

### Questions researched for the 50 states

1. *Has the state adopted standards based on the Common Core State Standards or other similarly rigorous academic content standards?*
2. *Does state policy require districts to offer Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, International Baccalaureate or other opportunities for advanced coursework?*

High college remediation rates, coupled with business leaders' concerns about the poor skills of young people entering the workforce, suggest many K-12 students are not exposed to the English language arts and math content they need. In response, 48 states and the District of Columbia have adopted either the Common Core State Standards or similarly rigorous academic content standards.

In another effort to improve students' readiness for college and career, policymakers in 25 states require school districts to provide opportunities for advanced courses such as Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment or International Baccalaureate (IB). However, uneven access to these opportunities creates disparities for students who want to boost their skills or start early on a postsecondary credential or degree. In addition, states are increasingly using grade 10 and 11 assessments for dual purposes — to identify students capable of succeeding in advanced coursework, and to identify students in need of additional supports to progress to college and career readiness before high school graduation.

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## POLICY GOALS

While states began adopting K-12 content standards in the 1980s, it is only recently that momentum has built for adopting college and career readiness standards. Some of the goals that adoption of these standards are intended to achieve, include:

- ✦ Ensuring that exposure to college and career readiness content is not an accident of student location or demographics.
- ✦ Helping students achieve college and career readiness before high school graduation.
- ✦ Improving student performance on state, national and international assessments.
- ✦ Ensuring that mobile students — including students with family in the military — can progress through the K-12 curriculum without repeating or skipping key content.

States also are increasingly requiring all districts to offer AP, IB, dual enrollment or other rigorous coursework to ensure advanced opportunities are available to students statewide. In recent revisions to dual enrollment policies, some states have outlined the benefits of such programs and defined them as strategies to increase college-going and college-completion rates, particularly among students traditionally underrepresented in higher education.



## KEY POLICY ACTIONS

Step one is the adoption of college and career readiness standards. Once adopted, states should consider the following steps:

- ✦ Identify and adopt aligned curricula, assessments and instructional supports.
- ✦ Communicate the difference between the “old” and “new” standards — and the value of higher standards — to stakeholders.
- ✦ Ensure teacher preparation and professional development programs equip educators with the content knowledge and pedagogy they need to deliver high-quality instruction aligned with the standards.
- ✦ Ensure administrator preparation and professional development expose candidates and seasoned leaders to the standards, and help leaders learn how to effectively support teachers in teaching the standards.
- ✦ Integrate the standards as appropriate in career/technical coursework.
- ✦ Consider revisiting graduation requirements, particularly in math, to ensure all students have adequate exposure to college and career readiness standards.

Some considerations states should weigh in requiring advanced courses to be offered:

- ✦ **Consider scope.** Policies to enhance access to advanced coursework often require all districts — rather than all high schools — to offer advanced courses. Requiring all districts to offer advanced courses may be easier to achieve and may meet the letter of the law, but may result in these courses not being available in buildings serving large proportions of capable but traditionally underserved students.
- ✦ **Consider return on investment.** Are all postsecondary institutions required to award credit for AP, IB or dual enrollment? Are credits transferable statewide?
- ✦ **Consider how students are identified or recruited** for these courses to ensure that students who could succeed are not shut out.

States should consider surveying K-12 teachers and principals on the professional development they need in order for college and career readiness standards to be fully implemented. States should also ensure the more rigorous standards are integrated as appropriate into career/technical education courses, including those being taken for dual high school and college credit.

As for advanced coursework, policymakers could gain valuable information by requiring all public high schools to annually report student participation and success rates (as measured by AP and IB exam pass rates and dual enrollment/early college course completion rates). Disaggregating the data by student demographics and state geography would help policymakers identify disparities in participation and success.



# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Adopting college and career readiness standards is arguably the easy part. It's in implementation that the real challenges arise. Below are just a few examples of the challenges in implementing college and career readiness standards. Each challenge is countered with correlated opportunities:

## *The Challenge: Teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach the new standards*

### Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Create and support teacher communities of practice — online and in person — to enhance teacher access to aligned instructional resources and tests, including materials to support English language learners and students with disabilities.
- ✦ Encourage collaboration among teacher preparation programs to deliver adequate and high-quality preparation and professional development.
- ✦ Encourage teachers to use online tools such as **Achieve's EQUiP** (Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products) to gauge the alignment of specific lessons and units to the new standards.

## *The Challenge: Lack of public understanding of/support for new standards*

### Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Help familiarize parents with content of new standards — and support classroom instruction at home — via approaches such as Arkansas' **Refrigerator Curriculum**.
- ✦ Address perceptions of unwanted influence on state actions and values by using executive orders or legislative/state board authority for state standards to rename standards.
- ✦ Encourage state and local chambers of commerce to articulate the need for rigorous K-12 standards to meet current and projected workforce needs.
- ✦ Provide factual documentation on taxpayer costs of postsecondary remediation and workforce training for young adults who are not college and career ready.

## *The Challenge: Lack of strategy in expanding access to advanced learning opportunities*

### Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Ensure that in addition to mandating offering of courses, the state has developed a comprehensive strategy to ensure course quality and student access.
- ✦ For AP and IB, provide financial support for course materials and program fees.
- ✦ For dual enrollment, provide annual (and accurate) student outcomes data — including high school completion and college-going and postsecondary remediation rates — to allow for program evaluation and retooling of state policies as needed.

# EXAMPLES OF STATE POLICIES

## Approaches to consider

The examples below highlight approaches states may consider in adopting standards based on the Common Core State Standards (or similarly rigorous content standards) and requiring districts to offer AP, IB or dual enrollment coursework.

## KENTUCKY

*Building public awareness in standards implementation*



Kentucky has emerged as a national leader for its comprehensive approach to implementing the Common Core State Standards. The groundwork was laid by **2009 S.B. 1**, which called for the Kentucky Department of Education to collaborate with the Council on Postsecondary Education to put in place “a comprehensive process for revising the academic content standards” in core subjects, aligned with postsecondary course and assessment standards for the gateway areas of reading and math.

To build public awareness of and support for the standards, the commonwealth soon began communications efforts to explain the changes underway, and that higher standards initially might result in lower assessment results. In 2012, Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday and Kentucky Chamber of Commerce President Dave Adkisson conducted a tour of local chambers of commerce around the commonwealth, clarifying the connection between college and career readiness efforts and workforce needs.<sup>1</sup>

S.B. 1 and the standards adoption efforts have led to a **Unified Strategy for College and Career Readiness**, which outlines four goals. For each goal, the strategy describes actions, outcomes, completion dates, persons responsible and impact measures.

## ARKANSAS

*Preparing for AP course expansion and incentivizing exam success*



In the early 2000s, Arkansas led the nation in becoming the first state to require all high schools to offer four Advanced Placement courses — at least one each in English language arts, math, science and social studies by the 2008-09 school year. The requirement was phased in over a four-year period starting in 2005-06. Any high school offering the International Baccalaureate program is exempt from this requirement.

Arkansas also supports AP through teacher training subsidies, equipment grants and school awards for exam scores. A 2009 National Governors Association **analysis**<sup>2</sup> notes that as a result of these supports, “AP participation is now evenly spread across the state. Moreover, Arkansas is on its way to becoming one of the nation’s leaders in AP enrollment and achievement.” More recent College Board data likewise indicate that between 2003 and 2013, Arkansas experienced the greatest growth nationally in the percentage of students taking AP exams. Over the same 10-year period, Arkansas was fourth nationally in increasing African American students’ AP exam participation, third nationally in increasing Hispanic students’ AP exam participation and sixth nationally in increasing the number of students earning a “3” or higher.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Kentucky Department of Education, *Unbridled Learning – Communications and Collaboration*, December 2012, <http://education.ky.gov/comm/ul/documents/unbridled%20learning.pdf>.
- 2 David Wakelyn, *Raising Rigor, Getting Results, Lessons Learned from AP Expansion* (Washington D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2009), <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0908APREPORT.PDF>.