

Ten Action Steps Toward Aligning Standards

Step One:

Understand the Role of Alignment

Your work in developing Academic Standards for College and Work will—and should—affect high school assessments, course descriptions and graduation requirements, and postsecondary placement policies. Ideally, you or members of your Alignment Institute Team are already involved in other state efforts that are planned or underway to address these American Diploma Project (ADP) issues. Whether or not this is the case, members of your Alignment Team should identify other relevant initiatives underway or on the “drawing boards,” and:

1. Become familiar with the goals and timeline of your state’s ADP Action Plan;
2. Initiate and maintain regular communication with key participants in each effort to ensure they know about your team’s purpose, plans, timetable and progress as work proceeds and you understand theirs; and
3. Coordinate your work plans and timelines as appropriate.

Step Two:

Identify Context and Supporting Data for Alignment in Your State

Prior to enlisting the support and assistance from a broader group of experts, as leaders of the effort, you need to review the data that support the call for stronger alignment between high school and postsecondary pursuits. Understanding this context is part of the Alignment Institute agenda; therefore, you will be given instruction, information, and time to examine and internalize these data. For example, your Achieve State Profile details high school pipeline data (e.g., drop out statistics; achievement on high school and college entry assessments; data on college admissions, placement, remediation, persistence, and completion rates).

Step Three:

Identify Connections and Gaps between Your State Standards and the Demands of College and Work

You will want to spend time with the side-by-side analyses in mathematics and English you receive during the Alignment Institute that point out how your current state high school standards correlate to the American Diploma Project (ADP) Benchmarks and spotlight what content (concepts and skills) need to be included in your college- and work-ready standards. Through these analyses, you will have a sense of the “gap” between your state high school standards and the ADP Benchmarks, and understand how to conduct a process with postsecondary faculty and business representatives to determine essential skills.

You will also want to review other perspectives on workplace readiness so that you can help employers understand the relationship between the ADP Benchmarks and other standards and studies that may be more familiar to them. Refer to the document you receive during the Alignment Institute, *Perspectives on English and Mathematics Skills Needed for Work Readiness*, by Hans Meeder and Grace Solares. Their side-by-side analysis compares the ADP Benchmarks with career cluster skills and will provide your employer community with a “real-world” example of the academic skills that students will need in order to be prepared for quality jobs. (For more information, see section on Side-by-Sides).

Step Four:***Develop Plan and Process for Your State Level Alignment Activities through Board Action***

As the title suggests, during the initial Alignment Institute, your team will draft a plan that identifies who, what, where, when, and how to develop a set of Academic Standards for College and Work that will be well vetted with your various publics (K – 12, college, and employer communities) and approved or endorsed by various boards. Put another way, your team will devise a plan that encompasses Step’s Five through Ten that follow.

Step Five:***Conduct Postsecondary and Business Outreach***

Before actually drafting a set of Academic Standards for College and Work, engage key faculty and business leaders from around the state to identify the knowledge, skills, and academic rigor needed to meet the demands for entry-level credit-bearing coursework or good jobs. We suggest holding separate sessions with each of these constituencies as the cultures, language, perspectives, and priorities of each group will differ enough to make separate sessions more efficient and fruitful. For example, the purpose of convening employers will be to identify priority skills that business leaders seek in high-skill employees and gain more general buy-in for the agenda of raising academic expectations in high schools to match “college and work readiness.” Feedback from postsecondary faculty can be much more targeted to the content and wording of individual standards. Separate sessions also will allow you to keep track of what each constituency is saying that, in turn, will enable you to plan communication strategies and policy initiatives.

Consider asking both—postsecondary and business—to bring artifacts that illustrate real world demands and/or tasks to your meetings. These artifacts will point to which concepts and skills most need to be represented in your college- and work-ready standards. Employers might provide excerpts from training manuals, sample employee resumes for selected jobs, work products, sample job descriptions,

proprietary school-based occupation-specific programs that lead to certifications, and items from exams required for professional and major industry certifications. College faculty might provide course syllabi and samples of student assignments from freshmen courses.

Step Six:

Draft Academic Standards for College and Work

The development of standards is an iterative process that will require the continual engagement of members of your Alignment Team and additional English and mathematics experts you may want to convene to carry out the actual drafting. We suggest forming one group for mathematics and one for English. Whether you keep your groups small or decide to go bigger with representation from across the state, setting up a separate workgroup for each content area will make the work more manageable, make effective use of content expertise, and allow more people to take part in the process than asking a single group to define the standards across the board.

The primary task for your English and mathematics drafting workgroups is to articulate as clearly as possible the threshold proficiencies students need for success in credit-bearing vs. remedial courses, and for entry-level jobs in high wage occupations. To help with this task, workgroup members should draw on a variety of sources of data such as national standards from ADP and ACT that summarize previous research, studies on the relationship between high school course-taking and postsecondary success, examples of course syllabi, assignments and student work as well as examples of workplace tasks, manuals, etc. Your side-by-side comparisons (ADP vs. state standards) and any information you have collected during your college and employer outreach about essential knowledge and skills will be of particular assistance during the drafting phase. (For more information, see Sections on Side-by-Side Comparisons, Postsecondary Outreach, and Employer Outreach.)

We suggest that your drafters start with your existing state high school standards and edit them so they represent college- and work-ready standards. That means, for example, that you can revise and add to the Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 state standards so together they represent readiness for your students' postsecondary pursuits.

Using all pertinent information that you have gathered, ask your English and mathematics workgroups to review the current set of high school standards to:

- Confirm essential knowledge and skills
- Identify gaps that need to be filled

- Note non-essential knowledge and skills that could be dropped

Then, refine your current set of state high school standards appropriately. You may want to provide K – 12 personnel charged with updating the standards with a detailed analysis of what gaps you have filled, what revisions you have made, and the rationale for updating the existing state high school standards to match the college and work expectations that you have identified. This will allow you to respond to questions (or criticisms) that may arise as you move forward to finalize your drafts.

Standards-setting is not a process without controversy. When workgroups first meet, prepare for differences of opinion and heated debate on some key issues, such as: What do *all* students really need to learn? *Who* will provide teachers with the training and resources they need? Welcome the questions and the debate. Giving participants the opportunity to state their views allows them to grapple with the issues that matter most, broaden their thinking, and coalesce as a team. Through deliberation and dialogue, team members will begin to understand that their charge is not to figure out why standards can't be achieved or, for that matter, how to achieve the standards. Workgroups have but a single charge: to lay before students, teachers, and the broader postsecondary community a common core of learning that all students have the right to learn—*must learn*—to ensure success. Period.

Step Seven:

Submit Draft Academic Standards for College and Work for Achieve Quality Review I

When you have reached the point where you have a solid working draft of its Academic Standards for College and Work, Achieve content experts will conduct a detailed analysis of your English and math documents' alignment with ADP, reveal strengths and weaknesses, and contain specific recommendations for refining the standards. This analysis will allow you to fine tune the standards so the knowledge and skills that are described will be an effective framework for delineating the coursework high school students should complete and the assessments they should pass to be prepared for the demands of college and work. (For more information, see section on Quality Review.)

Step Eight:

Conduct Additional Vetting with Constituencies (as needed)

Once workgroups (or the Alignment Team) have responded to revisions recommended from the Achieve Quality Review, you should decide whether vetting the standards further with key constituencies is necessary.

This is the time for high school and postsecondary institutions that may or may not have had faculty members included in the Alignment Team’s work sessions to participate in the feedback process. There may be selected faculty committees, academic councils, or other postsecondary groups that should be included—particularly if they are critical for the final implementation of these standards.

Consider making your review process multifaceted, including both focus groups and surveys. Focus groups allow for personal and in-depth inquiry (but they are time consuming and can accommodate only small numbers). Surveys, on the other hand, are able to reach large numbers of people. They are time and cost efficient but they don’t allow for inquiry, explanation, and discussion that can promote greater understanding. Opting for a “combination” gives you both depth and breadth, allowing you to gather rich qualitative and quantitative information.

“Vetting” standards widely helps to:

- Ensure that your standards are appropriate, clear, accurate, and complete;
- Build ownership and awareness among key constituencies; and,
- Provide ideas about the rollout of the standards and next steps.

Gaining ownership can be as messy as it is important. Reviewers often have a drive to register complaint and criticism. Beneath what can be the torrent of complaints often lay legitimate concerns or suggestions about how to improve the standards. Listen carefully and makes changes where appropriate. Be clear about your reasons for not making changes as well. You may hear and need to respond to similar criticisms in the future.

Step Nine:

Submit Draft Academic Standards for College and Work for Achieve Quality Review II

Once a state has had the opportunity to refine and further vet and validate its standards with essential stakeholders, Achieve content experts will conduct a final review of your standards and produce a statement that you can share with various publics and governing boards that summarize our findings and any final recommendations as may be appropriate in order to eliminate gaps fully and better align with postsecondary demands. (For more information, see section on Quality Review.)

Step Ten:

Solicit Board Adoption/Endorsement of the Academic Standards for College and Work



Your Alignment Team's efforts need to be 'brought to scale" across the K – 12, postsecondary sectors, and employer sectors through the:

- Adopted, endorsed or otherwise recognized by state postsecondary institutions as defining the knowledge and skills necessary for placement into credit-bearing courses;
- Adopted by the State Board of Education or other appropriate governing body as defining the knowledge and skills in math and English all students should meet by the end of high school; and,
- Verified or endorsed by employers and the business community (Business Roundtable, Chambers of Commerce, Business/Education Coalitions, etc.) as constituting skills necessary to enter and succeed in the 21st century workplace.



Achieve Alignment Institute
Alignment of Academic Standards for College and Work:
Ten Action Steps

Ten Action Steps	Tasks	Timeline	Person(s) Responsible	Support from Achieve
Step One: <i>Understand the ADP Agenda and Role of Alignment</i>				
Step Two: <i>Identify Context and Supporting Data for Alignment in Your State</i>				



Ten Action Steps	Tasks	Timeline	Person(s) Responsible	Support from Achieve
Step Three: <i>Identify Connections and Gaps Between Your State Standards and the Demands of College and Work</i>				
Step Four: <i>Develop Plan and Process for Your State Level Alignment Activities Through Board Action</i>				
Step Five, Part 1: <i>Conduct Postsecondary Outreach</i>				



Ten Action Steps	Tasks	Timeline	Person(s) Responsible	Support from Achieve
Step Five, Part 2: <i>Conduct Business Outreach</i>				
Step Six: <i>Draft Academic Standards for College and Work</i>				
Step Seven: <i>Submit Draft Academic Standards for College and Work for Achieve Quality Review I</i>				



Ten Action Steps	Tasks	Timeline	Person(s) Responsible	Support from Achieve
Step Eight: <i>Conduct Additional Vetting with Constituencies (as needed)</i>				
Step Nine: <i>Submit Draft Academic Standards for College and Work for Achieve Quality Review II</i>				
Step Ten: <i>Solicit Board Adoption/Endorsement of the Academic Standards for College and Work</i>				



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