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College Success Task Force Report, Executive Summary

Higher levels of education benefit the health and economic and social well-being of individuals and their communities, yet many students leave high school unprepared for college or careers. Many students who are academically prepared begin a degree at a two- or four-year college but fail to complete a credential either because they lack the financial resources to do so or encounter non-academic challenges that discourage them. Despite Maryland's successes in education, every year, thousands of students who enter a two- or four-year college must take at least one remedial course, at significant cost to the student, counties, and State. Gaps in achievement and educational attainment linked to race, income, and parental education are evident in secondary and postsecondary education. Maryland's high school population is now majority minority and has an increasing number of students from households in which there is no one with a college degree. If Maryland is to continue to have an internationally competitive workforce and to meet Governor O'Malley's goal of increasing its percentage of college degree holders to at least 55 percent by 2020, then the achievement gap throughout P-20 must be eliminated. Lifelong learning is increasingly important, but young people who earn a college degree are much more likely to be employed. To prepare more students to choose their postsecondary path with confidence, and to help those who choose college succeed once there, PreK-12 and postsecondary educators have to do more to prepare and support students for college and career success. Parents, communities, businesses, and the State must partner with educators if all students are truly going to be ready to be independent adults and informed citizens.

To address these interrelated challenges, the College Success Task Force was charged by Governor Martin O'Malley's P-20 Leadership Council of Maryland to examine current Maryland policies and practices related to the alignment of public secondary and postsecondary expectations, standards, and student learning outcomes. The task force was to identify gaps between standards for high school exit and college entrance, identify national benchmark educational achievement standards, and make recommendations for appropriate governing boards. The task force charge coincided with the work of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and the task force used the Common Core work on benchmarked standards to guide some recommendations. The task force was also to identify strategies for college *success*, and, in response to the Commission to Develop the Maryland Model for Funding Higher Education, to define "college readiness."

A few key themes emerged in the task force work. Repeatedly, it was clear that collaboration across the Pre-Kindergarten through graduate/professional school (P-20) educational system is needed to make real change. Using a data-driven approach is also prerequisite to implementing strategies to help students succeed. To help all students, not just those on certain career pathways, the task force focused on core academic skills—those required for entry into all two-year and four-year degrees, as well as for rigorous postsecondary training in the military or certificate programs. Academic skills are not the only core skills of readiness, which is why the task force also addressed building structures of support to help students succeed and emphasized P-20 educational institutions have flexibility to work with individuals' needs. Academically and socially, some students will need extra support to meet their goals, such as through extended time in school, enrichment activities, and learning communities. Having such additional supports available in schools and colleges should not be seen as an anomaly but as a standard component of the education provided by all schools and colleges.

Although it is just one element of success after high school, a key step is to ensure that high school graduates have the reading, writing, and mathematics skills needed to place them in credit-bearing college courses. This point has implications for the non-college-bound, too. Achieve, the National Skills Coalition, and other policy organizations argue that these core skills are also key to entering training for middle-skill jobs, which require more preparation than a high school degree and less than a bachelor's, wherever that instruction takes place. (While most careers that pay a family-sustaining wage require at least an associate degree, a few may require a certificate; all require strong core skills.) Because these core academic skills are necessary for all students' success, the task force made recommendations focused on aligning expectations for high school graduation with expectations for entry into higher education, with close attention to language arts and mathematics.

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Because of the importance of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education to the state's economy, and because many students with an initial interest in STEM do not complete a STEM degree, the task force has also called for content experts to identify what specific skills are needed to prepare for a STEM major in a two-year or four-year degree program. This does not mean that non-STEM majors are any less important, but non-STEM majors generally do not require as much specific preparation to enter introductory courses. Economics majors, for example, will need calculus, but they may not need it in the very first year of college; engineering majors do, if they are to graduate in four years with a bachelor's degree.

While it is the expectation that all students should be prepared for college and the workforce, it is important the performance level expected for college readiness be high enough to meaningfully predict success in most introductory general education college courses. The task force wants there to be a realistic understanding of college readiness and strategies in place to encourage more students to meet that standard, but recognizes that not all students will do so. Currently, many students who are not college-ready enter college—and supports of different kinds help many succeed. Students in Maryland community colleges who complete recommended remediation graduate or transfer at slightly higher rates than students who did not need remediation, so leaving high school not college-ready does not mean college is out of reach. The task force wants all students to aspire to and plan for college and does not wish to discourage students who are not college-ready from embarking on a college path. There is a communications challenge to wrestle with here: How can we let all students clearly know if they are college-ready without discouraging those who need to do more work to be fully ready? Several of the recommendations address themselves directly or indirectly to this challenge.

Helping students identify their career interests early and making it clear how to achieve career goals are important parts of engaging students and their families in aiming at and above college-readiness benchmarks throughout PreK-12. Career planning remains important throughout a college education as well so that students leave college with direction and know how to make the most of their interests and skills. Various kinds of student supports are needed, including career exploration, to strengthen our system of education. Academic supports are not the only elements of college success. Other supports include helping students and families identify student financial assistance, building student communities to create peer supports, structured work experiences, and raising awareness of the variety of student services available. Teachers need support, too, if they are to prepare all students well, including strong content preparation, training to work with diverse students, and ongoing professional development to deliver a college-readiness curriculum to all students.

To deliver a college-readiness curriculum, it must be clear what college-ready means. Ready for one college major may not mean ready for another; ready to enter a credit-bearing course may not mean ready to *succeed* in such a course; and intellectually ready does not mean socially, emotionally, and financially ready. Since most career-training requires at least an associate degree or a postsecondary certificate program, there is a clear connection between being college-ready and career-ready: the same core academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics are needed. **A career-ready student must be college-ready, even if the student chooses a pathway other than college. The task force believes ongoing communication efforts will be needed to refine the definition of college readiness to include performance levels and other specific indicators, but that a college-ready student has these characteristics:**

- Prepared to succeed in credit-bearing introductory general education college courses or in an industry certification program without needing remediation;
- Competent in the Skills for Success, which are a component of the Core Learning Goals identified in the late 1990s by the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education and educators as identifying skills for workplace readiness; these skills include learning skills, thinking skills, communication skills, technology skills, and interpersonal skills. While the particular technologies that students need will change, the general skills remain the same. Skills for Success is a Maryland model that resembles

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significant portions of the more recently developed Partnership for 21st Century Skills, which also includes these skill sets to prepare students to work in a diverse, innovation-driven economy;

- Has identified career goals and understands the steps to achieve them; and
- Mature enough and skilled enough in communication to seek assistance as needed, including student financial assistance.

In addition, the task force distinguishes between general college readiness, which includes the characteristics above, and **STEM-readiness**. For a student to be prepared to succeed in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs without needing additional time or help, specific training in mathematics and science courses is needed.

The task force recommendations in this report are sometimes technical or highly specific in the language they use. To provide a summary of the recommendations for a general audience, they are summarized below in the “recommendations at a glance.” The extent to which these recommendations can be implemented depends on the resources, will, and collaboration of the State, school districts, and colleges.

Recommendations at a glance:

1. **Change curricula and high school graduation requirements to meet higher standards:** Adopt the Common Core Standards and create P-20 discipline-based groups to back-map PreK-12 curricula from college-ready standards; change high school graduation requirements so students must earn at least one credit of math in each year of high school, to include study at least through Algebra 2; regularly convene P-20 State and local alignment groups; increase the number of career and technology education program completers who are also college-ready .

Responsibility: MSBE, local school boards and districts, MSDE, MHEC, colleges, governing boards

2. **Identify and adopt college/career-readiness assessments to be used statewide:** Use Maryland P-20 discipline-based groups to identify assessments and college-readiness performance levels for language arts and mathematics. Administer benchmark assessments throughout students’ school careers, and administer college-readiness tests to all students no later than 11th grade as part of that coherent sequence of measures to keep students on track for graduating from high school ready for college and career training.

Responsibility: MSBE, MSDE, MHEC, General Assembly, Governor, colleges and their governing boards

3. **Adopt diploma endorsements for college/career-readiness:** Identify on the diploma students who achieve basic college readiness (reading, writing, mathematics) and those who are college-ready for STEM majors; work on a communications strategy that (1) describes the rationale for endorsements; (2) provides guidance to students seeking endorsements; and (3) honors other choices.

Responsibility: MSBE, MSDE, MHEC, local school districts, institutions of higher education

4. **Rethink how schools and colleges deliver education:** Prioritize and expand supplemental education instead of remediation, including such efforts as transition courses, bridge programs, and learning communities; provide more flexibility to differentiate instruction and pathways; explore ways to reshape or extend school calendars; expand access to early college options (e.g., dual or parallel enrollment, AP, IB); redesign courses; strengthen early childhood learning; use technology more effectively.

Responsibility: MSDE, MSBE, MHEC, institutions of higher education and their governing boards, local school boards and school districts, Governor’s Office, General Assembly, MD Lumina Making Opportunity Affordable Leadership Team

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5. **Develop a statewide system of support to increase college and career success:** PreK-12 schools and colleges need more systemic supports so all students receive needed guidance; ensure each student has an individual plan for pathways/completion in PreK-12 and higher education; expand programs for diversity and for first-generation and low-income college students; communicate to all students and families about available supports.
Responsibility: MHEC, MSDE, higher education institutions and their governing boards, local school systems and schools, PTA, MBRT

6. **Make changes to teacher preparation and professional development:** Adapt teacher preparation and professional development so, as support to higher education allows, P-20 partnerships can expand professional development networks and involve higher education in teacher development to the Advanced Professional Certificate. Have a statewide professional development plan to support a college/career-ready curriculum.
Responsibility: MSDE, MHEC, institutions of higher education, local school systems

7. **Communicate more effectively about college-readiness and financial assistance for college:** Greatly enhance statewide efforts to inform low-income and first-generation-college families of what students need to do to be college-ready and how to apply for financial aid; expand communications about saving for college and about how much aid can be provided by the State's Rawlings Educational Excellence Awards (FARMS-eligible students are entitled to an award that covers expenses at a public two- or four-year college); expand guidance and mentoring; colleges should clearly post minimum admission requirements and information about students accepted.
Responsibility: General Assembly, Governor, MHEC, MSDE, MPT, higher education institutions, local school systems, PTA, MBRT, community organizations

8. **Make high schools and colleges accountable for college/career-ready graduates:** Make high schools accountable for graduating more students prepared for college and careers, and hold colleges accountable for students succeeding in gateway courses. Develop an accountability model with a growth component so improvement is rewarded.
Responsibility: MSDE, MHEC, institutions of higher education and their governing boards

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Recommendation 1: Ensure that by 2011 all districts have PreK-12 curricula and graduation requirements aligned to the Common Core Standards and back-mapped from the college- and career-ready standards.

Responsibility: MSBE, local school boards, MSDE, MHEC, school districts, and colleges

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 1 [change curriculum and H.S. graduation requirements]

- ✓ The State should use Race to the Top or other funds to have all 24 school districts and higher education work together to have a Maryland-Common Core curriculum aligned grade-by-grade to the new K-12 standards and back-mapped from college-ready standards. Standards in mathematics and communication skills should be reinforced across disciplines.
- ✓ Once the State Board of Education acts on the Common Core high school exit standards, MSDE and MHEC should convene discipline-based alignment teams with faculty and staff from across P-20 to participate in the development and implementation of aligned curricula and student performance benchmarks to ensure P-20 alignment in core areas. Local P-20 alignment teams should also be convened once State standards are clear to assist with local curricula review and implementation.
- ✓ State and local alignment teams should be institutionalized (i.e., with formal structures in place) to monitor alignment at regular intervals, helping to ensure that college-ready skills are clear to teachers and students. It is especially important that these teams operate regularly at the local level since that is where alignment or lack thereof affects classroom practice.
- ✓ As part of adopting a college-ready curriculum, school districts and alignment teams should determine if appropriate transition courses are available in the senior year of high school in expository reading, writing, and mathematics to assist students who are not college-ready in becoming college-ready prior to graduation. If such courses are deemed necessary but not available, districts should partner with MSDE and higher education, as well as the State and local alignment teams, to help develop, share, or adapt existing transition courses. (Some states have expository reading courses that could be models.)
- ✓ The State Board of Education should require students to earn at least one credit of mathematics each year of high school to be awarded a Maryland high school diploma and those credits should include courses through at least Algebra II. The 4-year requirement should begin with the 9th-grade class of 2011, and the Algebra II requirement should begin then or as soon thereafter as the necessary PreK-8 supports can be in place to make this requirement feasible (but no later than the 9th-grade class of 2015). After Algebra II, students should continue in rigorous mathematics.
- ✓ School districts should monitor Career and Technology Education (CTE) completers to ensure an increasing percentage of CTE completers who are also college-ready.

Recommendation 2: Based on the Common Core Standards, develop by June 2012 college/career readiness assessments with an agreed-upon readiness score.

Responsibility: MSDE; MHEC; Maryland General Assembly (if funding is required for assessments); Governor (to participate in multi-state initiative and link to Race to the Top); institutions of higher education and their governing boards

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 2 [identify & adopt college-readiness assessments]

- ✓ Maryland PreK-12 should participate in a multi-state assessment consortium and compete for federal grants to develop assessments to be shared by the consortium state partners. In this effort, PreK-12 teachers and faculty from higher education should work in collaboration to develop a system of assessment that is linked to standards and provides teachers, students, and families with information

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on how students are performing relative to identified K-12 benchmarks so that students may be assisted in staying on track for graduating college- and career-ready.

- ✓ Maryland PreK-12 should work with the multi-state consortium and also with higher education partners within the state to identify appropriate assessments for identifying college- and career-readiness, as well as for benchmarks leading to readiness. Part of the assessment system to be adopted should include testing no later than 11th grade to identify if students are college-ready in key areas (Core skills and/or disciplines, as decided by the assessment experts) or approaching readiness or not ready. Schools should use the information to guide students and families in planning the senior year (transition courses, dual enrollment, supplemental instruction and then transition course etc.).
- ✓ Maryland higher education content and assessment experts should be closely involved in identifying college-ready performance levels and other criteria for high school exit that are strong predictors of success in credit-bearing, introductory general education courses.
- ✓ Higher education should help provide incentives to students for taking the college readiness assessment (or assessment system) seriously. One important incentive would be for students to know that achieving college-ready scores on these assessments would qualify students to enroll in credit-bearing introductory college-level courses in these disciplines upon admission to the college or university.
- ✓ The agreed-upon criteria used to identify college-readiness should be developed by K-12 teachers and higher education faculty working collaboratively and should be used by schools and colleges in accountability processes (see recommendation 8).

Recommendation 3: To help encourage more students to graduate college-ready, include a general college/career-ready endorsement and a STEM-specific endorsement for qualified students on the high school diploma beginning with the incoming 9th-grade class of 2011.

Responsibility: MSBE, MSDE, MHEC, local school districts, institutions of higher education

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 3 [adopt diploma endorsements for college-readiness]

- ✓ Use the multi-state assessments as part of determining if a student is eligible for a general college-ready endorsement on the high school diploma. Convene appropriate parties to identify assessments and performance levels indicating college readiness.
- ✓ Maryland P-20 faculty and administrators should be convened to develop by June 2011 criteria for STEM college/career-readiness in STEM and determine the most appropriate manner in which to measure such readiness. The group should work for one definition of STEM readiness and indicate readiness differences by discipline only as necessary. The group should remain apprised of work being done through the National Research Council to determine if efforts can be dovetailed or consolidated.
- ✓ Develop a communications plan that (1) describes the rationale for endorsements; (2) provides guidance to students seeking such an endorsement; and (3) honors other career choices.

Recommendation 4: Redesign as needed P-20 instructional delivery models to embrace innovative concepts and flexible structures that meet the diverse learning needs of the state's students.

Responsibility: MSDE, MSBE, MHEC, institutions of higher education and their governing boards, local school boards, Governor's Office, General Assembly; local school systems, Maryland Lumina Making Opportunity Affordable leadership team (includes MACC, MHEC, MICUA, USM, Governor's Office, legislature)

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 4 [Rethink how schools and colleges deliver education]

- ✓ Schools and colleges should provide students with enhanced learning opportunities to accelerate progress and completion, especially but not only when students perform below expectations (e.g., pre-

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school education, summer academic enrichment and bridge programs, early college access, accelerated learning programs). These programs may require additional time in school or time devoted to a particular subject.

- ✓ Transition courses should be developed for high school seniors in mathematics, expository reading, and writing; these may be especially helpful if validated college-ready performance levels cause a temporary spike in remediation rates. (See also recommendation 1 and strategy on p. 12.)
- ✓ Local school boards should explore what flexibility is available to them through section 7-103 of the *Education Article* to extend school calendars as appropriate to ensure all students receive a high-quality college-ready education.
- ✓ Colleges and universities should explore how course redesign, effective use of technology, alternative calendars, and other successfully piloted strategies can be brought to scale to support both access to higher education and quality within it.

Recommendation 5: By July 2011, develop a plan for a collaborative statewide system of support for PreK-12 and higher education to ensure both a smooth transition from high school to college/career and success in college.

Responsibility: MHEC; MSDE; higher education institutions and their governing boards; local school systems and schools; PTA; MBRT

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 5 [a statewide system of support to increase college success]

- ✓ Build capacity for administrators to help them communicate the “big picture” of college readiness to students and families throughout PreK-12.
- ✓ Coordinate academic and student services to provide appropriate supports to ensure student success.
- ✓ Have each student in PreK-12 and in higher education, in collaboration with appropriate staff and/or faculty, develop a completion and career plan and update it at intervals.
- ✓ Support colleges using their strategic plans to identify ways to improve developmental education, as well as to generate greater overall student success by coordinating programs.
- ✓ Continue to develop State and local P-20 partnerships to develop programs to support students and to ensure good communication between PreK-12 and higher education with respect to college readiness standards, high school curriculum, and how to smooth students’ transition from high school to college.
- ✓ Address the shortages of staff and resources in both PreK-12 and higher education that are needed to implement appropriate programs to support students.
- ✓ Expand efforts to include parents and families in P-20 partnership efforts as a means of strengthening support services being developed.
- ✓ Develop a plan for showing the alignment of support systems P-20, similar to the alignment we show for standards, assessments, and curriculum, with particular emphasis on supports for students with disabilities (including parental release for the sharing of information between PreK-12 and higher education).

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Recommendation 6: Convene during the 2010-11 school year a group of P-20 stakeholders--to include the deans and directors of teacher education and appropriate PreK-12 staff—to examine how the State and education institutions can best address challenges for teacher preparation and professional development in the 21st century.

Responsibility: MSDE, MHEC, institutions of higher education, local school systems

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 6 [make changes to teacher preparation and professional development]

- ✓ The State, school districts, colleges, and governing boards must prioritize professional development funds to support instructional changes necessary to implementing K-12 college- and career-ready curricula and using research on learning. If Maryland receives Race to the Top funding, some funds should be directed toward P-20 collaborative professional development to support these changes statewide.
- ✓ MSDE, working with the deans and directors of teacher education and local districts, should organize regional professional development workshops to address college-readiness. Topics would include the State Curriculum, minimum first-year expectations for college, college course syllabi, statewide minimum standards for a “C” paper, and philosophy and implementation of student portfolios in both high school and higher education.
- ✓ Technical experts, including the deans and directors of teacher education, should be convened in 2010 to consider NCATE changes and other topics. This group should consider work from the Teacher Shortage Task Force and the STEM Task Force, along with the *2009 State Plan for Postsecondary Education* and recent reports from MSDE and P-20, in formulating next steps. Among other topics it considers relevant, this group should consider the following:
 - The existing and potential role of professional development networks in maximizing the professional development resources of school districts, community colleges, and public and independent 4-year institutions;
 - How teacher development can offer teachers the differentiated professional development needed for their success and that of their students in a college-ready curriculum;
 - How collaborative professional development might be expanded statewide so higher education is more involved in staff development through a teacher’s induction and “residency” (the period through the achievement of an Advanced Professional Certificate);
 - An assessment of current resources and the need for further resources to support existing and enhanced professional training and development—and how fiscal responsibility can be shared appropriately for joint work in teacher preparation and professional development;
 - How Race to the Top plans and possible funding can catalyze these efforts;
 - Instructional shortage areas and recommendations from recent related reports; and
 - What incentives can be built into PreK-12 and higher education to institutionalize effective P-20 partnerships in teacher professional development.

Recommendation 7: By July 2011, develop a communications campaign for college and career readiness that focuses on (a) the expectation that every child in Maryland will be ready for college, (b) students' and families' awareness of the availability of state, federal, college-based, and private financial aid programs and scholarship opportunities, and (c) families' awareness of the importance of saving for college many years before college begins and savings strategies.

Responsibility: MD General Assembly and Governor; MHEC; MSDE; MPT; higher education institutions; local school systems; MBRT; PTA; community organizations

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 7 [communicate more clearly about college readiness & student financial assistance]

- ✓ Develop a comprehensive statewide communications plan that uses all partners to provide a unified message about the need to be college-ready, what it takes to be college-ready, and how financial aid is widely available to help all students enter college.
- ✓ Ensure that communications from the State and local levels are addressed to families from a child's earliest years in school, to include strategies for saving for a child's college education from well before college would begin.
- ✓ Promote web-based programs such as *MDgo4it* and use social media as part of the campaign.
- ✓ Use district master plans and school improvement plans to help implement a statewide communications strategy related to college readiness and student financial assistance.
- ✓ Provide communications to families in languages other than English.
- ✓ As resources allow, consider funding the College Readiness Outreach Program.
- ✓ Teach students how to budget and finance a 4- to 6-year undergraduate education and to be financially literate prior to entering graduate school, professional school, or the workforce.

Recommendation 8: Establish by July 2012 agreed-upon growth models for college/career readiness that require: (a) high schools to publish according to the defined model the percentage of students who graduate college/career-ready; and (b) colleges and universities to publish according to the defined model the percentage of full-time students who are retained each year and who were previously declared college/career-ready.

Responsibility: MSDE; MHEC; institutions of higher education and their governing boards

Summary of Strategies for Recommendation 8 [make high schools and colleges accountable for college-ready graduates]

- ✓ MSDE and MHEC, working with their district and segment partners, as well as other parties as appropriate, should convene P-20 technical experts to develop an accountability model that rewards growth in terms of developing and retaining college- and career-ready students.
- ✓ The accountability model should be developed prior to the administration of statewide college- and career-ready assessments.
- ✓ The process of developing a growth model of accountability should also involve consideration of some elements of performance other than growth.