

**Higher education has a vital leadership role to play in establishing and sustaining high standards for student learning and success that transcend the traditional boundaries between K–12 and postsecondary education in the United States. This role is rooted in deep collaboration with our K–12 counterparts. Many states have already begun to reshape how colleges, universities, and state higher education agencies organize, design, and execute policies and practices that establish stronger alignment with K–12.**

One key building block — college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics — is already in place across most states. In many cases, corresponding aligned assessments have been developed, meaning that for the first time, higher education institutions can be confident that students who meet these expectations are academically prepared for entry-level, credit-bearing coursework in college. Higher education is well positioned to leverage these new standards and assessments to significantly improve college readiness; smooth student transitions into credit-bearing, nonremedial college courses; and ultimately, shorten students' time to degree.

Higher education is advancing the P–20 alignment agenda by leveraging higher standards in three key areas:

- **Precollege interventions to help students be ready for college by the time they graduate high school**, including collaboration with K–12 school districts to design 12th grade bridge courses and

support programs based on areas of student need revealed through the new college-ready assessments.

- **Postsecondary placement practices to put incoming college students into appropriate courses and, consequently, on a path to persistence and completion.** This includes using the new high school assessments to determine if entering freshmen are ready for credit-bearing college courses.
- **Postsecondary freshman-year experiences to align secondary and higher education content and support students' transition into credit-bearing coursework.** Efforts include improving counseling, providing co-requisite remediation, and changing credit-bearing course sequences, consistent with the more ambitious expectations embedded in the new K–12 standards.

The following mini-case studies showcase examples of states where higher education is taking the lead in these areas.

## 1. PROVIDE PRECOLLEGE INTERVENTIONS

Some states are using the assessments to provide an early indicator of students' readiness for college work. Others have co-created transition programs. Most have created structures to foster joint work. In addition, many states have been collaborating with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) since 2009 to create math and literacy courses, which are publicly available on iTunes U, to address readiness gaps for 11th or 12th grade students.

While every state administers a college- and career-ready assessment, very few have used the results to inform student needs before they leave high school. The information from these new tests provides an opportunity to work with high schools to make the most of the 12th grade or support students in the summer months between high school and college. Precollege interventions come in a variety of formats and levels of intensity and may be

offered in one- or two-semester courses or as standalone modular units. The instruction may be delivered in person, online, or as a hybrid.

Summer bridge programs — which typically occur in the summer between high school graduation and fall matriculation in college — offer students accelerated, focused learning opportunities that can help them acquire sufficient knowledge to reduce the need for remediation, greatly increasing their chances of succeeding in college. Ideally, higher education can certify the quality of these transition courses by offering automatic placement in credit-bearing coursework or exempting students from further placement assessments.

For example, [Achieve](#) reports that:

**Delaware** is piloting a Foundations of College Math course that will guarantee placement into credit-bearing coursework in six institutions of higher education for any high school senior who passes.

In **Maryland**, senior year transition math and ELA/literacy courses will be piloted in 2015–16 and implemented in 2016–17. And state legislation requires the Maryland State Department of Education to collaborate by 2015–16 with districts and public community colleges to develop and implement transitional courses for grade 12, or other instructional opportunities aligned to the standards, for students who have not yet achieved college readiness by the end of grade 11, according to SREB.

**Tennessee** designed a voluntary Bridge Mathematics course for students who have not scored a 19 or higher on the ACT by the beginning of their senior year. According to Chattanooga State Community College, the SAILS (Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support) program it developed with Red Bank High School in 2011 helps underperforming students demonstrate competency with high school math standards and be prepared to enroll in credit-bearing math courses when they begin college. While dual enrollment programs are generally designed for students to earn high school and postsecondary credit, seven states, including Tennessee, allow high school students to complete noncredit-bearing developmental coursework through dual enrollment programs.

In **West Virginia**, legislation requires that all public high schools offer transitional courses for students who do not meet college readiness benchmarks on the COMPASS (or another mutually agreed-upon assessment), which West

Virginia administers statewide in 11th grade. And according to SREB, the state's Higher Education Policy Commission and the Council for Community and Technical College Education have adopted uniform standards of college and career readiness based on the state's Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives.

Additional states working on precollege interventions include:

In **Washington**, math transition courses are triggered by a student's 11th grade Smarter Balanced score. Developed by higher education faculty, high school teachers, and curriculum specialists from multiple colleges and school districts, the Bridge to College Courses were piloted in 2014–15. Up to 100 ELA and 100 math teachers statewide will implement courses in 2015–16, with broader implementation anticipated for subsequent school years. Passing these courses senior year guarantees placement into first-year at the state's 34 community and technical colleges, first-year, credit-bearing postsecondary courses, according to the state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

**Colorado's** GEAR UP Early Remediation Pilot program allows partner middle and high school students to participate in online, self-paced ELA and math courses that mirror the content of the remedial courses offered in state colleges and universities. The program would not be possible without the partnership of Adams State University to create the courses and ensure that students meet the requirements of mastering the classes. When students complete the classes, they receive an Adams State transcript. GEAR UP students can then use these transcripts to enroll in college-level classes as early as grade 10.

## 2. REVISE POSTSECONDARY PLACEMENT POLICIES

A growing number of higher education systems have agreed to honor the “college-ready” scores on the new statewide high school assessments for placement decisions, which will streamline the process for placing students into credit-bearing courses and remove at least one additional set of tests that students must take. Having higher education validate these scores underscores the rigor of the high school standards and courses and the reliability of the new assessments. It also likely will motivate students to work harder to meet the standards because they will see a more direct connection to their next steps after high school.

Seven states allow students achieving a minimum score on a statewide mandatory college-ready high school assessment to place into credit-bearing coursework upon college entry. Going forward, many more institutions/systems have said they will use college readiness cut scores on the new assessments for placement. Some will retain

the use of current placement tests but allow students to use PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessment scores instead.

**California's** Early Assessment Program led the way. The California State University (CSU) system supplemented the California 11th grade math and ELA/literacy exams with a small number of additional items so the tests would measure CSU's standards for readiness for credit-bearing courses. Eleventh graders who met the standards were notified that they would automatically be placed into credit-bearing courses, without the need to take an additional placement exam, if they enrolled in a CSU campus. CSU also partnered with K–12 to develop 12th grade bridge courses for students who needed extra support to achieve college readiness before leaving high school. With California transitioning to the Smarter Balanced exam, CSU and the state's community colleges will use the Smarter Balanced 11th grade scores for this purpose.

Higher education systems in some states participating in the **Smarter Balanced** assessment consortium have agreed to honor scores on the 11th grade assessment as an indicator of readiness for credit-bearing coursework. More than 200 colleges and universities in seven states will honor Smarter Balanced scores as college-ready indicators (California: 23 CSU campuses and 78 community colleges; Delaware: all seven public colleges, one independent college; Hawaii: all 10 public colleges; Nevada: all seven public colleges; Oregon: all 24 public colleges; South Dakota: all six public colleges; Washington: all 40 public colleges, nine independent colleges).

States in the **PARCC** assessment consortium also are preparing to use scores on the high school assessments as indicators of college readiness. Systems or institutions in three states have adopted such policies to date: Adams State and Aims Community College in Colorado, Illinois community colleges, and Southern Arkansas University. In addition, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, the University of Massachusetts, Massachusetts State Universities, and Massachusetts Community Colleges have issued a statement in support of the PARCC assessment, detailing their involvement

in shaping the test and their hope that it will be a better measure of college readiness than the old Massachusetts state tests, which were considered some of the best in the country. And presidents of the 19 community colleges in New Jersey anticipate considering PARCC scores as a factor in student placement beginning in 2016.

Some states are using **ACT** or **SAT** as their statewide high school assessment taken by all students. Both ACT and SAT claim to have revised their assessments to better align with college- and career-ready standards, such as the Common Core State Standards. In states using those assessments as their high school measures, higher education systems and institutions may have the opportunity to waive placement tests for students who score “college ready,” similar to what is happening with PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments.

Some states have chosen to develop **their own assessments** to measure their new college- and career-ready standards, rather than using PARCC, Smarter Balanced, ACT, or SAT. For those assessments to be used by higher education as college-ready indicators, they will need to be validated as adequately measuring college-ready knowledge and skills.

### 3. REDESIGN FRESHMAN-YEAR EXPERIENCES

A growing number of institutions are rethinking how they can better support entering freshmen, with improved counseling programs, block scheduling, and a new approach to remediation that helps more students enter and succeed in gateway courses more quickly.

**Complete College America** offers multiple examples:

**In Indiana, Ivy Tech Community College** and the **Lumina Foundation for Education** have created a one-year accelerated associate degree program. The program has two key components that shorten time to degree: recruiting and working with students in high school so they are able to start college without the need for remediation and block scheduling associate degree courses, which makes participating more convenient for students.

**In West Virginia, Mountwest Community & Technical College** provides multiple approaches to co-requisite remediation, including fall bootcamps to get students ready for college-level math courses. In addition, stretch courses merge the traditional three-hour developmental course and three-hour college-level course into one five-hour course that includes developmental support as needed. Under the traditional model, only 12 percent of developmental students at the school passed the gateway course after two years in fall 2011. Under the new model, 74 percent of developmental students passed their gateway course in the first semester in fall 2014.

**The City University of New York** offers an Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) to help select community college students earn associate degrees more quickly. ASAP provides student-friendly structures (e.g., block scheduling from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., Monday to Friday, and cohorts by major) along with financial incentives (free subway passes and textbooks) to speed participants’ paths to a degree. One study found that ASAP students had three times the graduation rate of a comparison group who lacked the same supports.

**The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) at the Community College of Baltimore County in Maryland** allows the majority of students who did not pass the writing placement test to enroll in both English 101 and a companion course that provides extra support. Designated sections of English 101 reserve 10 of 20 seats for ALP students, and the course standards are the same as for all sections of English 101. The 10 ALP students enroll in the companion course or workshop, which meets immediately following the English 101 course with the same instructor. The design removes some of the stigma of developmental courses and places ALP students in the classroom with stronger students who model better writing, study habits, and class participation. Students pay for six credits and receive three credits for English 101. The ALP students not only complete English 101 at more than twice the rate of non-ALP students in traditional remedial courses, but they also go on to

complete English 102 at a higher rate and enroll in more college courses. The program is catching on, and as of fall 2013, 153 colleges and universities across the country are offering sections of ALP.

Through its **Developmental Studies Redesign Initiative**, **Austin Peay State University (APSU) in Tennessee** eliminated its two remedial math courses, Elementary Algebra and Intermediate Algebra, and instead offers enhanced sections of its two gateway (core), college-level mathematics courses. Developmental math students enroll in a core math course and a linked workshop simultaneously. Initial assessments determine each student's math weaknesses. During the linked workshops, students receive additional instruction on key math concepts and particularly on their identified weaknesses. The linked workshop facilitators, students who have excelled in math, also attend the core class with the developmental students and then review concepts presented in class during the workshop. Students completing the co-requisite workshop and core math courses have succeeded at more than twice the rate of those who previously took the traditional developmental courses. The pass rate for developmental students rose from 23 percent to 54 percent in Elements of Statistics and from 33 percent to 71 percent in Mathematical Thought and Practice. Furthermore, more of these students are returning and enrolling in college courses the following school year.

The **New Mathways Project**, a joint initiative of the **Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin** and the **Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC)**, is a statewide approach to improving student success and completion by reforming developmental education. The initiative includes the development and implementation of a set of accelerated mathematics courses — matching the appropriate kind of math to modern programs of study. Built-in support systems help students more quickly earn college-level credits in rigorous mathematics in comparison to traditional remediation approaches. The 10-year partnership between the Dana Center and TACC offers the opportunity to work directly with the state's 50 community colleges, which have agreed to provide seed money to develop the initiative, and it enables collaboration on articulation, placement, and accreditation policies.

**For more information on these policy levers, see Education First Consulting's Core to College briefs:**

1. Achieving the Benefits of K–12/Higher Education Alignment
2. Defining College and Career Readiness
3. Adopting New College- and Career-Ready Assessments

Other institutions are beefing up their mentoring and advising programs to help entering freshmen get on track from day one. For example, **Georgia State University** has boosted graduation rates by more than 20 percentage points in the last 10 years by using degree maps and intrusive advising. Entering students receive intensive advice on their pathway options, then are closely counseled throughout their time on campus to help ensure that they stay on track. At the earliest signs of problems, the university steps in with support — an approach called “intrusive advising.” Pell (52.5 percent), African American (57.4 percent), and Hispanic students (66.4 percent) now graduate at higher rates than the overall student body, and the university confers more bachelor's degrees to African Americans than any other U.S. university.

Meanwhile, **Tennessee** has developed common, standards-based resources for the state's nine public universities and 13 community colleges, according to a recent report by Education First Consulting. Through the Core to College program, faculty from various campuses first developed sample syllabi and model lessons for two courses common across Tennessee campuses: English 1010 (a composition course) and College Algebra. After extensive engagement with educators across the state, faculty worked with the nonprofit Achieve to show their colleagues how to use these materials in gateway courses. Key lessons: use experts from groups such as Achieve to describe the necessary instructional shifts and be thoughtful about overemphasizing college readiness messages such as branding the gateway courses as “13th grade” when communicating with higher education faculty.

In addition to the examples cited by Complete College America, **Ohio** higher education leaders have made several improvements. They revamped their math curriculum to provide alternatives to algebra for students who are not planning to become math majors. Courses like quantitative reasoning, modeling, and elementary statistics often are more relevant to their majors. Postsecondary mathematics faculty and K–12 teachers also are partnering to redesign an aligned secondary mathematics curriculum and instructional practices. In addition to creating a new system of gateway postsecondary math courses and support services, they will be revising postsecondary placement criteria and providing advisers/counselors in both K–12 and postsecondary with tools and knowledge to better support students.

4. Developing and Using College Readiness Courses
5. Aligning Gateway College Courses
6. Redesigning Educator Preparation Programs