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TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*

DATE: May 25 -26, 2010

SUBJECT: Recommendations of the College Success Task Force

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this item is to have the State Board take action on the recommendations of the College Success Task Force Report received in April 2010.

BACKGROUND/HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

Governor Martin O'Malley convened the College Success Task Force in the spring of 2009 and commissioned Dr. Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent, and Dr. James Lyons, Secretary of Higher Education, to co-chair this important group. He charged the Task Force with examining current Maryland policies and practices related to the alignment of secondary and postsecondary expectations, standards, and student learning outcomes, with particular attention to be paid to reading, writing, and mathematics. The task force was to identify gaps between standards for high school exit and for entrance to college, identify national benchmark educational achievement standards, and make recommendations for appropriate governing boards aimed at ensuring a smooth transition for students moving from 12th grade to the first year of college. The Governor also asked that the task force move beyond issues of preparation to look more broadly at strategies for students to be successful in college.

The task force began its work just as the state-led Common Core State Standards initiative was kicked off by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. These two organizations are partnering with Achieve, Inc., ACT, and the College Board to coordinate the development of voluntary state standards in mathematics, reading, writing, and listening and speaking for K-12 and high school exit. The standards are to be rigorous, internationally benchmarked, and aimed at graduating students prepared for college and workforce training; the exit standards are called the "college- and career-ready standards." The Common Core effort overlaps with the task force charge, and the task force concurred with the Governor and the Superintendent that Maryland would benefit from



participating in this Common Core initiative, so long as the standards are at least as rigorous as existing standards.

What does it mean to be college-ready? Educators, policy organizations, analysts, and legislators all over the U. S. have been grappling with this question. This question is now inseparable in policy discussions from that of how college readiness is related to workplace readiness. Confounding these discussions are misplaced beliefs that certain students could never be “college material,” that students who enter career training pathways in the military or in industry do not need rigorous preparation for those pathways, and that “college” only references a 4-year institution. There is a strong body of evidence about predictors of college readiness and success, but less research has been done to define “career readiness.” Achieve and ACT have both done research on this topic with employers and see a convergence of the skills needed in language arts and mathematics to be successful in entry-level college courses and workforce training programs that lead to careers that provide a family-sustaining wage (i.e., middle-skill jobs).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

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 technology skills that students need will change, the general skills remain the same. Skills for Success is a Maryland model that resembles significant portions of the more recently developed Members of the State Board of Education Partnership for 21st Century

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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.
2. Identify and adopt college/career-readiness assessments to be used statewide.
3. Adopt diploma endorsements for college/career-readiness.
4. Rethink how schools and colleges deliver education.
5. Develop a statewide system of support to increase college and career success.
6. Make changes to teacher preparation and professional development.
7. Communicate more effectively about college-readiness and financial assistance for college.
8. Make high schools and colleges accountable for college/career-ready graduates.

ACTION:

I am recommending that the State Board “Embrace the concepts of the recommendations of the College Success Task Force.”