

## WHAT IS COLLEGE- AND CAREER- READY?

It is commonly said that the goal of high school reform is to ensure all students graduate “college and- career-ready.” But as often as this mantra is repeated, confusion remains over what it actually means. Much of Achieve's work to define college and career readiness to date has focused on the content knowledge and skills high school graduates must possess in English and mathematics – including, but not limited to, reading, writing communications, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving. Readiness depends on more than knowledge and skills in English and math but these core disciplines undergird other academic and technical courses and are considered essential by employers and colleges alike.

To be college- and career-ready, Achieve believes high school graduates must have studied a rigorous and broad curriculum, grounded in these core academic disciplines but also consisting of other subjects that are part of a well-rounded education. Students must also possess the skills or habits of mind that enable them to apply their knowledge in a range of environments and situations.

*“I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma.”*

*President Obama, Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009*

### What is “**COLLEGE**” ready?

College today means much more than just pursuing a four- year degree at a university. Being “college-ready” means being prepared for any postsecondary experience, including study at two- and four-year institutions leading to a postsecondary credential (i.e. a certificate, license, Associates or Bachelor’s degree). Being *ready* for college means that a high school graduate has the English and mathematics knowledge and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework without the need for remedial coursework.

### What is “**CAREER**” ready?

In today’s economy, a “career” is not just a job. A career provides a family-sustaining wage and pathways to advancement and requires postsecondary training or education. A job may be obtained with only a high school diploma, but offers no guarantee of advancement or mobility. Being *ready* for a career means that a high school graduate has the English and math knowledge and skills needed to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for their chosen career (i.e. technical/vocational program, community college, apprenticeship or significant on-the-job training).

### Is ready for **COLLEGE** and ready for **CAREER** the same thing?

With respect to the knowledge and skills in English and mathematics expected by employers and postsecondary faculty, the answer is yes. In the last decade, research conducted by Achieve as well as others shows a convergence in the expectations of employers and colleges in terms of the knowledge and skills high school grads need to be successful after high school.

Economic reality reflects these converging expectations. Education is both more valued and more necessary than ever before. The bottom line is that today ALL high school graduates need to be prepared for some postsecondary education and/or training.

- Thirty five years ago, 28% of U.S. jobs required some postsecondary training or an associate’s degree (12%) or a bachelor’s degree or higher (12%). Today, over 80% of jobs require some postsecondary experience.
- Nearly one-half of all job openings in the United States are be in “middle skill” jobs, all of which require at least some postsecondary education and training. By contrast, those with a high school diploma or less are eligible only for the one-fifth of all job openings that are deemed “low skill.”
- While the U.S. still ranks 3rd in the adult population (25-64 year olds) with an associates degree or higher among 30 countries, we now rank 10th among 25-34 year olds with a two-year degree and above. Competing countries are catching up to – and even outpacing – the U.S. in the educational attainment of their new generation of adults.
- Higher levels of education lead to elevated wages, a more equitable distribution of income and substantial gains in productivity. For every additional average year of schooling U.S. citizens complete, the GDP would increase by about 0.37 percentage points – or by 10% – over time.