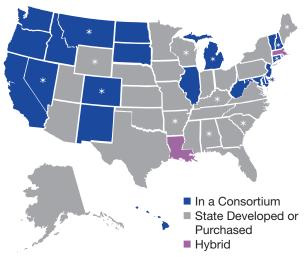
Ensuring Assessments Measure College Readiness

As states implement new student assessments in high school, higher education has a tremendous opportunity to partner with K–12 to use the data from the new tests to better prepare students for, and ultimately place students into, college-level courses. However, the K–12 standards must be aligned to the expectations of higher education, and the assessment system must be able to accurately measure students' ability to master those standards. Without either of these elements, higher education's ability to use a college-ready assessment to increase student success is crippled.

Many states have participated in one of two consortia — the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium — that developed new K–12 assessment systems, including assessments in high school that were developed to measure college readiness. Others have developed their own assessments or purchased assessment products from other



*State using ACT or SAT for high school assessment Highlighted states are subject to change.

organizations. As states decide the type of assessment system they will use to measure college-ready standards — remain a member of the two multi-state consortia or go their own way — it is critical that higher education be an active participant in the decision-making process and understands that alignment is a major opportunity to address current issues of postsecondary remediation and student success.

Scenario 1: State Remains in a Multi-State Consortium (PARCC or Smarter Balanced)

Many states have participated in the PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessment consortia, and higher education has played a key role in developing the high school assessments so they can serve as indicators of college readiness. As those assessments are administered for the second year in spring 2016, there are clear opportunities for higher education to support and leverage the work as part of a broader student success strategy.

What higher education can do:

- Initiate a process to create a policy that recognizes students' scores on the high school assessments as evidence of readiness for credit-bearing courses. In most states where this has occurred, statewide faculty committees in English and mathematics have evaluated the assessments and recommended changes to existing system or institutional policies.
- Ensure that your policy recognizing students' high school scores is well publicized to key college and high school personnel as well as students and parents. Communication activities should include:
 - Training sessions for college personnel who interact with high schools and their key personnel (i.e., principals, guidance counselors, teachers) and prospective students.

- A multi-channel communication campaign with K–12 to ensure that students and parents are well aware of how the new assessment can benefit them.
- Educate key policymakers on how college- and careerready standards and aligned assessments help reduce remediation, improve graduation rates, and increase the state's postsecondary success rates.
 - If your state is implementing new 12th grade courses for students who are not yet college ready, invite policymakers to visit those classrooms or meet with instructors and students.
 - Explain why higher education has chosen to recognize the assessments or is moving toward such a policy.
 - Review and elevate current third party evaluations of multi-state consortia assessments, such as the recent Fordham Institute report.

Scenario 2: State Decides to Use Hybrid Assessments

Some states, such as Massachusetts, may consider combining questions from the consortia assessments with state-developed questions to form hybrid assessments. It will be critical that higher education play a role in that process to ensure the assessments remain robust enough to measure college readiness.

What higher education can do:

- Work with K-12 officials to ensure that maintaining a college-ready indicator is a priority in the assessment revision process. Offer higher education's participation and leadership.
- Work with K-12 to establish appropriate validation studies to ensure the high school assessments are strong indicators of college readiness. The PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia have been conducting such studies with their assessments. But if significant changes are made to those assessments, states may need to revisit the validity process.
- Insist that the process include the establishment of a threshold that must be met by the assessment (the right

- combination of rigorous assessment questions) to reliably indicate that students are college ready in mathematics and English language arts.
- Place higher education faculty representatives on key K-12 assessment workgroups in charge of designing the new assessment system.
- Establish a communications plan to educate campus presidents, chief academic officers, and higher ed faculty and staff how college- and career-ready standards and aligned assessments contribute to efforts to reduce remediation, improve graduation rates, and increase the proportion of the state's citizens with a postsecondary credential.

Scenario 3: State Develops or Purchases Assessments

Some states are developing or purchasing their own high school assessments. Tennessee, for example, developed its own high school assessment to serve as a college-ready measure; while other states, such as Michigan and Arkansas, will use the SAT or ACT, respectively, as their statewide high school assessment. In these cases, it is very important that higher education engage in the development process and/or be involved in making the decision if the state purchases a test off the shelf. Ensuring the integrity and transparency of the college readiness indicator is of paramount importance.

What higher education can do:

- Work quickly to ensure that higher education is effectively represented in whatever body will make decisions about the high school assessment.
 - If the test is to be a measure of college readiness, then the state's colleges must be at the table when decisions are made.
 - State higher education leaders should insist on selecting the individuals who are best able to represent the state's colleges.
- During the current contract window (typically one to three years), execute an evaluation process of the range of high school testing options that measure college readiness, comparing the current assessment system with its ability to determine whether students will be successful in college credit-bearing coursework; and provide K–12 leaders with feedback in advance of the next round of decision-making.
- When considering purchasing a new assessment, invite higher education faculty to review sample tests and offer a formal opinion on the ability of the measure to serve as a college-ready indicator that can be used by colleges in placement decisions as well as by high schools in targeting curricular supports to students to enable them to reach college-ready performance levels before they graduate. Effective high school assessments must be well-aligned to college-ready standards and serve both of these purposes.

- When building a new exam, involve key higher education faculty in the design and development. Faculty should serve on the state technical advisory committee, on committees that establish the content and item specifications for the test, and on item review panels. Faculty also should play a key role in establishing the performance standards for the assessment so that they can be used to determine student readiness for credit-bearing courses.
- Evaluate the predictive validity of the new assessment as a measure of college readiness. This may involve commissioning an internal or external evaluation process; committing to track student performance data over time; and reporting back to K–12 on how students who have entered postsecondary institutions are performing in credit-bearing coursework.
- Educate key decision-makers on how tests are used in higher education for admission and placement. Use of tests has changed dramatically in higher education in recent years, and K–12 and policy leaders may make decisions based on outdated knowledge.
- Agree to waive the placement test for students who score college ready on the new assessment once that assessment has been shown to be associated with student success.