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 a SCRI have been identified—standards, assessments, accountability. Some, like the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the California State University System (CSU), 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 a 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 with priority by all of the state’s school classroom teachers.

Over several years and based on its experience with many states, 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 develop 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 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/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 advance study immediately.

4. Curriculum
   Using the standards and performance levels established by the end-of-course 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. However, upon observing the fits and starts and subsequent lack of progress of state efforts, we also believe that PSE needs to be more substantively involved and committed at other steps prior to implementation. PSE must not only endorse the position, believe that an effective SCRI is in not only the public, but its own, interests, but PSE must also act on this position. 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 gear all action and decisions toward what will help school classroom teachers be effective in teaching the readiness standards. This recognizes that the K-12 classroom is the primary focus of action. It is where education needs to change or be strengthened or refocused to increase the 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 most 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) to school and college accountability. This principle should help guide decisions about the kinds of standards and who sets them, 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 common finding 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 criteria 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.

The critical importance of these common standards lies in their capacity to make SCRIs systemic by providing the single, common thread connecting each step of the implementation agenda — from testing to school curriculum to teacher development to school accountability. Dealing from one set of clearly-defined and accepted readiness standards contributes greatly to creating the kind of conditions in which classroom teachers come to know, understand and commit to a clear and focused set of readiness standards.

Our view of these standards holds that K-12 and PSE ultimately need to agree in detail on one set of readiness standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Both K-12 and PSE should adopt the same, specific standards and apply them with priority and precedence.

Furthermore, 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.

**KENTUCKY CONTEXT FOR COLLEGE/CAREER READINESS AGENDA**

**The Reform Context before Senate Bill 1**

Kentucky has a rich history of education reform beginning at least in 1990 with the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The Act revamped Kentucky's education system in the areas of finance, governance, and curriculum in an attempt to provide equal educational opportunities for all of Kentucky's children regardless of the property wealth of the district in which they lived. It set higher educational standards, introduced new approaches to statewide assessment, and created additional support systems for teachers,
families, and students. The assessment regimen, known as the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), was designed as a school-based accountability system and not as a source of information on the performance of individual students.

1997 brought the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act (HB1) that made key organizational and governance changes. HB1 created the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) and charged it with developing a strategic postsecondary education agenda. It also created the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) by removing the 14 community colleges from control of the University of Kentucky, removing the 15 technical colleges from the state education bureaucracy, and merging them. A major goal of HB1 was to bring more centralized focus to postsecondary education.

More major reform followed shortly thereafter. In 2000 the Kentucky Adult Education Act placed adult education within CPE to elevate the priority of adult education. In the 10-year period from 1990 to 2000, then, the Kentucky legislature enacted three major reforms – in K-12, postsecondary, and adult education. Each reform was ambitious. But each was addressing just one segment of the K-16 enterprise and none was specifically aimed at improving college readiness. Since these reform measures were enacted, Kentucky, along with other states, has become increasingly aware of the need to connect these separate systems to bridge the performance gap between high school graduation and college/career readiness.

A common theme across Kentucky’s reform history is the attempt to place statewide planning and policy coherence on a state with a strong culture of regionalism and local and institutional autonomy. This has proved difficult. Some local P-16 Councils, for example, have seen more activity and results than the state council. As another example, CPE has had difficulty in the past unifying the public colleges and universities around state-level policy initiatives, possibly as a result of these tensions. It should be noted that the challenges faced by Kentucky’s coordinating body are typical of those faced by similar agencies in other states.

More recently, readiness-related reforms have centered around Kentucky’s work with Achieve on the American Diploma Project (ADP) to improve high schools. In 2006 the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) approved an increase in high school graduation requirements and approved revised core curriculum standards in literacy and mathematics. That same year, the General Assembly passed two education reform measures. House Bill 197 established a pilot program in end-of-course testing for Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry. Senate Bill 130 required, beginning in 2008-09, a series of diagnostic assessments in grades 8, 10, and 11 using the ACT Educational Progress Assessment System (EPAS). This series was billed as assessing for high school readiness (in grade 8), college readiness (in grade 10), and college admissions and placement examination (using ACT in grade 11).

Most of the ADP-related initiatives were centered on K-12. One exception was the development of a Statewide Public Postsecondary Placement Policy in November, 2004.
Using ADP research on math and English skills needed for college readiness, CPE convened statewide placement policy groups in each area. The result was a policy that used a consistent set of ACT scores as the basis for determining which incoming students would be placed directly in credit-bearing courses and which could be placed in remedial courses at the discretion of the admitting institutions.

In summary, the situation before the enactment of Senate Bill 1 in March, 2009 could be characterized as follows:

- Core content standards that were not formulated with a specific intent to define college readiness and with limited participation by postsecondary educators
- Reliance on the ACT admissions test for the standards and performance measures of college readiness
- A school accountability regimen that did not provide data on student longitudinal progress and served primarily as a school accountability vehicle rather than to guide teachers in helping students achieve proficiency or college readiness
- A testing regimen that did not yield sufficient individual student information about how well Kentucky school children were performing either in relation to Kentucky core content standards or to national standards
- Differences in testing philosophy with some favoring ACT for its simplicity and ability to provide national comparisons and others favoring assessments that are directly linked to Kentucky school standards
- Reliance across postsecondary education on placement policies that are not consistent across public institutions and do not reflect consensus across K-16 about what constituted readiness for entry-level college coursework
- Widespread concern that, in spite of decades of education reform, remediation rates were too high and overall education performance was inadequate

**Senate Bill 1 and Beyond**

The passage of SB 1 has established a path for Kentucky’s implementation of a statewide college readiness agenda. It is important that SREB’s Gates college readiness project fit with and support this plan set by SB 1.

SB 1 has ushered in a new era of reform that addresses some of the long-standing issues over standards and assessments. The intent of the new law is to find a balance between norm-referenced tests (using the ACT package of assessments called EPAS) and criterion-referenced tests that would directly reflect core content standards. One suggested approach to finding this balance is to use criterion-referenced test items only to assess standards that are not covered by the 11th grade ACT testing in English, reading, math, and science. KBE is to conduct “periodic alignment studies” to determine how well the norm-referenced tests (i.e., ACT) adequately measure performance against content standards. The criterion-referenced components of the assessment program are to be a combination of constructed response and multiple-choice items and could, pursuant to KBE action, be replaced by end-of-course exams.
A related goal of the new assessment regimen is to generate longitudinal data on student performance as a basis for providing feedback to students and teachers about any deficiencies in meeting standards. Also, the new law calls for the continuation of some on-demand, open-ended assessments but on a less frequent basis. The bill addresses concerns about excessive testing also by calling for fewer, but deeper, standards that would be assessed.

The bill addresses the cornerstone of the SREB model readiness agenda in its call for the revision of core content standards through a collaborative process between KDE and CPE. The standards are envisioned to be benchmarked to national standards in math and language arts, potentially drawing heavily upon the new national common core standards to be released by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA). This is intended to address another long-standing conflict about whether Kentucky’s standards are comparable to national standards. The bill calls for revised content standards throughout K-12 that would align with postsecondary expectations to ensure that the school standards are common to introductory course expectations in PSE. Revised academic content standards are to be developed in reading, writing, math, science, social studies, arts and humanities, practical living skills and career studies.

Other provisions of the bill show it to be a comprehensive approach with the potential to address most aspects of the SREB model agenda. The bill:

- Recognizes that content standards must drive assessments by engaging in the work to identify content standards before that on assessments
- Calls for the standards to communicate expectations clearly and concisely to teachers so as to affect classroom instruction
- Requires KBE to disseminate standards to teacher training programs, for the KDE to provide for statewide teacher in-service training about the standards, and for the Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) to provide training on new standards in all teacher preparation programs
- Calls for the standards revision process to involve industry professionals in addition to K-12 and postsecondary faculty, providing the opportunity to address career readiness issues
- Calls for the KDE Commissioner and CPE president to ensure that academic standards recommended to the KBE are aligned with postsecondary course and assessment standards for gateway areas of reading and math

The bill lays out an ambitious timeline for accomplishing these major changes. The standards revision process with math in 2009 has already begun and is to be completed by early 2010. The revisions of the language arts standards by P-12 and PSE will be finalized by December 2010. The standards would become the basis for a new state testing system to be implemented in 2011-12 that would more clearly affect classroom instruction.

The bill recognizes existing statutory governance responsibilities and is clear about where ultimate responsibility lies and where collaboration is needed:
• KBE is responsible for adopting revisions to core standards that are developed in a collaborative process between KDE and CPE.
• KBE is responsible for creating and implementing a statewide assessment program that measures students, schools and district achievement to ensure compliance with No Child Left Behind and to ensure school accountability.
• CPE is directed to participate with KDE and KBE and postsecondary institutions to ensure that content standards in reading and math for introductory college courses are aligned with high school content standards
• CPE is directed to monitor remediation rates in postsecondary institutions relative to the bill’s goal of reducing them by 50% and increasing graduation rates of developmental students by 3% annually
• KDE and EPSB are directed to integrate new standards into teacher training and professional development, as noted above.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the SREB review about the current state of the college readiness agenda in Kentucky. It begins with some general observations about the educational environment and the capacity to implement and sustain the readiness agenda, and then discusses findings in several specific areas.

SB 1 is a major step forward in that it has the potential to break through key areas of impasse that have stalled reforms in recent years. We found a great deal of optimism about the content of SB 1. At the same time we heard some skepticism about the capacity to implement the new legislation.

First, SB 1 establishes one of the best general outlines of a SCRI in the nation. However, even with this solid policy in place, there are many decisions that need to be made in pursuing the agenda in detail.

The few states that have pursued aggressively a comprehensive SCRI have found that a number of substantial issues and sub-issues exist in each of the agenda’s steps. Implementing the agenda effectively depends on resolving and building statewide consensus and common understanding on these issues.

Second, implementing effectively a SCRI requires the strongest leadership state-level and statewide both within K-12 and PSE, individually and then across both segments. Few states have been able to pull this off. Nationally, all states have struggled with how to get all of PSE moving in the same direction. This will be a challenge too in Kentucky with its history of strong institutional autonomy. Locating coordination of the Gates/SREB project within the offices of the Governor and the Secretary of Education and Workforce Development is a very positive sign of high-level support.

In postsecondary education, we have found that the CPE President and his staff are committed to this initiative and the challenge. We are somewhat concerned about the involvement to this point of the Kentucky Community and Technical Colleges System
(KCTCS), especially given that the community colleges are, in most states, the most local and closest representation of those skills needed to begin postsecondary work. This sector needs to play a central leadership role in the implementation of SB 1 and the further development of all components of Kentucky’s college and career readiness initiative.

In K-12, we find a strong commitment and understanding, especially from the new Commissioner, who has a strong background in standards-based teaching and assessment. Both the CPE and KDE are experiencing significant staff turnover, which could hinder implementation but also present an opportunity to embed within new staff support for this effort.

Budget cuts pose additional concerns. KDE is cutting staff, sustained funding for the development of end-of-course exams have not been provided, and postsecondary institutions will face scores of challenges that could take precedence over participating in time-consuming processes to fix what unfortunately is often seen within the postsecondary sector as a K-12 problem.

Although Kentucky has one of the oldest P-16 councils, it is highly unlikely that the leadership or impetus for policy leadership will come from the council. Despite having good representation from the education bureaucracy, the Council has no funding, no authority, no official charge from the Governor or legislature to advance an agenda, and no legislative members. There appears to be more activity happening at some of the regional P-16 councils than at the state level. Such local collaboration is important but cannot lead a statewide policy change agenda.

The good news is that there is only a short list of substantive issues that require resolution in order for Kentucky to move effectively to implement a college readiness agenda. Also encouraging is that the framework supplied by SB 1 is very sound. But these are highly challenging issues that will require a great deal of effort to resolve. Following are some findings and suggestions regarding the individual steps in the SCRI agenda.

**College Readiness Standards**

Kentucky, like nearly all states, has not been able to point to a specific set of college readiness standards, clear both in terms of content and performance expectations and shared fully by both K-12 and PSE. K-12 has not been able to identify a subset of its KBE-adopted core standards as the recognized set needed to be PSE ready and PSE has not established a common set of standards across all PSE and applied them through a common placement process. Kentucky traditionally has relied upon the ACT for general information about PSE readiness, both for conveying readiness expectations to K-12 and for measuring readiness of entering college students. At best, attempts have been made to cross-walk ACT college readiness standards to core content standards to try to peg college readiness to something with concrete direct meaning to classroom teachers. This has not served the state well, as teachers are reportedly confused as to whether they should gear their curriculum to ACT or to core content standards. Moreover, the use of
the ACT to measure readiness for PSE has not resulted in one set of PSE-wide readiness standards because often the ACT benchmarks are used to indicate the need for further testing if a threshold score is not met. The further testing and performance expectations do not appear to be uniform as applied across all PSE institutions.

SB 1 provides that KDE and the CPE revise the academic content standards and ensure that these revised standards are aligned with postsecondary course and assessment standards especially in the gateway areas of reading, writing and mathematics. As reported recently by CPE President King:

Postsecondary education is in the process of reviewing current systemwide public postsecondary placement policies in English and mathematics, and working with institutional faculty members and representatives from the K-12 system, determining whether revisions are needed in those content standards. A statewide reading group, partnering with the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (housed at the University of Kentucky), is reviewing strategies for reading in academic content areas. Assessments to identify those reading skills needed for success in postsecondary introductory reading-intensive courses are being developed. A mathematics group, partnering with the Kentucky Center for Mathematics (housed at Northern Kentucky University), is doing the same. Reading and mathematics are widely acknowledged as the gateways for success in all educational endeavors. The science standards will be reviewed in the very near future as part of the next stage of the process.

Our understanding is that the readiness standards identified by the PSE work groups will be brought forward and join with P-12 work groups in reading and mathematics to build a revised set of P-12 core standards to be recommended to the KBE for approval. We also note Kentucky’s commitment to conforming theses standards to the National Common Core Standards now being developed.

From our point of view, Kentucky has been wise to focus first on the reading, writing, and mathematics areas, given that these are the key learning skills.

These activities and progress 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. We understand that the PSE readiness standards will define the specific skills needed to succeed in related introductory (first-year) coursework in PSE. This understanding, if correct, suggests a series of questions and issues that, depending on if or how they are resolved, likely will determine the effectiveness of the resulting standards. By effectiveness we mean the capacity of the readiness standards to send a unitary set of clear, specific signals statewide to all school teachers, who will then be able to accord these standards the needed focus and priority.

Accordingly, in implementing the standards-setting phase of Kentucky’s statewide readiness initiative as called for in SB 1, 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 is critical to building on effective SCRI. These common understandings will do much to determine the nature, level and application of the readiness standards. Kentucky 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 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. Kentucky has recognized the importance of emphasizing what it calls these “gateway skills.” 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.

2. **Content and Performance Standards**

   The final readiness standards need to be specific as to both content (what) and performance (how well), the latter which 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 effectively a standard, 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.

4. **Scope of the Readiness Standards**
Kentucky 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.

Readiness for which PSE options. For several years, the rhetoric has held that all high school graduates need to be ready for all 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, such as Texas, have questioned this assumption, there is 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. 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 those postsecondary paths that lead to a degree. A first priority in a SCRI should be to set strong, valid standards for associate and bachelor’s 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.

**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. As they do now, PSE institutions would apply a different set of readiness standards and assessments 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 KBE core standards, particularly the culminating performance descriptive of 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 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.

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

- Used in school assessments
- 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 in the readiness standards
- Used by PSE in all its pre-service teacher preparation programs
• Used by P-12 and PSE to develop a 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 included, and in some instances were based on, an assessment of students’ readiness for PSE while still in high school. Most states settled on tests given late in the junior year because testing at this time allowed students to be exposed to coursework and standards that rose to the PSE readiness level and the timing also allowed 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 holds a particular allure to many who believe that the 12th grade is not being used effectively currently.

Beyond when to test for readiness in high school, the major assessment issue in a SCRI concerns the kind of test to use. Early experience saw a few states elect to use the SAT/ACT tests to also test 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 EOC examinations in Algebra II, or a combination of Algebra II and Geometry and Statistics, and English III.

Several years ago by legislation, Kentucky established a 10th grade readiness test and the 11th grade ACT as vehicles to test for readiness, as well as to provide a national normative basis against which to compare Kentucky’s student performance and state standards. ACT proponents also noted the motivational value of having all students take a college-related assessment. It was recognized at the time that Kentucky’s criterion-based and school accountability centered CATS assessments did not focus directly on student performance on specifically-identified college readiness school standards.

SB 1 now calls for revamped Kentucky state standards that rise to PSE readiness levels. This bill maintains the reliance on the ACT and 10th grade testing to assess readiness for PSE. However, this legislation also recognizes the use of criterion-based tests in high school to assess student performance on the specific state-adopted standards. Relatedly, 2005 legislation authorized piloting the use of EOC tests in mathematics. Expansion and funding for this initiative, however, is uncertain.

This background defines the readiness assessment question that needs clear response for Kentucky’s SCRI to advance effectively. We offer several points for consideration. The first is that this is not an either-or question: the ACT or state-based tests that address the specific state standards. Most states either now require or see a substantial majority of high school students taking the ACT, SAT, or both. Clearly, these are advantages that flow to states and students. States can compare their school and student performance to other states. Students learn where they stand compared to students across the nation, and some who have not been strongly motivated to attend PSE are challenged by new goals.
The use of tests that are tied directly to specific state-adopted readiness standards also has 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.

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.

An approach that Kentucky may wish to explore would take advantage of both kinds of testing. In many states, high percentages of high school students take the ACT/SAT for admission purposes and also state-developed comprehensive or EOC tests. The results of the state standards-based tests are used sometimes as graduation requirements and increasingly to recognize higher levels of student achievement. These tests can give priority and focus to the state standards.

Recognizing a common concern over the amount of testing, one option would be for Kentucky to develop a limited number of EOC tests, especially in English III and Algebra II to directly assess student achievement of the specific state-identified college readiness standards. The Algebra II and English III tests would provide the anchor assessments for the PSE readiness standards and also a basis for back-mapping the standards to earlier coursework.

The ACT results would continue to be used for the above purposes and also as a general benchmark to ensure the alignment of Kentucky standards and student performance over time.

**Teacher Preparation and Professional Development**

The SREB team was encouraged by the shared understanding that the ultimate goal of revising standards and adopting new assessments is to influence classroom instruction. The team was less encouraged by what it heard about the state of teacher preparation and training, as several respondents expressed concerns about the quality of these programs. There was concern about initial training of teachers as well as continuing education.

The provisions of SB 1 calling for KBE, KDE, and EPSB to take certain steps to align teacher preparation and training are essential. As most professional development is done locally, it will be important for the SB 1 process to focus on the exact standards and set clear directions for how local efforts are to contribute to the state’s overall plan. Improving teacher preparation will require high levels of coordination not only across the state but across colleges 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.

There is a concern, seen in other states, that efforts to improve teacher preparation and training may move on a parallel, but uncoordinated, track with the college readiness agenda. As one sign of that, we note that the P-16 Council has set a priority to raise the quality of teachers by improving preparation and professional development, but it is not at all clear how their work will be integrated with the SB 1 college readiness agenda. Since most of the P-16 council activity occurs at regional levels, this underscores the need for more state-level attention to professional development.

Since 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.

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 once 11th grade assessments are reviewed.

In building a statewide professional development for teachers and principals program around the readiness standards, Kentucky should consider the following:

• That a common, statewide professional development curriculum be developed and aimed specifically at the reading, writing and math 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 ensure shared performance expectations; and instructional strategies that 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 state curriculum frameworks and providing concrete, shared examples of materials, lessons, assignments, assessments of student work that will build clearer understandings of expected performance.

**Accountability**

Kentucky invested heavily in accountability in recent years, and put most of it on hold through SB 1. As noted above, CATS was created as a school-based accountability system, but it did not provide the kind of information needed to monitor accountability for individual student performance. The absence of student performance data was of concern to parents as well as many at the school building, district, and state levels. The advent of discussion around college and career readiness stimulated interest in a different accountability system, partially because the current accountability system does not feature college awareness—a situation that is typical of most states.

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 end-of-course tests. Recently, some states 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. Kentucky’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.

Moreover, higher education’s commitment to the college and career readiness movement will be strengthened if Kentucky 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. For Kentucky’s initiative to be truly systemic and effective, the role established in SB 1 for the Council on Postsecondary Education and the higher education institutions must be carried out so that they are involved in most of the key steps of the implementation agenda. The Council on Postsecondary Education and public institutions need to not only endorse the
position—believe that an effective readiness initiative is in not only the public, but its own, interests—but PSE must also act on this position.

Accordingly, Kentucky needs to hold postsecondary education accountable for the outcomes that will flow from a commitment to increasing college and career readiness—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. SB 1 has reinforced the latter area by requiring CPE, KBE, and KDE to develop a unified strategy to reduce college remediation rates by at least 50 percent by 2014. To ensure transparency for the general public, Kentucky should consider ways that accountability programs and public reporting activities for schools and colleges can feature these measures and goals.

**Targeted 12th Grade College Readiness Courses**

Providing high school students with the opportunity to find out if they are college ready in math and English language arts is a central piece of a SCRI. In most instances, this means offering a diagnostic test in the sophomore or junior year of high school. 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 the KDE and CPE
- 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