Most advanced math assessment for all students	Algebra II required coursework/ content for *all* graduates	Algebra II/Integrated Math III end-of-course (EOC) assessment *available,* but not required
AL	ACT QualityCore Algebra I EOC	YES*	NO
AK	Alaska Measures of Progress (grades 9, 10)	NO	NO
AZ	AzMERIT Algebra II EOC	YES*	N/A — Algebra II EOC required
AR‡	PARCC Geometry EOC	YES*	YES
CA	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
CO■	CMAS Algebra II/Integrated Math III (developed by PARCC)	YES	N/A — Algebra II EOC required
CT	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
DE	Smarter Balanced	YES	YES (local option)
DC	PARCC Geometry/Integrated Math II EOC	YES	YES (local option)
FL●	FSA Geometry EOC	NO	YES
GA	Georgia Milestones Assessment System Analytic Geometry EOC	YES	NO
HI	Smarter Balanced	YES	YES
ID	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
IL	PARCC Algebra II/Integrated Math III EOC	YES▼	N/A — Algebra II EOC required
IN	New ISTEP+ aligned to Indiana State Standards in Algebra I EOC assessment	YES*	NO
IA	Iowa Assessments (grades 10, 11)	NO	NO
KS	Kansas Assessment Program (grade 10)	NO	NO
KY	K-PREP ACT QualityCore — Algebra II	YES	N/A — Algebra II EOC required
LA	Algebra I EOC	NO	NO
ME	Smarter Balanced	YES	NO
MD●	PARCC Algebra I EOC	NO	YES
MA▲	MCAS (grade 10)	NO	YES (for districts that chose to administer PARCC in 2014–15)
MI	Michigan Merit Exam (grade 11)	YES*	NO
MN	Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (grade 11)	YES	NO
MS	PARCC Algebra I EOC	YES*	NO
MO●	Algebra I EOC	NO	YES
MT	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
NE	NeSA (grade 11)	YES	NO
NV	Math II EOC	NO	NO
NH	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
NJ	PARCC Algebra II EOC	YES◆	N/A — Algebra II EOC required
NM	PARCC Algebra II EOC	YES*	N/A — Algebra II EOC required
NY●	Regents Algebra I (Common Core)€	NO	YES
NC	READY CCSS-aligned EOC in Math I	YES*	NO
ND	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
OH	PARCC Geometry/Integrated Math II EOC◗	YES*	NO
OK	Algebra II End-of-Instruction	YES*	N/A — Algebra II EOC required

	Most advanced math assessment for all students	Algebra II required coursework/ content for *all* graduates	Algebra II/Integrated Math III end-of-course (EOC) assessment *available,* but not required
OR	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
PA	Keystone Exam in Algebra I	NO	NO
RI	PARCC Geometry EOC	NO	NO
SC	Algebra I/Mathematics for the Technologies 2 EOC	NO	NO
SD	Smarter Balanced	YES*	NO
TN	Algebra II EOC	YES	N/A — Algebra II EOC required
TX	STAAR Algebra I EOC	NO	NO
UT	SAGE EOC in Secondary (Integrated) Math III	YES*	N/A — Integrated Math III EOC required
VT	Smarter Balanced	NO	NO
VA●	Algebra I, Geometry or Algebra II Standards of Learning¥	NO	YES
WA	Smarter Balanced	YES*	NO
WV	Smarter Balanced	YES	NO
WI	ACT Aspire Early High School (grades 9, 10)	NO	NO
WY	ACT	NO	NO

Notes: States administering the Smarter Balanced comprehensive 11th grade assessment in 2014–15 can assess students on content through Algebra II/Integrated Math III.

*All students in these states are automatically enrolled in a math course sequence that includes Algebra II, but with parental permission a student may modify (i.e., lessen) the Algebra II/ Integrated Math III requirement or its equivalent course content or opt into another state diploma that includes a different set of course requirements that does not include Algebra II/ Integrated Math III. Students in these states who modify the math requirement will not be assessed using the Algebra II/Integrated Math III EOC (if one exists in the state).

‡Arkansas submitted an amendment to the U.S. Department of Education to request that PARCC grade 11 ELA/literacy and Algebra II exams be optional for districts.

■ Beginning with 9th graders in fall 2017, Colorado school districts will begin implementing revised local high school graduation requirements that meet or exceed the Colorado Graduation Guidelines approved by the Colorado State Board of Education. The local high school graduation requirements must align with the Colorado Academic Standards, Colorado English Language Proficiency Standards, and the Colorado Career and Technical Education Standards. Local school district graduation requirements must also align with the postsecondary and workforce readiness definition and description adopted by the State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in 2009.

● Florida, Maryland, Missouri, New York and Virginia have Algebra II EOCs available; however, Algebra II coursework/content is not required for all students to graduate.

▼ In Illinois, per Public Act 098-0972, "The State Board of Education shall administer no more than 3 assessments, per student, of ELA and mathematics for students in a secondary education program. One of these assessments shall include a college and career ready determination." The state will only administer the Algebra II/Integrated Math III EOCs for mathematics in 2014–15. It is the state's intention that all students will take a series of math courses that deliver the content through Algebra II/Integrated Math III; however, as the state transitions to the new assessment system, some students will not have the opportunity to take an Algebra II/Integrated Math III course or will have completed these courses prior to the assessment administration in spring 2015. The state is beginning the rulemaking process to address the transition to the new legislative requirements for the new assessments.

ΔMCAS will continue to be used for competency determination for all classes through 2019. Massachusetts districts may choose to administer any appropriate PARCC test in grades 9 or 11.

◆ In New Jersey, the state plans to require all students to complete the content of Algebra II and take the Algebra II EOC prior to graduation. As the state works through this transition, it is the expectation that beginning with the 2014–15 school year, as students complete the content of Algebra II, they will take the Algebra II EOC.

€All students must take and pass one Regents math exam to graduate. Any student who in the 2013–14 school year or thereafter, regardless of grade of enrollment, begins his or her first commencement-level math course culminating in a Regents Exam in June 2014 or thereafter must take the New York State Common Core Learning Standards mathematics Regents Exam that corresponds to that course, as available, and be provided with Common Core instruction. Most typically, this first course will be Algebra I (Common Core).

Þ In 2014–15, all grade 9 students will take the appropriate PARCC EOC for mathematics courses in which the student is enrolled. All grade 10 students will take the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT); these tests are needed to meet the assessment requirements that were in place when the students entered 9th grade. Grade 11–12 students who have not obtained the proficient level will be given the opportunity to retake the required areas of the OGT.

¥Students must pass one math Standards of Learning test to fulfill their math graduation requirement.

CREATING THE RIGHT SYSTEM OF INCENTIVES AND "STAKES" AROUND HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS

Tests that matter, particularly ones that can help open doors for students and signal readiness for placement into credit-bearing courses in postsecondary, are generally valued more by students and parents than many state assessments. New high school tests that are well aligned to the full range of CCR standards can and should serve these purposes as well.

Both PARCC and Smarter Balanced have designed the tests and the procedures for setting performance levels and associated "cut scores" so that students and postsecondary institutions will learn which students, based on their 11th grade scores, are ready to enter and succeed in credit-bearing courses. That information can help open doors for students. In most states, students who meet the CCR standard will be eligible for credit-bearing courses without the need to take an additional placement test upon enrollment. Further, for students in PARCC or Smarter Balanced states, this "college-ready" determination should be portable — acceptable in postsecondary institutions in other consortia states. And in a number of states, students whose performance does not meet the CCR standard will have access to 12th grade transition courses, designed to help foster the skills that are most essential for success in entry-level courses.

Realizing that states' assessments are very much in flux and that the incentives for states, schools, teachers and students to work toward shared goals are not established, Achieve asked states what ELA/literacy and math assessments they will administer to high school students in 2014–15, whether those same assessments will be used to evaluate schools and districts (not limited to 2014–15), and whether/how student stakes are attached to these assessments. As states

HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION COURSES

Some states are working to identify and close gaps in students' readiness for postsecondary in math and/or ELA/literacy while students are still are in high school, thus lowering the need for remediation and ensuring more CCR graduates. State policies and approaches to transition courses differ in a number of ways, including being triggered by different assessments; being required versus optional for students; counting toward core graduation requirements versus elective credit; and in some states, having agreements with their postsecondary systems such that *passage of the courses* will guarantee placement into credit-bearing courses. For example:

- **Delaware** is piloting a course jointly developed by the Delaware Department of Education and six institutions of higher education that will guarantee credit-bearing coursework in any of the six institutions if students pass the course their senior year. This Foundations of College Math course was designed specifically for students who are not determined to be college and career ready in their junior year and will be triggered by performance on the Smarter Balanced math assessment.
- **Kentucky** has implemented voluntary transitional courses in math and reading. Kentucky administers the ACT to all 11th graders; students who score below the readiness benchmarks for English, reading or mathematics on the ACT are targeted with transitional bridge interventions as a strategy to promote college and career readiness and degree completion. The state has provided a model course that districts may offer.
- In **Maryland,** SB 740 catalyzed the development of senior year transition math and ELA/literacy courses. These courses will be piloted in 2015–16 and implemented in 2016–17. Students who have not met CCR benchmarks on a state assessment by the end of the 11th grade will enroll. These transition courses will include a reassessment of college readiness after completion of the course. Teams in ELA/literacy and math comprised of K–12 and higher education leaders created a voluntary framework for districts to use.
- **Tennessee** designed a voluntary Bridge Mathematics course for students who have not scored a 19 or higher on the ACT by the beginning of their senior year.
- The **Washington** math transitions courses are triggered by a student's 11th grade Smarter Balanced score. Passing these courses senior year guarantees placement into first-year, credit-bearing postsecondary courses.
- In **West Virginia,** legislation requires that all public high schools offer transitional courses for students who do not meet college readiness benchmarks on the COMPASS (or another mutually agreed-upon assessment), which West Virginia administers statewide in 11th grade. These students must enroll in Transition Mathematics for Seniors or a higher-level course during their senior year. The state has also developed a Transition English Language Arts for Seniors course. Students who enroll in the transitions courses are reassessed at the conclusion of their senior year; students who meet the readiness benchmarks are placed directly into college-level work.
- A number of states have also collaborated with the **Southern Regional Education Board** to create a math course and a literacy course to address readiness gaps for 11th or 12th grade students. Courses are publicly available on iTunes U.

phase in new assessments, some are introducing them by cohort, e.g., the class of 2016 (the more common approach for comprehensive assessments), and others are introducing the assessments by school year, e.g., students who take an Algebra I course in 2014–15 take the Algebra I assessment, regardless of what year they will graduate (the more common approach for end-of-course assessments).

Beyond who takes the assessments, states have different policies for how much such tests matter for students or whether there are stakes attached. Most commonly, students are either required to achieve a passing score on an assessment or suite of assessments to graduate or the assessment results are factored into a student's course grade. Notably, some of these states have stakes tied to legacy assessments that are being phased out, some have yet to determine how and whether stakes will exist on their new assessments, and some have established new stakes that will be phased in over time. As states prepare to administer new assessments, they are approaching this transition carefully and working to provide students an adequate opportunity to learn the new standards and demonstrate their proficiency.

- **Passing score required to graduate:** No student graduating in 2014–15 in a state administering a PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessment will be denied a diploma because they were unable to achieve a passing score. In most states, previous assessments that had student stakes (meaning that a passing score was required to graduate) were administered in either 10th or 11th grade. Students who did not pass the assessment during the first administration will have the opportunity to retest using that same assessment and will not be required to earn a passing score on PARCC or Smarter Balanced to graduate. Most states will continue to offer their previous assessment (legacy assessment) through the 2015–16 school year to ensure that students have the opportunity to retest and pass the assessment they originally took in either 10th or 11th grade. In 2014–15, PARCC and Smarter Balanced will be used for first-time test takers.

- **Score factored into course grade: Eight states** are factoring student scores on end-of-course assessments into course grades, although states' policies differ in how students' performance on these assessments are weighted as part of an overall course grade.

- **Alternate routes to graduation:** Almost all states that require students to achieve a passing score to graduate offer students alternate routes to meeting the requirement if they are unable to meet the passing score on the assessments.[20] States generally provide students a menu of assessment options, as well as other means (e.g., portfolio, appeals process), to meet the state's assessment graduation requirements. Among the alternate routes that are designed to show that students have met the same standards as those required by an exit exam or end-of-course assessment are the following:

  - At least **nine states** permit students to pass another test with a score that has been determined to be comparable (e.g., designated score on an SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exam).

  - At least **six states** permit students to complete a performance-based assessment, or a portfolio of current or cumulative work, in the content area in which they did not earn a passing score.

  - At least **two states** have a formal appeals process in place.

The student stakes landscape is complex across and within states as this assessment transition is made. States are approaching the transition differently, with some states phasing in assessments and stakes by school year — when students take certain courses, they take the assessments aligned to those standards, so there is no clear cohort in which all students will take the same assessments prior to graduation. This approach is most common for states that are administering end-of-course assessments. States that are using this approach will have students graduating in the same cohort who took different assessments from one another prior to graduation (e.g., for two students graduating in the class of 2017, one student may have taken a legacy Geometry end-of-course assessment because he or she took the course in 2013–14, while another student may have taken a PARCC Geometry end-of-course assessment because he or she took the course in 2014–15).

Other states are phasing in new assessments by cohort, a more common approach for comprehensive assessments, so that all students in a cohort will take the same assessment prior to graduation because the assessment is not as

Tests that matter, particularly ones that can help open doors for students and signal readiness for placement into credit-bearing courses in postsecondary, are generally valued more by students and parents than many state assessments.

POSTSECONDARY USE OF STATE-DEVELOPED CCR ASSESSMENTS

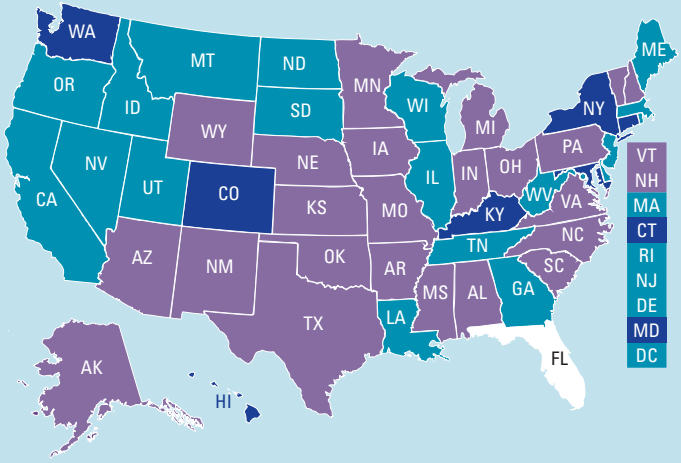
Incorporating assessments that provide high school students and postsecondary institutions with information regarding students' readiness for entry-level, credit-bearing courses into state assessment systems is essential for more successful transitions from secondary to postsecondary education and for more efficient and streamlined assessments. These assessments more clearly articulate for students and their families the level of performance necessary for postsecondary success. By offering guidance and support on how students who have yet to achieve this level of performance can use their final year in high school to reach this goal, students and families have better information and resources to take action. By using a state-developed assessment closely aligned to CCR standards for placement decisions, states can also begin sending signals to students earlier in high school and middle school about what they need to do to get and stay on track to reach college and career readiness by graduation.

What does it take for states to use state-developed high school assessments for placement decisions? Ultimately, states need to have agreements with public postsecondary institutions or systems representing public universities and/or community colleges that indicate that student scores on these assessments will be used to inform decisions about course placement. For example, these agreements may specify that students who attain certain scores will be placed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses and are exempt from taking other placement tests. Reaching these agreements requires collaboration with postsecondary leaders and faculty throughout the development and standards-setting process to ensure that the tests measure the content and rigor required to enter and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses.

With the transition to new CCR assessments under way, many states are poised to send students a clear and meaningful signal about their preparation for credit-bearing courses. For example, postsecondary leaders in **Washington** have agreed to use student scores on the 2014–15 11th grade Smarter Balanced ELA/literacy and mathematics assessments to determine placement into credit-bearing rather than remedial courses. The Council of Presidents for the state's public baccalaureate institutions and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges have signed placement agreements indicating that students who score a 3 or 4 will be placed into entry-level, credit-bearing courses. In **Colorado,** postsecondary institutions have agreed to use students' scores on PARCC but are awaiting future research and validation studies.

State Progress in Linking High School Assessments' CCR Determinations to Postsecondary Placement Decisions

- Has Process/Plan/Timetable To Adopt Policy (7)
- Plans To Create Policy (20)
- No Process/Plan/Timetable (23)



contingent on coursework as end-of-course assessments are. Given the current assessment environment, it is more important than ever for states to communicate clearly and effectively what the assessment expectations are for students. States also need to be explicit as to whether assessment requirements apply to entering cohorts or graduating cohorts or are being phased in by school year and not by cohort at all. **Maryland** recently released clear guidance around the assessments required for graduation for the next several school years.

As states transition, they should consider a range of stakes and incentives for student performance on the CCR assessments. Some will use the assessments as a new exit exam, albeit with a lower passing standard than the CCR performance level. Others that administer end-of-course exams may count test performance for a portion of the course grade. But assessments that provide an indicator of college and career readiness allow states to use other ways to incent and reward academic performance, such as bonuses in state means-tested financial aid programs, additional financial aid and recognition to low-income students who meet the CCR standard, and guaranteed enrollment in credit-bearing (nonremedial) courses in college for students who score at the college-ready level on these assessments. Tests whose results matter to students, especially when they open doors of opportunity, will generally be more readily accepted by students and their parents than other tests they take.

States are also in the process of phasing in teacher evaluation systems and making determinations about which assessments should be incorporated into these evaluations and when. Achieve asked states whether their state ELA/literacy and math assessments factor into their state's teacher evaluation system. **More than half the states** and the **District of Columbia** indicated that they intend to use measures of student achievement/growth for teacher evaluation based on the state's summative assessment(s) administered in the 2014–15 school years **(Alaska, Arizona, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia** and **Wisconsin)** and/or 2015–16 school years **(Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, South Dakota** and **Utah).** Other states are still refining their evaluation systems and/or timelines for implementation. Some states will allow districts the option of using the summative ELA/literacy and math assessments. Still other states have no teacher evaluation systems and no plans to incorporate statewide assessment data.

GETTING TESTING RIGHT: *STUDENT ASSESSMENT INVENTORY FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS*

As states implement new annual tests aimed at assessing — by the end of high school — whether graduates have the knowledge and skills they need to be ready for college and careers, now is the right time for states and districts to review their current testing requirements to be sure that students are required to take only high-quality tests that help students and teachers.

To support such decisions, Achieve released the *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts,* a tool designed for district leaders to use with teachers and other stakeholders to take stock of their assessments and assessment strategies from a student perspective.* Districts should require only the minimum number of tests necessary to serve diagnostic, instructional and accountability purposes. Each assessment should be high quality; be aligned to a state's CCR standards; and provide valuable information to educators, parents and students. The inventory process should lead to reducing the amount of time spent on testing.

*See www.achieve.org/assessmentinventory.

It is more important than ever for states to communicate clearly and effectively what the assessment expectations are for students.

Even states that intend to use assessment data within the next two years have varying approaches to how and when the data will be incorporated into teacher evaluations. Some states will use 2014–15 data as a baseline year to measure student growth. Other states will use 2014–15 assessment results as the first of multiple years of data that will be rolled into a teacher's evaluation. The nuances and variations across states make it nearly impossible to compare policies without oversimplifying the information. For state-specific information, see www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2014.

SMOOTHING THE ASSESSMENT TRANSITION

With so many changes occurring in state assessment and accountability systems for students, teachers, schools and districts in 2014–15, it is important that states carefully consider their transition plans and make adaptations where needed to ensure the proper alignment of timelines, assessments and stakes for this school year and beyond.

Each state needs to wrestle with these questions and issues, but they are particularly urgent for the states that have recently changed course on their assessments. Some of the transition questions states face include:

- Do teachers and students know what assessments are being given in the 2014–15 school year?
- Do teachers and students know what content these assessments are measuring?
- What is the state doing to prepare students, parents and teachers for the transition to new and more rigorous assessments?
- Who in the state will be required to take the assessments? Are the assessments for all students or only those who elect to take the course?
- What are the student, teacher and school stakes tied to the assessments — and are they aligned among these actors? When do they take effect?
- How will results be communicated to the public and reported?
- How will the state engage higher education institutions in endorsing the rigor of the new CCR assessments?

Accountability for Students' College and Career Readiness

States need to make college and career readiness the central focus of their accountability systems, not an afterthought. A strong, coherent accountability strategy that ties together the state's graduation course requirements, assessments and other indicators of readiness is essential to provide the information that can guide school, district and state strategies for increasing college and career readiness.

INDICATORS

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act requirements set a minimum floor for accountability. States should act — whether through waiver renewal or independent of the federal government — to incorporate into their accountability systems a set of indicators that measure college and career readiness and are used in several ways. The indicators should also reflect a continuum of performance including toward, meeting and exceeding readiness and should include indicators from each of the following categories:

1. **Earning a CCR diploma:** The percentage of students who graduate from high school with a CCR diploma.

2. **Scoring college ready on a high school assessment:** The percentage of students who score at the college-ready level on high school assessments aligned with CCR standards. Such assessments signal which students are prepared for postsecondary success and which will require additional support before leaving high school. These assessments are given to all eligible students and are used by the postsecondary community for placement into first-year, credit-bearing courses and/or by the business community for decisions about training and hiring.

3. **Earning college credit in high school:** The percentage of high school students earning college credit through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and/or dual enrollment. Just as states must know whether students are progressing toward and reaching certain benchmarks of college and career readiness, they also need to know whether high school students are exceeding those goals by taking the advanced courses that further solidify their transition to college.

4. **Requiring enrollment in remedial courses in college:** The percentage of high school graduates who — upon entrance to a postsecondary institution — are placed into a remedial course in reading, writing and/or mathematics.[21]

5. **Completing a career-ready course of study or certification:** The percentage of high school students who successfully complete a career and technical education pathway or program of study aligned to workforce needs; meet standards on a technical skills assessment; earn an industry-recognized or stacked industry credential, employability certificate, or work readiness certificate; complete a preapprenticeship program; or earn an academic or technical endorsement on a CCR diploma. These indicators are not replacements for other CCR indicators, particularly academic ones, but rather an additive way of enriching accountability and reporting systems.

Table 4: State Progress on Using and Reporting CCR Accountability Indicators

● Publicly reported
○ Included in formula
◆ Publicly reported AND included in formula

	CCR diploma	CCR assessment	Earning college credit in high school	Postsecondary remediation
AL				●
CA	●	●		
CO				●
CT		●		
DE	◆	●		●
DC	◆			
FL		○	○	
GA	◆		◆	○
HI	●	◆	●	●
ID			○	
IL		◆	○	
IN	◆		◆	●
KY	◆	◆	○	●
LA		●	◆	
ME		●		●
MD	●		○	
MA	●		●	●
MI		●		●
MN	○	●		●
MS		○		
MO			○	●
MT				●
NV			◆	◆
NJ		●		
NY	◆	◆		
NM			○	
NC		◆	●	●
OH	●		●	●
OK	●			●
OR		○		
PA			◆	
TN	◆	●		
TX	◆	◆	◆	●
VA	●		●	
WA		○		●
WV				●
WI		◆		
WY				●
TOTALS (change since 2013 report) ● Publicly reported	**15 (+1)**	**16 (+5)**	**11 (+1)**	**20 (+5)**
○ Included in formula	**9 (+2)**	**11 (+7)**	**13 (+3)**	**2 (+0)**

USES

The following uses of accountability indicators, while not exhaustive, are evidence that the state's accountability system values college and career readiness:

1. **Public reporting:** Reporting to the public the percentage of students who satisfy the requirements of the CCR indicators at the school level.
2. **Performance goals:** Setting and publicly communicating statewide performance goals that include a date for increasing the percentage of students who satisfy the requirements of the CCR indicators.
3. **Incentives:** Establishing incentives to reward schools and districts for increasing the percentage of students who satisfy the requirements of the CCR indicators.
4. **Accountability formula:** Factoring the percentage of students who satisfy the requirements of each CCR indicator into the high school accountability formula.

MAKING CAREER READINESS COUNT

The student performance indicators that states include in school- and district-level report cards and accountability systems should tell a story about what matters most to the states. When states do not choose to include student performance indicators tied to career pathways and experiences in their report cards and accountability systems, they miss an opportunity to signal to schools and districts, communities, parents, and students that preparing all students for careers matters.

Achieve surveyed states on how and whether they include measures of career readiness in accountability systems (e.g., weighted in accountability formulas and/or awarding bonus points) and in public reporting systems such as school report cards. Achieve found that **more than half of the states** publicly report or include at least one career-focused indicator in their accountability systems.[22]

Most states currently combine measures of career readiness into a meta-indicator of college and career readiness, thereby masking career readiness indicators at a time when they instead need to be highlighted and valued in their own right.

Kentucky is one of the few states that recognizes the distinction between college- and career-ready measures, reports on both, and includes them within the statewide accountability system. Kentucky breaks down its indicators into College Ready (which is based on student achievement on the ACT or a college placement exam) and Career Ready (which is comprised of "career-ready academic" and "career-ready technical" indicators). The state also assigns a bonus half-point for students who meet both the college-ready and career-ready indicators.

Maryland publicly reports at the high school level the number of students completing the University System of Maryland Course Requirements (a CCR-level course of study), the Career and Technology Education Program Requirements, and *both* the University and Career/Technology Requirements. These data can also be disaggregated by subgroup.

Virginia includes a comprehensive and disaggregated list of technical and work-ready assessments on the state's report cards, including the number of students earning the state-developed Work Readiness certificate (which measures students' employability skills), state licensures, industry certifications and competency assessments. And effective with the class entering 9th grade in 2013–14, Virginia students who earn a Standard Diploma must also earn a Board-approved industry credential. Finally, in its annual performance reports, Virginia provides the State Board of Education and the public with information about the number of students who graduate from high school with an industry credential and having completed a college-preparatory course of study, as represented by Virginia's Advanced Studies diploma.[23]

PERFORMANCE GOALS AND INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Achieve has long encouraged states to take a broad view of school and district accountability systems, encompassing mechanisms beyond accountability formulas that differentiate and classify schools for support and intervention and even well beyond state public reporting systems. To create a culture centered on CCR performance expectations for all students, accountability systems should rest on shared and widely communicated performance goals, leverage effective public reporting of results, and drive progress toward the goals through incentive and recognition programs that celebrate success.

For example, **Virginia** offers a Governor's Excellence in Education award to schools and school divisions that meet several criteria, including that the percentage of graduates who attain a CCR-level Advanced Studies diploma exceeds the state's goal of 57 percent of graduates and that the percentage of students earning college credit in high school exceeds 25 percent. **Kentucky** has set a statewide CCR goal for increasing the percentage of students who graduate college and career ready from 34 percent in 2009 to 67 percent in 2015. To support the state's goal, it has secured from all districts a "Commonwealth Commitment" to move 50 percent of their high school graduates who are not college and/or career ready to college and/or career ready. The state is reporting each district's progress toward meeting this and other goals.*

Surprisingly, in recent years, states seem to have narrowed the scope of their accountability systems' use of performance goals and incentives rather than broadened them. The number of states that have performance goals for CCR indicators has declined, with now roughly a quarter of states having any performance goals tied to these indicators. This number will soon decline further as many of these performance goals were articulated through states' Race to the Top commitments that conclude in 2014–15. Even more striking, today only a handful of states have positive incentive programs for schools that meet performance goals or improve the rates of students meeting college and career readiness expectations.

This trend should be reversed. **Particularly given the transition to new standards and assessments, states have a window of opportunity to reset the conversation about student CCR outcomes — to create a new culture of shared accountability for results that emanates from a broader set of strategies.** States should harness this opportunity, working across K–12, higher education and business and including broad sets of stakeholders, to define new performance goals for students leading to college and career readiness and to analyze and report these indicators in a shared space so that parents and the public can more easily access the information, see how the indicators flow together and more clearly track progress over time. Finally, states should consider ways to recognize schools and districts that are making great strides in improving college and career readiness — providing a variety of incentives or simply holding them up for the recognition they deserve.

*See http://education.ky.gov/commofed/cdu/pages/delivery_home.aspx.

2014 CCR ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS IN STATES

Achieve surveyed states' use of the CCR indicators listed on page 29 and focused this year's report on whether and how states are publicly reporting these indicators and including them in their accountability formulas or performance reports.

Any indicator used in an accountability formula should also be reported publicly by school and district level. States should clearly report on the subindicators from their accountability systems so that all stakeholders can understand the indicators being collected and students' performance on them. In many cases, accountability data are reported as dichotomous (yes/no) indicators or are part of a weighted calculation, making them difficult to decipher.

Achieve found that states have made progress in publicly reporting the indicators.

- **Six states — Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Nevada, New York** and **Texas —** stand out for publicly reporting and including in their accountability formulas at least two of the indicators listed in Table 4.
- **Two states — Hawaii** and **Texas —** publicly report school-level data on each of the four indicators included in Table 4. **Six additional states — Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina** and **Ohio —** now report school-level data for three of the indicators.

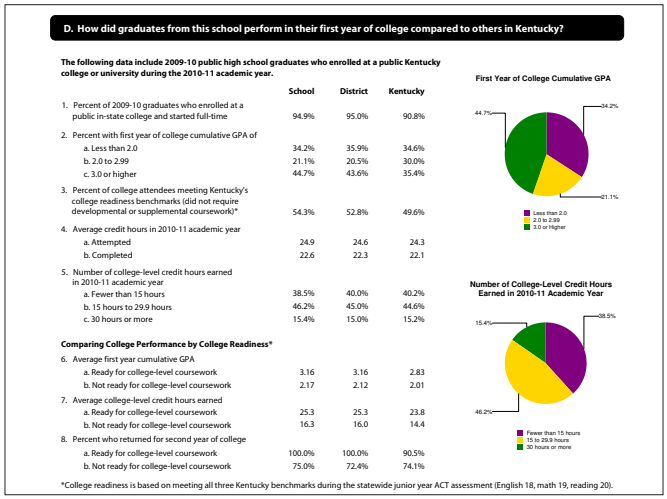
Thirty-seven states and the **District of Columbia** publicly report or include in their school accountability formulas at least one CCR indicator — three more states than last year.

Further, since last year, **24 additional indicators** are being publicly reported or included in accountability formulas in states, with the largest increases happening in the CCR assessment inclusion in states' accountability systems. There is even greater potential for growth in this indicator as states transition their assessment and accountability systems.

BEST PRACTICES IN ACCOUNTABILITY

Publicly Reporting a Range of CCR Indicators and Accountability Systems That Value CCR Courses of Study

Snapshot: Kentucky High School Feedback Reports



D. How did graduates from this school perform in their first year of college compared to others in Kentucky?

The following data include 2009-10 public high school graduates who enrolled at a public Kentucky college or university during the 2010-11 academic year.

	School	District	Kentucky
1. Percent of 2009-10 graduates who enrolled at a public in-state college and started full-time	94.9%	95.0%	90.8%
2. Percent with first year of college cumulative GPA of			
a. Less than 2.0	34.2%	35.9%	34.6%
b. 2.0 to 2.99	21.1%	20.5%	30.0%
c. 3.0 or higher	44.7%	43.6%	35.4%
3. Percent of college attendees meeting Kentucky's college readiness benchmarks (did not require developmental or supplemental coursework)*	54.3%	52.8%	49.6%
4. Average credit hours in 2010-11 academic year			
a. Attempted	24.9	24.6	24.3
b. Completed	22.6	22.3	22.1
5. Number of college-level credit hours earned in 2010-11 academic year			
a. Fewer than 15 hours	38.5%	40.0%	40.2%
b. 15 hours to 29.9 hours	46.2%	45.0%	44.6%
c. 30 hours or more	15.4%	15.0%	15.2%
Comparing College Performance by College Readiness*			
6. Average first year cumulative GPA			
a. Ready for college-level coursework	3.16	3.16	2.83
b. Not ready for college-level coursework	2.17	2.12	2.01
7. Average college-level credit hours earned			
a. Ready for college-level coursework	25.3	25.3	23.8
b. Not ready for college-level coursework	16.3	16.0	14.4
8. Percent who returned for second year of college			
a. Ready for college-level coursework	100.0%	100.0%	90.5%
b. Not ready for college-level coursework	75.0%	72.4%	74.1%

First Year of College Cumulative GPA

Number of College-Level Credit Hours Earned in 2010-11 Academic Year

*College readiness is based on meeting all three Kentucky benchmarks during the statewide junior year ACT assessment (English 18, math 19, reading 20).

Snapshot: Ohio School Report Cards

The **Kentucky** Center for Education and Workforce Statistics (KCEWS), created by an act of legislation in 2013, collects data from several state education and workforce agencies in the state, including the Kentucky Department of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education, the Educational Professional Standards Board, the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, and the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. KCEWS produces robust public High School Feedback Reports and Postsecondary Feedback Reports, connecting student and teacher performance data across preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, college and adult education and into career. Kentucky's work is emerging as a powerful strategy to drive progress toward that state's CCR performance goals. High School Feedback Reports include the overall college-going rate for the school by subgroup; college readiness in math, English and reading; the types of colleges attended by graduates; and first-year performance in postsecondary institutions (grade point average, credit hours, etc.). The reports also compare students' college performance by whether they were college ready based on meeting all three Kentucky benchmarks during the statewide junior year ACT assessment. Postsecondary Feedback Reports by individual two- and four-year institutions further break out degree attainment, employment outcomes and average wages for graduates.[24]

Ohio uses its Ohio School Report Cards to show the college readiness of high school graduates across a range of indicators, including the percentage of students who took the ACT and SAT and the percentage who achieved a score that signals readiness for placement in first-year, credit-bearing postsecondary courses without the need for remediation; rates of Advanced Placement participation and test scores of 3 or better; and the percentage of students earning a CCR-level honors diploma, industry-recognized credential or dual enrollment credit. Ohio plans to provide post-high school outcomes as well, such as college graduation, college enrollee demographics, and workforce and military enlistment.[25]

In **Indiana,** beginning in 2014–15, there will be possible bonuses and penalties associated with the diploma types that schools award. If a school meets the target of having a certain percentage of graduates earning a nonwaiver honors diploma (academic, technical and International Baccalaureate diplomas), the school receives a 1.00-point bonus. A school may also lose points. Schools awarding too many general (non-Core 40) diplomas will be penalized in their school grade. Schools that exceed the allowable percentage of graduates with a waiver or general (non-Core 40) diploma will lose 1.00 point.[26]

STATE ACTIONS

States can take some specific actions now to build toward use of a continuum of accountability indicators:

- **Report how many graduates successfully complete a CCR course of study:** The percentage of students who complete the CCR course of study should be built into each state's school-level report cards. By publishing course-taking patterns — disaggregated by income, ethnicity and special populations — as well as local graduation requirements and achievement results, state departments of education can help reduce disparities in student access to the learning opportunities needed for success after high school.

- **Factor the percentage of students who complete a CCR course of study into the high school accountability formula:** Ultimately, students who graduate on time having completed the CCR course of study will be included in the state's cohort graduation rate. However, states that have an opt-out policy should bring particular attention in their formulas to students who graduate having completed more rigorous expectations. Similarly, states may want to reward schools when students excel and complete academic or technical honors endorsements that extend beyond the state's CCR graduation requirements.

- **Report and/or factor course completion into school accountability:** States can also keep track of the number of students in the cohort who are on track to graduate on time having completed the CCR course of study. One option is for states to build annual credit attainment of core academic courses into their accountability determinations.

- **Report assessment results to the public:** States should have plans in place to transition to new systems of public reporting to illuminate attainment of CCR benchmarks on the new assessments and drive understanding and use among parents, policymakers and the public. States should make CCR data transparent and understandable to those who can influence student performance. They can incorporate the measures into the school and district report cards that parents, educators and policymakers rely on to learn about performance in their community's schools.

- **Use CCR assessments to differentiate and classify schools and districts for support and intervention:** States should make CCR and on-track-to-CCR levels of performance on the new assessments a centerpiece of their accountability formulas that differentiate and classify student performance. In states that use a performance index in which different values are assigned to different indicators and to different levels of performance on the indicators, college and career readiness performance levels should carry the greatest weight. To support this use, states must administer high school assessments to all students.

The Challenges for the Year Ahead

This current school year and the next several years are particularly critical to the CCR agenda. State policymakers and educators must stand together to confront both policy challenges and political obstacles in their path as never before.

One particularly challenging policy issue facing many states right now centers on testing, as concerns — and pushback — mount around the quality, number and uses of tests in the K–12 system. As state education officials and policymakers confront these issues, they must keep several things in mind:

Testing is important. Good summative tests administered annually can and must give parents important information about the performance and progress of their own children and give the public important information about the performance and progress of the education system, particularly with respect to progress on closing achievement gaps.

Assessment quality is improving. Tests developed by both Smarter Balanced and PARCC make significant advances over the bubble tests they are replacing. The new tests are more rigorous; require more writing as well as performance-based tasks in mathematics; take advantage of technology to create better test items as well as to score them and report results faster; and provide information to individual students and their parents to let them know if the student is on track for the work of the next grade and, ultimately, ready to enter and succeed after high school in credit-bearing courses in postsecondary institutions without the need for remediation.

PARCC and Smarter Balanced have changed assessments for the better and have become the new gold standard; no state should ever again accept annual fill-in-the-bubble assessments that fail to allow students to show what they know and are able to do in math and ELA/literacy. States that have chosen to develop their own assessments will find creating tests with the same advantages more costly and difficult, but it can be done — and their students and parents deserve these same benefits. They, in fact, should demand it.

With respect to testing, we can all agree that students should be given only tests that serve essential diagnostic, instructional and accountability purposes. Concerns about overtesting are legitimate. States and local districts must act thoughtfully and quickly to address them. While state-mandated tests generally take up less than 2 percent of instructional time each year, there is considerable anecdotal evidence that local districts and individual schools add layers of tests.[27]

Some of the overtesting at the local level is in response to the accountability consequences of performance on state tests. As the consequences increase, so do the pressures on local district and school leaders to add tests that can predict end-of-year performance, can diagnose student weakness and can identify students who need extra help. In many districts and schools, these same pressures also lead to narrowly focused test preparation, at the expense of time devoted to rigorous, high-quality instruction. Further, these new tests are typically layered on top of existing ones, resulting in assessment systems that are bloated, costly and incoherent.

States should look at their own testing requirements and encourage local school districts to take stock of all existing assessments. Educators in each district should review all assessments and identify those that provide useful, actionable information for students, teachers, parents and the system. Those that are of low quality, are poorly aligned with state standards, do not provide useful information or have otherwise outlived their usefulness should be discarded. A number of states, including Connecticut, New York and Illinois, have already launched such initiatives. To support these and other state and local efforts, Achieve has developed

a *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts* and associated training materials, all of which can be downloaded and freely modified.

An even greater challenge relates to state standards. In this coming year, there will be mounting pressure on some governors, state legislators, chief state school officers and state board of education members to throw out the CCSS and write new state standards. It has been politically convenient, on both the left and the right, to conflate the CCSS themselves with a host of other issues — such as curriculum; testing; teacher evaluation; data privacy; copyright; and the roles of the federal government, foundations and the business community in public education — and argue that those concerns would somehow be resolved by dumping the CCSS. They will not. State leaders should resist this pressure and instead keep some common sense lessons in mind.

The CCSS are not perfect, but they are significantly better than nearly all of the state-specific standards they replaced. Since our founding in 1996, Achieve has helped more than 30 states improve their state standards by providing ongoing reviews and feedback during the development process. We have learned a lot about the features of really great standards and what it takes to create them. These lessons were applied to the development of the CCSS, which were designed to correct the weaknesses that were common to most state standards. Over the past four years, states, school districts, principals and teachers have made significant investments in the time, professional development and instructional materials needed to implement them well. And while the initial implementation of the standards was not always smooth, abandoning the standards four years after their adoption pulls the rug out from under educators, creates uncertainty over what to teach and what will be tested, and disrupts each student's education for a year or more. These years can never be made up.

This does not mean that the CCSS are untouchable. State standards should be reviewed and updated periodically, and state-adopted CCSS are no exception. States should set up a timely and orderly process for their review, as they do with content standards in all subjects. They should establish review teams comprised of experienced educators with strong content expertise, teaching experience, and knowledge of the research on teaching and learning, as well as postsecondary faculty, employers and others who bring evidence of the real-world skills students need upon high school graduation. Those who see a need for improvement are obligated to suggest and justify specific changes to specific standards. This will focus the debate about the CCSS (or any state standards) where it ought to be but rarely has been of late — on the expectations for student learning.

Throwing out the CCSS and replacing them with home-grown standards will not satisfy their most vocal opponents. In 2014, Governor Pence of Indiana signed legislation rescinding the adoption of the CCSS and requiring the development of new CCR standards written "by Hoosiers for Hoosiers." The resulting standards were roundly criticized by CCSS opponents in Indiana and nationally for being too similar to the CCSS. A few states enacted legislation in 2014 to review and revise their math and ELA/literacy standards; in other states governors or state departments of education have initiated reviews of existing state standards. The same handful of national opponents have not even waited for new standards to be produced in these states; they immediately accused those responsible for these reviews of deceiving parents and rigging the process to ensure that there are no meaningful changes to the standards. The lesson here is simple — reviewing or replacing the standards will not bring peace; there is no satisfying the opponents.

Throwing out the CCSS will not change the federal government's role in state standards, curriculum, tests or any other aspect of public education. There are legitimate reasons to be concerned about federal overreach in K–12 education. One thing that is beyond debate, however, is that abandoning the CCSS will not change the nature or level of federal involvement in state education systems. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires that states adopt standards in math and ELA/literacy and test all students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school. Since NCLB was enacted, every state has received federal funds that can be used to develop academic standards and other funds that have been specifically earmarked to underwrite the annual testing. States that walk away from the CCSS and the PARCC or Smarter Balanced tests will still be required to have math and ELA/literacy standards and annual tests and will continue to receive federal funds to underwrite their costs. They will also continue to be required to meet the commitments they made to receive NCLB waivers. State leaders who believe that the federal government is too deeply involved in public education in their state should work with Congress to change the law.

States are in the midst of a long-term effort to better prepare all young people, and our nation, for a successful future. Adopting and implementing CCR policies — starting with standards — is a key component of this nationwide effort. Staying the course is what is most needed.

Conclusion

As a nation, we still have a long way to go to prepare all young people for college and careers. The most important work to improve preparation must be done by students, their teachers and their parents working together, and it is happening in classrooms and communities all over the country.

State education leaders have the essential job of setting the expectations for completing a K–12 education so that when the expectations are met, graduates will indeed be college and career ready. States have been explicitly working at this task for nearly a decade, each at their own pace and in their own way. Despite a particularly challenging political environment — and some policy setbacks — in 2014, nearly every state continued to make progress toward implementing CCR standards and adopting and implementing related policies. But there is a long way to go, and we are not moving quickly enough.

As this year's report shows, while every state has adopted CCR standards in math and ELA/literacy, in most states these standards are merely aspirational at the secondary level. Fewer than half of the states require high school students to take the courses that deliver those standards to earn a high school diploma, and this picture has not improved significantly in the past several years. The outlook for state assessments that measure CCR skills is understandably murky in this transitional year, further clouded by last-minute decisions in a number of states to abandon participation in Smarter Balanced or PARCC and launch a search for new assessments and assessment developers. The vast majority of states will ultimately implement assessments that measure college and career readiness, though the tests will not necessarily be well aligned to their specific state standards. Very few states factor multiple indicators of college and career readiness into their state accountability systems and publicly report the percentage of students who satisfy the requirements of the CCR indicators at the school level. And as new state assessments are phased in at the secondary level, states will have more robust information to report with respect to the preparedness of high school students.

However, though states are acting, their actions frequently fall short of the coherent policies and strategies that reinforce the standards they expect students to meet and the curriculum they expect schools to deliver. Though 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted CCR math and ELA/literacy standards:

- **Fewer than half — 23 states and the District of Columbia —** require all students to take math and ELA/literacy courses that deliver all content standards (whether for all students or as a default curriculum).
- Only **nine of the states** with CCR graduation requirements in math and ELA/literacy administer high school assessments that are (1) aligned with state standards and (2) designed to provide evidence of readiness to enter and succeed in first-year, credit-bearing courses in postsecondary institutions.
- **11 states** with CCR graduation requirements administer the ACT or SAT — tests that **do** measure college readiness **but are not necessarily well aligned** with state standards.
- Of the **27 states** that do not require students to complete a college- and career-preparatory curriculum but instead leave it optional for students, ***only six states*** **(California, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Texas** and **Virginia)** report how many graduates actually complete that course of study. Policymakers, educators, parents and the public in the other states operate in the dark on this important matter.

- Of the **13 states** that make a college- and career-preparatory course of study the default option, allowing students to opt out of it rather than requiring them to opt in, **only one state (Indiana)** reports how many students opt out or modify coursework each year. In the other states, policymakers and others are operating in the dark about the impact of an important policy design choice they have made.

As noted previously, this incoherence is especially evident with respect to high school mathematics because only a handful of states will both require all students to take content through advanced algebra and assess students on that content as defined by state standards.

Students, especially but not only low-income and minority students, pay the price for incoherent and incomplete state policies. The failure to adopt CCR graduation requirements leaves to chance whether all students will take a sufficiently rigorous curriculum. We know from decades of experience that low-income and minority students are less likely than their more advantaged peers to take a rigorous, college-preparatory course of study. We also know that even when students take courses with the same title, low-income and minority students are more likely to be given undemanding assignments, while their more advantaged peers, even in the same school, are engaged in a rigorous curriculum. These students are likely to suffer when there are no mechanisms for validating the content and rigor of the courses they take.

In 2004, Achieve surveyed recent high school graduates, and we repeated this survey in 2014.[28] In both years, approximately 40 percent of recent high school graduates reported that they recognized significant gaps in their academic preparation now that they were in postsecondary education programs or the workforce. In both surveys, only one in five respondents reported that their high schools set high academic expectations. Whether they went on to college or the workplace, more than half reported gaps in preparation for life after high school. And knowing what they know now, approximately 60 percent in the 2014 survey said that they would have worked harder, and 72 percent of students who went to college and 65 percent of those who did not would have taken higher-level or more challenging courses. The message to state policymakers could not be clearer. It is past time to send very clear and consistent signals to all students about the courses they must take and the skills they must demonstrate to earn a high school diploma and to be prepared to pursue the education and careers of their dreams.

Table 5: Building a Coherent Policy Framework for College and Career Readiness

	Adopted CCR standards	Required courses/ content aligned with all standards	Reports # completing CCR course of study	Verifies course content and rigor*			Administers CCR assessment aligned with state standards	Administers college admissions assessment to all students	Two CCR indicators publicly reported and included in accountability formula
				Audit course materials	Course approval process	End-of-course assessments			
AL	●	●			●	●		ACT	
AK	●			●	●				
AZ	●	●			●	●			
AR	●	●			●	●	PARCC‡		
CA	●		●	●	●	●	SBAC		
CO	●	●				●	PARCC	ACT	
CT	●					●	SBAC		
DE	●	●	●	●	●	●	SBAC	SAT	
DC	●	●	●			●			
FL	●				●	●			
GA	●	●	●		●	●			●
HI	●	●	●	●	●	●	SBAC	ACT	
ID	●					●	SBAC		
IL	●					●	PARCC		
IN	●	●	●			●			●
IA	●								
KS	●								
KY	●	●	●	●		●		ACT	●
LA	●					●		ACT	
ME	●	●					SBAC		
MD	●		●			●	PARCC■		
MA	●		●				PARCC■		
MI	●	●						ACT	
MN	●	●						ACT	
MS	●	●		●	●	●		ACT	
MO	●					●		ACT	
MT	●						SBAC		
NE	●	●		●					
NV	●					●		ACT	●
NH	●						SBAC		
NJ	●					●	PARCC■		
NM	●	●			●	●	PARCC■		
NY	●		●			●	Regents		●
NC	●	●		●		●		ACT	
ND	●			●			SBAC		
OH	●	●	●			●			

	Adopted CCR standards	Required courses/ content aligned with all standards	Reports # completing CCR course of study	Verifies course content and rigor*			Administers CCR assessment aligned with state standards	Administers college admissions assessment to all students	Two CCR indicators publicly reported and included in accountability formula
				Audit course materials	Course approval process	End-of-course assessments			
OK	●	●	●			●			
OR	●						SBAC		
PA	●					●			
RI	●					●			
SC	●			●	●	●		ACT	
SD	●	●			●	●	SBAC		
TN	●	●	●		●	●		ACT	
TX	●		●			●			●
UT	●	●			●	●		ACT	
VT	●						SBAC		
VA	●		●			●			
WA	●	●				●	SBAC		
WV	●	●			●		SBAC		
WI	●							ACT	
WY	●				●			ACT	
Totals	51	24	15	10	17	35	22	17	6

Note: Additional details for each of the following policies and practices can be found in the report: has aligned required courses/content with all standards (page 6), reports number of students completing CCR course of study (page 15), verifies course content and rigor (page 16), administers CCR assessment aligned with state standards (page 21), administers college admissions assessment to all students (page 21), and publicly reports two CCR indicators and includes them in accountability formula (page 30).

* Types of efforts listed in this table for verification of course content and rigor are not mutually exclusive. A number of states provided other examples of efforts to verify course content and rigor outside the scope of the categories identified in the survey.

‡ Arkansas submitted an amendment to the U.S. Department of Education to request that PARCC grade 11 ELA/literacy and Algebra II exams be optional for districts.

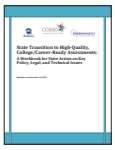
■ State will administer PARCC Algebra II/Integrated III end-of-course assessment to students who elect to take the Algebra II/Integrated III course.

APPENDIX A: Achieve Resources

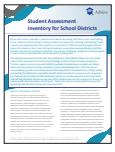
In the past 10 years, Achieve has released a number of hallmark reports on the state of the nation's standards, graduation requirements, assessments and accountability systems, as well as many materials that serve to inform and assist stakeholders as they work to improve America's high schools. The following are available at **www.achieve.org.**

Advancing Competency-Based Pathways to College and Career Readiness Series: The Imperative for State Leadership examines what a competency-based system looks like across states and how states transition to it, which varies based on state priorities and context — reinforcing the value of state leadership to find the route that fits best. This paper is designed to provide guidance to state leaders to ensure that their efforts translate into the right actions in districts and schools and then into solid results for students. [2014] www.achieve.org/imperative-state-leadership

Making Career Readiness Count provides guidance and recommendations for states on how they can take steps in the next few years to ensure that the "career" in their college- and career-ready accountability and public reporting systems is not an afterthought but rather a powerful lever to focus priorities, drive progress, and ultimately see more students and their communities succeed. Achieve and the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEc) developed this brief to catalyze action. [2014] www.achieve.org/publications/making-career-readiness-count



State Transition to High-Quality CCR Assessments Workbook was designed in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers and EducationCounsel and provides states with a tool to inform this transition to high-quality, CCR assessments, with a particular focus on the policy, legal and technical decisions states must address. This workbook (along with state team meetings and other supports) is meant to help each state (1) evaluate its current readiness for this important transition, (2) identify priority issues for state action and (3) develop a workplan to guide assessment transition over time. [2014] www.achieve.org/publications/state-transition-high-quality-ccr-assessments-workbook



Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts is a tool district leaders can use to take stock of their assessments and assessment strategy from a student perspective. [2014] www.achieve.org/publications/student-assessment-inventory-school-districts

Voter Perceptions: Common Core State Standards & Tests shows solid majorities of voters support common standards, common assessments, and allowing teachers and students time to adjust to these new expectations. [2014] www.achieve.org/publications/voter-perceptions-common-core-state-standards-tests

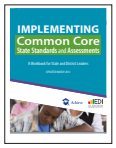
Common Core State Standards Instructional Materials Alignment resources include the **Toolkit for Evaluating Alignment of Instructional and Assessment Materials to the CCSS,** developed in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers and Student Achievement Partners, and **EQuIP (Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products).** The toolkit offers a set of interrelated, freely available instruments for evaluating alignment to the CCSS. EQuIP provides eLearning modules, a student work protocol, and exemplary lessons and units to support the identification and development of high-quality materials aligned to the CCSS. [2013] www.achieve.org/toolkit and www.achieve.org/equip

Common Core State Standards Tool for Legislators is a resource for state legislators to help them understand the CCSS and their role in supporting the implementation of the CCSS and related policies, developed by Achieve, Education First Consulting, the Aspen Institute and the Insight Education Group. [2013] www.achieve.org/publications/common-core-state-standards-tool-legislators

Graduation Requirements for Students with Disabilities: Ensuring Meaningful Diplomas for All Students was developed through a partnership with the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota to provide guidance to state education policy leaders to support the goal of ensuring that students with disabilities leave school with meaningful diplomas. [2013] www.achieve.org/publications/graduation-requirements-students-disabilities-ensuring-meaningful-diplomas-all-students

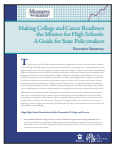
Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Adoption and Implementation Workbook contains guidance, exercises and templates for all states to use as they work through the critical steps for adoption and implementation of the NGSS, developed in a partnership of Achieve and the U.S. Education Delivery Institute. [2013] www.achieve.org/publications/ngss-adoption-and-implementation-workbook

Open Educational Resources (OER) guidance includes **Key Findings from Achieve's OER Institute** that details seven states' efforts to advance OER in their respective states and an **Evaluation Tool Handbook** designed to help educators use and learn more about the Achieve OER rubrics and Evaluation Tool. [2013] www.achieve.org/oer-rubrics and www.achieve.org/files/AchieveOEREvaluationToolHandbookFINAL0.pdf



Implementing Common Core State Standards and Assessments Workbook, developed by Achieve and the U.S. Education Delivery Institute, uses a proven performance management methodology known as "delivery" to lay out clear action steps for states and districts. The workbook provides relevant information, case stories of good practice, key questions and hands-on exercises for leadership teams. [2012] www.achieve.org/ImplementingCommonCore

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 in high school, focusing on college access and success, workplace and career readiness, and personal and U.S. competitiveness. [2008] www.achieve.org/BuildingBlocksofSuccess



Measures that Matter is a joint effort by Achieve and The Education Trust to provide strategic and technical assistance to states in creating CCR assessment and accountability systems. [2008] www.achieve.org/MeasuresthatMatter

Out of Many, One: Toward Rigorous Common Core Standards from the Ground Up presents an analysis of the CCR standards for English in 12 states and mathematics in 16 states. Achieve found that a critical mass of states has arrived at a common core of standards in English and mathematics. [2008] www.achieve.org/outofmanyone

Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts found a convergence in the expectations of business and postsecondary leaders; established the American Diploma Project (ADP) benchmarks; and laid out a rigorous policy agenda, which has since become the agenda of the ADP Network. [2004] www.achieve.org/ReadyorNot

Many additional national and state reports, as well as policy briefs, surveys and white papers that focus on preparing all students for college and careers, are available on the Achieve website: www.achieve.org/publications.

Achieve also has developed Web-based resources to provide information and tools needed to ensure that our schools prepare students for college and careers:

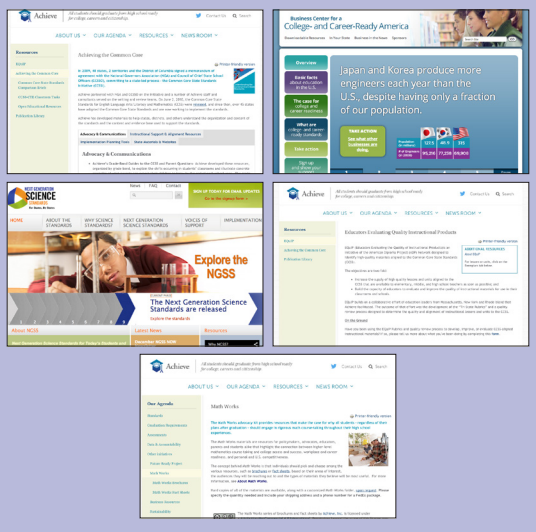
Achieving the Common Core: www.achieve.org/achieving-common-core

Business Center for a College- and Career-Ready America: www.businessandeducation.org

EQuIP: www.achieve.org/equip

Next Generation Science Standards: www.nextgenscience.org

Math Works Advocacy Kit: www.achieve.org/math-works



APPENDIX B: Methodology

ACHIEVE'S NINTH ANNUAL SURVEY OF POLICIES

As in past years, Achieve's 2014 50-state survey of high school policies focused on aligned standards, graduation requirements, assessments, and accountability and data systems. This process included a survey states completed in summer 2014. Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia participated in this year's survey. Throughout the summer and fall, Achieve staff followed up with states by phone or e-mail to discuss their responses — either to clarify an answer or to address state questions. Finally, Achieve sent an individual confirmation form to each state indicating how its information would appear in this report.

Beyond evaluating every policy states reported as already in place or recently adopted, Achieve asked states about their implementation of adopted policies. Achieve also evaluated reported plans, asking questions about where states are in the planning or development process and when they anticipate reaching final adoption. The only plans counted in the report are those that could be verified, i.e., those that are documented and consistent with the minimum criteria for the particular policy area. Achieve applied this approach to all reported accountability indicators and their uses; only verified indicators that met the criteria were included in this report.

It is worth noting that in a small number of cases, responses reported this year differ from those in last year's report as a result of further refinements to Achieve's criteria for analyzing states' new interpretations of the questions. In nearly all cases, however, the differences from last year to this year reflect recent developments in the states.

For more details, see www.achieve.org/files/AccountabilityCriteria.pdf.

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This report would also not have been possible without the hard work, collaboration and important contributions of the following members of the Achieve staff: Marie O'Hara (associate director) led the research, analysis and report writing; Jennifer Taylor (senior policy associate) managed the survey process and data analysis and provided significant writing support; Cory Curl (senior fellow, assessment and accountability) provided critical feedback and writing support; Alissa Peltzman (vice president of state policy and implementation support) served a key role as a thought partner and reviewer; and Sandy Boyd (chief operating officer) provided leadership and guidance in shaping the overall vision of the report.

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Michael Cohen
President
Achieve

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1. Achieve. (2004). *The Expectations Gap: A 50-State Review of High School Graduation Requirements.* www.achieve.org/files/coursetaking.pdf.

2. www.achieve.org/files/pollreport_0.pdf.

3. Roderick, M., Kelley-Kemple, T., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum N.O. (2014). *Preventable Failure: Improvements in Long-Term Outcomes When High Schools Focused on the Ninth Grade Year.* Retrieved from The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research: http://ontrack.uchicago.edu/pdfs/Preventable_Failure_Exec_Summary.pdf.

4. Degree Attainment Index = University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR) High School Graduation Rate x Four-Year College Enrollment Rate x Six-Year College Graduation Rate from Four-Year Colleges.

5. Healey, K., Nagaoka, J., & Michelman, V. (2014). *The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: A Focus on Four-Year College Degrees.* Retrieved from The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research: http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Fast%20Facts%20Brief.pdf.

6. Two additional states, Illinois and New Jersey, plan to require Algebra II/Integrated Math III content and assessment for all students before they graduate.

7. Through the class of 2018, Washington state students must take Algebra II/Integrated Math III unless they opt out. SB 6552 removed the requirement that students take Algebra II/Integrated Math III for the class of 2019 and beyond. Three credits of math are required: Algebra I/Integrated Math I, Geometry/Integrated Math II and a third credit chosen by the student. Once these changes take effect, the state will no longer have a default CCR diploma in place for students.

8. Two additional states, Illinois and New Jersey, plan to require Algebra II/Integrated Math III content and assessment for all students before they graduate.

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10. More information available on the Transcript Evaluation Service website: www.transcriptevaluationservice.com/index.html.

11. http://ocrdata.ed.gov/.

12. www.ode.state.or.us/news/announcements/announcement.aspx?=9668.

13. www.arkansased.org/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-and-instruction/course-approvals.

14. www.rules.utah.gov/publicat/code/r277/r277-700.htm.

15. http://regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title14/500/502.shtml#TopOfPage.

16. Achieve and The Education Trust. (2008). *Measures that Matter: Making College and Career Readiness the Mission of High Schools: A Guide for State Policymakers.* www.achieve.org/files/MakingCollegeandCareerReadinesstheMissionforHighSchool.pdf.

17. Achieve. (2004). *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up? A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams.* www.achieve.org/MeasureUp.

18. In addition to PARCC and Smarter Balanced, which are developing assessments that will include accommodations and supports for many students, four other consortia are developing alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities and English language proficiency assessments. The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium and the National Center and State Collaborative received grants to develop a new generation of alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The assessments are aligned to the CCSS and are expected to fit cohesively with the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessment systems. The English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century Consortium and the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium received grants to develop new assessments of English language proficiency.

19. Additionally, a number of PARCC or Smarter Balanced consortia states are not administering these assessments to students in 2014–15 but may elect to do so in future years.

20. California and Texas do not offer alternate routes.

21. Limitations of the postsecondary remediation indicator, particularly with respect to comparability of remediation across states, include that states have different standards for placement into remedial courses among postsecondary institutions within the state; some state policies allow students to bypass remedial courses if they choose to do so; and some states only permit remediation at two-year institutions.

22. These findings are consistent with the joint Achieve and National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEc) brief, published in May 2014 and available at www.achieve.org/publications/making-career-readiness-count.

23. https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/reportcard/.

24. See more information about the KCEWS reports at http://kentuckyp20.ky.gov/Reports/HSFeedback/HSFeedbackReports.aspx.

25. School reports cards can be accessed at http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/School-Search.aspx.

26. See www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/accountability/basic-summary-f_1.pdf.

27. Lazarín, M. (2014). *Testing Overload in America's Schools.* Center for American Progress. Retrieved from www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2014/10/16/99073/testing-overload-in-americas-schools/.

28. See www.achieve.org/rising-challenge for 2014 data and www.achieve.org/files/pollreport_0.pdf for 2004 data.

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