

College and Career Readiness Definitions

Broadly, the concept of college and career readiness encompasses the knowledge, abilities, and skills required for student's success in a postsecondary settings. College and Career Readiness (CCR) was one of the main goals of President Obama's signature education program, in which he called for "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training."¹ As the world's economy continues to evolve, many stakeholders consider CCR and aligned educational shifts highly necessary in order for all students to remain competitive in a progressive environment.²

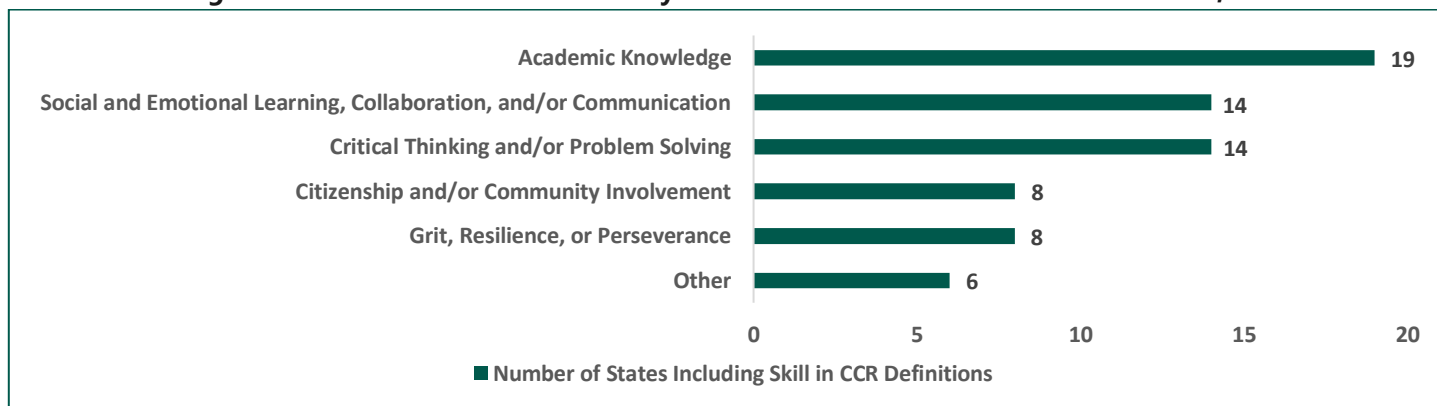
Definitions of college and career readiness (CCR) commonly emphasize preparation for success in introductory postsecondary coursework without needing remediation, as shown in Figure 1. Although some states define college and career readiness separately, most states use a single definition that encompasses both college and career readiness to reflect the substantial overlap between skills needed for workplace success and skills needed for success in postsecondary education.³

Figure 1: Common CCR Outcomes

STATE/ORGANIZATION	CCR OUTCOMES
ACT, Inc. ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of nonremedial postsecondary coursework
Arizona ⁵	<p>College Ready:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of nonremedial postsecondary coursework <p>Career Ready:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school diploma Completion of postsecondary degree or training program required for chosen career Qualification for a job that provides a family-supporting income and opportunities for advancement and that requires postsecondary training
The College Board ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation for a postsecondary degree or training program
Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) ⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of nonremedial postsecondary coursework
National Forum on Education Statistics ⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of nonremedial postsecondary coursework Development of skills needed for success in the workforce

As of 2014, state definitions of CCR most frequently included the skills listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Skills Most Commonly Included in State CCR Definitions, 2014



Source: College and Career Readiness and Success Center at American Institutes for Research⁹

Broader Definitions of CCR

Historically, definitions of CCR tend to emphasize grade-point averages and assessment scores.¹⁰ However, CCR definitions focused solely on academic content have been criticized for failing to incorporate nonacademic skills needed for success in the workforce and for focusing on high school students without providing schools the resources they need to support CCR across Grades K-12.¹¹ In recent years, organizations such as those outlined in Figure 3 advocated for a broader definition of CCR that incorporates both technical and social-emotional skills.¹²

Figure 3: Summary of College and Career Readiness Components

ORGANIZATION	COMPONENTS
Achieve ¹³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mastery of rigorous knowledge and skills in core academic disciplines ▪ The skills and dispositions necessary to be successful in charting a postsecondary path ▪ Successfully participated in postsecondary opportunities
College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) ¹⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ College aspirations ▪ Academic planning for college and career readiness ▪ Enrichment and extracurricular engagement ▪ College and career exploration and selection process ▪ College and career assessments ▪ College affordability planning ▪ College and career admission process ▪ Transition from high school graduation to college enrollment
Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) ¹⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key cognitive strategies ▪ Key content knowledge ▪ Key learning skills and techniques ▪ Key transition knowledge and skills

Broader definitions of CCR often reflect 21st century skills, which are competencies that students need to be most successful in the digital age.¹⁶ Both CCR and 21st century skills, such as those listed in Figure 4, are believed essential for success in the contemporary workforce.¹⁷ For example, the American School Counselors' Association's [Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success](#) identifies 35 CCR-related standards about students' beliefs around postsecondary readiness as well as behaviors associated with academic success.¹⁸

Figure 4: Sample 21st Century Skills

<p>Cognitive Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic mastery • Critical thinking • Creativity 	<p>Interpersonal Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and collaboration • Leadership • Global awareness 	<p>Intrapersonal Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth mindset • Learning how to learn • Intrinsic motivation • Grit
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Source: RAND Corporation¹⁹

College and Career Readiness Across Grade Levels

Research emphasizes the need to begin considering CCR before students reach high school, as closing gaps in preparation for CCR becomes more difficult as students move closer to high school graduation.²⁰ For example, the U.S. Department of Education defines College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) as “rigorous academic standards that build from Kindergarten through 12th Grade to support students’ preparation and success upon graduation from high school.”²¹ The College Board NOSCA’s CCR components build from elementary to high school, as shown in Figure 5.

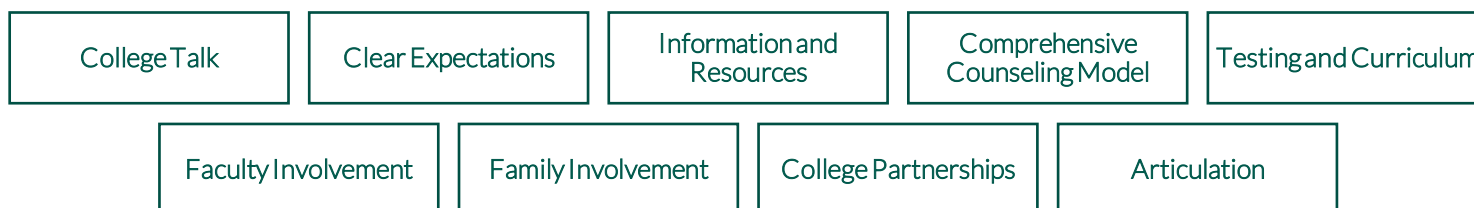
Figure 5: NOSCA CCR Components Across Grade Levels

Component	Elementary	Middle	High
College Aspirations	✓	✓	✓
Academic Planning for College and Career Readiness	✓	✓	✓
Enrichment and Extracurricular Engagement	✓	✓	✓
College and Career Exploration and Selection Process	✓	✓	✓
College and Career Assessments	✓	✓	✓
College Affordability Planning	✓	✓	✓
College and Career Admission Process			✓
Transition from High School to College Enrollment			✓

Source: College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy²²

Supports for CCR tend to be more general in the elementary and middle grades and then focus specifically on students’ postsecondary career and educational choices in the high school grades. Research on CCR in Grades 3-8 emphasizes the importance of a “college-going culture,” defined as “the environment, attitudes, and practices in schools and communities that encourage students and families to obtain the information, tools, and perspective to enhance access to and success in postsecondary education.”²³ Figure 6 shows key elements of a college-going culture identified by the Center for Educational Partnerships at the University of California, Berkeley.

Figure 6: Key Elements of a College-Going Culture



Source: University of California, Berkeley Center for Educational Partnerships²⁴

As states and educational institutions continue to emphasize postsecondary preparedness for students, they are encouraged to continuously revisit their CCR definitions to ensure the definition, goals, and policies are aligned and relevant.²⁵ The current, common definitions of CCR are included on the next page in Figure 7.

Common Definitions of College and Career Readiness

Figure 7: Common Definitions of College and Career Readiness

ORGANIZATION	DEFINITION
ACT, Inc ²⁶	"The acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll in and succeed in credit bearing first-year courses at a postsecondary institution (such as a two or four-year college, trade school, or technical school) without the need for remediation."
The College Board ²⁷	"Being prepared for any type of postsecondary education, including two-year and four-year institutions and trade and technical schools offering workforce training programs."
Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) ²⁸	"A student who is ready for college and career can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate or certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental coursework."
National Forum on Education Statistics ²⁹	"A student is college and career ready when he or she has attained the knowledge, skills, and disposition needed to succeed in credit-bearing (nonremedial) postsecondary coursework or a workforce training program in order to earn the credentials necessary to qualify for a meaningful career aligned to his or her goals and offering a competitive salary."
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers ³⁰	"The academic knowledge, skills, and practices in English language arts/literacy and mathematics students must demonstrate to show they are able to enter directly into and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses and relevant technical courses in those content areas at two- and four-year public institutions of higher education."

Endnotes

- ¹ "College and Career Readiness." ASCD, 2012. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/vol18/num03/College-and-Career-Readiness.aspx>
- ² "College and Career Readiness Standards." U.S. Department of Education. <https://www.ed.gov/k-12reforms/standards>
- ³ Mishkind, A. "Overview: State Definitions of College and Career Readiness." College and Career Readiness and Success Center, September 2014. p. 2. https://ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/CCRS%20Defintions%20Brief_REV_1.pdf
- ⁴ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "PLAN Overview." ACT, Inc. <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Plan-CommunicationText.pdf>
- ⁵ Chart contents taken verbatim from: Mishkind, Op. cit., p. 7.
- ⁶ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Research Foundations: Empirical Foundations for College and Career Readiness." College Board. p. 6. <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/research-foundations-college-career-readiness.pdf>
- ⁷ Chart contents taken verbatim from: Conley, D.T. "A Complete Definition of College and Career Readiness." Educational Policy Improvement Center, May 2, 2012. p. 1. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=college+and+career+readiness+definition&ft=on&id=ED537876>
- ⁸ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Forum Guide to College and Career Ready Data." National Forum on Education Statistics, May 2015. p. vi. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015157.pdf>
- ⁹ Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 4–5.
- ¹⁰ Conley, Op. cit., p. 1.
- ¹¹ Mattern, K. et al. "Broadening the Definition of College and Career Readiness: A Holistic Approach." ACT, Inc, 2014. pp. 3–4. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=college+and+career+readiness+definition&ft=on&id=ED555591>
- ¹² Conley, Op. cit., p. 4.
- ¹³ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "What Is College and Career Readiness." Achieve, 2017. https://www.achieve.org/files/Achieve_Def_No%20Crop.pdf
- ¹⁴ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling." The College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy. p. 3. https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/nosca/11b_4416_8_Components_WEB_111107.pdf
- ¹⁵ Chart contents taken verbatim from: Conley, Op. cit., p. 3.
- ¹⁶ "What are 21st Century Skills?" Thoughtful Learning. <https://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/FAQ/what-are-21st-century-skills>
- ¹⁷ Soland, J., L.S. Hamilton, and B.M. Stecher. "Measuring 21st Century Competencies: Guidance for Educators." RAND Corporation, November 2013. p. 3. <http://asiasociety.org/files/gcen-measuring21cskills.pdf>
- ¹⁸ "ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student." American School Counselor Association, 2014. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/MindsetsBehaviors.pdf>
- ¹⁹ Chart contents taken verbatim from: Soland, Hamilton, and Stecher, Op. cit., p. 4.
- ²⁰ Dougherty, C. "Catching up to College and Career Readiness: The Challenge Is Greater for At-Risk Students. Issue Brief." ACT, Inc., 2014. p. 1. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED546855.pdf>
- ²¹ "Understanding College & Career Ready Standards." Ideas That Work: U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs. <https://ccrs.osepideasthatwork.org/families-academic/understanding-college-career-ready-standards>
- ²² Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling," Op. cit., p. 4.
- ²³ "College-Going Culture." University of California, Berkeley Center for Educational Partnerships. <https://cep.berkeley.edu/college-going-culture-2>
- ²⁴ Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.
- ²⁵ "College and Career Readiness Definitions. Southern Regional Education Board. <https://www.sreb.org/definitions-college-and-career-readiness>
- ²⁶ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "PLAN Overview," Op. cit.
- ²⁷ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Research Foundations: Empirical Foundations for College and Career Readiness," Op. cit., p. 6.
- ²⁸ Chart contents taken verbatim from: Conley, Op. cit., p. 1.
- ²⁹ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Forum Guide to College and Career Ready Data," Op. cit., p. vi.
- ³⁰ Chart contents taken verbatim from: "PARCC College- and Career-Ready Determination Policy in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics & Policy-Level Performance Level Descriptors." Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, November 2015. p. 1. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED582072.pdf>