

# THE AMERICAN DIPLOMA PROJECT

## CLOSING THE EXPECTATIONS GAP

In nearly every state today, students can meet the requirements for high school graduation and still be unprepared for success in college or the workplace. Simply put, our standards have not kept pace with the world students are entering after high school.

States need to raise standards for all students and tie high school tests and requirements to the expectations of colleges and employers. Colleges and employers must then honor and reward student achievement on state tests through their admissions, placement and hiring policies. This will send a powerful signal to students that it pays to meet higher standards in high school.

### The American Diploma Project

The American Diploma Project (ADP) is an Achieve initiative created to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared to face the challenges of work and college. The ADP Network includes 35 states dedicated to the same goal. ADP is designed to ensure that all states:

- Align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for success after high school.
- Require all graduates to take rigorous courses – aligned to college- and career-ready standards – that prepare them for life after high school.
- Streamline the assessment system so that the tests students take in high school also can serve as placement tests for college and hiring for the workplace.
- Develop reporting and accountability systems that value college and career readiness for all students.

### Keeping Pace with Rising Knowledge and Skill Demands

In the new, knowledge-based economy, employers and college leaders are placing a higher premium on high-level math and communications skills than ever before. Yet, few states expect students to take high school courses in math through and beyond Algebra II or advanced courses in English and science, despite the research that finds students that complete this coursework are more likely to be successful in work and college. Only nineteen states have high school graduation requirements aligned with college and workplace expectations.

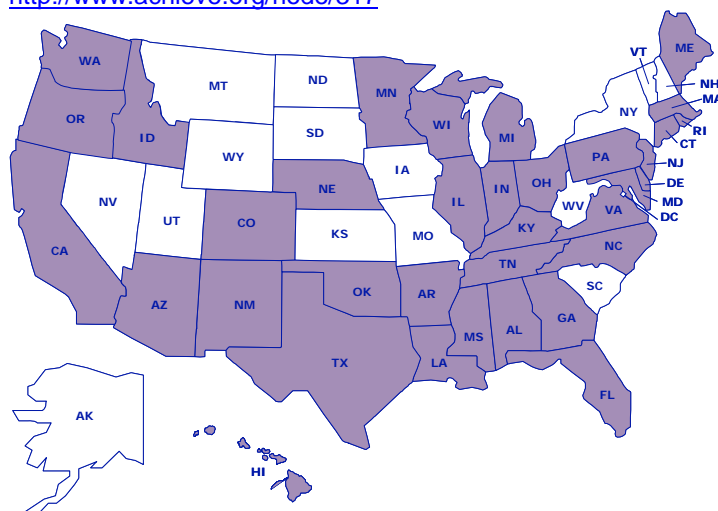
### High School Graduates Are Not Prepared To Succeed

Far too many recent high school graduates enter college and the workplace unprepared for the demands of learning and earning. According to a survey commissioned by Achieve, 39 percent of recent graduates enrolled in college and 46 percent in the workforce say there were significant gaps in their preparation. Professors and employers estimate that four out of ten graduates are unprepared for college or employment.

### The American Diploma Project Network

Thirty-five states – educating nearly 85 percent of America's high school students – have signed on to the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network. In these states, governors, state education officials, business executives and higher education officials work together to raise high school standards, strengthen assessments and curriculum, and align expectations with the demands of college and careers.

Although all Network states have committed to a common set of key policy priorities, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each state has developed its own action plan for carrying out the agenda. See the state profiles at [Achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org) for more details: <http://www.achieve.org/node/317>



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These gaps come with a steep price. States, postsecondary institutions, employers and young people spend an estimated \$17 billion each year on remedial classes to re-teach material that should have been mastered in high school. This price tag might be acceptable if remediation was a proven fix, but one national study indicates that 76 percent of students who take remedial courses in reading and 63 percent of students who take one or two remedial courses in math fail to earn college degrees.

#### **What Is Causing the Expectations Gap?**

Only recently have state officials, together with college and business leaders, begun working to define what skills and content signify college and work readiness. This lack of collaboration has bred confusion in the past: parents, teachers, colleges and employers have no agreed-upon benchmark for what readiness entails, so students don't know what courses to take to ensure they are prepared. As a result, the case is not effectively being made that hard work in high school leads to future success in the marketplace, college, and beyond.

Unless these stakeholders come together, high school courses will continue to vary widely in their academic content and rigor. Although some students are exposed to content-rich and stimulating classes that build college- and career-ready skills in high school, many others only have access to courses that offer remedial and non-academic content. These watered-down courses are unlikely to engage students, let alone prepare them for work and college, and can lead to higher drop out rates.

#### **Next Steps for the States**

The good news is that progress is being made throughout the states. While only a handful of states have put into place the policies championed by ADP, many others are in the process of implementing them. Over half of the states already have aligned their academic standards and developed comprehensive data systems – or plan to do so in the coming years. There is certainly more work to be done, but the ADP agenda is gaining momentum.

#### **About Achieve**

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 was founded at the 1996 National Education Summit and has sponsored subsequent Summits in 1999, 2001 and 2005. At the 2005 Summit, Achieve launched the American Diploma Project Network.

Achieve provides policy and advocacy leadership, technical assistance and other support to the ADP Network states and is leading a number of initiatives aimed at meeting specific challenges states face while implementing the ADP policy agenda, including:

- *Alignment Institutes:* K-12, postsecondary and business leaders from each state come together to define the core English and math knowledge and skills graduates need to be ready for college and careers and then revise their high school standards as necessary.
- *ADP Assessment Consortium:* Fifteen states partnered to develop a new end-of-course assessment in Algebra II and Algebra I. Achieve is supporting the development of the test, providing an annual report comparing the performance of participating states, and helping the states share and develop tools and strategies for improving teaching and learning in high school math.
- *Research and Data:* Achieve is a resource of information, analysis and advice for state leaders through policy briefs, annual progress reports, public opinion polling, sample communications materials, and best practices.
- *State Outreach and Advocacy:* Achieve convenes states to engage in meaningful and strategic dialogue about policy and political strategies and to provide the opportunity for peer networking.