

The Case for Higher Education's Involvement

To ensure sufficient rigor, higher education needs to be involved.

Although the K–12 system has the lead in setting standards and selecting assessments, higher education's involvement can make a critical difference. College-ready standards and aligned assessments are the foundation for the entire K–16 pipeline. They are the necessary underpinning of education reform, though not sufficient on their own to improve student outcomes.



Without adequate higher education involvement, standards may be set too low or not aligned with college expectations.

The data below demonstrate the consequences of such low expectations: poor student performance, high levels of remediation, and major misalignment between what it takes to graduate from high school and what it takes to succeed in college.

K–12 educators need input from experienced college faculty.

K–12 teachers want their students to be prepared for college, but despite their best intentions, they aren't always up to date on what is truly expected of college students. Teachers need college faculty to engage with them to ensure that the K–12 standards are fully aligned to what students need to know and be able to do on day one as college freshmen.

Higher education can provide a real-world counter-balance.

In some cases, K–12 leaders will face increased pressures to lower the standards to make them “reachable” for more

students. By participating in the process and advocating for rigor, higher education can provide an important counter-pressure to keep standards appropriately high. Higher education is ideally positioned to offer a real-world perspective: prepare now or pay later.

Standards must have credibility with higher education to have an impact.

If higher education isn't helping to establish standards for what it takes to graduate from high school and weighing in on the appropriateness of assessments, colleges are less likely to accept scores on the new high school tests as indicators of college readiness.

Involving higher education in the standards-setting process will foster greater collaboration with K–12 on many fronts.

Standards at Work (page 9) summarizes examples of collaboration in areas such as college access programs, dual enrollment, 12th grade bridge courses and other strategies for smoothing the transition from high school to college.

These new standards and assessments will open doors for students and provide them with greater opportunities, especially for traditionally underrepresented groups.

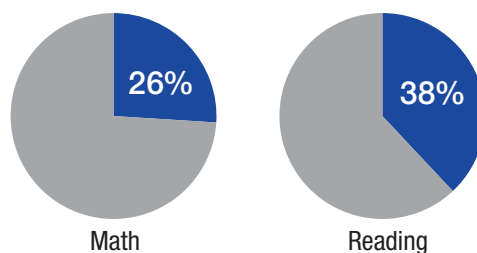
As the Higher Ed for Higher Standards coalition and many others have demonstrated, too many current high school graduates are not ready for college or careers. We need to close the preparation gap so that proficient in high school means truly prepared for college or work. Consider the current reality:

- Three-quarters of American students who take the ACT and achieve a high school diploma do not score “college-ready” across all four subject areas and may need remedial classes at both the university and community college levels.

- “Each year, more than 1 million students begin college in remediation – prerequisite coursework that costs states and students hundreds of millions of dollars but doesn't count toward a degree,” according to a [Complete College America](#) report.
- U.S. high school students have fallen to 36th in math and 24th in reading among nations that administered the Programme for International Student Assessment in 2012.

- On the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress — known as the Nation’s Report Card — only 26 percent of 12th graders scored proficient or above in math, and just 38 percent did so in reading.
- Manufacturing executives report that six out of 10 positions remain unfilled due to the talent shortage, according to a 2015 [report by Deloitte](#).

Few 12th Graders Proficient on NAEP



Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2014087>

Don’t focus only on the standards. Aligned assessments are an essential part of the “package.”

Colleges will pay attention to K–12 test scores — but *only if* the new tests are aligned to higher standards. If these new assessments measure college-ready skills, colleges and universities will increasingly use these scores to determine whether incoming students are ready for credit-bearing courses or need to take non-credit developmental courses to close gaps in their academic preparation.

More accurate placements will help higher education better support students so that they persist through college to earn

degrees and credentials. Early warnings from test scores will help close preparation gaps before enrollment.

If states water down their assessments, however, higher education will be confronted with the same dilemma it faces now: not being sure who arrives on campus prepared and who does not, and being forced to place too many incoming freshmen into remedial courses.

The [Proficient Means Prepared toolkit](#) includes additional data, plus information that you can use to create a customized report for your state.