

WHAT IS COLLEGE- AND CAREER- READY?

"I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma."

President Obama, Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009

It is commonly said that the goal of high school reform is to ensure all students graduate "college and-career- ready." But as often as this mantra is repeated, confusion remains over what it actually means. Simply put, "college and career readiness" refers to the content knowledge and skills high school graduates must possess in English and mathematics – including, but not limited to, reading, writing communications, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving – to be successful in any and all future endeavors. Of course, readiness for college and careers depends on more than English and mathematics knowledge; to be successful after high school, all graduates must possess the knowledge, habits and skills that can only come from a rigorous, rich and well-rounded high school curriculum.

What is "COLLEGE" ready?

College today means much more than just pursuing a four- year degree at a university. Being "college-ready" means being prepared for any postsecondary education or training experience, including study at two- and four-year institutions leading to a postsecondary credential (i.e. a certificate, license, Associates or Bachelor's degree). Being *ready* for college means that a high school graduate has the English and mathematics knowledge and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses without the need for remedial coursework.

What is "CAREER" ready?

In today's economy, a "career" is not just a job. A career provides a family-sustaining wage and pathways to advancement and requires postsecondary training or education. A job may be obtained with only a high school diploma, but offers no guarantee of advancement or mobility. Being *ready* for a career means that a high school graduate has the English, and mathematics knowledge and skills needed to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for their chosen career (i.e. technical/vocational program, community college, apprenticeship or significant on-the-job training).

Is ready for COLLEGE and ready for CAREER the same thing?

With respect to the knowledge and skills in English and mathematics expected by employers and postsecondary faculty, the answer is yes. In the last decade, research conducted by Achieve as well as others shows a convergence in the expectations of employers and colleges in terms of the knowledge and skills high school grads need to be successful after high school.

Economic reality reflects these converging expectations. Education is more valued and more necessary than ever before. The bottom line is that today ALL high school graduates need to be prepared for some postsecondary education and/or training if they are to have options and opportunities in the job market.

- Thirty five years ago, only 12% of U.S. jobs required some postsecondary training or an associate's degree and only 16% required a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Nearly eight in ten future job openings in the next decade in the U.S. will require postsecondary education or training. Forty-five percent will be in "middle skill" occupations, which require at least some postsecondary education and training, while 33% will be in high skilled occupations for which a Bachelors degree or more is required. By contrast, only 22% of future job openings will be "low skill" and accessible to those with a high school diploma or less.
- While the U.S. still ranks 3rd in the adult population (25-64 year olds) with an associates degree or higher among 30 countries, we now rank 10th among 25-34 year olds with a two-year degree and above. Competing countries are catching up to – and even outpacing – the U.S. in the educational attainment of their new generation of adults.
- Higher levels of education lead to elevated wages, a more equitable distribution of income and substantial gains in productivity. For every additional average year of schooling U.S. citizens complete, the GDP would increase by about 0.37 percentage points – or by 10% – over time.