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STATEMENT OF MICHAEL COHEN BEFORE THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION'S COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Commission on the Future of Higher Education
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Creating a High School Diploma That Counts

Too many high school graduates are unprepared for postsecondary education

- Of every 100 9th graders, 68 graduate from high school, 40 enroll in postsecondary education, 27 return for a 2nd year, and only 18 earn a college degree within 150% of expected time.
- Only 34% of 9th graders graduate from high school “college ready” – having taken the courses typically required for admission to nonselective 4-year colleges.
- Nearly 30% of first year college students must take at least one remedial course; students who take remedial reading are about half as likely to earn a degree as those who take no remedial courses.
- 39% of recent high school graduates who went on to college report significant gaps in their academic preparation for college.
- College faculty estimate that 42% of first year students are not prepared for college level work.

We know the essential academic skills for success in postsecondary education

- Research conducted by the American Diploma Project has identified a core set of math and English skills necessary to enter and succeed in credit-bearing courses.
- These same skills are necessary to gain access to 21st century jobs.
- In math, these skills are typically taught in a 4-year sequence including Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and a fourth year of rigorous math.

We don't yet expect all students to be prepared: few states require students to demonstrate these skills in order to earn a high school diploma

- In most states, high school standards reflect a *consensus* among discipline-based experts about what would be *important* for young people to learn – not a reflection of what would be *essential* to know to succeed at the next level.
- While four years of rigorous math are necessary to prepare high school graduates for college, only 22 states require students to take Algebra I, only 13 also require Geometry, and only 4 also require students to take Algebra II in order to earn a high school diploma.
- Students can pass state math tests required for graduation – typically administered in 10th and 11th grade – knowing content typically taught in 7th and 8th grade internationally.

- More than 80% of recent high school graduates say they would have worked harder if their high school had demanded; more than 60% would have taken more demanding courses in high school, if they knew then what they know now.

States must act

To close this “expectations gap” states must:

- Align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary education and work.
- Administer a college- and work-ready assessment, aligned to state standards, to high school students so they get clear and timely information and are able to address critical skill deficiencies while still in high school.
- Require all students to take a college- and work-ready curriculum to earn a high school diploma.
- Hold high schools accountable for graduating students who are college ready, and hold postsecondary institutions accountable for their success once enrolled.

Postsecondary Education Must Act

To help improve college preparation and improve the transition from secondary to postsecondary education, Postsecondary Education must:

- **Be Transparent:** Provide a clear definition of the knowledge and skills necessary to do college-level work – to enter and succeed in credit-bearing courses.
- **Speak With One Voice:** Adopt uniform placement standards statewide, especially for open door and broad access institutions.
- **Partner with the K-12 system:** To align high school standards and assessments with college-ready standards.
- **Send clear signals to high school students:** Use high school assessments for placement decisions; let students know if they are college-ready or need to make up skill deficiencies in 12th grade.