



Achieve

American Diploma Project Network



Taking Root

*Lessons Learned for Sustaining the
College- and Career-Ready Agenda*



About Achieve

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

About the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network

In 2005, Achieve launched the ADP Network—a collaboration of states working together to improve their academic standards and provide all students with a high school education that meets the needs of today's workplaces and universities. The ADP Network members—responsible for educating nearly 85 percent of all our nation's public high school students—are committed to taking four college and career readiness action steps:

- Align high school standards with the demands of college and careers.
- Require all students to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum to earn a high school diploma.
- Build assessments into the statewide system that measure students' readiness for college and careers.
- Develop reporting and accountability systems that promote college and career readiness for all students.

The world has changed, and high schools must change with it. The ADP Network is leading the charge in ensuring that all high school students graduate with a degree that works.

Taking Root

Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

To help state leaders build strategies for sustaining their education agendas over the long run, Achieve has launched *Taking Root: Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda*, generously funded by the GE Foundation.

Through this project, Achieve conducted research on state education policies that have been sustained successfully to better understand the factors that had the most significant impact. Achieve focused on reforms in Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Texas because these states were able to sustain significant education reforms over at least a decade. The focus of the research is not on the specific policies passed but rather the processes and strategies the states employed to make significant change last with an eye toward how other states might learn from those experiences.

The project includes:

- Four case studies that examine both governmental and non-governmental strategies that were effective in making reform last in Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Texas.
- A paper that draws on and synthesizes the case studies' ten overarching state strategies for sustainability.
- A tool that states can use in their own sustainability planning.

Achieve hopes this work will help state leaders, wherever they may be on their road to reform, replicate successful strategies and accelerate systemic education reform in their own states, particularly around the college- and career-ready agenda. All states, no matter where they are in the college- and career-ready policy agenda, need to consider how they will sustain their efforts over the long haul. Achieve is committed to providing all states with the tools and guidance they need to engage in and successfully consider this critical issue as they move forward. For more information see www.achieve.org/takingroot



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

Introduction

College and career readiness has become a unifying principle for education reform leaders across the country. A majority of states have made it a top policy priority, with an increasing number of national foundations and education reform advocates supporting this work. More recently, the Obama administration has signaled its intent to make readiness a central principle of its education agenda.

While some states have made real progress enacting ambitious policies, such as raising standards and graduation requirements in high school, for these reforms to have real impact they will need to be implemented thoughtfully and sustained over the long term. On the whole, states do not have a great track record in these areas, regardless of the focus of their reforms.

Historically, education reform has been difficult to sustain over time, and the forces working against sustainability in the states are both real and complicated. Education reform—and particularly the college- and career-ready agenda, which involves setting ambitious standards—can be a politically-charged issue and is subject to undergo continued scrutiny during political cycles. Turnover of governors, state education leaders, legislators and other high-level officials is unavoidable and can make sustaining the policies a challenge after leading advocates leave office. These reforms also require a significant, phased-in implementation timeline and then even more time before any measurable impact becomes visible. Economic downturns, changes in federal regulations and impatience over delayed results can all contribute to the sustainability challenge.

At a more fundamental level, the college- and career-ready agenda poses a particular challenge as it seeks to shake up the status quo and build an education system based on high expectations for all students. College- and career-ready policies require a culture change in many states and communities, one that acknowledges that students *will* need to meet higher expectations to be successful in the real world, and that all students *can* meet those standards. In addition, given the cross-sector nature of college- and career-ready policies that often intentionally blur the line between K-12 and post-secondary systems, the agenda requires strong commitment from leaders across—as well as outside—the government.

As an increasing number of states embark on the college- and career-ready agenda, and as states prepare to take advantage of the unprecedented resources offered through the federal stimulus package, including Race to the Top grants, it is vital that they take the long view and put the necessary pieces in place to ensure that the policies can take root and be sustained over time.

In an effort to help state and national leaders in this area, Achieve launched a research project with funding from the GE Foundation to better understand what makes education policies sustainable. We first turned to the research community for answers but found that very little has been done on the issue of sustainability. While we found two studies¹ on sustained education policies—each of which explored different attributes of sustainability or the “keys to durability” in education policy—generally the research base is thin and provides few footholds for state leaders looking for strategies for sustaining the college- and career-ready agenda.

Our next step was to identify states that had successfully sustained ambitious education reforms over at least a decade, and unpack the strategies and conditions that led to their success. The states we focused on—Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Texas—took different approaches to their policies, but each was successful in enacting, implementing and sustaining comprehensive and bold reforms. Despite their different approaches and unique state contexts, a common set of ten sustainability strategies emerged from our analyses that we believe offer valuable insights into what states in the process of adopting and implementing college- and career-ready education reforms need to consider in order to ensure their reforms are built to last.

This paper summarizes the lessons learned from Achieve’s research in the four states and highlights examples and promising strategies from those states and others. Achieve also published separate case studies for each of the four states that go into greater detail on how their reforms were enacted and sustained. All of these materials are available at www.achieve.org/takingroot.

¹ Grissmer, D. & Flanagan, A. (1998). *Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas*. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel; Kirst, M. W. & Meister, G. R. (1985). Turbulence in American Secondary Schools; What Reforms Last? *Curriculum Inquiry*, 15(2), 169-186.

Ten Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

- Strong and consistent political and education leadership
- External champions pushing for change
- A coalition of supporters
- An open and transparent policy process
- Strategic communications and outreach
- Investment in implementation and capacity-building
- Monitoring progress and making mid-course corrections
- Well-integrated policies that promote P-20 alignment
- Highly functional “quasi-governmental” entities
- Data collection and use

Strong and Consistent Political and Education Leadership

Major reform efforts would not be possible without strong, visionary leaders to champion the cause. Strong leaders are necessary to conceptualize reforms, build the political and public support to get them enacted, and help create the longer-term commitment necessary for sustainability. Their ability to convene, motivate and navigate the policy terrain is paramount in launching a comprehensive reform effort, and is equally important in ensuring it is sustained.


Reforms are much more likely to be sustained when political leadership is broad and bipartisan. A group of united leaders with a common vision and common goals will always be stronger than any one individual, particularly when that group includes leaders from different political parties.

Most successful education reforms are led by some combination of governors, state K-12 and higher education commissioners, state board members, and legislators. States need elected and appointed officials with the stature to make change happen and the courage to push ahead, even in the face of system inertia or resistance. These leaders need to have a keen understanding of the policy that undergirds reform and should be trusted by those inside and outside the education field.

Reforms are much more likely to be sustained when political leadership is broad and bipartisan. A group of united leaders with a common vision and common goals will always be stronger than any one individual, particularly when that group includes leaders from different political parties. When leadership is siloed, or resides with only one leader, reforms are often more vulnerable in the long run. Even the most successful education governors can find that their reforms are not sustained by their successors if the policies are too tightly associated with their administration and they failed to establish sufficient bridges to broaden ownership. Sustainable reforms survive political turnover because they do not depend on one individual; after a political leader who championed the reform leaves office, there are other leaders, just as committed to the policies, to carry the reform forward.



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda



The need for broad, cross-sector leadership is particularly important around the college- and career-ready agenda, which, by definition, is relevant to the K-12, higher education and business communities. The states that have been most successful in this work have had visible, committed leaders in all three sectors working as a team.

While the focus is usually on the top leaders in government, ownership and commitment need to extend downward to the people responsible for carrying out the day-to-day work for reforms to be truly sustainable. From Department of Education and legislative staffers to district superintendents, a host of potential champions at the state and local level have roles to play in making sure the reforms are implemented with fidelity and adequately meet the needs of the students. States that have been most successful in sustaining their reforms have cultivated these leaders from the beginning and given them important responsibilities for both shaping and executing the reforms. These individuals become long-term advocates for the reforms and often remain in influential positions after governors or state superintendents are no longer in office.

Broad-Based Leadership in Texas

Throughout the long history of Texas' standards-based reform efforts, there has been a consistency of leadership, but it has been not from any one leader or any one branch of the government. Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Texas is that leadership can, and should, come from a variety of people across the state.

Both political and education leaders—along with members of the business community—have played a major role in shepherding, implementing and protecting the reforms over time. From 1984 to today, governors, lieutenant governors, state legislators and commissioners of education have supported each other in those responsibilities. As a result, many of these leaders also have felt shared ownership over the reforms and their successes.

The best example may be from 1995 when the state Legislature passed SB1, rewriting the Texas Education Code. The final piece of legislation drew from three separate drafts written by the chair of the House Public Education Committee (a Democrat), the chair of the Senate Education Committee (a Republican) and the state commissioner of education (appointed by a Democrat), with buy-in from the state's education and business communities and the full support of the speaker of the house (a Democrat), the lieutenant governor (who was the president of the Senate and a Democrat) and the governor (a Republican). That piece of legislation was potentially the most dramatic education overhaul in Texas' history and continues to be the foundation for the state's education system.

Leadership at All Levels in South Carolina

While there is little question that governors and their key education, policy and political staff are typically the crucial drivers of large-scale reform, South Carolina benefited from a broader and deeper commitment level from many government actors. Specifically, a number of Department of Education staffers and fairly young legislators provided critical leadership during both the adoption and implementation of South Carolina's Education Improvement Act (EIA). This can largely be attributed to the ownership these individuals felt around this reform.

A group of younger legislators volunteered to divvy up the reform act and be trained as "experts" on different sections—not just the formal provisions but also the reasoning and evidence behind them—so they could explain them in detail to their more hesitant colleagues. Working with the governor's office, these champions managed to get fellow members to consider the merits of the substantive proposals separately from funding, finding that once a legislator agreed to the reforms in principle, it was easier to convince him or her of the need to fund it.

The growth of these legislative champions had both short- and long-term benefits. Running up to the EIA's adoption, they could credibly explain why each provision was necessary, the research behind it, how it

was priced out and other relevant facts to opponents. In the longer term, when some aspects of the bill’s implementation became contentious or were misunderstood, these legislators could explain the justification for and mechanics of that component over and over again.

After the reform was passed, the state superintendent of education, Charlie G. Williams, dedicated about 20 of his staff to ensure that the bill was implemented smoothly and successfully, in alignment with his other education priorities. While some of these employees were hired specifically to implement the EIA, others had been key players in getting the bill enacted. Having a handful of non-political appointees remain engaged on the implementation of a bill they had worked hard to get passed helped keep the momentum moving forward and the message and goals consistent. It was these Department of Education staff members who proposed and built support for the creation of regional implementation forums.

Key Questions to Ask About Your State’s Leadership

- *How strong is cross-sector leadership in your state (from sectors such as the governor’s office, K-12 department of education, legislature, higher education system, etc.)? Is it bipartisan?*
- *To what extent has each sector made college and career readiness a top priority?*
- *Is there a well-defined core group of senior staff committed to working on college- and career-ready policies? If yes, have these people been working consistently on the agenda over time? Do they represent a cross-section of government and non-government agencies/organizations?*
- *Has support for the college- and career-ready agenda penetrated mid-level staff at state agencies (i.e. department of education, higher education commission)? Do these staff members feel ownership over the agenda?*

- *Has support for the college- and career-ready agenda penetrated to the district/school level? Do district and school leaders feel ownership over the agenda?*
- *How are your current leaders developing and/or recruiting the next generation of education reform leaders to sustain the college- and career-ready agenda?*
- *Does the state have a transition plan to address maintaining the college- and career-ready agenda in light of any upcoming/expected leadership turnover?*

External Champions Pushing For Change

States with sustained reform efforts can all point to the presence of external advocates as a major condition of their success. Outside advocates can make the case and push for change, apply pressure to policymakers when the effort is stalled, and make sure reforms are implemented despite setbacks or changes in key elected leaders or majority political parties.

A number of external leaders can play a major role in the college- and career-ready agenda including, but not limited to, members of the business, civil rights or philanthropic communities; teachers or principals; and leaders from community-based organizations. Each type of stakeholder likely has his or her own agenda and grassroots network, both of which may help strengthen the structure of and support for systemic reform in the long run. The most effective external champions are those who have influence—be it political, financial or with broad membership—and are willing to use that influence to impact change.

Across the four states Achieve researched and other states throughout the nation, members of the business community are typically the most prevalent, visible and proactive stakeholders in helping to champion and sustain standards-based reforms. The business community

Taking Root

Lessons for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

is a natural ally of college and career readiness policies, since they are best positioned to describe changing workforce demands and what it will take for the state to be economically competitive. In a number of states, it was the business community—the chamber of commerce, business roundtable or a group of CEOs—that got the college- and career-ready movement off the ground and onto the agendas of state political leaders.

Whether it is the business community or other advocates, our research shows that the role of external champions becomes more important as time goes on. Non-elected leaders in a state are a vital ingredient to ensuring the college- and career-ready reforms are not dismantled when political leadership changes or when higher standards begin kicking in and people start feeling the heat. Experience shows that as implementation plays out, the challenges inherent in transforming schools and getting students ready for college and careers become more real to educators, which can then lead to stronger opposition than when the reform was initially passed.

External champions, however, can take the long view and keep pressure on new candidates and elected officials to “stay the course” on ambitious policies when others begin to soften under the pressure that inevitably accompanies a drive for higher standards.

Massachusetts' Business Champions

In Massachusetts, the business community got the ball rolling and kept pushing—for nearly two decades. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) of 1993 would likely not have been conceived, enacted or sustained if not for the state's business community. What the business community brought to the table was pressure for change and the stature to get leaders to pay attention. Most notably, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), the Massachusetts Business Roundtable (MBRT), and Mass Insight Education and Research Institute (Mass Insight) did the work that is critical to the success of any reform effort, including:

- *Creating early interest and establishing urgency:* By tying reform to global competitiveness and the need to keep up with a changing world, MBAE was able to make the case for education reform in Massachusetts.
- *Bringing diverse stakeholders to the table—and serving as a trusted convener—to develop the plan for change:* MBAE purposefully chose to include those who traditionally might align against major reform efforts, such as school boards and teachers' unions, concluding it was better to engage them at the front end than to fight them at the back end. While it did not completely ward off opposition from certain groups once MERA was passed, it did allow for important conversations to occur from the beginning.
- *Spreading the word to constituents:* By traveling the state and talking to community, business and education groups, business leaders were able to make their case for reform and explain the specific components on the table to a broad cross-section of stakeholders. Outreach efforts began during the early 1990s, as the reform plan was being shaped and enacted, and continued throughout the implementation of the law.
- *Keeping the flame alive:* The Massachusetts business community began the reform effort and stuck with it long after the package had passed through the Legislature—refusing to go away, be quiet or quit pushing, even when things got challenging.

Key Questions to Ask About Your State's External Champions

- *Does your state have strong external champions (either organized in a coalition or acting as individuals) who are highly committed to the agenda and highly effective at influencing policy and public opinion? How have they helped ensure passage and implementation of key reforms during and after political turnover?*
- *How, if at all, do state leaders rely on/engage with external champions and coalitions to move and sustain the college- and career-ready agenda in your state?*

- *How strong is the state's business community's commitment to the college- and career-ready agenda?*
- *How strong is the state's education community's commitment to the college- and career-ready agenda?*
- *How do your external champions from different sectors collaborate? Does your state have a mechanism for bringing external leaders together, such as a business-education partnership?*

A Coalition of Supporters

While individual organizations or champions may be influential independently, when diverse groups—such as business and education leaders—collaborate and advocate as one, the effect can be exponential. Regardless of whether these stakeholders join together to form a single coalition, advocate from separate organizations, or form a “coalition of coalitions,” having a broad base of supporters with a common goal and common message is a key element of sustainability.

A coalition of supporters can build and sustain the case for reform by leading or promoting communications and outreach efforts, building partnerships and fostering collaboration among key organizations and actors, influencing policy and implementation, and finding ways to leverage new and existing programs or funds to support the reform efforts. If designed right, these coalitions can also live on well after key politicians leave office, thus becoming the long-term owners and drivers of reform.

It is important to note that no two coalitions will look exactly alike. Some coalitions are incorporated as non-profit organizations, others are loosely affiliated groups of individuals or organizations, and others are offshoots of more formal organizations. Yet the specific organization of the coalition of supporters is not nearly as important as its shared agenda around college and career readiness for all students, clear and consistent voice,

diversity of members, and ability to reach and win over individuals at the state and local levels.

The most successful coalitions have a small but strong group of core drivers who exercise leadership and keep them active and focused. Moving out from the core group, it is important to recruit organizations or individuals who represent key stakeholders; have significant influence with policymakers, educators and the public; and share common goals and visions for education reform. It is then important to reach out to a broader group of stakeholders, even individuals and groups who may be expected to oppose the college- and career-ready reform, to determine if and where there may be common ground.

Too often, coalitions do not attempt to recruit beyond the obvious supporters, leaving potential allies untapped. Some of the most interesting and successful coalitions include unusual bedfellows who bring diverse backgrounds, political viewpoints and grassroots support to the table. In addition, one consequence of not reaching out to certain groups, such as local boards of education or teachers unions, is that they may feel as though they were intentionally left out of the loop. Therefore, they may be more likely to oppose the reforms during passage and implementation.

The specific organization of the coalition of supporters is not nearly as important as its shared agenda around college and career readiness for all students, clear and consistent voice, diversity of members, and ability to reach and win over individuals at the state and local levels.



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

As with any policy change, all coalitions face hardcore “opposition.” Knowing the opposition and its arguments is important to making the case for college and career readiness, but states shouldn’t spend precious time trying to change the mind of outright opponents. It is a better use of time and resources to strengthen and broaden the existing base of support.

Coalition-building and outreach is work that is never done. As we noted with external champions in the previous section, the role of coalitions becomes more important as time goes on. As higher standards and accountability metrics kick in, policymakers will start feeling pressure to slow down or roll back the reforms. Coalition leaders need to continually engage new stakeholders and, at times, re-sell the reform to already engaged or previously engaged stakeholders. With competing priorities—in education and other policy areas—it is imperative that coalitions have ongoing outreach and communications strategies to maintain the level of public support necessary to sustain reform.

The Tennessee Diploma Project

In 2007, a consortium of government, business and education leaders from across the state—including the governor, the K-12 and higher education commissioners, and key business executives—launched the Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP) to build public and stakeholder support for raising education standards and curriculum to the college- and career-ready level.

The first major action undertaken by the TDP was a series of regional roundtables—hosted by the governor and supported by the Tennessee Business Roundtable and Hyde Family Foundation—during which state CEO’s and business leaders were asked for their observations on the state’s current high school graduates’ skills and knowledge. Overwhelmingly, these business leaders called for stronger math and science skills, stronger communications skills, and a greater ability of graduates to work in teams and think critically, giving the agenda a sense of urgency.

In 2008, the TDP achieved its first success as the State Board of Education adopted standards and graduation requirements aligned with the expectations of the post-secondary and business communities. Despite the early success, the TDP has not relented in its advocacy and outreach, in particular to educators and employers. The TDP continues to have the support of the Tennessee Business Roundtable, the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce, the Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) and the philanthropic community.

A core group of Tennessee’s most powerful and influential private-sector and philanthropic leaders will be launching a third-party education reform organization, the Public School Forum, aimed at sustaining the Tennessee Diploma Project and positioning the college- and career-ready agenda as the fundamental driving force for education reform in Tennessee. The organization will build its agenda around three critical issue areas: higher standards for teaching and learning, teacher quality, and accurate and useful assessments.

Key Questions to Ask About Your State Coalition(s)

- *Does your state have a clearly identified coalition (be it a non-profit organization, an offshoot of a more formal organization or a more loosely affiliated group of individuals or organizations) that is a key champion for the passage and implementation of the college- and career-ready agenda?*
- *Does your coalition(s) have broad membership, including representation from the business community, political and education leadership, higher education, local educators, community-based organizations, and the philanthropic community?*
- *Is your state’s coalition institutionalized and sustainable? Does it have a formal mission, charter and governance structure? A secure funding stream?*
- *Is there a recognized leader(s) of the coalition with some level of authority to ensure visibility and consistent efforts?*

An Open and Transparent Policy Process

To adopt and sustain a college- and career-ready agenda that is supported widely across the state, state leaders must be careful to communicate early and often about the proposed changes and the process through which those changes will be implemented. State leaders, particularly political leaders, need to be open and clear about the reform's goals and why college and career readiness for all students is a priority for the state. They also need to reach out to key constituencies and engage them in dialogue about how to best structure the reforms. It is essential that teachers, administrators, local school boards, parents and students do not view the reform agenda as something being done to them but rather for them and with their input.

This is in part about a communications strategy, described in the next section, but it is also about a more transparent policy development process. The policy-making process should not be viewed as something that is occurring behind closed doors, but rather as an open process with opportunity for real input. As information moves faster and to more people than ever before, there is little to gain in trying to shield the process from the education community or the broader public. In fact, there is much to lose in terms of their support and confidence. Transparency alone won't lead to successful college- and career-ready reforms, but it is part and parcel of any policy change that lasts.

The benefits of engaging education stakeholders and community members throughout the reform process—and even the reform planning process—considerably outweigh any of the costs (such as a slower process or the fiscal cost of outreach). By communicating with key stakeholders at the earliest stages of reform, through such strategies as open meetings, forums, roundtables, focus groups and surveys, leaders can craft college- and career-ready policies that best meet the needs of

It is essential that teachers, administrators, local school boards, parents and students do not view the reform agenda as something being done to them but rather for them and with their input.

the state; find advocates to rally the cause in their communities; identify other local and state leaders who may be able to provide important services or guidance as the reform efforts move forward; and better understand, and therefore be more prepared to address, roadblocks to progress. In many cases, just having a dialogue with community members can go a long way toward gaining their support.

This is not a one-time effort, however. At key transition points in the college- and career-ready reform's implementation, states should communicate with the public about the impending changes and provide new opportunities for public comment and discussion. If there is dissension in the field or at the local level, it is better for state leaders and their supporters to address it head on.

South Carolina's Regional Forums

Very early on, then-Governor Richard Riley and his supporters committed to a grassroots strategy to develop support for and buy-in around the Education Improvement Act (EIA). They wanted to ensure the proposal had wide stakeholder agreement and quickly realized that the most effective way to sway legislators was to have constituents support it. By engaging early, and often, through forums, site visits and a wide-scale public service announcement campaign, South Carolina was able to build support from the ground up, among parents and local education leaders, and get the state on board with the idea of sweeping education reform.



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

Over the course of two months in 1983, the state held seven regional forums with two overarching strategies to garner support and shared ownership: (1) provide a data-driven and well-grounded rationale for the recommended plan and (2) offer community members the opportunity to voice their own priorities and concerns about the reform agenda. The forums featured presentations by top leaders, including Gov. Riley and key local education and business leaders, which were followed by small-group discussions led by specially trained facilitators. Each forum generated a report on its community's priorities, which were shared with all of the forum participants and the state committees.

About 13,000 people participated directly in the evening forums and approximately 40,000 people total participated in activities related to the “forum days” in some way. Many of the volunteers from the education and civic groups who helped mount the forums were left with a deeper investment in the reform effort because of their effort to make it a success. According to a survey released in 1988, 52 percent of South Carolina citizens were familiar with the EIA compared to just 25 percent of citizens from six other southeastern states, each of which had also enacted a highly visible reform package in the mid-1980s.

Two years after the EIA was passed, the Department of Education launched a second round of regional forums, focused on implementation, providing an opportunity for the state to explain the lack of results in the short term, maintain local engagement and garner explicit feedback from those on the ground.

Key Questions to Ask to Ensure an Open Policy Process

- *Has your state provided key stakeholders with an opportunity to learn about, vet and provide input before and during the policy development process?*
- *Does your state engage in open communication about progress being made on the reforms and on the impending policy changes?*

- *Were there efforts to build on-the-ground consensus for the college- and career-ready agenda with educators, school administrators, parents, students and local leaders?*

Strategic Communications and Outreach

Strategic communications and outreach are critical throughout every step of the policy process and are essential components of any sustainable reform effort. Without ongoing, strategic communications, states will often feel like they are always playing defense.

One of the most frequent mistakes states make with their communications efforts is to limit their time horizon to obtaining passage of the reforms. Building support to ensure adoption of policies is important, but more important is keeping the goals, the rationale and the progress of the reforms high on the radars of the public, educators and opinion leaders so that support remains strong when the going gets tough.

The first step a state can take towards building a communications strategy is to develop a communications and outreach plan, focused on the college- and career-ready agenda. Leaders should take the time up front to identify their key goals, key audiences, key messages and the channels through which the state will reach those audiences with those messages. For example, if a state believes students should be one of their target audiences, the state may craft messages around the personal benefits of taking more challenging courses and graduating ready for college and careers, and may rely more heavily on new media, such as Facebook and viral videos, as a vehicle to deliver those messages.

It is important to note that a strong communications effort is not dependent on a big budget or the ability to buy media; many communications and outreach strategies are low to no cost. More important to the effort is leadership, organization, outreach to key players and consistency of message.

In many ways, the college- and career-ready agenda's success requires a shift in public attitudes and perceptions about what students can and should be able to learn and do in high school. The only true way to sway public attitudes is by keeping lines of communications open, engaging the public in the process, and using powerful and consistent messages to help them understand what opportunities the college- and career-ready agenda can afford them and their children. If a state can build a culture of college and career readiness, the college- and career-ready agenda will effectively sustain itself.

Hawaii's College- and Career-Ready Communications Strategy

In 2008, Hawaii adopted a more rigorous, optional college- and career-ready diploma—the Board of Education's Recognition Diploma, recently re-branded as the Step Up Diploma. Hawaii has focused and coordinated its communications and outreach efforts to ensure more students enroll in and complete this curriculum.

Hawaii's strategy began with a research-based communications and outreach plan for how to best engage students around this new diploma. In crafting its messages and strategies, Hawaii continually evaluated what messages—and what messengers—would best resonate with high school students. The state also evaluated how existing projects could bolster these efforts.

In 2009, the P-20 Partnerships launched Step Up, a “multiyear community awareness and action campaign” tied directly to the new Step Up Diploma. The new campaign includes videos targeted at students and community members featuring students making the case for rigorous high school preparation through data and clever parodies. Step Up also has a companion program, Project Step Up, which asks middle and high school students to commit to the new diploma.

Critically, the Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education coordinates the state's communications efforts, including both Step Up and Hawaii's Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). GEAR UP is a statewide campaign that provides crucial information about college preparation, access and financial aid and offers a number of programs and services, such as preparation for college placement tests; a college awareness month; and the GEAR UP Scholar program, which encourages middle school students to take a rigorous curriculum in high school. Having these activities coordinated by the P-20 Partnerships allows for a consistent message and broader reach across the state, as well as a dedicated funding stream for the state's college- and career-ready communications strategy, as GEAR UP is partially funded through a federal grant.

Key Questions to Ask About Communications and Outreach in Your State:

- *Does your state have a communications plan? Who developed it? Who is responsible for implementing it?*
- *Can you identify your state's 3-5 key messages around college and career readiness? Are they used consistently by state leaders across sectors? Is there a public perception that the college- and career-ready agenda is a shared agenda by state leaders?*
- *Is there a process in place for keeping opinion leaders and other key stakeholders (such as district leaders) informed about the college- and career-ready agenda?*
- *Does your state publicly report student-level data on indicators of college and career readiness as part of its advocacy and communications efforts?*
- *How will your state continue to communicate with key stakeholders during implementation to maintain support?*





Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

Investment in Implementation and Capacity-Building

Any major reform effort will require some investment or redistribution of resources to build capacity; facilitate implementation; and provide students, teachers and schools with the necessary supports they need to be prepared for the new reform requirements.

The college- and career-ready agenda presents states with a particular set of implementation challenges in a familiar set of areas: teacher effectiveness, curriculum design, instructional materials, student supports and interventions, etc. Planning for these implementation challenges should begin during the policy development process, and resources should be allocated when the policy is passed to ensure the policy goals can be met. Poor implementation, either because resources weren't allocated or because thoughtful plans weren't laid, is the surest way to kill a major reform effort.

The ultimate goal of college- and career-ready policies is to get more students through a rigorous curriculum in high school so they graduate well prepared for college and careers. Given that goal, states will need to work through a range of implementation issues such as:

- How to ensure an adequate number of teachers are available to teach more rigorous courses in high school and how to make sure all schools and students have access to those highly-qualified teachers;
- What additional training teachers will need to effectively teach rigorous courses to new and larger groups of students;

- How to make sure all schools have access to high-quality curricula aligned to the state standards, with a particular eye toward curricula that present rigorous content in more relevant, applied ways;
- How to build early warning indicators into the state longitudinal data system to target dropout prevention and remediation and recovery programs to the students who are off-track from graduating ready for college and careers;
- How to provide extra time and support to students who need it in order to succeed; and
- How to structure differentiated supports and interventions for high schools, if college- and career-ready graduation is the goal for which they are being held accountable.

When it comes to funding major reforms, some states have been able to invest new money, often through a “grand bargain,” based on the theory that if the state is going to require higher expectations, it must provide the appropriate resources and support for schools and students to meet those expectations. Massachusetts, Texas and South Carolina all did this as they embarked on major new reforms.

However, not all states that have been successful have allocated a lot of new money to implement their reforms. Indiana implemented its college- and career-ready policies with limited investments of new money. States that have significant budget constraints will want to explore other avenues, such as re-allocating funding from ineffective or unnecessary programs or looking to partnerships—with community-based groups, philanthropic

Poor implementation, either because resources weren't allocated or because thoughtful plans weren't laid, is the surest way to kill a major reform effort.

foundations or other service providers—to help supplement state budgets and services. All states should also take advantage of the federal stimulus resources over the next one to two years to support the implementation of their college- and career-ready policies.

Massachusetts' Grand Bargain

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) established a broad range of new policies, including statewide academic standards; assessments based on the standards; accountability systems for students, schools and districts; management flexibility for superintendents; new educator certification and training rules, including teacher testing; and charter schools. In order to ensure all of these policies would be implemented effectively—and to right a wrong in the state's education funding system that led to low-wealth school districts having less money than wealthier districts—MERA also injected nearly \$2 billion of additional funds into public education over the course of a decade.

Specifically, a new “foundation” funding formula was enacted in statute, which distributed as much as \$350 million in new dollars to poorer districts each year. An act of the Legislature is required to override the formula. In addition, as much as \$100 million in targeted support for Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) remediation was allocated over a five-year period. These dollars helped school systems provide interventions such as double doses of literacy and math, before- and after-school academic support, teacher-led extra academic support, and online tutoring for students not meeting the standards.

All in all, this “grand bargain”—reform with resources—enabled significant changes in the Commonwealth's school systems. Today, Massachusetts is one of the few states in the country that spends more on students in poor districts than students in wealthy ones. It is also one of the highest achieving states on both national and international assessments.

Indiana's Careful Budgeting

Although Massachusetts, Texas and South Carolina all provided new funding streams while upping their expectations for their education systems, Indiana did not explicitly tie a new major pot of money, at least not at the onset, to the Core 40 reforms. The General Assembly did provide some funding to support the Education Roundtable and to assist in the implementation of the then-voluntary Core 40 curriculum throughout the 1990s to ensure all students had access to the curriculum and an adequate supply of teachers, but nothing like the \$2 billion spent by Massachusetts or the \$200 million raised by the penny tax in South Carolina at the onset of its reform.

In addition to the modest increase in the general assembly's education funding the state also shifted resources to support the Core 40—as well as the teachers and students facing the new curriculum—and looked for partners to share costs. For example, the state re-focused some of its existing professional development into more targeted support for teachers shifting into Core 40 courses and developed a set of classroom and instructional materials that better clarify the state's academic standards and expectations. Indiana also tied financial aid to completion of the curriculum (requiring no new expenditure of Core 40 funds) and provided financial incentives to schools for every student who earns the Core 40 with Academic Honors diploma, by re-working the school funding formula. In addition, in one early grant project—focusing on the role of guidance counselors in the Core 40's implementation—Indiana relied on the Lilly Endowment, an Indiana-based philanthropic foundation, to fund summer institutes for counselors.

This mix-and-match approach of carefully targeted state and private resources allowed Indiana to implement a range of interlocking reform policies without a massive infusion of new state money. It has proven to be successful, as more students each year complete the Core 40 curriculum and enroll in college.



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

Key Questions to Ask About Implementation and Capacity-Building

- *Does your state have an implementation strategy for the college- and career-ready policies?*
- *What agencies, departments, offices and individuals will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the reform, and what needs to be put in place to empower them to lead the implementation?*
- *Are your state's budget priorities consistent with its policy priorities? How does the state plan to pay for implementing and sustaining the reform—through new funds, the re-allocation of existing funds, grants, partnerships, or a combination thereof?*
- *As part of its implementation strategy, has your state evaluated whether it will need new high-quality teachers to teach college- and career-ready courses (and, if so, how many and in what subjects) or whether existing teachers can be re-allocated from lower-level courses and/or other schools?*
- *As part its implementation strategy, has your state invested in relevant supports and necessary capacity aligned with the reform (e.g. curricula, classroom resources, professional development, remediation and recovery programs, dropout prevention, etc.)?*
- *Does your reform require a phase-in (and, if so, over what time period)? What sort of support for students and educators is being provided during the phase-in?*

Monitoring Progress and Making Mid-Course Corrections

New reforms often need to be sufficient in scope to kindle interest and challenge the status quo, but they should not be so rigid that they cannot evolve as circumstances do. Successful states have built on their reforms incrementally over time and made mid-course

corrections at key points so that the reforms can evolve and be sustained over time.

It's not always easy to balance the need to stay the course and the need for mid-course adjustments. There are some goals and some policies that states will want to consider non-negotiable because they are the backbone of the reform. It is important to hold firm on those elements while being flexible in other areas that allow the reforms to evolve and take root over time.

In addition, reforms aiming at significant, system-wide change typically prove to be very difficult to implement all at once. States should take into consideration whether the college- and career-ready reforms should be adopted incrementally; determine whether they require a phase-in (and, if so, over what time period); identify what needs to be put in place beforehand (such as research and development, professional development, new data systems, etc.); and create milestones to monitor progress on the implementation and impact of the reform agenda. A “steady as it goes” approach—building up and building on reforms incrementally over time—provides stakeholders with an opportunity to adjust to the new college- and career-ready reforms gradually. The more states can build up and build on these reforms, the more sustainable those reforms may become.

In order to be positioned for success, it is critical that states carefully monitor their reforms to ensure they are having their intended impact without unintended consequences. By regularly taking stock of progress and having an ongoing dialogue with district leaders and educators in the field, states will be better positioned to re-allocate resources to address the most substantial needs, respond to legitimate concerns that could threaten the success of the reform and make changes in the policies as needed to keep the reforms on track.

Successful states have approached this task in different ways. Some created legislative oversight committees that monitor progress, others established agencies within or outside state departments of education, and others gave the responsibility to quasi-governmental organizations (see section below). In addition to allowing

leaders to keep their fingers on the pulse of the reforms and make necessary adjustments, creating these monitoring processes and making the information public provides an additional level of transparency, credibility and accountability to the reform process that will become critical to sustainability.

Massachusetts' Compromises

When the first results from the then-new, high-stakes standards-based assessment required by the MERA—the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)—were posted in 1998, they were disappointing. Opponents took this opportunity to stress that a high-stakes test was unfair, especially to students in low-wealth districts, when so few students were passing it. This opposition may have been successful were it not for strong leaders throughout the state and their willingness to make compromises that did not undermine the reform.

The Board of Education made thoughtful, reasonable policy choices around the use of the test for graduation. Compromises were struck that ensured the reforms would keep moving forward: Students were required to pass tests in English and math, while the science and history requirements were delayed. The original passing score was set at the “needs improvement” level, rather than the “proficiency” level and the state put in place focused retakes and a thoughtful appeals process for students who had difficulty with the pencil-and-paper test.

While adjustments were made to respond to legitimate challenges, state leaders, including the commissioner of education, the chair of the State Board of Education and the governor, did not back down under the intense pressure that was applied to delay the testing requirement or do away with it altogether. Urban superintendents also stood by the reform. And their tenacity paid off: Student achievement on the MCAS has improved greatly and Massachusetts' students consistently are among top scorers on national and international assessments.

Texas' Incremental Reforms

Over the course of twenty-five years, Texas passed a number of interrelated standards-based reforms that continually, but incrementally, raised the bar for students, schools and the system as a whole. Each reform built on the last and tried to improve the balance between state and local control and between finance and accountability. This steady process has been key to the reforms' sustainability; the progression of policies and philosophies on accountability was deliberate and, by and large, reasonable.

For example, since 1979, Texas has required four different assessments (not including the new end-of-course assessments set to come online in 2011-12). As each new test came online, each with greater alignment to the curriculum and measuring more rigorous content, the proficiency standard for school accountability was readjusted and then raised incrementally each year. The goal was to keep it one step above where the system—or average school or district—was.

By regularly taking stock of progress and having an ongoing dialogue with district leaders and educators in the field, states will be better positioned to re-allocate resources to address the most substantial needs, respond to legitimate concerns that could threaten the success of the reform and make changes in the policies as needed to keep the reforms on track.



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

The state consciously made the decision to do it in “baby steps,” especially once a new accountability system came online in 1993, which upped the stakes for districts, schools and students. Leaders knew that getting too far ahead of students and schools could lead to a revolt and threaten the reforms’ sustainability in the long run. Equally important was that this strategy was articulated broadly and often so no one ever felt blindsided by the new requirements. One result: Texas experienced a steady improvement in achievement across all student groups over this time.

Key Questions to Ask About Monitoring and Mid-Course Corrections

- *Does your state have an oversight mechanism—be it governmental, quasi-governmental or independent—to monitor the implementation of the reform and provide recommendations on ways in which the reform’s implementation could be improved upon?*
- *Has your state identified interim benchmarks to ensure the policies are being implemented efficiently (e.g. reaching its intended targets)?*
- *Is your state positioned to make necessary mid-course corrections along the way? Has your state identified what elements of your reform are fundamental and therefore “non-negotiable?”*

Well-Integrated Policies That Promote P-20 Alignment

Reforms are strongest when they are aligned with other reforms and thus become part of a larger whole. Piecemeal efforts are relatively easier to “pick off” and roll back than reforms that have hooks and tentacles across a state’s policy landscape. And more important, policies are more effective when they are connected coherently to others and are well integrated within the state’s policy environment. Policy coherence is achieved by promoting mutually reinforcing policy actions across agencies, departments and systems in alignment toward a common goal.

To achieve true policy integration, state leaders should have a good understanding of the current scope of education policy and reform in their states and how the new college- and career-ready reforms fit into that landscape. All too frequently education reforms are siloed by level of education (e.g. early education, elementary, secondary, higher education, etc.) or by the student populations they aim to serve, often to the detriment of the state’s full P-20 education pipeline.

This is especially relevant to the college- and career-ready agenda, which seeks to strengthen the alignment of K-12 and postsecondary systems. As such, it is particularly important that K-12 and higher education policies are aligned and mutually reinforcing to ensure smooth transitions for students and the sustainability of the agenda. For example, states could:

- Align their high school assessment and graduation requirement policies with their state higher education’s admissions, placement and financial aid policies.
- Align their college- and career-ready academic standards with their professional development standards.
- Develop a coherent dual enrollment policy that streamlines funding and transfer of credit for students.
- Align their dropout prevention programs with the college- and career-ready reforms.
- Develop programs to improve the middle to high school transition, such as bridge programs, that are anchored in college- and career-ready expectations.

The more policies fit together in a coherent fashion—with all sectors signaling the same expectations—the easier it is to communicate policy changes with students, parents and the public at large, and the more durable the reforms will become.

More broadly, after any major reform has been passed, as new policies come online, there should be a concerted effort to make sure they are aligned—or, at a minimum, not in conflict with—the reform. For example, if a state puts a new set of graduation course requirements in place, any subsequent changes to the high

school assessment system should be planned with an eye toward their relationship to the graduation requirements. Or if a state is planning a new low-performing schools initiative or policy, leaders should consider how college and career readiness will be factored in when determining which schools are meeting their targets and which need extra help.

Key Questions to Ask to Ensure Policy Integration

- *Did your state conduct a review of existing policies to determine how the new reform would impact, overlap or conflict with them? Has it given clear direction on how all policies fit together and on the state’s goals?*
- *How have college- and career-ready policies intentionally been “linked” with other K-12, higher education or workforce policies, initiatives or incentives?*
- *When other state education reforms are introduced, are efforts taken to determine how they may align with or reinforce the college- and career-ready policies? Are similar efforts taken to leverage federal reforms and resources?*

Highly Functional “Quasi-Governmental” Entities

One of the most significant challenges in sustaining reforms is ensuring that they have broad enough ownership so that they can continue to thrive when key leaders leave office. Some of the strategies described earlier speak to the importance of cultivating a broad array of government and non-government leaders to serve as champions of the reforms. Some of the most successful states have created quasi-governmental (public-private) organizations made up of key cross-sector leaders and have given those organizations overarching responsibilities for monitoring and guiding the implementation of the reforms. This can be a very effective way to broaden

ownership and hold the state and other key actors accountable for results.

The most successful and highly functional quasi-governmental entities are typically those that are institutionalized or recognized officially by law or executive order, have real decisionmaking authority, and have broad political support to enable them to survive gubernatorial turnover. Successful quasi-governmental entities also typically include both natural allies and unexpected supporters, as well as stakeholders from both inside and outside of the government, to facilitate open debate and help competing interests find common ground.

P-20 councils are an example of quasi-governmental organizations that many states already have in place that could serve this role with college- and career-ready policies. The advantage of these groups is they include leaders from K-12, higher education and workforce development, each of which is very important for the college- and career-ready agenda. The challenge with P-20 councils is that few of them have the necessary authority to make policy design or implementation decisions; instead they provide a forum for conversations and sometimes may simply make policy recommendations for others to act on.

The more policies fit together in a coherent fashion—with all sectors signaling the same expectations—the easier it is to communicate policy changes with students, parents and the public at large, and the more durable the reforms will become.



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

Indiana's Education Roundtable

In the mid-1990s, informal conversations about Indiana's education system began between leaders of key constituencies, including business, K-12 and postsecondary leaders. These informal, yet facilitated discussions, began to chip away at a long-standing stalemate between business and educators (especially the state teachers' union), who had a history of squaring off repeatedly on opposite sides of any issue. These discussions were endorsed by Governor Frank O'Bannon in 1998 when he created the Indiana Education Roundtable, which included leaders from K-12, the business community, higher education, the Legislature and the community.

When the General Assembly formalized the Roundtable in state law in 1999, it charged the entity with important rule-making responsibilities, including the development of a P-16 plan and the adoption of new "world class" K-12 standards. From its inception, the Roundtable was both impressive in its membership and bipartisan in its work, with Governor O'Bannon (D) and State Superintendent Suellen Reed (R) acting as co-chairs.

In 2004, the Roundtable came together in support of making Core 40—then a voluntary college- and career-ready curriculum—the requirement for all of Indiana's high school students. The Roundtable offered their plan—to make Core 40 both the default requirement for high school graduation (with an "escape clause" to allow families and students to knowingly opt out of the curriculum) and the minimum admissions requirement for Indiana's four-year higher education institutions – to the Legislature.

Although the vote in the legislature wasn't a slam dunk, by all accounts the Roundtable's endorsement and its public deliberations to reach its recommendation paved the way and dampened opposition; in 2005, Core 40 was adopted as the default high school curriculum for all students and as the minimum admissions requirement for Indiana four-year institutions, both effective beginning with the class of 2011. As one Roundtable

member observed, "When there are disparate voices telling them what to do, legislators can make excuses not to act. When the Roundtable spoke with one voice, the Legislature had no other way to go."

More than ten years (and two new governors and a state superintendent of education) later, the Education Roundtable continues to meet regularly and play a role in the state's education reform. In March 2009, for example, the Roundtable passed a resolution recommending that the State Board of Education adopt the latest version of the state's academic standards in mathematics, certifying the quality and external validity of the standards.

South Carolina's Institutionalized Entities

South Carolina's Education Improvement Act (EIA) was remarkable in a number of ways, but it was particularly innovative in that it institutionalized a number of governmental and public-private entities to monitor and provide feedback on the implementation and evolution of the law.

For one, the EIA institutionalized a version of the blue-ribbon committees first formed by Governor Riley to conceptualize an education reform package. The stand-alone, independent Business-Education Partnership and Committee on Financing Excellence were required under law to convene at least once annually to review the implementation of the act and recommend improvements. In 1989, these quasi-governmental, public-private committees were reconstituted as the Business-Education Partnership for Excellence in Education and its standing Business-Education Subcommittee. The Business-Education Subcommittee, in particular, played a significant role in reviewing state plans and progress reports to ensure any new or existing programs were being implemented efficiently and effectively.

The bill also created a Select Committee—a legislatively formed, yet independent entity that included political, business, education and civic leaders—tasked with reviewing and monitoring the implementation and evaluation of the EIA programs and funding. The Select

Committee was composed of state leaders or their designees, including the speaker of the house, chairmen of the house and senate education committees, state superintendent of education, chairman of the commission on higher education and others. The Select Committee was largely responsible for issuing annual reports to the General Assembly, State Board of Education and public on the progress of the programs and their impacts and making recommendations about necessary funding or programmatic changes.

In 1998, when the Education Accountability Act was passed, the Select Committee was replaced with the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) and re-tasked to focus on overseeing the provisions of the new law, although the EOC still has a subcommittee dedicated to the EIA and improvement mechanisms.

Finally, the law established a new Division for Public Accountability “for the planning and development of the implementation of the Education Improvement Act,” which was housed in the Department of Education, but maintained a level of autonomy. This decision was made to ensure the Division was neither adversarial to the Department nor absorbed into it, could access the necessary data, and didn’t lose credibility with outside stakeholders. This “special unit” was mandated to exist only until 1991 to plan, monitor, and review programs developed under the EIA and provide information, recommendations, and an annual assessment of the Act to the governor, Select Committee, and Business-Education Subcommittee.

Between 1984 when the EIA first passed and the mid-1990s while the Division for Public Accountability, Business-Education Partnership and Business-Education Subcommittee were all still in existence, the combined presence, authority and visibility of these entities made it very difficult for anyone to undermine the EIA.

Key Questions to Ask About Quasi-Governmental Mechanisms

- *Does your state have a quasi-governmental entity? If so, is it “highly functional,” i.e. has some level of decisionmaking authority, is institutionalized officially and/or has survived gubernatorial turnover?*
- *Does your state’s quasi-governmental entity provide a forum for key stakeholders to plan for, implement and support the college- and career-ready reform agenda?*
- *If your state doesn’t have a quasi-governmental entity, are there plans to create one to support the college- and career-ready agenda?*

Data Collection and Use

It is critical that states develop a P-20 longitudinal data system that regularly matches student-level data across the K-12 and postsecondary systems to monitor student progress and transitions. Just as postsecondary institutions require detailed information about the academic preparation of applicants and incoming students, it is also important for high schools and teachers to know the extent of their graduates’ postsecondary success to better prepare future cohorts of students. States need to collect a broad array of college- and career-ready indicators—including student course-taking and achievement data, an accurate graduation measure, postsecondary remediation and persistence rates, and college- and career-ready assessment data—to have a robust data system capable of evaluating student transitions out of high school and into college and careers.

The use of data can be a powerful tool in building, maintaining and sustaining support for the college- and career-ready reforms over time, clearly illuminating weaknesses or failures of the existing education system. States can use student-level achievement, access and attainment data to justify and rally people around the



Taking Root: Lessons Learned for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda

college- and career-ready agenda. Disaggregated data that demonstrate equity gaps between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers are particularly compelling in making the case for change. Economic and workforce data can also be powerful when explaining the need for graduating all students ready for college and careers. States, for example, may evaluate the outlook for future jobs and whether their education system has been producing enough qualified workers to meet the areas of growing demand.

After college- and career-ready policies have been implemented, collecting and sharing data remains a critical component of maintaining support. Often the first round of data collected after a new reform is instituted is discouraging (i.e. the first administration of a new exam may yield low achievement levels across the board), but can be very effective at demonstrating why the new reforms were so necessary in the first place and help spur more action. Even if the data are not positive, it is critical to share as much data as often as possible to demonstrate the continued need and maintain a transparent and open process.

Most importantly, only data can let states know accurately whether the reforms are having their intended impact. Plus, many state longitudinal data systems include financial data, allowing policymakers to evaluate which programs or policies are the most efficient or the most wasteful and then make adjustments as necessary.

Access to student-level achievement data gives teachers the information they need to tailor instruction for students and gives administrators important information to manage their resources and staff effectively. States need to develop technical training so that any and all relevant stakeholders can access the data and use them in meaningful ways.

Key Questions to Ask About Data Collection and Use

- *Does your state have a functioning P-20 longitudinal data system; i.e., does your state currently match student-level records from a K-12 longitudinal data system with student records in the postsecondary data system(s) at least once annually?*

- *Does your state collect and report student-level data, including course-taking, achievement and attainment data? Does it use the data to support your advocacy and communications efforts? To monitor the implementation and impact of the college- and career-ready reforms?*
- *Has your state developed the technical capacity and provided the necessary training for school-level personnel to access and use student-level data in the classroom?*
- *Is your state using relevant workforce (e.g. workforce growth projections) and postsecondary (e.g. remediation rates in two- and four-year institutions) data to inform policy, advocacy and communications efforts?*

Conclusion

For any education reform to take root and produce results, it needs to be implemented thoughtfully and sustained over time. This is especially true of policies designed to ensure that all students graduate ready for college and careers. Unfortunately, implementation and sustainability planning is not typically high on the list for policymakers and education leaders when designing ambitious reforms.

While conventional wisdom suggests that education reform is notoriously difficult to sustain in the long run, *Taking Root: Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda* demonstrates that sustainability is not only possible, but also attainable. Achieve's research in Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Texas shows that there are a core set of elements that distinguish sustainable reforms from those that do not take root. With the proper attention to these issues, we believe all states—those that are just embarking on college- and career-ready reforms and those that have already put ambitious policies in place—can dramatically increase their chances of success.

Acknowledgements

Achieve would like to thank the individuals and organizations who contributed to Taking Root: Strategies for Sustaining the College- and Career-Ready Agenda.

Achieve would first like to thank the GE Foundation for the generous funding they provided for this project and for all of their support over the past four years.

In addition, this report would not have been possible without the cooperation and assistance of individuals across the four states studied (Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Texas) who agreed to be interviewed and provided valuable feedback for this project. For a full list of interviewees, see the individual state case studies.

Achieve would like to thank the members of its staff for their hard work on this report: Kate Blosveren, senior policy analyst, who served as the project director for Taking Root; Matt Gandal, executive vice president, who provided the overall leadership for the project; Sandy Boyd, vice president, strategic communications and outreach, who served as the project's senior advisor and editor; and Alissa Peltzman, associate director, state leadership and policy development, and Stephanie Porowski, research assistant, who provided additional support.

Achieve also would like to thank Jennifer Vranek, Bill Porter and the team at Education First Consulting, and Craig Jerald of Break the Curve Consulting, for their invaluable policy and research expertise.

Finally, Achieve would like to thank Gregg Burrage, Suzanne Benoit, Marjorie Tucker-Pfeiffer and the team at Rings Leighton Design Group for their editorial and design contributions.

Michael Cohen
President
Achieve

Achieve Board of Directors

Co-Chairs

Governor Tim Pawlenty
State of Minnesota

Craig R. Barrett
Chairman of the Board
Intel Corporation

Board Members

Governor Jennifer Granholm
State of Michigan

Edward B. Rust, Jr.
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer
State Farm Insurance

Governor Donald L. Carcieri
State of Rhode Island

Mark B. Grier
Vice Chairman
Prudential Financial, Inc.

Governor Phil Bredesen
State of Tennessee

Jeffrey Wadsworth
President & Chief Executive Officer
Battelle

Governor Dave Heineman
State of Nebraska

Governor Deval Patrick
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Chair Emeritus

Louis Gerstner, Jr.
Former Chairman
& Chief Executive Officer
IBM Corporation

President

Michael Cohen

Treasurer

Peter Sayre
Controller
Prudential Financial, Inc.

Achieve, Inc.

1775 Eye Street NW, Suite 410 • Washington, DC 20006

P 202.419.1540 • F 202.828.0911 • www.achieve.org