



## Preparing High School Students for Careers

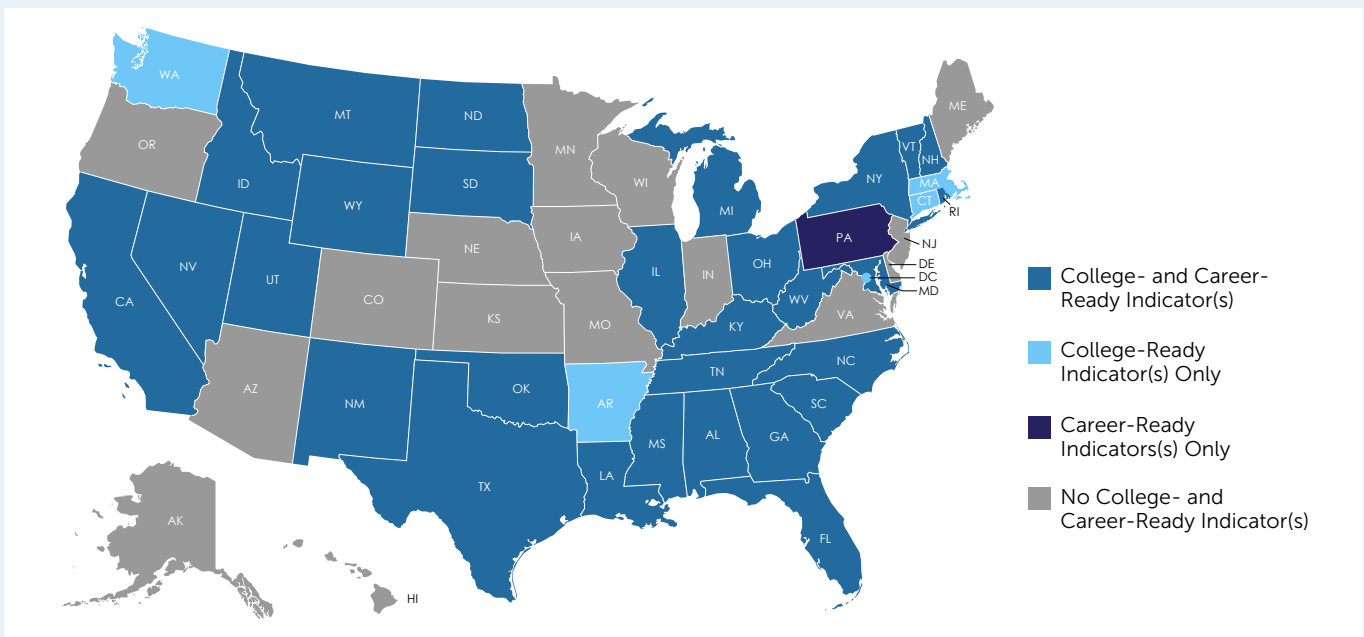
### Career Readiness in High School Accountability

State accountability systems provide incentives for schools to promote certain outcomes, programs, and experiences for students and help identify schools that need additional support to ensure all students, especially historically underserved students, achieve those outcomes and experiences. Given new flexibility in federal accountability requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), **thirty-five states and the District of Columbia now include at least one indicator of students' college and career readiness (CCR) in their ESSA accountability systems for high schools**—recognizing that a successful high school not only ensures students earn a diploma, but also prepares them to succeed beyond high school.

Further, **thirty-one states include specific measures of career readiness in their CCR indicator(s)**—recognizing that success beyond high school includes both higher education and workforce preparation. Common measures states use in their CCR indicator(s) include

- completing a career and technical education (CTE) pathway or multiple CTE courses within a program of study;
- earning an industry-recognized credential;
- passing an industry-recognized credentialing exam;

#### State High School Accountability Indicators of College and Career Readiness



- meeting benchmarks on a general career readiness assessment, like the ACT WorkKeys®;
- earning a military-ready score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB); and
- participating in a state-approved apprenticeship training program.

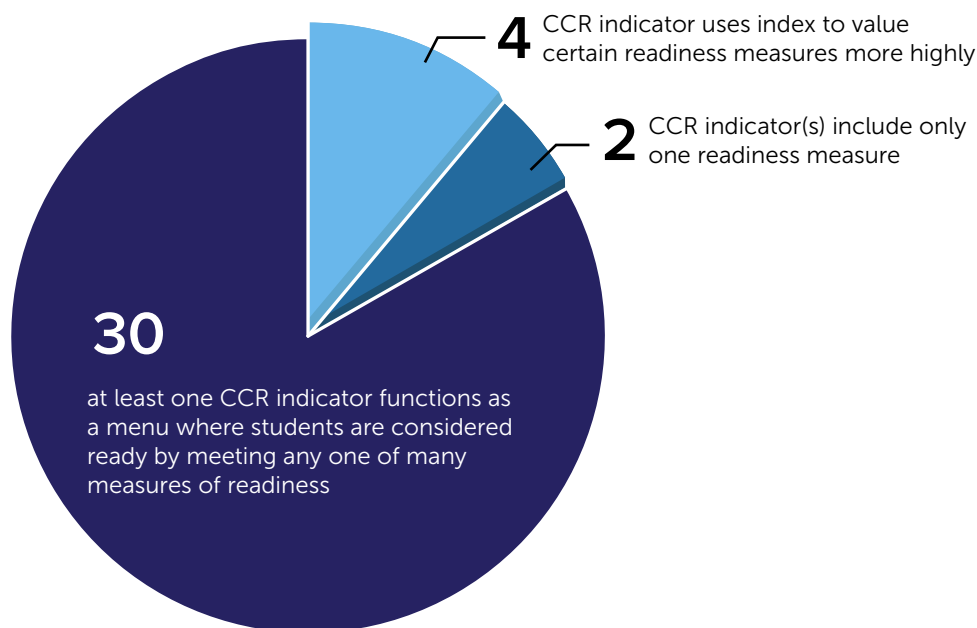
However, **just five states and the District of Columbia avoid using CCR indicator(s) that function as a menu, where students demonstrate postsecondary readiness by meeting one of many potential measures.** The District of Columbia and Pennsylvania use CCR indicators that consider student achievement against a single CCR measure, but these indicators fail to consider students’ readiness for both college *and* careers. In Pennsylvania’s case, the state measures only whether students are likely to be career ready, while the District of Columbia measures only if students are likely to be college ready. The other four states (Arkansas, Louisiana, New York, and South Dakota) use a CCR index to value certain measures of CCR more highly than others, which enables them to consider a broad range of measures inclusive of both college readiness (e.g., attainment of college credit via dual enrollment) and career readiness (e.g., acquisition of an industry-recognized credential or CTE endorsement).

In contrast, **an accountability indicator based on a menu of CCR measures (used by thirty states) can recognize a wide range of student outcomes related to college and career preparation, but may suffer from three key shortcomings:**

1. These indicators often are structured in ways that treat all measures of college readiness and career readiness the same—regardless of whether those measures are equally rigorous or indicate students are prepared for certain, but not all, postsecondary options. In many cases, students can be deemed “college and career ready” even if they never demonstrate achievement on a measure related to career readiness.
2. Many measures used in CCR indicators are based on student participation in programs or courses, rather than on the rigor or quality of those experiences or—ideally—actual evidence of successful postsecondary outcomes beyond high school, like enrollment in nonremedial college courses, job placement, or military enlistment.
3. CCR indicators designed as menus often fail to recognize which students are deemed ready by which measures. This can mask disparities faced by students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities in accessing the courses and experiences needed to prepare for postsecondary opportunities.

Although the widespread inclusion of CCR indicators indicates a growing recognition of the importance of expanding access to high-quality college and career pathways, work remains to refine these indicators to include measures that truly reflect skill attainment and student outcomes (i.e., job placement, postsecondary enrollment and retention) and identify equity gaps in students’ high school experiences.

### How States’ College- and Career-Ready Indicators Consider Multiple Measures



## Louisiana: Recognizing the Strength of the Diploma

The strength of diploma index (detailed on page 57 of Louisiana’s **approved ESSA plan**) is one of the most innovative CCR indicators in the country. High schools receive points in the Louisiana accountability system based on whether students graduate on time and earn a diploma (up to 100 points) and the credentials students earn while in high school (up to sixty additional points). The more valuable the credential, the more points a school receives. For example, schools receive 160 total points for students who graduate in four years with a high school diploma as well as an associate’s degree, 150 points for students who earn a diploma plus a passing score on an Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exam, 110 points for those with a diploma and a passing course grade for an AP or dual-enrollment class, and 100 points for students who graduate in four years with no additional credentials. Similarly, high schools receive fewer than 100 points for students who graduate in more than four years, or through a less rigorous pathway than a traditional high school diploma.

## South Dakota: Valuing Multiple Measures of Students’ Readiness

South Dakota uses a college- and career-readiness indicator that considers two sources of data on students’ preparedness for college and careers during high school: assessments and coursework (see page 57 of the state’s 2018–2019 **Accountability and School Performance Index Technical Manual**). For readiness based on assessment results, the state examines student performance in English language arts and mathematics on statewide standardized assessments, the ACT, ACCUPLACER, and the National Career Readiness Certificate/ACT WorkKeys®. For readiness based on course experiences, South Dakota considers whether students are CTE concentrators (i.e., earning two credits within a single career cluster), earn dual credit by completing a college-level course with at least a C grade, or attain a score of 3 or higher on an exam associated with an Advanced Placement (AP) course. Students who demonstrate they are college and career ready by assessments or coursework receive half a point in the index, while students who demonstrate readiness on both assessments and coursework receive a full point.



The **Alliance for Excellent Education** (All4Ed) is a Washington, DC–based national policy, practice, and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those underperforming and those historically underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. [all4ed.org](http://all4ed.org)

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