

Virginia

2016 College- and Career-Readiness Policies and Practices

The Southern Regional Education Board has long emphasized the critical need to strengthen students' readiness to succeed after high school. SREB's recommendations to improve readiness (SREB.org/Readiness) cover standards, assessments, transitional courses, postsecondary placement and remedial education. To support states' efforts, SREB compiled information through interviews of P-16 education agency staff and review of numerous documents to determine state progress as of fall 2016 on the recommendations. This state profile summarizes selected findings for each of the five areas. SREB plans to update this information annually.

Standards

Does the state have statewide college- and career-readiness standards in reading, writing and mathematics? Do K-12 and postsecondary education agree on the same standards?

Virginia House Bill 895 mandates that, by September 1, 2017, the Virginia Board of Education will define and establish graduation requirements and a high school graduate profile to describe the knowledge, skills, competencies and experiences students should attain during their K-12 education to prepare them for college and work and to be successful in life. All students entering high school as freshmen after July 1, 2018, will have a profile. Legislation directs the state Board of Education to establish high school graduation requirements with emphasis on flexibility and competency-based learning by that date. The Virginia College and Career Readiness Initiative, supported by SREB through a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ensures that college- and career-readiness learning standards in reading, writing and mathematics are taught in every Virginia high school classroom. The Virginia Standards of Learning identify the skills that constitute college and career readiness. The standards align with the Common Core State Standards.

Readiness Assessments

How does the state assess high school students' readiness? What are the options for students who do not meet them?

Virginia K-12 schools use the state-adopted Standards of Learning examinations; the assessments contain a diagnostic component that determines student readiness and any weaknesses that need to be addressed before high school graduation. The student profile defines the five skill areas students should master during high school. High school students have some opportunities for dual enrollment at four-year institutions, but community colleges offer most of the dual enrollment options. To participate in dual enrollment, students must pass the Virginia Placement Test, a remediation assessment tool for math and language arts.

Transitional Courses and Interventions

Does the state require transitional readiness courses or other interventions for students who are not ready to succeed in college-level courses?

Virginia has no policy or statute requiring transitional courses to help students who are assessed as underprepared build college- and career-readiness skills. The Virginia Department of Education tracks student data from the Standards of Learning college readiness assessment, and provides results to high school students in their junior year. Virginia has a longitudinal data system, but the state does not currently include readiness data per se. To determine college readiness, the Virginia Community College System allows high school juniors to submit results of their Virginia Placement Test with the stipulation that schools use the results to improve student performance in the senior year. Individual colleges often work with high schools in their area to develop college bridge programs.

Postsecondary Placement

How do institutions place a student who is not ready for college-level work? Are the same standards, assessments and qualifying score levels applied statewide or systemwide? Are multiple criteria and measures used in placement decisions?

The Virginia Community College System uses the Virginia Placement Test for placement, and policy allows colleges to use other placement criteria, including SAT or ACT. Placement standards, assessments and qualifying scores apply to all institutions in the System. The VPT determines if a student should be placed in a credit-level course, a credit-level course with a support course, or a stand-alone developmental course. Students must meet course prerequisites, which may be satisfied by the VPT.

The Virginia Department of Education participated in the Virginia Community College System's Multiple Measures for Placement Taskforce and assisted in obtaining data on student high school performance. VCCS faculty, working with an external psychometrician, developed cut scores for the VPT. Reading scores are combined with writing scores to determine placement.

Remedial and Developmental Education

Are there state or system policies for remedial and developmental education in colleges? What curricular and support paths are available for students? Is corequisite instruction—an academic course taken in conjunction with another course—required or optional? How do institutions and the state monitor student progress? What evidence is available on the effectiveness of these interventions?

Virginia has systemwide standards for remedial education. Policies require uniform testing to determine proper and individualized course placement for remedial students. Four-year public institutions admit students without remediation if they meet admission standards. By statute, students who need remediation may not enroll in a four-year institution, and no state funding can be used for remediation in a four-year institution. Instead, students who need remediation are referred to two-year institutions. Developmental

math is divided into nine modules; the diagnostic placement test determines level of competency in each developmental module. A student who passes all math unit tests is deemed college ready. Students are placed in remediation only for modules they do not pass on the VPT placement test. Colleges place students who need English support in one of four levels. Monitoring of student progress varies by institution. The process is empirically based on actual correlation with student success. The two- and four-year systems collect and report course pass and completion rate data.