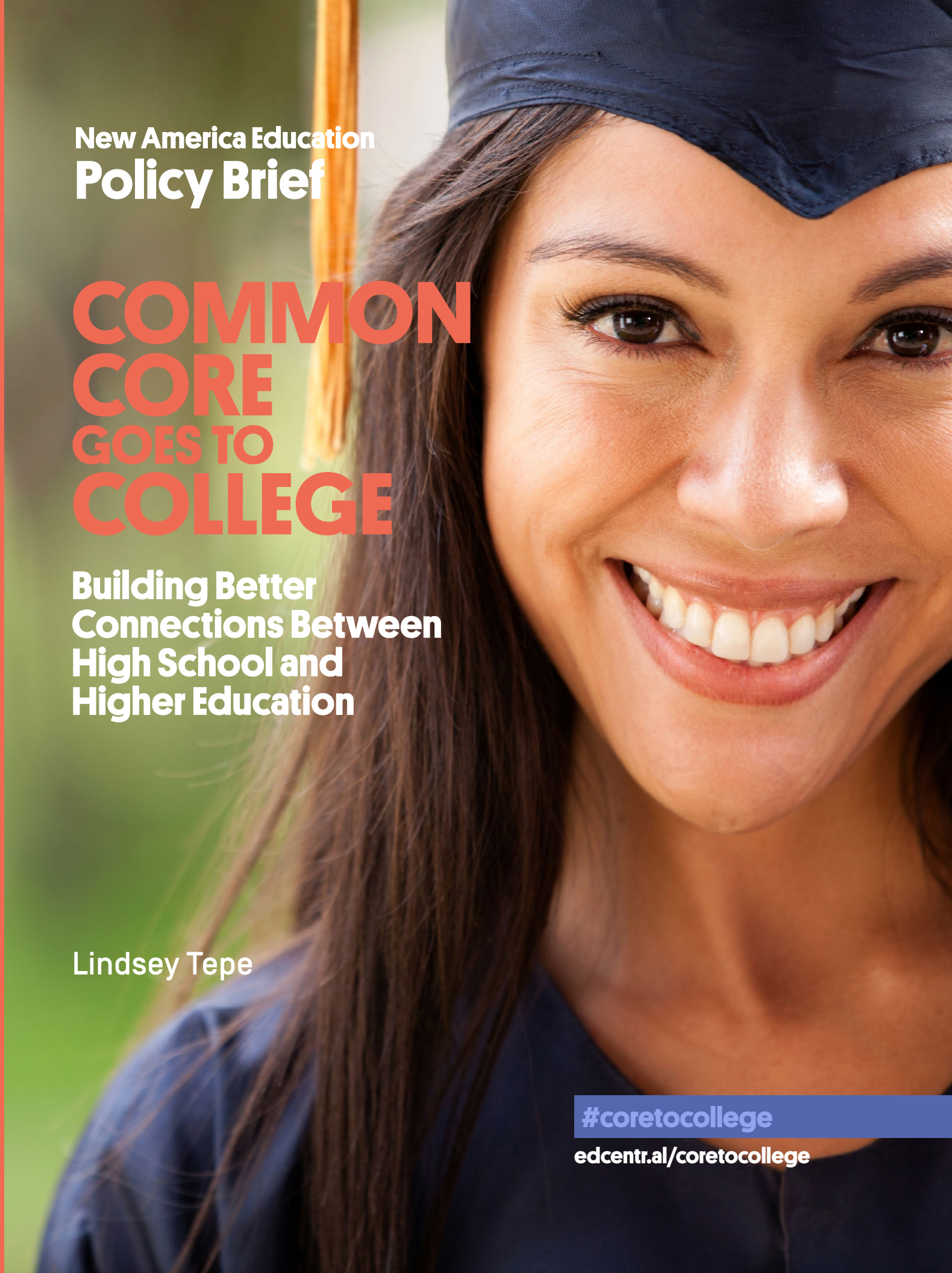

New America Education

Policy Brief

COMMON CORE GOES TO COLLEGE

Building Better Connections Between High School and Higher Education

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About the Author

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About New America

New America is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy institute that invests in new thinkers and new ideas to address the next generation of challenges facing the United States.

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COMMON CORE GOES TO COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

Beneath Chicago's downtown Central Business District, the city's pedestrian walkway—the Pedway—winds its way underneath 40 city blocks, covering approximately five miles. The labyrinthine tunnels have attracted the attention of journalists, urban planners, bloggers, and tour guides alike, but one Friday in June, 1989, unwelcome news about the Pedway required the attention of then-Mayor Richard M. Daley.[1]

Several years earlier, the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois had begun adding a tunnel to the Pedway connecting City Hall with the State of Illinois Center, each beginning directly under their own buildings with the intention of connecting in the middle. The plan was to build the tunnel exactly 22 feet, 4 inches below ground level. After five years of on-again, off-again construction, the two ends finally connected—with the state's side coming in nine inches too low, and eight inches to the east, of the city's side.

On that June day Mayor Daley quipped to the press, "only in Chicago could we be building our tunnel and they be building their tunnel . . . and I guess we missed."[2]

Ultimately, the Chicago tunnel case was more of an embarrassment than a crisis. But it shows what can happen when two different entities embark on a project together without enough leadership and coordination. America's education system is currently experiencing just such a misalignment. The ambitious effort to develop Common Core State Standards in K–12 schools is in danger of falling short of its promise because the nation's higher education system is not currently lining up at the same depth.

This is a new version of an old problem, rooted in the very different origins of the nation's elementary, secondary, and higher education systems. Less than 100 years ago, only 16.8 percent of all 17-year olds in the U.S. had graduated from high school.[3] At the same time, less than 5 percent of those 18–24 years old was enrolled in higher education.[4] The K–12 and higher education systems rapidly expanded over the next century to accommodate larger and larger portions of the population, but they did not evolve in concert.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of students now graduate from high school and enter college without being adequately prepared to succeed there. Thousands more fail to make the transition into college at all. Because the two systems are not properly connected, millions of people fall short of earning the college credentials that are crucial for prosperity in the modern world.

In the early 2000s, a group of key education leaders decided to tackle this problem. The resulting Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative led to the creation and adoption of common education standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, presently adopted by 43 states and the District of Columbia.[5] In the words of CCSS leaders, "The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers."[6] For the first time, the vast majority of all American children will be educated in K–12 schools organized around standards that have been explicitly designed to prepare students to succeed in higher education.

> “Hundreds of thousands of students now graduate from high school and enter college without being adequately prepared to succeed there.

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards in classrooms throughout the country, while at times rocky, is well underway. The standards will be accompanied by sophisticated new assessments that are designed to gauge students' progress, culminating in an eleventh grade final assessment of college readiness,[7] scheduled to be used for the first time in the 2014–15 school year. In theory, university systems and college governing boards of participating states were required to endorse the new standards and recognize their accompanying assessments as accurate indicators of college readiness.

But careful analysis of state policies and practices reveals a higher education landscape riddled with complications and shortcomings for the successful alignment of higher education with the Common Core. An examination of the higher education policies that guide students through the transition from high school to college—including admissions, financial aid, retesting and course placement, and developmental education—reveals many detours and inconsistencies that remain unaddressed. Further, there is little evidence to suggest colleges are meaningfully aligning college instruction and teacher preparation programs with the Common Core standards. This has been further complicated by many states' shifting K–12 policies, as well as the fast-approaching date for launching these new assessments.

Currently, there are few coherent approaches being used to join these two systems into a rational shared commitment to the Common Core. In part, this is because the establishment of a single benchmark for college readiness is difficult, given the huge variation in America's diverse and independent system of thousands of colleges and universities. A binary indicator for college readiness masks the intense, deliberate sorting of students that takes place between high school and higher education. Further, there is little or no pressure on colleges and universities to change their own academic practices to align with or incorporate these new standards.

In 1991, taking advantage of the new location for the State of Illinois Center, the city and state began construction of a new tunnel within the Chicago Pedway. Doug Mills, the contract manager for the new project, told the *Chicago Tribune* it would be different this time around: “There won't be the problem of two pieces not fitting, because we're doing it all in one piece.”[8]

Right now, the pieces of high school and higher education are not fitting. But the new college- and career-ready standards present an opportunity for states to reexamine and rebuild the connection. To prepare students to succeed in college and beyond, the spirit of these standards—alignment—needs to go to college as well. And each state needs to plan how to “do it all in one piece” if it is going to be a success.

BACKGROUND

While the Common Core State Standards Initiative is often cited as beginning in 2009, the roots of the movement for common K–12 education standards began much earlier. President George H. W. Bush tried in 1991 with his America 2000 initiative to establish "world class" standards in the key subject areas. Though the effort stalled, it was picked up again with President Bill Clinton's Goals 2000 initiative; states each established their own standards, representing an emerging consensus that all students could learn to the same standards and rise to the challenge of high expectations.

With the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, however, mandated reporting of student proficiency scores provided evidence that students throughout the nation were being educated to very different standards of achievement. Student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) did not correlate with the proficiency scores reported by states and it became clear that each had created standards of widely disparate quality.[9] In 2005, for example, 87 percent of Tennessee's fourth graders tested proficient on their state mathematics test, while just 28 percent were proficient on NAEP. Conversely, 40 percent of Massachusetts' fourth graders were deemed proficient on their state's math test; this converged much more closely with the 41 percent proficiency rate for those students on NAEP.[10]

Troubled by these findings, in 2007 the bi-partisan National Governors Association (NGA), led at that time by Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, appointed a task force to examine how the United States could get to a world-class education system. The task force's first recommendation was to "upgrade state standards by adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards in Mathematics and English/Language Arts for grades K–12 to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive."[11] In concert with the Chief Council of State School Officers (CCSSO), that is exactly what they set out to do.

In creating college-ready standards, leaders of the initiative selected three organizations they viewed as having the greatest expertise in college readiness—ACT, the College Board, and Achieve—to put together working groups to develop the standards and nominate members from their staffs, as well as several consultants, to serve in those groups.[12] (ACT and the College Board produce the two dominant standardized college admissions tests, the ACT and SAT. Achieve is a nonprofit, nonpartisan education reform organization started by a bipartisan group of governors and business leaders.) Each group sought to follow three criteria to create a set of standards that were "fewer, higher, and clearer"—an implicit critique of the existing state standards as being too widespread and numerous, insufficient in their academic rigor, and obscure and confusing to educators and the general public.

These new criteria specified that the standards would reflect:

1. **College- and career-readiness**, defined as the ability to succeed in entry-level college classes without the need for developmental education.

2. **Research on college- and career-readiness**, removing topics that were not essential for college success.

3. **Internationally benchmarked standards**, at least as high as those of the highest-performing nations.[13]

In the beginning, the working groups' efforts were undertaken with little public visibility. A leaked draft of the standards in July of 2009 prompted a formal release of the standards for public comment two months later. The final draft of the standards was reviewed by a "validation committee" comprised of prominent voices in the education standards community, including co-chairs David Conley and Brian Gong, as well as Linda Darling-Hammond, James Milgram, and several others from the K–12 and higher education communities.[14] Additional studies from groups outside the initiative, including a 2010 report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and a 2012 study from Michigan State University by William Schmidt and Richard Houang, also evaluated the standards based upon these criteria and found them better on the whole than the majority of standards they were replacing.[15] For example, Fordham's analysis concluded, "the Common Core standards are clearer and more rigorous than the ELA and Mathematics standards presently used by the vast majority of states."[16]

With common standards in place, the next major undertaking was to develop standardized tests to assess the extent to which individual students were measuring up. In September 2010, the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top Assessment Program awarded $362 million to fund a new generation of college- and career-ready assessments. Rather than develop individual state tests, as had been done previously, many of the Common Core states organized themselves into two testing consortia, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced). Both were awarded grants to develop assessment systems for grades three through eight and high school that will gauge student progress toward college- and career-readiness, to be introduced in the 2014–15 school year.

These are criterion-referenced assessments, meaning they are designed to measure individual student performance against a fixed set of learning standards—in this case the Common Core. The alignment between the new standards and these assessments is critical. Assessments which authentically measure students' mastery of standards that reflect the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college have the unprecedented opportunity to connect high schools with colleges and guide young people through this transition more effectively.[17] Thus, while both consortia are developing comprehensive assessment systems, the most high-profile task has been the development of high school summative assessments for English/Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics.

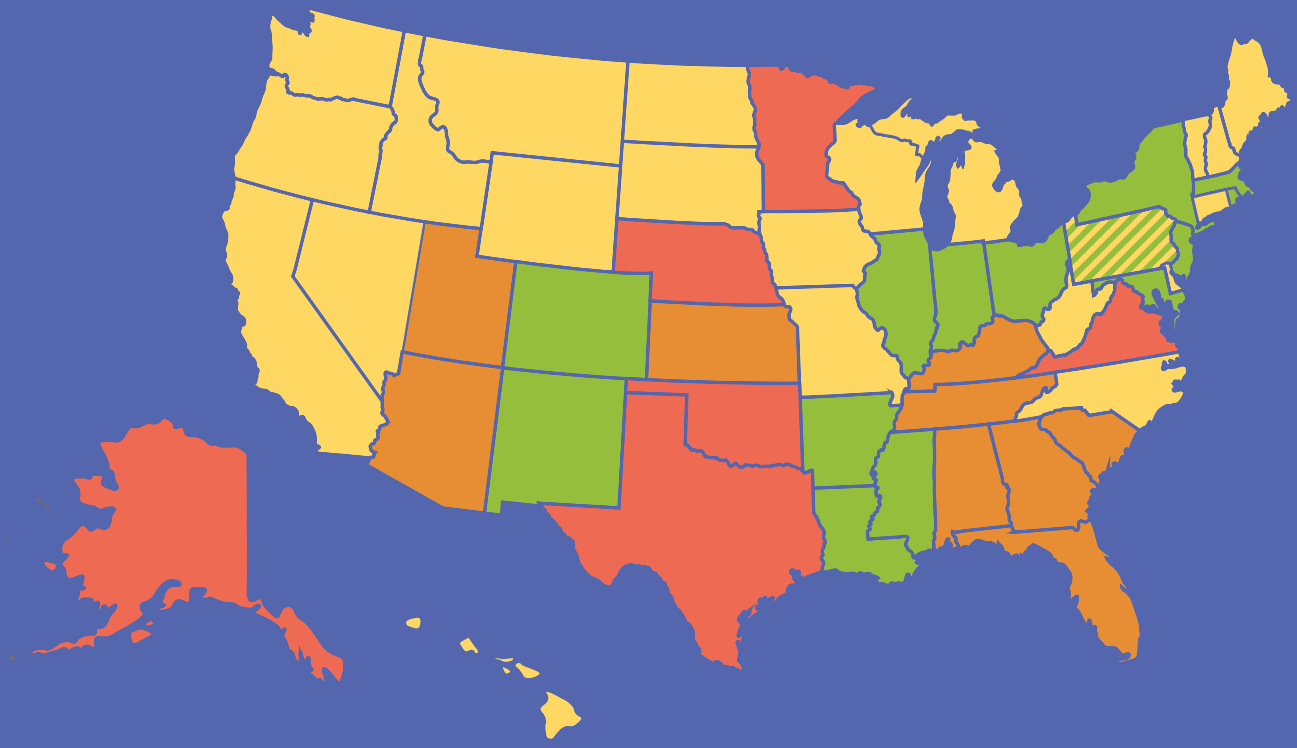
As with many policy initiatives, the more high profile it is the more controversial it becomes—and the Common Core has proven to be no exception. Over the past year, these new standards have rallied strong opposition amongst some groups and the Common Core assessments have suffered the brunt of the attack. When the consortia formed, PARCC had 26 member states and Smarter Balanced claimed 31 members.[18] PARCC's coalition has shrunk to 15 member states (including the District of Columbia), while Smarter Balanced has 22 member states remaining. **[See Chart A for a complete list, and additional details, on PARCC and Smarter Balanced states]**

Nevertheless, the majority of states are still planning to implement one of the two Common Core assessments and their launch date is fast approaching. States will soon be determining what specific test score students will need to meet in order to demonstrate "college readiness." In theory, this specific "cut score" will represent the point at which students have demonstrated they have the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college.

The establishment of a college-ready score, however, is just one piece of the puzzle, given the vast differences in academic standards and educational philosophies among the nations' thousands of autonomous colleges and universities. It represents only one among a host of higher education policies and practices that will need to be aligned with the Common Core standards. The analysis in this report suggests that with many of the current state and institutional policies in place, even with a cut score in place, being "college ready" will not mean as much as it should when Common Core students go to college.

> "With the passage of No Child Left Behind, mandated reporting of student proficiency scores provided evidence that students throughout the nation were being educated to very different standards of achievement.

Chart A. PARCC and Smarter Balanced Consortium Membership



PARCC Consortium States

Arkansas
Colorado
District of Columbia
Illinois
Indiana *
Louisiana †
Maryland
Massachusetts †
Mississippi
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York †
Ohio
Pennsylvania #
Rhode Island

Smarter Balanced Consortium States

California
Connecticut
Delaware
Hawaii
Idaho
Iowa #
Maine
Michigan †
Missouri #
Montana
Nevada #
New Hampshire
North Carolina #
North Dakota
Oregon
Pennsylvania #
South Dakota
Vermont
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin #
Wyoming #

Non-Member (CCSS) States

Alabama
Arizona
Florida
Georgia
Kansas
Kentucky
South Carolina ◊
Tennessee
Utah

Non-Member (Non-CCSS) States

Alaska
Minnesota
Nebraska
Oklahoma ‡
Texas
Virginia

* Indiana currently remains a PARCC Member, but the state has "un-adopted" the Common Core standards and has indicated it plans to use an alternate assessment.
† Louisiana, Massachusetts, and New York currently remain PARCC Members and Michigan currently remains a Smarter Balanced Member, but these states have indicated that they are undecided on their assessment use.
‡ Oklahoma is the second state to officially "un-adopt" the Common Core standards.
# Iowa, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming currently remain Smarter Balanced Members (PA is a member of both consortia), though they have indicated they plan to use alternate assessments. Further, Missouri, Nevada, and Wisconsin currently remain Smarter Balanced Members, but plan to use alternate high school assessments.
◊ South Carolina will be using the Common Core standards for the 2014–15 school year, but will be developing new standards for the 2015–16 school year.

Data compiled from PARCC and Smarter Balance Consortia websites, as well as current news reports as of May 31, 2014.

NO CLEAN SLATE FOR COMMON CORE ASSESSMENTS

Standardized tests of college readiness are not a new invention. As colleges and universities expanded access, they were faced with the daunting task of evaluating a diverse pool of applicants and accurately determining their levels of academic preparedness, despite immense differences in local high schools' grading scales, curricula, and program rigor. This problem grew larger as access to secondary education increased—today, colleges and universities receive applications from students graduating from more than 24,000 public high schools and 10,000 private schools throughout the United States (not to mention non-traditional and international applicants).

The SAT and ACT tests were developed as tools for these institutions to better compare student performance, putting local school data from districts and schools into a national context. Over the years, performance on these two assessments has been integrated into a wide array of higher education policies, far beyond college admissions—they also impact student qualification for many forms of state and institutional financial aid. These tests, and others sold by College Board and ACT, also influence what courses students will be able to take, or place into, during their first semester.

Piloted in 1926, the SAT was historically a norm-referenced assessment, designed to compare student performance to others who have taken the test by converting absolute scores into a percentile ranking. The ACT, by contrast, was introduced in 1959 as a criterion-referenced assessment, assessing a student's mastery of "basic knowledge" in four subject areas: English, mathematics, social studies, and natural sciences.

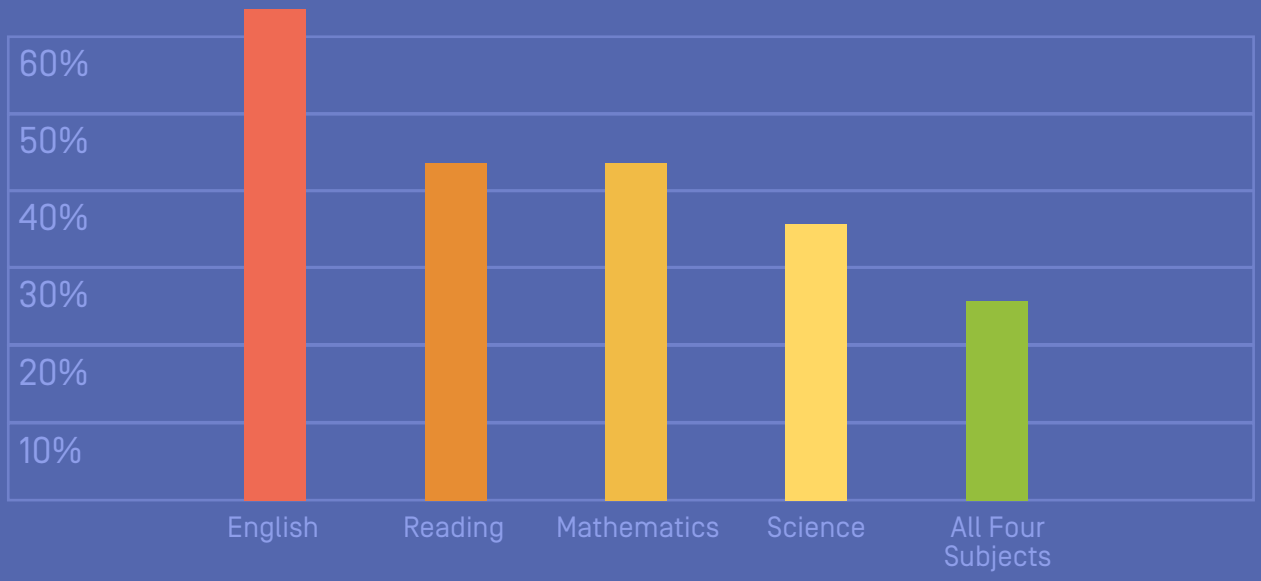
Both the College Board and ACT have amassed substantial data regarding student performance on their various assessments (in addition to the SAT and ACT, the College Board and ACT produce many other tests, including the Accuplacer and COMPASS higher education course placement assessments). By comparing these test score data with student performance in the first two years of college, these two organizations have become the de facto experts for what constitutes college readiness in the United States, even more than colleges and universities themselves.

ACT has used its data to provide students with information regarding their individual college readiness, in the form of the ACT College Ready Benchmarks. These benchmarks represent the score on each of the four ACT subject area tests that indicates a student has a 50 percent chance of earning a B or higher, or about a 75 percent chance of earning a C or higher, in first-year credit-bearing coursework. For English that benchmark score is 18, for mathematics and reading it is 22, and for it is science 23.[19] Of the approximately 1.8 million high school graduates who took the ACT in 2013 (54 percent of all high school graduates in the United States), 64 percent demonstrated proficiency in English while just 44 percent demonstrated proficiency in mathematics. Only 26 percent tested proficient in all four subject areas.[20] [See Chart B]

While these test scores provide colleges and universities with one perspective on students' college readiness, recent research indicates that other criteria, including high school grade-point averages (GPA), are better indicators of student preparation for college. In the 2009 book Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities, William Bowen, Michael McPherson, and Matthew Chingos found that high

Chart B. Percent of ACT-Tested High School Graduates Meeting ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

Source: ACT, Inc.



school grades have better predictive value for college graduation rates, and in their analysis standardized test scores offer little additional explanatory power.[21]

Further, a 2011 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that only the English and mathematics portions of the ACT are predictive of college success, while the other two subject area tests provide little additional predictive power.[22] There are lingering questions about the predictive power of the SAT test as well—oddly enough, a 2008 College Board Research Report indicated that the Writing section of the SAT (which is being discontinued) is more predictive of first-year college GPA than either the English or math sections, while high school GPA has higher predictive power than all three.[23]

Moreover, a 2014 report released by the National Association for College Admission Counseling found that there is "virtually no difference" between the academic performance of students who submitted ACT or SAT scores and those who did not submit them.[24] Questions about the utility of these assessments, which currently guide student transition into higher education, were being posed as the testing industry gained two new entrants, PARCC and Smarter Balanced.

With the adoption of the Common Core standards and aligned assessments by a majority of states throughout the country, local educational data will begin to grow more comparable at the national level. The information produced by PARCC and Smarter Balanced (as well as the college- and career-ready assessments being developed and used in non-consortia states) will overlap with the market for information that ACT and the College Board have traditionally filled. Understandably, both organizations have responded by taking steps to better align their products with the Common Core standards. Specifically, ACT has discontinued its products, ACT Explore and ACT Plan, and will replace them with ACT's new testing regime, ACT Aspire. ACT Aspire has been positioned as a substitute for PARCC and Smarter Balanced grade three through high school assessments, while the standard high school ACT test will serve as the high school summative assessment.

More recently, ACT has also announced changes to its high school assessment. The mathematics subject area test will provide a slightly greater emphasis on statistics and probability and, for the first time, the reading test will include comprehension questions based

> With the adoption of the Common Core standards and aligned assessments by a majority of states, local educational data will grow more comparable at the national level.

on comparing or using information from two different texts (these skills are prominent within the Common Core standards). Additionally, student score reports will contain significantly more information: students will receive a "STEM" score (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), a composite of the math and science subject area test scores; an English language score, a composite of English, reading and writing scores; a "progress toward career-readiness" score that indicates readiness for different kinds of work; a "text complexity progress indicator" based upon scores on all written responses; and further indicators on the optional writing test, including scores on ideas and analysis, development and support, organization, and language use.[25] While these additional data will be provided to students, the changes to the test itself are minor.

The SAT is undergoing a more substantive alteration. The new SAT will do away with the obscure vocabulary and reasoning questions that until now have been a hallmark of the test. They will be replaced with greater attention to content mastery. In a speech in March, David Coleman, president of the College Board and architect of the Common Core standards, elaborated further: "Admissions officers and counselors find the data from admissions exams useful, but are concerned that these exams have become disconnected from the work of high school classrooms."[26] As he stated just before assuming his current role, "The Common Core provides substantial opportunity to make the SAT even more reflective of what higher education wants."[27] Unfortunately for both the SAT and ACT, the Common Core standards have also provided the opportunity for several new entrants to the assessment market, ones that will be deeply connected with the work of high school classrooms throughout the country. Unlike these old incumbent tests, the Common Core assessments will be intentionally designed with the Common Core standards in mind.

The challenge for states, of course, is to determine how these assessments will be used within existing policies to connect high school students to higher education. PARCC and Smarter Balanced are still—at minimum—a year away from full implementation, and understandably states are focused on making the launch of their assessments a success. But without keeping the bigger policy picture in mind and planning for the future, these assessments may have little impact for students as they transition to college.

Admissions Criteria

Despite widespread concern about getting into college, only about a third of America's 7,565 postsecondary institutions have selective enrollment policies, meaning they have additional criteria for admission beyond a high school diploma. (These may include secondary school record, grade-point average (GPA), or class rank; completion of a college preparatory curriculum; letters of recommendation; and admissions test scores or some other formal demonstration of competency.) These selective enrollment colleges and universities, however, include 77 percent of all public four-year universities and 68 percent of all private four-year universities. For those institutions, the most common admissions criteria are a student's secondary school record (2,051 institutions) and GPA (1,501 institutions), followed closely by admissions test scores (1,308 institutions), almost always the ACT or the SAT.[28]

Regardless of their predictive validity, test scores continue to serve as one criterion for admission to selective-enrollment colleges and universities—and admitted students' actual scores vary dramatically. While on average, the 25th percentile ACT scores in English and mathematics for all selective-enrollment institutions are both right around 19, individually, institutions range from 25th percentile scores as high as 34 to as low as 13. [See Chart C] The difference between institutions' 25th percentile ACT scores demonstrates the wide range of minimum college-readiness standards established by colleges and universities around the country.

The most selective universities admit students whose average scores far surpass the ACT College Ready Benchmarks. The 2012 Harvard freshman class's 25th percentile ACT scores in English and mathematics were 33 and 31, respectively. Public institutions such as the University of Florida's students clear the college-ready bar easily as well, with 25th percentile ACT scores of 25 in both subject areas.

By contrast, Alabama State University's scores were 14 and 15 for English and math, which is well below ACT's benchmarks for college readiness (Alabama is one of four Common Core states that plans to use the ACT as its high school college- and career-ready assessment instead of PARCC or Smarter Balanced). While Alabama State is not an open-admissions university, like many institutions it enrolls a substantial number of students who are very likely underprepared for college-level work. This is reflected in the number of Alabama State students forced to take developmental coursework. For example, in Fall 2013, 267 students were enrolled in developmental mathematics, 233 in developmental English, and an additional 163 were enrolled in both. Undergraduate enrollment at Alabama State is only 5,356, meaning more than 12 percent of the entire student body is enrolled in at least one developmental course—for first-year students, this rate is undoubtedly much higher.[29]

The difference between the way these two types of institutions use SAT and ACT scores is significant. Highly selective universities like Harvard use test scores for *sorting*. Their goal is to identify the very best students among a much larger pool of students (Harvard's admission rate is about 5 percent), most of whom are well-prepared for college. Less selective universities like Alabama State use test scores primarily to establish *minimum eligibility standards*, in part to avoid enrolling students who are highly likely to fail.

While the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments will theoretically provide information that serves both of these purposes, they could have the biggest impact if used to establish minimum standards.[30] Both testing consortia, however, have so far stated that they are not for use as admissions tests. Their assessments may not prove to be the best tool for sorting students seeking admission to highly selective institutions, but they are being designed explicitly for the purpose of demonstrating student preparation for many colleges like Alabama State. **For institutions that currently use ACT and SAT scores to establish minimum standards, expanding those standards to include Common Core assessment scores would provide an additional opportunity to demonstrate student readiness.**

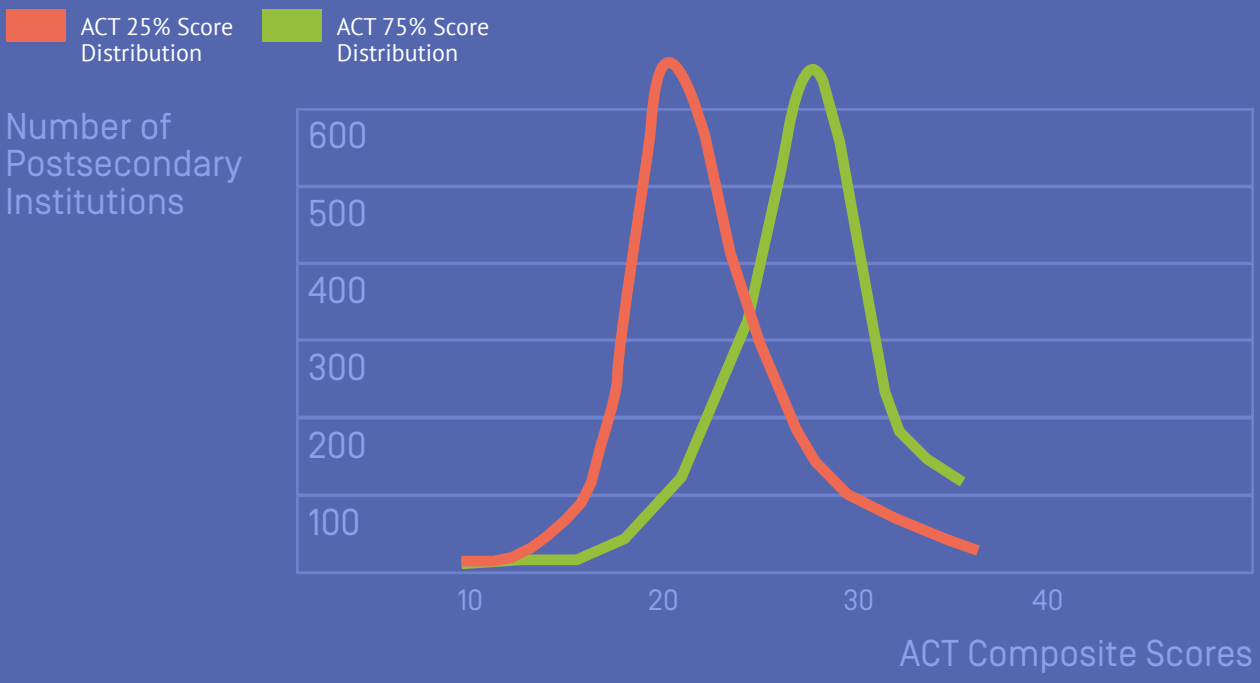
But whether to use this additional assessment information is not simply a matter for individual colleges and universities to decide case-by-case. Numerous states have adopted minimum eligibility criteria for admission to public colleges and universities that include test scores. For example, in Arkansas, to be unconditionally admitted to a public four-year university—meaning that admission carries no requirements, conditions, or restrictions on initial enrollment—students must obtain a minimum test score on one of a number of standardized assessments. As an official from the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) detailed in email correspondence:

> "To be unconditionally admitted a student must make at a minimum the composite score of 19 on the [ACT], the score of 910 on the SAT, the score of 43 on the ASSET Reading test, or the score of 83 on the COMPASS Reading test.[31]

According to the same AHECB official, Arkansas is not even considering integrating its high school assessments with its admissions criteria. If that remains the case, the state's college-ready assessments will have no bearing upon a student's actual ability to attend one of the state's four-year universities.

This approach will not make sense moving forward. **A college-ready designation on the state-adopted, Common Core standards-aligned PARCC assessment should be sufficient to meet state minimum eligibility criteria for unconditional admission to the state's public universities.** While students may always choose to take additional assessments—as many currently do by taking both the ACT and SAT—they should not be required to jump through multiple hoops of assessment just to meet minimum standards.

Chart C. ACT Composite Score Distribution for Selective Institutions



Data compiled from ACT Inc.

In addition to Arkansas, Common Core consortia member states[32] with higher education systems that have embedded ACT and SAT score thresholds in their minimum admissions criteria include California, Colorado, Idaho, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. [See Box A for more on Wisconsin and Wyoming] These eighteen states have incorporated the ACT and SAT within their minimum admissions standards in a variety of different ways. Some states require students to take these assessments for the only purpose of submitting the results (regardless of their score). Others have set minimum score thresholds, and yet more have created elaborate score indexes that weight these scores with other criteria. [See Chart D for additional information on ACT/SAT use in state admissions policies]

Yet as of this spring, among states contacted, only Colorado responded that it will amend its minimum admissions standards, and even that policy will leave decisions in the hands of individual institutions.[33] According to one Colorado Department of Higher Education official, the "new admission policy will come into effect Fall 2019 and it will allow institutions to use PARCC and SBAC as admission indicators."[34]

Less obviously, the ACT and SAT tests also affect certain admissions decisions at colleges with open admissions policies, including the more than 1,000 community colleges throughout the United States serving 45 percent of all U.S. undergraduates.[35] In theory, open admissions institutions require no criteria for admission other than a high school diploma or GED. But in practice, students often find that while a high school diploma will get them through the front door, and perhaps into credit-bearing work, it may not be enough to enroll in their chosen program or field of study. As community colleges have both increased and diversified their course offerings and programs, many have restricted access to students with demonstrated academic achievement, and are increasingly using test scores from ACT and SAT as a requirement for program entry.

One such example is the nursing program at St. Charles Community College in Cottleville, Missouri. To apply to the nursing program, all applicants must submit ACT scores regardless of age or work experience (unless an applicant has already obtained a bachelors' degree). For admission, applicants must achieve a minimum ACT composite score between 20 and 24 depending on high school GPA—a requirement more rigorous than many states' minimum admissions standards for four

year colleges and universities.[36] If selective admissions programs continue to operate within open-admission institutions using ACT or SAT as a criterion for admission, a comparable score on PARCC or Smarter Balanced (or other college- and career-ready assessment) should be a sufficient substitute.

Here, too, higher education leaders must consider how best to integrate these new college-ready assessments with admissions policies that affect millions of college students ever year. Currently, the best advice the U.S. Department of Education can offer prospective community college students is as follows:

> "Most community colleges have open enrollment and don't require standardized test scores. . . . If you want to enroll in a selective program at a community college (nursing, computer science, law enforcement), then standardized test scores may be required. Later, if you transfer from a community college to a university or another school, test scores may be required.[37]

States and institutions will need to work together to streamline these admissions policies, both at the state and institutional level, and clarify how their high school assessments fit into the current confusion of testing requirements for entry into higher education. The Common Core assessments (as well as other states' college- and career-ready assessments) offer an unprecedented opportunity to build greater systemic connections between high school and college. But if these assessments do not serve as a means for determining college readiness in minimum admissions policies, it will undermine the standards as a true proxy for college readiness.

State and Postsecondary Financial Aid

Some states' postsecondary financial aid is need-based, but many states award aid based on academic merit as well. Many of the factors currently considered by colleges and universities in the admissions process are weighed for financial aid considerations, including high school GPA, adherence to a "college-preparatory" course load, and ACT and SAT scores.

For example, the state of Louisiana offers the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) Award which pays for tuition and some additional fees at public colleges and universities. To earn a TOPS award, graduating high school students must meet several standard eligibility requirements, including a minimum ACT score or its equivalent SAT score, determined by the prior year's state average (the current minimum qualifying score is 20). As it now stands, if Louisiana rolls out the PARCC assessments, high school students will need to take the PARCC assessments but then also sign up for and take the ACT or SAT to qualify for TOPS.

Several states spend large amounts of money on so-called "merit" aid—for Louisiana, as well as South Dakota and Wyoming, over 80 percent of state financial aid has a merit-based component, with ACT and SAT scores included as a criterion for eligibility. In those states, the minimum eligibility scores required vary. For example, South Dakota's Opportunity Scholarship—a program that received 88.51 percent of the state's total student aid funding for FY 2013–14—requires a minimum Composite ACT score of 24 or a combined SAT score of 1800 in order to qualify. Louisiana and Wyoming have tiers of merit aid, with incrementally higher ACT scores qualifying

Box A: Postsecondary Policies Coming Into Alignment with K–12 Adoption of ACT

Back in April of 2013, Alabama's State Board of Education signed a resolution which officially made it the first state to adopt the ACT as its college- and career-ready assessment. At the time it was big news, as ACT had also recently announced its new testing product, ACT Aspire, for grades three through high school, which Alabama also committed to implement. This marked Alabama as the first to adopt ACT's entire suite of products for its K–12 system, tracking students' progress toward college- and career-readiness using an assessment aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Three additional states have followed suit, with Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Wyoming also planning to use the ACT test (for their states' high school assessments at least).

A funny thing happened when these four states adopted an assessment already used throughout their higher education systems for a variety of purposes: many of their states' higher education policies suddenly align with their K–12 education systems. Wisconsin and Wyoming's minimum admissions standards will now align with the assessment all of their high schoolers will be taking at the end of eleventh grade. Kentucky and Wyoming's financial aid requirements are now based on tests that all students will be required to take, making the path to college smoother for students. While questions remain as to the quality of the ACT (as previously highlighted), the path to college for students in those states is now a bit smoother.

Chart D. Common Core State Standards / Admissions and Assessment Policies

CCSS Assessment Consortium Members with State-set Admissions Requirements for Some Public Institutions

State	Adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?	CCSS Assessment Consortium Membership?	State-set Admissions Requirements for Some Public Institutions?	ACT / SAT Score Reporting Required for Students?	How are ACT/ SAT Scores used in Admissions Decisions?	Considering CCSS Assessment for Admissions?
Alabama	YES	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Alaska	NO	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Arizona	YES	NO	YES	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria	NO
Arkansas	YES	YES (PARCC)	YES	Required	Minimum set score	NO
California	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	Indexed with other criteria	*
Colorado	YES	YES (PARCC)	YES	Required	Indexed with other criteria	YES
Connecticut	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Delaware	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
D.C.	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Florida	YES	NO	YES	Required	Indexed with other criteria	N/A
Georgia	YES	NO	YES	Required	Minimum set score	N/A
Hawaii	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Idaho	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	No set score	NO
Illinois	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Indiana	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Iowa	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kansas	YES	NO	YES	Required	Indexed with other criteria	N/A
Kentucky	YES	NO	YES	Required	Minimum set score	N/A
Louisiana	YES	YES (PARCC)	YES	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria	NO
Maine	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maryland	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts	YES	YES (PARCC)	YES	Required	Indexed with other criteria	NO
Michigan	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A

Minnesota	YES (ELA ONLY)	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mississippi	YES	YES (PARCC)	YES	Required	Can substitute with other criteria	*
Missouri	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	Indexed with other criteria	*
Montana	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria	NO
Nebraska	NO	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nevada	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	No set score	NO
New Hampshire	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Jersey	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Mexico	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
New York	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
North Carolina	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	Minimum set score	NO
North Dakota	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	No set score	*
Ohio	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Oklahoma	NO	NO	YES	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria	N/A
Oregon	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	No set score	NO
Pennsylvania	YES	YES (BOTH)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rhode Island	YES	YES (PARCC)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	NO	NO	YES	Required	No set score	N/A
South Dakota	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria	NO
Tennessee	YES	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Texas	NO	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Utah	YES	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vermont	YES	YES (SB)	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Virginia	NO	NO	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A
Washington	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	No set score	NO
West Virginia	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	Minimum set score	NO
Wisconsin	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	No set score	*
Wyoming	YES	YES (SB)	YES	Required	Minimum set score	*

* No Response. Surveyed April 2014

Source: Compiled from Common Core website, consortia websites, state higher education governance bodies, and survey data from the states.

students for more generous merit aid packages. To qualify for Wyoming's Hathaway Scholarship—which received 100 percent of the state's total student aid funding for FY 2013–14—the first tier requires an ACT Composite score of 19 for $840 per semester, the second tier a 21 for $1,260 per semester, and the third tier a 25 for $1,680 per semester. Louisiana's TOPS awards are tiered similarly to Wyoming's Hathaway Scholarships.

These states are not alone. A number of additional Common Core consortia member states,[38] including Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, and West Virginia (nineteen in all) include the ACT or SAT tests as a criterion for eligibility for some types of state-funded student financial aid. **[See Chart E for state financial aid details.]**

Yet, as with admissions policies, few states have determined if, or how, they will integrate the new college-ready assessments into this critical area of higher education policy. And for those states developing or using their own high school assessments, most remain separate and distinct from financial aid eligibility.

Three of these states, however, use results from older, pre-Common Core state tests to determine eligibility for state-funded student financial aid. With the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP), the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), and the New York Regent's Examinations, these states have made an explicit policy connection between standards-based high school performance and college readiness. Moving forward, these three states will be reexamining their high school assessments: Delaware will be transitioning to Smarter Balanced, and Massachusetts and New York may be moving to the PARCC assessments. In addition, Florida (which, until recently, was a governing member of the PARCC consortium) currently allows students applying to vocational education programs to qualify for aid based upon their performance on the state's Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (a customized, common course placement test developed by the state) as a substitute for ACT or SAT scores, though the remainder of their state scholarships require ACT or SAT scores to qualify. These states will need to revisit their current financial aid policies and update them to reflect their new high school assessments.

Allowing students to demonstrate college readiness—and thus financial aid worthiness—with scores on Common Core assessments would provide many students with another avenue to gain needed financial resources. Further, aligning state financial aid qualifications with state high school assessments will help streamline a process that can be confusing for many students and families. With this simplification, states and high schools would be able to provide better outreach and guidance to students regarding state aid programs. If states are committed to organizing K–12 instruction around the Common Core standards, and to establishing an authentic standard of college readiness on the PARCC and Smarter Balanced tests, they should change their aid-worthiness policies accordingly.

Retesting and Course Placement

An enormous apparatus has been developed to assess, sort, and remediate underprepared undergraduates (through what is commonly referred to as developmental coursework), due in part to the concern that students were graduating from high school without the academic skills necessary to succeed in college-level work. Today, across all institutions, anywhere from 28 to 40 percent of first-year undergraduates are enrolling in at least one developmental course. At community colleges, this number is closer to 50 percent.[39]

While there are many factors contributing to these enormous enrollment rates in developmental education (including inadequate high school preparation, which the Common Core seek to address), college and university retesting and course placement policies have been cited as part of the problem. Many institutions require students to retest basic skills in mathematics and English through the administration of standardized placement exams (such as COMPASS and Accuplacer, developed and sold by ACT and the College Board, respectively). These placement exams funnel students into developmental courses that have a dismal record for helping students learn these basic skills, and as a result they keep millions of students from ever reaching college-level classes.[40]

Retesting and course placement have thus represented one of the most prominent policy areas where the assessment consortia and states have sought to integrate Common Core assessments with higher education. As students are educated to higher standards and demonstrate their college readiness through high school assessments, additional layers of retesting through course placement exams acts become unnecessary barriers to college-level coursework. Therefore, states participating in the two testing consortia have agreed that students who meet the college-ready cut scores on PARCC and Smarter Balanced are ready to enroll in first-year credit-bearing coursework at public institutions without retesting. Individual institutions in these states will not retest students' basic skills in math and English as a prerequisite for enrolling in college-level work.[41]

High schools will begin using the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments as soon as the end of the upcoming 2014–15 school year, and as mentioned, states will soon begin to determine the cut scores that will define what level of mastery represents "college ready" (states are required by their consortia to set these scores by January 2015). To do so, the consortia will need to determine what level of content mastery will represent a college-ready level—for PARCC, this would be a standard score of four or greater (out of five), and for Smarter Balanced a three or greater (out of four).

The devil remains in the details, however.

The current emphasis on establishing a college-ready cut score highlights the strong attention currently focused on non-remediation, or avoiding the placement of students into developmental coursework. Addressing dead-end developmental education programs is critical, it is not the whole picture. Retesting and course placement policies for colleges and universities are complex, and are not limited to developmental coursework. Scores on course placement exams provide colleges and universities with

Chart E. State Financial Aid Awards Requiring ACT/SAT Scores

Consortium Members with Merit-Based State Grant Programs

State	CCSS Assessment Consortium Membership?	Merit-Based State Grant Programs?	Total State Scholarships and Grants (FY12–13)	State Financial Aid Program Name	Total Funds Disbursed (FY12–13)	Percent of Total State Fin Aid (FY12-13)	ACT / SAT Score Reporting Required for Students? State High School Test?	How are ACT / SAT Scores used in Aid Decisions?
Alabama	NO	NO	$9,535,806	N/A			N/A	N/A
Alaska	NO	YES	$16,910,686	Alaska Performance Scholarship	$5,655,304	33.44%	Required	Minimum Set Score
Arizona	NO	NO	$21,712,958	N/A				
Arkansas	YES (PARCC)	YES	$158,468,101	Academic Challenge Scholarship	$128,837,398	81.30%	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria
				Governor's Scholars Program	$12,159,560	7.67%	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria
California	YES (SB)	YES	$1,545,140,939	Cal Grant A	$867,429,000	56.14%	Conditional	Required for non-traditional students
				Cal Grant B	$647,232,000	41.89%	Conditional	Required for non-traditional students
				Cal Grant C	$4,292,000	0.28%	Conditional	Required for non-traditional students
Colorado	YES (PARCC)	NO	$105,475,468	N/A				
Connecticut	YES (SB)	YES	$138,626,455	Capitol Scholarship Program*	$5,103,004	3.68%	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria
Delaware	YES (SB)	YES	$21,553,789	Diamond State Scholarship	$241,867	1.12%	Required	Minimum set score
				Michael C. Ferguson Achievement Award	$335,717	1.56%	Use state HS assessment	
D.C.	YES (PARCC)	NO	$34,135,930	N/A				
Florida	NO	YES	$550,012,208	Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program - Academic Scholars	$104,659,203	19.03%	Required	Minimum set score
				FBFSP - Academic Top Scholars	$286,423	0.05%	Required	Indexed with other criteria
				FBFSP - Medallion Scholars	$204,667,694	37.21%	Required	Minimum set score
				FBFSP - Gold Seal Vocational Scholars	$2,537,270	0.46%	Optional (may use PERT placement test)	Minimum set score
Georgia	NO	YES	$538,521,252	Georgia HOPE Scholarship	$337,712,934	62.71%	Conditional	Required for non-traditional students

				Zell Miller Scholarship Program	$92,111,590	17.10%	Required	Minimum set score
Hawaii	YES (SB)	NO	$3,787,511	N/A				
Idaho	YES (SB)	YES	$6,701,010	Idaho Promise Category B Scholarship	$3,477,163	51.89%	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria
Illinois	YES (PARCC)	NO	$0	N/A				
Indiana	YES (PARCC)	NO	$285,437,920	N/A				
Iowa	YES (SB)	NO	$63,756,267	N/A				
Kansas	NO	YES	$21,797,399	Kansas State Scholarship	$937,446	4.30%	Required	Indexed with other criteria
Kentucky	NO	YES	$198,073,976	Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship	$102,273,471	51.63%	Optional	Indexed with other criteria
Louisiana	YES (PARCC)	YES	$218,107,828	TOPS Performance Award	$190,149,297	87.18%	Required	Minimum set score
			$218,107,828	TOPS Tech Award	$862,500	0.40%		
Maine	YES (SB)	NO	$18,278,853	N/A				
Maryland	YES (PARCC)	YES	$99,392,826	Senatorial Scholarship	$6,426,983	6.47%	Required	No minimum score
Mass.	YES (PARCC)	YES	$137,354,543	John & Abigail Adams Scholarship	$16,316,741	11.88%	Use state HS assessment	
Michigan	YES (SB)	YES	$92,778,175	Michigan Competitive Scholarship	$22,924,171	24.71%		
Minnesota	NO	NO	$253,520,097	N/A				
Mississippi	YES (PARCC)	YES	$32,701,183	Mississippi Eminent Scholars Grant	$5,212,308	15.94%	Required	Minimum set score
			$32,701,183	Mississippi Tuition Assistance Grant	$13,880,728	42.45%	Required	Minimum set score
			$32,701,183	MS Higher Ed. Legislative Plan	$4,852,533	14.84%	Required	Minimum set score
Missouri	YES (SB)	YES	$104,262,157	Higher Ed. Academic Scholarship Program	$11,815,877	11.33%	Required	Minimum set percentile rank
Montana	YES (SB)	YES	$6,374,943	Governor's "Best and Brightest" Scholarship Program - Merit	$1,037,000	16.27%	Required	Minimum set score
			$6,374,943	Governor's "Best and Brightest" Scholarship - Merit at Large	$313,000	4.91%		
Nebraska	NO	YES	$125,862,224	Remission/Tuition Waivers	$104,578,489	83.09%	Required	Minimum set score
Nevada	YES (SB)	NO	$78,209,637	N/A				
New Hampshire	YES (SB)	NO	$0	N/A				
New Jersey	YES (PARCC)	YES	$561,612,376	New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship	$5,074,308	0.90%	Required	Minimum set score
New Mexico	YES (PARCC)	YES	$116,453,487	NM Scholars	$672,387	0.58%	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria
New York	YES (PARCC)	YES	$1,038,708,170	NYS Scholarships for Academic Excellence	$10,636,000	1.02%	Use state HS assessment	

North Carolina	YES (SB)	NO	$414,737,654	N/A				
North Dakota	YES (SB)	YES	$19,641,168	ND Scholars Program	$1,158,360	5.90%	Required	Minimum set percentile rank
			$19,641,168	ND Academic Scholarship	$2,808,870	14.30%	Required	Minimum set score
Ohio	YES (PARCC)	NO	$122,064,999	N/A				
Oklahoma	NO	YES	$275,193,913	Academic Scholars	$10,043,250	3.65%	Required	Minimum set score
				Regional Baccalaureate Scholarship	$977,250	0.36%	Required	Minimum set score
Oregon	YES (SB)	NO	$139,640,996	N/A				
Penn.	YES (BOTH)	NO	$477,602,808	N/A				
R. Island	YES (PARCC)	NO	$12,406,003	N/A				
South Carolina	NO	YES	$319,029,041	LIFE Scholarship	$175,664,083	55.06%	Required	Minimum set score
				Palmetto Fellows Scholarship	$53,947,701	16.91%	Required	Minimum set score
South Dakota	YES (SB)	YES	$4,883,979	South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship	$4,322,667	88.51%	Required	Minimum set score
Tennessee	NO	YES	$375,194,826	HOPE Scholarship	$254,343,075	67.79%	Optional	Can substitute with other criteria
				ASPIRE supplement to HOPE Scholarship	$27,197,510	7.25%	Required	Minimum set score
				GAMS Supplement to HOPE Scholarship	$6,157,788	1.64%	Required	Minimum set score
				HOPE Access Grant	$913,802	0.24%	Required	Minimum set score
				Ned McWherter Scholars Program	$565,093	0.15%	Required	Minimum set score
Texas	NO	NO	$869,485,016	N/A				
Utah	NO	YES	$90,262,128	Regents' Scholarship	$3,669,903	4.07%	Required	No set score for base award; minimum score for supplemental funds
Vermont	YES (SB)	NO	$20,591,664	N/A				
Virginia	NO	NO	$431,410,568	N/A				
Washington	YES (SB)	NO	$360,999,068	N/A				
West Virginia	YES (SB)	YES	$146,915,079	PROMISE Scholarship	$47,161,143	32.10%	Required	Minimum set score
Wisconsin	YES (SB)	NO	$130,862,566	N/A				
Wyoming	YES (SB)	YES	$15,470,317	Hathaway Scholarship	$15,470,317	100.00%	Required	Minimum set score

Chart Data Compiled from Common Core website, consortia websites, state higher education governance body websites, and survey data from the states, and NASSGAP's 43rd Annual Survey Data. See: "National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs State Data Quick Check," NASSGAP, accessed April 21, 2014, http://www.nassgap.org/survey/state_data_check.asp.

Chart includes state undergraduate merit-aid programs with an assessment component; excludes programs that serve fewer than 100 students, serve no undergraduate students, or are targeted toward a small subset of students (pre-dental, nursing, etc.).

a method for sorting students into different levels of credit-bearing courses.

For example, both Kent State University and the University of Delaware (and many others) use the Assessment of Learning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS) for course placement in mathematics. ALEKS—an "artificially intelligent assessment" recently acquired by McGraw-Hill Education[42]—is required by both universities to sort students into their wide array of credit-bearing courses (in addition to their developmental coursework), most evident in their math classes. All of the courses listed in Chart F are credit-bearing, and are potentially open for first-year undergraduates—depending upon their ALEKS scores.

The content covered in Kent State University's first math offering, MATH 11009: Modeling Algebra, bears remarkably similarity to the Common Core mathematics standards; the course is described as the "study of algebra arising in the context of real-world applications, including linear, polynomial, exponential and logarithmic models."[44] As a recent report from the Education Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) noted, "the more Common Core standards in which [students] are proficient, the wider the range of postsecondary-level classes they will be ready to undertake."[44] Obviously, students who have been taught the Common Core algebra standards in high school and demonstrate mastery on either the PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessment would be ready to undertake a course more rigorous than Kent State's MATH 11009—it would make very little sense for them to repeat this content in their first year of college.

According to PARCC guidelines, students scoring at level five (which represents a distinguished command of the Common Core standards) are "well prepared to engage successfully in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in College Algebra, Introductory College Statistics, and technical courses requiring an equivalent level of Mathematics."[45] Yet, students demonstrating distinguished command of the Common Core standards at Kent State would still be required to retest using ALEKS to determine where they should be placed within the array of courses offered—unless they wanted to start back at the very beginning with College Algebra.[46]

This appears to be the likely approach that other colleges will take. Jaqueline King, director of higher education collaboration with Smarter Balanced, noted that her consortia's assessment will also only guarantee placement into college-level algebra or its equivalent.[47] So while these tests theoretically allow students to enroll in college-level courses, it quickly becomes clear that in terms of math content, "college ready" only applies to the *lowest-level credit-bearing course a college offers*. There is a disconnect between the level of college readiness alleged by the Common Core standards and testing consortia and the level of college readiness reflected in actual college placement policies.

In many cases, these lowest-level credit-bearing courses are not what students need to take in order to start earning credit toward their specific degree. As an example, a student hoping to pursue a degree in any of the STEM fields is certainly going to need to take a college mathematics sequence that begins at a more advanced level than algebra. Those degrees often begin their general requirements with Calculus I or its equivalent. It is not just a matter of college-level algebra vs. calculus. Clearly, colleges and universities (much like University of Delaware and Kent State University) have an array of math classes, often half a dozen or more, organized as a sequence. A student starting in a college-level algebra class could take several years of study just to reach the beginning point of calculus in pursuit of a STEM degree. Thus, tests such as ALEKS will still factor largely into the academic futures of students.

It would be less worrisome that students continue to be required by many institutions to retest using assessments such as ALEKS, COMPASS, and Accuplacer if such assessments were used consistently for course placement (and were accurate predictors of college success). But as Chart F shows, Kent State and University of Delaware have fairly idiosyncratic cut scores on ALEKS which determine course enrollment options. For students seeking to take a pre-calculus or calculus course that difference is a seemingly arbitrary 7 or 8 percent. Colleges and universities have set cut scores on these various placement tests at widely disparate levels, which is both confusing for students and illogical at the policy level. The range of cut scores that institutions have established for these tests further underscores higher education's inconsistent understanding of college readiness.

Further, research from Thomas Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center, has shown that these tests, at best, only have a weak relationship with educational outcomes. A 2011 article in *Washington Monthly* noted that "tests like the Accuplacer and the COMPASS routinely underestimate the ability of large numbers of students."[48] Nevertheless their use for retesting and course placement has persisted.

To have a substantive effect on course placement and to mitigate the need for retesting, the Common Core assessments need to contextualize their range of possible scores, both in terms of students' mastery of specific content as well as their ability to succeed within the sequence of first-year coursework offered in colleges. Current efforts have not sought to do so and instead have focused on the task of setting a single college-ready cut score for all students, trying to distinguish between students who need developmental education and those who do not. Representing "college readiness" as a single standard when colleges themselves define readiness along a long continuum could limit many students' understanding of their own preparedness for college-level work, as well as the range of postsecondary course options they have.

For college- and career-ready assessments to be effective in guiding student course placement decisions, and to reduce the amount of retesting necessary at the college level, states will need to decide upon more than a single college-ready cut score. They should also provide information about the types of first-year college-level coursework that students are prepared to take. **For this information to be useful, public colleges and universities will need to adopt more consistent and reliable policies around placement decisions.** Otherwise, the inconsistent use of inadequate college course placement tests will continue to be the norm, and students who pass those college- and career-ready assessments will be only a little better off than they were before.

Chart F. ALEKS Course Placement Cut Scores for Mathematics

Similar Precalculus Courses

Similar Calculus Courses

Min. Score on ALEKS Assessment	Math Courses at University of Delaware	Math Courses at Kent State University (Ohio)
78%		MATH 12021 Calculus for Life Sciences
		MATH 12002 Analytic Geometry and Calculus I
75%	MAT 241 Analytic Geometry and Calculus A	
70%	MAT 221 Calculus I	
67%		MATH 12011 Calculus with Precalculus I
		MATH 12001 Algebra and Trigonometry
		MATH 11022 Trigonometry
		MATH 11012 Intuitive Calculus
65%	MAT 117 Pre-calculus for Scientists and Engineers	
60%	MAT 115 Pre-calculus	
55%		MATH 11010 Algebra for Calculus
45%	MAT 114 College Mathematics and Statistics	
		MATH 20095 Special Topics
		MATH 14001 Basic Mathematical Concepts I
		MATH 11009 Modeling Algebra
0-45%	MAT 113 Contemporary Mathematics	
35%		MATH 20095 Special Topics-Developmental

Data compiled from University of Delaware and Kent State University math placement websites and course catalogs.

NO 'STANDARD' HIGHER EDUCATION

The creation and adoption of common standards and assessments—with accompanying policies for admission, financial aid, and course placement—only makes sense if the standards are reflected in the curricula and teaching practices used throughout K–12 schools. Some college educators and higher education officials have invested significant time and effort in achieving this goal by collaborating with K–12 educators to build high-quality curricula and materials aligned with the Common Core standards.

There appears, however, to be little or no movement to treat the Common Core standards as a more solid foundation upon which to build higher education: better aligning college teaching and curricula to the Common Core standards. Many of those within higher education were not involved in developing or endorsing the Common Core standards and assessments, and have not considered how they might change their own practices to align with this K–12 initiative. Indeed, many are not even aware of the Common Core. This appears to be true even among educators who are genuinely invested in making these new standards and assessments work at the K–12 level.

For example, through its Early Assessment Program (EAP), California has made progress in identifying high school students who are struggling to achieve college- and career-readiness. The EAP—developed by the California State University (CSU) system, along with the State Board of Education and the California Department of Education—tests students' English and math skills, and is intended to determine whether they are ready at the end of eleventh grade for college-level academics at a CSU school. Introduced in 2004, this voluntary college-ready assessment is now taken by about 82 percent of California's public high school juniors, or about 386,000 students.[49]

Going a step farther, a 2004 taskforce that included both state high school teachers and California State University faculty developed a full-year preparatory English/language arts course for juniors and seniors. The course, Expository Reading and Writing, is designed to help high school English teachers lead students to college-level critical reading and writing skills. As the California State University website indicates:

> "Course assignments, organized into 14 modules and based mainly on non-fiction texts, emphasize the in-depth study of expository, analytical, and argumentative reading and writing. The University of California has approved the ERWC for area "b" credit (from the "a-g" requirements), and the Course meets college preparatory requirements for both the UC and CSU.[50]

To facilitate greater use of this course, CSU has partnered with local offices of education throughout the state to provide professional development opportunities for high school English teachers. The four-day professional development covers training on the modules, and further, offers coaching on how to effectively teach using the included readings and other materials. An estimated 2,200 high school teachers have been trained on how to teach this course throughout the state so far.

In November of 2013, Nancy Brynelson, Co-Director of the Center for the Advancement of Reading at California State University, touted this curriculum at an event hosted by the Community College Research Center.[51] She held up this curriculum as a successful strategy to "make the most of 12th grade in the Common Core era." In fact, CSU is in the process of back-mapping this twelfth-grade curriculum all the way down to seventh grade for optimal alignment.

As a follow-up, when asked how the course aligns with CSU and other California college and university first-year ELA coursework, it appeared as though that alignment was nonexistent. She explained that with twenty-three CSU campuses in California all teaching introductory English courses—let alone the rest of the state's universities and community colleges—they could not expect them all to align.

If 2,200 high school teachers can adopt and implement a new college-preparatory curriculum, professors at 23 campuses *could* band together to align their content and teaching to that curriculum. But while states have continued to take on increasingly greater roles in shaping K–12 education throughout the country, for a variety of reasons (including deep-seated principles of shared governance and academic freedom) public institutions of higher education have carried on, largely insulated

from change. Further, what nominal higher education support for the Common Core movement that does exist may erode if that support implies change within higher education itself.

This is due in part to the fact that while the Common Core standards are predicated on the notion that there is a clear progression of learning that builds on previously acquired knowledge and skills, many higher education programs are not based on such a scaffolded concept of learning. Some disciplines, particularly in the sciences and professions, guide students through a developed sequence of courses. But very often, the content of college courses—even within developmental coursework—is developed with no awareness of K–12 expectations or even those of other college-level courses. There appears to be little movement for change within higher education, despite the massive nationwide change and alignment of K–12 expectations.

Thus, the Common Core standards appear at the moment to end at the college gate, representing the completion of an indistinct goal–"college readiness"–rather than as another deliberate step on a student's journey toward a college degree.

Developmental Education

Developmental education represents the clear first step in aligning *college* instruction with the Common Core standards. After all, developmental courses teach skills that students should have mastered in high school while under the Common Core umbrella. There will be many opportunities for such alignment because, while the goal of these new standards is for all students to graduate high school prepared for college, this goal is far from being fully achieved. A staggering number of students are currently paying college prices for what amounts to high school coursework. This is also a major obstacle for college completion. While 58 percent of students who place into credit-bearing courses will go on to earn a bachelor's degree, only 17 percent of students placed into developmental reading and 27 percent placed into developmental mathematics will go on to graduate.[52]

Some states are already rethinking developmental education policy within high school and higher education. Many are beginning to look at the twelfth grade as a "bridge" year, pushing these interventions back into high school to help students catch up prior to entering college. But certainly there will be many students attending colleges and universities who are underprepared for first-year credit-bearing coursework, especially in the short-run. If students are going to continue taking what amount to high school courses in college, and it is understood that the Common Core standards represent the knowledge and skills students will need to be prepared for college coursework, these standards should be the basis for developmental education as well. **Whatever form developmental education takes, coursework and instruction should be aligned with the Common Core standards.**

Further, and equally important, **the Common Core assessments should be used to gauge the effectiveness of developmental education programs**. Based on the dismal percentage of students who are placed into developmental education and go on to earn a degree, it is apparent that these programs are not effective for the vast majority of students. The Common Core assessments will provide a consistent measure of learning to give students a clearer understanding of their progress. Additionally, the assessments will provide an empirical basis for gauging the impact of developmental education programs in higher education.

This does not appear to be happening yet. A 2014 discussion paper from the Community College Research Center noted, "there are still relatively few cases in which developmental education or college course content and pedagogy have been examined or reformed as part of these efforts."[53] While the study identifies a few pieces of legislation—in California, Kentucky, and Tennessee—that could spur greater alignment between college coursework and the Common Core standards, it is not at all clear that state legislation will translate into meaningful change in higher education instructional practice. The paper goes on to report: "one state higher education representative said, 'There are not a lot of resources and incentives to do anything differently—to find the time to figure out what it would look like in individual college classrooms.'"[54] Unlike the high-stakes accountability framework that has taken shape in elementary and secondary education which creates strong incentives for change, accountability in higher education is virtually nonexistent.

The report points to broader higher education engagement as a key to reform, but it is unclear that higher education stakeholders have thought through the substantive changes needed within colleges and universities themselves. In the most recent example, the new group, Higher Ed for Higher Standards, represents a growing coalition of college and university leaders that support higher, college- and career-ready standards in K–12. Its mission is to "elevate the higher ed voice in support of efforts by K–12 educators to implement college- and career-ready standards, including the Common Core standards." While the coalition points toward implementation of these new standards and assessments as an important step for reducing developmental education rates, so far it has not signaled any efforts which colleges and universities may need to undertake in order to improve student success.

Teacher Preparation

A final consideration is how to effectively integrate the Common Core standards into teacher preparation. With K–12 systems in 43 states and the District of Columbia using these standards in their classrooms, the majority of teachers in this country will soon be required to teach based upon this framework.

A recent survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) indicated that of the 40 responding states, 35 reported that their postsecondary institutions are involved in preparing students in teacher preparation programs to teach the Common Core standards. Of those responding states, only 24 are planning to revise teacher

preparation curriculum to reflect the new standards; just 17 indicated they are planning to make the entry requirements for the teacher preparation program more rigorous; and merely 12 reported they were revising course requirements for a teaching degree to require more courses in subject matter content.

Even these survey results should be interpreted with caution. It is easy enough for a state education agency to answer affirmatively to a broad question about future plans. The real test will come with substantive changes to teaching practice at the departmental level within institutions, changes that, as with developmental course instruction, many states have no experience with or mechanisms for adjudicating. Several state officials offered the following and other similar responses to CEP's survey in terms of their involvement in rethinking teacher preparation:

> "These types of decisions about teacher education are outside of the SEA's authority.
>
> Our state's colleges of education are largely independent so there is [sic] a variety of activities occurring in relation to CCSS; however, most are in pockets of individual faculty and/or institutions, so the SEA cannot say as a system that all colleges of education are doing any one of these activities.[55]

The ultimate ability of teachers to implement the Common Core standards in classrooms throughout the country will be much greater if colleges and universities are preparing them to do so.

In part, the uneven integration of the Common Core standards into higher education so far represents the general difficulty of translating abstract commitments into real world-change. But it also represents a more fundamental problem with the concept of a uniform standard of college readiness. There are many different kinds of colleges, and what it takes to be "ready" for them varies widely. Moreover, the elements of college readiness include many factors that are not represented in the mathematics, English, and, in the future, science standards embodied in the Common Core standards.

The larger challenge confronting most states, as they attempt this integration, lies with the fragmentation of most states' education systems. States that are actively partnering with the various decision-makers who control these diverse policy areas will have the most success in implementing the big policy changes necessary for integrating state college- and career-ready standards and assessments within their systems.

"Whatever form developmental education takes, coursework and instruction should be aligned with the Common Core standards

ALIGNING HIGH SCHOOL AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The path from high school to college is fraught with detours and pitfalls for students seeking to make this transition. Those states that have made a commitment to preparing all students to college-ready levels will be unable to uphold that ideal without addressing the complicated, piecemeal policies and practices which have been put into place over the past century.

In some places, initiatives have been launched to help guide the adoption of effective policies. Core to College, a project sponsored by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors with funding from several additional nonprofit foundations, is working to promote greater collaboration between the higher education and K–12 sectors. Similar initiatives include the College Readiness Partnership initiated by the CCSSO in partnership with several other organizations, and the Common Core Postsecondary Collaborative initiated by the NGA.[56] Both PARCC and Smarter Balanced are reaching out to higher education officials as well. While these initiatives are an important start, more needs to be done to ensure these systems align.

To address the many policy issues plaguing this transition, officials within and across states must engage to amend inconsistent policies, increase the usefulness of new assessment tools, and overhaul outdated practices. While addressing any one of the following areas will begin to improve the pathway to higher education, real alignment of Common Core with colleges and universities will require action across all five areas. Crafting more inclusive policies that account for the creation of new Common Core assessments will level the path to higher education, while linking higher education practices to the standards themselves will pave a smoother transition into college-level coursework, making all learning of a piece. To summarize the argument put forth in this paper, we recommend the following five changes:

1. Where test scores are used for minimum standards in higher education, include college- and career-ready assessments as a means to meet these standards.

2. Where test scores are used as a proxy for college readiness to award financial aid, allow students to demonstrate proficiency with college- and career-ready assessment scores.

3. As college- and career-ready assessments are being developed and implemented, provide greater clarity and consistency between assessment scores and preparation for specific higher education coursework.

4. Align developmental coursework offered by colleges and universities with high school college- and career-ready standards, and use college- and career-ready assessments to evaluate the impact of developmental education programs.

5. Ensure that teacher preparation programs provide comprehensive instruction in how to effectively instruct using college- and career-ready standards.

Many of these changes must start with state-level leadership, but will need to be supported by other stakeholders and institutions of higher education as well. Moreover, each state will need to keep in mind its own high school policies [see Box B for secondary policies to keep in mind] and implementation timelines for the Common Core standards and assessments as it seeks to build better connections between high school and higher education. The following steps should be taken by state governing bodies and public institutions of higher education:

State Higher Education Governing Boards / Boards of Education:

1. For those states currently using assessments such as the ACT and SAT within their minimum admissions standards, amend minimum admissions standards

to include high school college- and career-ready assessment scores.

2. For those states which continue to award financial aid on the basis of demonstrated academic merit, amend any criteria relating to assessment scores to include those from the state's high school college- and career-ready assessments.

3. Member states of the Common Core assessment consortia should work with test developers to provide additional information for college and university use in the course placement process.

Colleges and Universities:

4. Institutions with minimum standards for admission should amend those standards to include college- and career-ready assessment cut scores.

5. Adopt more consistent and reliable policies around retesting and course placement.

6. Institutions offering developmental coursework should base this instruction upon their state's college- and career-ready standards, and determine the success of those programs using the state's high school assessments.

7. Institutions with teacher preparation programs should require the incorporation of the state's college- and career-ready standards within required coursework.

Today, if you visit the city of Chicago, you would likely still struggle to find the Pedway in the downtown business district. While the path between City Hall and the State of Illinois Center is relatively easy to navigate, visitors continue to pay $25 for tours through this unique "urban safari." At the time, reforming one piece of these tunnels may have alleviated the public embarrassment of two government agencies, but it did nothing to address the fundamental lack of planning which is now the distinguishing feature of the Pedway.

A few lost tourists likely will not impact Chicago's tourism industry. The hundreds of thousands of students lost in the transition from high school to college, on the other hand, will adversely impact the economy as a whole—as well as each of those students' economic futures.[57] The Common Core has presented a unique opportunity to find common ground between high school and higher education, an opportunity on which states and higher education should begin to act.

Box B: Keep in Mind the Secondary Policy Landscape

To ensure secondary and postsecondary education align, the policy foundations on either side need to be designed in tandem. While this paper focuses explicitly on postsecondary considerations, they are highly dependent on the context of the secondary policy landscape. Without going into significant detail, these areas include:

Definitions of College Readiness
Many states have either adopted or are in the process of developing a statewide definition of what it means for students to be "college ready." Establishing a shared understanding and agreement of what college readiness means is a critical step in thinking through policies that guide the transition from high school to higher education.

High School Graduation Requirements
States have adopted requirements for the number of high school credits that students need to obtain in each subject area for graduation. Several states have updated these requirements to reflect the level of preparation students will need to succeed in college, including mathematics and English/language arts coursework that is aligned with the Common Core standards. States will need to consider the alignment between graduation requirements for high school and minimum admissions requirements for state colleges and universities.

High School Exit Exams
Many states administer exit exams for high school students, and some require students to pass these exams as a condition for graduation. Understanding the layers of assessment that students will need to complete prior to graduation, in addition to those for college admission, should be a top priority for states. States need to determine the function and purpose each serves in the transition from high school to college, and effectively communicate this to students.

Twelfth Grade Curriculum and Bridge Programs
A number of states have created, or are in the process of creating, developmental coursework for the twelfth grade as well as programs for the summer between high school and college. Many states designing these courses are putting them into place in order to support students who have not earned college-ready designations on Common Core assessments. States should consider such efforts and initiatives in high schools, and coordinate efforts at the postsecondary level.

NOTES

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