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 is an initial step in providing policy and education leaders in Maryland with an action agenda and implementation plan to mobilize all key stakeholders to make the needed big gains in college and career readiness. We begin by presenting a model agenda for reform to achieve college and career readiness and best practices and principles for college readiness initiatives. Next we summarize some general observations of the context for current SCRI-related efforts, based on numerous interviews and an extensive review of background information. Next we present our analysis of both the process and the substance of current efforts, outlining what we see as the key issues to be addressed.

### Status of State College Readiness Initiatives

Over this decade, the college readiness theme has grown but not prospered. Indeed, we assert below that most states are only at the initial stages of building an effective statewide college readiness initiative (SCRI).

To be sure, the key individual components or steps of an SCRI have been identified — standards, assessments, and accountability. Some entities, like the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the California State University (CSU) system, and Texas, have included and even built
their SCRI agendas on an extended set of related steps such as teacher development and curricular change.

Notwithstanding this recognition of the general steps of an SCRI agenda, few states have effectively implemented each of these steps. And, when some steps have been addressed, they often have been carried out in piecemeal ways.

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 as a 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. The 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 should jointly develop college readiness standards in reading, writing, and mathematics that become highlighted subsets of official statewide school standards. Having one set of readiness standards that are approved 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- and 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 should be 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 also should 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 an 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 percentages of entering students who succeed in first-year courses, or successfully complete 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 an 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 an 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 an SCRI. Linking all action steps and decisions about the implementation of an SCRI to one criterion — what will motivate and help a classroom teacher to teach effectively the readiness standards effectively — 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 an 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.

MARYLAND CONTEXT FOR COLLEGE/CAREER READINESS AGENDA

Maryland is a national leader in the college readiness movement on some fronts, having dedicated much time and effort to talking through and addressing many K-16 issues. The 2009 report Quality Counts gives Maryland an A, the highest grade among all states, for progress on how well the state has helped students transition through the educational pipeline, including early childhood education, college readiness, and the economy and workforce. In 2002, Achieve, Inc., noted that Maryland is among a handful of states that has come the farthest in raising standards and achievement. But most of those interviewed for this project agree that much remains to be done in light of Maryland’s inherent advantages and potential.

Maryland began its commitment to standards-based reform in the 1990s. After a decade of experience, State Superintendent Dr. Nancy Grasmick established a Visionary Panel to review
past reforms; the panel’s recommendations emphasized improving classroom instruction as well as giving greater attention to equity, curriculum, alignment, shared accountability, and funding. Specifically, the Panel recommended that the state create a voluntary curriculum for every grade and every subject area.

In 2001, at the request of Superintendent Grasmick, Achieve, Inc., conducted an external review of Maryland’s education reform efforts, focusing on four areas: setting and measuring higher standards; holding schools, districts, and students accountable for results; strengthening teaching and helping schools and districts build capacity to implement reform; and sustaining public support for standards-based reform.

In 2002, the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland signed a memorandum of understanding to form the Maryland Partnership for Teaching and Learning K-16 (“Partnership”). The Partnership was designed to provide leadership in building links among schools, school districts, colleges, universities, businesses, parents, students, and communities to promote excellence in teaching and learning. Maryland became a leader in P-16 efforts.

While a few states, such as Texas and Kentucky, have passed significant legislation to set in motion several aspects of a college and career readiness initiative, Maryland has not. Nonetheless, the strength of the Governor’s solid position on these issues, the composition of the P-20 Leadership Council, and the support of the legislature should provide the leverage and impetus needed to move the agenda on a readiness initiative.

The following sections highlight the key components of a college and career readiness initiative, outline Maryland’s status on each component, and suggest ways the state can move forward.

FINDINGS

Statewide commitment to a college and career readiness initiative is extensive and strong in Maryland, due in large part to Governor O’Malley’s restructuring and strengthening of the earlier K-16 Council. By expanding both the membership and charge to the group, renaming it the Governor’s P-20 Leadership Council, and laying out a few, high-level goals, the Governor asserted to the education community that he expected much more collaboration across education sectors and progress on college and career readiness goals. The release of Investing in STEM to Secure Maryland’s Future by the Governor’s STEM Task Force in August 2009 signaled another step in moving Maryland forward on a firm college and career readiness agenda. These excerpts from the report state:

In Maryland, the Bohanan Commission forcefully supported the adoption of a statewide P-12 curriculum that is aligned with global workforce and academic standards. ‘The curriculum should have a strong emphasis on STEM; should provide a seamless transfer into postsecondary education; and should include a definition of standards for teaching, writing, mathematics, and science.’ In addition the Commission called upon the state to ‘develop a common
definition and measurement of college readiness so that regardless of which school or college they attend in the state, students are aware of, and encouraged to take, the courses they need at the secondary level to be prepared for college level work.’

To overcome shortfalls in the preparation of Maryland students for successful transition to postsecondary education, the Governor’s P-20 Leadership Council established the College Success Taskforce to examine current P-12 and higher education policies and practices related to alignment of educational standards, expectations, and student learning outcomes. The College Success Task Force will recommend policy revisions and/or new practices to raise standards and ensure that high school graduation requirements are aligned with entrance expectations for postsecondary education, which for USM institutions now include three years of science and three years of mathematics capped with a minimum of Algebra II. The Governor’s STEM Task Force recommends that high school course requirements include four years of challenging mathematics in high school at least through Algebra II.

We heard from members of the Governor’s P-20 Leadership Council and the College Success Task Force as well as from individuals at the local level that the state has a “window of opportunity” to make significant progress to ensure that more students are college and career ready when they leave high school. Such energy and commitment are encouraging signs, and, when combined with Maryland’s past leadership in P-16 efforts, suggest a solid foundation from which to complete a successful SCRI. What needs to be solidified, we find, is a commitment to a systemic and comprehensive statewide PSE readiness agenda of the nature and range described earlier. This work would include specifying what the college readiness standards are and integrating them with core K-12 standards, testing students in early high school to determine their level of college and career readiness, designing a teacher development plan that would ensure that teachers (particularly those in high school) understand what the standards are and how to teach them, designing transitional courses to help students who are not ready in mathematics and the English language arts to remediate weaknesses during their senior year of high school, and building a school accountability system that emphasizes PSE readiness.

The following sections of this report outline our findings of where Maryland is in each step of the readiness agenda and suggestions for carrying each step to completion.

**College Readiness Standards**

The foundation and key to a systemic SCRI and to the effective implementation of all succeeding steps in an SCRI are a set of specific PSE readiness standards expressed clearly in performance expectations for reading, writing, and mathematics. Moreover, these exact standards need to be fully shared by both P-12 and PSE and applied within each sector consistently — in P-12 as highlighted, priority subsets of the state-adopted school standards and throughout PSE as the standards used in threshold placement procedures.
The central question in Maryland as to whether the state has statewide college readiness standards elicited a variety of responses, illustrating the dilemma, shared by most states, that there is confusion not just about the content of the readiness standards, but their existence. Some individuals felt that Maryland does not have college readiness standards; others thought the state did have them, but they were expressed at a very general “50,000-foot” level. Some individuals stated that the readiness standards existed, but they needed to be clarified. A few people said that everyone had their own definitions of college readiness standards or that districts had their own ways of defining college readiness. There was also the opinion that a definition of college readiness is being addressed on an inter-segmental basis.

A number of individuals equated college readiness standards with the University of Maryland System’s “Completer Program”—indicating that college-ready meant that a student had fulfilled the requirements for admission by meeting the requirements of the Completer Program, which equates to a “college-ready diploma.” Reportedly, a study group is working now to revise the curriculum to include four credits of mathematics through Algebra II, as well as mathematics in the senior year.

Maryland, as is true in all states, needs common PSE readiness standards in reading, writing, and mathematics that are mutually shared in exact detail by P-12 and PSE and applied in each sector statewide. The absence of a clearly identifiable set of standards stalls substantive work on the other steps of an SCRI. It also contributes to the uncertainty among parents and students concerning what college readiness means. Families do not understand the disconnect between what it takes to graduate from high school and what it takes to enter college-level courses; parents and students believe that high school graduation equates to college readiness. Or they believe that only taking the right courses signifies readiness. This issue is not unique to Maryland, and it is perhaps the most universally shared problem across the states.

While there is no consensus on a specific set of college readiness standards that were developed jointly by K-12 and higher education, there have been efforts across and within the sectors in recent years on mathematics and English language arts to lay out a set of skills needed for college success. We learned of a PreK-16 English Composition Task Force, comprised of representatives from higher education two- and four-year institutions and high schools, formed in 2006 by the PreK-16 Leadership Council. Its report was approved by the PreK-16 Leadership Council, the University System of Maryland Board of Regents, and the Maryland Higher Education Council. One recommendation called for the PreK-16 Partnership (What is this? It has never been mentioned before. It has a different name from the earlier Partnership. Lisa) to develop high school exit writing expectations consistent with entrance expectations for the first college-level writing course; other recommendations spoke to teacher preparation, writing instruction, and professional development. An English Language Arts Alignment Committee was created to implement the recommendations on writing expectations. This group also reviewed the K-12 curriculum and found that if students followed this curriculum and scored well on the exams, they should be college-ready. The higher education sector reportedly has had a mathematics alignment committee working for nearly 10 years, but P-12’s involvement is unclear. We heard that mathematics faculty from the University of Maryland system developed an early mathematics placement test to be used as a diagnostic exam for 11th-graders, but it was rarely used by K-12. A number of successful efforts appear to be in place locally, with frequent
meetings between K-12 school and district administrators and higher education leaders. For example, we heard of several collaborative activities between community colleges and local schools to administer college placement exams to juniors and seniors.

There is widespread agreement that the Governor’s P-20 Leadership Council has had a cohesive effect in bringing the sectors together on a readiness initiative. Additionally, the efforts of the College Success Task Force to define “college readiness” and lead work on the SREB-Gates project will provide a common platform for moving forward on several fronts. Most importantly, the collaboration needed to develop a single definition of readiness should pave the way for a joint discussion and identification between K-12 and higher education of readiness standards in mathematics and the English language arts. As we emphasize below, consistency and single messaging is fundamental.

We strongly recommend that every effort be made jointly by P-12 and PSE to bring to effective completion the identification of these common readiness standards.

The activities and progress on this front are very positive and encouraging. What we have yet to determine relates to specifics about the form of the standards, their presentation, their scope, and how the standards are to be validated. In implementing the standards-setting phase of Maryland’s statewide readiness initiative, it is important that a number of points be raised, addressed, and resolved. Addressing and reaching statewide consensus on these assumptions and understandings concerning the content and meaning of readiness are critical to building an effective SCRI. These common understandings will do much to determine the nature, level, and application of the readiness standards. Maryland needs to be clear in how it defines the following points related to standards:

1. **Key Components of Readiness**

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. 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 mathematics 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’s 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.
Maryland appears to be moving toward a required high school curriculum that includes the coursework commonly accepted as being needed to build readiness for PSE. The STEM report, the USM completer program, and MDE work with Achieve-ADP point to increasing curricular requirements, especially in mathematics and science. These are promising efforts that will provide a solid basis on which to focus on the other related components of readiness — the actual reading, writing, and mathematics skills that result from these courses. A strong focus on these skills is critical to a successful SCRI. Being able to read with comprehension different texts and to think and learn logically along multiple dimensions are keys to all learning at higher levels.

2. **Content and Performance Standards**

The final readiness standards need to be specific as to both content (what) and performance (how well); the latter requires description of both the difficulty or complexity level of a task and how well a student needs to perform it. Only with such specificity can school teachers teach a standard effectively and can deeply shared understandings develop between P-12 and PSE faculty.

3. **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 performance levels for PSE readiness in reading, writing, and mathematics 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 these 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 requirements to result in readiness standards that are not as high as they should be.

4. **Scope of the Readiness Standards**

Maryland 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 an 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 mathematics 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’s 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’s 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.

Related (WORD LEFT OUT HERE? Need to fix. Lisa), 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 those postsecondary paths that lead to a degree. A first priority in an SCRI should be to set strong, valid standards for associate’s 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, mathematics, 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.

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 mathematics 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 mathematics skill areas to determine readiness for these fields of study.

5. Presentation of the Readiness Standards

How the readiness standards are presented makes a large difference. If all P-12 teachers statewide are to give them priority, these standards need to be highlighted as a critical subset of the state-adopted school core standards, particularly the culminating performance defined by the standards. The standards need to be readily identifiable and specifically understandable.

**Consistent Application of Common Standards**

An effective and comprehensive SCRI depends on having a core set of readiness standards in reading, writing, and mathematics 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 or tests 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, and
- 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**
From their beginnings earlier this decade, SCRI agendas typically have included, and in some instances are based on, an assessment of students’ readiness for PSE while still in high school. Most states are choosing testing late in the junior year because testing at this time allows students to be exposed to coursework and standards that rise to the PSE readiness level and also allows students to strengthen skills in the senior year through instruction focused directly on the readiness standards. Also, making better use of the senior year to help students transition to PSE is attractive to many who believe that the 12th grade is not being used effectively.

Beyond when to test for readiness in high school, the major assessment issue in an SCRI concerns the kind of test to use. Early experience saw a few states elect to use the SAT/ACT admissions tests to test also for readiness. Over the past several years, many states and organizations such as Achieve, Inc., and SREB have come to favor the use of state school assessments based directly on the state-adopted readiness standards, especially end-of-course (EOC) examinations in Algebra II and English III.

Maryland now requires all students to take and pass the Maryland High School Assessments (HSAs). These EOC tests in English I, Algebra I, Biology and Government and their performance expectations are acknowledged to represent threshold or floor performance requirements that do not approach PSE readiness expectations.

We noted substantial interest in developing EOC assessments that could be used to assess the student performance on PSE readiness standards. Such EOC tests in Algebra II and English III are being used successfully in other states. When used to measure PSE readiness, such tests should not be required for graduation, or it should be understood that the readiness expectations will be higher (probably significantly higher) than those required to graduate from high school.

The use of EOC tests that are tied directly to specific state-adopted readiness standards has many advantages. The major benefit of such testing stems from its direct and specific focus on the actual state-adopted standards. High school teachers tend to teach to the official state standards, especially if these standards are the basis for school accountability, professional development and other functions. These state-based assessments are more transparent to teachers with respect to the standards and performance expectations on which they are based. Done effectively, these tests can provide more specific information on performance on specific state standards and performance changes over time. Moreover, teachers can use the results to adjust their teaching in specific courses.

In short, this form of testing can be effective in reinforcing the power with which a commonly shared and clearly understood set of state readiness standards can connect the different steps of a systemic SCRI.

**Targeted 12th-Grade College Readiness Courses**

Providing high school students with the opportunity to find out if they are college-ready in mathematics and English language arts is a central piece of an SCRI. In most instances, this means testing students in their junior year on the state readiness standards. Students identified 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 courses:

- 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 skills mutually determined by P-12 and PSE.
- 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 students should be deemed ready and not subject to further placement testing in postsecondary education.
- That these courses essentially incorporate the most effective forms of PSE remedial education and the best P-12 reading, writing and mathematics instruction.
- That these 12th-grade courses increasingly be used to replace PSE remedial education.

**Teacher Preparation and Professional Development**

Since P-12 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. In-service teachers deserve special assistance in gaining the most explicit understandings possible of these standards and how to teach them effectively. Pre-service teacher preparation programs also need to ensure that all new teachers are prepared to know and teach these standards well. 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.

Improving teacher preparation will require high levels of statewide coordination between P-12 and PSE and also within universities, as students seeking high school teaching credentials receive much of their subject-matter training in colleges of arts and sciences, not colleges of education.

To ensure a coordinated and systemic approach to pre-service teacher training and in-service professional development, statewide plans should be designed that focus specifically on the state college readiness standards to help teachers understand the college readiness standards and how to teach them effectively in grades 8-12. These plans should also address how teachers should implement the new 12th-grade courses or activities designed to bring students up to readiness standards.
In building a statewide professional development for teachers and principals program around the readiness standards, Maryland should consider the following:

- That a common, statewide professional development curriculum be developed and aimed specifically at the reading, writing and mathematics readiness standards.
- 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 curriculum and activities be based on the specific readiness standards and performance expectations of the tests in English III and Algebra II.
- That the teacher development activities include engagement by teachers in the elements of the 12th-grade readiness courses — how the courses are constructed; the standards and expectations on which they are based; how their materials, lessons and assignments relate to the performance standards; course assessment rubrics to ensure shared performance expectations; and instructional strategies that are particularly effective in teaching these standards.
- That, as a starting point, professional development activities be formed around effective instruction specifically of the 12th-grade courses.

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 state curriculum frameworks and providing concrete, shared examples of materials, lessons, assignments, and assessments of student work that will build clearer understandings of expected performance.

**Accountability**

**School Accountability**

Most state school accountability systems do not include a PSE readiness component. While slow in developing, some progressive state accountability systems also are reaching for higher than minimum achievement levels, 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. Accountability is central to a successful college and career readiness agenda, in part because schools and teachers emphasize that for which they are accountable. 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. Teachers focus on state-adopted standards and state-mandated EOC tests. Maryland’s college and career readiness initiative would be reinforced by a state school accountability program that highlights college readiness and recognizes schools statewide that increase the percentages of high school graduates who achieve the readiness standards.

**Postsecondary Education Accountability**
Moreover, higher education’s commitment to the college and career readiness movement will be strengthened if Maryland holds colleges and universities accountable for helping students succeed in first-year college study and for helping students meet the common readiness standards through their own remedial education programs. To ensure transparency for the general public, Maryland should consider ways that accountability programs and public reporting activities for schools and colleges can feature these measures and goals.