



Tenets of State Accountability for Increased College and Career Readiness

Measuring and reporting on education outcomes related to schools and students have been fundamental to SREB in helping states make continuous progress and meet their education goals. Since 1988, SREB has focused on the role state accountability systems serve in ensuring that all schools measure up to the needs of the students they serve. That focus has helped SREB identify key accountability tenets that support efforts to increase college and career readiness among the SREB region's future high school graduates.

Policymakers and education leaders in SREB states have long understood that setting expectations for public schools, districts and states and measuring performance over time lead to sustained improvement. For decades, SREB states have led the nation in developing education accountability systems that have supported strong reform and continuous improvement.

So, it's no surprise that every SREB state implemented policies in the 1990s to hold public schools accountable for reporting results by 2000 — before the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required them to do so. The most recent reauthorization (2015) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 — Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — provides states with the flexibility and responsibility to redesign their state education accountability systems to meet current challenges. ESSA establishes minimum requirements for state accountability systems, but state leaders should expect more of their schools than these minimum thresholds.

College and Career Readiness as a Goal of Accountability

The most important responsibility of state accountability systems should be to ensure that schools and districts are accountable for increasing the percentage of high school students who graduate with the academic knowledge, critical-thinking and career and technical skills they need to be successful after they graduate.

Holding schools accountable for increasing postsecondary readiness is an important measure in school accountability systems.

SREB's college- and career-readiness agenda calls for states to increase postsecondary readiness as a top priority in school accountability systems. But just helping more students graduate from high school in four years will not ensure that graduates are adequately prepared to meet future workforce demands. National assessments show that too few high school graduates meet standards of readiness for college and career. As a consequence, states need greater percentages of students from all student groups to graduate from high school prepared to pursue a postsecondary credential or degree. Meeting *this goal* will be especially challenging.

Students from economically disadvantaged groups make up an increasingly higher percentage of public school enrollment. These students are less likely to have the education resources to be successful in school and after graduation. States need to step up their efforts to ensure that these students are prepared to pursue postsecondary certificates and degrees and seek more advanced, higher-paying careers. Only then will these students be able to help their states meet rapidly changing workforce demands.

College and Career Readiness as a Measure in Accountability Systems

States can depend on good accountability systems to monitor progress on college and career readiness if they include the right metrics and if the metrics are based on empirical evidence. In fact, the quality of a state's accountability system depends, to a great extent, on the measures it uses to assess progress toward goals. States and districts have flexibility to choose nearly all of the metrics for their accountability systems, develop indices for grouping them and determine the weights for specific measures that determine their prominence in rating schools and districts. States need to consider carefully which metrics they choose and how much prominence they give them. They also need to tie incentives or consequences to them to ensure the important ones have even greater significance. Consider Kentucky's use of incentives.

To prioritize college and career readiness across the state, Kentucky developed metrics for high schools based on career readiness, college readiness and college and career readiness. It also established incentives that promoted its readiness goals. Schools received credit for graduates who were ready for either careers or college and extra credit for students who were ready for college and careers, thereby favoring high schools with higher percentages of students who graduated both college and career ready.

State accountability systems should center on literacy (reading and writing) and mathematics metrics that gauge the college and career readiness of high school juniors and seniors to help ensure they are successful in the future. Literacy and math are fundamental to postsecondary learning, and SREB states already have assessment systems that measure knowledge and skills in these areas. The challenge for state assessments is determining student performance levels that indicate college and career readiness. These performance levels should be validated by empirical reference related to the success of students in postsecondary programs.

Academic Metrics That Indicate College and Career Readiness

States, districts and schools need to track a wide array of data on students to help students advance toward their goals. But the most important metrics that states should track in their school accountability systems to ensure progress on college and career readiness are certain key academic measures. States should include them in their indices of college and career readiness. They should report regularly on the number and percentage of students who graduate from high school and meet the state's college and career readiness benchmarks.

Percentage of students who meet college-and career-readiness assessment benchmarks on the state assessments

- Percentage of students who meet the assessment benchmark in math by student group
- Percentage of students who meet the assessment benchmark in reading, by student group
- Percentage-point gains in these subjects, year to year, for all students and by group

Percentage of high school graduates who meet the state's college-readiness benchmark

- Percentages for all graduates and by groups
- Percentage-point gains for all graduates and by group
- Percentage of graduates who are college ready by diploma path, if the state has multiple diplomas
- Percentage of graduates who are college ready by diploma endorsement, if the state has endorsements

Percentage of high school graduates who meet the state's career-readiness benchmark

- Percentage of graduates who meet career-readiness benchmarks, for all students and by group
- Percentage-point gains from year to year for all the graduates and by group

- Percentage who earn an industry certificate for all the graduates and by group
- Percentage of graduates who are career ready by diploma path, if state has multiple diplomas
- Percentage of graduates who are career ready by diploma endorsement, if the state has endorsements

Percentage of graduates who meet the state’s college-and career-readiness benchmark

- Percentage of students who graduate college and career ready and received a diploma endorsement in either area
- Percentage-point improvement from year to year for all students and by group

SREB Tenets of Accountability

Over time, SREB has honed clear tenets of accountability that have guided SREB states and continue to point toward meaningful, valid, balanced accountability systems that can promote continuous improvement for all students and schools — particularly for low-performing schools. These tenets should guide SREB states in developing their accountability systems.

Establish long-term goals that support increased college and career readiness, accompanied by interim goals that mark progress over time.

- States should help local school systems and schools establish clearly defined interim goals to gauge annual progress toward long-term state goals. State data should provide the basis for interim goal setting that is realistic and achievable. Interim goals should inform district and school efforts as they work to promote continuous growth for all students. Finally, interim goals should help the public gauge and monitor annual progress through transparent state accountability reporting.

Establish state, district and school accountability systems that are based on multiple measures and place emphasis on high school measures of college and career readiness.

- When states use multiple measures to determine school, district and state performance, they have the ability to provide a more complete, holistic profile. Measures should include academic achievement in key subjects, as well as high school attendance, grade-level progression, advanced course participation and success, high school graduation and college and career readiness.

Give greater weight to accountability measures that reflect state priorities and goals, with college and career readiness at the focal point.

- States should weigh the variables within the accountability system to match the state’s priorities and goals at each grade level — and reassess the weights when needed. Decisions about weighing should be publicly transparent and explicit.

Provide incentives to local districts and schools to support continuous improvement for all students and all student groups — that ultimately lead to greater percentages of high school graduates who are ready for college and careers.

- The message from states to districts and schools should be explicit: All students can learn — each able to make measurable, incremental progress on the way to meeting interim and long-term goals. States should set clear expectations for students through meaningful outcome measures — taking care to report all performance categories and student groups. In short, states need to ensure greater percent of students are improving and moving up from one performance category to the next — and that more students are on track to be college and career ready as they move through high school to graduation.

Provide timely, regularly scheduled, understandable reporting to all stakeholders.

- State and local accountability reporting should be easy to find and understand. Reporting should help stakeholders make sense of accountability measures that may be unfamiliar, including index scores. Reporting should clearly explain what the measures are, how they are obtained, how they are calculated (if calculations are involved) and what the scores, index ratings and scorecard grades mean for a school or district.

Reporting provides a picture of the strengths and challenges in schools, districts and states. Good reporting provides constituents with a consistent, clear message about student progress and outcomes. The publication of state and local report card data should be paired with a highly visible public information campaign directed at all stakeholders — from the state house to the school house. Proactive reporting should be the expectation, not the exception.

Support local capacity building to increase student achievement and get more students college and career ready.

- Good accountability provides state leaders with reliable and valid school and student data. These data allow leaders to provide technical assistance and professional development for schools that need assistance. Accountability reporting identifies which schools need help to improve instruction and which ones need professional development or better technology resources, for example. Teaching students is not the state's role, but helping districts build their capacity to get the job done well is paramount.

Include accountability mechanisms that identify and trigger state and local intervention for schools that need improvement; these mechanisms should be aligned to the specific type and degree of need at each school.

- Schools fail to meet state interim goals for a variety of reasons. States should be able to offer targeted intervention strategies to help schools based on their specific needs.

References

Southern Regional Education Board (2009). *The Next Generation of Accountability: A Blueprint for Raising High School Achievement and Graduation Rates in SREB States*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

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