



College-Readiness and Academic Preparedness: The Same Concepts?

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Citation

Barnes, W., Slate, J., & Rojas-LeBouef, A. (2010). College-readiness and academic preparedness: The same concepts? *Current Issues in Education*, 13(4). Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/>

Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the issue of college-readiness as it relates to the concept of academic-preparedness. With President Obama's emphasis on changing the No Child Left Behind Act to a focus on college- and career-readiness, an examination of college-readiness is merited. Within the last several decades, academically rigorous curriculum and stringent accountability measures have been mandated by state and federal legislation in hopes of increasing the likelihood of students graduating from high school college-ready. A question that remains unanswered is the extent to which high school graduates are more academically prepared based on core curriculum and a one-size-fits-all standardized testing regime rather than being college-ready. The politics of education, including national reports and legislative acts, was examined and discussed to shed light on the issue of college-readiness. In a review of the plethora of college-readiness literature, college-readiness should, in all likelihood, be defined as academic preparedness.

Keywords: college-readiness, academic preparedness, literature review

College-Readiness and Academic Preparedness: The Same Concepts?

The long and winding road to college-readiness, or possibly more correctly stated as academic preparedness, began approximately three decades ago with a report commissioned by President Ronald Reagan on the state of secondary schools and students in America. Although the report was intended to create avenues for academic success for students in the U.S., little did the authors know that they set the course to high-stakes standardized testing and stringent accountability measures without considerations for fueling other requisite skills and strategies necessary for college success—creativity, critical thinking, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Bell, 1993; Berliner, 1993; Bracey, 1998, 2003; Crosby, 1993; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Ravitch, 2009, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2008a; Zhao, 2009a, 2009b). Although success in rigorous academic courses and high scores on standardized tests are good indicators of academic preparedness, high school and college personnel must work together to help students develop an understanding of the academic and non-academic expectations of entering and succeeding at postsecondary institutions, thereby internalizing a college-going attitude.

Purpose of the Study

We believe that an important distinction exists between the terms of college-readiness and academic preparedness. This distinction is more than mere words; it reflects real differences in the skills students possess. In this paper, we examine these terms and provide evidence that college-readiness, as it is currently defined and measured, does not represent the set of skills students need to be successful in college. As such, we contend that a better phrase, that of academic preparedness, represents what is presently being measured under the rubric of college-readiness. In this paper we discuss the extant literature concerning the extent to which high

school graduates are more academically prepared based on core curriculum and a one-size-fits-all standardized testing regime rather than being college-ready. The politics of education, including national reports and legislative acts, are examined and discussed to shed light on the issue of college-readiness.

Politics of Education

In their 1983 landmark document, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (A Nation at Risk)*, the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported, that, “American prosperity, security, and civility” were in serious jeopardy because the educational foundation on which the United States was built was rapidly eroding (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 7). Further stated in the report was that, “mediocrity threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 7). Although the Commission discussed the future of American prosperity and power through well-rounded citizenship, all recommendations for improvement in graduation rates and college-readiness were aimed primarily at academic preparedness. The Commission reported their findings and recommendations in four categories: (a) content, (b) expectations, (c) time, and (d) teaching (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Regarding content, the findings were that course content had been diluted and that many students were abandoning college preparatory courses for the easier “general track” courses (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 62). The recommendation regarding content was to strengthen graduation requirements, and

that, at a minimum to include, all students seeking a diploma be required to lay the foundation in the Five New Basics by taking the following curriculum during their 4 years of high school: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of

science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 70)

With respect to expectations, findings were that although grades were improving, much less time was being spent on homework, and average student achievement had declined. To remedy this problem, the recommendation was that:

schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct, and that 4-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission. This will help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 73)

Three disturbing trends emerged with regard to time. First, American students spend much less time on school work than do students from other nations. Second, the time spent on schoolwork is used ineffectively. Finally, students are not taught study skills and time management skills (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). To redirect the three trends, the Commission recommended that more time be devoted to teaching and learning the Five New Basics, but committee consensus was to leave administrative and curricular decisions to education professionals. However, the recommendation was made to increase the number of hours in the school day and the number of days in the school year (e.g., 7 hours per day for 220 days per year) (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Regarding teachers, it was determined that academically adept students chose college majors other than teaching. Moreover, rigor was lacking in teacher education and programs needed substantial pedagogical improvements. Another concern was that teachers did not make enough money and they were not valued as professionals. Finally, noted in the report was that serious shortages of teachers existed in key fields (i.e., mathematics, science, and technology) (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Recommendations included moving to an 11-month contract for teachers to allow time for inservice and additional preparation time. An additional recommendation was to hire noneducators as mathematics and science teachers who were degreed and had been in the workplace (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983)

Although the National Commission on Excellence in Education was incorrect on both of their primary assertions that the U.S. K-12 educational system was in shambles, with student achievement scores on a downhill slide; and the political, technological and economic dominance of the United States in the newly forming global community was imperiled, “the report motivated much that is right for American education” (Guthrie & Springer, 2004, p. 7). Guthrie and Springer (2004) identified two positive results that *A Nation at Risk* may have triggered: (a) “a move away from measuring the quality of schools by the resources they receive and onto a plane where school performance is judged on outcomes students’ achieve,” and (b) “the nation has increasingly focused on the achievement gap, the failure of low-income and minority children to achieve at the levels of White middle class children” (p. 9). However, Guthrie and Springer (2004) pointed out three negative results engendered by the authors of *A Nation at Risk* that severely hampered the effectiveness of creating equality in education: (a) “federalization of education policy... that now threatens the creativity and diversity of local

school systems that have been among the nation's greatest strengths," (b) primarily disregarding all other aspects of student achievement except scores on standardized tests, and (c) adding residual factors on the "belief that all of the nation's social problems can be solved by improving schools alone and an accompanying willingness to tolerate failures in other social institutions" (p. 9).

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education issued another ominous report, *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years after A Nation at Risk*, which reiterated the gloom and doom in the original document, summarizing that the American education system was still in shambles, with student achievement in mathematics and reading stagnated for 25 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a). Of the risk factors (i.e., content, expectations, time, and teaching) discussed in the 1983 document, the only improvement was in the standards and expectations because of more rigid federal control with the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). To emphasize the point, the authors stated "A Nation at Risk anticipated that our secondary schooling deficiencies could eventually threaten the quality of the entire K-12 system, and this legislation has generated data that, unfortunately, confirm this threat" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a, p. 4). Further, the authors reported that through the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act, "we have transformed ourselves from a nation at risk of complacency to a nation that is accountable and at work on its education weaknesses" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a, p. 8).

The Clinton Administration's education agenda was responsible for enacting the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) (P. L. 103-382). Primarily, the IASA was created under the guise of the federal government promoting a comprehensive approach to promote students' academic success (Paris, 1994), when in actuality the new amendment

“required state academic-content standards and tests” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a, p. 8). Two of the eight major goals of IASA were that every child will begin school ready to learn and that high school graduations will increase to 90%. Additionally, it was posited that students would leave the 12th grade having mastered challenging subjects, including: English, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, art, history, and geography (Paris, 1994). At the time the IASA was signed into legislation, the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) reported that only one in five 12th graders could understand complex math problems and perform critical literacy tasks (Paris, 1994).

In 1994, IASA was the mandate by which the academic progression of students was identified and schools' annual yearly progress evaluated (Cizek, 2001; Cizek & Bunch, 2006).

According to Riley (2002), Secretary of Education from 1993 to 2001:

it is imperative that we recognize that our national effort to raise standards is not just about testing... rather, it represents a broad and sweeping endeavor to reform American education from top to bottom. An unflinching commitment to excellence and equity must be our guiding principle... the future of American education must involve creative ways for students, teachers, parents, and the entire community to work together in partnership to make sure that all children are given a high-quality education. If we offer young people a future of hope and an education of rigor, excellence, and excitement, they will respond and America will be better for it. (pp. 700, 707)

Further, Riley (2002) stated “In the broad effort to raise standards, states should not rely on just a single high-stakes test...I believe that these tests and other accountability measures will be useful if, at the same time, we build capacity of schools and students to meet the challenge” (p. 703). Although IASA mandates were well-intentioned to provide guidelines to enhance

academic success for all students, high-stakes testing and accountability were escalated to the forefront at the expense of most other possible positive features of the new law with little effect on increasing student academic achievement. Shortly after the new millennium began, the No Child Left Behind Act was created to bolster student achievement, create more equality and equity in education for all America's students (i.e., decrease the achievement gap), and develop more stringent assessment and accountability measures (Borkowski & Sneed, 2006; Gray, 2005; Paige, 2002; Yell & Drasgow, 2008).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (P.L. 107-110) was enacted into law by President Bush in 2002. Accountability measures defined in NCLB guidelines require states, districts, and school administrators to develop and implement rigorous standardized tests to all students in grades 3 through 8, in both reading and math (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Schiller & Muller, 2003; Yell & Drasgow, 2008). Although the primary focus of the NCLB Act was kindergarten through 8th grade, secondary schools must now comply with five NCLB guidelines. First, states must set adequate annual yearly progress (AYP) goals and objectives to ensure that all students attain proficient levels by the 2013-2014 school year. Second, students must be tested in reading, mathematics, and science at least one time in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade. Third, high school graduation rates must be included in AYP reports. Fourth, graduation rates are calculated on students who receive regular diplomas in the standard number of years. Finally, teachers who teach core subjects must be highly qualified (Learning Point, 2007).

College-Readiness vs. Academic Preparedness

In the first decade of the 21st century, college-readiness became the standard by which all high school graduates were measured (Ravitch, 2009, 2010; Zhao, 2009a). Greene and Winters (2005) indicated that the college-readiness rates in the U.S. increased from 25% in 1991 to 34%

in 2002. Greene and Winters (2005) stated that the 9% increase in college-readiness rates may have been caused by increased testing and accountability measures. However, the American College Test (ACT) (2009) reported that only 23% of high school graduates in U.S. who completed the ACT test in 2009 attained a college-ready score as measured by four ACT college-readiness benchmarks.

Shortly before the turn of the century, high schools were placed under the microscope and examined through a more powerful lens. Although assessment and accountability guidelines for high schools were not specifically stated in the NCLB Act, it became apparent that high schools were not fulfilling their expectations of preparing students for postsecondary education, and as a consequence, redesign and reform initiatives were begun (Balfanz, 2009; Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006; Gray, 2005; Scott, 2007). Points of contention to invested stakeholders were high student dropout rates, flat admissions test scores, stable but wide achievement gap, large numbers of students poorly prepared for college, and 50% of students enrolled in developmental education classes in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b).

At the beginning of the new century, high school reform received intense attention by local, state, and national legislators, philanthropic individuals and foundations, and school district administrators who discovered that high school course enrollment statistics were disappointing, and actually worse than imagined (Clark, 2007). According to Balfanz (2009), “reformers must also create a system of academic and social supports for students who enter high school with inadequate academic skills and declining levels of school engagement” (p. 31). Readers are referred to Table 1 to review the chronology of national high school reforms from 2000-2010.

Table 1

Chronology of National High School Reforms, 2000-2010

2000	U.S. Secretary of Education formed the National Commission on the High School Senior Year
2000	Carnegie Foundation focused major efforts and funds on urban high school reform
2001	Annenberg Foundation completed a multi-million dollar grant to Chicago Public School district to improve urban schools
2001	<i>Bridging the Gap</i> report explored the poor alignment of classes and the curricular disconnect and between high school and colleges
2001	States met to discuss school alignment from early childhood to college graduation, P-16 initiatives
2001	<i>Betraying the College Dream</i> illuminated the lack of preparedness of high school graduates based on expectations of colleges
2001	<i>Claiming Common Ground</i> was a prescriptive document to alleviate the disparity discussed in <i>Betraying the Dream</i>
2001	Alliance for Excellence in Schools formed as an advocacy organization on behalf of “at-risk” students
2002	Bill & Melinda Gates forayed into secondary education to recommend and design smaller schools
2002	National High School Alliance formed to promote excellence and equity to high school students in 50 states
2004	President George W. Bush created high school reforms and funding to complement NCLB
2005	Achieve, Inc. and NGA held the National High School Summit in Seattle, Washington to discuss dropout rate, college readiness, and the cost of developmental education
2005	U.S. Department of Education funded the National High School Center to help states develop goals and guidelines to improve high school performance and college readiness
2005	U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce convened to congratulate President Bush on making high school initiatives a national priority

Table 1 (continued)

2005	Gates Foundation donated \$23.6 million to improve college-ready graduate rates in 26 states
2005	Gates Foundation funded the NGA High School Honor States Program, American Diploma Project Data Quality Center, and National Center for Educational Accountability Data Quality Center
2006	Commission on No Child Left Behind released report, NCLB: <i>Fulfilling the Promise of our Nation's Children</i> , to recommend strengthened accountability in the form of a 12th grade assessment
2006	New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce published <i>Tough Choices or Tough Times</i> to illuminate problems that may be detrimental to the national economic landscape
2007	No Child Left Behind reauthorization rescheduled by Congress
2008	Researchers at Rice University and the University of Texas-Austin find that Texas' public school accountability system under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) directly contributes to lower graduation rates.
2009	Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, supports the focus on accountability for student achievement, but he wants to make the NCLB law less punitive.
2009	Race to the Top funding competition begun by President Obama to help states with low graduation rates and wide achievement gaps
2010	President Obama voices significant changes to the NCLB Act
2010	Arne Duncan visits Congress with new NCLB Act proposal

Note. The information in Table 5 was synthesized from Clark, 2007; Dillon, 2010; Khadaroo, 2010; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez-Heilig, 2008; Ramirez & Clark, 2009; Toppo, 2009.

In an attempt to increase college-readiness rates and to comply with the stringent NCLB accountability measures, Texas legislators mandated that at the end of the 2006-2007 school year all Texas school districts should report to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) on six indicators of college-readiness: (a) Advanced Placement exam scores; (b) dual credit course enrollment; (c)

Standardized Assessment Test (SAT) critical reading and math test scores, ACT English and math test scores, or the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics exit-level test scores; (d) advanced coursework in science, math, and foreign languages; (e) scores from state college-readiness assessments; and (f) the percentage of college-ready graduates in each high school and district as determined by the first four indicators (TEA, 2009). These indicators can be used by administrators and teachers as they work to ensure that students will be able to perform in entry-level, credit-bearing courses at postsecondary institutions (i.e., vocational and trade schools, community colleges, and universities). However, to exhibit college-readiness, a graduate must have met or exceeded the college-ready criteria by the attainment of specific scores on the: (a) TAKS ELA and mathematics exit-level tests, or (b) SAT critical reading and mathematics tests, or (c) ACT English and mathematics tests (TEA, 2009). Readers are referred to Table 2 to examine the college-readiness criteria for high school graduates in Texas.

Table 2

TEA Criteria for College-Ready Graduates

Subject	Exit-level TAKS		SAT		ACT
ELA	2200 or higher scale score and 3 or higher essay score	or	500 or higher in critical reading and 1070 or higher composite score	or	19 or higher in English and 23 or higher composite score
Math	2200 or higher scale Score	or	500 or higher in math and 1070 or higher composite score	or	19 or higher in English and 23 or higher composite score

Note. Information in Table 2 synthesized from TEA, 2009.

In 2009, Achieve, Inc. released *Closing the Expectation Gap 2009: Fourth Annual 50-State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Careers* to “help states raise academic standards, improve assessment, and strengthen accountability to prepare all young people for postsecondary education and training, careers, and citizenship” (Achieve, Inc., 2009, p. i). In 2005, at the National Summit on High Schools, the American Diploma Project (ADP) a collaborative effort by The Fordham Foundation, The Education Trust, and Achieve, Inc., was founded with 13 states participating to close the expectations gap (Achieve, Inc., 2009). In 2009, the ADP network was comprised of 34 states and approximately 85% of America’s students (Achieve, Inc., 2009). Although well intentioned, it appears that Achieve, Inc. is focused on academic preparedness rather than college-readiness.

Although federal mandates for academic rigor in high school curriculum have been in place well over 20 years, college-readiness rates of high school graduates continue to be low nationwide. Zhao (2006, 2009a) suggested that because of high-stakes testing and the NCLB Act accountability measures, students who met or exceeded college-readiness standards based on standardized test scores, to which the aforementioned Texas college-readiness indicators allude, were perhaps more academically prepared for college rather than college-ready. Conley (2007a, 2007b) concurred that high school students were more academically prepared, and that college-readiness was more inclusive of students’ self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), self-regulation (Young & Ley, 2002, 2003), and knowledge of academic strategies for reading, writing, and critical thinking rather than specific content knowledge as measured by standardized tests. Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) elaborated that if college-readiness standards were used to gain college access and measure college success, high schools and postsecondary institutions must

couple strategies and skills needed by students to understand the college-going process with the academic preparedness as measured by standardized tests.

Several researchers postulated that junior high and high school students should be made aware of faculty expectations and postsecondary academic standards to develop college knowledge and a college-going attitude that would increase their likelihood of entering college and persisting to graduation, especially lower-socioeconomic, ethnically-diverse students (ACT, 2005; Barefoot, 2008; Bean & Eaton, 2002; Conley, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Roderick et al., 2009; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 2007; Zhao, 2009b; Zimmerman, 2000). Further, researchers indicated that not only do junior high and high school students need the academic prowess to be successful at the postsecondary level; they should also have knowledge of the college enrollment processes, including admissions, financial aid, and money management (ACT, 2005; Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006; Moore, Slate, Edmonson, Bustamante, & Onwuegbuzie, in press; Roderick et al., 2009; Varcoe et al., 2001; Vienne & Slate, 2009; Zhao, 2009b). Additionally, junior high and high school students should develop key cognitive strategies, including time management and study skills (Conley, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Lammers, Onwuegbuzie, & Slate, 2001; Slate, Jones, & Dawson, 1993; Slate, Jones, & Harlan, 1998; Slate, Jones, & Rodgers, 1997/98). Moreover, an awareness of such factors as locus of control may influence student success at college (e.g., Jones, Slate, Blake, & Sloas, 1995; Jones, Slate, & Marini, 1995). According to Zhao (2006), measuring college-readiness by centralized curriculum and excessive high-stakes assessments created a one size fits all syndrome, which negated creative and critical thinking; both of which were required to be successful at the postsecondary level and beyond.

Because of high-stakes testing requirements and punitive accountability guidelines set forth in the NCLB Act, college-readiness, even by academic standards alone, may be illusory. After 27 years of academic reform suggested by the authors of *A Nation at Risk* and approximately eight years of stringent academic accountability mandated by the NCLB Act, little, if any, change has occurred in the academic achievement of most American students (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Jones et al., 1995; Jones et al., 1995; Lammers et al., 2001; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; NCLB, 2001; Nichols & Berliner, 2008; Ravitch, 2010; Slate et al., 1993; Slate et al., 1998; Slate et al., 1997/98). According to Slate and colleagues (1993, 1998, 1997/98), teachers acted primarily as dispensers of knowledge who filled student vessels with that knowledge. However, Slate and colleagues (1993, 1998, 1997/98) stated that if students were to be successful at the postsecondary level, teachers should explain and model effective cognitive and metacognitive strategies as integral parts of the curriculum and diligently help students internalize these strategies to become confident, autonomous, self-regulatory critical thinkers.

In 2010, control in public secondary schools is more soundly in the hands of teachers than in the 1990s. With educational agencies nationwide being controlled by NCLB mandates, teachers are forced to narrow student learning and self-regulatory strategy development by deleteriously dumbing-down student learning, dispensing only those content specific items that will ensure successful student pass-rates on state mandated standardized tests (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Dzubak, 2010; Cubukcu, 2009; Popham, 2008; Ravitch, 2010, Zhao, 2009a, 2009b). Additionally, redundant benchmarking of state mandated tests has significantly lessened teaching and learning experiences that should be occurring in public schools (Amrein-Beardsley,

2009; Berliner, 2006; Dzubak, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). According to Ryan, Matheson, and Morgenthau (2003):

The No Child Left Behind Act, perhaps the most important federal education law in our nation's history, is at war with itself. First, while the Act is supposed to raise achievement across all schools, it creates incentives for states to lower academic standards. Second, while the Act is supposed to close the achievement gap, it creates incentives to increase segregation by class and race and to push low-performing students out of school entirely, which will make it even more difficult for disadvantaged students to catch up to their more affluent peers. Finally, while the Act is supposed to bring talented teachers to every classroom, it may deter some from teaching altogether and divert others away from the most challenging classrooms, where they are needed the most. In short, although the Act is supposed to promote excellence and equity, it may work against both. (p. 934)

With the aforementioned ideas in mind, the requirement of highly qualified teachers mandated by the NCLB Act should be severely scrutinized. Also, the idealistic notion that all children will have access to a quality education is called into question by the negatively reinforced accountability measures of the NCLB Act.

To increase the college readiness-rate of graduates, schools and school districts should develop and implement comprehensive teacher professional development programs (Callan et al., 2006; Conley, 2007a, 2007b; Roderick et al., 2009). According to Conley (2007b), professional development for high school teachers, administrators, and counselors should include the "four facets of college readiness" (p. 12): key cognitive strategies, key content, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness. As high schools educate students, schools must

shift from an emphasis on GPA and credit accumulation to a predominant focus on learning and preparing students for college. Personnel developing professional developmental programs could focus on strategies for critical and analytical thinking, drawing inferences and conclusions, conducting research, and communicating effectively orally and in writing (Moore et al., 2010). Additionally, specific strategies and interventions that focus on academic behaviors (i.e., self-regulation and self-awareness) and study skills are essential for students at risk of not being prepared for entry-level, credit-bearing courses (Bean & Eaton, 2002; Callan et al., 2006; Conley, 2007b; Lammers et al., 2001; Roderick et al., 2009; Seidman, 2005; Slate et al., 1993; Slate et al., 1998; Slate et al., 1997/98; Young & Ley, 2002, 2003; Zhao, 2006, 2009b).

To assist students at risk, high schools and postsecondary institutions must work together to create environments that prepare students to graduate college-ready to allow them to be academically and socially adept at the college level (Conley, 2007b; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Moore et al., 2010; Roderick et al., 2009). According to Kuh et al. (2006), programs to assist the transition from high school to college for students at risk should include but are not limited to the following student success initiatives: “(a) orientation, (b) transition courses and first-year seminars, (c) learning communities, (d) intrusive advising, (e) tutoring, (f) supplemental instruction, (g) peer tutoring, (h) study groups and summer bridge programs, (i) study skills workshops, (j) mentoring and student support groups, (k) student-faculty research, and (l) senior capstone projects” (p. 57).

Although rigorous programs for students, effective instructional resources, and quality professional development may do much to increase college-readiness rates and prepare students to be successful in college courses, schools and school districts should establish working relationships with local universities and colleges to perpetuate a college-going attitude in high

schools across the U.S., especially among lower-socioeconomic, ethnically-diverse student populations. Continuous interaction between high schools and postsecondary institutions may assist schools in defining and aligning their programs and instructional goals and create a working relationship of professional cooperation to help high school graduates excel in their postsecondary endeavors (Callan et al., 2006; Conley, 2007b; Roderick et al., 2009).

To ensure that students graduate college-ready, high schools cannot rely only on increased graduation requirements and standards alignment that focus primarily on academic preparedness (Roderick et al., 2009; Zhao, 2009a, 2009b). Policy and practice must create instructional environments that develop cognitive strategies (i.e., content knowledge and core academic skills) and metacognitive strategies (i.e., self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-regulation) to provide students with college knowledge with which they can internalize a college-going attitude (Brown, 1987; Callan et al., 2006; Flavell, 1976, 1979, 1981; Lammers et al., 2001; Moore et al., 2010; Roderick et al., 2009; Slate et al., 1993; Slate et al., 1998; Slate et al., 1997/98; Zhao, 2009a, 2009b). Additionally, Roderick et al. (2009) stated that students must develop a set of metacognitive skills:

that determine educational achievement but are not measured readily by standardized tests or directly taught as content. Metacognitive skills include a range of behaviors that reflect greater student self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control—study skills, work habits, time management, help-seeking behavior, and social problem-solving skills. Meeting the developmental demands of college requires behavioral, problem-solving, and coping skills that allow students to successfully manage new environments and the new academic and social demands of college. (p. 190)

According to Conley (2005, 2007b), key elements for college-readiness are the development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies; an understanding of content knowledge (i.e. writing, key concepts, and major theories); self-regulation behaviors and strategies demonstrating self-awareness, self-control, and intentionality; and college knowledge. College knowledge includes the information, strategies, and skills that allow students to successfully navigate the complex, sometimes mind-boggling, college admissions and financial aid processes, as well as develop an understanding of college norms, expectations, and diverse academic and social cultures (Conley 2005, 2007b). Roderick et al. (2009) stated that although academic strategies and behavioral skills are necessary, college-readiness “moves beyond academic and behavioral skills to acknowledge the role of social capital in college access and success” (p. 190). According to Jones (2005), financial literacy and personal money management strategies should be included in college knowledge discussions in junior high and high schools to help students begin to understand the importance of personal finance decisions. An understanding of financial literacy and the internalization of money management strategies by students empowers them with the knowledge and confidence to make wise budgetary decisions (Vienne & Slate, 2009). Further, Vienne and Slate (2009) stated that large amounts of debt and credit related problems place financial burdens on students that may hinder persistence, college graduation, or financial and social success after attaining a degree.

“College-readiness is a multifaceted concept comprising numerous factors internal and external to classroom environments” (Conley, 2007b, p. 6). Academic preparedness is one piece of the college-readiness puzzle, but, college-ready is more than college-eligible. As long as school systems in the U.S. are required to evaluate college-readiness using high-stakes standardized test scores controlled by stringent accountability measures, minimized teaching and

learning environments may equate to academic preparedness, but college-readiness will continue to be elusive for most high school graduates (ACT, 2009; Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Balfanz, 2009; Dzubak, 2010; Lammers et al., 2001; Moore et al., 2010; Nichols & Berliner, 2008; Slate et al., 1993; Slate et al., 1998; Slate et al., 1997/98; Ravitch 2010; Rothstein, 2008; Zhao 2009a, 2009b).

Conclusion

National and state policy and school district, school, and classroom practices should be developed and implemented to help all students be successful in more rigorous coursework and develop a college-going attitude (Conley, 2007a, 2007b; Moore et al., 2010). Lower-socioeconomic, ethnically-diverse students who exhibit persistently low college-readiness rates will need intense intervention and mentoring if they are to have the slimmest of chances to be successful at the postsecondary level (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2006; Moore et al., 2009; Roderick et al., 2009, Zhao, 2009a, 2009b). Because many of fastest-growing jobs require some form of postsecondary education (Dohm & Shniper, 2007; National Association of Manufacturers, 2005; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006), schools and school districts cannot continue to measure college-readiness solely on GPA and standardized test scores, rather students must develop college knowledge, which is a personal understanding of how to enroll in and successfully navigate the new academic culture they aspire to join (Conley, 2005, Roderick et al., 2009; Wise, 2008; Zhao, 2009a, 2009b). As standards for academic success become more demanding, universities and school districts must work together to assure that all students are prepared for promising, productive learning experiences at postsecondary institutions.

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Current Issues in Education

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Current Issues in Education



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Volume 13, Number 4

Winter 2010

ISSN 1099-839X

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