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Public Education Policy And Progress

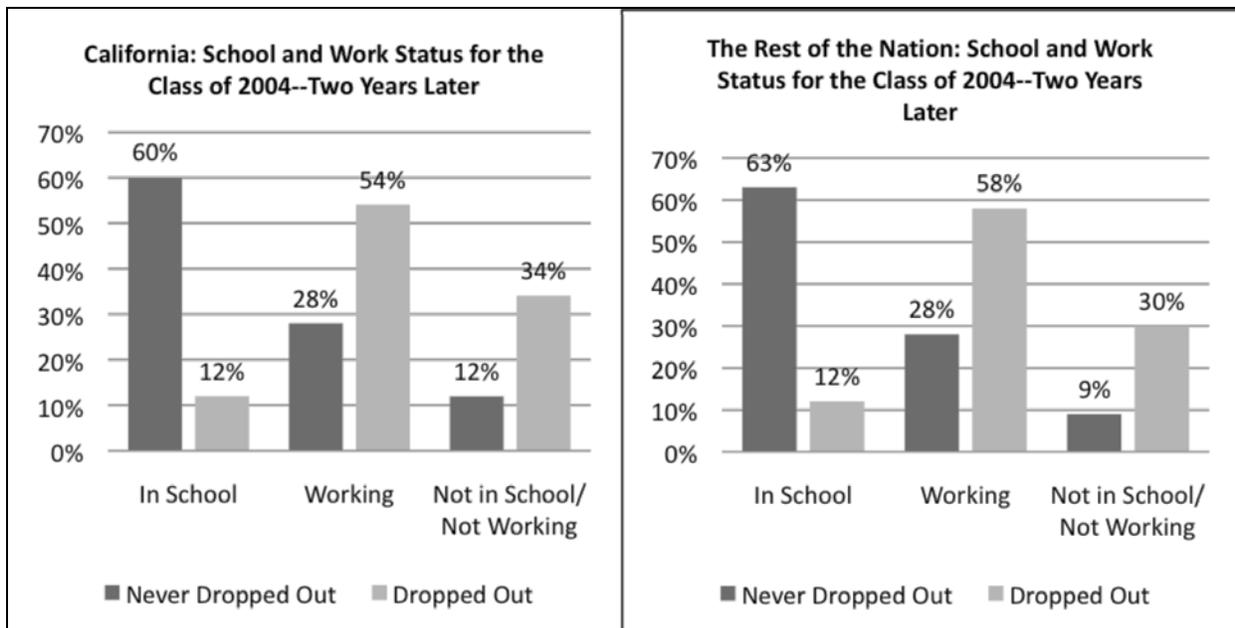


“WHAT HAPPENED TO DROPOUTS FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2004?": Brief Finds Over a Third Not Working and Not in School

A new brief from the California Dropout Research Project (CDRP) checks in with California students who were scheduled to graduate in 2004 but who dropped out after the tenth grade. It finds that in 2006 over one third of these students were doing absolutely nothing—neither going to school (high school or college) nor working—two years after their scheduled graduation date. Nationwide, 30 percent of dropouts were not in school and not working four years after leaving school.

“We are losing too many kids,” said **Russell Rumberger, director of the CDRP**. “Their futures are at stake and without education from either being in school or on the job, opportunities are limited. And it’s not just the students who will suffer, but the community, which will be affected socially and economically.”

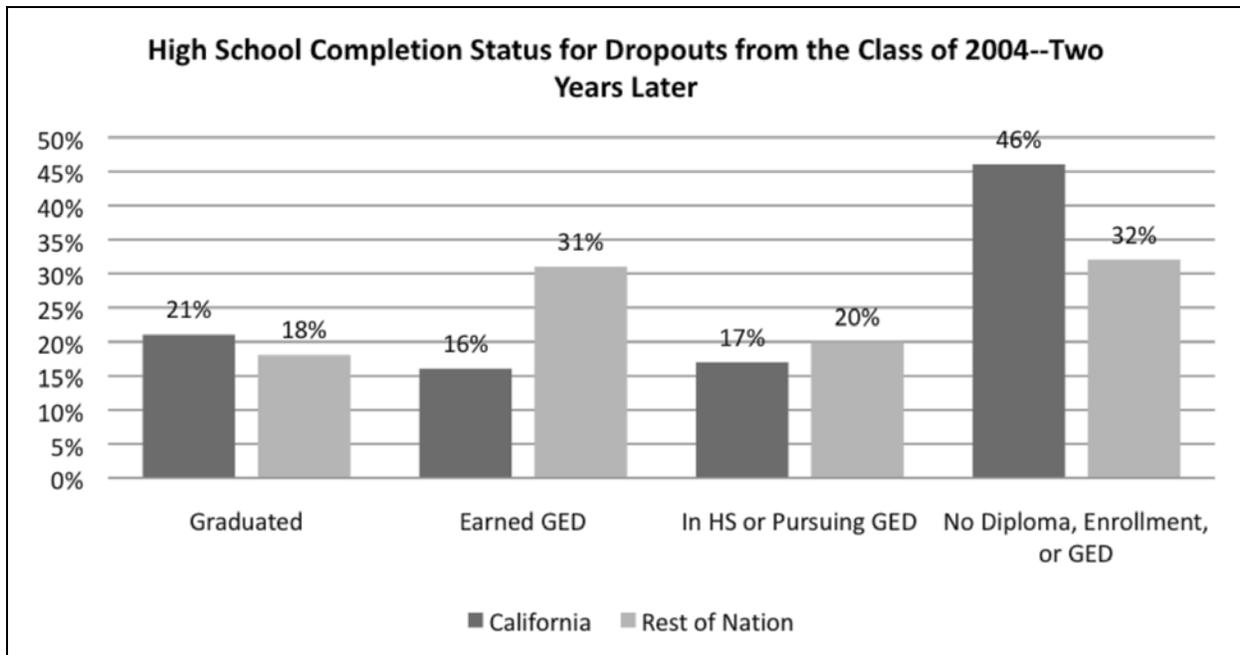
According to the brief, students who never dropped out of high school fared much better, both in California and in the rest of the nation. As shown in the graphs below, 88 percent of California students from the Class of 2004 were either working or in school in 2006; nationwide, 91 percent were either in school or working.



Source: *Education Longitudinal Study 2002*, National Center for Education Statistics

“What Happened to Dropouts from the High School Class of 2004?” (Continued from p. 1)

The good news is that over half of all tenth-grade dropouts eventually completed high school by earning a diploma or a GED or were still attempting to do so two years after they were scheduled to graduate. Nationwide, approximately 70 percent of tenth-grade dropouts had either graduated, earned their GED, or were still trying to do so. However, 46 percent of California dropouts and 32 percent of dropouts nationwide had abandoned their quest for a high school diploma two years after they were scheduled to graduate.



Source: *Education Longitudinal Study 2002*, National Center for Education Statistics

CDRP analyzed data from a national study that tracked high school sophomores from 2002 through 2006, two years after their scheduled graduation. It then compared the educational and employment experiences of students in California and in the rest of the nation who dropped out after tenth grade and those who never dropped out. According to the brief, 16 percent of California tenth graders dropped out compared to 13 percent in the rest of the nation. The brief does not report the percentages of students who dropped out in eleventh or twelfth grades.

In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Rumberger said that dropping out is “more of a process than an event” and that there “are a lot of telltale signs along the way.” He said that failure in middle and high school were the best indicators but added that data suggest that the problems that lead to students dropping out can begin as early as first grade. “It means there are a lot of places in a child’s school career where we could intervene to help,” he said.

The brief is available at

<http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/download.php?file=statisticalbrief-10.pdf>.

“Some California dropouts finish high school but don’t succeed beyond, study finds,” is available at <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-dropout12-2008sep12,0,4878394.story>.

Applications Now Being Accepted for Schools to Watch Program

The National Forum for Middle Grades Reform (National Forum) is now accepting applications from interested state middle grade associations, state departments of education, postsecondary institutions, and other collaborating organizations to join its expansion of the state-level Schools to Watch (STW) program. The STW initiative, launched in 1999 by the National Forum, is dedicated to improving schools for young adolescents across the country.

Successful applicants will receive training and technical assistance from the National Forum and use this training to identify middle grade schools that are leaders in providing an academically excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable education for young adolescents. Currently, over half of the nation's middle level students are in states involved in the program, and there are over 160 schools that have been identified as Schools to Watch.

Teams from interested states must submit applications by **December 5, 2008**. The National Forum will select up to five state teams with which to work in the implementation of a STW state program.

To download an application or receive more information about the program, visit www.mgforum.org.



SOMETHING IN COMMON: Achieve Reports That Many States Are Voluntarily Setting College- and Work-Readiness Standards

More and more states are aligning their curriculum standards with those for college and work readiness, leading to “a remarkable degree of consistency” in English and math requirements, finds *Out of Many, One: Toward Rigorous Common Core Standards from the Ground Up*, a recent report from Achieve.

The report analyzes to what extent a state's college- and work-readiness standards in math and English align with the American Diploma Project's (ADP) core benchmarks. ADP, a project of Achieve, is a network of thirty-three states committed to ensuring that every high school graduate is prepared for college or work. Each of the sixteen states studied for Achieve's report—among them Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, and Texas—is a member of ADP, and adopted college- and work-readiness standards voluntarily.

“States are leading the way in identifying and setting real-world standards for student success,” said **Mike Cohen, president of Achieve**. “A common core of college- and career-ready expectations in sixteen states is a positive development.”

To review the standards, several content experts from the university, public education, and consulting communities answered guiding questions to determine how strongly each matched with an ADP benchmark, on a scale of zero to three. Those that did not match at all or that matched weakly were ranked from zero to one, while those considered a good or excellent match earned rankings between two to three. The average English alignment ratings for the eight categories ranged from 1.96 in Rhode Island to 3.0 in Tennessee. Except for Rhode Island, all twelve states that had aligned their standards achieved at least a two average.

According to Achieve's findings, states' standards were strongest in the area of informational text, concerning the identification of main ideas in a text, and the interpretation and synthesis of

Something in Common (Continued from p. 3)

information; they were weakest in communication, regarding the identification of a thesis in a speech, making oral presentations, and participating in self-directed work teams.

In math, the average alignment ratings across the five categories ranged from 1.82 in Kentucky to 3.0 in Oklahoma. Achieve found state math standards to be strongest in algebra, but weakest in mathematical reasoning, which focuses on the constructing of proofs and strategic problem solving.

The report declares that a state-led movement for common standards is, indeed, feasible. “In the past, there has been remarkably little state-to-state consistency in curriculum standards,” the report reads. “However, today, nearly a third of the states, which collectively educate nearly 40 percent of the U.S. public school population, have embraced college- and career-ready standards. . . . *Further, they accomplished this by increasing the rigor of their standards, not by finding the lowest common denominator*” (emphasis the authors’). The report also asserts that establishing college- and career-ready standards is only the first of several important steps, and that standards must be dynamic, not static.

Out of Many, One cautions that “common standards” are not necessarily “identical standards.” Standards in the sixteen states are based largely on the ADP core, which “forms a foundation of college- and career-ready expectations, but does not necessarily constitute four full years of content.” Some states had content in their standards that was either out of ADP’s scope or was even more rigorous than ADP’s benchmarks; an example the report gives is the especially rigorous standards found in some states that are tailored to students interested in further education and/or careers in science, technology, engineering, and math. In addition, standards also vary across states in how they are organized and their level of specificity.

The full report can be downloaded at <http://www.achieve.org/files/CommonCore.pdf>

Five National Education Policy Groups Form College and Career-Ready Policy Institute

Earlier this month, education policy organizations Achieve, the Data Quality Campaign, EducationCounsel, Jobs for the Future, and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices announced the establishment of the College and Career-Ready Institute, a partnership designed to help states ensure that students graduate ready for postsecondary education and the workforce.

The institute will focus on eight states—Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, and Tennessee. These states were selected because of their demonstrated commitment to a college- and work-readiness agenda, and the institute intends to assist them in several areas. They will work on developing goals for improving their graduation, college- and work-readiness, and postsecondary educational attainment rates; establishing state assessment systems that are aligned with college- and work-readiness standards and that measure students’ progress; and putting in place accountability systems that provide incentives for appropriate actions, promote accurate judgments, and drive effective supports and interventions.

The organizations hope that the lessons learned from these eight can assist other states with their college- and career-ready agendas and boost the academic prospects for even more U.S. students.

For more information on this initiative, please visit <http://achieve.org/node/1033>.

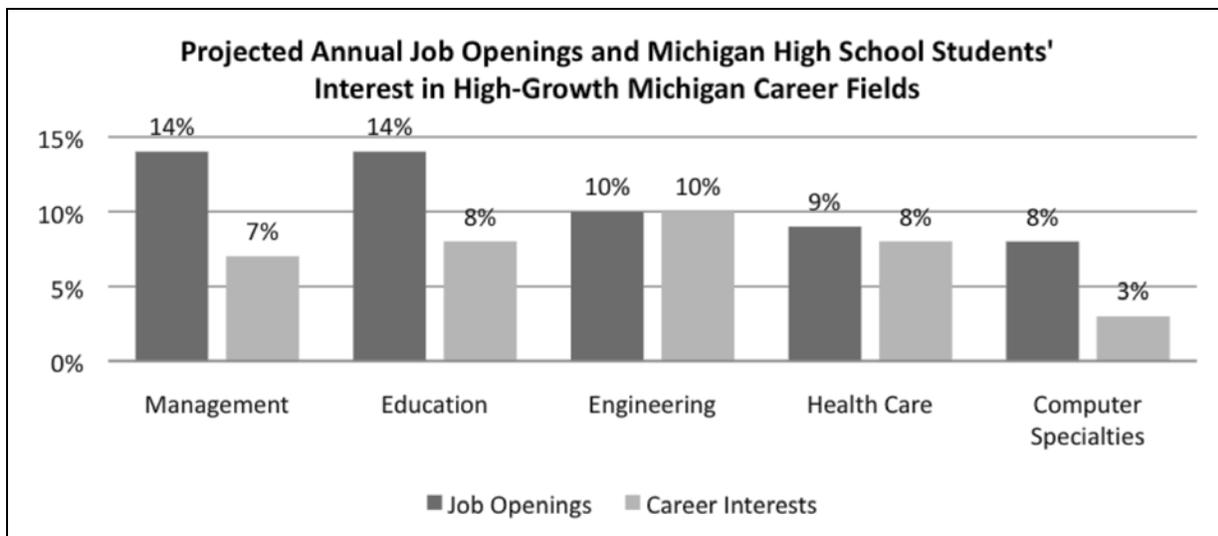


PREDICTING THE FUTURE: ACT Projects Future Workforce for States, Finds Many High School Graduates Unprepared for Success in College

Earlier this month, using data from the 2008 ACT for high school graduates and long-term occupational projections provided by states, ACT created a profile of the future workforce in thirty-one states. Dubbed the “Future State Workforce Gap Summary,” each profile lists the five highest-growth career fields for the state and compares the projected annual job openings in these fields to students’ interest in pursuing a career in them.

“Educators, employers, as well as workforce and economic development officials, can gain a more focused perspective on how well the interests of students in the educational pipeline align with the demands of high growth jobs in that state,” said **Martin Scaglione, president and chief operating officer of ACT’s Workforce Development Division**. “These profiles help present a view of the employees of tomorrow and how well their interests are aligning with future needs of the workforce.”

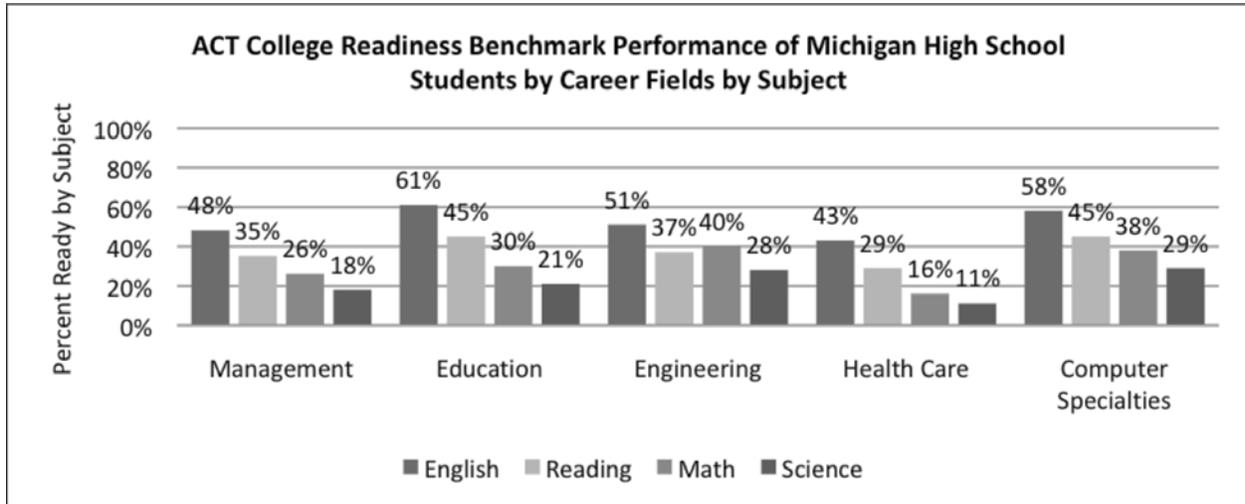
In Michigan, for example, ACT identifies management (convention planners, hotel/restaurant managers, etc.), education (secondary teachers, administrators, etc.), engineering (architects, mechanical engineers, etc.), health care (nurses, occupational therapists, etc.), and computer specialties (computer programmers, database administrators, etc.) as the top five career fields. However, according to the report, while there is some interest among Michigan high school students in pursuing these career fields, it is not enough to meet the demand, as indicated by the gaps between expected job openings and interested students in the graph below.



In addition to examining how well graduates were matched to future openings, ACT also analyzed how well-prepared students were to succeed in college. For example, while ACT did not find a gap between students interested in the engineering field and the jobs that will be available to them, it did find that most of the interested students are not ready to succeed in the college-level courses that they will encounter in their chosen field. As indicated in the graph below, more than half of high school graduates are not ready for college-level courses in English,

Predicting the Future (Continued from p. 5)

reading, math, and science according to the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks in those subjects.¹



As the report notes, more than one half of Michigan students are prepared for first-year college course work in English for three of the five high-growth career fields, but fewer students are prepared to succeed in college-level social science courses.

“Overall, the pattern of readiness for college coursework is similar across the five high-growth career fields,” the report reads. “Student preparation is highest for English and social sciences, and much lower for math and science. The lower levels of preparation among graduating high school students is alarming, given the high demand for science- and math-intensive careers such as nursing, pharmacy, and teaching.”

In order for ACT to create a profile for a state, the state must have had 25 percent or more of its 2008 graduates ACT-tested and had at least one hundred or more students represented in that state’s highest growth career fields.

The Future State Workforce Gap Summary, including links to the thirty-one states for which ACT performed an analysis is available at <http://www.act.org/news/data/08/workforce.html>.



“WHAT DID I DO WRONG?”: New Jersey College Students Push for Tougher High School Courses to Help Future Students Avoid Remediation

Last week, the Associated Press reported on several New Jersey college students who asked the New Jersey Board of Education to adopt more rigorous high school requirements in the hope that they could help future high school graduates avoid having to take remedial courses in college, as they had been required to do.

¹ The ACT College Readiness Benchmark is the minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area test to indicate a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college courses.

The article focuses on **Christine Arkainno, currently a student at Wilmington University in Delaware**. In high school, Arkainno was told that the basic English she took was not enough for college, so she insisted that her high school advisor place her in college prep courses during her senior year. However, Arkainno still had to take remedial courses when she enrolled at Cumberland County College in New Jersey.

“I thought I was reading quite well,” said Arkainno said. “After all, I was taking college level English. . . . I felt insecure. I felt stupid. I wondered what were those secret courses that I was supposed to be taking? What did I do wrong?”

Under the proposal under consideration in New Jersey, students would have to take higher levels of math, more rigorous English, and receive personalized learning plans that would prepare them for college or a career. The proposal, which is expected to be in draft form for several months, would also require instruction in Algebra II and chemistry and exams that assess work readiness.

Opponents of the proposal focus on the additional costs that it would be incurred in the form of new science labs, teacher training, and additional standardized tests.

“Students ask for tougher high school courses” is available at <http://www.app.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080918/NEWS0301/809180451/1007/NEWS03>.

Where We Stand: New PBS Documentary Examines State of America’s Schools

In 1995, the United States led the world in graduating students from college. Ten years later, it had fallen to fifteenth, not necessarily because it was doing worse, but because other countries were doing much better and were able to surpass it in the rankings. A new PBS documentary, *Where We Stand: America’s Schools in the Twenty-first Century*, explores whether the United States is doing everything it can to prepare its students to compete in a global economy.

Hosted by **Judy Woodruff, senior correspondent for the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer***, the documentary examines three Ohio schools—in urban Cincinnati, suburban Columbus, and rural Belpre—and raises tough questions about American education. It also provides examples of the impact of education policy and funding formulas and showcases innovative solutions.

Where We Stand also introduces students, parents, teachers and administrators whose stories illustrate both the challenges that many students confront and some students' the shining successes. They include **Bin Che, an educator from mainland China** who taught Mandarin in rural Ohio; **Cherese Clark, principal of Cincinnati’s Pleasant Hill Academy**, a high-poverty school struggling under the pressure of low test scores; **Guadalupe Medina**, a student at Metro High School in Columbus, who, at age sixteen, had completed all of her high school requirements; and **Anne Kuittinen**, a Finnish exchange student who had earned straight As in the United States but was required to redo her junior year when she returned to Finland because the Finnish school system doesn’t accept credits from America.

The documentary originally aired on September 16, but interested viewers can now watch it in five segments on the PBS website at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wherewestand/>.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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In this issue:

- “What Happened to Dropouts from the High School Class of 2004?”: Brief Finds Over a Third Not Working and Not in School
- Something in Common: Achieve Reports That Many States Are Voluntarily Setting College- and Work-Readiness Standards
- Predicting the Future: ACT Projects Future Workforce for States, Finds Many High School Graduates Unprepared for Success in College
- “What Did I Do Wrong?”: New Jersey College Students Push for Tougher High School Courses to Help Future Students Avoid Remediation



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