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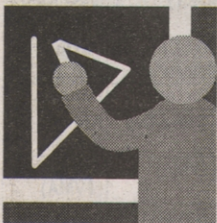
Schoolteachers, professors differ on what's important

By Mary Beth Marklein
USA TODAY

State learning standards may help high school teachers focus their coursework, but college faculty say they're focusing on the wrong things, says a report that finds a "significant gap" between what high school instructors teach and what college faculty think entering freshmen ought to know.

"States tend to have too many standards attempting to tackle too many content topics," the report says. The report examines science, math, reading and English.

Education



USA TODAY

Every state but Iowa has developed standards for what high school students should know when they graduate, a trend that began in the 1990s and has been further underscored by President Bush's No Child Left Behind law, says Cyndie Schmeiser of the non-profit ACT of Iowa City. It released the study Monday.

To date, more than 30 states have taken steps to align high school learning standards with college expectations, she says.

The report, based on survey responses from more than 6,500 middle- and high school teachers, first-year college and remedial college faculty, can "inform those efforts," Schmeiser says. Aligning standards is especially important, she notes, as more U.S. jobs demand a college education.

"High school teachers are working very, very hard at following and teaching their state standards," she says, but college faculty "felt it was more important for students to

learn a fewer number of fundamental but essential skills."

When asked what was most important for students to learn, the study found, by discipline:

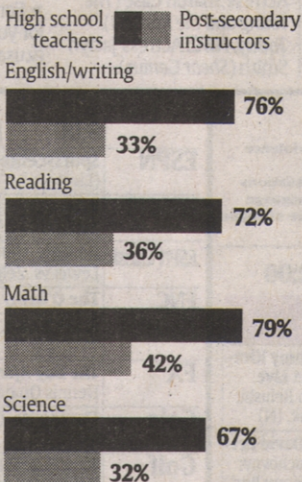
Math: High school teachers put more weight on advanced content, while college instructors said "a rigorous understanding of fundamentals" was more important. More than half (55%) of faculty ranked "basic operations and applications" most important, compared with 40% of high school faculty. Among material most desired by college faculty but covered the least in high school were algebraic problems such as solving quadratic equations and factoring.

Science: High school teachers consistently rated factual knowledge more important than process and inquiry skills, such as understanding a hypothesis. But that's what college instructors said they want most. For example, college faculty generally ranked "evaluating the similarities and differences, or strengths and weaknesses, of scientific viewpoints" important, while high school teachers were more likely to cite "understanding the physics principles involved in collisions" and "knowing the processes of how proteins are made inside of cells."

English and writing: More than a third (35%) of college instructors placed high importance on basic grammar and usage such as sentence structure and punctuation, compared with 10% of high school teachers. Similarly, high school faculty said the "ability to write an effective introduction and conclusion to a piece of writing" was the most important skill, but

Well-prepared for college?

When asked "How well do you think your state's standards prepare students for college-level work?" high school and college instructors didn't agree. Percentage who answered "well" or "very well":



Source: ACT National Curriculum Survey, 2005-2006

By Sam Ward, USA TODAY

college instructors ranked it 30th.

Reading: High school and college teachers generally agreed on the relative importance of specific skills and identified the teaching of "main ideas and author's approach" as the top skill. But other ACT data show a decline in performance in reading between middle and high school, suggesting that reading skills acquired in middle school are not being deepened in high school. While educators in college and high school agree that reading skills are important, such skills "need to be incorporated into state standards," the study says.