

BACKGROUND PAPER

For Presentation by

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12th Grade Preparedness: National and Colorado Perspectives

There is wide agreement across education, policy, and business sectors that the preparedness of high school graduates is unacceptable. The reasons given for the problem vary. So do the proposed solutions, including increased rigor in the high school curriculum, higher quality teachers, more parental responsibility, student motivation, school size, centralized or decentralized governance, technology-enhanced learning, better assessments, and a plethora of other interventions. But there is a widespread clamor for action and a growing concern that the under-achievement of American students will generate enormous strains in our society, our economy, and our way of life, and upon the students themselves.

The unprecedented level of frustration at the enormous failure in raising high school achievement comes after decades of reforms focused on the persistent achievement gap between white students and minority students who are African American, Hispanic or Native American. The U.S. Department of Education reports that the rate at which students drop out from high school between freshman and senior years has tripled over the past three decades. (USDOE, 2004, Clifford Adelman). Reports abound that capture the depth of the problem, the nature of the disagreements, the array of challenges, and the desired results.

What is Different Now?

What have we learned about student preparation and the nature of assessments over the last 20 years? What is the platform to go forward? What is clear about assessment is that the public has a thirst for measuring classroom learning, for easily digestible comparisons, and for finding out how a local school does relative to the rest of the school district or the state. In the past 20 years since state NAEP was launched, all states have undertaken some form of statewide measurement. The testing industry and assessment technology have grown enormously.

While national versus state tensions remain, the severe deterioration in college preparedness, as shown by-increasing remediation rates for high school graduates, when combined with the budget deficits in most states make this an action-forcing time. The magnitude of the economic crisis creates an opportunity and environment to reshape the

national assessment debate. Now more than ever, policymakers need data-informed guidance on how best to use limited resources to turn around the student success quagmire. They need credible and reliable tools to gauge their investments and to discern practices that yield improvements in academic performance. There is no argument about the need for a much higher percentage of Americans to have at least some postsecondary education to compete with people around the world. It is estimated that for about 67 percent of new jobs, some post-secondary education is needed. Even in today's dim job market, the person with high skills is more competitive than workers who cannot meet employer demands; employers have much more opportunity to be highly selective. (Closing the Expectations Gap, 2006).

There has never been greater need for an independent national benchmark of high school preparedness. Assessing local efforts against what other states have done on a common measure of academic preparedness will increase pressure for evidence-based interventions for student success. NAEP's 12th grade preparedness reporting will allow states to conduct careful investigations to ensure that academic initiatives and curriculum intensity result in marked progress. NAEP 12th grade preparedness benchmarks will raise consciousness and attention in every state about the effectiveness of local efforts.

A Colorado Perspective

Samantha Long, of the Office of Learning and Results in the Colorado Department of Education was recently quoted as saying "The picture in Colorado isn't pretty....High school graduation rates are declining. Colorado has the largest achievement gap in the country. Students aren't prepared to succeed."

Colorado ranks 46th in the nation in the rate of high school completion. Furthermore, once they get to college, 30 percent of Colorado high school graduates require remediation, and in the community colleges, 56 percent of the students receive remediation. Colorado currently has no state standards (and thus no assessments) below third grade or above tenth grade. Colorado was ranked 23rd nationally in college participation rates for potentially at-risk students from low-income families in a study conducted by Postsecondary Educational Opportunity, a public policy organization. The alarming factor is that Colorado boasts being the highest college-educated state in the country per-capita. On closer look, the irony is that Colorado enjoys in-migration of people from other states with college degrees, yet lags in its ability to produce its own college-educated work force. Known as the "Colorado paradox," a term coined by WICHE's David Longanecker, this problem has plagued the state for more than a decade.

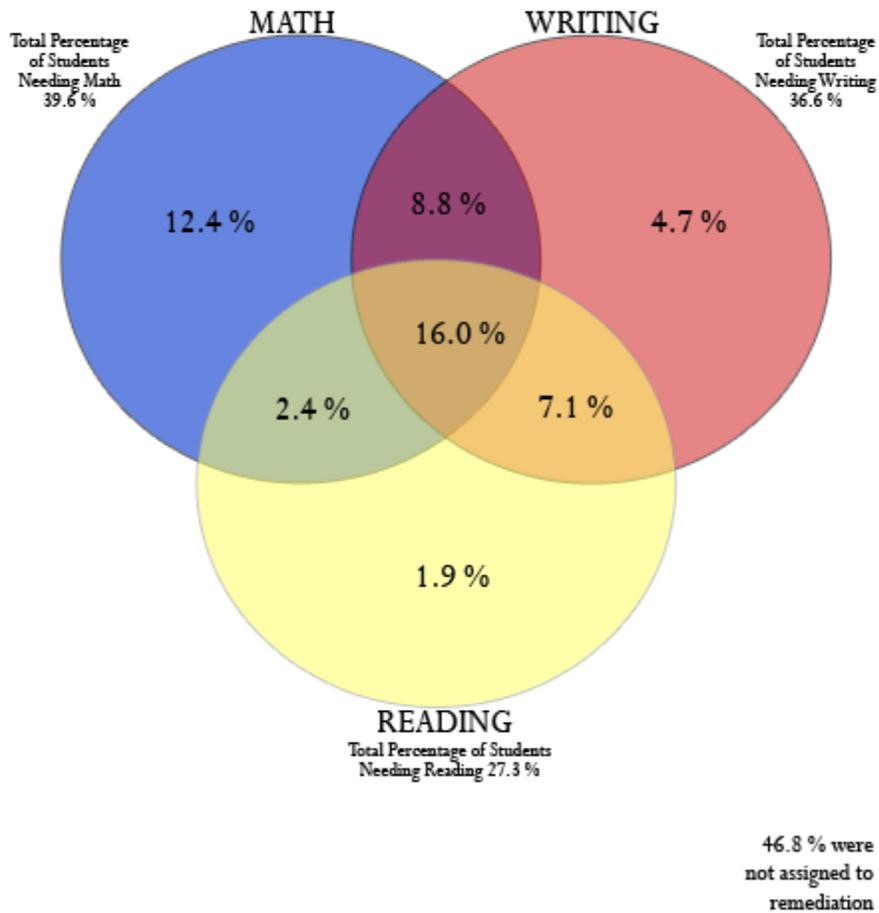
The abysmally low high school completion rates when combined with the state's remediation rates for students who graduate from high school, point to unsatisfactory results by any measure. Preparedness levels are not acceptable, and are a source of concern for education practitioners, policymakers and the public at large. A recent Colorado Commission on Higher Education report (2008 Legislative Report on Remedial Education, CCHE) provides data on the remediation needs of recent high school graduates from years 2005 to 2008. The report indicates that in fiscal year 2008, an

estimated 30 percent of all students were in remediation courses for at least one discipline. At two-year institution remediation rates for recent high school graduates were reported at an overall rate of 53 percent. At four-year institutions the overall remediation rate was about 21 percent. The report indicates 41,224 students enrolled in remedial courses at the two-year institution level, with 61% of the students passing; the remaining 39% failed, withdrew, or took incompletes. At four year institutions, 4,356 students enrolled in remedial work, with 59% passing and 41% failing, withdrawing, or taking incompletes. Further disaggregating data by race and ethnicity paints an even bleaker picture despite numerous reforms that have ranged from increased graduation requirements, focus on curriculum rigor, narrowing the achievement gap and teacher quality.

In 2008, Colorado's remediation rates for recent high school graduates when looking at race/ethnicity were reported to be 79% for Black, non-Hispanics; 65% Hispanics, 60% Native Americans and 47% of White non-Hispanics at the two year institution level. Remediation rates for the four-year institution level were 44% for Black, non-Hispanic; 37% Hispanics; 43% Native Americans and 17% White, non-Hispanics. Worse is the reported increase for remediation for all student groups except for Black, non-Hispanic students. Colorado also reports an estimated cost for remediation of recent high school graduates at \$14.6 million, \$13 million in tuition paid by students, and not included were the costs for cash-funded courses, and remedial course work taken during the summer months.

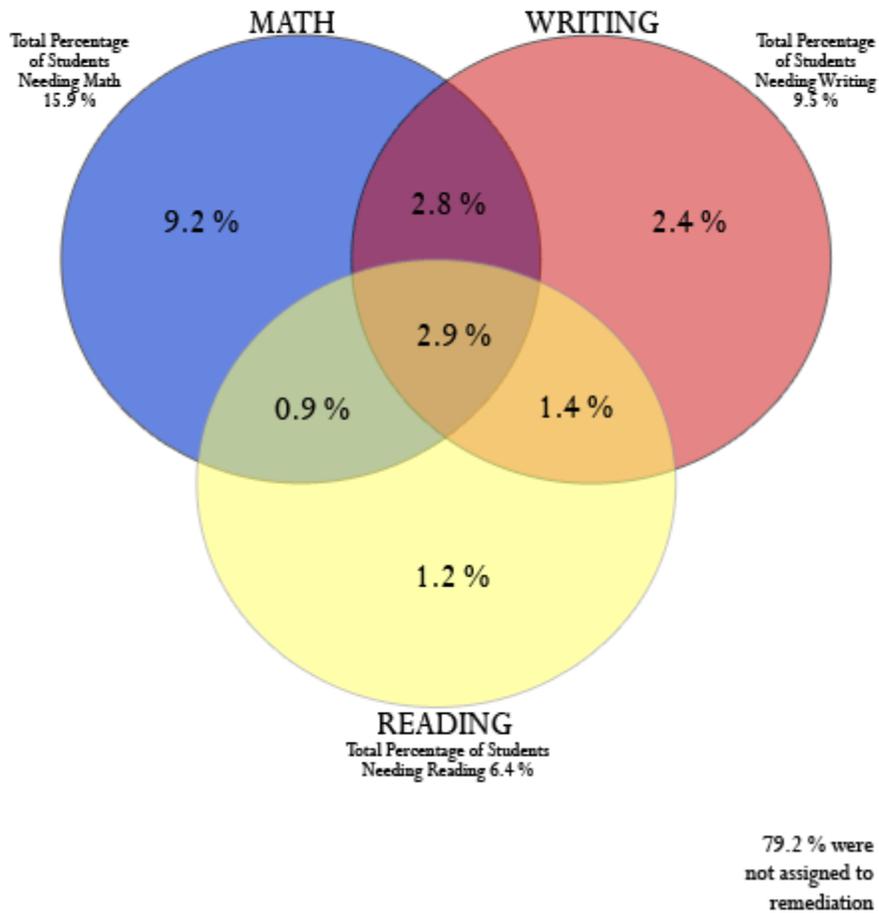
These statistics do not include the students who have dropped out of school. With this information revealed, and with educational attainment levels lagging behind other countries in the industrialized world, how can education leaders, policymakers and the community at large not reasonably demand a national codification of performance at higher levels? If national assessments mitigate the authority of local control, it is after states have been given a lot of latitude. A lot of experimentation by states has taken place, however, no matter how elegant the reform, the results have been less than inspiring for lower-income, first generation college students.

FIGURE 1:
Recent High School Graduates Requiring Remediation
Two Year Public (Nov 2008)



Source: Colorado Dept of Higher Education, 2008 Legislative Report on Remedial Education, December 11, 2008

FIGURE 2:
Recent High School Graduates Requiring Remediation
Four-Year Public (Nov 2008)



Source: Colorado Dept of Higher Education, 2008 Legislative Report on Remedial Education, December 11, 2008

Table 3: First-Time Recent High School Graduates Assigned to Remediation in at Least One Subject, by Sector and Gender, FY 2005 to FY2008												
Institutions/ Sector	Number of 1st Time Students				Assigned to Remediation in at least one subject							
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005		2006		2007		2008	
Recent Colorado High School Graduates Two-Year Public	#	#	#		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Female	4,653	3,972	4,084	3,898	2,643	56.8%	2,289	57.6%	2,303	56.4%	2,130	54.6%
Male	4,198	3,606	3,980	3,954	2,227	53.0%	1,944	53.9%	2,089	52.5%	2,047	51.8%
Unknown	11	-	-		9	81.8%	-	-	-	-		
Two-Year Total	8,862	7,578	8,064	7,852	4,879	55.1%	4,233	55.9%	4,392	54.5%	4,177	53.2%
Recent Colorado High School Graduates Four-Year Public												
Female	10,092	9,930	10,350	10,514	2,015	20.0%	2,112	21.3%	2,267	21.9%	2,391	22.7%
Male	9,314	9,284	9,643	9,796	1,472	15.8%	1,650	17.8%	1,682	17.4%	1,842	18.8%
Unknown	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-		
Four-Year Total	19,406	19,214	19,993	20,310	3,487	18.0%	3,762	19.6%	3,949	19.8%	4,233	20.8%
Grand Total	28,268	26,792	28,057	28,162	8,366	29.6%	7,995	29.8%	8,341	29.7%	8,410	29.9%

Source: Colorado Dept of Higher Education, 2008 Legislative Report on Remedial Education, December 11, 2008

Table 4: First-Time Recent High School Graduates Assigned to Remediation in at Least One Subject, by Sector and Race/Ethnicity, FY 2005 to FY2008												
Ethnicity	Number of 1st Time Students				Assigned to Remediation in at least one subject							
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005		2006		2007		2008	
Recent Colorado High School Graduates	#	#	#	#	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Two-Year Public												
Asian or Pacific Islander	269	253	285	258	134	49.8%	154	60.9%	182	63.9%	163	63.2%
Black, non-Hispanic	463	425	444	452	326	70.4%	294	69.2%	337	75.9%	359	79.4%
Hispanic	1,509	1,288	1,588	1,544	950	63.0%	879	68.2%	987	62.2%	1,009	65.3%
Native American	118	107	90	96	68	57.6%	52	48.6%	56	62.2%	58	60.4%
Non-Resident Alien	109	102	12	41	86	78.9%	83	81.4%	5	41.7%	21	51.2%
White, non-Hispanic	6,052	5,056	5,368	5,191	3,157	52.2%	2,616	51.7%	2,680	49.9%	2,425	46.7%
Unknown Ethnicity	342	347	277	270	158	46.2%	155	44.7%	145	52.3%	142	52.6%
Two-Year Total	8,862	7,578	8,064	7,852	4,879	55.1%	4,233	55.9%	4,392	54.5%	4,177	53.2%
Recent Colorado High School Graduates												
Four-Year Public												
Asian or Pacific Islander	914	888	966	1,001	159	17.4%	170	19.1%	176	18.2%	204	20.4%
Black, non-Hispanic	510	518	560	638	216	42.4%	219	42.3%	261	46.6%	283	44.4%
Hispanic	1,821	1,804	1,951	2,012	637	35.0%	638	35.4%	722	37.0%	753	37.4%
Native American	317	358	443	389	149	47.0%	154	43.0%	154	34.8%	169	43.4%
Non-Resident Alien	98	87	178	162	23	23.5%	16	18.4%	21	11.8%	45	27.8%
White, non-Hispanic	14,932	14,629	14,863	15,294	2,155	14.4%	2,339	16.0%	2,358	15.9%	2,555	16.7%
Unknown Ethnicity	814	930	1,032	814	148	18.2%	226	24.3%	257	24.9%	224	27.5%
Four-Year Total	19,406	19,214	19,993	20,310	3,487	18.0%	3,762	19.6%	3,949	19.8%	4,233	20.8%
Grand Total	28,268	26,792	28,057	28,162	8,366	29.6%	7,995	29.8%	8,341	29.7%	8,410	29.9%

Source: Colorado Dept of Higher Education, 2008 Legislative Report on Remedial Education, December 11, 2008

What Is Working in Colorado?

Colorado GEAR UP is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under a federal grant. It is managed by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education on behalf of the Governor's Office. Colorado GEAR UP receives \$3.5 million each year about half of which is used for college scholarships. The rest of the budget covers a statewide team of site coordinators and on-site programs.

Colorado GEAR UP's mission is to help prepare all students to meet the high expectations for college admission and graduation, thus helping to level the playing field for the neediest of students and families. The majority of GEAR UP students are from families in which no one has ever attended college. Of the 750,000 students attending Colorado Public Schools, 250,000 qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch. Colorado GEAR UP provides students and families with the information, resources and academic support necessary to finish high school and gain admission to college. The goal of Colorado GEAR UP is to reverse the Colorado Paradox by providing college access and support internally and through public and private partnerships.

Beginning in the 7th grade and continuing through high school graduation, Colorado GEAR UP is the State's pre-collegiate service program to encourage low-income and first generation students and students in need of academic support to consider and successfully prepare for college. Students who begin preparing for life after high school at an early age, and with the support of their families, are better prepared academically and financially to succeed in college and/or their future careers.

Colorado GEAR UP measures academic progress starting in 7th grade. Students are assessed twice a year to determine academic growth. Those that demonstrate academic need are provided supplementary support. Assessing students early allows us to identify and target individual student needs. The goal is for 9th graders to start high school on grade level.

The lessons of Colorado GEAR UP include that traditional measures for determining college preparedness have not done enough to reduce the learning gap. Standardized tests given at the end of junior year or in the senior year of high school alert schools and students about academic deficiencies much too late.

Colorado GEAR UP recommends that college preparedness efforts begin with assessment of college readiness early in high school and access to college level courses as soon as possible for each student.

Colorado GEAR UP advocates testing all students on the statewide college placement test known as ACCUPLACER as early in their high school career as possible. Students that take ACCUPLACER are immediately informed of their scores. If a student fails to achieve the standard score for introductory level college courses, ACCUPLACER prescribes the level of remediation the student needs to become college-ready.

Unlike other standardized tests, ACCUPLACER provides students with a very specific indicator of their skills. A student might not know how a “satisfactory” or “proficient” score translates to college readiness anymore than they understand the difference between an 18 and a 19 on other tests. However the ACCUPLACER placement tests are much more specific about skills and knowledge that are critical for all students, especially those in the first generation to attend college.

The second reason for administering ACCUPLACER early in high school is for more meaningful and timely feedback to teachers and staff about the students’ competencies. The students that have been accepted to college but are forced to take remedial classes, in theory, passed remedial level material in middle school or sometime in high school. Ironically, many students passed high school core curriculum with A’s or B’s. The ACCUPLACER stresses the mis-alignment between high school grades and college placement exams in a very meaningful way to high school teachers. The candor stimulates much more meaningful discussion between K-12 and Higher Education on curriculum content standards and the rigor of scholarship at both levels.

Finally, the delivery of the ACCUPLACER to students early in their high school careers saves states’ money. The State of Colorado spent over \$53 million on remediation classes for “college” students. By taking the ACCUPLACER early, gaps in student learning could be identified, and the remediation classes could be appropriately offered while the students are in high school. State expenditures on remediation at the postsecondary level could be reduced substantially, in addition to increasing the college success rates of students. Studies indicate that as many as 75% of students required to take remedial classes do not complete their Bachelor’s Degree.

Another important lesson of Colorado GEAR UP is that college course options be offered earlier in the high school progression. Clearly important is the students’ cognitive ability and motivation to succeed. Due diligence in course-taking offerings is essential. Colorado GEAR UP evaluation of student success shows that enrolling students in college classes during their high school career stimulates college matriculation of low-income students more than all other interventions.

<u>HIGH SCHOOL</u>	Total # of Sophomores (NOT IN GU) beginning 2008-09 school year	Total # of Sophomores (NOT IN GU) taking/taken a college class	%	Total # of GEAR UP sophomores	Total # of GEAR UP sophomores taking/taken a College class	%
Abraham Lincoln	450	93	20.7	39	38	97.4
Alamosa	143	1	0.7	49	29	59.1
Aurora Central	795	11	1.4	64	55	85.9
G. J. Central	446	0	0.0	39	18	46.1
Greeley Central	400	0	0.0	17	17	100
Lamar	120	8	6.7	52	33	63.4
Montbello	556	55	9.9	15	14	93.3

MLK	99	50	50.5	24	22	91.7
North Denver	258	14	5.4	53	43	81.1
Northridge	266	0	0.0	59	57	96.6
Pueblo East	260	44	16.9	54	46	85.2
Wasson	271	5	1.8	37	22	59.5
Total:	4064	281	6.9	502	394	78.5

Source: Colorado GEAR UP

Colorado GEAR UP began offering college courses to high school sophomores two years ago. What has been learned is that early college attendance eases postsecondary matriculation and removes the psychological barriers students have about college participation. Preliminary observation and informal evaluation of current college matriculation rates show promising results.

Challenge and Opportunity

The economic, social, political and academic forces today present a deep and broad array of daunting challenges. If the country is committed to making progress in educational attainment across all student populations, the stalking horse of local control vs. national educational assessment must be redefined. In many respects, that argument has created a false dialogue, and has contributed to the problem. States do not have the capacity (financial or technological) to add horsepower and right mix of incentives to invent and implement new assessment systems in a timely manner before another generation of students is lost. A more honest dialogue would examine the choices and successes that the current challenges dictate for a different state/national conversation.

How can the lessons of the last twenty years forge a new platform to go forward? Let's get clarity about the educational attainment problem. It is not a time to be mushy about it. Let's examine the external forces, the economic, political, and resource environments. Let's document the internal forces of tradition, capacity, leadership stability, culture and the different schools of thought on centralization and decentralization. Let's draw on state and national expertise. Let's tap state and national champions to demand national benchmarks of student performance assessments. Surely, we can recognize that America is truly at a crossroads, and that states and the nation need highly developed dashboards (with much local and state data for context), along with external benchmarks provided by the National Assessment.

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