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April 2007

The Development of Statewide College and Career Readiness Standards and Assessments

Goal: That all students are ready to begin college or preparation for occupations leading to their independent economic success

- Similar reading, writing and math skills are needed to succeed in both academic and career-preparation programs

Problem: Up to 70% of the nation's college-bound high school graduates are not ready for further learning (ACT, 2005)

Core Solution:

To have all schools in a state teaching all students to meet effective, statewide college readiness standards. This requires that each state:

- Recognizes the keys to increasing readiness lie in the school classroom.
- Has specific readiness standards adopted as part of the required statewide curriculum standards
- Helps all school teachers understand the specific performance expectations of the state standards (beyond content description to level of performance required)
- Provides state school and student accountability assessments that include these readiness standards

Needed Steps:

1. Statewide recognition of magnitude and nature of the college-readiness problem

- a. Problem masked by lack of common, substantial readiness standards across all of postsecondary education
 - Individual campuses or systems set their own readiness standards
- b. Readiness (placement) standards are often confused with admission standards
 - Readiness (placement) standards often applied after admission
 - Admissions criteria focus on courses, grades and ACT, SAT admissions tests
 - However, most students (70-80%) attend open or broad-access institutions; a relatively small proportion of colleges and universities are selective
- c. Readiness standards focus on the threshold skills needed to learn at the postsecondary level
 - Reading with comprehension
 - Writing (clearly, analytically, persuasively)
 - Mathematics (capacity for logical, symbolic and multidimensional thinking)
 - Readiness standards should indicate not only a description of the needed skills, but the level of performance required (how well something is done or known)
 - Readiness standards are related to taking the “right courses”, which is necessary, but taking the “right courses” (and getting B’s and A’s) does not ensure readiness.
- d. State goals for increasing high school completion, strengthening minimum high school diploma requirements, and ensuring that all graduates are ready for college/careers are all needed and important. The likelihood that it will be some time before all of these goals converge in any state should not deter states from establishing college readiness initiatives. What is important is that significant progress is made on each of these goals.

- e. The standards, performance levels and range of the high school assessments associated with college readiness generally will need to be higher than current high school graduation and NCLB testing requirements.
- f. Postsecondary education must view the improvement of college readiness as a responsibility to the state and also in its own best interest.

2. Statewide, state-level leadership and commitment are needed to ensure that the same college readiness signals are given to all high schools in a state, and that college readiness standards and assessments are fully part of high school standards and tests.

- Action needs to be at the state level and statewide
- Must be systemic action to send same signals to all K-12 schools
- Must include all state postsecondary education and high schools
- Must commit to specific agenda and action steps

3. Adoption by public higher education and public schools of common college readiness standards within a state.

- a. One set of statewide threshold performance standards is needed to send the same signals from all of postsecondary education to all high schools in a state
- b. Postsecondary education should speak with one voice, including all open-door and broad-access institutions. These less-selective institutions (community colleges and regional universities) have the potential to send the strongest, most powerful and clear signals about college readiness because:
 - Admit 80% of first time students
 - Local and regional orientation and service; closest to the schools

- Clarify that being less selective in admissions does not signify lack of readiness standards, or no standards
- c. All postsecondary institutions should adopt and apply these readiness standards in making placement decisions

4. Embed college readiness standards in state-adopted high school standards and curriculum.

- a. Align college readiness with school standards
 - By identifying matches with or revising existing school standards.
 - Must go beyond content description of standards to shared understandings of expected performance levels (requiring intensive interaction among school and college staff)
- b. Identify any needed additions (of college readiness standards) to existing school standards
- c. Have the state formally adopt and identify the aligned and new college readiness standards as full components of the required statewide curriculum and standards.

5. Make college readiness assessment part of the high school testing program.

- a. Use statewide school-based high school assessments as basis, if possible
 - School teachers teach to state standards and assessments
 - Achievement of college readiness standards is reinforced by their inclusion in school-based accountability testing
 - Preferable to supplement or revise existing high school state assessments (or create them) to include college readiness standards rather than add external college assessments into high schools, which do not have the force of school-based state assessments.

- Goal is to make college readiness standards fully part of high school standards, not introduce a different or parallel set of standards or tests
- Using school-based tests:
 - Gives more force to high school standards/tests
 - Guards against too much testing
 - Applies to all high school students

b. College readiness assessments should address directly the specific readiness standards rather than relying on other tests that only indirectly address the core readiness standards

- Any test scores can be cross-walked or correlated with other test results
- What is needed is for the specific standards to be taught in the classroom and embraced and understood by school teachers. ACT or SAT standards and assessments are not transparent enough to connect concretely to the classroom
- Most important, school teachers teach first to state standards and tests

c. State high school assessments should include all college readiness standards and range high enough in difficulty to indicate mastery at the threshold levels

- Range need not extend to highest performance levels addressed by selective admissions tests
- Exit, high student stakes tests probably not suitable because they do not address performance levels which are high enough
- End-of-course 11th grade English and mathematics tests are the best candidates because they have the strongest connection to classroom instruction

d. High school assessments should be available no later than 11th grade to give early signals to students about readiness for college

- Allows at least senior year to prepare further

6. Make the performance of schools and teachers in helping students meet readiness standards a significant component of the state school accountability process.

- Set student readiness goals for each school
- Recognize school progress to these goals in both absolute and growth terms

7. Embed college readiness standards into grades 8-12 teaching, curriculum and assessments.

- Sequence the college readiness standards into school curriculum and assessment progressively from grades 8-12
 - Formally adopt and highlight as a key part of the state's academic standards for K-12 schools
 - Develop teacher understanding and use of performance expectations through preservice and inservice training
 - Revise curriculum and instruction to make college readiness standards a priority
- Entrance into school-college dual enrollment programs should depend on students meeting the state college readiness standards.