

SECTION 4 | ACCOUNTABILITY

Questions researched for the 50 states

1. *Is college and career readiness one of the indicators used to determine school performance?*
2. *What proxies for college and career readiness are used in determining school performance?*

State policymakers increasingly are holding K-12 schools accountable, ensuring that graduates are prepared for college. All 50 states annually publish school report cards to provide a public snapshot of how well each school is educating its students. In 23 states, college and career readiness is one of the indicators measured to judge school performance.

Many states are working to define college and career readiness, although the indicators used for K-12 accountability vary. Some states consider college-going rates, ACT/SAT results or college remediation rates as indicators of college and career readiness. Others measure participation in dual enrollment courses, Advanced Placement scores or the number of industry certifications earned.

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POLICY GOALS

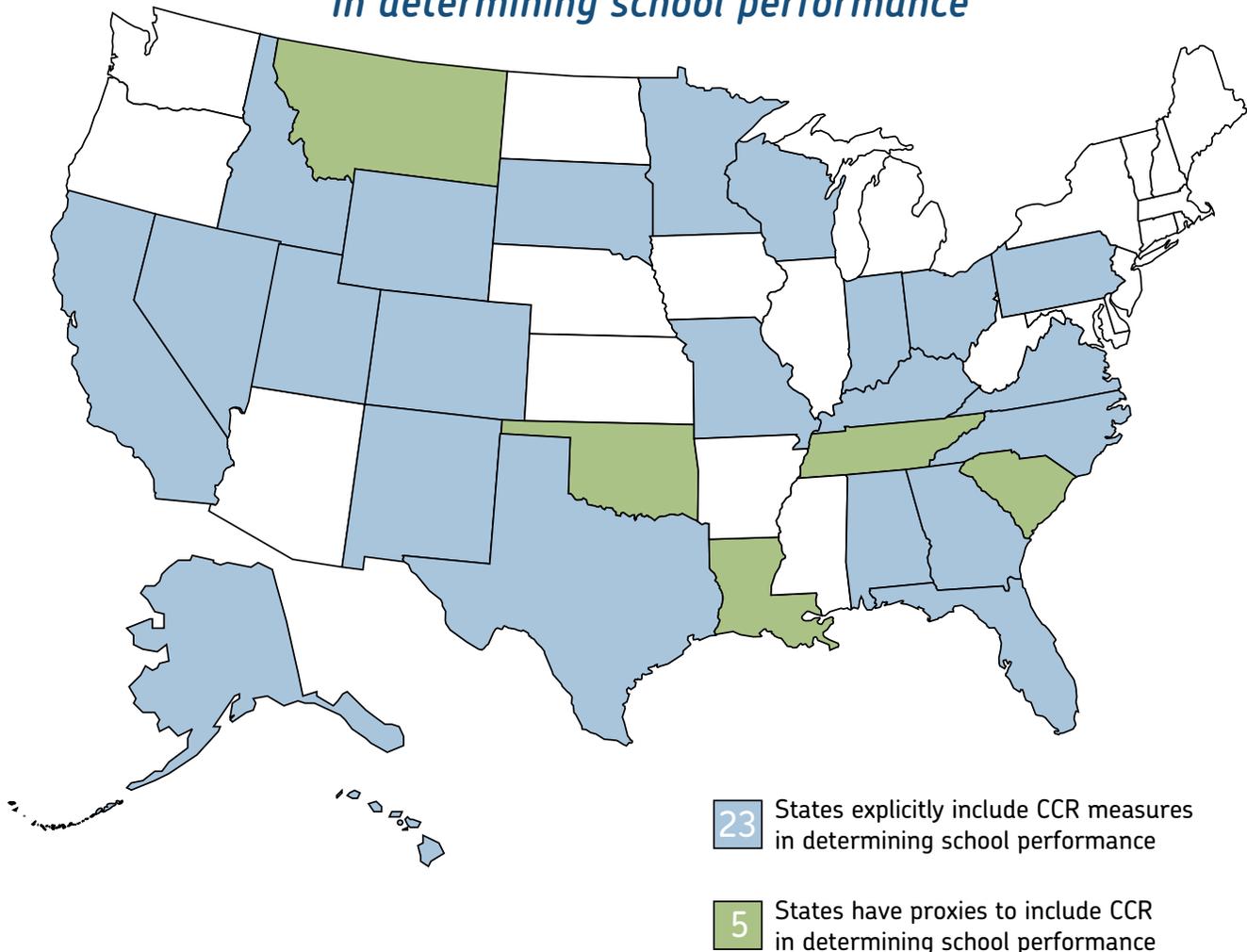
State K-12 school performance and accountability policies generally strive to improve all aspects of school performance, particularly focusing on:

- ✦ Increasing transparency about how well public schools are educating children.
- ✦ Balancing fairness for all schools and rigor for all students while increasing community expectations and increasing educator accountability.
- ✦ Creating improvement goals that encourage public support while focusing on areas in need of growth.
- ✦ Aligning accountability measures with state education goals, such as improving college and career readiness.

The focus on postsecondary success is driving states to analyze which measures best signal how well schools are preparing students for college and career. Policy goals related to this particular indicator include:

- ✦ Increasing the dialogue between K-12 and postsecondary education to foster collaboration and create a more aligned system serving students from preschool to the workforce.
- ✦ Reminding educators, parents, students and community members that each part of the school system is vital for student success.
- ✦ Providing communities with the information they need to insist upon change if they don't believe their children are being well served.

28 states include measures of college and career readiness in determining school performance



STATE ANALYSIS

ECS' review of K-12 accountability systems in the 50 states makes it clear that states are continuing to identify the best indicators of college and career readiness, including advanced coursework, assessment scores, dual enrollment, college-going rates and remedial rates. Twenty-three states explicitly include college and career readiness in their formulas to determine school and district performance and indicate the metrics used to evaluate it.

Five additional states — Louisiana, Montana, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Tennessee — while not explicitly requiring “college and career readiness” in their performance calculations, measure proxies that suggest readiness, such as college-going rates and ACT/SAT results, in school accountability systems. The following indicators of college and career readiness are commonly used by states as proxies for readiness:

- ✦ Dual enrollment participation and/or completion.
- ✦ Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate participation and/or results.
- ✦ ACT/SAT participation and/or results.
- ✦ Postsecondary participation rate.
- ✦ Industry certifications earned.
- ✦ College remediation rate.

While college and career readiness is only measured by about half the states, there is greater consistency in state selection and use of other metrics. For instance, all 50 states and the District of Columbia use student achievement and graduation rates as indicators of performance. An expert panel convened by ECS selected five indicators they see as essential for any state's school accountability system:

1. Student achievement
2. Student academic growth
3. Achievement gap closure
4. Graduation rates
5. College and career readiness.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS

The increased focus on college readiness will likely have a big impact on state accountability policies in the coming years. In 2014-15, many states will implement new standards and assessments that are designed to improve the rate of college and career readiness of high school graduates. The public will want to know how students are progressing toward meeting the new benchmarks and statewide accountability systems can help.

Some considerations for policymakers as they seek to include college and career readiness in their accountability systems:

- ✦ Align college and career readiness indicators with other statewide initiatives, such as developmental or remedial education redesign. In this way, the policies reinforce one another and establish a common vision for student transitions and success.
- ✦ Realize there may be limitations for college and career readiness indicators, such as participation in advanced courses or dual-enrollment programs, particularly in geographically remote or lower-income school districts.
- ✦ Weigh the ability of a state's data system to accurately track students into postsecondary education and/or the workforce, if this is required by the college and career readiness indicator under consideration.

More than any other indicator, measuring the level of student readiness largely depends on the availability of longitudinal data across state agencies. Robust data-sharing systems can either hinder or help states capture and understand how prepared students are for life after high school. It's also important to review and revise the accountability measures and formulas over time to determine their effectiveness and their impact on various student populations.

Definitions, indicators and reporting mechanisms are merely part of the puzzle. Two-way communication with higher education and business leaders is essential to a well-functioning system. Their perspectives can inform policies designed to improve student readiness and, eventually, student success.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Holding schools accountable for how well they prepare students for college and careers is a complicated process and requires addressing many challenges and considerations.

The Challenge: College and career readiness is hard to measure

No single formula or definition guarantees freshman year success in college.

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Choose indicators carefully.
- ✦ Be realistic about the limits of your data system. For example, what is its ability to handle highly mobile students or to capture college remedial rates?
- ✦ Consider the potential unintended consequences of what's being measured, rewarded or punished.

The Challenge: Participation does not necessarily mean readiness

Some states collect information on dual enrollment and AP/IB participation as a measure of college readiness. However, participation does not necessarily mean readiness.

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Collect and measure the results of advanced coursework in addition to participation rates. For example, what percentage of AP students took the final course exam and scored high enough to earn college credit?
- ✦ Collect and measure dual enrollment completion.
- ✦ Collect and measure the percentage of students enrolling in postsecondary education and also the percentage successfully completing the first year of college (or whatever time span is deemed appropriate).
- ✦ Collect and measure the percentage of students enrolling in two- and four-year institutions that require remediation and whether that remediation is in math, reading or both.

The Challenge: Communicating with students, parents and communities

Communication is about letting parents, communities and educators know which college and career readiness indicators are being used and why. Allow stakeholders to weigh in.

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Establish a strategic communications and outreach plan.
- ✦ Increase the dialogue between all aspects of K-12 and postsecondary education.
- ✦ Be transparent in communicating data and elements of the accountability system.

EXAMPLES OF STATE POLICIES

Approaches to consider

Texas and Wisconsin are two examples of efforts states are making to ensure college and career readiness is a prominent aspect in school and district accountability systems. Both states seek to increase communication and transparency for students and teachers through these efforts.

TEXAS

Multiple metrics used to measure postsecondary readiness



Texas' 2014 **State Accountability Rating System** (recently revised) emphasizes that a high school diploma should provide students with the foundation necessary for success in college, the workforce, job training programs or the military. Texas' accountability system uses four metrics to measure postsecondary readiness:

- ✦ **State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Final Level II:** Determined by the percentage of students with STAAR test results at or above the final Level II performance standard on two or more subject area tests.
- ✦ **Graduation Score:** Reflects the highest number of points possible from the combined performance across graduation rates for grades 9-12.
- ✦ **Graduation Plan:** Calculated as a rate based on a longitudinal cohort of students graduating under the Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program (RHSP/DAP).
- ✦ **Postsecondary Indicator:** Based on college-ready graduates meeting or exceeding the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) criteria in both reading/English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exit-level test, SAT, or ACT test.

WISCONSIN

Using multiple sources of evidence



Wisconsin's **Act 20** (2013) mandates the development and adoption of college and career readiness standards by seeking information from a broad range of sources, including elementary and secondary teachers, instructors and experts from postsecondary institutions. This approach attempts to strengthen the connection between secondary and postsecondary schools, better communicating what it means for students to be college and career ready.