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Commentary

When Achieve's American Diploma Project (ADP) Network was founded at the 2005 National Education Summit, only two states (Texas and Arkansas) had graduation requirements rigorous enough to prepare students for success in college and careers. The governors and state education leaders who helped start the ADP Network recognized that if they wanted their graduates to be able to compete for college and jobs in a "flat world" their 20th century education standards were no longer good enough. They also understood the power of collaborating with and learning from each other as they raised expectations.

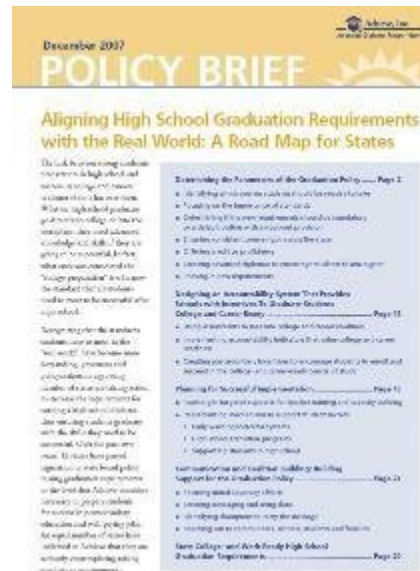
Nowhere has the power of collective state action been more apparent than in the rapid adoption by states of rigorous college and career ready graduation requirements. What began as two states just under three years ago now stands at 17, with Louisiana and Arizona taking action to raise their graduation requirements just this month. For a state by state comparison of the new requirements, go [here](#).

Each of the states that have put new requirements in place has faced a series of difficult decisions in designing and implementing its graduation policy. In which subject areas should the state establish requirements and how challenging should those requirements be? Should the new requirements be mandatory for all students or should there be an opt-out provision? How will the state ensure that courses with the same name are taught in a consistently rigorous manner across the state? What are the implications for career and technical education or other non traditional curricular pathways? The list goes on.

In order to help states navigate these issues, Achieve held a strategy session for ADP states earlier this year. We invited leaders from states who had already raised graduation requirements to attend so they could share their experiences and lessons learned with states that were planning action. The dynamics and the ideas that emerged were powerful.

As an outgrowth of that meeting, Achieve has developed a policy brief entitled, "Aligning High School Graduation Requirements with the Real World: A Road Map for States." (Download it [here](#).) The Road Map addresses the most frequently cited challenges of policy design as well as strategies for implementation, communication and coalition building. It draws heavily on the experience of early adopter states.

Raising graduation requirements is no panacea. It brings numerous capacity



challenges to the fore, from finding enough qualified math and science teachers to ensuring students receive the support they need to succeed. But that is exactly the point. Setting the bar so that all students graduate from high school prepared for the real world is an important first step in addressing and resolving these critical issues. Once the bar is set, it enables all of the leaders in the state, in districts and in schools to focus on what really matters: doing what it takes to help students succeed.

New from Achieve

ADP Mathematics Backmapped Benchmarks

Achieve has mapped out what students need to know and be able to do in mathematics in grades K-12, seamlessly connecting the expectations throughout the grades with those for the end of high school. These benchmarks outline a progression of mathematics content that, if followed, will ensure that students master the content needed to be successful in college and work. [More...](#)

Policy Brief on Interim Assessments

School districts increasingly see interim assessments as an important element in their instructional improvement strategy and are implementing interim assessments district-wide in multiple grades and content areas. Yet, they face significant design and implementation challenges to realizing the potential of interim assessments to improve teaching and learning. The Aspen Institute Education and Society Program and Achieve, Inc. partnered with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment to develop a policy brief on the role of interim assessments in a comprehensive assessment system. The goals are to clarify how interim assessments fit into the landscape of formative assessment and to offer recommendations to districts on the appropriate use of interim assessments as part of a broader assessment system. The brief is informed by conversations with the Aspen Institute Urban Superintendents Network and the affiliated Dana Center-Achieve Urban Mathematics Leaders Network. [More...](#)

Common Algebra II Test Update

The end-of-course Algebra II exam is the largest effort a group of states has ever undertaken to develop a common assessment based on common standards. Nine ADP Network states - Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island - formed the consortium initially and a number of other states are in the process of joining. The first field test of the Algebra II exam occurred in October. An additional field test will be held in February 2008. First operational administration of the test will occur in May 2008. A fact sheet that answers frequently asked questions is available, including information on the core test content and how states can become members of the consortium. [More...](#)

Louisiana and Arizona Increase Graduation Requirements

In early December the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved college- and career-ready graduation requirements. The revision to Bulletin 741, the Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators, will increase

News Clips

1. Align Student Performance with U.S., Global Standards.

The Arizona Republic

the Carnegie credits needed to earn a diploma from 23 to 24 by requiring a fourth year of math, including Algebra II, for high school graduation. Beginning with incoming freshman in 2008-09, all students automatically will be enrolled in the Louisiana Core 4 Curriculum, which includes four units each of English, math, science, and social studies; one unit of visual arts, performing arts, or Fine Arts Survey; and two units of foreign language or speech courses. These revisions are the result of recommendations from the Louisiana High School Redesign Commission, a statewide collaborative effort of the Department of Education, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Board of Regents and the Governor's Office.

At its meeting on December 10, the Arizona State Board of Education raised its graduation requirements, bringing the total number of states with college- and career-ready graduation requirements to 17. It added two additional years of math (Algebra II and another course that includes significant math content), one additional credit of science, and one-half credit of economics. The changes will be phased in beginning with the graduating class of 2012. These students will have to complete 20 credits, including one-half credit of economics and three credits of math. The class of 2013 must earn 22 credits to graduate high school. The final rules are posted on the Board of Education's [website](#). Read an [article](#) in the Arizona Daily Star.

published a viewpoint by Dr. Craig R. Barrett and Dr. Lattie F. Coor that strongly endorses an increase in the graduation standards of Arizona schools. It points out that, "If we ... do not educate our students to world standards, we will not be competitive." [More...](#)

2. Education Reform in Tennessee.

Dr. Susan Bunch, Assistant Commissioner for Teaching and Learning at the Tennessee Department of Education, notes in an editorial that, "The standards and curriculum that determine the framework and requirements for learning are the bedrock of a quality education. Gov. Phil Bredesen is leading the drive to bring the community together to advance those learning standards under the Tennessee Diploma Project." [More...](#)

3. World's Schools Teach U.S. a Lesson.

An article in The Christian Science Monitor focuses on the need to better prepare students in light of global competition. Achieve president Mike Cohen says that "governors and chief state school officers ... basically have said, 'Well, it's great that you want us to align our expectations with the real world kids will face domestically ... but that's not enough; we need to know what our expectations ought to be in order for our kids to succeed [globally].'" [More...](#)

New Resources

- The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released the results of the 2007 reading and mathematics assessments, known as the Trial Urban District Assessments, or TUDAs. These assessments were given earlier this

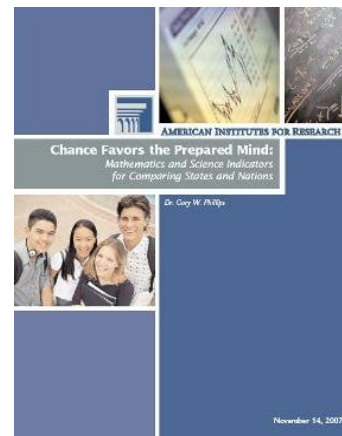
year to 4th- and 8th-grade students at eleven urban school districts at the same time as national- and state-level assessments. The study compares students' scores against the average nationally and the averages of students in other large central cities (population >250,000). Key findings show that national NAEP trends in 4th and 8th grade math and reading scores were similarly observed among the urban districts tested.

- The national average for 4th grade NAEP math scores increased from 2003 to 2007. Eight urban districts saw a similar increase, three saw no change.
- The national average for 8th grade NAEP math scores increased from 2003 to 2007. All eleven urban districts saw a similar increase.
- The national average for 4th grade NAEP reading scores increased from 2003 to 2007. Ten urban districts saw a similar increase, one saw no change.
- The national average for 8th grade NAEP reading scores remained constant from 2003 to 2007. Seven urban districts saw a similar stagnation, three saw an increase.

Detailed statistics about particular districts show some areas where achievement gaps are being closed. The full [TUDA report](#) gives examples.

- The American Institutes for Research (AIR) has issued a report entitled, "Chance Favors the Prepared Mind: Mathematics and Science Indicators for Comparing States and Nations." It compares the mathematics and science skills of 8th-grade students in each of the 50 states, D.C., and U.S. Department of Defense schools with those of their counterparts around the world and provides international benchmarks to help states see how their students are doing within an international context.

"More than a century ago Louis Pasteur revealed the secret to invention and innovation when he said 'chance favors the prepared mind'. The take away message from this report is that the United States is losing the race to prepare the minds of the future generation," says Dr. Gary Phillips, a chief scientist at AIR and report author.



According to the study, students in Singapore and several other Asian countries significantly outperform U.S. students, even those in high-achieving states. [Download the report...](#)

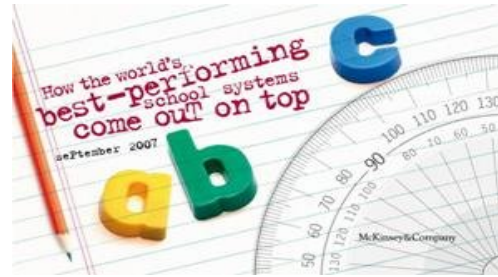
- The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results are in. PISA is an assessment that focuses on 15-year-olds' capabilities in reading literacy, mathematics literacy, and science literacy. In the U.S., this age corresponds largely to grade 9 and 10 students. It is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries. In 2006, fifty-seven jurisdictions participated in PISA, including 30 OECD jurisdictions and 27 non-OECD jurisdictions. The results show the average combined science literacy scale score for U.S. students to be lower than the OECD average. U.S. students scored lower on science literacy than their peers in 16 of the other 29 OECD jurisdictions and 6 of the 27 non-OECD jurisdictions. Twenty-two jurisdictions (5 OECD jurisdictions and 17 non-OECD jurisdictions) reported lower scores

compared to the U.S. in science literacy.

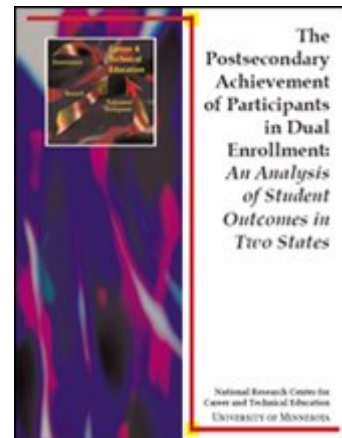
On the mathematics literacy scale, U.S. students scored lower than the OECD average. Thirty-one jurisdictions (23 OECD jurisdictions and 8 non-OECD jurisdictions) scored higher on average, than the U.S. in mathematics literacy in 2006. In contrast, 20 jurisdictions (4 OECD jurisdictions and 16 non-OECD jurisdictions) scored lower than the U.S. in mathematics literacy in 2006.

Administered every three years, PISA includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as learning strategies, and emphasizes skills that students have acquired as they near the end of mandatory schooling. PISA 2000 focused on reading literacy, PISA 2003 focused on mathematics literacy, and PISA 2006 focused on science literacy. [More...](#)

- McKinsey & Company, a global consulting group, conducted a study to find out why some schools succeed where others do not. It studied 25 of the world's school systems, including 10 of the top performers. The experiences of these systems suggests that three things matter most: 1) getting the right people to become teachers, 2) developing them into effective instructors, and 3) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every student. Read the [PDF](#) and an article in [The Economist](#).



- Researchers at the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, have examined the outcomes of dual enrollment participation for students in Florida and New York City, with emphasis on students in career and technical education (CTE) programs. "The Postsecondary Achievement of Participants in Dual Enrollment: An Analysis of Student Outcomes in Two States" analyzes both short-term and long-term effects of participation in dual enrollment and differential effects based on demographics such as race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. The authors report positive effects from participation and provide evidence that dual enrollment can be an effective transition strategy for a variety of students.



[More...](#)

Achieve Job Opportunities

Achieve seeks a Director, Postsecondary Initiatives; a Director, Assessment Partnerships; and an Assistant to the Vice President for Content and Policy Research. For more information, go [here](#).

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