



# Understanding College and Career Readiness

**T**o improve college and career readiness, the concept itself must be clearly understood. This book uses the terms “college” and “postsecondary education” interchangeably, but there is a critically important difference. “College” connotes a four-year liberal arts education to many people, even though community colleges provide a great deal of career and technical training. Most of the resistance against providing a larger proportion of students with readiness for postsecondary education comes from people who are concerned that these efforts will shoehorn all students into a traditional four-year degree path. “Some form of postsecondary education” is the focus of this book; it connotes some kind of additional education or training after high school, including degrees, certificates, the military, and additional training that is neither a degree nor a certificate. To have a family-sustaining wage with the ability to move up a career ladder, most people need some kind of additional postsecondary education and/or applied training. The focus of this book is that every high school graduate should be prepared to succeed in the postsecondary environment to which they aspire. The phrase “postsecondary readiness” is somewhat clumsy and thus this book interchanges terms, but we wish to make the meaning and intent clear from the onset.

With the emergence of the concept of college and career readiness in states, regions, localities, and at the national level, many states and organizations are developing definitions of college readiness, career readiness, or both. This book utilizes the definition developed at the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), based on research on this topic over the past two decades. EPIC's definition of college and career readiness follows:

Students who are ready for college and career can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate degree, a certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs, without the need for remedial or developmental course work. They can complete such entry-level, credit-bearing courses at a level that enables them to continue in the major or program of study they have chosen. (Conley, 2013, p. 51)

A student is college and career ready if he or she has the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully transition to the next step in his or her desired career or educational pathway. Such readiness includes both academic and nonacademic knowledge and skills (discussed in Chapter 2).

Another important distinction is the difference between college versus career readiness. Every distinct career pathway and college degree require knowledge, skills, and abilities that are unique to that

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area. According to research, however, college readiness and career readiness share many important elements, including study skills, time-management skills, persistence, ownership of learning, problem solving, collecting and analyzing information, and communicating in a variety of ways (Conley & McGaughy, 2012). Think of a Venn diagram. The first

circle represents the college readiness knowledge and skills and student needs. The second circle represents the career readiness knowledge and skills. The intersection and overlap between the two circles represent the knowledge and skills all students need when they graduate high school. The outlying areas represent the knowledge and skills that are unique to their specific postsecondary and career fields. College and career readiness, then, represent the intersection: the knowledge, skills, and abilities that all students need to make the next step, without remediation, along their desired career pathway.

## History

The focus on systemic reforms to connect K–12 and postsecondary education started in the last decade of the 20th century. Prior to that, most of the efforts in the field were focused on programmatic responses, such as the development of precollege outreach programs, to support traditionally underserved students. Those efforts had their origins in the Great Society reforms of the 1960s and were critically important, but awareness grew that (a) getting students *into*, but not *through*, postsecondary education was insufficient, and (b) disconnected education systems cause problems for many students.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, research in this field focused on informing educators, policymakers, and the public about how the students who need the most supports in K–12 and postsecondary education often get the least (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003) and that the sense of belonging and belief in oneself as “college material” is often lacking in first-generation college goers (McDonough, 1997). Research at that time also pointed to the tiers or tracks of educational offerings in middle schools, high schools, and broad access postsecondary institutions that reinforce inequalities and make it impossible for a large proportion of students to reach the American Dream through educational means (Oakes, 2005). The United States has set up systems that act as though they support educational and economic mobility, but to fulfill those aspirations across our disconnected educational systems, students need that special person who helps them navigate. The systems themselves are not set up to catch and hold

*What is the research base behind this definition?*

The significance of this definition is that it is both measurable and actionable. Research, policy, and practice can all be informed by answering a critical question: *What are the knowledge and skills students need to be successful in entry-level training programs, the military, or credit-bearing college courses?* Staff at EPIC has spent the past decade researching these critical questions and has established a considerable research base documenting these knowledge and skills. EPIC has collected and analyzed thousands of course documents and instructor ratings about the importance and applicability of knowledge and skills necessary for success in entry-level college courses in general education and in career and technical education (CTE) areas in both two- and four-year institutions of higher education (please refer to [www.epiconline.org/publications](http://www.epiconline.org/publications) for a complete listing of the research).

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the students who need help the most and provide them with the educational, motivational, psychological, and behavioral supports to lay the groundwork for successful adulthood. Each system has its own ways of helping students, but there is little that spans systems, and for students who attend more than one postsecondary institution—the vast majority of students in college—they are usually on their own to navigate, often by reaching out to extremely understaffed student services offices.

Fast forward to today and “college and career readiness” are mantras in states across the country and in the nation’s capital. The Common Core State Standards (Common Core) were adopted in most states. The rhetoric of today often risks masking the core reasons for the efforts and the difficulties in making success after high school a reality for traditionally underserved students. Backlashes against the Common Core are growing, and the original hope of the “K–16 reform movement” could be lost if educational reform efforts shift focus to another issue.

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In response to research about disconnected systems and to political pressure and many grant opportunities that require the development of cross-system governance entities, regional and local P–16 councils have sprouted up across the country. P–16 councils are collabora-

tive teams that are formed to create a unified educational system from preschool through postsecondary education or to focus on a key issue or issues related to high school-to-college transitions. These councils usually focus on issues related to college and career readiness, such as counseling and supports, curricular alignment, and workforce preparation” (Moore, Venezia, & Lewis, 2015).

Ensuring that the local partnerships spur reforms that affect students’ lives and are not just forums for people to update each other about their respective systems’ efforts is the focus of this book. A key issue here is that the experiences and expectations in K–12 must educa-

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tion be directly connected—or scaffolded, to use the language of educators—to expectations in postsecondary education and in the workforce.

Connecting to workforce needs is not meant to imply that students should get educated just to become workers or that students should be in different curricular tracks that relegate some students to

lucrative and flexible careers and others to minimum wage for life. We are strong supporters of (and have each benefitted from) excellent liberal arts education in high school and college. If liberal arts training—the abilities to think critically, analyze information, question assumptions, synthesize ideas, and so forth—is lost in a race to provide technical training too early, we believe that we will be left intellectually poorer, and the risks regarding tracking traditionally underserved students into old forms of vocational education are large. At the same time, it is clear that many students are not engaged by traditional approaches and that promising hybrids that infuse technical knowledge and experiences with strong abilities to think, analyze, synthesize, and so forth are being developed to create high-level, applied, learning opportunities for all students. Those experiences must be personalized; they are dependent on students' interests and educational strengths and weaknesses. Such efforts can be seen in California's Linked Learning and Career Pathways Trust initiatives, in Chicago's and New York's P-TECH schools, in Jobs for the Future's Pathways to Prosperity initiative, and many others across the country.

So what does this all mean in the context of this book? This book sits squarely in the center of these tough conversations that focus on some of the hardest educational issues in our country—issues around the meaning of public education, about access and equity, and about relationships between K–12 and postsecondary education.

If readers take nothing else from this book, we hope that educators at all levels understand that working together across systems is not merely a technical issue that can be completed successfully by using specific tools and strategies or by meeting around a table together once or twice a month. This is also not simply about aligning policies at the state level or all getting on the same page about expectations at the national level.

While those efforts can help send clear signals and create coherent policy environments, this is about doing good work collaboratively and collectively across systems locally and regionally. This book is for the individuals that work directly with students on a daily basis—the people who have the power to transform individual students' lives. The work to connect systems is often more challenging than it seems like it should be, with different terminology, incentive structures, funding streams, politics, and so forth. Few people are paid to wake up in the morning and think about how to connect educational systems, and most of us are not explicitly rewarded, professionally, for doing so.

## College “versus” Career Readiness

As a predictable part of a healthy policy cycle, issues related to college and career readiness are currently receiving increased scrutiny and, in some quarters, strong pushback. One of the largest critiques of the issue is the concern that not everyone should or needs to go to college (such as Owen & Sawhill, 2013; Rosenbaum, Stephan, & Rosenbaum, 2010; Samuelson, 2012). As mentioned earlier, the concern is that focusing on “college readiness” equates to a singular focus on obtaining four-year bachelor’s degrees and not the plethora of pathways available for success beyond high school. Some careers require a college degree; others do not, but they do require training (and some of that is highly technical). What all of the commentators seem to agree on, and is consistent with the messaging of this book, is that everyone needs some kind of education and/or training after high school to have a successful and productive life. This is why throughout this book, the terms “college and career readiness” and “postsecondary readiness” are used interchangeably. The goal of this book is not to prepare all students to incur massive debt attending a

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This book supports the conclusion of Harvard’s Pathways to Prosperity report, “The message is clear: in 21st Century America, education beyond high school is the passport to the American Dream” (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011, p. 2). Students need to be able to learn

well and succeed in whatever setting they choose beyond high school. What is emerging from research is that college and career readiness share many important elements, but they are not exactly the same. There is a foundational set of knowledge and skills that all high school graduates need for success beyond high school, but the precise set of knowledge and skills students need is influenced significantly by the next step they intend to take, with various career areas, institutions, and certificate or degree programs requiring proficiency in different content knowledge (Conley & McGaughy, 2012). College and career readiness represent the shared knowledge, skills, and abilities everyone needs, and the additional knowledge and skills individual

students need are dependent on the specific career area, admissions, degree, certificate, and/or training requirements. Communities should work together to provide the following:

A program of instruction at the secondary school level should therefore be designed to equip all students with the full range of necessary foundational knowledge and skills and help them set high aspirations and identify future interests . . . Readiness is a function of the ability to continue to learn beyond high school, and particularly in postsecondary courses relevant to students' goals and interests, as represented by their choice of major or certificate program. (Conley, 2013, p. 51)

The very process of obtaining a high school diploma should keep the doors open for students, not close the ability for students' to access some career pathways.

## Rationale

During a college readiness workshop sponsored by the California Community College Chancellor's Office in 2011, a group of community college admissions counselors gathered to discuss college and career readiness issues. One counselor from a Northern California community college shared a story that resonated with the participants. She described a recent meeting she had with a new student and the student's parents. The parents started the meeting by describing how proud they were of their daughter. She was the first person in their family to attend college. They had requested the meeting with the college admissions counselor because they were confused by the placement test score information the daughter had received. They had many questions, such as the following: What are placement tests? What is developmental education? Why do they have to pay for the developmental education courses since their daughter would not receive credit toward her two-year degree? The parents left the meeting upset. Their daughter had worked very hard in high school, passed all of her classes, and met all of her graduation requirements. The family kept asking, "What did we do wrong?"

Lack of academic preparedness for college is a stark reality nationwide. About 60 percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities are placed in remedial courses (Bailey & Cho 2010), but it is hard to get accurate

estimates because remediation is measured differently everywhere and, in some places such as California and Florida, community college students can choose not to take remedial courses, even if they receive a recommendation from their colleges to do so. Some community colleges have remediation rates of over 90 percent of their entering students, and 70 percent is not uncommon. Even four-year universities with relatively stringent entrance requirements have large numbers of students who need additional academic support; approximately half of the incoming students in The California State University (CSU) system require remediation. This is particularly troubling in the CSU system, since all entering students must have completed a college preparatory curriculum in high school and earned a B or better for their overall GPA ([www.calstate.edu/eap/](http://www.calstate.edu/eap/)). Remediation serves as a serious hurdle for degree and certificate completion in college; students requiring remediation graduate at substantially lower rates. Bailey and Cho (2010) explained the remediation “pipeline” as follows:

To take math developmental education as an example, 28 percent of those referred did not enroll. Another 30 percent failed or withdrew from one of the developmental courses in which they enrolled. Ten percent dropped out of their developmental sequences without ever failing a course. Thus, only 31 percent successfully completed their sequences of math remediation. Of those completers, about half (16 percent of all of those referred) actually completed a college-level course in math within three years. (p. 2)

This inability to place into credit-bearing entry-level college courses represents a significant barrier for attaining educational and career aspirations.

The same preparedness issues plague other arenas. In a national survey, employers reported a “skills shortage” for the U.S. workforce (Casner-Lotto & Benner, 2006). Table 1.1 lists the top skill deficiencies for high school graduates as reported by the results of a national sample of employers.

In addition to skills deficiencies for entering the workforce, many high school graduates who aspire to join the military also lack the requisite preparedness. To qualify for military service, potential recruits must meet the minimum score for their desired branch (each branch sets its own score) on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Between 2004 and 2009, 23 percent of the test-takers in the sample did not achieve a qualifying score (at least 31 out of 99).



**Table 1.1** Skill Deficiencies of New Workforce Entrants for High School Graduates

Skill Deficiencies	Percentage of Employer Respondents
Written Communications	81
Professionalism/Work Ethic	70
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	70
Oral Communications	53
Ethics/Social Responsibility	44
Reading Comprehension	38
Teamwork/Collaboration	35
Diversity	28
Information Technology Application	22
English Language	21

For African American candidates, 39 percent did not qualify, and for Latino candidates, the rate of ineligibility was 29 percent (Offenstein, Moore, & Shulock, 2010).

## New Economic Reality

Improving college and career readiness enables students to achieve their aspirations. Whereas approximately 88 percent of eighth-grade students report that they aspired to attend college (Venezia et al., 2003), only 44 percent directly enter college after high school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008). Without some additional education, including short-term training, simply earning a high school diploma solidifies someone's place as a low-wage earner or as part of the unemployed. While there are many stories circulating in the media about high tech geniuses who shirked college and made millions in Silicon Valley, those people had several unique factors in their favor. They were expert in a particular area—technological innovation—that also required levels of math proficiency, motivation, and persistence that many do not have. To imply that what happened to them is replicable for thousands of other people is disingenuous. Moreover, the knowledge and skills discussed in this book as prerequisites for

success after high school are consistent with the experiences of many tech whizzes—to support individualized and high levels of inquiry, innovation, creativity, motivation, and resiliency.

For most students graduating from high school now, a diploma simply does not afford the same opportunities it did up until the end of the 20th century. Most professions, particularly those offering clear advancement opportunities, require some formal training beyond high school. Workers can no longer learn a single skill set and expect to secure lifetime employment relying solely on that same skill set at a life-sustaining wage. Research predicts that by 2018, 63 percent of all jobs in the United States will require some postsecondary education, and 90 percent of new jobs in growing industries with high wages will require some postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). This reality does not mean that every high school graduate should complete

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four years of college. What it does indicate is that stopping at high school is not sufficient to ensure access to a career with a family-sustaining wage.

Not only are future job prospects tied to a higher skilled workforce, current job opportunities are also linked to levels of training. For example, one study found

that from 2006 to 2011, only 3 in 10 recent high school graduates were employed full time, compared to college graduates who are employed at nearly twice that rate (Van Horn, Zukin, Szeltner, & Stone, 2012). From the start of the Great Recession in 2007 through 2012, people with bachelor's degrees gained over two million jobs. Those with an associate degree or some college emerged from the recession with almost the same number of jobs available as at the beginning. The group experiencing the most devastating job losses were those for workers with a high school diploma or less, losing almost six million jobs during that time period with no sign of recovery (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2012). Over the past three decades, all of the net job growth in America has been generated by positions that require at least some postsecondary education (Symonds et al., 2011).

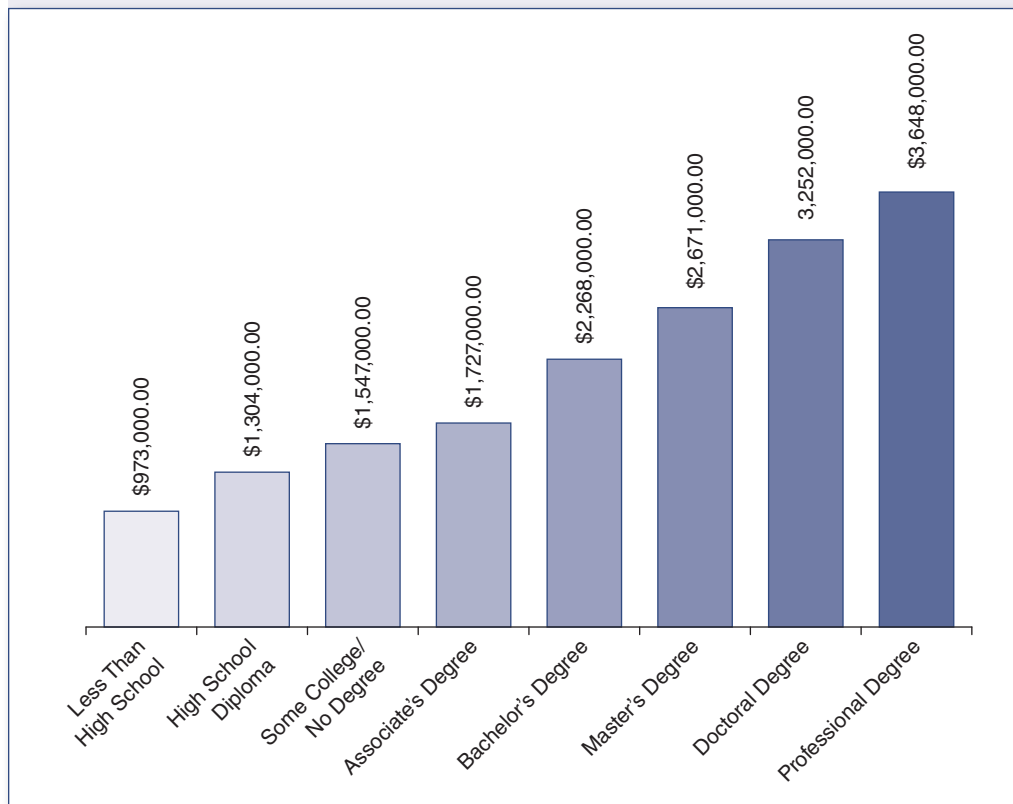
In addition to increased opportunities, increased education, on average, translates to higher earnings. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, in the report entitled "The College Payoff" (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011), examined lifetime earnings for all education levels and earnings by occupation, age, race/ethnicity, and gender. The results were clear: a college degree is key to economic opportunity, conferring substantially higher earnings

on those with credentials than those without (Carnevale et al., 2011). See Figure 1.1 for the median lifetime earnings by the highest level of educational attainment.

The report further clarifies, however, that individual earnings vary greatly depending on the degree type, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and occupation. For example, about 28 percent of workers with associate degrees earn more than the median earnings of workers with bachelor's degrees (Carnevale et al., 2011, p. 3). What this does indicate, however, is that overall, the more education a person obtains, the potential for obtaining higher lifetime earnings increases.

A hallmark of our 21st century economy is rapid change, requiring a flexible and adaptable workforce able to create and sustain innovations and adapt to ever-changing needs. For example, former Intel Corporation Chairperson Craig Barrett has stated that 90 percent of the products his company delivers on the final day of each year did not

**Figure 1.1** Median Lifetime Earnings by Highest Educational Attainment, 2009 Dollars



Source: Carnevale, A., Rose, S., & Cheah, B. (2011).

exist on the first day of the same year. To succeed in that kind of marketplace, U.S. firms need employees who are flexible, knowledgeable, and scientifically and mathematically literate (National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise, 2007). The challenge for U.S. education, at all levels, is to prepare students to be able to keep up with this frenetic and unpredictable world and economy, in addition to sustaining the education of students who receive solid training in liberal arts fields. In the words of Andreas Schleicher, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Education Directorate, "Schools have to prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created, technologies that have not yet been invented and problems that we don't know will arise" (2010). This is often a critical challenge for localities and regions—to utilize notoriously unreliable labor market forecasting data to inform the development of curricular pathways and school/postsecondary-based applied learning opportunities (see Chapter 4 for additional discussion).

## The Need for Collaboration at All Levels

To provide the vast majority of high school students with the academic and nonacademic knowledge and skills they will need to succeed after high school, there will have to be unprecedented levels of collaboration between high schools and colleges and between the bodies that govern them. Historically, public education and higher education systems have operated independently. Until recently, high school teachers and college faculty rarely discussed jointly their expectations for students in their classes. High school counselors rarely met with college counselors to talk about whether they were helping their students prepare well for college. State boards of education, working in tandem with state educational agencies, adopted their own standards and accountability systems with little involvement from higher education. High schools focused on meeting state accountability requirements and on preparing an elite group of students to be eligible for admission to selective colleges—not for students to be ready to succeed in a wide variety

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of postsecondary educational settings, such as community colleges, apprenticeships, or training programs. Institutions of higher education (either as part of a state system or independently) determine admissions policies, courses,

and curriculum, with wide variance in requirements, expectations, and alignment with workforce needs.

These disconnects have had serious ramifications for students—especially for students with the fewest educational and economic resources available through their families and communities (Venezia et al., 2003). High school curricula have traditionally been developed without consulting with postsecondary education, leading toward current disjunctures, such as different conceptions of writing and of algebra across the systems. Similarly, assessments have historically been disconnected, with entering college students often taking course placement tests that assess different knowledge and skills than were taught in their senior year—often with no warning and no ability to prepare. Students with familial, peer, and financial resources tend to weather these disconnects more successfully than do students without those benefits, due to such factors as supplemental supports and information from family or community members who have had experience with college and/or desired career paths.

The United States has historically focused solely on access to postsecondary education and training, rather than having a connected goal of postsecondary success, driven by a host of policy changes starting with the GI Bill in the 1940s, gaining steam in the 1960s with Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society reforms, and a plethora of precollege outreach programs. In the past 10 years or so, faced with data showing that a large proportion of traditionally underserved students drop out of high school and college, educators, community leaders, and policymakers have concluded that the country has moved the needle on access, but that is not sufficient to provide excellent educational opportunities for a large number of students. Students need access to post-high school readiness—to ways to succeed in whatever they choose to pursue. That is a complex and highly personalized endeavor that will require new resources, relationships, and perspectives about the purpose and aims of education at all levels.

Many state and national efforts over the past decade have begun to address these disconnects between what high schools demand of students and what postsecondary institutions expect a mere three months later (for students who go directly from high school to college). In the field, these are called systems alignment issues. One state-level example is work being done in Texas. Beginning in 2007, the Texas Legislature passed legislation requiring the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to collaborate to support the Texas College and Career Readiness Initiative. This multiyear initiative has resulted in the creation of the Texas College and

Career Readiness Standards (TCCRS), jointly developed by vertical teams of secondary and postsecondary faculty members. Additional state-level work to support the initiative included incorporation of the TCCRS into the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and K–12 assessment system and the development of implementation materials to assist educators statewide in translating the TCCRS into practice.

At the national level, the largest effort to improve college and career readiness is represented by the Common Core. In June 2010, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) released the Common Core. The aim of the Common Core is to define the knowledge and skills students should achieve in order to graduate from high school ready to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses and in workforce training programs (CCSSO & NGA, 2011). The Common Core provides information about what students are expected to learn, no matter where they live. It is intended to be more rigorous than many states' current standards and to be more applied (Van Roekel, 2013). To date, 43 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have voluntarily adopted these national standards. Objectives of the Common Core are for states to have shared targets for both secondary and postsecondary systems to aim toward, and to collaborate across, state lines in the development and identification of best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessments, while retaining flexibility on how to teach locally.

While a goal of the Common Core is to help close the gap between high schools and colleges, the standards have significant limitations. First, the Common Core only identifies the math and literacy skills students need to be successful beyond high school. This does not represent the complete set of knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary readiness. Increasingly, educators and researchers are coming to an understanding that student success throughout K–12 and postsecondary education relies a great deal on key cognitive strategies, or habits of mind, such as persistence, resiliency, self-efficacy, organizational skills, communication skills, and so forth (see, e.g., Casner-Lotto & Benner, 2006; Conley, 2013). Some of these strategies can be developed and enhanced through experiences such as music, the arts, and contextual or applied learning opportunities. Second, the Common Core standards are not geared toward English Language Learners or students with special needs.

The Common Core is currently facing intense political scrutiny in states across the country. As summarized in *The Washington Post*, those on the right tend to view the Common Core as a federal intrusion toward a national curriculum interfering with state and local control.

Those on the left have voiced a number of issues surrounding the standards, including not enough input from educators into the drafting, that the standards are not based on any research, and that they ignore what is known about early childhood education (Strauss, 2013). In addition, there is concern across the political spectrum about the connection between adopting the Common Core and state applications for federal funding and the use of data from Common Core-aligned assessments for high stakes teacher evaluations.

The authors of this book are neither staunch supporters nor critics of the Common Core, although they use a critical lens to analyze new reform efforts. They are researchers and educators interested in furthering the identification and examination of the quality, implications, and impact of college and career readiness standards efforts. It is clear from our country's experimentation with standards since the 1990s that standards alone are not sufficient to change educational opportunities for our nation's underserved youth. A significant aspect of the Common Core, along with other states' college and career readiness standards (such as Alaska, Minnesota, Texas, and Virginia), in relation to this book, is that they provide a shared point of reference for high schools and colleges to work together. Faculty members and administrators can partner to examine the standards in relation to their current practice, and through this partnership, they can clearly articulate at the local level what knowledge and skills students need to be successful in that community. However, if these reference points are not appropriate, or if they are interpreted or implemented poorly, they can do more harm than good. This raises the most important issue: implementation—translating the vision of the Common Core into classroom-based practice—is the biggest challenge for the Common Core initiative. Providing enough support and resources for teachers and administrators to change current practice is critically important.

## Blame the System

The question, “What did we do wrong?” from the family at the Northern California community college reveals a major challenge in engaging in communitywide efforts to improve college and career readiness. These conversations, if not carefully framed, can quickly devolve into finger-pointing and focusing on blame, not solutions.

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What needs to be emphasized throughout the process is that this is a systems alignment issue; no group or institution is solely responsible for creating the problems, and no one group or educational entity can solve the problems individually. In one poignant editorial being circulated on the Internet, a recently retired high school teacher, Kenneth Bernstein, issued a warning to college professors:

No Child Left Behind went into effect for the 2002–03 academic year, which means that America’s public schools have been operating under the pressures and constrictions imposed by that law for a decade. . . . Please do not blame those of us in public schools for how unprepared for higher education the students arriving at your institutions are. We have very little say in what is happening to public education. Even the most distinguished and honored among us have trouble getting our voices heard in the discussion about educational policy. (Bernstein, 2013)

Teachers and schools work very hard to educate their students well. Students and families work hard to meet the high school graduation and college admissions requirements. Education and workforce systems have worked largely in isolation in setting standards, expectations, and requirements. There have been no mutually agreed upon targets for student readiness post-high school; in fact, each postsecondary institution creates its own entry-level expectations (and many individual faculty members do as well within their own classrooms). While this is an important hallmark of academic freedom, it also makes it incredibly challenging to signal to students—particularly traditionally underrepresented students who would be the first in their families to go to college—the key knowledge and skills they need to be successful after they graduate from high school. In short, everyone has been working very hard to do exactly what the different systems have been holding them accountable to do, driven by their own passions to do right by students.

The critical messaging to avoid the “blame game” is to keep the focus on the need for shared responsibility to move forward. All community members share this challenge—students, educators, families, community leaders, employers, and more—to build successful educational pathways that span from early childhood to adulthood. Whereas state and national efforts are beginning to address these system misalignment issues, true change occurs at the local level. The existence of a state or national framework to support high school and college partnerships can help prod the work toward common goals and objectives, but ultimately, collaborations of local educators,



workforce representatives, and community representatives drive the reform efforts enabling students to be prepared for success beyond high school in that locality. Communities need not wait for state or federal direction; they can and do engage in this critical work independently. By moving beyond fault finding and instead toward emphasizing the need for shared responsibility, the conversations can be shaped constructively to pave the way for student and community success.

The remainder of this book outlines how a community can come together to overcome the historically disconnected educational systems. Whereas federal and state support can provide valuable resources and assistance in expediting such efforts, this is not a necessary element. Local stakeholders can do this work with or without external support. What is necessary is a shared vision that every student in the community should graduate high school ready to succeed. This book details how to accomplish this critical endeavor.

## SUMMARY

College and career readiness share many important elements, including core knowledge and skills from across the curriculum, study skills, time-management skills, persistence, ownership of learning, problem solving, collecting and analyzing information, and communicating in a variety of ways. The intersection and overlap between what students need to know and be able to do to be ready for college and for entering a career represent what all students need when they graduate high school. The outlying areas represent the knowledge and skills that are unique to their specific postsecondary and career fields. College and career readiness, then, represent the intersection: the knowledge, skills, and abilities that all students need to make the next step, without remediation, along their desired career pathway. This conception has evolved from a focus on access to postsecondary education to a focus on success in college and career preparation, and it requires the need to collaborate at all levels and not assert blame on a particular part of our educational system.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with the authors' definition of college and career readiness? Why or why not? What could be an alternative definition?
- Should all students have the opportunity to become prepared for some form of postsecondary education?

- When should college and career readiness activities start, ideally? How can those activities be scaffolded for students and faculty over time?
- Given the wide range of postsecondary options, how can all high schools provide students with high quality readiness opportunities—both academic and applied?
- Should applied postsecondary readiness activities also have an integrated academic core? What are the pros and cons of such an approach?