

By 2020, approximately two-thirds of all jobs in the United States will require some postsecondary education—meaning a certificate, credential or degree at the associate level or higher (Carnevale, 2013). Many of these jobs are in high-wage, high-demand industries like advanced manufacturing, aerospace and defense, biotechnology, computing and information technology, energy, financial management, health care, STEM, and transportation and distribution. Individuals who successfully secure good jobs will need to have industry-specific technical skills and work-ready skills, as well as the lifelong learning skills needed to adapt to a changing workplace.

To help more young people bridge the gap between high school, postsecondary education and the workplace, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) believes the senior year must have purpose and that it must offer all students the opportunity to gain postsecondary credit or a credential of value. During the 2013–2014 academic year, SREB formed the Commission on Career and Technical Education, which produced the report *Credentials for All: An Imperative for SREB States*, which discusses policies and practices that states can adopt to support strong career pathways (SREB, 2015a).

Within the report are eight actions states and school districts can take to build a bridge from high school to postsecondary education attainment and workplace training programs. One recommendation is developing rigorous career pathways that allow students to choose accelerated learning options in settings that provide the extended time needed to earn advanced industry credentials. To ac-

complish this goal, a redesign of the senior year of high school is required.

Recent studies conducted by SREB (SREB 2014, 2015b) indicate that between 30 and 40 percent of students concentrating in a career and technical education (CTE) program of study enter the senior year having met the college-ready benchmarks. Allowing these students to pursue an accelerated program of study will better prepare them for postsecondary studies in career pathways that align to state and regional economic sectors. This will in turn help more students obtain credentials of value that benefit the economy.

Existing Initiatives in the Senior Year

The redesign of the senior year has been a work in progress for the last decade, with California State University's (CSU's) Early Assessment Program and Jobs for the Future's (JFF's) Early College initiative leading the way in terms of increasing student readiness and expanding opportunities to earn college credit while still in high school. CSU's Early Assessment Program addresses the readiness gap by testing students in their junior year and using the senior year to improve their skills in English and mathematics (CSU, 2016), and the program's effectiveness has been documented in external studies (Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky, 2010).

JFF's Early College program blurs the lines between high school and college by creating partnerships between high schools and colleges that give students the opportunity to earn significant college credits before graduating from high school. The success of the Early College initiative has been impressive—achievement gaps have been closed, high school graduation rates have increased, 94 percent of the participants earn college credit

during high school and 30 percent of early college students earn an associate degree or postsecondary credential before graduation from high school (JFF, 2016).

SREB Senior Year Redesign

SREB has developed two programs that schools can use to expand existing efforts for students to earn college credits during high school. SREB's Advanced Career curricula offers career pathways that schools can use to parallel local industry needs, while SREB's Readiness courses can be implemented to increase student readiness during the senior year. The Advanced Career pathway programs of study include Aerospace Engineering, Clean Energy Technology, Energy and Power, Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management, Health Informatics, Informatics, Innovations in Science and Technology, and Integrated Production Technologies.

The Readiness program includes the senior-ready courses, Literacy Ready and Math Ready, to give students a foundation for success in college or postsecondary studies. Existing dual-enrollment efforts often exclude students in CTE pathways and underprepared students, focusing instead on university-track programs for college-ready students. By integrating Advanced Career programs and Readiness courses, SREB Senior Year Redesign gives all students the opportunity to earn college credits before graduating from high school.

The integration of Readiness courses during the senior year requires high schools to acknowledge that many of their students are not prepared for college-level coursework. By completing Readiness courses during the fall semester, these students can enroll in college courses during the spring semester, giving

Redesigning the Senior Year:

Expanding Opportunities for All Students

By Dale Winkler and John Squires





them the opportunity to accumulate college credits before they graduate from high school. With fewer than half the nation's high school graduates meeting ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks in reading and mathematics (ACT, 2015), SREB's Readiness courses address a glaring need, and their implementation can dramatically increase the number of students who earn college credits or industry certificates during high school.

Advanced Career curricula are essential to expanding dual-enrollment opportunities to students with aspirations in the technical fields. These students may not need to enroll in a four-year college or university; however, they may need to enroll in a technical center or community college to prepare for their career. As previously stated, two-thirds of the nation's jobs will require some form of postsecondary education, but almost half of these will not require a bachelor's degree, but an associate degree or an industry certification (Carnevale, 2013). Implementing high-quality CTE programs, such as SREB's Advance Career curricula, is essential to increasing the flow from high school into two-year colleges and trade schools.

The goals of SREB Senior Year Redesign are threefold: to give all students the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school; to address the readiness gap by introducing Readiness courses during the fall semester; and to expand dual-enrollment programs to include CTE studies, such as SREB's Advanced Career curricula. The realization of these goals can best be accomplished by following the five principles of SREB's Senior Redesign:

Industry Involvement

Seek industry leaders to help develop meaningful career pathways in high schools. The successful redesign of the senior year requires the implementation of high-quality CTE courses that lead to high-paying jobs for students acquiring the necessary industry certifications. To

make these courses relevant and meaningful, educational leaders should seek out executives from regional industries to create opportunities for job shadowing and apprenticeships. By integrating accelerated career pathways within a career academy structure, students have the opportunity to graduate from high school with either college credits or an industry certification.

Increase Student Preparedness

Include Readiness courses throughout high school to increase student preparedness. All students should be assessed before enrollment in high school and throughout high school for proficiency in literacy and mathematics. SREB recommends that schools use assessment results to place students who score below proficiency into ninth-grade Ready for High School courses and 12th-grade Ready for College courses that empower students to meet or exceed college- and career-readiness standards in English and math. These courses should be offered in an accelerated format to get these students back on track as quickly as possible.

Student Schedules

Accelerate student schedules during the senior year to increase student options. High school seniors who meet readiness benchmarks should be placed into accelerated studies, and these students should be able to graduate with up to 30 credit hours of postsecondary credits, putting them well on their way to receiving an associate degree or a bachelor's degree.

Realizing that the majority of students do not meet the readiness benchmarks going into their senior year, readiness courses should be offered in an accelerated format during the fall semester, giving students who complete these courses the opportunity to take dual-enrollment courses during the spring semester. These students should be able to graduate with up to 15 credit hours of postsec-

ondary credits, entering college or trade school with a significant advantage.

Emphasize Faculty Time

Reorganize high school schedules to emphasize faculty teamwork. Finding time for academic and career pathway teachers and counselors to plan connected learning experiences for students is essential to the success of the accelerated model. This necessitates a complete reorganization of class schedules to create common planning time for teams of teachers and counselors.

Expand, Include, Make Available

Expand dual-enrollment opportunities to include high-quality CTE courses and make them available to all students. While all college-level courses offered must be taught on the same schedule as the college (e.g., semester-length) and using the same syllabi, assessments and curricular materials and strategies to increase these offerings to all high schools and all students need to be employed. Incorporating CTE courses is critical to increase the number of students who benefit from these programs. Under an accelerated option, dual-enrollment courses can be offered by either high school instructors or college faculty, and these courses can be offered on the high school campus, in blended online formats or on the college campus.

Summary

The challenge put forth in SREB's Commission on Career and Technical Education's report is for states and school districts to double the number of young adults with credentials of value that will prepare them for high-demand, high-skill careers and lifelong learning. If states are to meet this challenge, programs such as SREB's Senior Year Redesign must be implemented in high schools—increasing the number of ways students can qualify for credit-bearing coursework that leads to an industry certification or a college degree.

ACTE's CareerTech

VISION 2016

Dale Winkler and John Squires will be presenting "Accelerating Opportunities for Students: A Redesign of the Senior Year" at ACTE's CareerTech VISION taking place Nov. 30–Dec. 3. To find out more about VISION visit careertechvision.com

EXPLORE MORE

To read the SREB report, *Credentials for All: An Imperative in SREB States*, in its entirety, visit sreb.org/publication/credentials-all-imperative-sreb-states. Or to find out more about SREB's Advanced Career curricula or Readiness program, visit sreb.org.



By redesigning the senior year to include both high-quality CTE programs leading to industry credentials and Readiness courses for underprepared students, opportunities for students to earn meaningful credentials and college credits can be expanded. And by forming partnerships among high schools, colleges and local industries, these programs can create pathways for students that lead directly to jobs in high-demand industries. **Tech**

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