



April 2010

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## Commentary

### Continuing the Race to the Top

Last month, American Diploma Project (ADP) Network states **Delaware** and **Tennessee** were selected, from among 16 finalists, as the winners of the first phase of Race to the Top (RTTT) grants. Delaware will receive approximately \$100 million and Tennessee \$500 million to implement bold, comprehensive school reform plans over the next four years.

Both Delaware and Tennessee have been leaders of the college- and career-ready agenda for years - as members of the [ADP Network](#) and two of the twenty-one states with college- and career-ready end of high school standards and graduation requirements. Both states earned praise for their commitment to reform from a cross-section of key stakeholders, including elected officials, teacher's union leaders and the state's business community. Ambitious yet achievable statewide goals around high school graduation and college enrollment and retention anchored both proposals. In both states, all school districts committed to implementing RTTT reforms, which will go a long way toward ensuring comprehensive, statewide change.

It is also clear that leadership mattered. Governor Markell of Delaware and Achieve Board Co-Chair, Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee, were both deeply involved in their state's proposal development. The two governors and their cross-sector teams built clear, straightforward plans that leverage the reform momentum already present in their states. As U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan said, "Both of the winning states built on their unique strengths and track records, rather than trying to manufacture a reform agenda from whole cloth."

Tennessee Commissioner of Education Dr. Timothy Webb credits Achieve and the American Diploma Network for laying the groundwork for Tennessee's success: "This is a landmark opportunity to change education in Tennessee for generations to come. We could not have made this kind of progress without first accomplishing the work of increased standards and curriculum with partners like the American Diploma Project Network. As a state, we already had a head start in making sure our students were college- and career-ready, making us an even more viable candidate for Race to the Top."

## ***Next Steps in the Race...***

Applications for Phase 2 are due on **June 1, 2010**. To help states as they prepare their proposals and to continue the nationwide dialogue on education reform, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) has posted all Phase 1 applications, peer reviewers' comments and scores on its [Web site](#).

Today in Minneapolis USED is also hosting a Technical Assistance Planning Workshop for potential applicants to Phase 2 of the RTTT grant competition. At the workshop, leaders from Delaware and Tennessee are discussing their reform agenda, implementation plans, approaches to building statewide collaboration and answering questions. USED staff are reviewing selection criteria, requirements, and priorities and answering technical questions. A transcript of the workshop will be posted at [www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop](http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop). [More...](#)

To help state leaders take advantage of this exceptional competition, Achieve prepared the [Race to the Top: Accelerating College and Career Readiness](#) guides. The guides look at RTTT through a college- and career-ready lens, offering specific advice and promising practices to help ADP Network leaders build on the work they have already begun and maximize the new opportunities presented through RTTT. Achieve developed a brief on each major reform area (standards and assessments, teacher and leader effectiveness, P-20 longitudinal data systems, and low-performing schools), as well as two additional briefs focused on building support and engagement from postsecondary stakeholders for states' RTTT plans and planning for success and sustainability. [More...](#)



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## ***New from Achieve***

### **Draft K-12 Common Core State Standards Released**

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers released the [draft](#) K-12 Common Core State Standards in English/Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics for public comment in March. Over 9,600 people provided feedback. The final standards are expected to be released in May at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org). Governors and state commissioners of education from [48 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia](#) have committed to developing a common core of state standards in English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. Achieve President Michael Cohen noted in a [press release](#) that the draft standards "are very strong, building on the best state and international standards. They are rigorous and provide classroom teachers with a clear and

focused picture of what students must learn in math and English Language Arts to be well prepared for postsecondary education and 21st century jobs."

### **Understanding the Common Core State Standards Event at Fordham**

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Achieve and the Hunt Institute are presenting a discussion on the Common Core State Standards on **Thursday, April 22**, from 10-11:30 a.m. ET, covering the content, organization and focus of the standards. The discussion will include a review of the evidence base and an exchange on how the standards can provide a solid foundation for improving student achievement. Panelists are Jason Zimba, Professor of Mathematics and Physics, Bennington College, Student Achievement Partners and member of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) mathematics work team; and David Coleman, President, Student Achievement Partners and member of the CCSSI English Language Arts work team. The moderator is Chester E. Finn, Jr., President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute. You'll be able to watch this event live on the Web at [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net). Web viewers can email questions during the event to [lpohl@edexcellence.net](mailto:lpohl@edexcellence.net). Please keep questions brief and include the subject line "Common Core Event." A recording will be posted after the event. [More...](#)

### **Achieve and ACE to Offer Webinar for Higher Education on Common Core Standards**

Achieve and the American Council on Education (ACE) are sponsoring a free Webinar for the higher education community about "Common Core Standards: What Are They? And What Could They Mean to You?" It takes place on Monday, May 3, 2010 from 3:30-5:00 p.m. ET. The Webinar will include an overview of the standards, discussion of their potential implications for higher education, and ample opportunity for audience questions. Featured speakers are: Michael Cohen, President, Achieve; Molly Corbett Broad, President, American Council on Education; and Lynne Weisenbach, Vice Chancellor for Educator Preparation and Innovation, Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. This Webinar is free, but pre-registration is required. [More...](#)

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### **Florida Strengthens Graduation Requirements**

**Florida** Governor Charlie Crist has signed into law a major bill ([SB 4](#)) that upgrades the state's graduation requirements to the college- and career-ready level. The legislation had strong bipartisan support, with a 36-1 Senate vote and a 106-12 House vote.

Florida Education Commissioner Dr.

#### **News Clips**

##### **1. The Case for Common Educational Standards**

Craig Barrett, a former CEO of Intel Corp. and Co-Chair of Achieve's Board of Directors, writes in an op-

Eric J. Smith said in the [St. Petersburg Times](#), "This bill is a great step forward for our state, and will result in better outcomes for your youth," he said. "By shifting the focus to these critical courses, we will ensure our students are leaving school prepared to succeed in today's global economy."

The new law eliminates the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) for high school in math and science, replacing the 10th grade test with a set of end-of-course exams. It adds Geometry, Algebra II, Biology, and Chemistry or Physics to the list of required courses. The requirements will be phased in beginning this fall, to first fully impact entering freshman in 2014-15.

As the legislature considered changes to graduation requirements, one of the pieces of evidence it reviewed was an interim [study](#) the Florida Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12 conducted of high school coursework requirements and the skills required for high school graduates to compete effectively in a global, knowledge-based economy. It notes that research indicates that U.S. students can't compete effectively given the current status of mathematics and science skills taught in public schools. The study references Achieve's [Math at Work](#) series, which underscores that all students should have a strong foundation in mathematics, regardless of whether they plan to enroll in a four-year or two-year college, a postsecondary training program, or enter the workforce directly after graduation.

ed in *The Wall Street Journal* that, "common education standards are essential for producing the educated work force America needs to remain globally competitive." He notes that the draft Common Core State Standards, "are a significant improvement over most current state standards." Read the [op-ed](#).

## 2. **ESEA Embraces College and Career Readiness**

With the Obama Administration's [blueprint](#) for revising the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) placing the emphasis on ensuring that all students graduate high school ready for college and careers, *The Christian Science Monitor* asks what being "college- and career-ready" actually means. Achieve President Michael Cohen explains that the skills needed in college and at a job with a viable career path are very similar. He adds that this indicates that high schools should be preparing every student for college-level work. [Read the article](#).

## 3. **Four Governors, Past and Present, on Common Core Standards**

**Indiana** Governor Mitchell E. Daniels and **Delaware** Governor Jack Markell wrote in a joint op-ed in the *Palladium-Item* that, "The current effort around Common Core Standards

resembles the United States effort in the 1950s and 1960s to bolster education in math and science following the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellite. It was one of America's great moments in reforming math and science education." [Read the op-ed.](#)

Former **North Carolina** Governor James B. Hunt Jr. and former **Florida** Governor Jeb Bush also penned a joint op-ed for the *Atlantic Journal Constitution* in support of the Common Core State Standards noting, "These standards draw on the best state academic standards in America and were drafted by experts from across the country - a brain trust no single state could assemble on its own. The standards are more rigorous and more relevant to the real world, yet simple enough for parents and teachers to understand." [Read the op-ed.](#)

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## New Resources

- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released a [study](#) that shows that improved performance on international math and science tests has a positive impact on a country's future Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Using data from twelve international tests (including PISA) dating back to 1964 to construct an index of cognitive skill levels for a large sample of countries, analysts employed scenarios to estimate the long-term effects of educational improvement, all of which are remarkable in their scope. Increasing the average scores on PISA by twenty-five points (a quarter of a standard deviation) over twenty years would result in an increase in the American GDP of \$40 trillion over the lifetime of the generation born in 2010. Bringing each country up to the level of the highest-performing PISA country (Finland, or roughly fifty points) would boost American GDP by \$100 trillion over the same time period. Raising the scores of the 19 percent of Americans children who perform below the PISA minimum competency level to that level would add \$72 trillion to our GDP over the same timeframe.



- While students and parents view college preparation as the main purpose of high school, most teachers disagree and rank mastery of subject areas and life skills as more important. This is one of the key findings from a Deloitte [survey](#). Of the 401 U.S. high school teachers, counselors, and administrators surveyed, only 9 percent think their primary mission is to prepare students for success in college. However, a new survey of over 40,000 teachers commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Scholastic, Inc. - "[Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's School](#)," - found that while fewer than 10





percent of teachers believe all their students will graduate from high school ready for college and careers, over 70 percent of teachers said preparing *all* students for careers in the 21st century (which typically require some education and training beyond high school) is one of the most important goals of schools.



- The Education Trust offers a free [College Results Online tool](#), providing information about college graduation rates. This allows users to select any four-year public or private nonprofit college or university in the country and see how its graduation rate compares with that of similar institutions serving like student populations. It also allows an examination of graduation rates by students' race, ethnicity and gender, which can help students choose a school.

- A new study published in the April edition of *American Sociological Review* indicates that individuals who are *least* likely to obtain a college education benefit the most from college. "Who Benefits Most from College?" explores how the economic return to a college education varies across members of the U.S. population. The study found that, on average, male college graduates from groups considered the least likely to go to college earned 30 percent more over their lifetimes than comparable students who had not pursued education beyond high school, compared to a 10 percent earnings bump among those males from advantaged backgrounds. The effect was similar for women, as females who seemed unlikely to pursue college, but got degrees anyway, earned 35 percent more than similar females with just high school diplomas, compared to a 20 percent earnings bump among those women expected to go to college.



The results of this analysis are particularly useful as states move forward with a college- and career-ready agenda, aimed at providing all students with the same opportunities, no matter their post-high school plans.

[Download the PDF.](#)

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### **Achieve Job Opportunity**

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