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Making the link between high school preparation and college success

## MESSAGES & INCENTIVES THAT MATTER

### *Indiana's efforts to align expectations, requirements and incentives for high school students*

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Recognizing early the need to transform its system of education in order to meet the demands of a changing, less manufacturing-oriented economy, Indiana has been in the forefront of the national movement to align expectations, requirements and incentives for high school students that will lead to better preparation for college and the workforce success. These reform efforts have been evolving for nearly two decades and represent the successful collaboration of state leadership including the state legislature, governor, and secondary and postsecondary systems. They also illustrate the importance of focusing on college completion through a multi-pronged approach:

- Increasing access through need-based aid;
- Improving preparation through rigorous high school curriculum; and
- Expanding college and university accountability for degree completion.

### **Ensuring Access for All**

One of Indiana's earliest efforts to increase the college going rate among students focused on eliminating financial barriers. The Indiana Twenty-first Century Scholars Program (<http://www.in.gov/ssaci/2381.htm>) was established in 1990 as an early college promise, drop-out prevention program – putting power behind a promise that if students work hard, are good citizens, and graduate from high school, they will have an opportunity to go to college. The program was first offered to 8<sup>th</sup> graders and has since been expanded to include 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders. Scholars must take a pledge of good citizenship and scholarship (including graduating with a minimum of a 2.0 GPA). In return, the students are guaranteed a tuition scholarship covering the cost of four years of undergraduate college tuition at any participating public college or university in Indiana or an amount comparable to a public institution if the student decides to attend a private institution. In addition, students receive college planning, preparation and on-campus support services. In recent years, several Indiana colleges and universities have stepped forward to expand financial support to Twenty-first Century Scholars. For example, Indiana University Bloomington (<http://www.indiana.edu/~covenant/index.html>) and Purdue University ([http://www.purdue.edu/sats/purdue\\_promise/index.html](http://www.purdue.edu/sats/purdue_promise/index.html)) extend aid to cover room and board. Indiana's Twenty-First Century Program has had an impact. Analysis of the program has found that Scholars are:

- More likely to graduate from high school;
- More likely to complete Core 40 (college preparation curriculum)
- More likely to go to college;

- While less likely to graduate from college than “all student”, Scholars are more likely to complete college than their low-income peers.

### **Aligning the Message about Rigor**

While removing the cost barriers for students to attend college was an important step, Indiana recognized that access without preparation to succeed in college was not true opportunity. Thus began Indiana’s foray into the world of establishing a rigorous high school curriculum for all students.

#### Indiana Core 40

In 1994, leaders from business and industry and higher education came together with their K-12 counterparts to focus on improving Indiana’s high school preparation for college and workforce success. Together they identified the sectors courses most likely to lead to success in college or the workforce - called the Indiana **Core 40 curriculum** (<http://www.doe.in.gov/core40/>). Core 40 was jointly established by the Indiana State Board of Education (<http://www.doe.in.gov/stateboard/>) and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE, <http://www.in.gov/che/>) as the curriculum designed to give students the best foundation for success in college and the workforce. While completion of the Core 40 curriculum was voluntary for students, all high schools had to offer the curriculum and all students were required to begin their high school careers enrolled in Core 40. Extensive communication efforts by all partners were deployed to convey to students and families the importance of completing Core 40.

#### Indiana’s Education Roundtable

The governor and superintendent of public instruction formed Indiana’s Education Roundtable (<http://www.edroundtable.state.in.us/>) in 1998, which was formalized by legislation in 1999. The Roundtable consists of a diverse group of stakeholders including key leaders from K-12 and higher education, business, industry and labor, parents and community, and the Indiana General Assembly. While not having any formal regulatory authority, their responsibility, established by statute (<http://www.edroundtable.state.in.us/pdf/PL146.pdf>), is to make recommendations to the Governor, Superintendent of Public Instruction, General Assembly and Indiana State Board of Education on policies that improve student achievement.

With the formation of the Education Roundtable, Indiana had a more formalized structure that enabled stakeholders to work together across sectors and provided even greater opportunity to align key communication messages regarding improving college and workforce success for Hoosiers – including Indiana Core 40 for all students.

The Roundtables’ early accomplishments included the adoption of new, world-class K-12 academic standards for student learning (2000) and a P-16 Plan for Improving Student Achievement (October 2003). (<http://www.edroundtable.state.in.us/pdf/P16/P-16plan.pdf>). This plan made 70 recommendations in 10 categories generally calling for greater alignment of policies and resources across the entire education system. The P-16 plan aligns efforts and messages by linking high school standards, graduation and assessment requirements with college placement and financial aid.

#### Aligning the High School Curriculum and Assessments for Graduation and College Admissions

During early Roundtable discussions, consideration was given to linking need based aid (such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars) to a higher academic standard. After study and consideration, the Roundtable

concluded that this was not a fair policy - students from low-income families should not be held to a higher standard than other students. Rather the state needed to raise expectations for all students. As a result, the Roundtable worked to understand what was required for college and workforce success and to identify gaps between those expectations and current state policy. Ultimately, the Roundtable made Core 40 a cornerstone of their P-16 plan calling for it to be the default curriculum for all students and the minimum requirement for admission into a four-year state university. This recommendation is grounded in data – research showed that students taking a minimum of Core 40 enter and graduate from college at significantly higher rates. Further, rigorous course-taking in high school can help students overcome socio-economic disadvantages that typically predict lower odds of college enrollment and completion.

The Roundtable’s work also included benchmarking the state’s differentiated diploma requirements against college and workforce standards. The analysis led to recommended improvements to Indiana’s differentiated diploma requirements – making Core 40 the default curriculum requirements for all high school students; strengthening the Core 40 with Academic Honors Diploma and *adding* a Core 40 with Technical Honors Diploma option.

In 2005, following the Roundtable’s recommendations, the State Board of Education adopted the improvements to the graduation requirements and the Indiana General Assembly adopted legislation (Senate Bill 0200, <http://www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2005/SE/SE0200.1.html>) to make the Core 40 curriculum the default curriculum for all students, beginning with the class of 2011 ( students can opt-out with parental approval). During this time, Indiana joined Achiever’s American Diploma Project (ADP, <http://www.achieve.org/node/604>), becoming one of the first five states in the nation to have high school standards aligned with college expectations. Using ADP protocol, a gap analysis was conducted on Indiana’s high school academic standards in English and mathematics. Beginning with the class of 2011, students have four diploma options:

- Core 40
- Core 40 with Academic Honors
- Core 40 with Technical Honors
- General Diploma (if opt-out of Core 40)

This legislation also established Core 40 as the minimum requirement for admission to the state’s public four-year institutions (for more information on Indiana’s graduation requirements see: <http://www.doe.in.gov/core40/welcome.html>)

#### Assessments for High School Accountability & College Placement

The initial development of end-of-course assessments (ECAs) in Indiana began in 1997 as an effort to help schools align instruction with Core 40 expectations and to ensure quality, consistency and rigor of Core 40 courses. The state developed and provided black-line master “final exams” in more than 25 different core 40 classes. The Roundtable’s 2003 P-16 plan made recommendations to advance and formalize the use of ECAs to ensure that students were meeting college ready benchmarks. Working with ADP, Indiana identified Core 40 courses most important for college success. College placement exams and employment practices were analyzed. This information was used to refine test blueprints for key Core 40 End-of Course Assessments including Algebra I, Algebra II, English 10, English 11 and Biology. Indiana is also one of 15 states who collectively developed and are currently administering Achieve’s Common Algebra II ECA (Achieve ADP Assessment Consortium: <http://www.achieve.org/ADPAssessmentConsortium>).

Currently Indiana requires students to pass the Algebra I and English 10 ECAs as part of the states graduation requirements (Graduation Qualifying Exam). Algebra II and English 11 ECAs are also widely administered and work continues toward the use of these assessments not only for high school accountability but also for college placement to determine if students need remediation, are ready for credit-bearing coursework, or can be placed in higher-level college classes.

### **Aligning the Message through Partnerships & Incentives**

Aligning high school curriculum with the preparation needed for college success delivers a simple yet powerful message to students. But, Indiana has also made efforts to triangulate the message for students – establish a high school curriculum aligned to college and workforce standards; require that curriculum for high school graduation and college admissions; *and communicate these efforts through partnerships and incentives.*

#### Partnerships

Indiana has worked to bring key state agencies and other stakeholders together for more strategic and consistent communication to students and parents. An important example of this is *Learn More Indiana* ([www.learnmoreindiana](http://www.learnmoreindiana)) a partnership of Indiana’s Commission for Higher Education, Department of Education, Department of Workforce Development, and State Student Assistance Commission. As a strategic communication effort, Learn More Indiana provides parents and students with a centralized resource to plan and prepare for college and careers. Communication includes outreach in print, in person, through partnerships and on the web. Learn More is the lead for the state’s KnowHow2GO and College Access Challenge Grant Efforts – both complimentary communication and network building efforts to ensure Hoosier students know the steps to get to and through college including the importance of completing rigorous high school classes.

Before Core 40 became the default graduation requirement, Indiana engaged business leaders to help encourage students to complete this important curriculum. Indiana was selected as one of the original four State Scholars states. Indiana’s Core 40 Scholars Initiative recruited business professionals in local communities across the state to help 8<sup>th</sup> grade students understand the “why” behind Core 40 and to encourage, support and celebrate with students completing Core 40.

#### Incentives

Indiana used financial aid to incent students to complete more rigorous coursework by linking state financial aid to students’ completion of the Core 40 curriculum. Outside the Twenty-first Century Program, Indiana’s formula for awarding need based aid is directly linked to students’ completion of a college preparatory curriculum. Students who complete Core 40 earn 90 percent of needed financial aid those who complete Core 40 with Academic Honors or Core 40 with Technical Honors degree earn 100 percent of needed financial aid.

In addition, through the U.S. Department of Education’s Academic Competiveness Grants (ACG, <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/AcademicGrants.jsp>), states identify a rigorous secondary school program of study that students must complete to be eligible for grant. One of Indiana’s recognized programs is completion of the Core 40 curriculum. Students who complete this curriculum and otherwise qualify can receive \$750 dollars of federal aid in their first year of college and \$1300 in their second year.

## Realizing Results

Indiana's efforts towards providing students with a more rigorous, college-preparatory high school curriculum have been rewarded with results. When the efforts first began in 1994, 12 percent of Indiana high school students graduated having completed a college-preparatory curriculum. That number rose to seventy-one percent of students by 2006, before the Core 40 became the default curriculum. And, while the General Diploma still remains an option for students who choose to opt-out, students are getting the message of the importance of completing Core 40 as only 5 percent of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students report they plan to opt out and pursue a General Diploma (*Learn More Indiana College and Career Information Survey 2008-09*, <http://www.learnmoreindiana.org/Documents/2008-2009%20survey%20report.pdf>).

Importantly, while gaps in achievement still remain, the increase in Core 40 diplomas has been realized across all racial and ethnic groups:

- In 1998, 22.5 percent of African Americans were graduating with a Core 40 diploma. By 2006, the number had risen to 50 percent (+27.5 percentage points).
- In 1998, 29.8 percent of Hispanic students were graduating with a Core 40 diploma. By 2006, the number had risen to 53 percent (+23.2 percentage points).

The Core 40 curriculum has also impacted the college aspirations of students. In 1992 only 50 percent of Indiana high school graduates enrolled in college, ranking Indiana 34<sup>th</sup> in the nation; by 1994, Indiana had jumped to 10<sup>th</sup> place with 62 percent of high school graduates deciding to continue their education. Today, 75 percent of Indiana 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, and 80 percent of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students report they plan to go to college.

And, the data gathered by Indiana shows that college students who graduated high school with a Core 40 diploma have a higher completion rate than students who did not. Yet, this is also the data that illustrates that more work lies ahead, as more than 40 percent of full-time students seeking a bachelor's degree at an Indiana college or university do not graduate within six years.

## College Completion Accountability: Indiana's Current Focus

Indiana continues to implement and advance its plan for greater alignment along the P-16 continuum. Included in these plans are the advancement of its data system more closely linking and reporting across K-12 and postsecondary levels to allow better understanding of what policies and programs ultimately lead to readiness for, and persistence in, and completion of college.

Recognizing the importance of improving the educational attainment of Hoosiers, the state is focused on significantly increasing college completion. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education adopted *Reaching Higher: Strategic Initiatives in Higher Education* (2007) ([http://www.in.gov/che/files/7-Reaching\\_Higher-7-7.pdf](http://www.in.gov/che/files/7-Reaching_Higher-7-7.pdf)) a strategic plan toward realizing the aggressive goal of awarding an average of 10,000 more college degrees each year through 2025. Included in these efforts is substantially changing the way colleges are funded to focus on outputs – performance funding for courses and degrees completed, on-time graduation and transfer activity and work to create a culture of college completion at both the state and campus level.

Indiana recognizes that the alignment of the P-16 pipeline does not end with college access. The agenda requires an aligned message of expectations and incentives, and, perhaps most importantly, a never ending focus on college completion. As described in the Roundtable's P-16 plan, the efforts begin with increasing college access but the end goal is to increase the number of students earning a college credential.

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### **Advice to Higher Education**

For those seeking to improve P-16 alignment and increase opportunities for all students to attend college, Indiana offers the following key take-a-ways:

- *Messages Matter*: Get clear on what it takes to succeed and communicate with one voice. A unified message from all sectors (K-12, higher education and business) is non-negotiable if we are serious about improving college and work-readiness.
- *Students Respond to Incentives*: Link high school diploma requirements, financial aid or other incentives to the completion of rigorous high school coursework. Find positive ways to incent students to take the tough courses.
- *It's About Completion*: Focus on college completion. Alignment of the P-16 pipeline does not end with college access. Ensure that a culture of college completion exists on your campuses and across your state. This focus will inevitably draw attention to the college readiness of high school graduates.

### **If you have any questions about this document, please contact:**

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