

Questions researched for the 50 states

1. *Has the state adopted a statewide definition of college and career readiness?*
2. *Do statewide high school exit policies recognize the college and career readiness definition?*
3. *Do statewide higher education admission and placement policies recognize the college and career readiness definition?*

In nearly every state, policymakers are calling on high schools to increase the college and career readiness of their graduates. But what does it mean for a student to be college and career ready, and based on what indicators? To address these questions, a number of states have called for the development and adoption of a statewide college and career readiness (CCR) definition.

In its 50-state policy scan, ECS identified 32 statewide definitions of CCR. The most common elements found in the definitions include academic knowledge, skills and assessment scores. Some of the definitions were as short as one sentence, while others were pages long. The Blueprint database examines the range of CCR definitions and the extent to which states are using the definitions to drive high school and higher education policies.

“Thirty-two states plus D.C. had policies to support the adoption of a CCR definition as of Jan. 1, 2014.”

POLICY GOALS

A number of organizations, experts and states are focused on defining CCR. While each definition is unique, ECS’ analysis identified the key policy goals most commonly articulated in these policies, including:

- ✦ Reinforcing and aligning with the Common Core State Standards and other college and career standards.
- ✦ Increasing collaboration between K-12 and higher education institutions to create a strong shared understanding of the knowledge and skills students need to enter a college or career pathway.
- ✦ Addressing the remedial needs observed by both higher education and employers.
- ✦ Unifying and informing K-12 and higher education policies to create a seamless and transparent system of education.
- ✦ Communicating to students, parents, K-12 teachers and other stakeholders the competencies high school graduates should possess to be ready for college and career.
- ✦ Providing a benchmark to help secondary — and even elementary — teachers understand the knowledge and skills students will need to demonstrate CCR by high school graduation.

A statewide definition can serve as a critical touchstone for K-12, higher education and the workforce. Ultimately, the purpose of the definition is to address the gap between high school and the expectations of higher education or the needs of an employer.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS

In defining CCR, state policymakers and leaders should take into account a number of postsecondary options. Based on the available research and state policy analysis, some of the considerations are as follows:

- ✦ Create a coordinating council or leverage an existing entity to be responsible for the development and adoption of a statewide definition.
- ✦ Ensure the business community, educators and the public are involved in every step of shaping the definition.
- ✦ Require school and district accountability systems to reflect the CCR definition.
- ✦ Require higher education admission and placement policies to reflect the CCR definition.
- ✦ Determine if “college readiness” and “career readiness” are defined and implemented in the same manner by both K-12 and higher education institutions.
- ✦ Determine if high school graduation requirements and higher education admission and placement policies are aligned to the definition.
- ✦ While the process of adopting a statewide definition is valuable, additional research is needed to understand how states are using the definition to drive important policies and strategies related to streamlining education systems, from preschool to postsecondary. To what degree are a state’s definitions actionable?

As statewide assessments are implemented to determine college and career readiness, states may move to more universal statewide definitions and common measures. However, the lack of uniformity across states may be indicative of future challenges. As admission and placement policies and other big changes are implemented, states may find the need to develop and adopt one unifying definition — or revise current policy.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

When adopting a CCR definition, policymakers should be prepared to address a number of challenges and opportunities. Each challenge is matched with opportunities for further study.

The Challenge: Lack of capacity for K-12 and postsecondary collaboration

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Require and incentivize state boards of education and higher education to collaborate to develop and approve the definition.
- ✦ Provide resources and support to create partnerships and opportunities for high school teachers to work with postsecondary faculty.
- ✦ Engage business leaders and employers to reflect the career side of the definition.

The Challenge: Reliance on one assessment score to determine CCR

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Require definition to include multiple measures and pathways for a student to demonstrate readiness.
- ✦ Require a report and analysis of student-level data to evaluate the various indicators used to determine readiness and the student's postsecondary outcomes.

The Challenge: Unclear expectations for high school students

Opportunities for how to address the challenge

- ✦ Develop a college and career readiness definition to build support and widespread awareness of the expectations for students graduating from high school.
- ✦ Ensure the definition is reflected in other state education initiatives and goals.
- ✦ Review skills and competencies that institutions desire of their incoming students, and how those skills and competencies will be measured.
- ✦ Connect the business community with K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions to clearly identify the skills and knowledge necessary to enter various career positions and pathways to ensure the CCR definition reflects workforce expectations.

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.

TENNESSEE

Aligning 12th-grade and entry-level college courses



Tennessee defines CCR as “the knowledge and skills needed for entry-level work and college freshmen coursework [and] success whether pursuing a career or a college education.”² The state quantitatively puts this definition to use through cut scores for both the ACT and future assessments as standards for college acceptance and course placement.

Statewide, the Tennessee Board of Regents and University of Tennessee leverage the CCR definition to align the K-12 Common Core State Standards to credit-bearing, entry-level courses in English and math. They also use the definition to create common course profiles and supplementary curriculum materials for Common Core-aligned college algebra and expository writing courses.

MASSACHUSETTS

Collaborating on college and career readiness definition



Massachusetts adopted a CCR definition in February 2013 after a two-year process. Led by Mitchell Chester, commissioner of elementary and secondary education, and Richard Freeland, commissioner of higher education, the goal was part of a broader effort to improve college readiness and college-completion rates.

High school teachers and higher education faculty actively engaged in more than 25 regional hubs that were established by the departments of education and higher education. In all, more than 500 educators participated, including 25 campus presidents who submitted formal reports on the work and recommendations for the commonwealth’s CCR definition. Another team was charged with integrating the previously separate definitions of “college readiness” and “career readiness” into one unified Massachusetts definition.

The resulting shared definition is intended to provide better coordination between schools and colleges, with the goal of aligning curriculum and expectations for students.³ It has informed curricular decisions and high school assessment designs.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Anne Mishkind, *Definitions of College and Career Readiness: An Analysis by State*, (Washington D.C.: American Institutes for Research, 2014), http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/CCRS%20Defintions%20Brief_REV_1.pdf.
- 2 Tennessee Department of Education, <http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/coretocollege/2014/Core%20to%20College%20Interim%20Grant%20Report.pdf>.
- 3 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, *Massachusetts Definition of Career and College Readiness* (Boston, MA: 2013) <http://www.mass.edu/library/documents/2013College&CareerReadinessDefinition.pdf>.