December 2015

Dear Reader,

High school graduation rates have reached a record high nationally and in many states. However, as a [new report](#) from Data Quality Campaign and Achieve's own [recent report](#) show us, graduation data alone don't tell the whole story. Graduation requirements often don't meet college- and career-ready expectations, and therefore some diplomas don't signify that a student is prepared for postsecondary success. Consequently, the challenge for states and local school districts is to continue to increase high school graduation rates while also increasing *college- and career-ready* graduation rates. It's certainly possible to succeed in that effort, especially in high-minority, high-poverty districts, as [the story](#) of the UC Merced-Fresno Unified School District partnership shows us. Consistent, quality data reporting along with creative partnerships and problem-solving are critical to improving not only graduation rates, but outcomes for all students. These and other resources from some of our partner organizations are highlighted in this month's issue of *Perspective*.

Michael Cohen, *President, Achieve*

Sealing the Cracks: Using graduation data, policy, and practice to keep all kids on track

In the past, trying to compare two states' graduation rates was like trying to compare apples to kumquats. But in the last decade, high school graduation rates have improved significantly across the country-a monumental success attributed in part to state and national leaders prioritizing quality, comparable data about which students actually graduated and which fell through the cracks.

This [new report](#) from [Data Quality Campaign](#) examines the current

practices of nine states and lays out the continuing work that can be done by state and national leaders to improve the quality of graduation rate data and build trust that the cohort graduation rate is a reliable measure of student outcomes and provides a path forward to support individual students.

For more on what graduation rates really tell us, be sure to check out our recent report, "How the States Got Their Rates."
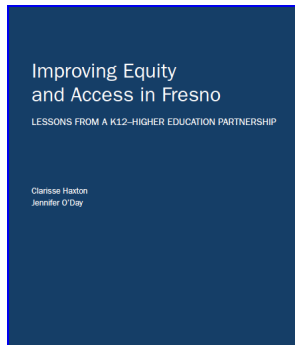
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Improving Equity and Access in Fresno: Lessons from a K12-Higher Education Partnership

In 2009, the University of California, Merced and the Fresno Unified School District established a partnership focusing on equity and access for all students to face the challenges in academic achievement and college access and attainment. Since the partnership's inception, student outcomes have been improving, as evidenced by increased four-year cohort graduation rates, A-G eligibility in Career Technical Education courses, and A-G completion rates. American Institutes for Research (AIR) recently released a report exploring lessons from this groundbreaking K12-Higher Education Partnership.

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Open Education Resources

The annual Open Education Conference was held in Vancouver, British Columbia in mid-November. This annual convening included educators and advocacy groups supporting the use of Open Education Resources (OER) and other aspects of openness in their work in both K-12 and higher education from across the globe. Hans Voss from Achieve presented on Achieve's recently-released policy recommendations for OER, as well as key takeaways that Achieve learned in the development of these recommendations. Other highlights from the K-12 space during the conference included:

- An update from the [K-12 OER Collaborative](#), their continuing work to develop high quality, full-course OER materials in math and ELA, and early ideas for how to measure the ways in which these resources, once developed, will impact classrooms and student learning.
- The state of [Washington's](#) continued work on OER initiatives, including the state's grant program for districts and recently convened user groups around problems of practice in OER.

Additionally, [CCSSO](#), in cooperation with [iNACOL](#), recently released [a suite of resources](#) highlighting the ways in which OER are being used across states and districts to support college and career readiness among students. Provided among these resources are case studies from a number of districts across states, including how the North Lake Middle School in Lake Stevens, Washington is using OER to help fill gaps in instructional materials to support implementation of the NGSS. You can read more about these resources in *Education Week's* MarketPlace K-12 blog [here](#).

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Achieve Webinar: Promoting High Expectations for All Students through Career Technical Education

Join us on December 15 from 1:00-2:00 p.m. ET for a [webinar](#) featuring school and state leaders in [Ohio](#) and [Massachusetts](#), who will share highlights from two recently-released briefs exploring career technical education (CTE) in each state. On the webinar, one school leader will describe his school's vision and approach to implementing high quality CTE pathways and two other state leaders will share insights about their state strategies for creating the enabling conditions for strong CTE programs to succeed. Register [here](#) to join.

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## *The iNACOL State Policy Frameworks 2015*
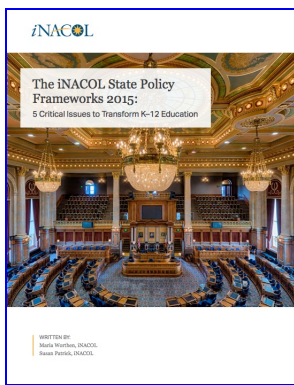
iNACOL's recently-updated [state policy framework](#) identifies five state policy issues critical to advancing personalized learning: creating competency-based education systems; improving student access and equity; ensuring quality with standards and performance metrics; modernizing educator and leader development; and building new learning models infrastructure. The framework recommends creating competency-based education systems through strategies such as establishing innovation zones, reframing state accountability around real-time student learning, developing state task forces on competency, and creating proficiency-based diplomas. Other key recommendations include creating outcomes-based student performance metrics, developing quality review processes to ensure program alignment to standards, and using openly-licensed instructional materials.

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## *States' Continued Commitment to Next-Generation Accountability Systems*
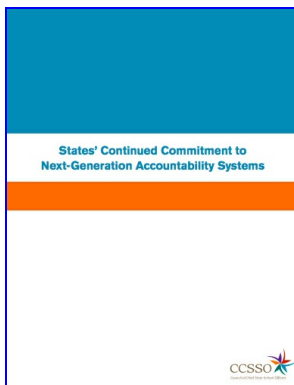
In 2011, CCSSO, on behalf of the states, released a vision for accountability as laid out in nine accountability principles (the Principles). These Principles were intended to serve as the framework for advancing state accountability systems beyond the limitations of No Child Left Behind. A [new report](#) reaffirms the commitment of states to design more advanced accountability systems that better meet the needs of all students and builds on the principles that state chiefs committed to in 2011 to move beyond what was required under No Child Left Behind.

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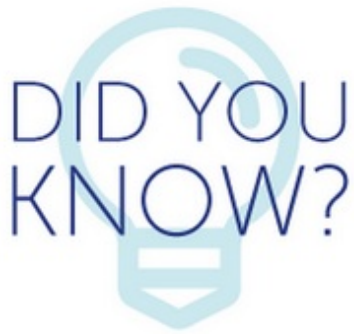
Among parents who say their children attended high schools with low academic expectations,

79%

believe that higher academic standards would have improved their child's preparedness for life.

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All students should graduate from high school ready for college, careers, and citizenship.

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