

Agenda Item: I.B.

DATE: July 26, 2007

SUBJECT: P-16 Report: Tennessee Diploma Project

ACTION RECOMMENDED: Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Tennessee is a member of Achieve's American Diploma Project Network, and considerable progress toward achieving the goals of the ADP standards reform has occurred over the last three months.

Ms. Margaret Horn, Governor Bredesen's Office of State Planning and Policy, is Tennessee's point person for the Tennessee Diploma Project. Ms. Horn will present the goals, recent activity, and next steps for the reform movement. A briefing paper is attached.

TENNESSEE DIPLOMA PROJECT

Background

In January 2007, Tennessee joined the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network, a coalition of 29 states dedicated to aligning high school curriculum, standards, assessments and accountability policies with the demands of college and work. The ADP Network is the flagship initiative of Achieve Inc., a bipartisan nonprofit organization that helps states raise academic standards, improve assessments and strengthen accountability to prepare young people for postsecondary education, work and citizenship. Achieve's major sources of funding include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the GE Foundation and IBM Corp.

The ADP Network calls on states to commit to four key priorities:

1. Align high school standards with the demands of college and work;
2. Require students to complete a college- and work-ready curriculum so that earning a diploma ensures that a student is ready for postsecondary opportunities;
3. Build college- and work-ready measures into statewide high school assessment systems; and
4. Hold high schools and postsecondary institutions accountable for student preparation and success.

The national need for higher standards is summed up in an Achieve report, *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* which found U.S. college professors and employers report that 42 percent of high school graduates are not ready for college level work and 45 percent are not ready for jobs beyond the entry level. Governor Phil Bredesen is leading Tennessee's efforts to couple additional education investments with higher standards and increased accountability.

Approach

The Tennessee Diploma Project is led by the Tennessee Alignment Committee, a panel of state and local government officials, and business, postsecondary and K-12 leaders from across the state. The goal is to build public and stakeholder support for raising education standards in a manner that rises above politics and partisanship. Both higher education and the business community play key roles.

As part of its effort, the Alignment Committee asked the Tennessee Business Roundtable - a statewide organization of CEOs committed to sound public policy - to gather input from key business leaders across the state regarding their observations and expectations of high school graduates' skills and knowledge. The information is valuable in developing the overall plan for addressing ADP Network priorities.

The Business Roundtable, with financial support from the Hyde Family Foundations of Memphis, worked with major chambers of commerce to host regional roundtable discussions, or informal focus groups, in six local markets across the Volunteer State: Chattanooga, Jackson, Knoxville, Memphis, Nashville and Northeast Tennessee. To demonstrate his commitment to the process, Governor Bredesen agreed to lead the discussions. Key objectives include: understanding which skills business leaders want in potential employees; identifying gaps between business needs and workforce skills; and taking inventory of suggestions for closing the gaps.

In addition to roundtable discussions, business leaders were asked to complete brief questionnaires gauging opinion on essential job skills. More detailed surveys are being administered to human resources directors across the state. Data gathered in surveys, developed by members of the Tennessee Alignment Committee in consultation with business experts, ultimately will be compiled in a comprehensive report.

The end goal is to clearly define job skills needed for entry level positions across the workforce spectrum, and communicate the information to state officials working to better align education standards with the demands of college and work.

A similar outreach effort in the higher education community is ongoing. College freshmen math and English professors from both the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents systems completed online surveys ranking key college ready skills. The State P-16 Council* plays an important advisory role as well. The Tennessee Higher Education

Commission leads the Council's activities including convening and charging a math standards committee of college faculty, high school and middle school teachers, and state curriculum specialists to map high school math content against ACT college readiness benchmarks and recommend revision in order to align high school preparation with college readiness expectations.

This type of grass roots collaboration by college and K-12 math teachers is an essential foundation for standards change. A similar working group of English teachers also produced recommendations to enhance the rigor and align high school preparation with the skills necessary for success in college and the workforce.

The State P-16 Council, as the oversight body for K-12 and higher education, also serves as the core steering committee for the Tennessee Gear Up Grant, a 6-year Federal grant contributing resources to school quality improvements. The Council supports teacher development necessary to affect Tennessee's stronger standards, particularly in increasing teacher quality and the number of math and science teachers in Tennessee's classrooms.

Another higher education initiative that directly supports the Tennessee Diploma Project is the School Leaders Reform Program, a model for preparing school principals and other school leaders to lead the schools of tomorrow. These school leader programs will be developed according to a model established by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in cooperation with Tennessee universities.

** The P-16 Council is made up of system heads for the Tennessee Board of Regents and the University of Tennessee, the Commissioner of Education, the State Board of Education's Executive Director, the President of the Association of Independent colleges and Universities, the Governor's Office of State Planning and Policy staff, and representatives of business and industry.*

Next Steps

Content experts from the Department of Education will embed findings from higher education and business community outreach into Tennessee's standards so that expectations regarding college and work readiness are clearly communicated to our educators and students.

Standards will then have two national reviews that will incorporate comparison to the ACT, NAEP and Achieve National Benchmarks then go before the State Board of Education for final approval in January 2008. The Department of Education and the Governor's Office will roll out the new standards very soon after that approval. We expect to have new assessments aligned with the new standards by the spring of 2009.

As we move forward, we are looking at our high school course requirements, developing curriculum based on these new standards, and designing professional development for teachers to teach the new standards.

In summary, our goal is to align our standards and curriculum with college and workforce readiness and make sure we give students, parents and teachers a pathway to reach those high standards. At the end of the day, we will ensure that our tests reflect whether or not our kids really are prepared for work or college.