

Closing the Expectations Gap 2006
Achieve, Inc.,

For the complete report, please see <http://www.achieve.org/files/50-statepub-06.pdf>

Created by the nation's governors and business leaders, Achieve, Inc., is a bipartisan, non-profit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education, work and citizenship. Achieve has helped more than half the states benchmark their academic standards, tests and accountability systems against the best examples in the United States and around the world. Achieve also serves as a significant national voice for quality in standards-based education reform and regularly convenes governors, CEOs and other influential leaders at National Education Summits to sustain support for higher standards and achievement for all of America's schoolchildren.

In an effort to monitor state progress toward the national goals, Achieve surveyed all 50 states in December 2005 on a key subset of the policies from the National Summit action agenda -those focused on aligning high school academic standards, course requirements, assessments, and data and accountability systems with postsecondary and workplace expectations. In most states there is a large gap between what high schools expect and what colleges and employers demand, an expectations gap. This report examines progress states are making in closing the gap.

College and workplace expectations

Anchoring high school standards in college and workplace expectations is a critical first step toward preparing high school graduates for success. More than two-thirds of the states report action in this area, reflecting significant momentum since last year. FIVE STATES (California, Indiana, Nebraska, New York and Wyoming) report that they have completed the alignment process, including validation by the business and higher education communities that the high school standards reflect their skill demands. THIRTY ADDITIONAL STATES report that they are taking action to align their standards, with many of them giving the postsecondary and business communities a substantial role in defining the high school standards.

In 2005, Achieve published a state-by-state report on the courses high school students are expected to take to graduate. At that time, only two states - Arkansas and Texas- had enacted graduation requirements that include four years of rigorous English and mathematics through at least Algebra II. These are the courses that Achieve's research suggests are prerequisites for success in college or well-paying jobs. Over the past year, there has been significant progress in the number of states moving toward requiring all students to complete a college- and work-ready curriculum:

. EIGHT STATES have enacted college- and work-ready graduation requirements. Six of these states (Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New York, Oklahoma and South Dakota) have made this change since 2005.

. TWELVE STATES report to Achieve that they plan to put college- and work-ready requirements in place for all students in the future.

. SEVEN ADDITIONAL STATES have raised their graduation requirements since 2005, though not to the college- and work-ready level.

High School Testing

While states have made progress over the past year aligning high school standards and course requirements with college and work, less progress has been made with high school assessments. Very few states have high school tests in place that are rigorous enough to signal whether students are ready for college-level work. As a result, colleges largely ignore the results of those tests and instead administer their own admissions and placement tests. This sends a mixed set of messages to students, parents and teachers.

. SIX STATES (California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Missouri and Texas) report that statewide assessments given to students in high school are used for college admissions and/or placement decisions. EIGHT ADDITIONAL STATES plan to do so.

. EIGHT STATES have tied college scholarships or financial aid to student performance on high school assessments, and FOUR OTHERS plan to establish such financial incentives.

Data and Accountability Systems

At the Summit last year, governors and other education officials agreed that the overriding goal for high schools should be increasing the percentage of incoming 9th graders who graduate ready for college and work. No state has yet made this the centerpiece of its high school accountability system, although a number are moving in this direction. The ability of states to hold high schools accountable for improving student transitions to college and work depends first on the quality of their assessments and data systems. States need P-16 longitudinal data systems with the capacity to track student progress from high school through postsecondary education.

. THREE STATES (Florida, Louisiana and Texas) report having a P-16 longitudinal data system in place today. THIRTY-ONE ADDITIONAL STATES report that they are in the process of creating a P-16 data system or linking their existing K-12 and higher education data systems.

. FOUR STATES (Indiana, New York, North Carolina and Oklahoma) hold high schools accountable for improving the college and work readiness of their students. NINE MORE plan to do so.

Once states have longitudinal data systems and more rigorous high school assessments in place, they will be in a position to make college and work readiness a key factor in high school accountability systems.