

## Rigorous K–12 Assessments Help Reduce Remediation, Increase Student Success

*This spring, 11th grade students in many states are taking new assessments designed to measure college-ready skills in mathematics and English. As more states implement these assessments, colleges and universities have an opportunity to redefine their placement policies, smoothing student transitions and reducing the need for costly remediation.*

Many higher education leaders across the country have already played a significant role in shaping states' high school assessments, working with K–12 to use the data from the new tests to better prepare students for, and ultimately place students into, college-level courses. These earlier, more accurate placements will allow educators to intervene sooner and build high-impact supports so that students enter college without the need for remediation, improving the chances that they will ultimately earn a degree or credential.

**Bottom line:** Higher education leaders in every state should support statewide assessments in high school that are aligned with college readiness standards and use them as early college readiness indicators, instead of waiting to assess students when they arrive on campus. Early warnings from rigorous, 11th grade assessments can help close preparation gaps before postsecondary enrollment, reducing time and money spent on non-credit-bearing coursework.

### States Leading the Way

Currently, systems and institutions in 10 states use aligned assessments for placement purposes ([Alaska](#), [California](#), [Colorado](#), [Delaware](#), [Hawaii](#), [Nevada](#), [Oregon](#), [South Dakota](#), [Washington](#), and [West Virginia](#)). In states such as Illinois, where the Council of Community College Presidents adopted a [policy](#) in January 2015 to use results on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers exams for placement in institutions statewide, these new policies provide students an important signal about whether they are ready for college. Some states are taking the next step and are not only providing that college readiness signal but also collaborating with K–12 to use data from the assessments to support students, ensuring that they enter college prepared for entry-level coursework and reducing the need for remediation. Following are more details from two of these states.

### Transition Courses and Redefined Placement Policies Benefit Students

- More high school students avoid remediation when they enter college.
- Improved curricular alignment between K–12 and entry-level college courses in math and English smooths student transitions.
- Deeper college/school district partnerships and faculty/teacher collaboration help align and clarify expectations for postsecondary success.

# The High Cost of Remediation

Many students require remediation when they get to college

**52%**

Entering **two-year** students



**20%**

Entering **four-year** students



Source: Complete College America. (2012). *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*.

First-time, full-time students who take a developmental course their first year after high school graduation are more likely to drop out than nonremedial students

**74%** more likely

**Four-year** students



**12%** more likely

**Two-year** students



Source: Attewell, Paul, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, and Tania Levey. (2006). "New Evidence on College Remediation." *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 77, No. 5.

Only 1 out of 10 students who take a remedial course go on to graduate



Source: Complete College America. (2014). *Four-Year Myth*.

In 2011–12, remediation cost students and families

**\$1.5 billion**  
in direct out-of-pocket costs

**\$380 million**  
in loans

Source: Barry, Mary Nguyen and Michael Dannenberg. (2016). *Out of Pocket: The High Cost of Inadequate High Schools and High School Student Achievement on College Affordability*. Education Reform Now and Education Post.

## California

In California, the [California State University \(CSU\)](#) system and participating [California community colleges](#) have a track record of successfully collaborating with the K–12 system on the Early Assessment Program (EAP). This pioneering initiative began when CSU supplemented the California 11th grade math and English language arts/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. CSU also partnered with K–12 to develop 12th grade bridge courses for students who needed extra support to achieve college readiness before leaving high school. In this way, the state shifted the college readiness

interventions into 12th grade, rather than waiting to "remediate" students when they arrived on campus.

Now that California has transitioned to the Smarter Balanced exams, those assessments will become the signaling system for the early college-ready intervention strategy. Eleventh graders who earn the "Standard Exceeded" level on the Smarter Balanced assessment receive automatic placement into credit-bearing courses if they enroll at a CSU campus or participating community college. Students who earn the "Standard Met" level receive similar placement as long as they earn a C or higher in an approved course during their senior year of high school. Students who do not meet standards on the exam can participate in the 12th grade bridge courses to achieve college readiness before leaving high school.

## Washington

In Washington, a statewide [agreement](#) among public colleges and universities allows high school juniors to use their [Smarter Balanced Assessment results](#) to “speed up” or “catch up” during their senior year. Students who score at level 3 or 4 (out of 4) are considered college ready. They can take part in dual enrollment programs, earning college credit before they even leave high school, and will be able to enroll directly in college-level math and English when they arrive on campus. Students who score at level 2 can take [Bridge to College](#) courses in their senior year to address gaps in learning. If they earn a B or better, they can receive the same placement agreement as students who score at level 3.

The key to the success of this placement policy is linking the assessment results to meaningful opportunities for students at levels of all performance. Another key is communicating the policy widely to raise awareness about the opportunities and benefits. Communication activities should include:

- Providing training sessions for college personnel who interact with high school principals, guidance counselors, and teachers and with prospective students.
- Partnering with K–12 on a multichannel campaign to ensure that students and parents are well aware of how the new assessment can benefit them and not serve as a barrier to higher education. See Washington’s [website](#) for more information.

## What You Can Do

- [Join](#) the Higher Ed for Higher Standards coalition.
- [Get active](#) in your state’s efforts to make college readiness an expectation for high school graduates.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Aligning Expectations: Partnering with K–12 to Ensure College Readiness](#), produced in partnership with National Association of System Heads (NASHE), State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), and Higher Ed for Higher Standards, is designed to position higher education leaders to be influential players in states that are reviewing or revising their standards and/or assessments.
- [Seizing the Moment: Community Colleges Collaborating with K–12 to Improve Student Success](#), produced in partnership with American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), and Higher Ed for Higher Standards, shows how collaboration with K–12 to leverage college- and career-ready standards and assessments can better support community college students.
- [Choices and Trade-offs: Key Questions for State Policymakers](#) when Selecting High School Assessments, designed to elevate the trade-offs between using state- or nationally-developed assessments, proposes

## Closing gaps in high school saves money in Tennessee



Collective savings for students in 2014–15 from TN SAILS, a program that uses high school assessment scores to offer remediation in high school

Source: Tatter, Grace. “Leaders highlight K-12 schools’ role in ‘Drive to 55.’” *Chalkbeat*, Sept. 21, 2015.

## Keys to Success

- Ensure that higher education and K–12 work together to build mutually reinforcing strategies for student success.
- Involve higher education faculty in designing and validating high school assessments as college-ready measures.
- Link assessment results to meaningful opportunities to speed up or catch up in senior year.
- Widely publicize the policy so that students and families know the benefits.

a series of issues state leaders should investigate to determine which approach best matches state policy priorities, with regard to the renewed flexibility and opportunities of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

- [Mapping College Readiness](#) uses New America’s ATLAS map tool to present policies that affect how well each state prepares students to meet the challenges of college and career, along with how well states have leveraged policy to build a bridge between high school and higher education.
- [Evaluating the Content and Quality of Next Generation High School Assessments](#) evaluates the high school English language arts/literacy and mathematics assessment for ACT Aspire, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

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