

# Summary of the Focus Group Meeting with State Education Officials June 28, 2018

## National Assessment Governing Board Ad Hoc Committee on Measures of Postsecondary Preparedness

To support the charge of the Ad Hoc Committee on Measures of Postsecondary Preparedness, the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) convened a small volunteer panel of education officials responsible for their state's assessment and/or accountability. The meeting was conducted in partnership with the National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The focus group was conducted on June 28, 2018, in San Diego, California during the CCSSO-sponsored National Conference on Student Assessment. The purpose of the focus group was to gather information about states' definitions of postsecondary preparedness/readiness and their efforts to develop and use indicators of postsecondary preparedness/readiness.

The focus group participants included **Chris Janzer**, Michigan; **Russell Keglovits**, Nevada; **Shelley Loving-Ryder**, Virginia; **Vaughn Rhudy**, West Virginia; **Michael Sibley**, Alabama; **Jenny Singh**, California; **Allison Timberlake**, Georgia; and **Vince Verges**, Florida. Ms. Loving-Ryder and Mr. Sibley participated in the panel as both state experts and members of the State Policy Task Force, which is jointly convened by the Governing Board and CCSSO.

In attendance were Governing Board members **Tyler Cramer** and **Joseph Willhoft**; Governing Board staff members **Michelle Blair**, **Lily Clark**, **Sharyn Rosenberg**, and **Lisa Stooksberry**; CCSSO staff members **Fen Chou** and **Scott Norton**; and HumRRO staff members **Sunny Becker**, **Monica Gribben**, **Thanos Patelis**, **Sheila Schultz**, and **Arthur Thacker**.

An overview of the Governing Board and the charge of the Ad Hoc Committee on Measures of Postsecondary Preparedness, along with the agenda and the logistical information for the meeting, were sent to the participants as read-ahead materials. The meeting agenda is at Appendix A.

Thanos Patelis, HumRRO Principal Scientist, started the meeting by reviewing the agenda and goals. Lily Clark, Governing Board Assistant Director for Policy and Research, welcomed everyone and provided an overview of the Governing Board's Strategic Vision initiative to "develop new approaches to measure the complex skills required for transition to postsecondary education and career," which led to the creation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Measures of Postsecondary Preparedness and the impetus for this focus group meeting.

Mr. Patelis facilitated a discussion among the participants that highlighted the following guiding questions:

- How does your state define college and career readiness?
- Did your state consult with industry groups to define career readiness?
- What measure(s) does your state use to assess career readiness?
- Is military service a component of postsecondary readiness in your state?
- How does your state use noncognitive measures?

- Are there innovative or nontraditional indicators that your state might use to measure or report on students' college and/or career readiness (e.g., student interest, micro-credentials earned, work-based learning)?
- What NAEP reporting on postsecondary readiness would be useful to states?

Following is a general summary of the information provided by this group of state assessment and accountability experts on definitions, activities, and indicators of postsecondary preparedness/readiness.

### **Definitions**

The state officials offered examples of definitions of college and career preparedness/readiness used in their respective states. It was evident from the examples that states have a variety of definitions for college and career readiness. The definitions and indicators for college readiness were separate from those of career readiness. Most of the definitions for career readiness explicitly included "soft skills," such as communication, collaboration, problem solving, and business practices. The state officials acknowledged the importance of soft skills to college and career readiness while also noting the challenge they pose in developing and measuring indicators related to these skills.

The definitions of college and career preparedness/readiness represented by the participating state officials varied in certain aspects and included the following:

- Two states defined *college readiness* as students who enroll and succeed in college courses without remediation.
- The use of benchmarks on college entrance and placement tests serve as a default definition of *college readiness*.
- *Career readiness* can be defined as obtaining a job that pays a living wage, which varies by location.
- *Career readiness* in several states was defined by a set of credentials from a career and technical education (CTE) program that did not include inter- and intra-personal skills. However, some other states included soft skills, such as inter- and intra-personal skills and business skills, in their definitions.
  - In one state, the inclusion of service learning was part of the secondary school experience that contributed to a career ready diploma seal.
  - In another state, career readiness was defined as acquiring specific skills from CTE programs as well as successful performance on assessments that represented specific skills (e.g., National Occupational Competency Testing Institute) and experience in a simulated workplace program.
- One state described the development of *college and career readiness* standards that defined specifically what is meant by college attendance and students' understanding of the available career fields.
- *Military readiness* was offered as a postsecondary option that involves a set of cognitive and physical requirements, which is seen as an indicator of readiness in some state accountability plans.

A couple of state officials commented how they would welcome a definition of college and career readiness from the Governing Board.

### ***Learning Opportunities and Interventions***

Several state officials described the following efforts for students to acquire college and career readiness skills:

- States work with schools and industry to develop diplomas to certify technical career skills.
  - The diploma is earned through CTE programs, work-based learning, industry/credential exams, or portfolios.
  - One state developed career ready diploma seals that reflect cooperation between CTE programs and industry to introduce service learning and experiences for students to acquire industry-specific technical and broad inter- and intra-personal skills (e.g., leadership, collaboration, communication skills).
- Programs to prepare students for career readiness are designed to take advantage of local industry and involve the cooperation and input of businesses likely to hire postsecondary students.
- Schools encourage or adopt dual enrollment initiatives to increase student access to college-level courses and experiences.
- Soft skills, such as communication and leadership skills, are taught through service learning, student organizations, work-based learning, and simulated work environments.
- One state's goal is to prepare students for college or a career by ensuring they are agile in facing an environment where the requirements are not always known.
- One state official indicated that the state department of education is (and should be) flexible in facilitating local education agencies to develop pathways for students that are relevant for local conditions and situations.
  - As an example, one school district described a multi-national company that moved into the municipality with plans to add an international business pathway for students. Students who complete designated international business courses and activities earn a career ready seal on their diplomas.

### ***Data and Indicators***

The state officials identified sets of skills important for college and career readiness. Some commented on the difficulty in measuring certain skills from both practical/logistical and technical/measurement perspectives. One state official opined that it is easier to measure college readiness than career readiness. Many state officials noted the difficulty with career readiness data is twofold: (a) the skills to be assessed are multi-faceted in nature and (b) there are practical limitations in identifying measurable indicators for all facets.

The skills explicitly mentioned, especially for career readiness, include business practices, collaboration, leadership, communication, creative problem solving, argument and reasoning, designing solutions, time management, and intellectual curiosity.

Several state officials indicated the Governing Board could contribute to the measurement of the soft skills important for indicating career readiness, particularly if provided at the state level. One official, however, encouraged the measurement of both college and career skills, but also cautioned that one consequence of reporting these skills by state is how industry may use them to target or avoid certain states for opening corporate and business locations.

State officials offered various comments and suggestions about data related to college and career readiness:

- Geographic differences reported in relevant career skills were based on the types of local industry and available jobs. States want data at a regional level.
- Some soft skills are not easily defined or measured (e.g., time management, intellectual curiosity).
- Student level data on absences, credits, and required course attainment can serve as proxies for some soft skills.
- A portfolio of artifacts (in the form of certificates, work-based learning, etc.) or experiences (advanced courses, dual credit) can be used as an indicator of college and career readiness.
- A concern about equity in terms of (a) opportunities to learn and (b) distribution of funds to offer college and career readiness opportunities (test fees) was expressed.
- Student service learning could be used as a relevant data point.
- One suggestion was for states to support and incorporate local accountability plans and metrics that involve school-specific indicators of important constructs such school culture, climate, and other environmental measures.
  - Examples of using school climate and school culture surveys were reported.
- Indicators used in state accountability plans included attendance, course participation, college entrance and placement test scores, and certification test results.

Various comments were offered about the measurement of college and career readiness:

- College readiness is easier to measure than career readiness.
- Soft skills typically are not included in state standards, so what to measure becomes a challenge.
- Measures should be general (versus specific) to remain relevant over time.
- Soft skills should be measured early (e.g., age appropriate elementary and middle school skills) to allow time for students to close gaps and attain common school and workplace skills. Early measurement would provide schools with data to monitor student learning and acquisition of these important life skills.
- States would like to see best practices in providing, documenting, and measuring college and career readiness skills.
  - For example, is there evidence that students who earn certificates are successful?
- A couple of state officials commented that the Governing Board is in a unique position to develop a measure(s) of soft skills at the state/national level.
- It would be a tremendous contribution if the Governing Board created a single definition inclusive of both college and career readiness as well as developed indicators to measure those skills.

**Appendix A: Meeting Agenda and Attendees**  
Discussion of State Efforts on College and Career Readiness

Thursday, June 28, 2018, 7:30 – 8:50 AM PST  
Room: Cobalt 520 (Level 5)  
Hilton San Diego Bayfront  
San Diego, California

**Agenda**

**Purpose:** Identify and discuss states' current and innovative practices regarding college and career readiness to inform the National Assessment Governing Board's effort to *"Develop new approaches to measure the complex skills required for transition to postsecondary education and career."*

**7:30 – 7:45 AM      Breakfast & Introductions**

**7:45 – 8:00 AM      Overview of the National Assessment Governing Board's Initiative on Postsecondary Preparedness**

Lily Clark, Assistant Director for Policy and Research  
National Assessment Governing Board

**8:00 – 8:50 AM      Discussion of State Efforts on College and Career Readiness**

Thanos Patelis, Facilitator, HumRRO

Guiding Questions:

- How does your state define college and career readiness?
- Did your state consult with industry groups to define career readiness?
- What measures does your state use to assess career readiness?
- Is military service a component of postsecondary readiness in your state?
- How does your state use non-cognitive measures?
- Are there innovative or non-traditional indicators that your state might use to measure or report on students' college and/or career readiness (e.g., student interest, micro-credentials earned, work-based learning)?
- What NAEP reporting on postsecondary readiness would be useful to states?

**8:50 AM              Thank you and Adjourn**

## Attendees

### State Officials (Department of Education)

Chris Janzer, Michigan  
Russell Keglovits, Nevada  
Shelley Loving-Ryder, Virginia  
Vaughn Rhudy, West Virginia  
Michael Sibley, Alabama  
Jenny Singh, California  
Allison Timberlake, Georgia  
Vince Verges, Florida

### CCSSO Staff Members

Fen Chou  
Scott Norton

### National Assessment Governing Board Members

Tyler Cramer  
Joe Willhoft

### National Assessment Governing Board Staff Members

Michelle Blair  
Lily Clark  
Sharyn Rosenberg  
Lisa Stooksberry

### HumRRO Staff Members

Sunny Becker  
Monica Gribben  
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