

## SECTION 1 | STATEWIDE ADMISSION POLICIES

### Questions researched for the 50 states

1. Do statewide admission requirements exist for public four-year institutions?
2. Which elements are reflected in admission policies?

States are taking a closer look at college admission and placement policies because of increased pressure to improve the number of students earning a degree. By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the United States will require a postsecondary credential.<sup>1</sup> Given this statistic, ECS wanted to identify those states using statewide college admission policies and the common admission criteria being used. Statewide admissions policies, when clearly written and widely distributed, can help ensure students are prepared for college and thus more likely to persist and complete their degrees.

As of July 1, 2014, 28 states have adopted either statewide or systemwide admission policies for their four-year institutions. Systemwide refers to institutions with multiple campuses that function as a single system. Nearly all of the states require certain high school coursework as part of their admissions criteria. However, an increasing number include other minimum indicators as states shift to more comprehensive measures of college readiness.

*\*Note: Figures include adopted policies scheduled for implementation by 2016.*

**“By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the United States will require a postsecondary credential.”**

## POLICY GOALS

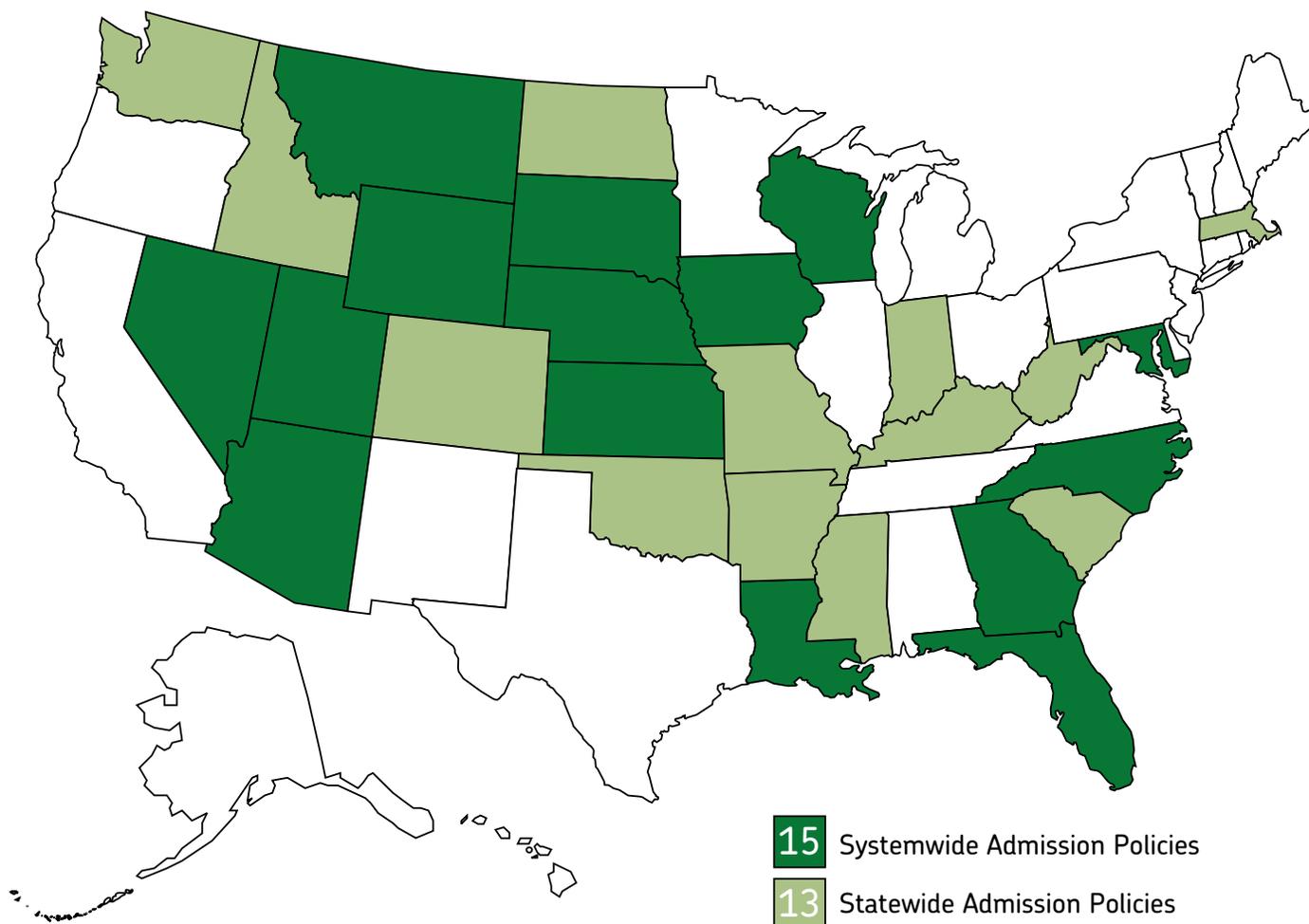
State lawmakers stepped up their role in setting college admissions policies following a series of reports in the 1980s — most notably, *A Nation at Risk* — finding high school students were under-prepared for higher education.

Since then, an increasing number of states have created minimum admission standards for public four-year institutions. These policies encompass multiple goals, including:

- ✦ Increasing the number of high school graduates entering postsecondary institutions.
- ✦ Creating transparency between high schools and higher education institutions about what indicators demonstrate college readiness.
- ✦ Increasing access to higher education for underrepresented populations.
- ✦ Using multiple measures to determine college readiness for admission and placement decisions so students have multiple ways to show they're prepared.

Ten states specifically outline the goals of their statewide admission policies. This helps explain why lawmakers believe a policy is important and what it is intended to achieve.

## Which states have statewide or systemwide admission policies?



## STATE ANALYSIS

Twenty-six of the 28 states with statewide or systemwide policies include specific high school coursework. However, most of the 28 states include other minimum requirements. This shows a move away from relying solely on high school course content and toward more comprehensive admission policies.

The five most common admission criteria in statewide policies are high school coursework, GPA, assessments, class rank and index score — the latter is typically created by combining some or all of the previous indicators into a single number. However, multiple states allow for alternative routes to meet minimum admission standards, such as the use of AP exam scores to substitute for a required course.

Assessments, including the ACT, SAT or an institutional-level test, are another common measure used by 24 states. This shows states are continuing to rely on standardized testing as an important indicator of college readiness.

Additionally, 20 states require a high school GPA in their admission requirements. Some states set specific minimums, which typically range between 2.0 and 3.0. Minimum GPA requirements help students gauge the level of academic rigor in their state's four-year public institutions and show how their academic progress matches postsecondary expectations.

## KEY POLICY ACTIONS

As the idea of college readiness evolves, so must statewide admission policies. State leaders should identify what academic levels students need to reach to succeed in their public four-year institutions. Some considerations might include:

- ✦ Using multiple measures to evaluate college readiness, such as a student's ability to succeed in college-level courses.
- ✦ Encouraging collaboration on college admission standards by stakeholders at the high school and postsecondary levels, including teachers, faculty, administrators and policymakers.
- ✦ Exploring the extent to which there is alignment between high school graduation requirements and college admission requirements.
- ✦ Promoting transparency within policies for students, parents and administrators.
- ✦ Providing alternative opportunities for students who do not meet minimum admission standards.

A majority of statewide admission policies provide options for students who do not meet the minimum qualifications to enter four-year public institutions. These options increase access for students who are on the cusp of college readiness but may need additional help in one or more academic areas. Alternative options for college admission also help institutions provide pathways for historically underrepresented populations.

States should study the effectiveness of statewide admission policies, including which of the multiple measures are proven indicators of college readiness. With a more in-depth look, policymakers can improve admission practices and increase success for high school graduates.

Further study would include exploring more alternate options of showing college readiness. This might include a review of current measures and their effectiveness, incorporating competency-based assessments for coursework requirements and how institutions weigh each measure when considering admission.



## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### *The Challenge: High school and college course rigor*

#### Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Align high school graduation course requirements with college entrance course requirements (when applicable).
- ✦ School districts should meet and communicate frequently with four-year public institutions to discuss course alignment and college readiness standards.
- ✦ Add “course rigor” to current legislative or board policy language.

### *The Challenge: Clarity of college selectivity on admission*

#### Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Identify different selectivity levels among the four-year public institutions and disseminate this information to high schools.
- ✦ Publicly share the selectivity levels and indicate which four-year public institutions identify at each level.
- ✦ Evaluate all four-year public institutions annually to ensure correct selectivity-level placement to provide prospective students with up-to-date information for admission.

### *The Challenge: Lack of access due to limited or strict requirements*

#### Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Consider alternative admission criteria in addition to course requirements.
- ✦ Review the skills and competencies that institutions desire of their incoming students and how those will be measured.
- ✦ Use multiple measures of student performance, such as GPA, assessment results and class rank, to create a single indicator or “index score” for the decision-making process.

# EXAMPLES OF STATE POLICIES

## Approaches to consider

States are taking a closer look at admission and placement policies because of increased pressure to improve the number of students earning a degree. The following examples represent some of the innovations taking place in higher education admission practices intended to create clear pathways to and through college.

## UTAH

*Identify selectivity levels in admission policy*



The **Utah System of Higher Education policy R461** outlines admission, access and articulation requirements. The minimum admission requirements include high school coursework, assessments such as ACT or SAT and high school GPA. Utah's policy is unique in separating public institutions into metropolitan/regional universities and teaching/research universities.

The policy provides information about admission to different types of institutions and sets out expectations for students. Metropolitan/regional universities are expected to provide access consistent with the minimum admission requirements. Teaching/research universities are expected to require more rigorous preparation to meet classroom standards in the institutions.

## COLORADO

*Consider alternative admission criteria/course rigor consideration*



Colorado has adopted **admission standards**, effective in fall 2019, that no longer include high school coursework. The new policy emphasizes college readiness as measured by multiple indicators. Colorado's previous policy included high school coursework, GPA, assessment score and class rank as minimum requirements for admission to four-year public institutions.

The new admission guidelines replace high school coursework with course rigor, which is fostering collaboration between secondary and postsecondary faculty on academic expectations for students. This policy aligns more clearly with the state's high school graduation requirements and remedial education policy. With the adoption of these new requirements, Colorado is incorporating alignment between high schools and postsecondary institutions.

## ENDNOTE

- 1 Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith and Jeff Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University, June 2013) <https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/tl10zkxt0puz45hu21g6>.