The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) has received funding from the Gates Foundation to help states improve the college and career readiness of high school students. The global economy demands a more highly skilled workforce than ever before, but the United States is not graduating enough students from high school who are ready to succeed in college or careers. Most states have begun efforts to improve college and career readiness but without adequate recognition of the size and urgency of the problem or the complexity of the solution. States need supportive public policies and practical strategies that will coalesce all of K-12 and public postsecondary education around a coherent college and career readiness agenda.

This progress report suggests to policy and education leaders in Virginia an action agenda and implementation plan to mobilize all key stakeholders to make the needed gains in college and career readiness. We begin by presenting a model agenda to achieve college and career readiness and suggesting best practices and principles for directing college readiness initiatives. Then we present our analysis of both the process and the substance of current efforts in Virginia on the various steps of the readiness agenda, outlining what we see as the key issues to be addressed.

THE SYSTEMIC STATE COLLEGE READINESS INITIATIVE AGENDA

In this section, we outline the key steps of a comprehensive and systemic SCRI. Next we discuss how each step can and should be related to others, and then suggest how each step can be
implemented systemically and effectively. We believe that each step is important and that each must be connected to the other. Moreover, all steps must be linked by the focus on the readiness standards and the goal of having them taught effectively and with priority by all of the state’s school classroom teachers.

Over several years, several organizations and states have developed a model college/career readiness agenda. This agenda outlined here is more comprehensive and systemic than most, particularly in the steps concerning application, curriculum, and teacher development.

1. Statewide college/career readiness standards

K-12 and public postsecondary sectors jointly identify college readiness standards in reading, writing, and math that become highlighted subsets of official statewide school standards. Having one set of readiness standards that are adopted and used by K-12 and all public postsecondary institutions (two-year and four-year sectors) is vital to sending clear signals to all public high schools about what it means to be college/career ready.

2. Consistent and Common Application of Core Readiness Standards

Both K-12 and PSE need to recognize the same core readiness standards as driving college readiness preparation in all public schools and all placement/readiness procedures and decisions in PSE. The same exact standards and performance expectations should be used by both K-12 and PSE and connect all steps of the SCRI agenda.

3. Assessment

Students are assessed at the end of the junior year to measure progress on the state-adopted readiness standards. These assessments should be used to direct students to targeted assistance in 12th grade to remedy deficiencies or to certify readiness to begin postsecondary or advanced study immediately.

4. Curriculum

Using the standards and performance levels established by the junior-year assessment aligned with college readiness, the public school curriculum should be modified as
necessary to target the specific statewide readiness standards, mapping back to at least grade 8. Supplemental curriculum and programs designed to teach and assess the skills needed to succeed in first-year college courses should be developed and taught in 12th grade to help students who, based on 11th grade assessments, are on track to graduate without being college/career ready.

5. Teacher Development
Statewide plans should be developed, focused specifically on the state college readiness standards, to help teachers understand the specific college readiness standards and how to teach them effectively in grades 8-12. Plans should also address how teachers should implement the new 12th grade courses or activities designed to bring students up to readiness standards once 11th grade assessments are reviewed.

In addition, pre-service teacher preparation programs need to be reviewed and revised as needed to include an emphasis on the core readiness standards. Appropriately reinforcing adjustments need to be made in relevant teacher licensure and certification state regulations.

6. School Accountability
School and student performance on the college/career readiness assessments should be part of the state school accountability program. This sends a clear message that it is important that all schools make PSE readiness a priority and that increasing percentages of students meet the standards.

7. Postsecondary Education Accountability
For a SCRI to be truly systemic and effective, PSE as a whole must be involved in many of the key steps of the SCRI implementation agenda. PSE needs to be substantively involved throughout the SCRI and recognize that an effective SCRI is in its own best interests. Accordingly, states need to hold PSE more accountable for the outcomes that will flow from a commitment to increasing readiness for PSE—namely, increasing the
percentage of entering students who succeed in first-year courses, or if not, completing successfully remedial work based on the shared state readiness standards.

**Driving and Coordinating the SCRI**

Beyond being clear about the overall outcomes, we find that the operational decisions involved in developing and implementing a SCRI require the guidance of some fundamental concepts or principles to ensure a systemic approach.

*The dominant principle should guide all action and decisions toward what will help school classroom teachers be effective in teaching the readiness standards.* Teachers can teach effectively to the readiness standards if the right conditions exist: one set of standards shared by all of PSE and P-12 and given the priority that results from being important parts of the state assessment, accountability and teacher development systems. This recognizes that the K-12 classroom is the primary focus of action in preparing students for PSE. It is where education needs to be strengthened or refocused to increase student readiness. We believe that the systemic nature of a SCRI can be strengthened if decisions in each step are made according to the operating principle: What will maximize the conditions in which classroom teachers statewide can best help students be ready for college study?

This principle arguably provides the most critical element in pursuing a systemic, connected approach to building a SCRI. Linking all action steps and decisions about the implementation of a SCRI to one criterion — what will motivate and help a classroom teacher to teach effectively the readiness standards — provides a common, clear thread connecting standards to testing to curriculum to teacher development (both pre-service and in-service) and to school and college accountability. This principle should help guide decisions about the kinds of standards, the form and nature of testing involved, the criteria of school accountability, and the nature of the school curriculum and teacher development.

In the later section that discusses the specific steps in a SCRI agenda, we suggest that some best practices emerge when the teacher-centered criterion is applied. We believe that it matters not
only what the standards are but also who sets and applies them and how they are expressed in performance terms. The same is true for readiness-related assessments. The key point here is that classroom teachers are moved most by one set of a limited number of specific standards about which they understand the level of performance required. Moreover, teachers give highest priority to those standards if they are adopted by the state as the target standards, applied by state assessments and reinforced by the state school accountability system.

While the “what helps the classroom teacher” principle offers the fundamental criterion for decision-making, a second concept provides the glue that can connect the SCRI agenda steps systemically. This concept concerns the need to fuel the agenda with a very specific set of readiness standards defined in detail in both content and performance terms. This set of standards needs to be shared in all specifications by both K-12 and PSE.

These standards need to be shared and applied by K-12 and PSE in full detail, including not just content descriptions but also performance specifications. K-12 teachers need a focused set of readiness standards to which they can confidently give priority and commitment. PSE needs to use these same standards in placement decisions and in teacher development programs.

**Advancing Virginia’s College-Readiness Initiative**

The goal of Virginia’s Statewide College-Readiness Initiative (SCRI) is to bring college-readiness standards in reading, writing and mathematics into each school classroom by providing teachers descriptions of the student expectations in clear and explicit performance terms. Moreover, state policy needs to reinforce and highlight the high priority of helping students meet these standards and support schools and teachers in implementing a college-readiness curriculum. This goal should guide all decisions about how to proceed at each step of the college-readiness agenda: the identification and expression of the standards; the readiness-related assessments—diagnostic, formative, and summative; the professional development of prospective and practicing teachers; revisions to curriculum targeting the standards; and readiness-related school accountability policy.
It is important that an SCRI be based on a direct and strong systemic connection from the standards through all of the related functions of assessment, teacher development, curricular emphases, and school accountability and priority. Effective SCRIs depend on each of these functions being carried out according to the same understandings of the same standards. All teachers must specifically know the readiness standards, the performance levels expected of students, and how to teach the standards effectively. The general content descriptive statements of the standards need to be highlighted and translated into performance expectation terms understood by all teachers statewide. It is important that the same college-readiness performance standards be used in the development of curriculum materials and assignments, new teacher preparation, professional development, and state assessments.

The process used by states to embed the readiness standards statewide with priority and clarity will differ, owing primarily to where a state starts with respect to readiness standards and related assessments. All successful college-readiness initiatives depend on having consensus readiness standards that have sufficient clarity and precision before the other steps can proceed. For some states, this means starting a new or separate process to define and adopt the content standards and to elaborate them in specific performance terms.

Other states may be able to identify a subset or essential core of their existing standards as college-readiness standards and validate their quality through an external “alignment” or benchmarking process.

**The Virginia Approach to the SCRI Agenda**

Virginia’s situation suggests that the steps of the readiness agenda can be approached less sequentially – namely, it appears that Virginia already has an essential core of standards that can be used to determine students’ college readiness among its state-board adopted Standards of Learning (SOL).

Several external reviews of Virginia’s Standards of Learning support the presence of such readiness standards. In 2007, Achieve Inc. reviewed the alignment of Virginia’s SOLs with its
American Diploma Project English and math readiness standards and found that the standards were substantially aligned. Concurrently, the College Board and ACT conducted similar analyses of Virginia’s SOL and concluded that overall, the standards were aligned to each organization’s college success standards. In areas where there were gaps, the College Board made specific recommendations that were incorporated into Virginia’s revised mathematics standards, and soon-to-be completed English standards.

In addition, the Virginia Department of Education (DOE) studied the relationship between SAT scores and SOL test/assessment scores and analyzed how SOL proficiency levels relate to the “college benchmarks” established by the College Board. This 2009 report suggests that both the proficient and advanced proficient score levels on the end-of-course SOL tests are strongly associated with college readiness at the “low” SAT benchmark level (defined as students having a 65 percent chance or higher of earning a 2.0 GPA or higher in the first year of college).

The state study also established a substantial correlation between the advanced proficient SOL score levels and the “high SAT benchmark” (65 percent chance or higher of earning a 2.7 GPA or higher). These two studies support the presence of standards in the SOL that relate to college readiness both in terms of the “content” of the standard and student performance level (the latter as identified by scores on the end-of-course SOL tests). Finally, analysis of National Clearinghouse data is providing information about the probabilities of Virginia public school graduates enrolling and persisting into the second year.

The confirmed presence of these standards in the state adopted SOL, the curriculum and the SOL tests places Virginia ahead of many states in establishing a data-driven foundation for a state college- readiness initiative — the basis on which all other steps on the readiness agenda are built.

It is also important that PSE participate in this process of identification and prioritization within the base SOLs to ensure that the resulting specification of the readiness standards is shared fully. Only by P-12 and PSE statewide agreeing on one set of reading, writing and mathematics standards can strong and singular message signaling occur to all schools.
We describe below two approaches by which P-12 and PSE can jointly use the current standards of learning as a base and then identify and specify further those existing standards that are most critical. The result needs to be one set of consensus standards shared fully and specifically by all of P-12 and PSE. Notably, Virginia is fortunate in that it already has evidence that its school standards rise to the level of PSE readiness, thereby eliminating the need to build a new set of standards. What is needed is a process through which the most important readiness standards among the current SOLs are highlighted, further defined and recognized by all stakeholders.

The following sections of this report outline our observations and recommendations for completing the work on the standards phase of the statewide readiness agenda and for implementing the remaining steps. These suggestions are based on our findings from extensive interviewing and document review.

It is our belief that if Virginia can act quickly in bringing to full implementation the standards step, then work can begin almost immediately, if not simultaneously, on the other agenda steps.

**Specification of the Readiness Standards**

Before discussing a process for specifying the readiness standards, it is important that both P-12 and PSE in Virginia address and reach consensus on a number of fundamental points and issues related to the purpose, nature and use of the readiness standards. These joint understandings will do much to determine the effectiveness of Virginia’s SCRI. Accordingly, Virginia needs to be clear on how it defines or resolves the following points:

1. **Content of Readiness Standards**

Being truly ready for PSE introductory courses involves a whole host of attributes — taking the right courses, earning good grades, having good study and scheduling skills, being financially stable, having the right motivation and so on. Some of these are intangible and it is hard to
measure their significance precisely. However, we know that a few are fundamental—necessary, if not always sufficient.

Research supports that to be ready students need to take the right courses, about which there is wide consensus. Knowledge from core courses in English, mathematics, science, and social science is essential. Research and practice also indicate that just taking these courses, and even earning good grades, does not ensure the development of the key learning skills needed for success in college. A high percentage of students who have passed core coursework need remedial education upon entering college to strengthen those reading, writing and math skills that are needed to learn at higher levels. These are the cross-cutting, foundational skills needed for learning and for success in first-year college courses. The fact that these core skills often are not developed through the high school academic core curriculum suggests that SCRI must focus on these skills in addition to core curricular requirements. However, it is equally critical that the readiness requirements include taking the recommended core academic courses.

The focus of this component of Virginia’s statewide readiness initiative centers on the reading, writing, and mathematics skills needed to succeed in PSE. The ability to read a variety of texts with comprehension and to explain or elaborate in writing are essential skills needed for higher-level learning in any subject. Additionally, some success in mathematics, preferably through Algebra II but minimally through Algebra, Functions, and Data Analysis, assures that a student possesses the ability to work abstractly and in multiple dimensions and variables. A strong focus on these skills is critical to a successful SCRI.

While a state may elect to address readiness in other areas later, SREB recommends that initially, Virginia focus on the reading, writing and mathematics skills that students need for college readiness.

2. Performance Levels

The standards and related performance expectations identified as needed for success in first-year PSE coursework need to be set at levels that powerfully predict success. Best practice holds that
these standards should be validated empirically by comparing student performance on the readiness standards to actual performance in introductory PSE courses.

Most states will face the likelihood that setting PSE readiness performance levels on reading, writing, and mathematics skills that more validly predict first-year success will require higher standards than are now in place (if they exist at all on a statewide basis). It is almost a certainty in any state that this level of readiness standards will be much higher than the performance currently required for high school graduation or high-stakes graduation tests. It is important that a state recognize this situation and not allow the likely gap between readiness expectations and minimum high school graduation requires to result in readiness standards that are not as high as they should be.

3. Scope of the Readiness Standards

Virginia needs to be clear about the scope of the readiness standards – that is, to what levels, programs and forms of PSE do the readiness standards apply. The few states that have advanced a SCRI have found this to be a critical issue, which, if left unresolved, slows or halts meaningful readiness initiatives.

Focus on readiness for PSE preparation. Sometimes states are not clear about what being ready for PSE enables a student to do. The confusion typically centers on the difference between being career-ready and ready to prepare for a career. It may be helpful to draw a distinction between readiness to begin preparation for a career and readiness to enter a career.

Readiness for which PSE options. For several years, the rhetoric has held that all high school graduates need to be ready for all PSE options and that the reading, writing, and math standards are the same for all options. These postsecondary education options include career-technical and academic programs and range from military training to single courses to certificates to associate and baccalaureate degree programs. We have found that this rhetoric has not been examined thoroughly and empirically. Moreover, as organizations and states have questioned this assumption, there is recent significant movement toward a more nuanced view.
The learning skills needed to be ready to prepare successfully in collegiate academic programs and postsecondary career-technical programs for economically sustainable jobs have converged at some levels for some programs. Empirical evidence supports the application of similar readiness standards for postsecondary associate and bachelor’s degree programs, both academic and career-oriented. There is a lack of research that establishes the kinds and levels of readiness needed for other postsecondary technical programs at the certificate and diploma levels. Further study may prove that one set of readiness standards for all postsecondary study is justified or that a different form of readiness, or way to exhibit readiness, is indicated.

Relatedly, our experience indicates that an effective SCRI will find that the readiness standards will need to be set significantly higher than is now common to strongly indicate success in first-year college degree study. As states validate and then establish in policy these higher standards for degree programs, it is likely that the differences in readiness for degree and non-degree programs will emerge.

SCRIs should consider focusing initially on postsecondary degree programs, including career-technical associate degrees. A first priority in a SCRI should be to set strong, valid standards for associate and bachelor’s degree programs; at the same time states should research fully the readiness standards suitable for non-degree programs. Recently, a series of national studies have been funded to address these issues.

**Readiness for what PSE institutions.** For greater impact, the readiness standards need to be applied to all PSE institutions that admit a significant proportion (over 10 percent) of students with a readiness problem in reading, writing, math, or all three skill areas. Practically and empirically in all states, this means that all open access and moderately to less selective community colleges and universities would be included, certainly encompassing all community colleges and regional universities. Selective universities with substantial admissions requirements most likely would admit students who meet the readiness standards, even though these standards, while related, do not necessarily align with the broader admissions criteria of
course grades and the ACT and SAT admissions tests. In light of these considerations, most state SCRIIs are led mainly by the community college and regional university sectors. Accordingly, in the interest of efficiency in policy and practice, SREB recommends that the readiness standards apply to all community colleges and to any university that is less selective in admission or has low college graduation rates.

**Readiness for what areas of PSE study.** States have found it important to establish that the statewide common core readiness standards and performance expectations apply to a certain threshold of study. The most common, and probably best, practice asserts that the readiness standards should be pegged to the level of reading, writing and math skills needed to succeed in introductory coursework in the social science fields. Readiness to begin study in STEM fields would need higher or different levels of readiness, particularly in mathematics. As they do now, PSE institutions would apply a different set of readiness standards and assessments in the reading, writing, and math skill areas to determine readiness for these fields of study.

**Specifying the Readiness Standards.**

Having established the presence of readiness standards in the Standards of Learning and associated end-of-course assessments, Virginia needs to highlight specific content and skills in standards identified from the data analyses, prioritize them, and define them in performance terms whose understandings are readily shared by all teachers. These additional specifications will enable the specific readiness standards to be brought with the same characteristics to all classrooms and teachers throughout the state. Each of the vehicles for conveying these standards to teachers will share the same standards. Assessment, teacher development, curriculum and school accountability all will support and reinforce these standards identically.

Virginia can “unpack” in a number of ways and further define the standards in the SOL, similar to what is currently done in developing the SOL Curriculum Frameworks for teachers. Each action serves to build further specific understanding of exactly which standards and the associated content and skills contribute most strongly to students succeeding in the first year of college. One action uses the ongoing SOL assessments as a basis for highlighting specific
standards and related performance levels. The other action uses the development of curriculum, or what is to be taught, in the form of courses for students targeted to the readiness standards or the readiness content to be delivered in the form of teacher professional development. In both cases, judgments need to be developed and made about the content standards that will be highlighted and the exact performance levels of students that will be expected and applied. Both actions, done well, will force a greater precision about the priority of standards and their nature and performance expectations.

The Assessment Route. Virginia already is attempting to use its end-of-course testing program to unpack the essential college-readiness standards from the general high school academic standards. Virginia has a substantial, ongoing end-of-course (EOC) assessment system that includes Algebra II and English: Reading (English III). State education officials believe strongly that these EOC tests contain the key CRS in the form of specific state SOL and they are conducting studies to establish the relationship of scores on the SOL tests with first-year college work. Once completed they could validate the test results’ relationship to readiness. These studies then may be used to identify which of the specific standards (and associated test items) exert the most influence on readiness. From that point, the identified standards could be further specified in performance terms and the results shared by all functions — assessment, professional development, curriculum, and new teacher preparation.

This assessment-based process has proved effective in generating both a shared understanding and more concrete view of the priority and performance expectations of key readiness standards. A strength of this process lies in its being grounded and bordered by a defined set of tests in which the general standards have been identified empirically and only need to be highlighted and specified in further detail.

The SREB-Gates Project could facilitate (and support resource-wise release time and technical assistance) a process through which DOE staff, K-12 teachers, and postsecondary faculty and staff convene under the guidance of testing experts (external such as ETS, the College Board, Pearson or internal from DOE).
The Teacher and Curriculum Development Approach. A powerful way to identify, highlight, and specify further meaning about the performance expectations of the readiness standards is to apply the standards identified from the SOL tests analysis to the development of curriculum and related instructional strategies. Developing new courses or modules targeting these specific standards would demand increased specification and shared understanding of both the content of the standards and their performance expectations. The standards would need to be defined and formed to build course materials syllabi, lessons and assignments, course assessments and instructional techniques. All of these tasks would create the need to be very specific and concrete about the exact performance expected. If done jointly, this course development process could also build shared understandings of the standards among public school and postsecondary education faculty.

The Gates-SREB project provides two ways to support this approach in bringing the college-readiness standards more clearly and effectively into each high school classroom — the development of 12th grade capstone courses in reading/writing and mathematics based on the specific readiness standards and the construction of a statewide professional development curriculum for practicing teachers specifically targeted to the readiness standards.

The Gates-SREB project can support the development of both the 12th grade capstone courses and the professional development curriculum. State and/or federal resources could support release time for DOE, public school, and postsecondary staff and faculty, travel and meeting costs, and technical assistance.

Placing the further specification of the readiness standards within statewide curriculum and teacher development is appropriate because these are the state’s vehicles to convey the readiness standards to all schools and teachers in Virginia.

Consistent Application of Statewide Readiness Standards

An effective and comprehensive SCRI depends on having a core set of readiness standards in reading, writing, and math that are specific in both content and performance terms. It is critical
that these standards are shared fully by P-12 and PSE in all of their detail. Alignment of standards between P-12 and PSE is not sufficient if alignment only results in two different sets of correlated or similar standards. The standards should be the same.

With these fully shared and commonly understood standards in place, both P-12 and PSE need to commit to their application throughout each of their respective sectors and in each successive step of the SCRI. These common core readiness standards are what connects the steps of the agenda together and makes the initiative systemic and effective. It gives P-12 and PSE confidence that everybody is pulling in the same direction; this is especially helpful to P-12 classroom teachers.

One example of the need for consistent application of readiness standards concerns the current situation in which individual PSE institutions, especially community colleges, do not use a common set of placement standards, tests, and qualifying scores to assess readiness.

In concrete terms, consistent application of the common readiness standards means that the specific standards and performance expectations are:

- Used in school assessments statewide
- Used by PSE in their post-admission placement or readiness tests, which means one set of placement and standards, tests and qualifying scores across all PSE
- Used by the state to hold schools accountable for increasing the percentages of students who meet the standards
- Used by both P-12 and PSE to deliver in-service teacher development statewide, focused on teaching effectively the readiness standards
- Used by PSE in all its pre-service teacher preparation programs
- Used by P-12 and PSE to develop senior year curriculum focused specifically on the common readiness standards to help students who are not ready

P-12 Assessment of Student Readiness
Virginia has been a leader in the use of end-of-course (EOC) testing. Best practice nationally increasingly favors the use of such tests to assess PSE readiness, recognizing that national admission tests (ACT, SAT) or even national placement tests (ACCUPLACER, COMPASS) are not sufficiently sensitive to a state’s specific readiness standards. In Virginia, these EOCs include more advanced courses such as Algebra II and English III, which should include ways to measure the key college readiness standards. Moreover, at least a general relationship has been established between performance on the SOL in these areas and the estimated SAT college readiness benchmarks. As noted earlier, Virginia needs to analyze in more detail these tests to identify explicitly the individual standards, or groups of standards, that contribute most to predicting students’ college readiness. This highlighting, along with the additional definition of expected performance levels, will provide the basis for conveying the standards to all schools and teachers through curriculum, professional development and new teacher preparation.

SREB recommends that the following points be considered in making the SOL testing most effective in assessing college readiness:

- Virginia should be recognized for using end-of-course tests to assess college readiness. These tests can address in more depth the student performance needed for college readiness and yield more information than most other states’ exams that is useful to identify student needs and improve instruction.
- While the analysis of DOE and SCHEV data might suggest other SOL tests should be considered to assess college readiness in the future, Virginia should focus now on the Algebra II and English III tests. These should provide the anchor readiness assessments.
- To the extent possible psychometrically, a separate college-readiness qualifying score should be set on each test, based on the correlational studies being conducted by the DOE and SCHEV. This scale score should have a stronger correlation to readiness than the overall score on the SOL.
- The readiness qualifying scores ultimately should be based on validation studies that relate the SOL scores to first-year college performance on subjects in related areas.
• These qualifying scores should be set at a level that indicates that a student possesses the reading, writing and mathematics skills needed to begin college immediately, and the scores should not be adjusted to estimate student growth in these skills in the senior year.
• If the English III and Algebra II SOL tests are used to verify credits for high school graduation, there will be a strong likelihood that the minimum passing score will be set at a lower level than an appropriate college readiness score. This probability should be accepted and should not keep the readiness-score threshold low.
• Currently, there is no common approach to placement testing and qualifying scores that are shared by all of higher education. Making the college-readiness standards a priority in K-12 schools requires that higher education institutions apply these standards uniformly to their incoming students (as well as K-12 schools applying them to end-of-course testing in the junior year). This will entail conforming across all postsecondary institutions placement/readiness practice to the specific content standards and performance expectations (or qualifying scores) of the English III and Algebra II SOL tests.
• Relatedly, students who meet the readiness performance standards on the advanced EOC tests (English III and Algebra II) should be exempted from taking further placement or readiness tests upon admission to a public community college or less-selective university in Virginia. The exemption for mathematics in a selective university might be conditioned upon a student taking a senior-year mathematics course (not necessarily at a higher level than Algebra II).
• The performance standards and scores ultimately used to measure students’ readiness on the English III and Algebra II tests should provide the basis for correlating these “anchor” or “end” readiness standards from English III and Algebra II to earlier coursework and grades (e.g., English II and Algebra I and geometry). The qualifying scores on the English III and Algebra II tests should be linked to predictive scores in earlier EOC tests.

Targeted 12th Grade College-Readiness Courses

Students identified through the junior year SOL tests in English III and Algebra II as not meeting the readiness standards should be provided senior-year instruction to help them meet these
standards before high school graduation. The nature and delivery of the instruction might vary — one or two semester courses or modules, tutorials, online or face to face, and so on. This supplemental instruction will be critical, considering that higher, statewide, more explicit readiness standards likely will cause at least a short-term spike in the numbers of students identified as not ready for college.

SREB recommends that the following points be considered in developing these senior-year capstone courses, recognizing that implementation may depend on availability of funds:

- That the initial focus be on English/language arts (specifically, expository reading and writing) and mathematics.
- That the courses be explicitly based on the college readiness SOL expressed through the SOL tests.
- That successful completion of these activities should be creditable to the high school diploma.
- That these activities should be developed jointly by public school and postsecondary staff, faculty and teachers.
- That a common assessment of student performance on these 12th grade activities be developed to determine if the students meet readiness standards. If so, the student should be deemed ready and not subject to further placement testing in postsecondary education. Another assessment option might be for students who have completed the recommended 12th grade activities to re-take the Algebra II and English III exams to achieve a higher score—one that meets or exceeds college readiness.

**Teacher Development on the College-Readiness Standards**

Teachers will convey and help students meet the state readiness standards. All teachers statewide need to know with confidence and clarity that both K-12 and postsecondary education have agreed on specific college-readiness standards and share the same performance expectations. These teachers deserve special assistance in gaining the most explicit understandings possible of these standards and how to teach to them effectively. Pre-service teacher preparation programs also need to ensure that all new teachers are prepared to know and teach these standards well.
SREB recommends that the following points be considered in building a statewide professional development for teachers and principals program around the readiness standards:

- That a common, statewide professional development curriculum be developed and aimed specifically at the reading, writing and math readiness standards and that the teacher development curriculum and activities be based on the specific readiness standards and performance expectations of the SOL tests in English III and Algebra II.
- That professional development for teachers focus on how the key readiness standards in each relevant course should be understood by content and level of performance.
- That the delivery of these development activities be coordinated carefully at the state level to ensure that the shared understandings of the readiness standards are conveyed similarly statewide.
- That the teacher development activities include engagement by teachers in the elements of the 12th grade-readiness courses — how the courses were constructed, the standards and expectations on which they are based, how the course materials, lessons and assignments relate to the performance standards, how the course assessment rubrics ensure shared performance expectations, and which instructional strategies are particularly effective in teaching these standards.

The goal is to build among all teachers a shared understanding both of the level of challenge or difficulty needed in the curriculum and of the level of student performance to be expected. Practically, this means elaborating on the Virginia Curriculum Frameworks and providing concrete, shared examples of materials, lessons, assignments, assessments of student work that will build clearer understandings of expected performance.

School Accountability and Recognition for College Readiness

Schools and teachers emphasize that for which they are accountable and/or rewarded. Teachers focus on state-adopted standards and state-mandated end-of-course tests and prestigious awards programs. Recently, some states including Virginia have made high school graduation rates an important part of accountability. While slow in developing, some progressive state accountability
systems also are reaching for higher than minimum achievement levels (either through improvement or absolute measures), such as for the percentages of high school graduates meeting college readiness standards. In this way, schools are recognized and encouraged to make readiness a priority.

Virginia already has one of the nation’s best school accountability systems, which also includes a Virginia Index of Performance (VIP) recognition program, and could lead other states in expanding its school accountability program to include higher levels of achievement in the form of college readiness.