



Incorporating Equity Measures in New State Accountability and Improvement Systems

Expanding Access to a College- and Career-Ready Curriculum

Abstract

This policy brief is part of a larger research report, *Advancing Educational Equity for Underserved Youth: How New State Accountability Systems Can Support School Inclusion and Student Success*, that describes how ESSA provides an opportunity for states to better support historically underserved students through the thoughtful selection of specific equity measures in their accountability and improvement systems. These five measures are:

1. Reducing student suspensions and expulsions.
2. Building a positive school climate and promoting social-emotional learning.
3. Eliminating chronic absenteeism.
4. Implementing extended-year graduation rates.
5. Expanding access to a college- and career-ready curriculum.

This brief treats the research, rationale, and evidence-based interventions associated with **expanding access to a college- and career-ready curriculum**.

For the full report, go to <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/advancing-educational-equity>.

This research was supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation. LPI's work in this area is also supported by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Sandler Foundation.

Introduction

New accountability policies under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) can be used to create systems that help schools develop stronger supports for historically underserved children and youth. As states work to implement ESSA and redesign accountability and improvement systems, they have an opportunity to incorporate indicators of student and school performance that can provide educators, parents, and the community with the information and incentives needed to create conditions that support greater school inclusion, and target resources to keep students in school and enable their success. ESSA requires that state accountability systems incorporate at least one indicator of school quality or student success that are annually measured and reported for all students and, separately, for each identified group of students, and used to help identify schools for intervention and support. There are many possibilities for leveraging the indicator(s) of school quality or student success to help students reach their full potential. By including increased access to, and success in, a college- and career-ready curriculum as an indicator, states can provide incentives for schools to engender a sense of purpose, engagement, and belonging for all children and youth that keeps them engaged in their learning, and prepares them to thrive in school and beyond.

Why This Measure Matters

According to a report by the Equity and Excellence Commission, inequities in educational opportunities are perpetuated through differential access to a high-quality curriculum that focuses on critical thinking skills, and prepares students for college and careers. Lack of access to a meaningful, relevant curriculum affects student achievement, graduation, and postsecondary success. Dropping out of school is more often than not the final stage in a cumulative process of increasing disengagement from school, the moment when students decide it offers them little of interest or utility.¹

Furthermore, early sorting of children into different curriculum tracks often prevents students from encountering and acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in subsequent grades.² A large body of research has shown that students have differential access to college preparatory curriculum and to high-quality career-technical programs that are aimed at skilled employment in the modern economy.³ The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights

reports, for example, that schools with high proportions of African American and Latino students are much less likely to offer advanced courses like calculus and that, across schools, African American and Latino students are underrepresented in advanced placement courses and Gifted and Talented programs—the kinds of settings in which higher-order skills are most purposefully developed.⁴

Research demonstrates that taking college preparatory coursework in high school correlates with several indicators of college readiness, from college enrollment⁵ and grades⁶ to persistence and completion.⁷ Similar research shows that students enrolled in career academies (which blend academic preparation with well-designed experiential learning in occupational fields) enroll in community college at higher rates,⁸ are more prepared for college coursework,⁹ and experience higher wages and greater employment stability.¹⁰

State accountability systems that include information regarding student access to and completion of a college- and career-ready curriculum can incentivize more attention to students' curriculum opportunities, and reveal whether additional resources and supports are needed.

Many states are already working to utilize indicators of college and career readiness within their accountability systems to leverage high-quality opportunities so that they are provided much more equitably to students. For example:

- Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas use evidence of challenging course offerings, including the availability of advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, or college credit courses as part of their college- and career-readiness indicator.¹¹
- Hawaii, Connecticut, and New Jersey use the total percentage of students who enroll in any institution of higher education within 16 months of earning a regular high school diploma as one way to indicate college and career readiness.¹²
- Eleven states, including Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, and Illinois, use the percentage of students who receive industry certification to measure college and career readiness.¹³
- California is developing a college- and career-ready index that includes measures of how many students complete a college-preparatory curriculum or a high-quality career-ready sequence of courses and internships; how many take and pass advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, or dual-credit college courses at a college-readiness level;¹⁴ and how many reach a college-ready score on the 11th grade Smarter Balanced test.¹⁵ The index will eventually add indicators such as the California Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes proficiency in two or more languages (a skill increasingly needed in the global economy) and perhaps the completion of rigorous performance-based assessments or graduation portfolios.

The use of college- and career-readiness indicators can reveal which students have access to a relevant and engaging college- and career-ready curriculum. The inclusion of these indicators thereby strengthens the ability of states to meaningfully tackle many of the structural and societal challenges they face in locally relevant ways in an effort to provide statewide access to this type of curriculum to all students.

Evidence-Based Strategies and Resources for Increasing Access to College- and Career-Ready Curriculum

To strengthen learning opportunities for their students, especially the historically underserved, states may want to consider incorporating into state accountability and improvement systems indicators of college and career readiness. One of the most important things that an accountability system can do is to ensure that 100% of students graduate from high school with a productive pathway to the future.

Indicators can include access to and performance in:

- advanced coursework, including advanced placement and International Baccalaureate programs;
- dual enrollment and early college programs, including college credit accumulation;
- completion of a college preparatory course of study and/or a high-quality career technical course of study (often developed with industry);
- applied learning opportunities, including work-based learning opportunities, and career and technical education certifications; and
- postsecondary education outcomes, such as rates of enrollment, remediation, persistence, and completion.¹⁶

States and districts can also include measures of students' demonstrated competence in areas such as world language (e.g., a demonstration of proficient communication in a language other than English), as California is doing, the arts (e.g., a demonstration of performance in an area of the performing arts), as Louisiana is considering doing, or other fields.

For examples of state legislative actions to increase student access to a high-quality college- and career-ready curriculum, see the National Conference of State Legislatures' *Accelerated Learning Options: Dual Enrollment AP, and IB*.¹⁷ For example, Idaho established the "8-in-6 Program" to identify students who are taking courses in grades 7 through 12 at an accelerated rate and provide them with an incentive to participate in dual credit, with the intent of earning up to two years of college credits while still in high school. The program will provide funding so that a portion of the summer online courses and online overload courses taken by students will be paid for by the state department of education. Arkansas established the Advanced Placement Training and Incentive Program to prepare more students for success in higher education, postsecondary training, and careers in science, technology, engineering, and Mathematics and provides grant funding to organizations that implement measures to achieve the goals of the program.

To support success on these indicators, many states have established college- and career-ready standards anchored in core academic knowledge and skills that recognize competencies considered by higher education, employers, and parents as critical to success.¹⁸ Several resources for states to consider in supporting these policies are contained in the U.S. Department of Education's *Blueprint for College- and Career-Ready Students*,¹⁹ which includes strategies for establishing standards that meaningfully map routes toward readiness for college or a career; creating systems that reward schools, districts, and states for success, require rigorous interventions in the lowest performers, and allow local flexibility in most cases to achieve results; using disaggregated data on progress and growth to fairly and accurately assess school needs, and appropriately target strategies; and increasing resource equity at every level of the system.

Achieve's Making College and Career Readiness the Mission for High Schools: A Guide for State Policymakers includes information on aligning high school standards with postsecondary education, and providing a high-quality curriculum and teacher support.²⁰ *MDRC's Preparing High School Students for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment* describes efforts that can be taken at the state, district, and school levels. At the state level, efforts might include creating governance mechanisms and financial incentives to align k-12 and postsecondary education planning and budgets, and providing feedback to high schools by creating a system for tracking students across the k-12 and postsecondary education systems and into the workplace. Efforts at the district and school levels could include emphasizing rigor and high expectations for all students, along with appropriate counseling and other supports; integrating strong academic content into career-focused classes; and collaborating with postsecondary education institutions, economic development agencies, and employers to help create smoother transitions to college and the workforce.²¹

Among successful state-supported models are Linked Learning schools in California, which have combined academic preparation for college along with career and technical education, work-based learning experiences, and integrated student supports to increase relevance and skill development through applied learning opportunities. Supported by a state public-private Career Pathways Trust, these efforts have increased credit accumulation, graduation rates, college-going rates, and access to highly skilled careers for certified Linked Learning pathway students.²²

States and districts have also increased youth success in college preparatory coursework by offering supports, such as AVID college-readiness programs,²³ that trains educators in providing academic and psychological supports to students. Districts can select and develop thoughtful, curriculum-embedded assessments of students' knowledge and skills that provide ongoing diagnostic information to support learning. For example, districts may take advantage of the opportunities under ESSA to include assessments in the form of projects, portfolios, or extended-performance tasks, as well as the inclusion of performance tasks in other academic subject areas such as science. These tools provide meaningful learning experiences that can inform the teaching and learning process, and enable greater success for youth.²⁴

Endnotes

1. Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J., & Morison, K. B. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.
2. U.S. Department of Education. (2013). *For each and every child: A strategy for education equity and excellence*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
3. Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University.
4. U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. (2016). *2013–2014 civil rights data collection first look: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights.
5. Balfanz, R., & Legters, N. (2006). Closing “dropout factories”: The graduation-rate crisis we know, and what can be done about it. *Education Week*, 25(42), 42-43.
6. Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
7. Long, M. C., Conger, D., & Latarola, P. (2012). Effects of high school course-taking on secondary and postsecondary success. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(2), 285-322; Willingham, W. W., & Morris, M. (1986). *Four years later: A longitudinal study of advanced placement students in college*. New York, NY: The College Board.
8. Center for Advanced Research and Technology. (2011). *A model for success: CART's Linked Learning program increases college enrollment*. Clovis, CA: Center for Advanced Research and Technology.
9. Dayton, D., Hester, C. H., & Stern, D. (2011). *Profile of the California partnership academies, 2009–2010*. Berkeley, CA: Career Academy Support Network, University of California.
10. Bishop, J. H., & Mane, F. (2004). The impacts of career-technical education on high school labor market success. *Economics of Education Review*, 23(4), 381-402.
11. Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009). *Reinventing the federal role in education: Supporting the goal of college and career readiness for all students*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.
12. Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009). *Reinventing the federal role in education: Supporting the goal of college and career readiness for all students*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.
13. Alliance for Excellent Education. (2009). *Reinventing the federal role in education: Supporting the goal of college and career readiness for all students*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Eleven states include: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Missouri.
14. James, D., Lefkowitz, L., & Hoffman, R. (2016). Dual enrollment: A pathway to college and career readiness. <http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/dual-enrollment-pathway-college-and-career-readiness> (accessed 12/27/16).
15. California State Board of Education. (n.d.). SBE Agenda for September 2016. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr16/agenda201609.asp> (accessed 12/14/16).
16. For a discussion of options for measuring college and career readiness, see Bae, S., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2014). *Recognizing college and career readiness in the California school accountability system*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.
17. National Conference of State Legislatures. (2014) Accelerated learning options. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/accelerated-learning-options.aspx> (accessed 12/14/16).
18. Darling-Hammond, L., Wilhoit, G., & Pittenger, L. (2014). *Accountability for college and career readiness: Developing a new paradigm*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education; Darling-Hammond, L., Bae, S., Cook-Harvey, C. M., Lam, L., Mercer, C., Podolsky, A., & Leisy Stosich, E. (2016). *Pathways to new accountability through the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
19. U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *Blueprint for College- and Career-Ready Students* <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/college-career-ready.pdf> (accessed 12/28/16).
20. Achieve, & The Education Trust. (2008). *Making college and career readiness the mission for high schools: A guide for state policymakers*. Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc. and the Education Trust.
21. Bangser, M. (2008). *Preparing high school students for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment*. Washington, DC: National High School Center, American Institutes for Research.
22. Warner, M., Caspary, K., Arshan, N., Stites, R., Padilla, C., Park, C., Patel, D., Wolf, B., Astudillo, S., Harless, E., Ammah-Tagoe, N., McCracken, M. & Adelman, N. (2015). *Taking stock of the California linked learning district initiative. Sixth-year evaluation report*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
23. AVID. (n.d.). What is AVID? <http://www.avid.org/what-is-avid.ashx> (accessed 12/27/16).
24. Darling-Hammond, L. (2014). *Next generation assessment: Moving beyond the bubble test to support 21st century learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.