

# CABINET REPORT <sup>(1)</sup>

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## **Students still not quite ready for college or careers**

*by Alisha Kirby*

(Iowa) Even as teachers become more comfortable teaching to readiness standards that are increasingly aligned with higher education, high school graduates may actually be less prepared, according to a new report.

In its new National Curriculum Survey, ACT – a non-profit research organization focused on education and workforce development – found that while 95 percent of high school teachers reported feeling comfortable teaching to new college and career readiness standards, only 16 percent of college instructors felt their incoming students were adequately prepared.

“Among those reporting any degree of familiarity with the Common Core, [42 percent] believe the standards are either ‘a great deal’ or ‘completely’ aligned with college instructors’ expectations regarding college readiness,” authors of the report wrote.

“However, alongside this reported degree of alignment between the Common Core and college instructors’ expectations about college readiness, the percentage of college instructors who reported that their incoming students are well prepared for college-level work in their content area has declined,” researchers concluded.

College and career readiness has been a prominent feature in nearly every initiative from the U.S. Department of Education in recent years including the No Child Left Behind waivers, as well as funding grants such as the Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants.

While Common Core itself was developed at the state level, the Obama administration's effort to promote it as the desired version of college and career ready standards provoked a lot of political pushback in recent years.

Since the last ACT survey was released, a handful of states have adopted Common Core and repealed the standards before they were fully implemented, or began to develop other rigorous state standards and computer-based assessments.

Of the more than 2,000 college instructors since surveyed by ACT, 16 percent reported students being well prepared for college-level work. In the previous two studies in 2009 and 2012, 26 percent of college professors felt their incoming freshmen were prepared.

The reauthorization late last year of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act gives each state more freedom to define what constitutes "challenging academic standards," and strictly prohibits the U.S. Secretary of Education from interfering in the development of new standards or creating incentives intended to influence the process.

Under the current setting, the authors of the ACT report suggest states maintain their commitment to high standards.

Researchers also found what appeared to be a disconnect between which skills determining success are prioritized in high school, college and in the workforce.

The report was based on interviews with more than 9,000 participants which include the college professors along with almost 3,000 high school teachers and nearly 400 workplace supervisors.

Critical thinking – which includes interpretation, analysis and explanation – was rated as the most important quality among high school educators, while study skills were emphasized in college and content knowledge was ranked highest in the workplace.

Behavioral skills such as "acting honestly" and "sustaining effort" by staying persistent and completing work were considered the most important nonacademic skills among those surveyed.

Responses across all demographics were most aligned in technological uses and education. More than half of the supervisors surveyed rated basic computer terminology, information security, email and ethical use of information as most important in the workplace.

Colleges and K-12 educators also deemed ethical use of information – which involves adhering to rules regarding copyright, attribution or plagiarism – a key factor in lessons involving technology.

"Because technology use has expanded well beyond the purposes of specialists and into everyday life and work, its important role in acquiring and applying information generally...means that computer skills need to be part of the broader K-12 curriculum, not limited to mathematics courses," authors wrote.