



# SREB State College and Career Readiness Initiative



## Teacher Development to Increase College and Career Readiness — Guidelines and Promising Practices for States

College and career readiness is an increasingly important issue, centered on the proper preparation of America's high school students for postsecondary education. A critical component of a complete college- and career-ready agenda in any state is a focus on effective high school teacher development, especially for teachers of courses based on college-readiness standards. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), with its Strengthening State College/Career Readiness Initiative (SSCRI), has developed guidelines for a complete, statewide college- and career-readiness agenda. Part of SREB's agenda includes developing senior-year transitional courses for students who are assessed as not ready for postsecondary study and generating teacher development guidelines for the teachers of these transitional courses.

**This brochure aims to assist states, school districts, state officials overseeing pre- and in-service teacher development, and postsecondary faculty as they prepare teacher development plans for college- and career-readiness standards and courses specialized for the transition from senior year to college or the workplace.**

### Senior-Year Transitional Courses

SREB promotes an agenda that encompasses statewide college- and career-readiness standards, early diagnostic assessments for college readiness, and transitional courses for high school seniors who lack skills to meet these standards. *Early assessment* — an important component of a state's efforts to increase college and career readiness — involves identifying students by or during the junior year of high school who are not ready for college-level work, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. This assessment in high school should similarly align with the state's college placement test given to incoming college freshmen. Specific statewide readiness standards with correlated junior-year assessments enable states to identify and better serve three groups of students as they enter their last year of high school: (1) those who likely will not be ready to graduate on time, (2) those who will graduate but who will not be college- and career-ready, and (3) those who are prepared for college and who could benefit from higher education exposure immediately (receiving college credits through dual credit, Advanced Placement, etc.).

SREB encourages states to create *senior-year transitional courses in mathematics and English* geared to close the skill gaps of students who are identified as unprepared. These courses should be based on the state's college- and career-readiness standards and should target essential content and skills that students must master to meet the performance expectations required by the standards. Transitional courses implemented statewide with supplementary learning modules and online tutorials can provide specific academic help for students not on track to graduate on time and for those who test as unprepared to succeed in first-year, credit-bearing college courses.

## Teacher Development for Senior-Year Transitional Courses

Too many high school graduates are not ready for college or careers. High enrollments in developmental courses in college are a clear symptom of the problem. National research indicates that approximately 61 percent of students who first attend a public two-year college and 25 percent who first attend a four-year institution completed at least one developmental course at the postsecondary level.

Ensuring that teachers can effectively teach college- and career-readiness standards and transitional courses is essential to increase the number of high school graduates successful in credit-bearing college courses and requires:

- teachers to have knowledge of the college- and career-readiness standards and the ability to utilize a variety of teaching strategies to engage their students to reach expected performance levels as well as a clear understanding of how college-readiness standards differ from other curriculum standards;
- states' preK-12 and higher education systems to mutually agree on the college- and career-readiness standards, create appropriate teacher development, and implement it with integrity and meaning.

Teacher development needs to be part of both teacher preparation programs and professional learning experiences for practicing teachers. A statewide plan with targeted professional development programs is a necessary first step in delivering teacher development activities for transitional courses.

## Professional Development (In-Service) for Transitional Courses

Effective teachers are key to more students becoming college- and career-ready. Teachers of transitional courses *and* core high school courses (particularly in mathematics and English) must be knowledgeable about the state's college-readiness standards and equipped with necessary teaching skills. Ideally, all high school teachers should be familiar with the standards and how they differ from other curriculum standards and expected performance levels.

The most immediate outcome of professional development should be that participants become very familiar with a state's college-readiness standards, learn strategies and methods to teach the standards to levels of proficiency that are college- and career-ready, and are able to focus their instruction on the transitional course structure. To better help students failing to reach college-readiness levels, teachers need to effectively evaluate students' skill gaps and progress by detecting failing strategies, applying new techniques or seeking assistance for prevailing problems. This occurs as they practice what they have learned and reflect with colleagues during and after professional development. Dialogue, networking, online activities, observations of classroom teaching and learning, and coaching at the school and district levels extend training by building on learning events.

### Phases of Teacher Development

1. **Plan** outcomes, content, activities and evaluation.
2. **Identify** educator groups to participate in professional learning.
3. **Develop** modules including the content and training strategies.
4. **Select** and train professional development providers.
5. **Implement** plans and conduct training.
6. **Follow up** with online or in-person practice to encourage participants to effectively use what they learned with their students.
7. **Evaluate** professional learning activities and follow-up activities.
8. **Change** programs and training based on evaluation results.



## Teacher Preparation (Pre-Service) for Transitional Courses

Teacher preparation programs should incorporate the state's college- and career-readiness standards, making appropriate adjustments or additions to the curriculum and methods for future teachers. Students in teacher preparation programs, particularly those who will teach math and English, will be the primary teachers needing the skills to understand and teach to college- and career-ready levels. Early and middle grades teachers will need to complete their preparation with an understanding of how the content they teach aligns with students' eventual college- and career-readiness needs. Teacher education programs need to familiarize future teachers with college- and career-readiness standards so aspiring teachers are able to detect the differences between these and other core curriculum standards. Future teachers need to clearly understand performance-level expectations for students and have a set of effective skills, strategies and methods ready to assist students to attain college- and career-readiness levels.

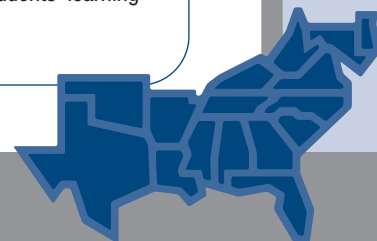
## State Guidelines for Teacher Development of Transitional Courses

The following guidelines are designed to assist secondary and postsecondary education leaders in developing statewide plans for teacher development around college- and career-readiness standards and transitional courses.

### Statewide plans for teacher development related to 12th-grade transitional courses should:



1. **Contain a clear set of college- and career-readiness standards and performance levels identified by the state and accepted by both preK-12 and postsecondary education.** Readiness standards should be set prior to teacher development planning and implementation.
2. **Focus teacher development first on teachers of senior-year transitional courses designed to help underprepared students reach college- and career-ready levels, adding more teachers as resources allow.** Teachers of transitional courses must be well versed on the state's college- and career-readiness standards, expected levels of performance and instructional strategies needed to accelerate students.
3. **Provide teacher development activities that are clear, thorough and accomplish expected outcomes.** Teachers of transitional courses need new knowledge acquisition, pedagogical skill development, practice, job-embedded support, reflection and dialogue in order to accelerate students to college-ready levels.
4. **Provide for evaluation of teacher development activities for transitional course teachers.** Evaluation criteria should include assessing the process, gathering participant feedback and estimating the achievement of expected outcomes (i.e., greater student success) to determine if modification is needed.
5. **Take into account adequate resources needed for teacher development.** Resources include time for transitional course teachers to participate in learning events and follow-up activities, financial support to pay for substitutes, access to facilities, appropriate technology, and training materials. All increase the likelihood that expected student outcomes will result from teacher development.
6. **Include teacher preparation (pre-service) components that parallel professional development (in-service), including college- and career-readiness standards and how to teach them.** Provisions to address college- and career-readiness standards in teacher preparation programs should be formalized by professional standards or higher education board rules and regulations.
7. **Embody research on effective practices.** Careful planning and implementation of creative methods to meet students' learning needs can yield successful teacher development for transitional and core course teachers.



## Elements of Effective Teacher Development for Transitional Courses

Research on effective professional development provides guidance on the methods appropriate for delivery. An article in the April 2009 issue of *Educational Researcher* lays out the following critical components of effective professional development. Some examples have been added to illustrate how each core feature might apply to teachers of transitional courses:

- **Content focus** — *Professional development should focus on math and English content in transitional courses and how students learn each content area differently (factual, procedural, conceptual, and meta-cognitive content knowledge).*
- **Active learning** — *Teachers of transitional senior-year courses need time and opportunity to engage in active learning (by observing and providing feedback to other transitional course teachers) and to collectively examine student work to gauge the degree to which they are teaching their students to the level of performance expected by the standards.*
- **Coherence** — *Teachers of transitional senior-year courses need to understand how these courses fit into their larger school, district and state plans for helping more students graduate college- and career-ready.*
- **Duration** — *Teachers of transitional senior-year courses need continuous and consistent professional development over a significant span of time.*
- **Collective participation** — *Teachers of transitional senior-year courses should be part of a school and district team that interacts with other transitional course teachers as well as core math and English teachers, career and technology teachers, and professors of developmental courses in the community college system for additional forms of teacher learning.*



The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) reports findings about effective teacher development, describes trends and strategies of professional development abroad and the status of professional development in the United States, and provides basic principles for designing professional learning similar to those described above.

## Evaluation of Process and Outcomes of Teacher Development

Effective teacher development programs usually include an evaluation component, preferably conducted by an external party that is not conducting the professional development. External evaluators can help professional development planners assess whether the planned activities will result in the depth of learning needed. Asking key questions before and after can assist planners in accomplishing the desired outcomes. For example: *What kinds of learning activities should educators engage in to clearly depict college- and career-readiness standards from other curriculum standards or levels of performance? What evidence will show that transitional senior-year teachers have met this outcome? Did the programs include activities as planned? How did participants perceive the process? Were the expected outcomes achieved?* It is important to determine if the process was followed with integrity and to ascertain the perceptions of participants. If perceptions are negative, it is less likely that participants learned what was expected or will implement what they learned meaningfully.



## Promising Practices and Policies for College and Career Readiness

States can best support teacher development for college and career readiness by enacting supportive policies and practices within law or regulatory code. State legislatures and higher education boards can require professional development statewide and allocate the necessary resources to do so, and states with professional standards boards can adopt rules or regulations to ensure that postsecondary institutions include college- and career-readiness efforts in their teacher preparation programs.

Policies that focus on college and career readiness in a comprehensive way are relatively recent. Practices stemming from such legislation or regulation are only beginning to be implemented. Among the examples below, Texas, Kentucky, Maryland, Virginia and Florida participate in SREB's Strengthening Statewide College/Career Readiness Initiative, and most are currently developing statewide transitional courses and professional development models for those courses.

The Texas Legislature has passed three key bills providing a foundation for all schools to implement a college- and career-readiness policy. [House Bill 1 \(2006\)](#) addresses professional development in several sections. For example, the bill:

- establishes school awards for student achievement, requiring that 25 percent of each grant be used in certain ways, including professional development of classroom teachers and teacher induction programs;
- calls for K-12 and higher education commissioners to establish “vertical teams,” composed of public secondary and postsecondary educators who will develop instructional strategies for teaching college-preparatory courses and establish minimum standards for professional development materials;
- requires the P-16 Council to recommend a college-readiness strategic action plan, including educator certification and professional development recommendations, to increase student success and decrease enrollment in developmental courses in higher education;
- directs the state Board of Education to develop specific programs, including professional development, for higher education faculty on college-readiness standards and their implications for instruction.





Educator training becomes a priority when formalized by legislators or board members and should require periodic reporting on results of its implementation. Teacher development should not be seen as an afterthought, but rather as a means-to-the-end of helping more students graduate college- and career-ready. To ensure that both pre-service and in-service teacher development plans are properly designed and implemented, focused on appropriate educator groups and adequately supported, states should require annual reporting to the state Board of Education on their teacher development plans for college and career readiness.

Passed in 2007, [House Bill 2237](#) adds provisions that allow professional development funds to be used for awards for technical assistance and professional development activities in the staff development training of public school teachers and administrators.

More recently, [House Bill 3 \(2009\)](#) extends and revises earlier college-readiness legislation and focuses on postsecondary readiness, rigor, relevance, recognition, interventions and sanctions. This set of legislation by Texas policy-makers provides one of the most comprehensive frameworks on the various components of college readiness in the nation.

[Kentucky's Senate Bill 1 \(2009\)](#) abolishes the assessment and accountability system in elementary and secondary schools and establishes a process for the development of new standards, new assessment requirements and alignment of standards and assessments with postsecondary education. Senate Bill 1 contains provisions that direct the Department of Education to facilitate statewide training sessions on revised content standards, assessments, higher-order thinking, and communication skills. New language also requires the Education Professional Standards Board, in cooperation with the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education, to coordinate information and training sessions for faculty and staff in all of the teacher-preparation programs, ensuring that each pre-service teacher-preparation program includes use of the academic standards and that all teacher interns have experience planning classroom instruction based on the revised standards. The department has developed math and English transitional courses and online resources for teachers of the courses.

[Florida's Senate Bill 1908 \(2008\)](#) requires high schools to evaluate the college readiness of each student who indicates an interest in postsecondary education and meets certain test score benchmarks before beginning 12th grade. It requires extending opportunities for remediation to high school seniors. In response, the Department of Education developed and piloted optional math and English transitional courses. As part of its professional development plan, the department held numerous "train-the-trainer" workshops in 2010 for district teachers and staff who will train teachers of senior-year transitional courses.

[Virginia](#) also is currently developing math and English senior-year transitional courses, called "capstone courses," based on aligning the state's long-established Standards of Learning (SOLs) for high school math and English with the Common Core State Standards. Once the performance expectations and course outlines are complete, the Department of Education will create professional development guides for capstone course teachers. The capstone courses will be piloted in the 2011-2012 academic year and implemented statewide the following year.

Although **Maryland** has not passed relevant legislation since the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act in 2002, the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Advisory Council was convened by the state superintendent in 2003. The council developed a set of standards for teacher development and a guide for implementing the standards (*The Maryland Teacher Professional Development Planning Guide, 2008*), and it reported on other aspects of evaluating and ensuring high-quality professional development.

**New Jersey** recently began to redesign its high school standards in many subject areas and considered them to be college-ready standards, or “21st Century standards.” In the midst of redesign, New Jersey joined the Common Core State Standards initiative and halted the development of its own math, reading and writing standards. Yet New Jersey created many online teacher development resources, as well as assessments and professional development activities around the standards in certain content areas.

In summary, teacher development — both professional development and teacher preparation — tailored to teaching 12th-grade transitional courses is a *vital* component of increasing the numbers of high school students who graduate college- and career-ready. College readiness is a complex issue involving many components that span preK-12 and postsecondary education, and teacher development is an essential element in a successful college-readiness initiative. Without sufficient investment in teacher development, a college-readiness initiative will have less impact on student success in post-secondary endeavors.

SREB, through its **Strengthening State College/Career Readiness Initiative (SSCRI)**, is working with leadership in Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia to accelerate the agenda for college and career readiness of high school graduates. Many states are working with the American Diploma Project, the National Governors Association, the College Board and ACT Inc. in efforts such as the Common Core State Standards to improve college readiness. SREB’s Strengthening Statewide College/Career Readiness Initiative focuses on a model **college- and career-readiness agenda** composed of six interrelated and essential components:



- Adoption of statewide college- and career-readiness standards.
- Assessment of state-adopted standards with qualifying scores denoting readiness.
- Modification of public school curriculum to align with college-readiness standards and application of 12th-grade transitional courses for underprepared students.
- Development of statewide teacher development plans to implement standards.
- Accountability of statewide programs to monitor student and school performance.
- Accountability of public postsecondary education for the application of the standards.



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