

In this issue:	Page:
A Note from the Director	1
Adopting Rigorous College- and Career-Ready Standards and High-Quality Assessments	1
State Highlights and Events	7

Adopting Rigorous College- and Career-Ready Standards and High-Quality Assessments

By Kathleen Theodore, MA, SECC Program Associate, and Robyn Madison-Harris, EdD, SECC Program Associate

Statistics tell the story. High school dropout and completion rates in 2005–2006 revealed that the average freshman graduation rate, which is an estimate of the percentage of public high school students who graduate with a regular diploma 4 years after starting 9th grade, was 73.2 percent (Citaldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009). In addition, according to the *High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States 2007 Report*, students living in low-income families were approximately 10 times more likely to drop out of high school between 2006 and 2007 than were students living in high-income families.

Furthermore, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for 17-year-olds were not measurably different from 1970–2008. On the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2006, with 30 participating countries from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the U.S. 15-year-old students' average mathematics literacy score of 474 was lower than the OECD average of 498, placing these students in the bottom quarter, 23rd out of the other 29 participating OECD countries. The average mathematics literacy score for U.S. students showed no measurable change compared to the OECD average or in its relative position to the countries whose scores increased or decreased. Also, the average science literacy score of 489 was lower than the OECD average of 500, placing U.S. 15-year-olds in the bottom third of participating countries.

In addition to dismal test scores, Achieve Inc. (2004), indicated that too few high school students are taking challenging courses while most employers are spending millions of dollars



A Note from the Director

As I previewed this issue of the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) eBulletin, I felt my professional and personal worlds collide. As I watch my daughter prepare for her college graduation and my son prepare for his high school graduation, both this spring, I wonder as their mom whether they are really ready to face the next phase of their lives. I'm sure that each of you have the same thoughts and concerns for the children in your lives. Have we guided them in the right direction? Have we pushed hard enough for them to take rigorous courses and reach for their dreams? Are their teachers and principals counseling them in how to increase their options in life by accessing the most rigorous courses they can? Will they really be prepared to face the world when graduation day comes?

As educators, our responsibility in ensuring access to a rigorous curriculum, readiness for college and career, and preparation for the 21st century reach another level as we make decisions that impact all of the children in our class, school, district, state, or nation. Are we making decisions that will ensure equal access for all our children? Are we ensuring that all children have the guidance and support to make the right decisions when selecting classes in high school or making decisions about college or work when completing high school? Are we doing everything possible to support our students to be successful with these more rigorous standards and assessments?

In this edition of the eBulletin, we highlight the issues of raising standards, ensuring access to rigorous curricula and assessments, and ensuring that every child is both work and college ready upon graduation. With the increased emphasis placed on these issues in recent years through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and through a growing body of research in this area, our nation is actively addressing the issues of college and work readiness.

We hope that the information included in this issue will provide you details on research and practice occurring both nationally and within our region. Be sure to read the stories from our states about their work in these areas to learn more about their efforts.

We continue to enjoy working with each of our states and look forward to continuing this work in the future. We are pleased at SEDL to provide the services of the Southeast Comprehensive Center and look forward to our continuing partnerships with all of you.

Sincerely,

Robin Jarvis, PhD
Director, SECC

for remedial training in reading, writing, and mathematics due to high school graduates' lack of basic skills. Although there are more high school graduates attending college, 25 percent of new students at 4-year institutions need to take at least one remedial course along with 61 percent of new students at public 2-year colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). The NCES 2004 report also found that students who take remedial courses are less likely to finish college.

What Is College and Career Readiness?

According to Achieve Inc. (2009), *college-ready* means being prepared for any postsecondary work, 2-year institutions as well as 4-year institutions. It means that a high school graduate has the knowledge and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses without the need for remedial coursework. Achieve Inc. (2009) describes *career-ready* as a high school graduate who has the knowledge and skills needed to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for his or her chosen career. Research conducted by ACT has shown strong similarities in the expectations of employers and colleges in relation to the knowledge and skills high school graduates must have to be successful (ACT, 2006). These similarities were especially noted in English and mathematics.

A review of publications on college and career readiness indicated that rigorous coursework, high expectations for success, and high-quality standards and assessments are crucial to helping all students prepare for success beyond high school. Support for this view is evident on the state and national levels.

In his speech on *Reauthorization of ESEA: Why We Can't Wait* at the monthly stakeholders meeting, Education Secretary Arne Duncan called education "the civil rights issue of our generation." In his address at the 2009 Governors Education Symposium, Secretary Duncan stated clearly that educational reform will be led by states and districts and that the role of the federal government is to support them. When President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), \$4.35 billion was provided for the Race to the Top Fund. It is a competitive grant program designed to reward states who are creating education innovation and reform, achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers, and implementing plans in the following four core areas of educational reform (U.S. Department of Education (ED), Race To The Top Fund, 2009):

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals;

- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and
- Turning around our lowest-performing schools.

In an ED publication on the use of ARRA funds for school reform efforts (ED, ARRA: Using Funds, 2009), the author discussed examples of actions that districts and schools may take to promote higher standards and effective assessment systems.

1. Increase student participation in rigorous advanced courses such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment in postsecondary credit-bearing courses and provide training for teachers and counselors to support these initiatives.
2. Use formative and interim assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, especially students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs), and that provide timely data to help educators track and improve student progress. If assessments are technology based, train teachers on the use of this technology.
3. Implement a high-quality curriculum aligned with standards with embedded assessments. Include instructional materials appropriate for ELLs and students with disabilities. Train all teachers in effectively using the curriculum with their students.

Closing the Expectations Gap

Knowledge demands in a global economy have prompted state leaders to develop a coherent policy framework that will close the gap between high school, college, and the workplace. Whether planning to attend college or going straight to the workplace, all high school graduates need the same rigorous education in order to be successful (ACT, 2006; Achieve Inc., 2008). In *Making College and Career Readiness the Mission for High Schools: A Guide for State Policymakers*, an Achieve and Education Trust publication (2008), the following recommendations were made to assist states with developing a framework for college and career readiness:

1. Align high school standards with the demands of college and careers.
2. Assure that students enroll in a course of study aligned with college- and career-readiness standards.
3. Provide high-quality curriculum and teacher support materials.
4. Measure student learning via a college- and career-ready assessment system.
5. Get everybody pulling in the same direction by using an information and accountability system focused on college and career readiness.

Common Core State Standards Initiative

The Common Core State Standards Initiative exemplifies how states are leading educational reform efforts. In June 2009, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center)

spearheaded an effort to develop and adopt common core state standards for English language arts and mathematics for grades K–12. Forty-eight states and three territories have agreed to take part in the initiative, which is motivated by the need to keep America's competitive edge in the global economy. In order to achieve this result, the ultimate goal of the initiative is to graduate students from high school that are college and career ready and successful in the global economy.

The first public draft of the college- and career-ready standards was released for review in September 2009. These standards were developed based on the following considerations:

- Fewer, clearer, and higher: The standards cover only those critical areas for student success.
- Evidence: Each document includes sources of evidence for the standards.
- International benchmarks: The standards are based on the content, rigor, and organization of high-performing countries and states.
- Special populations: The inclusion of all types of learners was critical in developing the standards.
- Assessments: The standards will be used to develop assessments.
- Standards and curriculum: The purpose of the initiative is to develop a set of standards that are common across the states. The curriculum will continue to be a local or state-led responsibility.
- Twenty-first century skills: The focus of the standards includes English language arts and mathematics. Although the standards do not include all the skills students need to be successful in the 21st century, the standards incorporate 21st century skills through rigorous content and application of knowledge utilizing higher-order skills.

On November 10, 2009, the NGA Center and CCSO announced the common core state standards initiative development teams for mathematics and English language arts, which include individuals representing a range of stakeholders with expertise and experience in assessment, curriculum design, cognitive development, early childhood, early numeracy, child development, English-language acquisition, and elementary, middle, and postsecondary education. Georgia and Louisiana—two of the states served by SECC—are among 30 states represented on the work teams that will provide feedback as the common standards are fully developed and finalized. The initiative is scheduled to release the common core standards in early 2010.

Support for College- and Career-Ready Standards from Education Organizations

ACT collects data yearly regarding tested students' readiness for college. If a student makes a benchmark score on an ACT subject-area test—which is the minimum score needed (i.e.,

English=18, mathematics=22, reading=21, science=24)—this indicates a 50 percent chance of the student obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college course (English composition, algebra, social sciences, and biology, respectively). The following table indicates the percentage of tested students in each state who made benchmark on the whole test and per subject tested (see Table 1. ACT-Tested Graduates Ready for College-Level Coursework by State). These compelling data substantiate the nation's move toward common college- and career-ready standards.

In addition to what ACT has asserted, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) promotes the development of statewide college- and career-readiness standards and assessments that are centered around the goal for all students to be ready to begin college or preparation for occupations leading to their independent economic success (Spence, 2007). According to Spence, this goal was established after ACT determined that 70 percent of college-bound high school graduates are not ready for further learning. He indicated that a solution to this problem is to create conditions in classrooms that enable teachers to help all students meet statewide college readiness standards, with those conditions being that all teachers know concretely and specifically the college readiness standards and that teachers give high priority to teaching these standards. In order for these conditions to be created, the following will be required: developing performance-based, statewide college readiness standards; making these readiness standards part of the statewide adopted school curriculum; and emphasizing these standards on state assessments used in school and student accountability.

In the 2007 report, Spence indicated that there must be statewide recognition of the college readiness issue and that the issue is currently masked by the lack of common readiness standards across postsecondary education facilities because individual campuses and systems are setting their own readiness standards. He also expounded on the following key points:

1. Admissions often are focused on courses taken prior to college, grades in those courses, and college entrance exams, such as the ACT and SAT. Many colleges have open-admissions policies, while only a small portion exercise selective admissions. Readiness is then often applied post-admission.
2. College readiness standards should be centered on reading with comprehension, writing (clearly, analytically, persuasively), and mathematics (capacity for logical, symbolic, and multidimensional thinking). Such readiness standards should indicate a description of the needed skills, including the level of performance required.
3. State goals for increasing high school completion, strengthening minimum high school diploma requirements, and ensuring that all graduates are ready for college/careers are needed and important.

4. Postsecondary education must view the improvement of college readiness as a public responsibility. Improved readiness is crucial to raising college degree completion rates, which is becoming an increasing focus of state accountability. College readiness standards must be infused into presecondary school standards. If necessary, additions to existing standards should be made.
5. Secondary school assessments should be revised to include college readiness components, rather than adding external college assessments into high school accountability. Dual enrollment in secondary school and college should only be allowed for those who exhibit college preparedness via meeting readiness standards. At present, end-of-course tests do the better job of measuring college readiness than other types of assessments.

Table 1. ACT-Tested Graduates Ready for College-Level Coursework by State

Percent of ACT-Tested Graduates Ready for College-level Coursework 2009						
State	Number of Students Tested	All 4	English	Math	Reading	Science
National	1480469	23	67	42	53	28
Alabama	35809	16	67	29	47	21
Alaska	2254	25	65	44	55	28
Arizona	12550	26	73	52	60	30
Arkansas	22523	18	67	35	50	24
California	81494	29	73	55	59	33
Colorado	51087	22	64	39	51	28
Connecticut	9240	37	85	63	71	41
Delaware	1060	31	77	55	64	37
Florida	105297	15	55	33	43	19
Georgia	36165	19	65	38	48	23
Hawaii	3115	24	69	50	53	28
Idaho	10228	24	72	45	60	30
Illinois	143791	22	66	40	48	27
Indiana	17321	28	75	54	61	33
Iowa	22377	29	79	50	64	37
Kansas	23147	26	74	48	60	33
Kentucky	45419	15	55	26	41	20
Louisiana	34548	15	67	30	44	20
Maine	1438	34	82	60	69	39
Maryland	11317	30	73	51	59	34
Massachusetts	13093	39	86	68	73	43
Michigan	121982	18	54	31	40	24
Minnesota	43642	32	78	57	65	39
Mississippi	25976	10	57	20	34	14
Missouri	46923	25	73	42	57	32
Montana	5960	26	74	48	63	33
Nebraska	16286	29	76	49	61	36
Nevada	6396	23	71	45	58	28
New Hampshire	2469	36	84	63	72	40
New Jersey	17679	34	81	61	65	38
New Mexico	12434	16	58	31	47	21
New York	47520	36	80	62	66	42
North Carolina	13347	26	69	51	56	30
North Dakota	5791	24	70	47	57	31
Ohio	88754	26	72	46	58	33
Oklahoma	27054	18	67	33	52	25
Oregon	11560	26	66	47	56	31
Pennsylvania	21199	29	74	52	60	33
Rhode Island	1309	30	81	57	68	35
South Carolina	18691	16	58	35	42	20
South Dakota	6676	28	74	49	60	36
Tennessee	52052	18	69	33	50	24
Texas	82640	22	63	44	49	26
Utah	23229	25	73	44	62	32
Vermont	2008	34	80	56	68	40
Virginia	17902	27	74	49	59	33
Washington	12285	33	77	58	66	38
West Virginia	11696	17	71	30	54	25
Wisconsin	46658	30	77	53	62	37
Wyoming	5530	17	57	33	45	22
Washington DC	1548	21	50	33	40	22

Note. The table above was reprinted with permission from ACT.

The Education Commission of the States (ECS, 2008) reported that several states—Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—are using end-of-course tests as a high school exit criterion; whereas others are doing so as a part of course grades or not at all yet. The movement in this direction certainly concurs with the move toward more rigorous college- and career-readiness standards.

The College Board is developing a multi-indicator system that provides educators with a comprehensive view of their students' college readiness. The information used to measure progress toward college readiness comes from the College Board's nationally administered assessments such as the SAT and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. Students who take content area courses for more years often demonstrate better preparedness for college. A way to determine this is to compare students' performance on the SAT to those stating that they participated in more core courses in secondary school to those who took fewer core courses. An additional indicator for measuring readiness is how well secondary students performed in college courses. Scoring a 3 on AP exams is another indicator of college preparedness. In fact, the National Center for Educational Accountability determined that doing so is a strong predictor for college readiness as well as for earning a bachelor's degree. The combination of high school grade point average and SAT is also a predictor of college preparedness. College and career planning skills, in addition to substantial academic performance, is a necessary readiness component.

According to Spence, a handful of states have taken action toward improving college readiness, notably Arkansas, California, Indiana, Georgia, Kentucky and Texas, all of which have at least established specific state policy agendas for dealing with the issue (March 22, 2007). In addition, he stated that Achieve Inc. has worked with many states through its American Diploma Project to help states take some early steps toward improving college readiness, and the American Council on Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers are among the groups that have begun supporting the need to take action on college readiness. However, Spence indicated that most states, though, have neither committed to a specific agenda for improving college readiness nor made significant progress.

The American Diploma Project (ADP) Network (Achieve, ADP Network, 2009) includes 35 states that are dedicated to making sure that every high school graduate is prepared for college or a career. This indicates a substantial increase from what Spence documented in 2007, so it can be gleaned that consideration of college and career preparedness has rapidly increased. Together, ADP Network member states are responsible for educating nearly 85 percent of all U.S. public school students. Those states are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan,

Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Illinois is one state that has incorporated policy, The College and Career Readiness (CCR) Act of Illinois, around the issues of college readiness. That policy has five main purposes

1. Align ACT scores to community college courses to diagnose college readiness.
2. Reduce remediation through college preparatory courses, college readiness skills, and successful transitions.
3. Align high school and college curricula.
4. Provide resources and academic support to students.
5. Develop an evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of readiness programs.

Recently, a [CCR pilot study](#) was conducted in order to determine implementation effectiveness, which consisted of four pilot sites with five community colleges: Pilot 1 - John A. Logan College and Shawnee Community College; Pilot 2 - Moraine Valley Community College; Pilot 3 - South Suburban College; and Pilot 4 - Southwestern Illinois College. The state of Illinois distributed grants to these five schools, which were used for a variety of purposes, including the delivery of college preparatory/remedial programs, the hiring of personnel associated with the programs, and the purchase of student incentives and classroom equipment.

Ultimately, the goals of the pilot sites were to improve students' college readiness, better align high school and college curricula, and reduce the need to remediate students prior to their entering college. During the first year of the grant, the pilot sites implemented a variety of strategies to address the goals of the CCR Act. Most of the community colleges set up meetings between high school and community college faculty and administrators to better align curriculum standards and expectations, including aligning grading standards. Most colleges implemented semester-long programs offering courses to improve students' reading, mathematics, and college study skills, and some offered orientations and workshops to acclimate students to college-level expectations.

A few colleges offered a combination of these activities. Students targeted by the pilot programs varied from high school sophomores to recently graduated seniors, with most participants being at the junior level of high school.

Year-one results of the evaluation of the CCR Act initially revealed that K–12 systems are not well connected to colleges, resulting in many students not having the requisite skills to enter college without taking remedial coursework. The findings and conclusions pertain to three main areas: goals and implementation, collaboration of partners, and state and local support. Year-one results also showed positive strides in

improving collaboration between the community colleges and high schools; however, it was determined that colleges should go well beyond establishing relationships and should reach out to more high schools and support efforts to improve their students' academic achievement.

As has been gleaned herein, the development of rigorous college- and career-readiness standards and high-quality assessments is crucial to the education arena in our country. Doing so will afford all students across the country access to more rigorous curriculum and assessments that will prepare them for success both in college and career paths. A strong start toward the development of these standards and assessments has occurred, yet there is still substantial work necessary in order to cyclically adopt, implement, evaluate, and refine these critical components of a world-class educational system.

References

- Achieve. (2004). *Ready or not: Creating a high school diploma that counts*. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from http://www.achieve.org/files/ADPreport_7.pdf
- Achieve & The Education Trust. (2008). *Making college and career readiness the mission for high schools: A guide for state policymakers*. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/MakingCollegeandCareerReadinesstheMission111908.pdf>
- Achieve. (2009). *May 2009 Perspective Newsletter*. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.achieve.org/files/enewsletters/200905/May2009Newsletter.html>
- Achieve. American Diploma Project (ADP) Network. (2009). Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://www.achieve.org/node/604>
- ACT. (2006). *Ready for college and ready for work: Same or different?* Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ReadinessBrief.pdf>
- ACT. (2009). *Measuring college and career readiness: The class of 2009*. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from http://www.act.org/news/data/09/pdf/output/ACT_WashingtonDC_Output.pdf
- Cataldi, E. F., Laird, J., & KewalRamani, A. (2009). *High school dropout and completion rates in the United States: 2007 (NCES 2009-064)*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009064>
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2009). Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Duncan, A. (2009, September). U.S. Department of Education. Press Room. Speeches. *Reauthorization of ESEA: Why we can't wait*. Remarks delivered at the Monthly Stakeholders Meeting in Washington, DC. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2009/09/09242009.html>
- Duncan, A. (2009, June). U.S. Department of Education. Press Room. Speeches. *States will lead the way toward reform*. Address delivered at the 2009 Governors Education Symposium in Cary, NC. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2009/06/06142009.html>
- Education Commission of the States. (2008). *Exit exams: States where end-of-course exams are used as the exit exam*. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=1361>
- Khan, S. (2009). *Evaluating the College and Career Readiness Act*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Education. Office of Community College Research and Leadership. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://occr.illinois.edu/Newsletter/2009/spring/3>
- Menson, R. P., Patelis, T., & Doyle, A. (2009). *New England's state of college readiness*. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from http://www.nebhe.org/info/pdf/nejhe/College_Board_Article_from_NEJHE_Spring_09.pdf
- Spence, D. (2007). *The development of statewide college and career readiness standards and assessments*. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/Board/agendas/2007/June/Item8.pdf>
- Spence, D. (2007, March 22). Getting serious about college readiness. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2007/03/22/spence>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009: Using ARRA funds to drive school reform and improvement*. Retrieved July 28, 2009, from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/guidance/uses.doc>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *General. Race To The Top Fund*. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *The condition of education 2004, indicator 18*. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004077_3.pdf
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Special analysis 2009 international assessments*. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2009/analysis/index.asp>

State Highlights and Events

Alabama

Providing Standards, Resources, and Support to Ensure That All Students Graduate College and Career Ready

By Cynthia Brown, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Dr. Gloria Turner, Assessment and Accountability Director, Alabama State Department of Education Mary Lou Meadows, EdD, SECC State Liaison

Alabama has worked over the last decade to improve accountability for its educational programs and achievement of its students and to establish a P–16 curriculum, ensuring that students are college and career ready. While progress has been made, businesses and higher education continued to indicate that a large number of Alabama graduates were unprepared for life outside the high school classroom. Committed to the belief that all Alabama students are entitled to an education that will enable them to succeed in an ever-changing and more complicated world, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) began a serious evaluation of what would be required to have its students graduate college and career ready. In 2008, ALSDE announced its charge “To Provide the Standards, Resources, and Support LEAs (local education agencies) Need to Ensure ALL Students Graduate College and/or Career Ready.” While the plan remains a work in progress, Alabama has made great strides in assuring that its students are graduating with the knowledge base and intellectual skills required for success in the 21st century.

A major indicator of whether students graduate with the skills and abilities needed to be college and career ready is the rigor of the high school curriculum. Revisions to the state’s courses of study (standards) focus on developing standards that are more rigorous and require a depth of understanding for mastery. State courses of study committees (consisting of classroom teachers, school administrators, university professors, and non-educational professionals) use/review professional organizations’ national standards developed for each discipline, other national reports, courses of study from other states (especially those that have received higher evaluations than Alabama by national review organizations), and the frameworks of national assessments, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as they developed standards for Alabama’s students. As each content area is revised, the committees strive to achieve two specific goals that standards reflect subject-area content that is substantive and relevant and becomes more rigorous across the grades and that standards require students to be able to analyze and synthesize data, defend positions, and make judgments about information rather than simply regurgitate information. Results have yielded courses of study (standards) that are highly rated nationally and that demand both knowledge and skill from Alabama’s students.

To accompany these rigorous standards and support instructional programs, materials and resources that will allow students to graduate and be college and/or career ready are developed. Alabama’s approach to addressing college readiness is strengthened by a partnership with Achieve Inc. and the American Diploma Project.

Alabama’s adoption of the Alabama High School Diploma with Advanced Academic Endorsement as its FIRST CHOICE diploma for all Alabama students established the expectation of all students graduating college and career ready. FIRST CHOICE includes capstone courses in algebra II with trigonometry, 2 years of a foreign language, and an online course or experience. For the 9th grade class of 2009–2010, FIRST CHOICE became the default diploma. Students and their parents or guardians must actively select to remove a student from this diploma option. The strength of the FIRST CHOICE commitment is that it is reinforced by Board Resolution—amending the Alabama Administrative Code to include the high stakes diploma—and a full Implementation Policy to support schools, students, and parents as the expectations for student achievement are raised.

Also, ALSDE has partnered with A+ College Ready to expand rigorous course offerings in mathematics, science, and English to allow more students to participate in challenging, college-ready courses and to earn qualifying scores on Advanced Placement (AP) exams.

Additionally, Alabama’s Governor Bob Riley, State Superintendent of Education Dr. Joe Morton, and the State Board of Education support the national initiative to establish Common Core State Standards that identify what students should know and be able to do in mathematics and English. Such standards will unify efforts to provide college- and career-ready standards nationwide.

On September 10, 2009, the State Board of Education adopted a new Student Assessment Plan. This plan will, over the next several years, reshape testing in Alabama across all grade levels. In grades 3–8, the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) will be replaced by the ARMT+, which will include the Alabama Science Assessments and maintain a writing component, by 2012. The Stanford Achievement Test (Stanford 10) will be removed from the testing protocol. Alabama students will continue to participate in NAEP testing at appropriate levels. The Alabama Alternate Assessment (AAA) will continue to be offered to special needs populations who make up less than 1 percent of statewide enrollment.

The Alabama High School Graduation Exam will be phased out and replaced by end-of-course tests designed to measure content knowledge and mastery of the rigorous content standards taught. Response to this change has been consistently positive.

In addition, a comprehensive testing protocol is being developed beginning in grade 8 to help students and their parents as they evaluate their readiness for college and/or careers. All 8th graders will take EXPLORE, and all 10th graders will take PLAN—ACT assessments that helps students look at a wide range of options. These assessments let students know if they are on track for college, help them choose high school courses that will get them ready for college, help them find careers that match their interests, and point out academic strengths and areas that need to be improved. In the future, all juniors will be required to take the ACT with writing at state expense. Dr. Morton indicated in the September 11, 2009, *Birmingham News* that 76 percent of students currently take the ACT. In making this change, the board is hopeful that the students who would not ordinarily take the ACT will be encouraged to consider college as an option.

Twelfth-grade students will take the WorkKeys assessment, which provides relevant information about workplace skills and requirements. It identifies current skill levels and the skill levels needed for success in a particular career. This system of assessments (EXPLORE, PLAN, ACT with writing, and WorkKeys) allows students, parents, and educators to see a comprehensive picture of the knowledge and skills a child has developed over a 4-year time frame and should enable them to make more appropriate decisions about future plans whether academic or career.

Alabama remains committed to the goal of having all students graduate with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to be successful in our global world. The ability to apply academic concepts in the real world, to work successfully in groups, to be able to think strategically, to identify problems and then solve them—these are the skills young people will need to thrive in the 21st century. Alabama’s efforts are all targeted towards that goal.

Georgia

Raising Standards to Prepare Students to Succeed

*By Kathy Cox, State Superintendent of Schools, Georgia Department of Education
Glenda Copeland, MA, SECC State Liaison*

Georgia is in a “Race to the Top” and, in many ways, we’re leading the country.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced recently that \$5 billion in grants are being made available to states that—in his words—adopt “college and career-ready internationally benchmarked standards” and “state of the art data collection systems, assessments and curricula to meet these higher standards.”

To me, it sounds like Secretary Duncan was reading straight from our Strategic Plan. For 6 years, Georgia has been focused on implementing a world-class curriculum, raising expectations, and using quality data to make decisions. We have received high

marks for the policies and standards we’ve put in place from groups across the nation.

But the journey to “the top” is not always smooth, and raising standards is not easy. The truth is that the material that Georgia students are learning today is more rigorous than it has ever been and, consequently, the assessments they are taking are more difficult.

Over the past few years, we’ve seen the pass rates on our state tests—such as the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) and end-of-course tests—drop in the first year we’ve implemented our new curriculum and given the new state exams. This is to be expected: Whenever you raise the bar, there’s going to be a temporary drop in the number of people that can reach that bar. That’s true in any situation.

The good news is that in the second and third year of the new curriculum, we have seen test scores increase in all subjects and all grades.

However, in all the focus on tests, pass rates, and percentages, it’s easy to forget the big picture: The mission of our public school system is to prepare students to be successful in life. In the 21st century, we must make sure our students have higher order thinking and analytical skills, the ability to communicate clearly, and a deeper understanding of mathematics and science.

We could certainly keep our standards low and get high test scores that make everyone feel good, but how does that help our students? Ultimately, we would be setting them up for failure later as they go on in their education and in life.

Instead, we are following a national, bipartisan call for higher standards and higher expectations for all students, regardless of whether they plan to attend college, go right into the workplace, or both.

Georgia is not going down this road alone. There are 35 states across the country that are raising standards and asking all students—regardless of their plans after high school—to take a rigorous core of classes in mathematics, science, English language arts, and social studies.

But in Georgia, we are ahead of the game and are combining those core academics with improved career, technical and agricultural education programs, increased public school choice options, and innovative approaches that allow school-level educators to decide what is best for their students.

We recently received results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress that shows our more rigorous curriculum is working. Georgia was one of just 15 states to show significant improvement in 8th grade mathematics. We are closing the achievement gap between all students and the nation.

If we want to continue making great progress and win the race to the top, we must be dedicated to giving our students and teachers the tools and information they need to run that race. It won't always be easy but, in the end, it will be worth it.

Louisiana

Advancing Education in Louisiana

*By Ken Bradford, Assistant Director of Louisiana Virtual School, Division of Leadership and Technology,
Louisiana Department of Education
Darlene Morgan Brown, PhD, SECC State Liaison*

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) is committed to providing quality educational experiences for all its students and equal access to these opportunities. Louisiana has adopted a rigorous School and District Accountability System designed to improve student and school performance. Components of this system include challenging academic content standards, a statewide model course curriculum for core subjects, and a set of distinct grade-level expectations for each core content course taught. The rigorous School and District Accountability System is tied to student performance and grade-level promotion, student and parent responsibility, school and school district accountability, as well as district and school site decision making. Louisiana is raising the bar at every level for students, educators, schools, and all the members of the education community. Schools and local school districts are now being held accountable for the performance of their students. Through two U.S. Department of Education Advanced Placement Program grants, LDE is working to ensure that more Louisiana students have access to rigorous high school curriculum and that low-income students have the opportunity to receive reimbursement of fee reduced AP exam fees.

The Louisiana Virtual School's (LVS) Louisiana AP Academy, LDE, and Louisiana State University (LSU) work together to ensure that more Louisiana students are given open access to a rigorous high school curriculum with strong Advanced Placement (AP[®]) and Pre-Advanced Placement components. The four main objectives are noted above. The AP Test Fee Program is one of the important tools Louisiana is using to help students reach these higher achievement levels. The number of students taking AP courses and exams is expected to grow in the years to come as the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) adopted an "Academic" diploma endorsement option that is linked to participation in AP courses and the AP testing program.

Despite the growing popularity of the AP Program, the exam fee (currently \$86 for the May 2010 test administration) can be prohibitive for many low-income students, particularly for those who wish to take more than one exam in Louisiana. The fee not only discourages students from taking the exams but has also discouraged students from enrolling in AP courses. LDE's

objective is to continue to increase the number of low-income students taking AP exams by reimbursing these students for the cost of the exams. The AP Test Fee Program helps to alleviate this burden and thereby provides more equitable access to educational opportunities for low-income students by reimbursing the cost of these exams.

Mississippi

Equipping Students with College Readiness and Workplace Skills

*By Jean Massey, Associate Superintendent of Accreditation,
Mississippi Department of Education
Debra Meibaum, MAT, SECC State Liaison*

The research is clear—what matters most for the jobs of tomorrow is postsecondary education and job training. This means that it is essential that students exit high school with college readiness skills that include academic knowledge, the ability to think and reason, strong teamwork skills, and proficiency in using technology. In Mississippi, a statewide effort is underway to provide students with the skills necessary to exit high school with college readiness skills.

This year, over 90 percent of graduating seniors in Mississippi took the ACT with a composite score of 18.9. These scores must improve if Mississippi students are to be successful at the next level. With ACT scores below the national average, work has begun to improve instructional practice in our public education system through higher expectations for student achievement and the implementation of a more rigorous curriculum. These changes will help ensure that students leave high school with the content and skills necessary to be successful in postsecondary work.

In August 2005, a statewide effort was initiated to increase the rigor of the Mississippi accountability system and to align the state's accountability system with national accountability models. This effort focused on

- establishment of high expectations for Mississippi's state school system;
- alignment of state and national standards;
- implementation of a new accountability system focused on raising Mississippi's test scores to the national average;
- implementation of high school redesign aimed at totally transforming Mississippi high schools into learning communities that set students on career pathways relevant to the 21st century; and
- establishment of college readiness graduation requirements for students entering the 9th grade, beginning with the school year 2008–2009, along with new requirements for admission to institutions of higher learning for this cohort of students.

All these initiatives work together to prepare students for postsecondary and/or career level opportunities.

Some of the most important work in this process has been the implementation of a new curriculum that aligns Mississippi's state curriculum with national curriculum. Language arts and mathematics curriculum alignments have been completed and implemented. Implementation of the new science curriculum begins this year and will be completed during the 2010–2011 school year. The social studies curriculum currently is in the design process, with implementation scheduled for the 2011–2012 school year.

New curricula required the development of new assessments and a new accountability system that reflected the new standards and the increased rigor of that curriculum. The new accountability system focuses on performance of both individual schools and school districts as a whole. The new accountability system includes an achievement component, a growth component, and a graduation or High School Completion Index (HSCI) component. The new accountability rating system represents a major step forward for Mississippi as it strives to achieve the national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

In today's world, some form of postsecondary education has become essential for all students. Through coordinating efforts between the Mississippi Department of Education and numerous external organizations, efforts are being made to prepare Mississippi students for postsecondary experiences. With the numerous improvements that are currently being implemented, it is our belief that Mississippi students will be better prepared to enter the world of postsecondary education.

South Carolina

South Carolina Course Alignment Project

By Robin Rivers, Interim Director, Office of Standards and Support, Division of Standards and Learning,

South Carolina Department of Education

Sandra Lindsay, EdD, SECC State Liaison

The South Carolina Course Alignment Project (SCCAP), the first of its kind in the nation, is a joint effort of the [South Carolina Department of Education](#), the [South Carolina Commission on Higher Education](#), and the [South Carolina Technical College System](#). A number of high school and college faculty members from across South Carolina are at the forefront of this ground-breaking initiative that is increasing connections between high school courses and entry-level college courses.

SCCAP is examining the scope and sequence of high school exit courses in English, mathematics, and science in relation to entry-level college courses in those same disciplines. The project's goal

is to improve the alignment between high school and entry-level college courses so that students transition more easily and successfully from secondary to postsecondary education.

The course alignment effort brings together faculty members from high schools and institutions of higher learning to develop courses that bridge the gap between the two entities. These faculty members have designed aligned courses in English, mathematics, and science. The key outcomes for the project include

- detailed specification of the content and skills necessary for postsecondary success in order to improve student preparation for college coursework in high school;
- constructed connections between high school and college coursework in order to help reduce curriculum redundancy and to improve alignment of expectations;
- improved high school graduation rates by enabling more students to view a postsecondary education as a distinct possibility; and
- increased proportion of South Carolina high school graduates who go on immediately to some form of postsecondary education without the need for remediation.

SCCAP was developed under the auspices of the Education and Economic Development Act ([EEDA](#)) of 2005. EEDA focuses on better preparing South Carolina students for the workforce and post-high school education through early career planning and an individualized curriculum. The act creates for each student a Personal Pathway to Success, making education relevant to their aspirations and abilities. In elementary school, students are made aware of a variety of professions, and in middle school they develop an Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP) with the help of parents and guidance counselors. In high school, students plan and prepare for postsecondary education, training, or employment.

The course alignment project has three phases. In Phase One, analyses were conducted of alignment issues and processes were put in place to support the project. Currently, during the project's second phase, paired courses in English, mathematics, and science have been developed. These paired courses are being piloted during the 2009–2010 school year, and feedback from pilot implementers will be used to refine the courses for statewide implementation the following year.

During Phase Three, efforts will focus on strategic outreach and support for the adoption of the courses statewide in order to ensure that students who complete exit-level high school courses will be prepared to succeed in entry-level college courses.

For more information regarding this project, please contact the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), Office of Standards and Support. The author gratefully acknowledges Janice Fairnot of SCDE for providing information about SCCAP, which was included in this article.

Southeast Comprehensive Center eBulletin

Quarterly publication of SEDL's Southeast Comprehensive Center

Wesley A. Hoover, PhD, SEDL President and CEO
 Robin Jarvis, PhD, SECC Program Director
 Chris Times, MBA, SECC Communications Associate and Publication Editor

Alabama State Liaison: Lou Meadows, EdD (lmeadows@sedl.org)
 Georgia State Liaison: Glenda Copeland, MA (gcopeland@sedl.org)
 Louisiana State Liaison: Darlene Brown, PhD (dbrown@sedl.org)
 Mississippi State Liaison: Debra Meibaum, MAT (dmeibaum@sedl.org)
 South Carolina State Liaison: Sandra Lindsay, EdD (slindsay@mailbox.sc.edu)

The Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) is one of 16 regional centers established by the U.S. Department of Education. The primary goal of the regional centers is to build the capacity of the state education agencies and statewide systems of support to implement NCLB. Links to the other regional centers, the content centers, and the U.S. Department of Education may be found on the SECC Web site (secc.sedl.org).

SEDL
 4700 Mueller Blvd., Austin, TX 78723, 800-476-6861, www.sedl.org

SOUTHEAST COMPREHENSIVE CENTER at SEDL
 3501 N. Causeway Blvd., Suite 700, Metairie, LA 70002, 800-644-8671, secc.sedl.org

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education. The contents do not, however, necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and one should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.