



# Six Aspects to Laying the Groundwork for a College-Going Culture

David T. Conley, Ph.D.  
CEO, Educational Policy Improvement Center  
Professor, University of Oregon  
Director, Center for Educational Policy Research

Presented at:  
American Youth Policy Forum  
Washington, DC  
April 27, 2009



# Aspect 1: Understand the Research on College Readiness

## Goals of Current EPIC Research

- Understand what it takes to succeed in entry-level college courses
  - What makes a college course a college course?
  - What are the content of key general education courses?
  - What are the key cognitive strategies and key content knowledge necessary to succeed in entry-level college courses?
- Unpack the complexity of the US postsecondary system
  - How does “college ready” differ across institution types?
  - What are the differences in general education courses among different types of postsecondary institutions?
- Scrutinize more closely claims that “college and work readiness are the same”
  - Is baccalaureate readiness the same as readiness for a two-year certificate?
  - How do both compare to career pathways that require neither?

# Examples of Recent EPIC Research on College Readiness

- **College Board College Curriculum Studies**
  - Identified and analyzed thousands of “best practices” entry-level college courses in 37 subject areas
- **AP Course Audit**
  - Analyzed course syllabi from all AP courses worldwide (over 150,000)
- **In-depth studies of 38 exemplary high schools**
  - Learned lessons on best practices for schools with large populations of minority and low-income students
- **Texas Course Validation Study**
  - Compared 930 entry-level course syllabi in 20 different subject areas from 98 institutions to Texas College and Career Readiness Standards

# Aspect 2: Adopt A Common Definition of College-Ready

## A More Comprehensive Definition:

- The level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in credit-bearing general education courses that meet requirements for a baccalaureate degree
- “Succeed” is defined as completing entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency sufficient to:
  - pass a subsequent course in the subject area
  - apply course knowledge to another subject area
- This definition gives high school teachers a clear target for selecting curricular content, setting challenge level, and gauging student progress- *if they understand what goes on in entry-level college classes*

# Four Key Dimensions of College Readiness

- **Key Cognitive Strategies**
  - Problem solving, research, interpretation, reasoning, precision and accuracy
- **Key Content Knowledge**
  - Key foundational content and “big ideas” from core subjects
- **Academic Behaviors (self-management)**
  - Time management, study skills, goal setting, self-awareness, persistence
- **Contextual Skills and Awareness (“college knowledge”)**
  - Admissions requirements, affording college, colleges types and missions, college culture, relations with professors

## Redefining College Readiness

David T. Conley



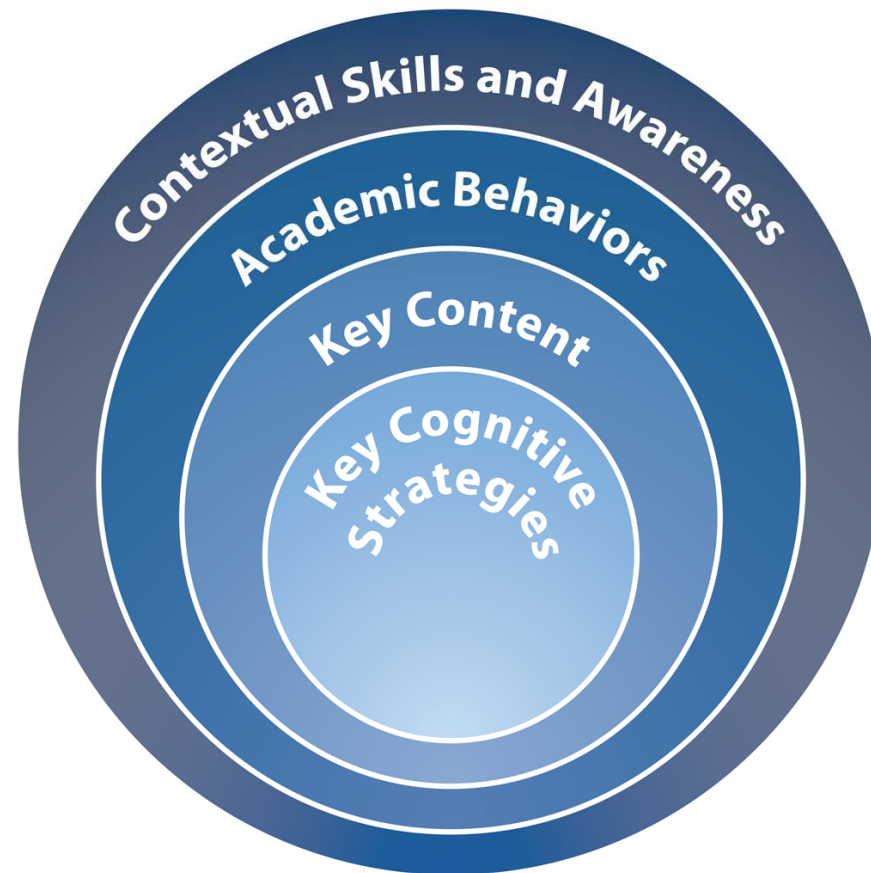
Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, March 2007

720 E. 11th Ave., Suite 203 | Local 541-346-6153 | epiconline.org  
Eugene, OR 97401 | Toll Free 877-766-2279 | contact@epiconline.org

**epic**  
Educational Policy  
Improvement Center

**Download at:**  
**[www.epiconline.org](http://www.epiconline.org)**

# The Nested Nature of the Four Key College Readiness Dimensions



# Example Performances of College-ready Students

- Write a 3-5 page research paper that is structured around a cogent, coherent line of reasoning
- Read with understanding a range of non-fiction publications, textbooks, and technical materials
- Produce written products that are consistently free of grammatical and spelling errors and that reflect proper writing conventions
- Employ fundamentals of algebra fluently in science courses and labs
- Collect and analyze data precisely and accurately
- Interpret conflicting explanations of an event or phenomenon
- Evaluate the credibility of sources



# Example Performances of College-ready Students

- Punctually attend and contribute to a study group outside of class
- Create and maintain a personal schedule that includes a to-do list with prioritized tasks and appointments
- Complete successfully a problem or assignment that requires about two weeks of independent work and extensive research
- Utilize key technological tools including appropriate online and desktop applications
- Locate and evaluate the motivations of websites containing information on colleges, the admissions process, and financial aid
- Present an accurate self-assessment of readiness for college



# Aspect 3: Apply Lessons Learned from the Research

- Ensure all high school students are fully ready in all four dimensions of college readiness
- Ensure all students practice and hone college readiness strategies throughout high school
- Challenge all students cognitively, especially those who are still developing their literacy and language skills
- Assess students in more complex ways that gauge key cognitive strategies
- Do not expect student support programs (remedial ed) to make up for a lack of proper preparation in high school
- Get high schools and colleges to communicate directly to develop more local programs that align and aid student transitions
- Encourage high schools and colleges to take initiative locally within larger state and federal policy frameworks

# Aspect 4: Apply Key Principles of College Readiness to High Schools

- ✓ **Principle 1:** Create and maintain a college-going culture in the school
- ✓ **Principle 2:** Create a core academic program that is aligned with and leads to college readiness by the end of 12th grade
- ✓ **Principle 3:** Teach key self-management skills, require students to use them, and provide students with feedback on how well they are developing these skills
- ✓ **Principle 4:** Make college real by preparing students for the complexity of applying to college and enrolling in an entry-level course
- ✓ **Principle 5:** Create assignments and grading policies in high school that more closely approximate college expectations as students progress
- ✓ **Principle 6:** Make the senior year meaningful and challenging
- ✓ **Principle 7:** Build partnerships with and connections to postsecondary programs and institutions

# Aspect 5: Develop Enabling State and Federal Policy

- Get everyone together at the table—secondary and postsecondary—with reasons for them to align their systems
- Designate funds that can be accessed only when the two systems plan and work together
- Ensure that a “highly qualified” high school teacher is someone who can prepare potential first-generation students for college success
- Simplify the college application and financial aid eligibility processes
- Ensure any federal “common core standards” are built around college readiness skills
- Encourage local high school-college partnerships that innovate
- Encourage dual-enrollment, AP, early college high schools
- Develop new assessments that move beyond standardized tests to measure complex college readiness skills and knowledge

# Case Study: Texas

- Policy framework in HB 1
- College readiness standards with which K-12 standards must be aligned
- Validation of college readiness standards against content of entry-level courses
- Reference courses that specify content and expectations of entry-level college courses
- Analysis of Career/Technical Education courses in relation to college readiness standards
- Demonstration high schools that show how to make more students ready for college
- Regional meetings to connect high school and college faculty and administrators to plan for better alignment
- Teacher education redesign to ensure the next generation of teachers prepares more students to be college-ready

# Other Examples of Efforts Beyond States to Improve Readiness

- **Gates/Carnegie Foundations**
  - New assessment and diagnostic systems
  - “Fewer, clearer, higher” standards
  
- **Other States**
  - South Carolina: Paired courses between high school and college
  - Massachusetts: Regional meetings with high schools and colleges
  - Maine: Analysis of all high school courses against state standards
  - Several states requiring all students to take college admissions test
  
- **Achieve**
  - State-level teams to align standards
  
- **US Dept of Ed**
  - Race to the Top, Common Core Standards

# Aspect 6: Get the Ball Rolling

- Get states to implement K-16 policy frameworks
- Use federal convening authority to create partnerships and networks to address these issues
- Use federal rule-making authority to motivate postsecondary institutions in particular to participate in alignment activities
- Remove obstacles to data sharing across system boundaries
- Sponsor projects to develop new teaching materials and to train educators to make more students college ready
- Sponsor research that documents what works and make policy changes based on findings