

College and Career Readiness

Introduction

The main goal of both elementary and secondary education is to prepare students for college and the workforce. Unfortunately, fewer than 30% of college professors believe that public school adequately prepares students for college (Achieve, 2005). An estimated 20% of college students have to take at least one remedial course upon entering college (NCES 2013). Likewise, too few students who enter the workforce immediately following high school have the job readiness and occupational skills that they need to gain access to stable employment with reasonable pay.

There are several measures an educator can use to monitor if a student has the competencies and skills for success in higher education and beyond. Algebra enrollment and course completion have been identified by researchers as early indicators of success in the upper levels of math both at the secondary and postsecondary levels.

Several states also use high performance on state standardized tests as an indicator of college readiness. There are several national exams that are administered from the 8th through 10th grade levels to prepare students for success on college entrance exams, including ACT's EXPLORE and PLAN programs and the College Board's PSAT exam. A student's score on these early tests helps provide educators early indicators: scores can identify students who have potential for enrollment in advanced courses, and scores can also identify areas where students need focused intervention in order to perform well on college entrance exams.

The SAT and ACT are the most widely recognized and accepted college entrance exams. While the SAT is more of a reasoning test, assessing how well students apply the subject matter and skills they have learned in high school with a mandatory writing section, the ACT is curriculum-based with questions directly related to high school courses in English, math, reading and science, with an optional writing assessment.

Measures that track postsecondary success, such as first-year success, grades, credits, and completion rates, will demonstrate that students are not only "profiled" as college ready because of demographic or other non-academic factors, but actually have the skills to thrive in a postsecondary environment. Aggregated at the campus and district level, educators can use this information to target patterns of weakness in college preparation as well as scale instructional methods or programs correlated with student success.

Although all students should have the skills necessary to enter college, not all students will choose to do so. It is therefore also important for schools to monitor the success of programs that prepare students who want to earn professional and technical certifications.

Collectively, these indicators give educators a clear picture of whether or not students are prepared to meet and exceed the challenges of postsecondary education and life.

Related Metrics

The following metrics are documented in this section: