The Road to Consistent Academic Standards

Summer 2014

The journey to consistent academic standards

that prepare students for success in college and career has been going on for at least 30 years. It has long been reported that too many students are leaving high school without the knowledge and skills required to succeed in college or find a job. For example, half of all undergraduates in the United States take remedial courses (an average of 2.6 courses among those who take them), at a cost of nearly $7 billion annually.[1] Manpower's 2013 talent shortage survey reported that 39% of U.S. employers have difficulty finding employees with the skills they need. Employers say candidates lack "technical competencies/hard skills (48%) and workplace competencies/soft skills (33%). And a third (32%) say there is a lack of available candidates.[2]

The following timeline maps the road to academic standards over the past 30 years:

1983

The federal report, "A Nation at Risk," is released, spurring the creation of the modern school reform movement.

1989

The first National Education Summit is held, with President George H.W. Bush and the nation's governors in attendance.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics publishes its first set of national math standards.

1990s

President George H.W. Bush announces the six (later eight) National Education Goals.

A National Education Goals Panel is created to measure and report on progress.

President Bush proposes America 2000, which grows into Goals 2000.

Congress establishes a National Council on Education Standards and Testing, which publishes "Raising Standards for American Education."

President Bill Clinton signs Goals 2000, which provides a framework for creating performance standards and the opportunity to learn standards.

The second National Education Summit is held. Governors pledge to develop state and local standards. The education reform organization Achieve is created by a bipartisan group of governors and business leaders and subsequently develops a national clearinghouse for standards.

2001

Achieve creates the American Diploma Project, which sets benchmarks for what graduates need to know in English language arts and math to succeed in college and high-growth jobs. The project shows that colleges and employers have similar expectations for what graduates should know. Over time, 35 states voluntarily join the American Diploma Project Network by having the governor, state superintendent, state higher education executive officer, and a business representative sign a letter committing to work to implement these benchmarks, raise graduation requirements, develop statewide assessments, and create accountability and reporting systems.

2002

No Child Left Behind is signed by President George W. Bush. The law requires schools to educate increasing percentages of students to proficiency. The quality and rigor of academic standards and assessments are shown to vary widely across states. The 2009 federal study, "Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Variation and Change in State Standards for Reading and Mathematics, 2005–2009," found that the "range of state standards continues to be wide: 60 to 71 NAEP points, depending on grade and subject. With such a wide range, a student considered proficient in one state may not be considered proficient in another."

2009

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) work with the 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia, which voluntarily sign a memorandum of agreement committing to a state-led process to develop common English language arts/literacy and mathematics standards.

The NGA Center and CCSSO convene work and feedback groups to develop and refine the standards. Teachers, researchers, professors, and content experts are involved in the work and feedback groups.

The Race to the Top grant competition provides 40 points out of a possible 500 for states that adopt "college- and career-ready standards."

2010

On March 10, CCSSO and the NGA Center release the draft K-12 standards for public comment on www.corestandards.org.

On June 2, the final Common Core State Standards are released.

Adoption of the Common Core State Standards

Members of state boards of education, governors, legislators, and chief state school officers in each state review the new standards and decide whether or not to adopt them using their existing process for reviewing educational standards. To date, 43 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense schools have adopted the Common Core.

Right now, school districts and teachers are working to bring the standards to life in the classroom. In addition, new assessments are being created by two consortia of states and private entities such as ACT. These assessments will accurately measure how students are progressing toward mastering the new standards.

Spring 2014

New assessments were field-tested in most states participating in one of the two state consortia. This involved several million students across the country.

More than 5 million students in 35 states and the District of Columbia participated in a practice run of the new assessments in mathematics and English language arts from mid-March to early June.

Spring 2015

New assessments will be administered in most states.

[1] Radford AW and Horn L. An Overview of Classes Taken and Credits Earned by Beginning Postsecondary Students. NCES 2013-151rev. Nov 2012. DC: NCES, U.S. Department of Education. Scott-Clayton J, Crosta PM and Belfield CR. *Improving the Targeting of Treatment: Evidence From College Remediation.* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2012.

[2] Manpower Group. *2013 Talent Shortage Survey Research Results, 2013*. Accessed at http://www.manpowergroup.us/campaigns/talent-shortage-2013.