Race to the Top: Promising Approaches to Achieving College- and Career-Ready Goals (Goal 1)
March 2009

Introduction
Through the recently passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the U.S. Department of Education will conduct a national competition among states for a $4.35 billion “Race to the Top” incentive program designed to push states to improve education quality and results. The Race to the Top fund will help drive substantial gains in student achievement by supporting states that make dramatic progress on four reform goals outlined in the ARRA. Race to the Top grants will be awarded in two rounds — fall 2009 and spring 2010.

What are the four reform goals?
Race to the Top funds must support efforts designed to achieve four goals:
1. Making progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities
2. Establishing pre-K to college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement
3. Making improvements in teacher effectiveness and in the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need
4. Providing intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.

Some promising actions
This ECS Briefing Memo highlights promising state approaches aimed at achieving Goal 1 — and identifies the components that make them so promising. If your state has achieved strong results using different approaches, please let us know.

Indiana
College- and work-ready standards embedded in high school curriculum: While development of college-ready standards is a work in progress in many states, Indiana’s college- and work-ready standards are already in place, the result of collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary stakeholders and employers in the state. These standards are embedded in the “Core 40” high school curriculum.¹

End-of-course assessments aligned with college- and work-ready standards: While some exams administered in grades 9-12 measure basic skills that do not reflect high school-level expectations, end-of-course assessments test content specific to the grade level being assessed, giving an accurate measure of a student’s mastery of grade-specific knowledge and skills. Student attainment of Indiana’s Core 40 college- and work-ready standards are measured by end-of-course assessments (EOCs) in English 11, Algebra I and II, and biology, while an English 10 EOC will be piloted in spring 2009. To help teachers best prepare students to meet EOC expectations, online student item samplers for the four EOCs are available, as are curriculum framework classroom activities. A “High Achiever” online tool allows teachers to develop Algebra I tests and exercises aligned with state standards.²

College- and work-readiness as high school exit expectation:
The Core 40 curriculum will become the default high school curriculum effective with the Class of 2011, and the common admissions requirements for public four-year postsecondary institutions, effective fall
Nearly 75% of Indiana public high school graduates already opt to complete the Core 40 or more rigorous Honors diploma requirements. 41.6% of the Class of 2008 completed the Core 40 curriculum, while 30.7% completed the Honors requirements. With the Class of 2012, the EOCs effectively will replace the standards-based Graduation Qualifying Exam as the state’s exit exam. Students who do not pass EOCs will be required to seek alternative means to earn a high school diploma.

**Colorado**

College- and work-ready standards embedded in the P-12 curriculum, and aligned with career/technical standards:
The Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids, better known as “CAP4K” (2008 S.B. 212), directs the state board to align preschool through grade 12 (P-12) standards, including English language competency standards for non-native English speakers, by December 15, 2009, with the goal that students will be able to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness prior to graduating from high school. The state board should align the appropriate portions of the P-12 standards with the career and technical education standards where possible, and collaborate with the commission on higher education (“commission”) to ensure the standards are aligned with the commission-adopted description of postsecondary and workforce readiness. By December 15, 2011, each district must review its P-12 standards to ensure they meet or exceed the expectations of the state-level standards, revising local standards as necessary, and adopt curricula and assessments aligned to the standards.

Statewide definition of college- and work-ready:
By December 15, 2009, the state board and commission must work together to adopt a definition of postsecondary and workforce readiness. The definition must, among other criteria, define the level of English competency required, and must describe a sufficiently high level of comprehension and skill needed to complete the common postsecondary academic core without need for remediation. By December 15, 2011, districts must review their high school curricula and make any revisions needed to ensure that a student who successfully completes the curricula will be prepared to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness by graduation. Legislation refers to the revised high school curriculum as the “postsecondary and workforce readiness program.” The legislative intent for CAP4K is that by December 15, 2012, each public high school student should “enroll in and successfully complete a postsecondary and workforce readiness program.” Students with disabilities may follow a differentiated plan to achieve postsecondary and workforce readiness, if required in the student’s individualized education program.

Technical support to districts:
The department of education, department of higher education and state institutions of higher education must, upon request, provide support to districts in implementing postsecondary and workforce readiness. Support may include:
- Assisting in reviewing and revising curricula
- Communicating with educators, local board members, district and school administrators, parents and business community members
- Providing professional development for educators
- Collecting and making available a resource bank of best practices in national, state, district, school and classroom reform efforts related to postsecondary and workforce readiness.

College-ready endorsement aligned with admissions requirements, national and international college- and workforce-readiness expectations and CTE standards:
CAP4K directs the state board to adopt criteria by July 2011 that a local board could opt to use to endorse high school diplomas to indicate a student had achieved postsecondary and workforce readiness. The level of readiness to earn an endorsement must reflect national and international expectations. In adopting endorsement criteria, the state board must consider any career/technical education standards adopted by the state board for community colleges and occupational education.

A student with an endorsed diploma must be guaranteed to meet minimum admissions qualifications and be eligible for placement in credit-bearing courses in all open, modified open or moderately selective public postsecondary institutions in Colorado, and at all other public postsecondary institutions in the state, receive priority consideration for admissions and be eligible for placement in credit-bearing courses. Additional admissions criteria beyond a student’s postsecondary and workforce readiness endorsement must be set by each postsecondary institution.
High-quality K-12 assessments aligned with college- and work-ready standards:
All Colorado 11th graders have taken the ACT since spring 2001. CAP4K additionally requires that the state board-adopted P-12 standards be aligned with the postsecondary and workforce planning, preparation and readiness assessments administered in grades 8 or 9, 10 and 11. Grades 8-11 postsecondary and workforce readiness assessments must test reading, math and science, and first be piloted in the 2008-09 school year in districts that volunteer, and must be able to be used to measure individual student growth toward attaining postsecondary and workforce readiness. The prequalified assessment vendors from which participating pilot schools choose include:

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<th>Grade 8</th>
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<td>ReadiStep</td>
<td>PSAT</td>
<td>PSAT/SAT</td>
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<td>EXPLORE</td>
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<td>PLAN</td>
<td>Colorado ACT (COACT) (special version of the ACT designed for Colorado students)</td>
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<td>Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)</td>
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<td>Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)</td>
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<td>Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)</td>
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The legislation directs the state board, based on the pilot results and with consensus from the commission, to adopt a system of assessments aligned with the P-12 standards by December 15, 2010. These assessments must first be administered in all districts by December 15, 2012. The state-adopted system of assessments must provide scores that can be used for state and federal accountability. The state board is authorized to consider a system of assessments that uses portfolios, projects and performances, provided the assessment methods are valid and reliable and employ standard scoring criteria.

Using grade 9, 10 and 11 college- and work-ready standards to identify student areas of need:
Any student who takes a postsecondary and workforce planning, preparation and readiness assessment in grades 9 through 11 must receive a copy of the results, and a teacher or counselor must review the results with the student and, to the extent practicable, with the student’s parent, to determine the areas in which the student needs additional instruction.

As of the 2011-12 school year, an English language learner in grades 11 or 12 who has not demonstrated postsecondary and workforce readiness must be provided additional supports and services. CAP4K calls for a cost study to evaluate the costs of implementing new provisions such as this. Following receipt of the cost study, which must be completed by March 2010, the general assembly must address the services and resources necessary for districts to implement this requirement.

High school transcripts:
A student’s level of performance in the postsecondary and workforce readiness program and on the postsecondary and workforce planning, preparation and readiness assessments will be included on the final high school transcript.

Practitioner involvement in P-16 alignment:
CAP4K requires the commissioner of education and the executive director of the department of higher education to convene meetings of P-16 educators in each of the state board’s regional service areas (RSA) at least annually. At a minimum, the following stakeholders employed or elected in the RSA must be invited to each RSA’s regional educator meetings:
- Early care and education providers
- Local school board members
• P-12 teachers, principals, administrators, counselors and other special services providers in districts in the RSA
• Postsecondary faculty, academic advisors and administrators in public postsecondary institutions.

Stakeholders at these convenings must collaborate in planning and implementing assessments, and in identifying and providing the supportive services needed.\textsuperscript{21}

**Reporting impact on college- and work-readiness:**
By February 15, 2013, and annually thereafter, the department of education must report to the house and senate education committees on results achieved by implementing the P-12 standards, and postsecondary and workforce readiness. The report must indicate for the previous academic year:
- The number of students enrolling in, making adequate longitudinal progress in and completing the postsecondary and workforce readiness programs
- The levels of postsecondary and workforce readiness demonstrated by high school students
- Beginning with the 2016 report: The number of students receiving a high school diploma with a postsecondary and workforce readiness endorsement.

All such information must be reported statewide and disaggregated by district, school, grade level, free- or reduced-lunch eligibility status, gender, ethnicity and any other characteristic the department deems meaningful.\textsuperscript{22}

**Texas**

**College-ready standards embedded in high school curriculum:**
[Legislation] calls for the creation of four state-level vertical teams of K-12 and postsecondary educators, one each in English, math, science and social studies. By September 2011, the vertical teams must:
- Recommend college-readiness standards that address what students should know and be able to do to succeed in entry-level college courses
- Evaluate whether high school curriculum requirements prepare students for college-level work
- Recommend how curriculum requirements can be aligned with college readiness standards and expectations
- Develop instructional strategies for teaching courses to prepare students for college-level work
- Developing standards for curricula, professional development materials and online support in English, math, science and social studies for students who need help preparing to do college-level work.

College-ready standards and materials for English language arts must be established first, followed by math, science and social studies, respectively. The English language arts standards and materials must be ready for state board approval by June 2009. These curricula and online materials must be made available to high school students beginning in fall 2009, with curricula and online materials in the other three subjects available to students becoming available each subsequent fall.\textsuperscript{23}

**End-of-course (EOC) assessments aligned with college-ready standards:**
[Legislation] replaces the standards-based grade 11 assessment with EOCs in Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, biology, chemistry, physics, English I, English II, English III, world geography, world history and U.S. history. These EOCs must measure student performance under the college readiness standards, and must be validated by national postsecondary education experts for college readiness content and performance standards. EOCs must include questions that measure a student’s college readiness. Students who achieve a performance benchmark on these questions may forego taking placement exams upon entering a public postsecondary institution.\textsuperscript{24}

**High-quality help for struggling students:**
The commissioner of education and the commissioner of higher education must recommend to the state board standards for [college preparatory courses] in English, math, science and social studies. These courses must be designed to prepare 12th graders not meeting college readiness standards on EOCs for success in entry-level college courses. Essential knowledge and skills for each course must be developed by September 2010. Each course and the related instructional skills must be available by the 2014-15 school year. To ensure course rigor, a state-level EOC must be developed for each college preparatory course. The EOC must incorporate questions that reflect college readiness.\textsuperscript{25}
State law calls for the establishment of a pilot grants program for districts or postsecondary institutions to provide intensive summer instruction to promote the college and workforce readiness of students at risk of dropping out of high school or college. Grants may be used to fund programs:

- Administered by a postsecondary institution to provide intensive instruction in English, math, science or social studies to facilitate transition into postsecondary education
- Administered by a district in partnership with a postsecondary institution to provide intensive instruction in English, math, science or social studies to promote high school completion and college readiness
- Administered by a district in partnership with a postsecondary institution to provide 6th – 8th graders with intensive reading and math instruction to promote high school completion and college readiness.

State funds must support specific programs that increase rigor of the high school curriculum and college readiness. Options include programs that provide academic support and instruction to prepare underachieving students for college entry, and programs that align the grades 6-12 curriculum with postsecondary curriculum and expectations via online course support and professional development.

Professional development on college-readiness:
State law allows the commissioner to award grants to districts, regional education service centers, nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions to establish and provide technical assistance in staff development training relating to standards and expectations for college readiness, as defined by the state board of education. Preference in grant awards may be given to a district or regional entity that applies for a grant in partnership with a state or national organization with demonstrated success in the development and implementation of high school reform strategies.

Assessments that are valid and reliable for all students
Race to the Top funds must support efforts to provide valid and reliable assessments for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities. Policymakers must keep in mind several principles related to assessing special populations:

- If "what gets measured, gets taught," it is important to ensure that English language learners and students with disabilities are receiving access to quality instruction and the general curriculum.
- English language learners need to acquire knowledge and skills at levels high enough to allow them access to postsecondary education and/or career-potential positions.
- Students with disabilities need to acquire knowledge and skills at levels high enough to validate their ability to benefit from postsecondary education and/or participate fully in the workforce.
- Reasonable accommodations that are matched to the special needs of students with disabilities and of students whose first language is not English allow these students to fully demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

Best practice suggests that only accommodations or modifications used in regular classroom activities should be used on assessments of English language learners, and that states should establish differentiated accommodations for English language learners and students with disabilities. The ECS 50-state database on Special Populations in High School Assessments provides information on state policies related to inclusion of English language learners and students with disabilities in high school assessments and exit exams as of June 2007.

Additional resources
ECS state policy collections and analysis can guide you as your state moves forward to address the effectiveness and equitable distribution of teachers. The following resources may be of particular help:

- College-Ready Standards database (indicates whether all students are required to complete a college-ready high school curriculum and whether all 11th graders take the ACT or SAT):
• **Embedding College Readiness Indicators in High School Curriculum and Assessments**

• **Alignment of High School Graduation Requirements and State-Set College Admissions Requirements**
  [http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/68/60/6860.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/68/60/6860.pdf)

• **Ensuring Rigor in the High School Curriculum: What States Are Doing**

• **High School-Level Assessments: Include College-Ready Measures** data point:

• **High School-Level Assessments: Include End-of-Course Exams** data point:

• **Special Populations in High School Assessments** database:

• **ECS Research Studies Database FAQ: High school curriculum: How important is rigor?**

• **ECS Highlights** database: San Jose and Los Angeles Unified's college-ready curriculum for all; North East Independent School District (Texas) improving outcomes for students with disabilities

• **Test Accessibility and Modification Inventory (TAMI)**, Vanderbilt University:

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2. [Indiana Department of Education, *End-of-Course Assessments*, accessed March 17, 2009, from](http://www.doe.in.gov/core40eca)
3. **IND. CODE § 20-32-4-1(b)(2) and 21-4-2**
4. [Indiana Department of Education, *Graduates Time Series, State Total (Public School)*, accessed March 17, 2009, from](http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/TRENDS/graduate_time.cfm?corp=0000&pub=1)
5. [Indiana Department of Education, *Class of 2012 and Beyond*, accessed March 17, 2009, from](http://www.doe.in.gov/core40eca/docs/GQE_guidance_2012.pdf); **IND. CODE § 20-32-4-4 and -5**
6. [COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1005](http://www.doe.in.gov/core40eca/docs/GQE_guidance_2012.pdf); **IND. CODE § 22-7-1013**
7. [COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1008](http://www.doe.in.gov/core40eca/docs/GQE_guidance_2012.pdf); **IND. CODE § 22-7-1015**
8. [COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1015(4)](http://www.doe.in.gov/core40eca/docs/GQE_guidance_2012.pdf); **IND. CODE § 22-7-1009**
9. [COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1017(2)](http://www.doe.in.gov/core40eca/docs/GQE_guidance_2012.pdf); **IND. CODE § 22-7-1005(4)**
10. [COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1007](http://www.doe.in.gov/core40eca/docs/GQE_guidance_2012.pdf); **IND. CODE § 22-7-1009**

16 COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1016(1), -1008(2)
17 COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1006(1)(a)(V) and (VI), (b)
18 COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1016(1)
19 COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1016(5), -1018
20 COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1016(2)
21 COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1011
22 COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-7-1019
23 TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 28.008; 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 4.175, 4.176, 74.1001
24 TEX. EDUC. CODE. ANN. § 39.023 and 39.0233
25 TEX. EDUC. CODE § 28.014
26 TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 29.098
27 TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 39.114
28 TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 21.4511