

Destination Known

Valuing College AND Career Readiness in State Accountability Systems



The destination is known:

success for all students in life after high school. Students will take multiple paths to get there, and most will need postsecondary education or training beyond high school to have rewarding careers. States' education strategies and accountability systems must support this by more accurately measuring and more prominently valuing college and career readiness.

Executive Summary

The economic future of the country rests on students' ability to develop the knowledge and skills and earn the postsecondary credentials necessary to meet workforce demands of the future. According to economic projections, the country needs to dramatically increase—from 50 to 65 percent—the working age population that possesses a degree, certificate or other high-quality postsecondary credential to meet future workforce needs.¹ While recent trends show a slight increase, states still have a long way to go. Only six states have current attainment rates above 50 percent, and every state will need to increase its success by more than one percentage point each year to meet the national mark by 2025.²

The challenge is more than just an issue of economic competitiveness; it's an issue of equity—as fewer youth from traditionally underserved subgroups transition to and successfully complete postsecondary education and training. These youth are at a significant disadvantage in their ability to successfully engage in the economy of the future. Nearly all of the jobs created during the recovery from the Great Recession have gone to workers with some college education or training, leaving behind those with a high school diploma or less.³ This trend is confirmed in employer surveys that indicate students with only a high school education have significant skill gaps that make them less marketable in the workforce.⁴

America's growing national skills and attainment gaps necessitate that state K-12 systems prepare more students for success in college *and* career. State education leaders recognize the challenge and are committed to dramatically increasing the number of students that graduate high school well prepared to attain a postsecondary credential with labor market value. In developing their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plans, many states are considering how to include important measures of college- and career-readiness in their K-12 accountability systems. Data drives action, and right now, data on the most critical outcome of the K-12 system is largely absent. States need this information to support students on their path toward success beyond high school.

States have an immense opportunity to refine their accountability systems to focus on preparing students for both college and careers. State leaders can and should develop systems of accountability and support that drive toward that vision. States are right to double down on student preparation—by increasing access, providing targeted supports, and holding

all schools accountable for the success of all students—to meet the future workforce projections and close the skills gap. In preparing all youth for success beyond high school, states will fuel their economic engine.⁵

Valuing Career Readiness in Accountability

In 2014, Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Taskforce on Career Readiness released a pivotal report calling on states to make career readiness more meaningful in their accountability systems. As *Opportunities and Options: Making Career Preparation Work for Students* succinctly summarizes, “What’s measured gets valued by schools, but most state accountability systems today don’t measure or value career readiness. Given the critical role that accountability systems play in signaling priorities and driving resources, states must expand these metrics to emphasize readiness for both college *and* careers.”

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), graduation rates and test scores were the predominant measures of student success, with little attention to indicators that reflect students' successful transition to postsecondary education and training opportunities.

Since the passage of NCLB, states have slowly added college and career readiness measures to their accountability systems. Currently, over half the states publicly report on measures of college and career readiness and 17 states include at least one measure of career readiness in school accountability determinations. The approach to and quality of those measures vary widely.

For example,

- Fewer than 20 of states publicly report how many students completed a rigorous sequence of classes that research indicates will prepare students for success in college and career.⁶
- While approximately 20 state accountability systems include information about students earning postsecondary credit while in high school in their accountability determinations, through dual credit, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB), only 11 states include information on students earning any industry certification—and even fewer include industry-recognized credentials—in their accountability system.⁷
- Only thirty states and the District of Columbia make explicit in public reports the percentage of students that have scored at the college- and career-ready level on the state's high school assessment, and even fewer states report career pathway-aligned demonstrations of readiness.⁸
- Fewer than five states publicly report any measure of a student's learning outside the classroom, leading to a limited understanding of the development of professional skills through long-term work-based learning opportunities.⁹
- Publicly-reported, student-level information on transitions into postsecondary certificate or registered apprenticeship programs, military, and even employment is nearly nonexistent in states.

Without a clear focus on career readiness in state accountability systems, educators, parents, policy makers and other key stakeholders lack the information and incentives necessary to make career preparation a priority for all students.

This informational gap leaves parents and policymakers in the dark about students' college- and career-readiness—and may not lead educators to prioritize the actions that are most predictive of long-term success beyond high school.

A Path Forward

While accountability is not a silver bullet, it is apparent that educators and students respond to clear goals, transparent data and systems that highlight success and identify underperformance. In particular, accountability can provide useful information to help school and state leaders understand where there are gaps in performance of specific student groups. This information can lead to critical actions, such as increasing access to college-level coursework, developing opportunities to gain career certificates that have value in the workplace, and

offering targeted student supports to meet college- and career-ready expectations on assessments that are validated by higher education and industry.

ESSA presents states with a critical opportunity to design a truly college- and career-ready K-12 education system, with an accountability system that fully captures and values student preparation. Each state has the opportunity to include measures of college and career readiness as an indicator of “school quality or student success.” Further, states have increased flexibility to design and financially support student preparation for and transition to postsecondary education and training.

CCSSO launched a Career Readiness Initiative in 2015 to support states in following through on the recommendations outlined in the Opportunities and Options report. In 2016, JPMorgan Chase collaborated with CCSSO, Education Strategy Group (ESG) and Advance CTE in its New Skills for Youth Initiative to dedicate \$33 million in grant funding to help states turn their visions for transforming career readiness into a reality. To help inform this work, ESG convened an Accountability Workgroup of state and national experts with a clear charge: provide guidance on the measures states should adopt to make college and career readiness the main driver of accountability systems.

In identifying potential measures, the Accountability Workgroup placed emphasis on measuring college and career readiness together, rather than as separate components. If the goal is for all students to be college- and career-ready, then it is paramount that state systems promote and capture students' demonstration of that preparation through multiple means. This is especially true given our growing understanding that “college and career readiness” means the development of academic, technical and professional skills. These skills are obtained and demonstrated through completion of rigorous coursework, long-term co-curricular experiences and meaningful assessments, and they are ultimately validated by a student's successful transition to life beyond high school.

Separating measures of college and career readiness can present a false choice to students, parents, educators and the public—especially as the new economy demands all students to receive some education or training beyond high school.

Recommended Measures of College and Career Readiness (CCR)

Drawing upon this vision, the Workgroup recommended four measures that all states should consider including in their high school accountability systems. The four categories outlined on the following page are a much more robust set of measures than those currently in place in most states and are consistent with the goals and intent of ESSA.

Recommended College and Career Readiness Measures



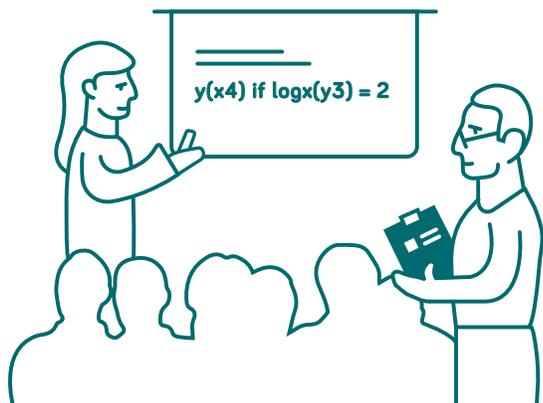
Progress Toward Post-High School Credential

Student demonstration of successful progress toward credentials of value beyond high school. At a minimum that means completion of a validated college- and career-ready course of study. It should also include whether students completed a rigorous pathway¹⁰ and earned postsecondary credit while in high school. Rather than focus solely on whether a student graduates, this is a critical measure of whether a student is graduating prepared for the next step. Research suggests completion of rigorous coursework—including career pathways and dual credit—is highly correlated with student success beyond high school.¹¹



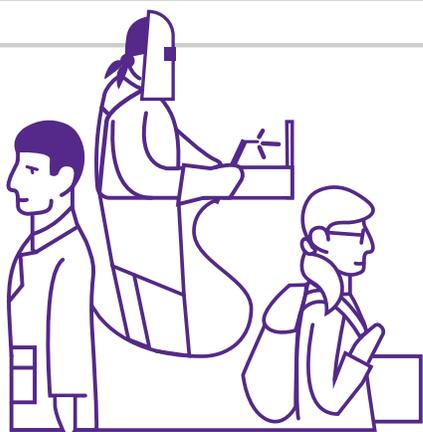
Co-Curricular Learning and Leadership Experiences

Student completion of state-defined co-curricular experience(s) aligned to students' academic and career plans. This would include an evaluation that the student met expectations and gained the professional skills necessary for success in college and careers. Learning and Leadership experiences include extended work-based learning, service learning or co-curricular activity, such as participation in state career technical student organization competitions.



Assessment of Readiness

Students scoring at the college- and career-ready level on assessment(s) that are validated by higher education and industry. In many states, the proficiency cut point on the high school assessment does not indicate college and career readiness, so an accurate examination of readiness for the next level is critical, including assessments that provide value to students' paths into education, training and the workforce beyond high school. Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, industry recognized credentials, technical skills assessments and other performance-based demonstrations of students' knowledge and skills should be incorporated to provide valuable insight into student progression toward college and career in their chosen pathway.



Transitions Beyond High School

Successful student transition to postsecondary education, training or the workforce within 12 months of graduation. Examining the quality of each of these transitions is critical to ensure that alignment between K-12, higher education and workforce exists and that students are placed into situations that promote their ability to realize long-term economic success. This means enrollment in higher education without the need for remediation, engagement in high-quality registered apprenticeship certificate programs, military enlistment, or employment in state-defined in-demand fields.

FIGURE 1

Recommended College and Career Readiness Measures



Opportunities for States to Incorporate the Recommended CCR Measures

There are three main ways that states can work to integrate the recommended college and career readiness measures into their overall accountability system: public reporting, goal setting and school accountability determinations. The Accountability Workgroup recommends that states consider the following steps:

HIGHLIGHT CCR MEASURES IN HIGH SCHOOL PUBLIC REPORT CARDS

Every state has mechanisms in place today for publicly reporting how its schools are performing, including school report cards that give parents and community leaders critical information on how each school performs on a common set of indicators. Unfortunately, very few school report cards include meaningful measures of college and career readiness. States should report information about student performance in each of the four recommended areas, either through incorporating the measures into the federally-required school report cards or creating a College and Career Readiness and Success Feedback report for each high school. For instance, **Kentucky** reports on the post-high school outcomes of students in college and the workforce by level of preparation in high school. Public reporting is a foundational step in creating a college- and career-ready accountability system—and one in which systems are already in place to support immediate state action. In fact, there are many additional indicators—measuring college and career readiness and otherwise—that may be best handled through public reporting, rather than inclusion in school accountability determinations. Students, parents, educators, policymakers and the public all want more information about the success of the K-12 system in preparing youth for life beyond high school. States can and should provide that information.

ALIGN K-12, HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE GOALS

Integrating ambitious goals into state education policy is a fundamental step to galvanize change and realize system improvement. States can leverage the ESSA opportunity to inspire and support successful transitions to college, career, and life for all youth. This means statewide agreement on the critical components of student

Very few school report cards include meaningful measures of college and career readiness

preparation; implementing ambitious and achievable goals that are aligned across K-12, higher education, and workforce systems; and, monitoring progress against annual milestones to highlight success and bring support and resources to bear in areas of struggle. For instance, **Tennessee** has included postsecondary attainment as one of its K-12 state goals under ESSA. States should articulate the trajectory toward college and career readiness for all students—incorporating each of the recommended measures—to set a vision for the future that is aligned to state’s long-term economic needs.

MAKE THE MOST VALID CCR MEASURES COUNT IN SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY DETERMINATIONS

To truly put college and career readiness at the forefront of the K-12 system, schools need to be held accountable for how well they are preparing students for the next steps beyond high school. Publicly reporting data for each high school is a good start, and incorporating the indicators into actual accountability determinations can make these data even more powerful. Each of the recommended measures in this report—with the appropriate access and data quality control checks in place—can be considered for inclusion in state accountability determinations. States will need to ground these decisions in their vision for the education system and ability to collect and report the pertinent information. Every state has authority and flexibility to make college and career readiness the focus of their high school accountability system. While ESSA provides room for an indicator of “school quality or student success,” it is clear that states are in control of their own accountability systems and have multiple ways to incorporate CCR measures. States are approaching this in several ways:

- Including CCR measures as a “school quality or student success” indicator: In their proposed ESSA plans, both **California** and **Tennessee** intend to include multiple measures of college and career readiness that students can meet as the “school quality or student success” indicator under ESSA. Alternatively, **Kentucky** pioneered the creation of an accountability incentive for students demonstrating readiness for both college and careers.
- Measuring CCR with high school graduation: **Louisiana** includes an index in its accountability system that rewards points to schools based on students’ graduation status and completion of advanced college- and career-ready coursework. Under ESSA, **New York** is considering adding a similar graduation index to its accountability system.
- Incorporating CCR into assessment calculations: When calculating student assessment scores for accountability purposes, **Rhode Island**, among other states, provides additional points for students scoring at the CCR level.

Recommended Actions for States

For college and career readiness to be valued in all schools and for all students, states should strive to:

- 1** Publicly report performance of all high schools across all four measurement categories, disaggregated by individual measures and all subgroups;
- 2** Increase the sophistication of its measures in all four categories annually, striving to reach the Exceptional level within 5 years;
- 3** Include each category of measure in the state's accountability determination system;
- 4** Make each measure a significant part of the high school accountability determination; and,
- 5** Use the information to support improvements in preparing all students for college and career.

States are at different starting points in their ability to collect, report and use data in the four measurement areas. For states that are nascent in this work, collecting and publicly reporting data at the baseline level of each category will be pivotal to their progress. States that are more advanced should increase the sophistication of the measure definitions and transition from reporting to inclusion in accountability ratings.

Regardless of the starting point, all states have opportunity to move forward with the recommended action steps. States should take advantage of the focus on continuous improvement in ESSA to transition measures and increase performance expectations over time. It is critical that all states set a vision for the future and work to implement the data and policy changes necessary to bring that vision to life.

Preparing students for success beyond high school is the charge of the K-12 system. Today, states have an opportunity to reflect this in their accountability systems—and provide equal and collective measurement of college and career readiness for all students.

NOTES

¹ Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020*, Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce, Washington, D.C., 2013. Available at: https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.FR_Web_.pdf

² Author's own calculations based on Lumina Foundation, *A Stronger Nation: 2016*, Indianapolis, IN. Available at: <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2016/>

³ Anthony P. Carnevale, Tamara Jayasundera, and Artem Gulish, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, 2016, Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce, Washington, D.C., 2016. Available at: <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Americas-Divided-Recovery-web.pdf>

⁴ Susan Adams, "The College Degrees and Skills Employers Most Want," *Forbes*, April 16, 2014. Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/04/16/the-college-degrees-and-skills-employers-most-want/#9536fd3fd2de>. See also, National Association of Colleges and Employers, "Employers: Verbal Communication Most Important Candidate Skill," February 24, 2016. Available at: <http://naceweb.com/s02242016/verbal-communication-important-job-candidate-skill.aspx#sthash.ul0bK1zs.dpuf>

⁵ Eric A. Hanushek et al, *Education and Economic Growth*, *Education Next*, Spring 2008, Volume 8, Number 2. Available at: <http://educationnext.org/education-and-economic-growth/>.

⁶ Achieve, *The College and Career Readiness of U.S. High School Graduates*, Washington, D.C., 2016. Available at: <http://www.achievetest.org/files/CCRHSGrads-March2016.pdf>

⁷ Achieve and Advance CTE, *How States are Making Career Readiness Count: 2016 Update*, Washington, D.C. and Silver Spring, MD, 2016. Available at: <https://careertech.org/sites/default/files/MakingCareerReadinessCountUpdate-2016.pdf>

⁸ Achieve

⁹ Achieve and Advance CTE.

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