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Need For Vertical Alignment In English Classes Between K-12 And Higher Education Institutions

Kelsey Buchholz

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**NEED FOR VERTICAL ALIGNMENT IN ENGLISH CLASSES BETWEEN K-12
AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

by

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A Dissertation in Practice

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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for the degree of

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July 12, 2023

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation was to analyze efforts at the time of this study to vertically align curricula between secondary and post-secondary institutions and then analyze how much needs to be done to close the gap in curricular and performance expectations as students transition to higher education. To narrow the focus, this dissertation specifically followed English content and coursework, but ideas could be conveyed to other topic areas as well. Across the nation, students have been continuing to complete their high school graduation requirements but have been struggling to transfer their knowledge and performance to the next level as there has been an increasing number of students needing remedial coursework upon entry into post-secondary institutions. This has held true in South Dakota as well. By achieving a better grasp of where high school standards end and introductory college standards begin, we can work to close the gap and better align coursework between the two levels of education, opening the door to more student success. This gap sheds light on a growing spread between high school and college level standards and the negative effect it has on student success but shows that efforts can help bridge that gap. High school and college-level institutions should be working cooperatively together rather than as two separate entities that happen to serve the same population. This study adds information to our understanding of what was in place at the time of this study, what resources we have that can aid us in improving the problem at hand, and what needs to be done for more effective practices.

Results of the analysis show that some standards and efforts transfer over to the post-secondary level such as *reading literature* and *reading informational text*. However, some skills show significant opportunities for improvement. *Language* as well as *speaking and listening* were two standards college professors identified as in need of the most work. At the post-secondary level, students were showing a lack of grammatical command and willingness to contribute to discussions among other skills that fell under the language and speaking and listening standards. These are standards that may need a bit more attention at the high school level, hopefully producing more proficiency for students entering their post-secondary education.

Keywords: standards, stakeholders, planning and implementation

INTRODUCTION

Many schools pride themselves on preparing their students for life outside their walls. After going through primary and secondary school, students should have all the necessary tools and skills to be successful in whatever venture they choose next. That could be going out into the workforce, pursuing a military career, or furthering their education at a vocational school or 4-year college or university. While stakes are high regardless of which path is chosen, it is maybe more nerve-wracking when such a large investment, like college, is at stake.

When primary and secondary schools are growing these young minds, in addition to their social and emotional needs, schools follow a rigorous academic curriculum. It is set to scaffold and develop skills deemed necessary for success at the next level, whatever that level is. For example, in kindergarten, mastery of letters, their sounds, and basic sight words is key for the next step, first grade, where students are expected to decode more difficult words and read longer texts. Students learn how to convert fractions to decimals before growing into more advanced geometry and finances. While scaffolding appears to be happening within traditional public education (K-12), linear development and continuation comes into question when students transition from mandatory education to voluntary education. Schools claim, in many of their mission statements, that their aim is to prepare students for an everchanging world. While a variety of classes, based on requirements, gives students exposure to multiple content

areas: math, language arts, science, arts, technical skills, etc., one questions whether that coverage, albeit structured by standards, is enough for success at the next level.

At the time of this study, most students were continuing their education after high school, but it has been a matter of what that education looks like. Has it been in the form of on-the-job experience? Has it been focused on a specific trade? Or has it been a traditional higher education structure at a college or university?

With a traditional public education, there are standards in place to guide a student's continued development. In higher education, standards have also been scaffolded leading to linear development of students, but the big question is when, where, and if the starting point of post-secondary standards picks up where secondary education standards left off or if there a gap in expectations. Furthermore, how much communication is happening between these two levels of education? While it cannot be assumed that all high school students attend college, one would want academic development and expectations at higher education levels to be congruous to prior academic expectations in place at lower education levels.

This dissertation covers three separate artifacts to address this issue. Artifact #1 provides an overview of this problem, a literature review to support or deny an educational gap exists between secondary education and college level education standards, what other states are doing to approach and combat this problem, as well as introduce possible solutions to implement and correct the problem based on this research study and theoretical foundations. Artifact #2 covers the research approach that was taken as well as a narrative of the inquiry's results. The final component, Artifact #3, will include a final product to address the problem.

These three artifacts build upon one another. First, in Artifact #1, I conducted research of similar issues by reviewing literature and finding appropriate theories that support a specific course of action. Based on that research and information, Artifact #2 put into action the research that was conducted in Artifact #1 and specifically analyzed what had been done in South Dakota, focusing on the English/Language Arts standards. I focused on answering: Where do secondary and post-secondary standards align? Is the preparation high school students are receiving meeting the expectations of their college professors? And how can the transition from high school to college be smoother, looking at what is already in place? What areas need improvement? How do we best handle the change?

Finally, the third artifact provides resources and examples for high school educators to supplement student growth and learning in areas that were targeted in results of this study as in most need of attention. Artifact #3 offers supports to help bridge the gap in standards and student proficiency between high school and college as well as a student's comfort level when transitioning to higher education. It delivers suggestions on ways to incorporate multiple opportunities for students to practice and show proficiency with multiple standards, reinforcing the high expectations students will be met with in college. While this study specifically used English/Language Arts content as its vessel, many of the ideas can be seen across disciplines. Students are not coming into universities and colleges with as strong a proficiency and execution in certain standards as college educators would like to see.

ARTIFACT #1

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Overview of the Problem

The problem exists with an inconsistency in standards and expectations between compulsory and post-compulsory schooling. While this may be prevalent among multiple curricular topic areas, for the purpose of a focused dissertation, I will be concentrating on English/Language Arts content. There should be a more logical alignment between secondary and post-secondary standards. I will also be delving into topic areas that agreed (high school and college standards that were congruous) at the time of this study, ones that differed, what was being done at the time of this study, and what still needed to happen at the time of this research to better prepare students for college, to ease the transition from high school to a college-level education.

Key Words/Phrases/Concepts

For the sake of this study, there are some terms that will be defined in order to increase understanding and approaches used later on in this dissertation.

Standards

Standards are set structures and expectations that need to be covered in public education and understood by students. Completion of a said standard should indicate a student's readiness to move on to the next standard, of increasing difficulty, through a step-by-step structure.

South Dakota Content Standards

The South Dakota Department of Education has adopted standards that direct instruction in primary and secondary classrooms. These standards are modeled after the nationwide common core standards.

- **Relation to the Problem:** The problem is focused on standards alignment and an inconsistency in skills of students and expectations of administrators when students reach higher education. This study is focusing on alignment between secondary and post-secondary education in the state of South Dakota. All states have slightly different standards at the high school level as well as at their post-secondary institutions. For the purpose of a focused example, the state of South Dakota was used for this study.

English Content Standards

This is a specific content area within the South Dakota Content Standards. English content standards address a wide range of skills in multiple areas including reading literature, reading informational text, language, writing, and speaking and listening.

- **Relation to Problem:** There are numerous content areas which could be studied. However, for this study, to give an example of what has and has not been working, the content area of English was used. English was chosen as it is a mandatory class in both high schools and colleges. In South Dakota at the time of this study, students had to take 4 years of English in high school; at state higher education institutions, students were required to take, at minimum, two English classes.

Proof of Standard Achievement Opportunities

Standard achievement opportunities are chances for students to showcase their knowledge in a specific content, satisfying post-secondary expectations and requirements. Some of these prospects also give an individual the possibility of attaining college credit without taking a particular class from a college.

Smarter Balanced Testing

The required state assessment given to third through eighth graders as well as high school juniors. The smarter balanced testing does not perfectly measure each standard, but it does give a strong snapshot of a student's current level of understanding in a given content area.

- **Relation to Problem:** Some colleges have been considering using state assessment scores, when taking into consideration class placement or possibility of taking CLEP exams.

CLEP Exams

Exams given by higher education institutions where students can earn credit for a given class without taking the class itself. Passing of a CLEP exam showcases a student's grasp of standards and content structure in the exam.

- **Relation to Problem:** If students showcase a strong grasp of content and understanding on a CLEP exam, they shouldn't have to take the class covering material on the CLEP exam they passed.

AP Classes

Advanced placement (AP) classes have been offered in high schools but are taught at a collegiate level. At the end of a class, students take an AP exam. If they pass

this exam, students earn college credit for the class. Each post-secondary institution is responsible for deciding which college level class(es) best fit(s) the AP class being taught. Private post-secondary institutions decide on their own while public systems follow guidance of the South Dakota Board of Regents.

- Relation to Problem: Students are able to take classes and earn college credit, but there may be an inconsistency in what standards the AP classes cover and which college class students are given credit for.
 - Example: A student may pass the AP literature and composition exam, earning them credit for a 200-level class at a South Dakota public university, but still needing to take a 100-level, introductory English class. However, that same AP Class may cover both the 100- and 200-level class or just the 100-level class at another university.

Stakeholders

There are multiple persons and entities affected by standards alignment or a lack thereof as well as some that have a say in how standards are set and what they cover. It is important that all stakeholders have a say in setting standards, understand the importance of having a linear progression in standards by grade levels, and speak with each other to properly develop a linear progression of standards in the most effective way possible.

South Dakota Department of Education

This is the institution responsible for guiding all K-12 schools in South Dakota which includes standards adoption and implementation.

- Relation to Problem: In order to have the appropriate standards alignment between secondary and post-secondary schools, both types of institutions need to be considered, evaluated, and involved in decisions relating to standards.

South Dakota Board of Regents

This is the department responsible for overseeing post-secondary public education establishments in South Dakota. This includes the following colleges and universities: Black Hills State University, Dakota State University, Northern State University, South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, South Dakota School for the Deaf, South Dakota State University, and University of South Dakota.

- Relation to Problem: In order to have the appropriate standards alignment between secondary and post-secondary schools, both types of institutions need to be considered, evaluated, and involved in decisions relating to standards.

Planning and Implementation

Not only is it important to find what works (where standards are correctly aligned between institutions), we also must find where the gaps are and what can be done to be more effective in execution of standards. A plan to actually effect change is needed. This would result in better outcomes for students as well as universities (higher success in initial post-secondary exploration).

Vertical Alignment

This structure has been successfully implemented in K-12 education and at the time of this study was currently in progress when looking at the structure of the South Dakota Content Standards. There has also been a semblance of vertical alignment in

higher education as certain classes are prerequisites to higher level classes within a content area.

- **Relation to Problem:** The idea would be to bridge the concept of vertical alignment between two entities. While both high schools and college-level institutions in South Dakota have been utilizing vertical alignment within their own systems, it is unclear if the ending point of standards at high school levels naturally lead into standards at college levels.

Key Concept Relation

High school curricula in South Dakota has been directly related to and governed by state standards. High school state standards are objectives that, when met, should best prepare students for their next step, whatever that may be (work, college, technical school). The South Dakota Department of Education adopts or develops state standards and has appropriate checks in place to make sure public schools are following these standards in a suitable manner. The South Dakota Board of Regents brings unity to classes and expectations among public universities. So, in theory, if a student takes a Calculus III class at South Dakota State University, the same concepts would be covered if a student took a Calculus III class at Black Hills State University or Northern State University.

While in high school, students are able to take multiple assessments to showcase, prove, and demonstrate their knowledge of a subject. Some of these are required exams such as Smarter Balanced testing, though others are options such as honors classes, AP exams, and dual credit classes. Additionally, students are able to take CLEP exams to indicate their understanding and achievement level in a given content area.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to align English/Language Arts content standards between secondary and post-secondary educational institutions and then assess student preparation and proficiency in execution of those standards at the collegiate level.

This study is important for a couple reasons. First being that compulsory schools intend to adequately prepare all their students for life beyond graduation. However, if students entering post-secondary education are expected to be proficient in standards they have never been exposed to before, there may be a sharp learning curve that could be defeating some students before they can succeed. Fostering an ability for early post-secondary success can increase the likelihood of post-secondary students completing their degree.

Second, post-secondary education is a natural successive option for students who have just graduated from high school. Secondary schools should be building on skills/concepts from primary and intermediary schools and introducing concepts and ideas students would be needing in their next steps of life (considering all options including technical skills, trade skills, life skills, and academic skills). If there is not an alignment between what is being taught in high school and expectations of what students should have mastered by the time they reach the next level of education, that needs to be addressed.

Finally, it is assumed a natural movement occurs of many high school seniors into post-secondary education. Much like the South Dakota Department of Education mandates and standardizes content for K-12 education, the South Dakota Board of Regents oversees content for the state's public colleges and universities. With post-

secondary education being a natural next step for many high school graduates to continue their education, it only makes sense that society provides a seamless transition from high school to college. If primary educators can communicate and work with secondary educators in aligning standards, the same alignment processes should be able to be done between secondary and post-secondary educators. The biggest hurdle is not simply different levels of educators within the same institution communicating but educators from different institutions as well.

Overview of the Problem

At the time of this study, there appeared to be a gap in communication and student performance expectations between secondary and post-secondary institutions. They continued to operate as completely separate organizations despite serving similar populations and working toward the same goal: properly preparing and educating students for life past a specific establishment's walls. Kirst and Venezia (2001) described the separation between planning in these two types of organizations. Kirst and Venezia observed any form of change has been limited to a specific institution without consulting other institutions. Post-secondary institutions determine curriculum and expectations individually while high school curriculum is set by the governing K-12 body. In South Dakota, this is the Department of Education. "The lack of coordination between the public K-12 and post-secondary sectors impedes successful transitions between the systems and diminishes educational opportunity for many students" (Kirst & Venezia, 2001, p. 93). This lack of coordination creates a system that is ineffective for students, teachers, and institutions. While standards alignment may have occurred initially, without communication about changes between two organizations, standards and expectations can

and have easily deviated and shifted focus, no longer following the vertical path they once did.

Furthermore, the very people these institutions are supposed to be helping are the ones suffering most. At the time of this study, students in South Dakota were consistently struggling to find success at the collegiate level. The *South Dakota News Watch* reported that three in ten graduates from South Dakota high schools needed to take remedial math and/or English classes each year (Pfankuch, 2019, para. 1). With 30% of South Dakota students needing to take remedial courses in college, that shows systems at the time of this study were ineffective. Students have been graduating from high school and enrolling in college, but they have been unable to perform at the levels needed.

Overall, between 2010 and 2017, nearly a third of graduates enrolling in one of the South Dakota's six public universities required remedial classes in reading, math or both. The numbers suggest that some high schools are struggling to prepare a significant number of students for college.

(Raposa & Ellis, 2019, para. 5)

This highlights that there has been a gap in preparation and connection between high school and college levels of education. Ideally, if students are graduating from high school, they should have the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete introductory college courses. However, almost one-third of South Dakota students are needing to take remedial courses before even getting to those entry-level classes at their higher education institutions.

By needing to take college remedial courses, students not only have to pay to take classes that are teaching concepts they should have mastered in high school, they also put

their college graduation at risk. Pfankuch (2019) of the *South Dakota News Watch* reported that graduation rates for South Dakota students who were required to take a remedial class were cut almost in half compared to those who did not require remediation. More than four in ten students who enroll in a South Dakota public university graduate in 4 years; however, that number changes to just over two in ten if the student has to take a remedial course (Pfankuch, 2019). These findings were reiterated in a report published in the *Argus Leader* looking at graduation rates of students, giving up to 6 years to complete their bachelor's degree. "Among those who took six years to earn a degree, 62 percent of the students who did not need remedial classes were successful, while only 38 percent who took a remedial class succeeded" (Raposa & Ellis, 2019, para. 21). If students can be better prepared for college coming out of high school, college remedial courses will not be as necessary, increasing students' chances for graduating from college.

The South Dakota Board of Regents has been aware of this issue and recognizes that it is not just a lack of preparation causing low graduation rates for students. At the time of this study, the South Dakota Board of Regents had a new president, Paul Beran, who knew that the secondary school system often took the brunt of the blame when remediation numbers were so high, but Dr. Beran also acknowledged there is not an easy fix to this issue (Pfankuch, 2019). Instead of blaming the previous entity, Dr. Beran believes being able to establish a process to work together and clearly communicate needs and standards between secondary and post-secondary institutions would help alleviate the need for so many remedial classes. If high school teachers know what points

to emphasize for higher education classes, they will better be able to prepare their students for those demands.

At the time of this study, the need for remediation had been holding steady for 20 years, showcasing the gap in standards, expectations, and student performance.

In 2010, about 31.5 percent of the nearly 3,000 South Dakota high school graduates who enrolled in state universities full time were required to take remedial math, English or both. In 2017, about 32.8 percent of students were forced to remediate at some level. (Pfankuch, 2019, para. 10)

So, for the past 20 years, about one in every three students needed at least one remedial course, highlighting a dearth of necessary skill acquisition. While there are many students that take a remedial course and complete school and many students who are able to make the necessary adjustments to college standards and expectations, there are a multitude who are falling between the cracks because of a possible gap in standards and expectations between compulsory education institutions (administered by South Dakota Department of Education) and voluntary education entities (administered by South Dakota Board of Regents).

Research Question

Do high school standards and requirements match or adequately lead into expectations of students, standards, and requirements at the post-secondary level? And ultimately, if not, what can be done to aid in communication and make that high school to college transition smoother?

This is important because it is an expectation that students enter their post-secondary education with necessary skills and content knowledge to not only function in

their classes but continue to grow. This problem of practice addresses the concern that there is a gap between high school standards and university expectations of students entering entry level college classes.

There are many difficulties in transitioning from high school to college. Some are emotional; others deal with independence; while others are academic. In order to make the transition easier for students and bridge the gap between the two academic entities (secondary school and post-secondary school), a linear progression and common expectations is essential in fostering success among students. “It is important for high school course outcomes to be aligned with post-secondary expectations. A rigorous high school core curriculum must teach students the essential knowledge and skills they will need to be successful in college and work” (ACT, Inc., 2007, p. 1). If this is not being done, how can we address and resolve this issue?

Literature Review

The importance of initial success in early stages of academics is a key component to long-term success in one’s post-secondary career. Primary experiences build the foundations of perceptions and confidence. Just as one’s initial impression of someone solidifies within the first few seconds of meeting, one’s first college experiences set the tone for their higher education journey. If students are adequately prepared, in multiple areas, their transition from high school to college tends to be less of an upheaval. This is not to say that one can account for every unique experience and nuance one would encounter, but a well-rounded preparation helps ease that transition. Among evolving competencies an individual undergoes as they mature, including social, emotional, and financial to name a few, academics are another area of focus.

When one has graduated from high school, there is an assumption that all academic areas necessary for moving on in life have been covered and done so appropriately so the individual has mastered them. However, there is a possibility of a gap between the highest level of academia focused on in high school and the introductory level presented in one's freshman year of post-secondary education. That gap is not solely the responsibility of high school teachers to resolve as there are multiple factors that can be attributed to the gap. The fact is there are too many students who struggle with the academic transition between high school and the beginning of their post-secondary education (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012).

A study by ACT, Inc., highlighted the disparity in perceptions of student preparation for college as a majority of high school teachers strongly believed they were adequately preparing their students for the next step beyond high school; however, that number sharply changed into an inverse value when college faculty were asked if they thought freshmen were ready for higher education. This study emphasized the separation in perceptions of faculty working in the two levels of educational institutions: K-12 and post-secondary education. "A significant percentage of high school graduates discover only after enrolling in college that they need . . . remedial courses before they can take a credit-bearing, college-level class" (DeMaria, Vaishnav, Cristol, & Mann, 2015c, p. 1). This is not solely the responsibility of secondary education educators to fix, nor is it just for post-secondary educators to address. There needs to be some middle ground – some communication between secondary and post-secondary institutions. At the time of this study, the ability to communicate and share data was easier than ever before, but so was the disproportion in faculty expectations of students. Across the nation, . . .

. . . more than 50 percent of high school graduates who enter two-year colleges and 20 percent of graduates who enter four-year institutions still need remedial classes in core subjects to prepare for college-level work. With common standards and assessments, states now have the opportunity to be transparent with educators, students and families about not only what it takes to enter college but also what students must do to place into and succeed in credit-bearing college courses. (DeMaria, Vaishnav, Cristol, & Mann, 2015b, p. 4)

More needs to be done to place students in the right classes and make sure they are fully prepared before entering higher education. Making sure there is a logical, strategic vertical alignment between high school and college not only will positively impact students' experiences but also have long-standing benefits for higher education as well.

Early Success in College

While high school graduation is a time of celebration and often comes with an overwhelming sense of accomplishment, that “high” can be quickly stripped away a few short months later as collegiate-level expectations may surpass academic preparation as well as deflate confidence in one’s academic abilities. “Greater alignment between secondary and post-secondary education can promote easier student transitions, less course duplication, and a reduced need for developmental course work when students enter college” (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012, p. 1). By aligning standards and having greater communication between the two entities, a bridge to success can be built for educational institutions as well as students. This alignment is best achieved through shared language and definitions. DeMaria, Vaishnav, Cristol, and Mann (2015a) proposed each state create an agreed upon definition of “college readiness.” This

shared or standard definition would then set the groundwork for collegiate faculty of introductory courses to create appropriate academic curriculum to build on college readiness skills as defined in this college readiness definition. Likewise, high school associations can make sure their standards appropriately build students' skills up to the college readiness definition that has been created. Building a shared language benefits colleges, high schools, and students as it lends itself to a smoother transition where students are more comfortable and confident in their freshman college setting as introductory college classes are logically aligned to high school courses just completed, often leading to a more successful transition between educational institutions and ultimately a higher likelihood of collegiate success (DeMaria, Vaishnav, Cristol, & Mann, 2015a).

Therefore not only would students feel successful and reap rewards from proper high school preparation, students would also raise the likelihood of achieving their own college graduation by circumventing the need for remedial classes. Students who have to take just one remedial college course greatly reduce their probability of attaining a college degree, let alone just reaching their second year. Almost three in four students who have to take a remedial class don't complete their degree, or if they do, they take much longer than the average 4 years to achieve their degree (DeMaria et al., 2015a). This can be detrimental to students in multiple ways as they accumulate student debt, don't procure the same benefits as those with a college degree, and may doubt their abilities. In South Dakota, effects of enrollment in remedial classes are mirroring national trends.

National studies and data from South Dakota universities show that enrollment in a remedial course dramatically reduces the likelihood a student will graduate or complete a degree program. The same problem exists at state technical schools that also require remedial courses for students who test poorly in math or English.

(Pfankuch, 2019, para. 2)

While remedial classes should not be completely removed, one should be questioning why so many students are needing to take them after showing proficiency at the high school level. The gap in standards alignment and lack of communication between secondary and post-secondary institutions are causing issues with educational organizations as well as students. However, when vertical alignment between secondary and post-secondary institutions happens, it gives a stronger focus to what is needed to be successful as students further their education, but it also emphasizes high school graduation requirements as students focus on next-step-preparation whether that preparation is for college or the workforce (Achieve, 2010).

High School Preparation for Collegiate Work

Adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) across many states in the nation, including South Dakota, resulted in concern at aligning curricular expectations for high schoolers when they moved between districts or states. Although South Dakota did not directly adopt the CCSS, they did use them as a basis for South Dakota Content Standards (SDCS), and there are striking similarities between the CCSS and the SDCS. If general alignment across the United States can happen in K-12 education, one would think each state could figure out how to align their collegiate classes to CCSS, or at minimum, encourage proper points of emphasis. Reasonably, this should have been able

to happen as CCSS were created with input from high school teachers as well as higher education faculty. This should have helped students achieve the idea of college readiness before dipping into post-secondary waters (DeMaria et al., 2015c).

Nevertheless, that does not appear to be the case as students often have performed well in high school but have not always been able to transfer that high performance to higher education. While American College Testing (ACT) numbers would show that South Dakota students seem to be proficient when tested, students still struggle with the transition to college-level course content. South Dakota students averaged a 21.7 composite score on the ACT in 2020 (Heemstra, 2020). While that number is about one point higher than the national average, there is still a gap between high school standards and college standards in South Dakota. As students bring their knowledge and work to higher education more than 1,000 South Dakota students need to take remedial classes. If South Dakota students are scoring that high on the ACT, above the national average, but still needing to take remedial coursework, there must be an obvious gap in standards and expectations nationwide as students move between secondary and post-secondary schooling.

This idea of vertical alignment is a two-way street. While colleges can take a look at their expectations and curriculum, high schools can do the same. At the high school level there are multiple opportunities to showcase standards proficiency other than coursework as students take standardized tests including Smarter Balanced Assessments and the ACT. There is more than one accurate way to place students in appropriate post-secondary classes because of the increased prominence in student assessments during high school. Students are continually evaluated for collegiate readiness through

standardized assessments and placement exams and this information can be used by colleges and universities to find the best match between students and the appropriate classes, lessening the need for remedial coursework (DeMaria et al., 2015a). However, students are not just being placed in the wrong classes, expectations at the college-level aren't matching what students have been learning during their primary and secondary education. "What post-secondary instructors expect entering college students to know is far more targeted and specific than what high school teachers view as important" (ACT, Inc., 2007, p. 2). This means that if there was a better alignment of standards and expectations, high school teachers would not need to cover such a wide variety of material and go more in depth on the material deemed as "important" by collegiate instructors, thus better preparing students for the next step in their educational journey.

It has been shown that high school teachers tend to think that more standards and skills are important to know than post-secondary professors. In a survey by ACT, Inc., college instructors "selected fewer topics and skills as important prerequisites for success" (ACT, Inc., 2007, p. 2). This emphasizes the concern that states expect too many standards to be covered and evaluated during high school, lessening the depth of knowledge and skills in which students are taught (ACT, Inc., 2007), and ultimately reducing the ability for high school teachers to adequately cover needed content for students to succeed at the next level.

In South Dakota, for English/Language Arts alone, there are 42 anchor standards for seniors to show proficiency in based on the South Dakota Core Standards (South Dakota Department of Education, 2018). This does not count the sub-standards that give more specific ideas of what needs to be covered, utilized, or analyzed. Just employing

anchor standards, to cover each standard by the end of the school year, students would need to show proficiency in a new standard every four days. This does not account for any reteaching, reinforcement, or repetition to make sure the content is truly learned and not just memorized until a test and then forgotten. However, high school teachers are stuck as they do not have the ability to pick and choose standards that they cover as they are expected to teach and measure each one, eventually helping students reach proficiency (ACT, Inc., 2007). These pressures may make teachers cover all standards equally rather than scaffolding and spending more time on skills that are more highly sought after in higher education. Despite the high volume of standards needing to be covered, equaling about one standard every 4 days, high school teachers believe they are fulfilling the stereotypical mission statement of preparing students for their future.

Although the majority of high school teachers feel they are preparing students for collegiate expectations, that opinion is not necessarily shared with college instructors who believe the standards, not necessarily the teachers, do an inadequate job in student preparation for collegiate level work. This draws attention to gaps in communication, expectations, and standards preparation between K-12 and collegiate institutions (ACT, Inc., 2007).

When ACT, Inc., surveyed teachers at both the high school and post-secondary level, respondents matched thoughts on foundational skills with high school teachers rating adequate preparation much higher than collegiate professors as 76% of high school English teachers thought the state standards prepared students well or very well for college. However, only 33% of collegiate instructors thought the same (ACT, Inc., 2007). “This finding strongly suggests that a gap still exists between what colleges believe is

important for college readiness and what state standards are requiring teachers to teach” (ACT, Inc., 2007, p. 3). Nevertheless, though there are gaps in perceptions of college readiness, it is not necessary to start completely from square one; remedial courses are doing their job in bridging content standards between high school and college-level institutions. Furthermore, when surveyed by ACT, Inc., remedial course instructors ranked skill and standard importance much closer to post-secondary instructors than high school teachers. This continues to highlight the gap between the two levels of institutions: K-12 education and post-secondary education (ACT, Inc., 2007).

When high school and college institutions try to work together, there are multiple occasions of inconsistency as colleges and universities do not always use standardized assessment results or results are interpreted differently by college-level educators depending on what higher education institution is looking at them. There has been inconsistent messaging about what it means to be college-ready; thus, high school students and secondary teachers have not been sure if they have been meeting standards needed and expected at the next educational level (DeMaria et al., 2015b). Consequently, perceptions in preparedness and standard measures in place have yielded incongruous results.

This gap in content and expectations is not only an issue in South Dakota; other states have put together task forces to address the problem as well. For example, Washington state has identified large numbers of students who are needing remedial work before entering into introductory post-secondary classes. This is particularly prevalent in core subjects like math and English. The Washington Student Achievement Council noted that a divergence in requirements between high school and college are too

extreme for widespread student success (Spaulding, 2013). Thus, the need for remedial classes and gaps between final high school standards and beginning college standards is pervasive across the United States, not just isolated to South Dakota. Some of the issues of student success stem from disconnected requirements as high schoolers earn a diploma but labor in higher education. Likewise, young educators adequately finish teacher preparation programs but are not fully ready for a classroom, unsure of developmental expectations (DeMaria et al., 2015a). The lack of communication and alignment between K-12 and higher education is causing issues for all stakeholders. As K-12 education is being blamed for not doing a good-enough job educating and preparing students, higher education is having more students enroll in remedial classes and needing to staff those classes, and remedial classes have been shown to adversely affect graduation rates. Students and families are suffering the consequences as they flounder in their transition between high school and a college level education.

Standards Alignment in CTE Classes

While gaps in curriculum expectations and skill development in high school students and college students and a lack of communication between secondary and post-secondary educational entities seems to be an issue in multiple content areas, there has been some success in closing the gap in career and technical education (CTE) classes. Oftentimes, working collaboratively with local technical schools and community colleges, students in high school are introduced to basic concepts needed for success at the post-secondary level. In CTE, the focus may be more concentrated on future career necessities rather than giving students a general college education, but that has been a common theme among education at all levels recently: college and career readiness.

Efforts to increase collaboration between colleges and a technical workforce have shifted content and expectations to best match the needs of employers. The same can be done to align high school and college content. As states have seen the positive benefits of technical school and employer cooperation, they must realize those same approaches to alignment can be done in other areas to replicate the academic and employability successes seen through CTE approaches (DeMaria et al., 2015a).

Cooperation and collaboration between community/technical colleges and the business sector is not new. Those entities have been working together for years to match college level training with workforce demands (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012). This shows that cooperation between higher education and another entity is possible. If community colleges can tailor student options and preparations to meet business needs, it is plausible that the same scenario can occur between secondary and post-secondary schools.

Successes in communications between some higher education institutions and the workforce showcase that alignment and improvements between post-secondary education and other entities can happen. This gives hope that K-12 and higher education can also work together to best align their needs and expectations, heightening the potential for student success along the way. While individual efforts are in place at certain schools or cooperation is happening between particular institutions, these efforts are not widespread. There are multiple students who are still missing out on alignment of academic requirements of their high school and choice of college and bearing the results that come from inconsistent standards and varied emphasis of skill importance.

Pre-College Exposure Options: Dual Enrollment, AP, and Other Opportunities

Some efforts are working toward an alignment of standards and credits between educational institution levels as some schools have dual credit and advanced placement (AP) courses, articulation agreements, and programs of study (POS). Dual credit classes are typically taught by a college professor and are transcribed as a college course that also serves to fulfill high school graduation requirements. “Dual enrollment requires high schools and colleges to work together, fostering collaboration between college faculty and high school teachers that can potentially lead to better alignment of curricula” (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012, p. 5). Dual credit classes, becoming more popular each year, introduce students to higher education coursework and expectations but at a cost. Students pay for dual credit classes and their earned grade stays with them throughout their college career. Additionally, if students struggle with these dual credit classes, it can lessen their confidence going into college. However, high school students being willing to challenge themselves with college classes demonstrates a commitment to one’s education and can result in a few benefits including lessening time and costs needed to be spent in college as well as making higher education accessible to all, especially first-generation college students (Achieve, 2010). Nevertheless, offering dual credit is not a panacea and will not guarantee that secondary and post-secondary establishments will communicate continually. While initial conversations may take place in order to establish a dual credit class, it does not change what and/or how high school teachers teach that class nor does it inform college professors on student preparation.

AP (advanced placement) courses are similar to dual credit classes as a syllabus and course expectations for an AP course have to be approved by the CollegeBoard. In

order to earn full college credit for an AP course, students have to show their proficiency by taking a cumulative test at the end of a term; students do have to pay a fee to take this test. If a high enough score is attained, students receive college credit. How high a score is high enough varies depending on the course and the higher education institution. If a lower score is earned, the student does not receive credit and must still pay the fees for the course and exam.

Articulation agreements are a blend of dual credit classes and AP courses. Articulation agreements allow students to earn college credit for a high school course if content in the high school course is similar to a course or courses at a higher education level. While this is often seen in CTE classes, widespread use and/or branching of this practice into various other content areas has yet to become the norm (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012). However, high school instructors of courses covered by articulation agreements must have the content of their classes match collegiate expectations and the teachers themselves need to show a certain level of educational attainment and/or proficiency in the selected subject.

A final option for exposing high school students to college level courses is programs of study. POS courses are looked at more as clusters, giving students options of successive courses and allowing students to concentrate on expanding into one career area. This not only promotes focused areas of study, similar to choosing a major in college, but also tends to heighten the rigor of classes as classes directly build off each other (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012). The constant performance demands and centered standards with high expectations, sets a tone for students early on in high school, allowing students to transfer those heightened skills to the collegiate level.

Gap in Standards Alignment in English Classes

While the disparate expectations between high school and post-secondary instruction are prevalent among multiple content areas, it is noticeably rampant in English courses as those are classes that all students have to take in high school as well as college. Looking at a large sample size from California, standards divergences were prominent as less than 20% of high school seniors were “college-ready in English” (Achieve, 2010, p. 4). DeMaria et al. (2015c) argued, “Improving college readiness starts with implementing strong K-12 standards in . . . [English and mathematics], whether through the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other rigorous college and career readiness standards” (p. 2). So, the foundation should be set, however it is not being utilized fully or appropriately between secondary and post-secondary education.

One of the biggest disparities comes in points of emphasis between high school teachers and post-secondary instructors. Dividing the main ideas presented to students into mechanics which include sentence structure, punctuation, and usage, and rhetoric, which encompasses idea development and editing as defined by ACT, Inc (2007), high school teachers stress one skill, rhetoric, while college professors focus on the other, sentence structure. This disconnect between directives causes a sharp learning curve for students as they transition from secondary to post-secondary education (ACT, Inc., 2007, p. 5). This extends beyond just writing but reading skills as well. A survey by ACT, Inc., revealed that collegiate entry-level and remedial course teachers “devote a large percentage of time to teaching [targeted reading strategies]” to prepare students for collegiate coursework (ACT, Inc., 2007, p. 6). This is in sharp contrast to the traditional high school approach as many schools place light emphasis on reading strategies and/or

overlook explicit instruction for the final 3 years if not all 4 years of high school. And while complex texts should be tackled in the English classroom, they should also be continually utilized in other content areas as well as it helps students enhance their reading skills and decoding/comprehension strategies (ACT, Inc., 2007). These skills are important as they not only prepare students for success in a multitude of high school classes but for success at the post-secondary level as well as in the job market (ACT, Inc., 2007). These vital skills are not being taught properly, fully, or enough at the high school level leaving students with a skill deficit as they move on to their next steps after high school.

State Efforts to Connect Secondary and Post-Secondary Education

This issue of connection, support, and vertical alignment is not concentrated to one specific state or region. Efforts to better prepare students and enhance content alignment can be seen all across the United States. Multiple states across the nation including South Carolina, Illinois, and Washington have set up councils to enhance alignment and coordination between high school and college entities. Some have even gone as far as creating legislation mandating synchronization of standards between secondary and post-secondary schools (DeMaria et al., 2015a). The benefits of these aligned programs are evident from multiple states that have already implemented coordinated curricula. In areas where high school curricula and college curricula are coordinated, high school students have a better idea of secondary graduation expectations and of immediately transferring those high standards to the collegiate level. This preparation is essential as coming in with the proper content knowledge and performance

abilities “translates into more students persisting to a credential or degree – in less time and at a lower cost” (DeMaria et al., 2015a).

While this seems like it would be a natural and viable fit in all states, it isn’t that easy. Getting major stakeholders to buy into a unified program is key to successful creation, support, and implementation of aligned curricula. As more states and organizations realize there is an issue of curriculum alignment and gaps in alignment interfere with collegiate preparation, more education consortiums are creating coordinated assessments and resources (DeMaria et al., 2015b), but it is still a matter of states and/or institutions partnering with those programs and making the necessary adjustments. Whether it is through a coordinated program already established or a state-created program, the need for support and engagement in aligning curricula is necessary for successful implementation.

However, there is more to standards alignment than informing post-secondary entry-level college professors of the need for change or adjusting high school standards. While these two tasks are at the foundational level of aligning curricula, gaining input of college professors and high school teachers in the creation of an aligned curricular program is necessary for gaining full buy-in from educators at both secondary and post-secondary institutions as teachers are more likely to want to change their courses if they are involved in the process that creates change. “As first implementers [high school teachers, college faculty, and administrators], they must be involved in decision-making and cross-sector alignment strategies” (DeMaria et al., 2015a, p. 7). This can be through creating a shared definition of college readiness as Massachusetts did or gathering

teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level together to work on college readiness standards and course alignment like Louisiana and Tennessee (DeMaria et al., 2015a).

South Carolina Personal Pathways to Success

In the mid-2000s, South Carolina implemented the “Personal Pathways to Success” (PPS) system. PPS has not just aimed at high school graduates pursuing post-secondary education but at all students. The PPS program has focused on career exploration throughout high school. Additionally, this legislation has called for secondary and post-secondary schools to “partner to create articulation and dual enrollment agreements, encouraging collaboration between education levels” (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012, p. 6). Aside from collaboration between educational institutions, regional support centers were created to encourage continual communication and connection between multiple stakeholders including students, teachers, employers, and community members. This PPS effort has aligned high school graduation requirements with college entrance requirements and grown appropriate pursuits and next-level success in the workforce and at colleges. Preliminary information from a longitudinal study of this program has shown an increase in high school graduation rates as well as more access to career planning resources (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012).

Illinois Career Pathways

While South Carolina’s approach has been successful for that state on the east, Illinois has taken a different approach in the Midwest. Illinois has primarily focused on aligning curriculum with industry expectations. By providing students with opportunities including dual enrollment; articulation agreements; partnerships between high schools,

tech schools, colleges, and employers; and continued career and professional development opportunities, multiple educational levels are all working toward the same goal, providing students with endeavors that help students with readiness for life beyond high school (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012).

Washington “Core to College” Alignment Efforts

On the west coast, Washington state identified a concerning gap in early success at the post-secondary level. After putting together a task force, they concluded that “Washington must develop a systematic approach to facilitate alignment of expectations and requirements across sectors” (Spaulding, 2013, p. 3) because of the gap between high school curriculum and necessary post-secondary skills and knowledge. This has been a common problem seen not just in Washington, but in states all across the country. Washington’s taskforce found four key takeaways to guide their efforts in addressing this academic shortfall: necessitating alignment of high school curriculum to college expectations, increasing education funding while integrating Common Core State Standards (CCSS), improving educational atmospheres and assessments to aid in transitions from one level of education to the next, and targeting high school seniors encouraging rigorous content and experiences that prepare students for post-secondary education or the workforce (Spaulding, 2013). These steps give a structured plan of attack to lessening the educational gap students may face as they transition between high school and college, and with a few minor changes, can be generalized to any state as a foundational beginning.

Washington implemented a collaboration between colleges and universities in the state and the K-12 system, giving meaning to some of the standardized testing that has

been done in high school. An agreement between post-secondary institutions allowed students to use their scores from their 11th grade Smarter Balanced tests as a placement standard for enrollment in first-year college courses (DeMaria et al, 2015b). This showed students not only purposefulness to the testing but a vertical progression of standards and expectations as they moved from secondary to post-secondary institutions.

Furthermore, Washington's Core to College program looks to increase collaboration between high schools and colleges by "piloting transcript-based placement" (Spaulding, 2013, p. 3). This placement requires high schools offer a curriculum that intersects with post-secondary admission requirements. Students can submit appropriate coursework in any content area for collegiate credit (Spaulding, 2013). The Core to College policy also actively encourages collaboration between educators, not just institutions, as teachers and faculty generate transitional curricula for high school seniors who are at risk of needing remedial coursework at the next level of their education. Finally, the taskforce supports and executes professional learning communities across multiple educational sectors including early childhood, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education, gaining a better picture of vertical alignment and educational development for students (Spaulding, 2013). Washington's Core to College program brings into focus one of the most noticeable gaps in South Dakota's educational system at the time of this study, a lack of communication and opportunity to collaborate between educators at high school and collegiate levels.

While all these programs address the need of vertical alignment and stronger communication between multiple levels of education, there is not a one-size fits all approach. However, lessons can be gathered through partnerships, initiatives, and

program collaboration. South Dakota could pull on and expand upon some of the efforts other states have enacted to continue to bolster the educational success of its students.

South Dakota does participate in the same consortium as Washington concerning the Smarter Balanced performance placement (DeMaria et al, 2015b). South Dakota also has cooperation between high school, college, and career businesses with its Build Dakota program; however, that program focuses more on building and retaining a skilled workforce rather than aligning and building upon standards. This is also present only in CTE courses, not general education like science or English.

Benefits of Secondary and Post-Secondary Curriculum Alignment

Efforts to bring consistency to compulsory education standards has been successful for the most part as almost all states adopted the CCSS or made slight variations to their educational programs to fit their state's needs, expectations, and requirements; subsequently, standards are now better aligned vertically and structured to build on each other from year to year through high school. If something can be implemented among that many individualized state educational institutions across the nation, why is it so difficult for secondary and post-secondary entities within a state to talk to each other and align their requirements and expectations?

The CCSS is a perfect vessel to encourage collaboration between high school and college institutions. Common core state standards are clear, easy to find, widely adopted, and structured to continually encourage improvement in a concept or content area. However, states are not taking advantage of this as only a nominal number of states have or have plans to align their collegiate admissions requirements and freshmen-level curriculum with the common core (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012;

Spaulding, 2013). While the CCSS brings students to a consistent point by the end of high school, it is still emphasizing different content and/or falling short of where many post-secondary institutions think entry level students should be. This leads to the proposition that technical schools, colleges, and universities should have a say in college readiness assessments given to high school seniors. Making this adjustment would help ensure tests accurately measure content and performance to anchor expectations of what is needed for collegiate success (Achieve, 2010). Though this type of collaboration would be ideal, it is not the norm, as a majority of states keep high school assessment creation and evaluation segregated from post-secondary input.

Higher education leaders or faculty members are rarely invited into the K-12 assessment development process and when they are it's usually to provide additional insights into pedagogy or psychometrics rather than to define college-ready expectations. This needs to change. (Achieve, 2010, p. 3)

Without active, supported collaboration between high school and college level educators, aligning standards between the two levels of education and implementing them effectively cannot and will not happen.

Effective alignment of curricula helps multiple stakeholders including institutions, students, and families, not to mention educators. "For institutions, a strong, focused and aligned college readiness and college success agenda translates into higher enrollments, improved retention, improved rates of completion and likely lower loan default rates" (DeMaria et al., 2015a, p. 2). By having congruent standards and expectations, students quickly find post-secondary success which boosts confidence, lessens time spent at an institution, reduces the need for remedial classes, lowers the amount of money needed to

dedicate to higher education pursuits, and increases the likelihood of graduation (DeMaria et al., 2015a). There are multiple benefits for multiple stakeholders when communication happens between secondary and post-secondary institutions.

Communication Between Secondary and Post-Secondary Entities

The idea of vertical alignment and collaboration between multiple entities is not new and has been shown it can be successful through multiple industries other than education. Education has shown its promise in unity of K-12 standards, bridging gaps as students transition from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school, as well as many CTE classes aligning their course content to industry standards. Vertical alignment and communication are necessary not just in education but other organizations as well.

The restaurant and the produce supplier, the manufacturer and the parts supplier, and the insurance company and the sales agency, to name a few . . . the success of one relies on the success of the other—and when both succeed, the customer benefits. When circumstances change, partners must change and adapt to ensure ongoing success. (DeMaria et al., 2015a, p. 1)

This is where education needs to be more adaptable and collaborative. K-12 education has changed based on student needs, legislation passed, and adoption of new standards. Likewise, higher education has changed as a higher number and greater diversity of students are enrolling and new career opportunities continue to pop up which dictates new majors and courses be offered. However, these changes are not always congruent between educational institutions, and little is being done to mediate this issue. “In general, secondary and post-secondary education are not well aligned. The expectations

and standards for high school graduation are not the same as those for successful college entry, and this has adverse consequences for students” (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2012, p. 8). A shared vision, a shared definition, and a shared expectation is necessary to properly prepare students for life after compulsory education.

Fixing standards alignment issues is not solely a matter of communication between various entities. It can also be addressed early on by the way teachers are prepared. As a result of gaps in college-readiness, California State University (CSU) has held sessions for working teachers to better supplement missing standards and skills in high school teaching. CSU paved the way in closing their college readiness gap by inserting conversations and content standards information in pre-service teacher preparation programs as well as high school in-service programs (Achieve, 2010).

Awareness of issues and actively working to find opportunities for collaboration is a start to creating the needed environment to align standards between high school and collegiate institutions.

South Dakota Efforts in Place in Content Areas Other Than English or Individual School Districts

Matching efforts other states have taken, South Dakota is starting to explore various options and look for ways to narrow the standards gap after realizing their state is not immune to this problem. However, there is no widespread coordinated effort across the state. Individual college level institutions are developing their own actions rather than waiting for legislation or K-12 institutions to reach out. South Dakota State University (SDSU) has been the most assertive in reducing the amount of students that need to take remedial courses. Specifically, the math department has made strides under direction of

department head, Kurt Cogswell. Through the creation of a new placement index and a new college algebra class that is taken in conjunction with a study skills/tutoring class, SDSU has seen a reduction in the need for students to take remedial classes within their math department (Pfankuch, 2019; Raposa & Ellis, 2019). Adjustments have been made across the university system after the South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR) noted the positive effects of SDSU's efforts. While SDSU's efforts have shown encouraging results, they are only taking care of issues once individuals are enrolled in college. SDSU's initiatives do not address any of the learning or preparation that happens in high school.

Separate action has been taken by the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE); they have created their own college readiness program. The SDDOE program focuses on high school seniors and juniors by using their ACT performance. If students fall into a certain range based on their ACT score, they receive a letter encouraging them to enroll in SDDOE's college readiness program; that program helps students prepare for college-level work. This matches suggestions made by Michael Kirst and Andrea Venezia (2001) of Stanford University. As they explained in their article "Bridging the Great Divide Between Secondary Schools and Post-secondary Education," it is important all stakeholders understand what needs to be done at the college level. It is not just an understanding of content but an execution of college-level work, paired with meeting expectations and building confidence in students. Using placement exams (like the ACT) to assess where high school students may be in skills and knowledge and what gaps need to be filled in before moving on to the next level of their education will help make the transition between secondary and post-secondary education easier when that time comes (Kirst & Venezia, 2001).

While this program the SDDOE is implementing is a step in the right direction; it does come at a cost. Students must pay, on average, \$150 per college readiness class, which may deter students who could greatly benefit from the support of college readiness classes. These 10-week to 12-month classes are offered in English, math, and reading (Raposa & Ellis, 2019). Financial support from school districts varies as some districts choose to take care of the costs in part or in full while other districts don't contribute at all, leaving students and families to pay the entire cost. As extra encouragement to do well, other than reducing the likelihood of needing to take remedial courses in college, if students pass a college readiness class, costs may be reimbursed. Unfortunately, this effort hasn't caught on like the SDDOE hoped, "Response to the program has been underwhelming. In the 2015-2016 school year, just 100 students participated, and of those, only 51 passed" (Raposa & Ellis, 2019, para. 18). While just over a 50% success rate may seem defeating, it is better than the over 1,100 other first-year public university students who have needed remediation (Raposa & Ellis, 2019).

So, both the SDDOE and SDBOR have realized there is a standards gap issue and have taken steps to address the problem, but still have failed to work together. It has been shown that cooperation to address the gap in standards between secondary and post-secondary institutions yields better results and stronger buy-in from both sides. If those systems work together "to develop anchor assessments that reflect the breadth and rigor of the content needed for entry into credit-bearing, entry-level post-secondary courses, without the need for remediation" (Achieve, 2010, p. 3), it benefits not just students, but families, schools, and communities along the way.

Gaps in the Literature

There is a wealth of information about the need for vertical alignment of standards between high schools and post secondary schools and what CTE courses are doing when coordinating workforce and tech school expectations. However, specifically looking at English content, there is not the same breadth of research. Being a core class, English data is often grouped with other core classes such as math and/or science. Also, there has not been full research that showcases success stories of states' efforts to align standards between secondary and post-secondary schools. Because this is a newer topic, the amount of data available regarding outcomes of alignment efforts is scarce.

The amount of literature showcasing specific efforts of how states have coordinated K-12 and post-secondary communication and action is often too general. Other than just saying collaboration was fostered/encouraged, the literature doesn't say whether collaboration occurred independently between two educational institutions or because of legislation passed. The literature also does not showcase how collaboration has spread through various systems nor does it address how two groups involved in collaboration felt about changes to their curricula and expectations. It has been noted that "higher education systems and institutions have little incentive to collaborate with K-12 districts and schools . . . there are few levers in place—such as K-16 accountability systems or funding mechanisms that cross the sectors—to encourage higher education to change its practices" (Kirst & Venezia, 2001, p. 93). Part of this issue is that K-12 education is under the control of the state government as they dictate standards and assessment practices. However, the same oversight is not given to post-secondary institutions as "state legislatures and governors often view higher education as

comparatively untouchable” (Kirst & Venezia, 2001, p. 93). Without any incentive, nor any governmental oversight, at least to the extent that K-12 institutions are subjected to, the desire for college level institutions to change is left to the sole discretion of the post-secondary institution or maybe the university system.

Possible Solutions and/or Barriers to Theoretical Foundations

Evidence shows that better vertical alignment and course sequencing would lead to greater success for students moving through South Dakota’s educational system; they not only would have a gradual increase in academic rigor but also intensifying expectations. It only makes sense to have the first undergraduate courses at the college level match up with and build off of senior courses taken in high school (Kirst & Venezia, 2001). However, that was not happening at the time of this study. While K-12 academic standards were present in every state and almost all states had statewide assessments, very few transitioned those efforts to the post-secondary level. “While many of these problems are created by structural inequalities in the schools and society at large, it may be possible that, by coordinating reform efforts across the K-16 system, we could improve academic outcomes for all students” (Kirst & Venezia, 2001, p. 93). That means that more needs to be done to articulate introductory college classes to high school senior year coursework.

Not only does this call for changes to the way things are done in K-12 and higher education systems but also for government oversight.

Most states implicitly discourage K-16 policymaking by having separate K-12 and higher education legislative committees, funding streams, and state agencies. These barriers inhibit joint policymaking and communication regarding issues

such as funding, data sharing, student learning (curriculum, standards assessment), matriculation and transfer, teacher training and professional development, and accountability. Having a K-16 entity does not, however, ensure that innovative K-16 reforms will follow. Only a concerted effort by policymakers, educators, parents, and students will do the job. (Kirst & Venezia, 2001, p. 97)

Although there is not a panacea to the issue of standards gaps, there have been a few focused steps that could be taken to nudge multiple entities in the right direction to coordinate efforts, expectations, and standards between the two principal education institutions: K-12 and higher education.

Another issue facing the connection and collaboration between K-12 and higher education is accessibility of information. The South Dakota Department of Education has a clear website where one can easily navigate to find the South Dakota's Content Standards. They are essentially the same as the CCSS, so any general Google search will yield the results one is looking for. While that is great for the K-12 system, it is not that easy at the next level. Finding set standards for collegiate classes can be cumbersome. While some professors post their syllabi or a department website gives general ideas of what their classes will cover, such information is not always easy to find. As a result, high school teachers who are trying to align their classes to college level standards and expectations struggle because of a lack of accessibility to what those standards may be.

Leaving it up to high school teachers to choose what is most important to focus on and what skills to emphasize is not consistent nor reliable as high school teachers typically rate more topics as important than post-secondary instructors. This points to the

idea that there are too many standards that teachers are expected to cover in high school; if state high school standards were reduced to fewer more focused, targeted skills and knowledge, it may help align high school standards to expectations of post-secondary instructors, expectations for next level success (ACT, Inc., 2007).

However, successful collaboration has occurred. The university system works together with various colleges and universities to easily transfer credits between institutions. Dual credit courses are in place at some schools. CTE classes in particular have done a great job at aligning their content with workforce expectations, giving students the option to go straight into the labor market or continue schooling. Alignment between non-education entities have been in place for years looking at cooperation between supply-demand product lines. There are multiple examples to set the foundation of collaboration occurring between high school educational systems and college level educational systems, but when K-12 and higher education have been separated and treated differently for so long, it isn't just getting the schools to communicate and adjust that is a problem. It is also getting other stakeholders involved like legislative committees and other government forces, oversight boards such as the SDDOE and SDBOR, as well as student, parent, and teachers; they must buy in to the notion that changes are necessary to help bridge the academic gap that has been present in South Dakota.

Conclusion From Literature Review

It is imperative that more cooperation and collaboration happens between secondary and post-secondary education to help bridge the gap in knowledge, performance, and expectations of students. With communication practices in place, both sides can work toward better aligning their standards and guiding their points of

emphasis, still covering all necessary content components but being more effective at building on skills vertically rather than having students make leaps as they transition from their compulsory education to the university system.

Ideally, groundwork should be set, as structures at the time of this study showed representatives from higher education serve on mandatory education boards and vice versa. It must be noted that just because there is a representative on a board, it does not mean that a conversation between two full institutions is happening or that messages are being relayed to people directly working with students. “The country's two separate systems of mass education—K-12 on one hand and universities and colleges on the other—rarely collaborated to establish consistent standards” (Kirst & Venezia, 2001).

There is not a clear direction for high school teachers to take to address the problem other than following CCSS because finding content standards for college level entry work is nearly impossible. So, if high school teachers want to individually facilitate a better connection, they can't because of a lack of accessibility to college standards. Also, collegiate institutions did not adjust their standards when Common Core State Standards came out, leaving a gap between final standards students learn in high school, assuming all 40+ standards get covered, and beginning standards students are exposed to as freshmen in college. Skills learned by the end of one's secondary education should be enough for them to work productively and effectively in the workforce. Furthermore, if students are continuing on to post-secondary institutions, standards students complete in high school should prepare them for the next logical step in expectations, being able to perform freshman level college work without having to take remedial courses.

ARTIFACT #2

RESEARCH APPROACH NARRATIVE

In order to create truly meaningful results, the research conducted for better vertical alignment in English standards between secondary and post-secondary institutions was multifaceted. Using a mixed methods research design, this artifact covers results from a document study as well as survey results from educators answering questions about alignment of standards at both levels, secondary and post-secondary. Mixed methods was best for this study as it allowed for an understanding of what was already in place, through policy. Consequently, this identified areas that have been vertically aligned as well as ones that have room for a more efficient linear approach. Additionally, the survey captured qualitative perceptions of both high school and collegiate educators. It highlighted not only the structure of participants' classes but also the preparation of participants' students as students transitioned from high school to college.

The literature review underlined the importance of building upon academic skills and how that foundation can impact a student's collegiate success. When students come into a university class ill-prepared, have to take remedial courses, or have to repeat a course, it greatly reduces the likelihood of them graduating on time or possibly at all. However, the literature review did note there have been efforts to address these pitfalls. One has been looking at a full PK-16 curriculum that is vertically aligned so students all

get to the next level with the foundational education they need to succeed. Furthermore, the literature points to positive results when implementing vertical alignment in other content areas, especially CTE courses. There are proven areas of success between secondary and post-secondary institutions that are cooperating in aligning standards. The goal is to develop a viable plan of cooperation of vertical alignment of standards between high schools and colleges that can be implemented to better prepare our students in their English standards and coursework as a solid English foundation is critical across all content areas. Results of this literature review explored alignments in place at the time of this study as well as standards that have yielded success. Literature review results also revealed areas needing improvement and most prevalent gaps in standards alignment.

Research Design

A mixed methods research approach was used to set up this study. Quantitative data was assessed through the document study, identifying commonalities between standards at the high school level and the collegiate level. Using quantitative information allowed for a clear picture of standards and skills that were being emphasized and expected at the time of this study as well as areas containing gaps or that did not connect at all between institutional educational levels.

Furthermore, data from the literature review was supported by a survey that relied on both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data gave specific numbers including the amount of time high school teachers have spent on certain standards as well as comfort levels participants had with each standard. However, qualitative information supported other data giving voice to perceptions and experiences teachers, both at the high school and collegiate levels, have had with students and their educational

preparations. Additional qualitative data focused on student-specific skills and assessments put in place that analyzed student progress and readiness for college.

Participants

Two similar surveys were sent out to educators in the states of South Dakota, North Dakota, and Minnesota. Because the ultimate result will yield suggestions for better implementation and alignment between the South Dakota Department of Education (overseeing Grades PK-12) and South Dakota Board of Regents (overseeing Grades 13-16), results continued to focus on Upper Midwest trends. While the focus of this study was on South Dakota educational institutions, other states were included in the surveys because of the mobility of students in both directions. Not all high school South Dakota students choose to stay in South Dakota; however, a majority of them do as about 70% of South Dakota high school graduates stay in state (Mayer, 2021). Likewise, South Dakota college students are not all comprised of only South Dakota residents. In fact, according to the SDBOR Factbook (South Dakota Board of Regents, 2023a), just over 61% of students enrolled in the South Dakota state colleges and universities that comprise the SDBOR are from South Dakota. So, while the majority of students are staying in state, there are students who are choosing to pursue their education outside of South Dakota and there are non-South Dakota residents who are coming into South Dakota to continue their educational journeys.

For the high school side, focusing on standards teachers fixated on most, felt most comfortable with, and thought students performed best in; a survey (see Appendix A) was sent to high school English teachers in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Minnesota. High school participants were contacted (see example email in Appendix B) using the

English/Language Arts email listserv available through state departments of education as well as state councils of English teachers. All respondents ($n = 26$) answered all questions of the survey.

A similar survey was created for college-level teachers (see Appendix C), looking at teacher perceptions of standards students were strongest in beginning their introductory level English courses, and in which areas students needed the most help. The college level survey was sent out to English professors via a link in an email (Appendix D) at South Dakota institutions including the following: South Dakota State University, University of South Dakota, Dakota State University, Black Hills State University, Northern State University, and Augustana University. Other post-secondary institutions such as the University of North Dakota and North Dakota State University were also contacted as many South Dakota students, while not always staying in-state to pursue their college education, often stayed in the Upper Midwest. Just as in the high school educator survey, all respondents of the college-level educator survey ($n = 40$) answered all questions.

Table 1

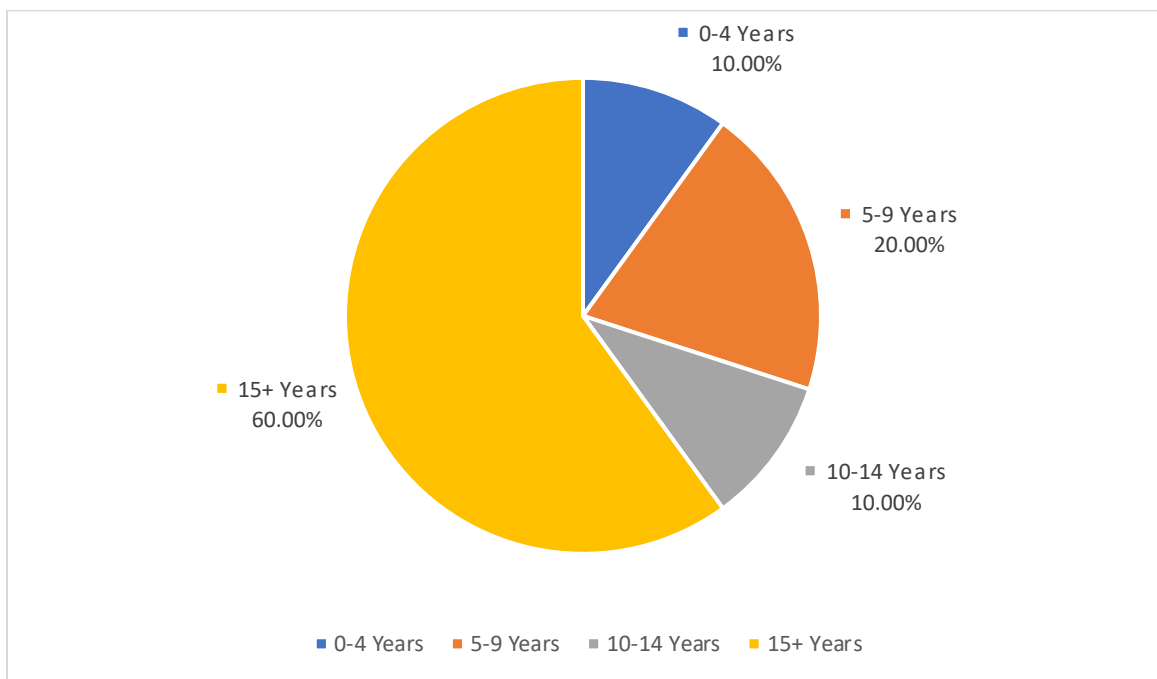
Number (n) of Survey Participants by State

High School Survey		College Survey	
State	<i>n</i>	State	<i>n</i>
South Dakota.....	23	South Dakota.....	16
North Dakota.....	1	North Dakota.....	18
Minnesota.....	1	Minnesota.....	6
Other.....	1	Other.....	0
Total	26	Total.....	40

Approval from the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted to send out surveys to secondary and post-secondary educators. Information from surveys was anonymous, as no personal or specific institution names were collected. This was intentional so respondents could be honest with their answers and the researcher could remain unbiased when going through collected data. Figure 1 illustrates overall veteran experience of collegiate educators teaching the required, introductory level English/Composition classes.

Figure 1

Number of Years Selected Participants Taught at the Post-Secondary Level

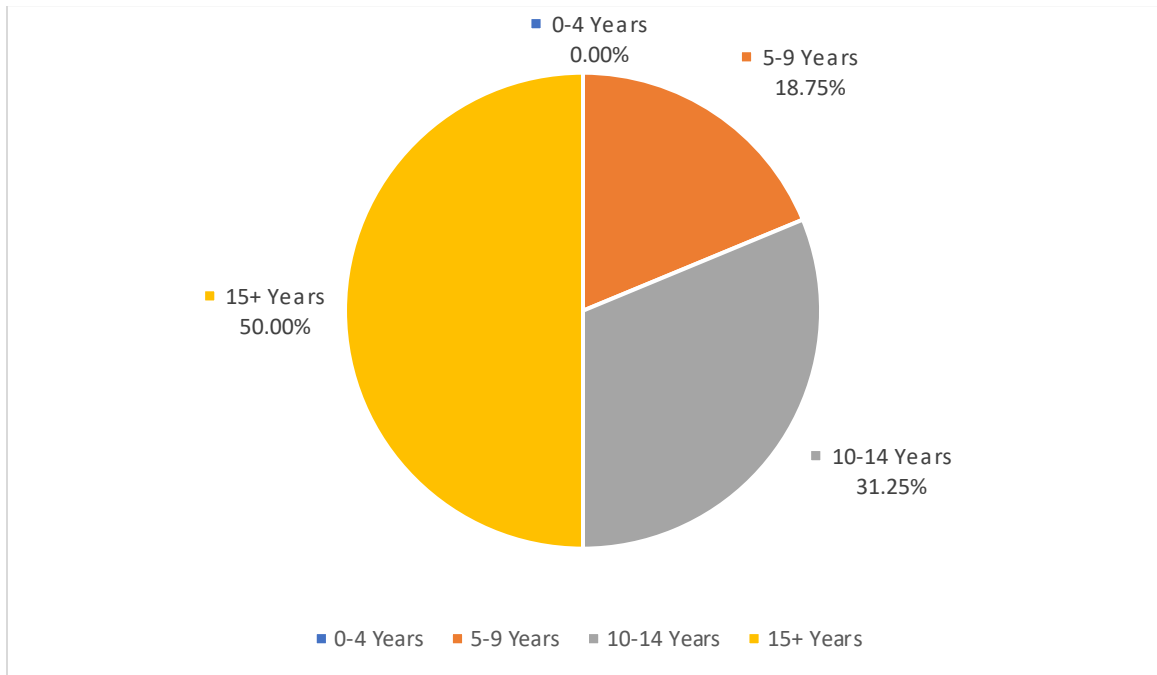


Note. Number of educator respondents at the college-level ($n = 40$)

Figure 2 shows veteran experience of participants teaching in an English classroom was also present at the high school level with the majority of respondents teaching for 10 years or more.

Figure 2

Number of Years Selected Participants Taught at the High School Level



Note. Number of educator respondents at the high school level ($n = 26$)

The veteran experience of educators at both educational levels is a testament to dedication and enjoyment of the profession as well as having multiple years of students and observations to draw from in order to give the most accurate analysis of their classrooms and experiences and truly know what is needed for success.

Research Environment

The document study was conducted electronically using public data published by both the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) and South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR), using state content standards and the system general education requirements (SGR) adopted by post-secondary institutions involved in this study.

In order to identify potential respondents for the study survey, public contact information and the educational listserv were used. Contacts through state councils of teachers of English in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Minnesota were also included in the electronic survey.

Participants completed the study survey through a link in their email (Appendix B, Appendix D). The link sent respondents to a Qualtrics survey. Participation in the survey was optional, and participants had an option to complete all, some, or none of the survey. The aim of the survey was to get an understanding of teacher perceptions of student performances and preparedness in their classrooms, and to understand which standards teachers felt most comfortable with and which ones they needed more supports in.

Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this mixed methods study. The document study gathered standards and expected course material from both high school (SDDOE) and collegiate (SDBOR) levels. The researcher focused on five main high school standards: reading literature, reading informational text, language, writing, and speaking and listening. The researcher looked for common wording, vertical development in expectations and content difficulty, and points of emphasis using thematic analysis. Additionally, the researcher identified concepts at the collegiate level that were missing at the high school level and vice versa. Information collected from the document study and the survey was synthesized highlighting themes, gaps in data, and discrepancies in information.

Document Study

The researcher utilized standards requirements set forth by governing boards from both the secondary and post-secondary level, looking at similar requirements and themes. This study provided visual evidence of required skills expected at both the secondary and post-secondary level. The SDDOE had developed more specific requirements for high school students to cover than the college level requirements, the SGR (system general education requirements) set forth by the SDBOR.

The SDDOE used South Dakota state content standards as a basis for course development and implementation. There have been separate standards for each content area. The English/Language Arts standards are split into five groups as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Standards/Requirements Comparison

Secondary Schools Areas of Focus	Post-Secondary Schools Areas of Focus
South Dakota State Content Standards – English/Language Arts Focus	System General Requirements – English/Language Arts Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Language- Reading Literature- Reading Informational Text- Speaking and Listening- Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Arts and Humanities/Diversity- Written Communication

The SDBOR also has guiding standards for their class requirements. There are six system general education requirements (SGR) but only two are linked to introductory level English/Language Arts classes: written communication and arts and humanities/diversity. And while the writing SGR is satisfied through introductory English classes, the arts and

humanities/diversity SGR can be addressed through English or through other classes; it is not exclusive to just introductory English classes.

A major takeaway from this comparison of standards between high school and college level classes is that high school students have a much wider scope of specific content standards to cover in their academic class selection than post-secondary students in their introductory level classes. This may cause high school students to have a wide breadth of knowledge and familiarity but a lack of depth and possibly a lack of time to practice and refine skills. Whereas post-secondary students have a narrower focus but are allowed to work with a certain topic more. It is worth noting that some specific standards covered in high school, while not explicitly stated in collegiate requirements, are needed and utilized in college in order to achieve mastery of the two SGRs highlighted to be relevant to introductory English/Language Arts classes at the post-secondary level.

Surveys

Two separate surveys were created: one for high school teachers to complete (Appendix A) and one for collegiate professors to complete (Appendix C). The survey for secondary educators consisted of 25 questions focusing on high school standards, sub-standards, implementation of standards, performance evaluation of students, and teacher perceptions. A similar survey of 27 questions was used for collegiate professors and faculty members, but the focus remained the same: college standards, sub-standards, implementation of standards, performance evaluation of students, and teacher perceptions.

Surveys were emailed at various times throughout the year to both high school teachers and college professors including at the beginning of a semester, at the end of a

semester, and during the summer when planning and revisions to content often take place. The data was compiled using both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Findings From Surveys Alone

Table 3 highlights which standards high school teachers felt their students were most prepared to execute effectively when going into college and which standards college professors saw incoming students most proficient in. The ranking was created using averages on a five-point scale, with a ranking of 1 being the *most prepared* to execute effectively and 5 being the *least prepared*.

Table 3

Standards Evaluation: Comparison of Perceptions of High School and College Teachers

Standards High School Teachers Feel Students Are Most Prepared to Execute When Entering College		Standards College Professors Feel Students Are Most Prepared to Execute When Entering College	
Standard	Average Ranking	Standard	Average Ranking
Reading Literature.....	2.13	Writing	1.67
Reading Informational Text	2.80	Reading Literature.....	2.56
Writing	3.00	Language.....	2.78
Speaking and Listening.....	3.27	Speaking and Listening	3.22
Language.....	3.80	Reading Informational Text	3.56

Note. Number of high school educator respondents ($n = 26$). Number of college-level educator respondents ($n = 40$)

Table 3 shows that while *reading literature* consistently is seen at the top of proficiency and *speaking and listening* is toward the bottom, there are inconsistencies in the way high school teachers perceive their students’ college readiness to the way college professors assess incoming students’ preparation. Notably high school teachers and college professors are at different ends of the spectrum when it comes to the perceived

abilities of students concerning *reading informational text*. High school teachers feel their students are well prepared, ranking it second highest on their list. However, college professors mark *reading informational text* the lowest, questioning how prepared their students are to execute that standard effectively when getting to the post-secondary level. In spite of the inconsistency in the *reading informational text* standard, perceptions of teachers concerning other standards seem to be fairly similar.

High school teachers' positions are reinforced by the way they approach their classroom and content as well. High school teachers responded they need to spend most their time actively teaching standards under *reading literature*, while *speaking and listening* and *language* standards were at the bottom of their list. This trend continued when looking at standards high school teachers felt most comfortable teaching as well with *reading literature* toward the top and *language* at the bottom, as shown in Table 4. Teachers evaluated their confidence on a 100-point scale.

Table 4

High School Teaching Evaluation

Standards High School Teachers Spend Most Time Actively Teaching		Standards High School Teachers Feel Most Confident in Teaching	
Standard	Average Ranking	Standard	Average Ranking
Reading Literature.....	1.88	Speaking and Listening.....	92.20
Writing	2.94	Reading Literature.....	90.40
Reading Informational Text	3.06	Reading Informational Text	90.00
Language.....	3.38	Writing	89.87
Speaking and Listening.....	3.75	Language.....	78.88

Note. 1 = most time teaching, 5 = least time teaching

Contrarily, teachers feel most confident in teaching the speaking and listening standard and components and yet spent the least amount of time actively teaching it. This lack of direct, focused instruction may be one of the reasons college professors rank *speaking and listening* toward the bottom of their list of “Standards College Professors Feel Students Are Most Prepared to Execute When Entering College” (as referenced in Table 3). There is a disparity between high school preparation and what is needed at the collegiate level, and it is further emphasized by high school teachers not actively teaching the *speaking and listening* standard as often in their classes as other standards.

This issue comes into play as high school English and language arts teachers have a multitude of standards to cover. There are five specific categories: *reading literature*, *reading informational text*, *language*, *writing*, and *speaking and listening*. But there are more than 40 sub-standards to cover. Table 4 showed high school teachers feel like they spend most their time actively teaching the standards of *reading literature* and *writing* and at the college level, professors identified writing as the skill incoming students have been most proficient in as shown in Table 5. Table 5 also addresses that while instructors at the collegiate level feel like students are not as well versed in *reading informational text* as they are in other standards, *reading informational text* is the standard college professors feel most confident in teaching.

Even though the *reading literature* standard was tied for second in perceptions of student proficiency by college professors, it was significantly behind the first standard of *writing*, showing that there is a possibility of inconsistency or at least a gap in incoming students’ proficiency in that standard, despite *reading literature* being the standard high school teachers spend the most time teaching.

Table 5

College Teaching Evaluation

Standards College Professors Feel Incoming Students Are Most Proficient In		Standards College Professors Feel Most Confident in Teaching	
Standard	Average Ranking	Standard	Average Ranking
Writing	1.67	Reading Informational Text	95.56
Reading Literature.....	3.22	Writing	95.22
Speaking and Listening.....	3.22	Reading Literature.....	91.00
Language.....	3.22	Language.....	89.33
Reading Informational Text	3.67	Speaking and Listening.....	80.33

Note. 1 = most proficient in, 5 = least proficient in

While high school teachers are guided by state standards set out by state departments of education, such as the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE), some colleges or introductory English and writing courses at the collegiate level have a little more flexibility. Respondents noted that standards college professors follow may be created by a variety of institutions or organizations including a university’s English program faculty, a collegiate composition committee, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the Board of Regents English Discipline Council (South Dakota), the Association of Writers and Writing Programs and/or the Creative Writing Studies Organization. Because of the multitude of voices involved in English education, there may be greater variance in expectations different institutions have of incoming college students, further emphasizing the need for more well-rounded exposure of students during primary and secondary education as students will not necessarily know what they will encounter at the post-secondary level, depending on where they choose to further their education.

Other Findings

This information collected from surveys and the document study was synthesized primarily using inductive reasoning, highlighting themes, and identifying gaps and discrepancies in the information. The document study underscored that while the high school system hosts six standards with six to ten sub-standards under each, the colleges have two standards with only four to six sub-standards under each. This gives greater focus to certain fewer skills at the collegiate level than at the high school level. However, some of the sub-standards at the high school level are necessary in order for students to achieve skills they are expected to know at the collegiate level, even though some skills are not explicitly stated.

Furthermore, the document study emphasized introductory English courses at post-secondary institutions were mainly focused on writing. The overarching goal for writing components in the SGR is for students to “write effectively and responsibly and . . . understand and interpret the written expression of others” (South Dakota Board of Regents, 2022b, Section 2.7.C.2, Goal #1).

Four sub-standards (learning outcomes) outlined by the South Dakota Board of Regents (2022a) align with nine SDDOE sub-standards for writing (South Dakota Department of Education, 2018). The SDDOE sub-standards are more specific than the SDBOR ones, thus multiple high school expectations can fit within one collegiate standard. In Table 6, college sub-standards were taken from pages 3-4 of a reference (South Dakota Board of Regents, 2022a). Many colleges also list SDBOR “learning outcomes” (South Dakota State University, n.d.). High school standards were taken from pages 52-54 of a source (South Dakota Department of Education, 2018).

Table 6

Standards Compared—College Level SGR #1 and High School Writing

SDBOR College Standard	SDDOE High School Standard
<i>SGR Goal #1: Students will write effectively and responsibly and will understand and interpret the written expression of others.</i>	<i>Writing</i>
1. Write using standard American English, including correct punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure.	4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
2. Write logically.	1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. 2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. 3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. 5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
3. Write persuasively, using a variety of rhetorical strategies (e.g., exposition, argumentation, description).	1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

SDBOR College Standard**SDDOE High School Standard**

SGR Goal #1: Students will write effectively and responsibly and will understand and interpret the written expression of others.

Writing

4. Incorporate formal research and documentation into their writing, including research obtained through modern, technology-based research tools.

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
8. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.
9. Draw relevant evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

[No college equivalent.]

10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences; independently select writing topics and formats for personal enjoyment, interest, and academic tasks.

The first SDBOR college level sub-standard focusing on writing appropriately using proper grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure is addressed under the language category of the South Dakota state content standards for high school students (South Dakota Department of Education, 2018). College professors indicated they felt students came into their classes with their greatest proficiency in the writing standard (Table 5); however, college professors rated freshman student skills in the language standard at 3.22 where 1 is most proficient and 5 is least proficient. The language standard covers basic mechanics of writing such as grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation. This rating shows that while students are strong in ideas, research, and revision; there is still room for improvement when it comes to fine tuning strong command of English conventions including punctuation and spelling as well as understanding the nuances of language choices.

In addition to the SGR #1 writing standard, the SDBOR also identified “SGR #4 – Arts and Humanities/Diversity” (South Dakota State University, n.d., para. 1) as a standard that could potentially be satisfied through an introductory English class at the college level. Table 6 compares the SDDOE high school standard of reading literature to SGR #4 on arts and humanities/diversity. While it is not an exact comparison, there are multiple sub-standards for reading literature to connect to the SGR on arts and humanities/diversity (South Dakota State University, n.d.). In Table 7, college sub-standards (learning outcomes) were taken from a South Dakota State University (n.d.) web page. They were also found in the minutes of a South Dakota Board of Regents meeting (South Dakota Board of Regents, 2014, pp. 5-6). High school standards were taken from pages 43-44 of a source (South Dakota Department of Education, 2018).

Table 7

Standards Compared –College Level SGR #4 and High School Reading Literature

SDBOR College Standard	SDDOE High School Standard
<i>SGR Goal #4: Students will understand the diversity and complexity of the human experience through study of the arts and humanities.</i>	<i>Reading Literature</i>
1. Demonstrate knowledge of the diversity of values, beliefs and ideas embodied in the human experience.	[No high school equivalent.]
2. Identify and explain basic concepts of the selected disciplines within the arts and humanities.	1. Accurately cite strong, relevant, and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text to support thematic analysis.
3. Identify and explain the contributions of other cultures from the perspective of the selected disciplines within the arts and humanities.	1. Accurately cite strong, relevant, and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. 6. Analyze how point of view and/or author purpose requires distinguishing what is directly stated in text and what is implied. 9. Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American or World literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

SDBOR College Standard**SDDOE High School Standard**

SGR Goal #4: Students will understand the diversity and complexity of the human experience through study of the arts and humanities.

Reading Literature

-
1. Accurately cite strong, relevant, and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
 2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text to support thematic analysis.
 3. Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama
 4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language.
 5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text . . . contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
4. Demonstrate creative and aesthetic understanding.
-

SDBOR College Standard	SDDOE High School Standard
<p><i>SGR Goal #4: Students will understand the diversity and complexity of the human experience through study of the arts and humanities.</i></p>	<p><i>Reading Literature</i></p>
<p>5. Explain and interpret formal and stylistic elements of the literary or fine arts.</p>	<p>2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text to support thematic analysis.</p> <p>3. Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama</p> <p>4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language.</p> <p>6. Analyze how point of view and/or author purpose requires distinguishing what is directly stated in text and what is implied.</p> <p>7. Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem in different artistic mediums, evaluating how each version interprets the source text.</p>
<p>6. Demonstrate foundational competency in reading, writing and speaking a non-English language.</p>	<p>[No high school equivalent.]</p>
<p>[No college equivalent.]</p>	<p>10. By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.</p>

Note. Under SGR Goal #4, students are required to Outcomes #1 and #2; students must meet at least one of Outcomes #3, #4, #5, or #6.

While SGR Goal #4 does not align perfectly with the high school standard of *reading literature*, or as well as writing standard comparisons, the cultural focuses of SGR #4 can be satisfied through multiple *reading literature* standards for high school. Additionally, SGR #4 can be satisfied through multiple classes, not just English/Language Arts courses. According to the academic affairs guidelines as put out by the SDBOR (South Dakota Board of Regents, 2023b), the arts and humanities SGR can be completed through a variety of classes including art history, foreign languages, history, music appreciation, philosophy, and theater to name a few. Despite there not being a set correlation of standards between SGR #4 and reading literature, there are many areas of overlap between high school and college expectations. However, as with writing, high school standards and sub-standards are much more specific than the collegiate ones. It is also noted that while Tables 6 and 7 compared SGR #1 and #4 to two specific high school standards, *writing* and *reading literature*, other standards may also be embedded in an SGR. Standards within *reading informational text*, *language*, and/or *speaking and listening* may be satisfied within another SGR.

It should also be noted that college professors seem more confident in teaching content areas that high school teachers are not confident in teaching. This allows students to eventually get instruction in every content area. Table 4 showed high school teachers were most confident instructing *speaking and listening* and *reading literature* and least confident in *writing* and *language*. On the other hand, college professors in this study were most confident in teaching *reading informational text* and *writing* and least confident in teaching *language* and *speaking and listening* (Table 5). So, for the most part, students are getting strong, confident instruction in all content areas at some point in

their academic careers. The most room for improvement, whether through instruction or teacher confidence, is the language standard. Neither high school teachers nor college professors ranked themselves as highly confident in teaching language. Furthermore, high school teachers ranked the language standard as the standard students were least prepared in when entering college, and college professors ranked student preparation in *language* as 3 out of 5 where 1 is *most prepared* and 5 is *least prepared* (Table 3). Furthermore, language ranked low on participants' time spent being actively taught (Table 4). This consistency opens up opportunity for improvement in teaching language in the future.

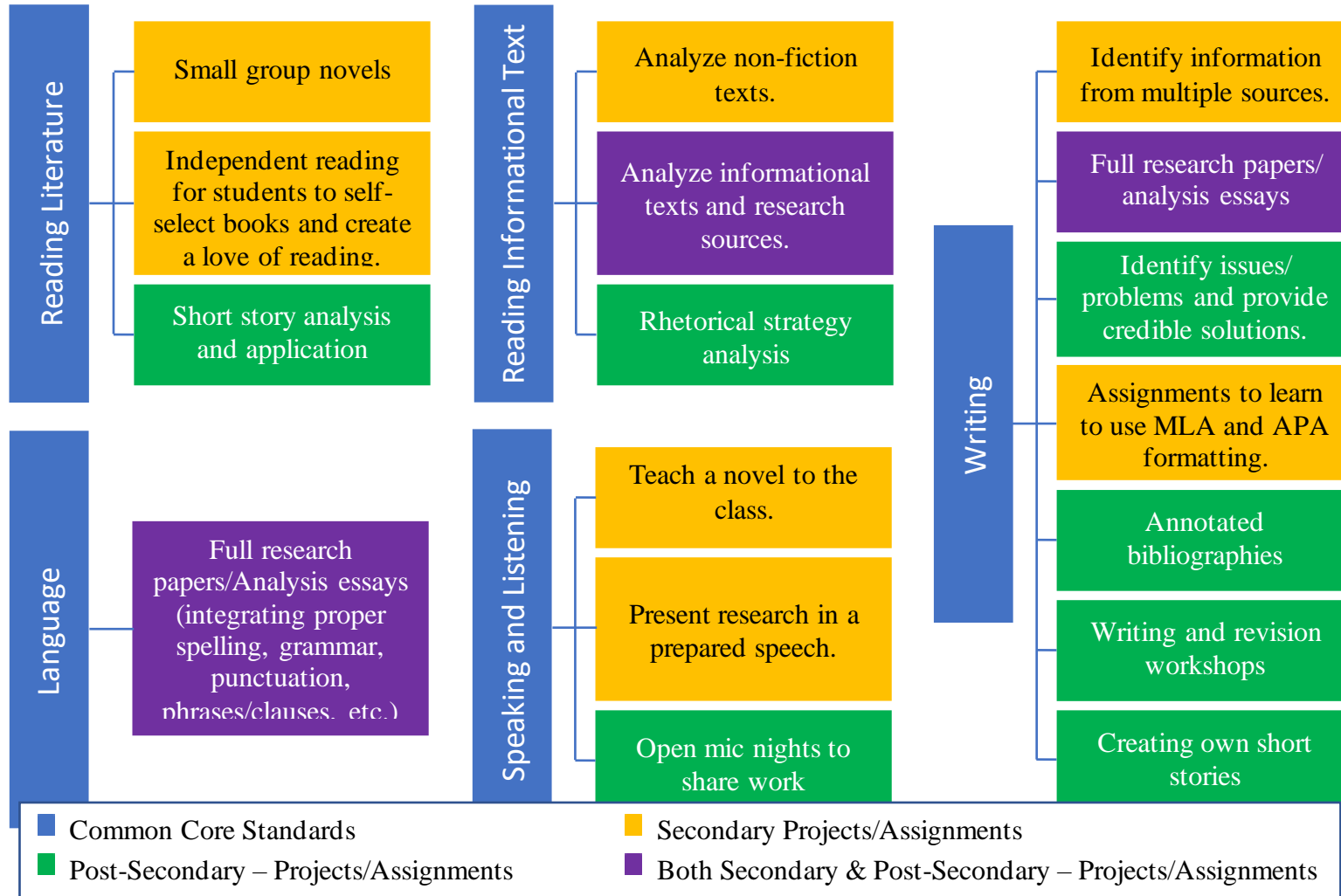
While standards are covered in different ways in different classes, there are some common ways educators evaluate proficiency. Figure 3 shows similar themes that high school teachers and college professors use to analyze their students' competence. The figure takes the five common core standards (■ blue) and matches up projects and assignments identified by high school educators (■ yellow) and college educators (■ green) in order to show competence in students; assessments seen at both levels are indicated by purple coding (■). Assignments are organized from most frequent response (top) to least frequent response (bottom).

The majority of college projects and assignments focused on writing skills, which matches the SDBOR focus, their belief that “SGR #1: Written Communication” would be satisfied by an introductory college-level English class. And while a few projects appeared to overlap, most assignments used to assess collegiate readiness and proficiency fell into the writing category. Language was, by far, the least directly referenced standard, which agrees with what has been seen previously, teachers lacking confidence teaching that standard as well perceiving students as not ready in language for college.

Figure 3

How Educators Teach and Assess Student Competence in Common Core Standards

67



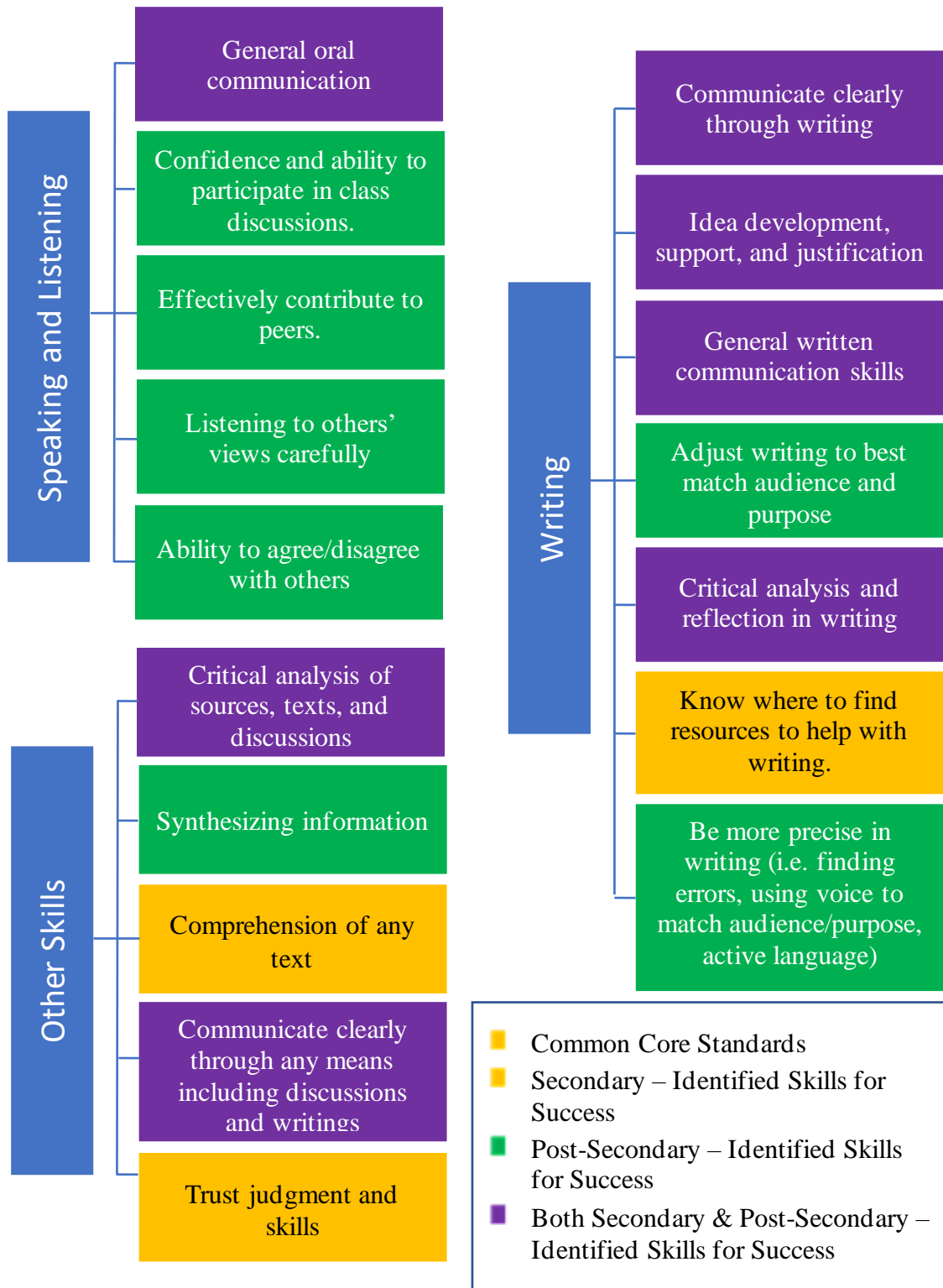
This is further supported by instructors at the post-secondary level identifying “grammatical command,” “understanding of scholarly wording,” and “strong understanding of conventions, grammar, and punctuation” as common skills students are most lacking in when coming into college-level English classes as noted through their responses to this study’s survey.

Many other responses noted a lack of skill dealing with the speaking and listening standard as students “lack confidence in verbally expressing their opinions/thoughts” and “are incredibly quiet, unwilling to speak up, and . . . tend to say as little as possible.” This makes sense as speaking and listening was the standard that took the lowest spot in the survey when it came to amount of time being actively taught at the high school level (Table 4). Speaking and listening also was rated as low (4 out of 5 with 1 being most proficient) in both high school and college educators’ views on skills students are most prepared to execute when entering their post-secondary institutions.

Ultimately, there are certain skills that students do need to be successful at the post-secondary level, but perceptions are not always consistent between what high school teachers think and college professors expect (Figure 5). While both secondary and post-secondary educators agree that strong writing skills are important for success past high school, college professors also noted many skills dealing with the speaking and listening standard are essential. However other than general oral communication, secondary teachers did not identify one skill that fell under the speaking and listening category that was necessary for collegiate success.

Figure 4

Educators' Perceptions of Skills Students Need to be Successful After High School



This also matches findings from the survey in which college professors ranked *speaking and listening* as the second lowest standard incoming students have been proficient in (Table 3). So, at the collegiate level, communication is emphasized in both written and oral forms; however, at the high school level most of the preparation for “next level” communication is targeted on written communication. This is confirmed by high school teachers who noted that while they were confident in teaching concepts that fell under the speaking and listening standard (high school teachers ranked their confidence in teaching *speaking and listening* as 1 out of 5 with 1 being the *most confident*), they spent the least amount of time actively teaching that skill (Table 4). This also shows high school teachers and college professors what skills are most needed and most lacking in order for students to be successful in college-level English classes, and a lack of understanding on what was being taught at the time of this study and what has been expected at each level of education.

Summary

Artifact #2 focused on the mixed methods research used through the course of this study. Through two wide-reaching surveys and a specific document study and looking at high school and collegiate standards, expectations, and perceptions, the data pointed to the writing standard as an area of strength and the language standard as an area of weakness. Furthermore, while high school teachers were confident in their ability to teach the speaking and listening standard, there was not much time dedicated to doing so. This leads to an inability among students to utilize those speaking and listening skills effectively at the collegiate level as expected.

Based on information collected through this research, Artifact #3 provides a plausible solution to the issue of consistent vertical alignment in English/Language Arts standards including practical ways to integrate *speaking and listening* into a traditional high school English classroom. A white paper was created to give educators at the high school level skills, tools, and resources to further integrate and support *speaking and listening* and *language* standards in their classrooms. These two standards were specifically targeted because of low scores in study results when it came to student performance, perceptions, and/or evaluation for readiness for post-secondary education as identified through this study's surveys. A stronger focus on these two standards also better aligns standards and expectations as students move from their secondary to post-secondary education. This white paper can serve as a foundation not just for better aligning English standards but also other subject areas, especially core classes such as math and science, further pushing standards consistency on a PK-16 level rather than focusing on standards at a PK-12 level independently and a 13-16 grade level independently.

ARTIFACT #3

IMPLEMENTATION OF SOLUTION

Introduction to White Paper

This study focused on vertical alignment of standards between secondary and post-secondary educational institutions to ultimately create a more linear progression of skill proficiency from Grade PK through Grade 16. Specifically focusing on English/Language Arts in high school and introductory English courses in college, standards were compared using input from high school teachers and college-level professors by determining what classes and activities were being taught as well as specific skills and activities students used and teachers looked for. Gaps in some areas, particularly *speaking and listening* and *language* standards, were evident in the data. To address this problem of practice, I created a white paper communicating the research and findings from this study.

The intended audience of this white paper includes teachers at both educational levels: secondary and post-secondary institutions. Since the focus of this study was held in South Dakota, the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) and South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR) are also a primary audience. However, this white paper gives active implementation suggestions to improve high school student exposure and performance in targeted standards: *speaking and listening* and *language*. Those two standards showed the most opportunity for growth at the high school level when

preparing students for success in college. Overall, the provided guidance is a suggestion to address a dearth of competency in *language* and *speaking and listening* at the high school level before students get to college.

White Paper

Kelsey Buchholz
University of North Dakota
July 12, 2023

Aligning High School Standards with College Needs and Expectations

Analysis of English standards and their correlation from secondary to post-secondary academics



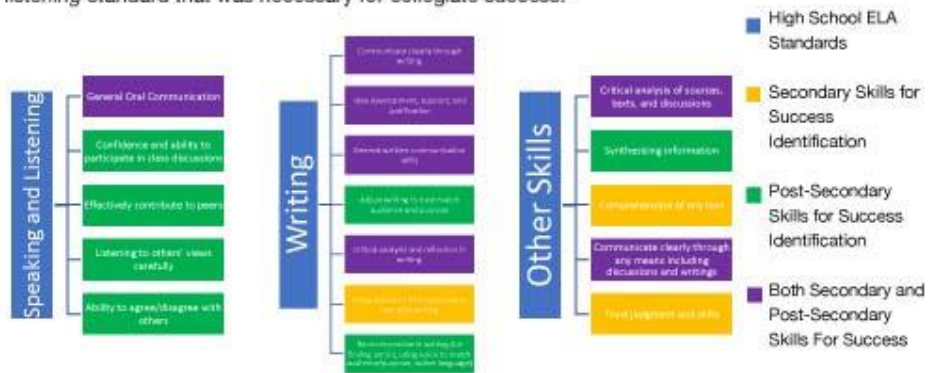
Strong percentages (roughly 70%) of high school graduates in South Dakota choose to pursue their college education in-state. Additionally, more than 60% of students in South Dakota's colleges and universities are South Dakota residents. This highlights the need to continue to build upon educational standards vertically reaching into post-secondary education. Research focused in the Upper Midwest shows that while students receive comprehensive exposure to a variety of standards in high school, students are still lacking some skills when they enter college that are impacting student success at the post-secondary level. While students' abilities in *reading literature* and *writing* seem fairly solid, there is gross room for improvement in other areas, especially in the *speaking and listening* and *language* standards.

100%
Of post-secondary respondents
And
78%
Of secondary respondents
Said they focused on
Writing/Research
to prepare for college or show
proficiency

Both high school and collegiate educators were surveyed and expressed consistency in their emphasis on the importance of writing. All respondents from the collegiate level noted writing/research-based projects and activities they have used for students to show proficiency in English composition and 78% of high school teachers who responded to the survey noted the same: writing/research-based projects and activities for college preparation. This does not mean that the other 22% of high school respondents don't do that, they just did not highlight that as their primary activity. It is great to see the consistency in emphasis of

this content area, but that is not the case across the board.

While both secondary and post-secondary educators agreed that strong writing skills are important for success beyond high school, college professors also noted many skills dealing with the *speaking and listening* standard are also essential. However, other than general oral communication, secondary teachers did not identify one skill that fell under the *speaking and listening* standard that was necessary for collegiate success.



"Responses [from college professors] noted a lack of skill dealing with the *speaking and listening* standard as students 'lack confidence in verbally expressing their opinions/ thoughts' and 'are incredibly quiet, unwilling to speak up, and...tend to say as little as possible'...*speaking and listening* was the standard that took the lowest spot in the survey when it came to the amount of time being actively taught at the high school level."

(Buchholz, 2023, p. 71)

High School Standards

Post-Secondary Expectations

Additionally, through the surveys sent out to both secondary and post-secondary educators, it was noticeable that most assignments used to assess collegiate readiness and proficiency fell into the *writing* standard. *Language* was, by far, the least directly referenced standard. This pairs with a lack of confidence in teaching that standard, as noted by high school teachers, as well as a low favorability in students being college-ready in *language*.

“Instructors at the post-secondary level identifying ‘grammatical command,’ ‘understanding of scholarly wording,’ and ‘strong understanding of conventions, grammar, and punctuation’ as common skills students are most lacking when coming into college-level English classes.

(Buchholz, 2023, p. 71)

Despite these results, integrating more language and specifically *speaking and listening* skills into English classes is achievable. Rather than putting more requirements and topics on high school teachers' plates, finding ways to integrate these topics into activities that are already happening in the classroom allows for teachers to broaden the number of concepts being taught, increasing student proficiency and comfort due to more exposure, and better preparing students for expectations at the next level of their education.

More communication between the South Dakota Department of Education and the South Dakota Board of Regents to better align standards and expectations is greatly encouraged. Furthermore, opportunities for educators at both levels to meet and converse could help with that cohesion and collaboration.

Ideas for ways to integrate more *speaking and listening* standards and *language* standards into traditional high school English classes are given below. All resources and ideas are open to the general public to share, modify, and/or use.



Helping bridge the success from high school to college

SPEAKING and LISTENING

Integrating the *speaking and listening* standard into current class set up

Idea #1: Final Discussions

In addition to or in lieu of a final test, let students hash it out. Pose intriguing questions for students to ponder, debate, and defend. Not only does this show understanding of content but also allows students to support their thoughts with evidence. Furthermore, students have the chance to discuss a topic with classmates as well as evaluate other people's points of view.

Hint:

Thinking of answers and feeling confident supporting them right off the bat may be tricky for some students. Give students a few minutes to put down BRIEF notes to each question. That way they have already thought about what they would possibly say and why they feel that way, focusing on supporting thoughts with evidence and reasoning.

Standards:

11-12.SL.1, 3, 4, 5, 6

Example:

Notes sheet to give to students before discussion:

QUESTION/CLAIM	ANSWER	REASONING/SUPPORT
Question #1	Yes/No	Details and descriptions
Question #2	Agree/Disagree	Examples from text
Question #3	Only if...	Character development and relationships
Question #4	English Class	Pulls from other experiences, themes, and situations

Idea #2: Presentations

There are plenty of ways to share content and ideas even if you aren't in speech class. Presentations are great opportunities for students to share their knowledge, understanding, and comprehension while communicating with a distinct purpose for their peers. These presentations can vary in length depending on the focus of the topic and need for the presentation. They also provide a great opportunity for students to evaluate a speaker, working on the listening skills as well as speaking skills.

These can be used for a variety of activities including research papers, poetry/short story analysis, novels and more.

Hint:

Vary time expectations and requirements. Sometimes it is good to have a short presentation that is direct and focused; however, sometimes students need to showcase in depth detail and understanding where a longer presentation is applicable. Giving students specific guidelines to hit in their presentation is good, but still allows for creativity and flexibility to show their understanding of their topic.

Standards:

11-12.SL.1, 3, 4, 5, 6

Example:

Research Paper Presentation Basics:

RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATION
15-20 minutes

TOPIC
1-2 minutes
 This is where you can give a quick overview of your topic. You may also want to add a few facts and figures from your research.

"INTERESTING FACT"
1-2 minutes

SUBTOPICS
1-2 minutes
 This may want to include your subtopics and maybe a picture or image that you think would add value.

BIG TAKEAWAYS
1-2 minutes
 Remember that your presentation is supposed to educate. It's not just to show off. You will need to include your main points. Remember that you are presenting to a wide range of students. It's important to have a clear, direct overview of the "biggest" information from your research paper.

Lit Circle Novel Presentation Basics:

Lit Circle Novel Lesson

Requirements and Expectations:

- Lit Circle Students will teach their novel to the class
 - One entire class period will be dedicated to one novel
 - All group members must speak and be a part of the teaching process
- Lit Circle Students must cover the main plot line including major conflicts
- Lit Circle Students must introduce and explain the importance of characters and their decisions
- Lit Circle Students must identify and explain the themes that were present in the novel
 - Multiple themes should be discussed
 - Specific examples from the novel are needed
- Lit Circle Students must cover the author including information about his and major influences from his life/time period
- Lit Circle Students must engage the rest of class in their novel
 - Class Discussion
 - Activity
 - Quiz
- Lit Circle Students must have some culminating activity that assesses how well the rest of the class understands their novel

Typical Lesson Plan Structure:

- Have some activity/question(s) in the beginning to get people thinking along the lines of the novel
- Explain the connection of the activity/question(s) to the novel
- Through class discussions, presentations, skits, etc students will learn about the novel
- Activity/question(s)/assignments to reinforce the novel
- Assessment (quiz/discussion/writing/poster/etc) to evaluate comprehension

Grading:

- Lit Circle Students will be graded/assessed in a few different ways:
 - Participation in the planning process
 - Participation in the teaching of the lesson plan
 - Understanding of the novel
 - Group participation grade as evaluated by partners
 - Peer evaluation grade as evaluated by class
- Students will be graded/assessed as well
 - Participation and attentiveness during the lesson taught
 - Thoroughness of peer evaluations

Idea #3: Small Group Discussions

While being able to contribute in large group discussions is important, sometimes there are a few students who seem to dominate the conversation. Offering small group discussion opportunities can be just as valuable where students need to defend their opinions, come up with questions, and evaluate their group members interpretations and explanations. Ideas shared are not usually all-inclusive in small groups and multiple ideas can be used to encourage small group discussions, ideas below are just a few to get students started.

Hint:

Varying members of the small groups is important as it helps students from falling into too much of a routine (same cliques all the time or same few people dominating the conversations). Groups can vary from class to class, or the teacher can rotate groups with in the same period.

Standards:

11-12.SL.1, 2, 4, 6

Example:

- #1: The 3 Cs: Comprehension Question, Clarification Question, and Curiosity Question

- In small groups, students will generate the 3 C questions. After the small groups have had time to establish those, they share their questions with the class. For example: Group A shares their comprehension question. Groups B, C, and D discuss that question within their group and share out as a class. Then Group B shares their comprehension with the class and Groups A, C, and D discuss.

- #2: Poster Focus:

- Create topics and put each topic as a label on an individual poster. Topics could be anything like Characters, Pictures, Themes, Questions, Connections to Other Text, etc. In their designated small group, students will put as much on the poster in a given amount of time as possible, then students will rotate to the next poster. Give students a few minutes to look over what was written, then give them X amount of minutes to add to their new poster. Rotate through until students get back to their original poster.

- #3: Question Rotation:

- Students are split into small groups and a question is posed. After students have had adequate time to discuss, question, analyze, and defend their question, rotate students so they are in a different group. A new question is asked; students discuss, question, analyze, and defend again. Continue rotating groups and asking questions as needed.

- #4: Jigsaw:

- This common practice is a great way to get students discussing in small groups as well as working with multiple groups. Furthermore, students have to really be an expert in their area as they need to explain their topic to classmates. Students work in small groups to read, analyze, and synthesize information. After identifying the most essential components, they split into other groups (so one from each section is in this new group), sharing their information with each other. This gives students safety in small groups as well as reinforces ownership of content knowledge.

LANGUAGE

Integrating the *language* standard into current class set up

Idea #1: Proficiency through Practice

Utilize the sources at your fingertips. There are many websites that reinforce proper grammar and language usage including NoRedInk, IXL, and Quill. Use these sources as a way for students to continue to reinforce their understanding as well as grow their skills. These can be a supplement to what is already being covered in class.

Hint:

Let students be self-paced through these activities and/or grade upon completion rather than on how many questions it takes them to show proficiency. Students are learning the skills; that is what is important. It is about students' overall understanding of the concepts, not about completing an assignment by answering the least amount of questions as possible.

Standards:

11-12.L.1, 2, 3

Example:

Utilize websites (such as NoRedInk as shown to the right) as supplements and reinforcements of what is being covered in class.

The screenshot shows the 'Practice' section of the NoRedInk website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Assignment Library' and 'Practice' (highlighted with a yellow circle). A search bar is on the right. Below the navigation, a subtitle reads 'Targeted exercises to help students master writing and grammar skills'. A 'Filter by grade level' dropdown menu is set to '11-12'. The main content area is titled 'Choose a category to browse topics.' and contains several topic buttons: 'All Topics', 'Parts of an Essay', 'Evidence, Citations, and Plagiarism', 'Clarity and Style', 'Sentences, Phrases, and Clauses', 'Capitalization and Punctuation', 'Commonly Confused Words', 'Parts of Speech', 'ACT® and SAT® Passages', and 'Passages'.

Buchholz, K. University of North Dakota 2023

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Idea #2: Heightened Vocabulary

In addition to completing an assignment, students should mark their five strongest vocabulary words. This can be done on a quick worksheet where students are expected to write their own answers, during outlines for presentations, or in formal research papers. Consistently challenging students to use specific, heightened vocabulary will make it more of an automatic practice when completing bigger assignments as well.

Hint:

Supporting heightened vocabulary through integration of vocabulary practices and activities will reinforce the importance of this subject. It also helps students be more confident in finding and using resources to improve their language use.

Standards:

11-12.L.2, 3, 4

Example:

Add in vocabulary to other assignments such as papers and speeches.

Idea #3: Pen Pal Letters

The best way to learn and reinforce a concept is to teach it to others. Work with a cooperating class where high school students exchange pen pal letters with elementary students. This puts a focus on the need to have a strong command of grammar, conventions, etc. It also looks at spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure variety in one's writing. High school students set an example for elementary students, reinforcing necessary skills that are transferable across activities, assignments, and classes.



This I Believe Speech

Buchholz



- Purpose -**
 - The speech, through detailed examples, will support your thoughts and ideas on a personal belief.
 - The speech will also give you the experience of using a manuscript and still be able to maintain the correct amount of eye contact for a speech.
 - Luckily you have had practice with the advertisement and newscast speeches, so this one should be the easiest yet.
- Standards -**
 - Speaking and Listening
 - Peer Evaluations, Your Speech
 - Writing
 - Manuscript - full sentence, proper formatting, strong vocabulary
- Length -**
 - Your speech should be between 2 to 5 minutes long.
 - You must meet this time frame. If you go over or under, you must present your speech again and your grade will be adjusted accordingly. You must practice, practice, practice!
- Speech Manuscript -**
 - You will be typing your speech in a word-for-word manuscript for this speech.
 - You will need 2 copies of your final manuscript - one to turn in for grading and another for yourself.
 - You will need to use your own copy to practice your speech.
 - Use appropriate word choice. Choose vocabulary that is better than a "4th grade level." You will be asked to identify some of your strongest words in your speech, so keep that in mind as you are typing.
 - 2-3 pages, typed in 12 pt font, using Arial or Times New Roman only, double-spaced is the average length of the manuscript.
 - Make sure you have your name and a title in the upper left hand corner of the manuscript.
- Speech -**
 - You will use a manuscript for this speech.
 - Use a creative attention getter.
 - Consistently use eye contact with the audience.
 - Practice your presentation several times to ensure you know the material to be presented and you know what you want to say.
- Preparation -**
 - You will be given two in class days to type.
 - We will be peer editing and reviewing the content.
 - Speeches will begin mid-week next week.

Hint:

Give students a guide to start their pen pal letters, but then for peer editing give them specific tasks to look for. Have one student peer edit another student, specifically looking for spelling. Another student can peer edit the same letter looking for punctuation, etc.

Standards:

11-12.L.1, 2, 3

Example:

Pen Pal Letter Formats

Dear Pen Pal,

Introduce yourself (first name only) with a simple sentence. Then write a compound sentence that covers at least two of your interests; make sure it is two full sentences. Write another simple sentence focusing on their interests.

In a simple sentence, ask your pen pal a question about their school year. Using a complex sentence, mention what has went well for you this school year and give a reason why. You may want to add one or two other unique situations but keep the ideas positive. Remember we are writing to elementary students who enjoy coming to school.

Use a complex sentence to tell the students what you are looking forward to most about Halloween since it is coming up. You may want to mention what your favorite candy is, but do so using a compound sentence. Finally in a simple sentence, ask them what they hope to be for Halloween?

Sincerely,

Your Pen Pal, FIRST NAME ONLY



Pen Pal Letter #5 Format

Posted Apr 25

Obviously you should have a good feel for how to write these letters for now. Continue to drive conversation forward and find something to engage your young pen pal? What are they excited/passionate about? How can you support that energy or foster new curiosity? You should have a full letter (at least three paragraphs) that are well developed.

Your last sentence of the first paragraph should be a noun clause.

- Example: I'm looking forward to going on vacation with my family WHEREEVER WE CHOOSE TO VISIT.

Your last sentence of the second paragraph should be an adjective clause.

- Example: The class THAT I ENJOY THE MOST is English.

Your last sentence of the third paragraph should be an adverb clause.

- Example: I'm so excited that it is finally spring BECAUSE GOLF IS MY FAVORITE SPORT and I can't wait to go out to the course.

References

Buchholz, K. (2023, August). *Need for Vertical Alignment in English classes between K-12 and higher education institutions* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation].

CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The goal of this study was to identify expectations of educators at the secondary and post-secondary levels in regard to student skills and address any alignment issues within the standards used as a guidance for what to teach students in high school and freshman college classes. For the secondary level of education, the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) used South Dakota Content Standards (SDCS) which are very similar to nationwide Common Core Standards. At the post-secondary level, the South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR) used System General Education Requirements (SGR). The SGR are shared across all South Dakota state universities who are members of the SDBOR. The document study highlighted that while standards between the two educational entities aligned, the SDCS were much more detailed and in-depth than the correlating SGR. Furthermore, there were only two main SGR connected to introductory English classes at the collegiate level. However, there were five main SDCS at the high school level. This wide breadth of content that must be covered at the high school level may contribute to a lack of strong proficiency in standards at the college level.

The study of alignment of standards was then bolstered through a survey where I focused on amount of time high school educators spent in their classroom with each standard, their comfort level in teaching each standard, activities implemented in the classroom to show college readiness among students, and skills high school educators

identified as necessary for collegiate success. Additionally, I considered the collegiate perspective, surveying professors on which skills and standards they felt students were most and least proficient in as first-year students.

The literature review corroborated findings from the document study and surveys that there are hints at alignment being needed but no direct action has been taken. This has left gaps in standards and skill proficiencies as students transfer from high school to college. However, other states' initiatives and other content areas such as CTE have shown strong potential for further, more direct collaboration between two educational entities, in this case the SDDOE and SDBOR.

As a result of this study, I created a white paper to address the primary skills and standards that showed most room for growth and improvement. This white paper outlines the problem and gives practical suggestions for implementation to address the issue. While the study and white paper focused specifically on English/Language Arts in South Dakota schools at both the secondary and post-secondary level, applications for student preparation can be transferred across disciplines and the nation.

Discussion

While partnerships have been seen between individual institutions and businesses, partn has yet to catch on across disciplines. Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses have been at the forefront of collaboration, making sure high school students are adequately prepared for post-secondary expectations. Furthermore, in South Dakota, the Build Dakota Scholarship shows connectivity between academics and the workforce, as students' education is paid for by businesses with a student promising to work for their benefactor for the next 3 years. This shows that varying levels of education can work

together as can public and private entities. Also, collaboration does not need to be limited to CTE courses but can be expanded to all disciplines.

Furthermore, some states are seeing the benefit of PK-16 standards alignment through initiatives, research, and action. South Dakota has yet to take a step in this direction. However, as South Dakota students continue to struggle academically in college and/or need to take remedial classes at the collegiate level, it is evident that more can be done to adequately prepare students in high school for their next step. By addressing gaps in standards expectations between high school and college educators, South Dakota students can reap the benefits as they choose to further their education.

Data collected in this study showed many academic standards and sub-standards that are aligned, despite very specific sub-standards at the high school level and broader sub-standards at the college level. However, there are also plenty of areas that fail to be addressed on either side of the spectrum. Laying the appropriate groundwork to facilitate vertical alignment gives purposefulness and focus to teaching at the high school level and better prepares students for success in college.

Reflection

The ultimate goal of secondary educational institutions is to prepare students for their next journey. If students choose to go into the workforce, they should be ready to do so and be productive citizens. If students choose to extend their education, they should be equipped with the tools to be successful at that next level. Vertical alignment of standards has shown to be effective in the K-12 system, so expanding it to the post-secondary level should yield similar successes.

College expectations have changed over the course of the years. So, while high school teachers feel like they are adequately preparing their students for college, the experiences in which they are drawing from may be outdated. However, high school teachers may not know the change in expectations at the college level because of a lack of communication between secondary and post-secondary levels. This can easily be addressed by collaboration between the two guiding institutions, the SDDOE and SDBOR. Creating an avenue of communication better allows for vertical alignment of standards, which in turn, should yield more competent performances by both teachers and students. Furthermore, giving high school teachers the necessary information and tools to better prepare students will also lead to better preparation for college.

Limitations

It should be noted, this study explicitly focused on introductory English courses at the collegiate level. It did not cover any other introductory courses nor advanced level English courses where other English/Language Arts standards would play more prominent roles.

Also, comparisons were made using the South Dakota Department of Education standards which are close but not exact to the Common Core Standards; respondents' familiarity with the exact standards, although they were explicitly listed in the survey, may sometimes be hazy as respondents can have different perceptions and interpretations of what encompasses a *reading literature* or *language* standard, for example.

Furthermore, standards were compared to the South Dakota Board of Regents' standard general education requirements (SGR). And while this comparison of South Dakota high schools to South Dakota colleges is valid, the specifics may look different

from state to state. However, the framework may be relatable across the board in other states.

It should also be noted, not all South Dakota high school students stay in South Dakota, and not all South Dakota collegiate students received their secondary schooling in South Dakota. There is a transfer of students both ways.

Recommendations

A purposeful effort needs to be made to better bridge the gap between secondary graduation requirements and post-secondary expectations. While there are some content areas that are covered at both levels to reinforce the points of emphasis, there are others that are severely lacking. The high school standards are explicit and detailed, giving teachers a clear direction. And while that wide breadth of standards gives consistency across the multitude of content topics being covered, it gives so many specifics to cover that depth of knowledge in high school graduates may be lacking.

Results were clear that at both the high school and the post-secondary level of education *language* was the standard most in need of focus and improvement. Collegiate professors explicitly listed *language* standards such as grammatical command (L.11-12.2) and understanding of conventions (L.11-12.1) as areas of weakness for incoming freshmen. A proposal for more training in integrating the *language* standard into high school content and curriculum is encouraged. This could be through small daily work, integrated lessons and activities, as well as optional extended practice with the white paper included in Artifact #3 of this dissertation in practice giving suggestions about these adjustments.

Furthermore, a specific focus needs to be made on the *speaking and listening* standard. While high school English teachers say they are confident in teaching that standard, they are also saying they spend the least amount of time actually actively teaching it, which raises the question as to why. More opportunities for students to practice *speaking and listening* in English classes is needed but so is instruction to those students on what is expected. This may be executed through class discussions, presentations, group work, and speaker analysis as highlighted in the white paper in Artifact #3.

It is obvious students need more overt instruction in *speaking and listening* as not only are students lacking active coaching at the high school level, but they are also struggling to excel in these skills at the next level of education. Consequently, collegiate professors identify multiple skills in the *speaking and listening* category needed for college success as evidenced in Figure 4. If high school teachers were aware of how much of an impact *speaking and listening* standards can have in a college classroom, they maybe would re-evaluate their workload at the high school level and give students more opportunities to develop and exercise these skills. The *speaking and listening* standard, in particular, maybe would be easily fixed if high school teachers were aware of the gap in skills of high school graduates and expectations of college freshmen, but when there is not clear communication between high schools and colleges as to what is needed, it is hard to address the issue.

Continued research needs to be done as to which areas of writing and language high school educators feel confident teaching as well as which areas college professors feel students are proficient in or lacking in. Because introductory college courses

primarily fit in the writing and language standards, those are the standards that could use the most delineation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
High School Educator Survey



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
Institutional Review Board Study Information Sheet

Title of Project: Need for vertical alignment between secondary and post-secondary education standards and expectations

Principal Investigator: Kelsey Buchholz Email: Kelsey.aakre.1@und.edu

Advisor: Dr. Jared Schlenker Email: Jared.Schlenker@und.edu
Phone: (701) 777-3584

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to find ways to better prepare students for their next educational journey. Currently there is a gap between what is required to graduate high school and what is expected when entering college, causing students to have to take remedial courses or retake courses. Data and literature reviews suggest that needing to take remedial courses or repeating a course in college has detrimental effects on graduation rates as well as financial flexibility. The goal of this research is to identify which standards align appropriately and which ones are showing gaps in expectations. Then through a document analysis and survey responses, be able to craft a document proposing changes and better alignment between the South Dakota Department of Education (K-12 Public Education) and the South Dakota Board of Regents (College Governing Board).

Procedures to be Followed: There are different components to this study, including a document study of high school standards compared to collegiate standards/requirements. To round out this mixed methods research two separate surveys will be sent out: one to high school teachers and one to college professors.

- For high school teachers: If you decide to participate in this study, you will answer some survey questions about your own implementation of the Common Core standards in your classroom as well as perceptions of what is most needed for success at the next education level. The results from this study will help me complete my dissertation on what is needed to better align standards between high schools and colleges in the English discipline, making sure students are best prepared to not only pass but exceed in their college courses, reducing the need for remedial or repeated course work. This is completely voluntary as you can

choose to participate in the study or not. The survey is expected to last about 10-15 minutes. There is no compensation for your time, but your input is greatly appreciated.

- For college professors: If you decide to participate in this study, you will answer some survey questions about the preparation of incoming students to your introductory level course. It will include an analysis of students' strengths and areas/skills are lacking in. The results from this study will help me complete my dissertation on what is needed to better align standards between high schools and colleges in the English discipline, making sure students are best prepared to not only pass but exceed in their college courses, reducing the need for remedial or repeated course work. This is completely voluntary as you can choose to participate in the study or not. The survey is expected to last about 10-15 minutes. There is no compensation for your time, but your input is greatly appreciated.

Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Benefits:

- The results from the survey can lead to better alignment between high school content standards and collegiate expectations and standards. This will help make the transition to post-secondary easier and more successful.
 - Currently when students struggle in their collegiate classes, requiring remedial or repeated courses, they have increased financial strains as well as a higher likelihood of not completing their degree. Working to bridge the gap can help increase student success rates, allowing for a more successful collegiate career and future as well as having a stronger applicability for needed high school content.
 - Possible benefits to others include the knowledge of contributing to a more purposeful and effective academic base for high school students in high school English classes and better prepared students in introductory collegiate English/composition classes.
 - You may learn more about yourself and how effectively you implement the standards/prepare your high school students for the next level of their education.
- Duration: It will take about 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

Statement of Confidentiality: The survey does not ask for any personally identifiable information. It does ask for respondents to select which state they currently work in, and which grade levels/classes they teach, but it does not get any more specific thus anonymity is maintained. If this research is published, no information that would identify

you will be included since your name is not asked for nor would it be linked to your responses. All survey responses that we receive will be treated confidentially. However, given that the surveys can be completed from any computer (e.g., personal, work, school), we are unable to guarantee the security of the computer on which you choose to enter your responses. As a participant in our study, we want you to be aware that certain “key logging” software programs exist that can be used to track or capture data that you enter and/or websites that you visit.

Right to Ask Questions: The researchers conducting this study are Kelsey Buchholz, doctoral student, supported by advisory Dr. Jared Schlenker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Dr. Jared Schlenker at (701) 777-3584 during the day. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or UND.irb@UND.edu. You may contact the UND IRB with problems, complaints, or concerns about the research. Please contact the UND IRB if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is an informed individual who is independent of the research team. General information about being a research subject can be found on the Institutional Review Board website “Information for Research Participants” <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html>

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Participation: You do not have to participate in this research. You can stop your participation at any time. You may refuse to participate or choose to discontinue participation at any time without losing any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this research study. Completion and return of the survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to participate in the research. Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

I teach in a school district in _____.

- South Dakota
- North Dakota
- Minnesota
- Other

I teach high school English/Language Arts

- Yes
- No

I teach _____. (Select all that apply)

- Freshmen (9th grade)
- Sophomores (10th grade)
- Juniors (11th grade)
- Seniors (12th grade)

I have been teaching for _____.

- 0-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15 + years

The Common Core Standards focus on 5 anchor ideas. Please rank in order on which one you spend the most time actively teaching in your classroom. #1 being the most time intensive and #5 being the least.

- _____ Language
- _____ Reading Literature
- _____ Reading Informational Text
- _____ Writing
- _____ Speaking and Listening

The Common Core Standards focus on 5 anchor ideas. Please rank in order on which one you are most confident that students will be able to execute effectively at the end of the year or in their first year of college-level English/composition. #1 being the most confidence in student performance and #5 being the least.

- _____ Language
- _____ Reading Literature
- _____ Reading Informational Text
- _____ Writing
- _____ Speaking and Listening

I feel very confident in my abilities to effectively teach the standard and students be able to apply the skills appropriately. Please slide the bar to best represent your feelings on each specific anchor standard: "0" being not confident at all, "100" being extremely confident. If you wish to leave the slider bar where it is, please click on it to register your response.

- 0
- 10
- 20
- 30
- 40
- 50
- 60
- 70
- 80
- 90
- 100

Language

Reading Literature

Reading Informational Text

Writing

--

Speaking & Listening

--

How do you know students are capable of effective performance on the common core standards? Please mark all that apply.

- Formative assessments (teacher generated)
- Summative assessments (teacher generated)
- Summative assessments (provided by a textbook company, etc)
- Performance on Statewide mandated assessments (SmarterBalanced, MCA, NDSA, Iowa Basic, PARCC, etc)
- Performance on Schoolwide mandated assessments (MAP, etc)
- Performance on SAT/ACT/PSAT/etc
- Other

Concerning the LANGUAGE standard, I feel like it is necessary to cover all the sub-standards listed within the time frame of my class for success at the next level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the LANGUAGE standard, I feel like it is most necessary and relevant for my students to cover this sub-standard to ensure college-level success. Please rank the most important as #1.

- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade appropriate reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- _____ Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- _____ Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

Concerning the READING LITERATURE standard, I feel like it is necessary to cover all the sub-standards listed within the time frame of my class for success at the next level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the READING LITERATURE standard, I feel like it is most necessary and relevant for my students to cover this sub-standard to ensure college-level success. Please rank the most important as #1.

- _____ Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- _____ Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- _____ Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.
- _____ Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
- _____ Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- _____ Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.
- _____ Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem.
- _____ Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar these or topics.

_____ Read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems at the high end of the appropriate grade text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Concerning the READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT standard, I feel like it is necessary to cover all the sub-standards listed within the time frame of my class for success at the next level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT standard, I feel like it is most necessary and relevant for my students to cover this sub-standard to ensure college-level success. Please rank the most important as #1.

_____ Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

_____ Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

_____ Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

_____ Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

_____ Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

_____ Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

_____ Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

_____ Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use the legal reasoning and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy.

- _____ Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational US documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.
- _____ Read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the appropriate grade text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Concerning the WRITING standard, I feel like it is necessary to cover all the sub-standards listed within the time frame of my class for success at the next level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the WRITING standard, I feel like it is most necessary and relevant for my students to cover this sub-standard to ensure college-level success. Please rank the most important as #1.

- _____ Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- _____ Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- _____ Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- _____ Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- _____ Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- _____ Use technology, including the internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
- _____ Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- _____ Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answer the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to

maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

_____ Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

_____ Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Concerning the SPEAKING & LISTENING standard, I feel like it is necessary to cover all the sub-standards listed within the time frame of my class for success at the next level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the SPEAKING & LISTENING standard, I feel like it is most necessary and relevant for my students to cover this sub-standard to ensure college-level success. Please rank the most important as #1.

_____ Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade appropriate topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

_____ Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

_____ Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

_____ Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

_____ Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

_____ Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Overall, I feel like my students are LEAST prepared for college-level English in this one of the Common Core Standards.

- Language
- Reading Literature
- Reading Informational Text
- Writing
- Speaking & Listening

Overall, I feel like my students are BEST prepared for college-level English in this one of the Common Core Standards.

- Language
- Reading Literature
- Reading Informational Text
- Writing
- Speaking & Listening

Please describe a project/assignment that you give to your high school's students that prepares them for college.

The most important skill(s) my students need to have in order to be successful in college-level English classes is _____.

Appendix B
Initial Email Contacting Potential Participants, Teachers From High Schools

Subject: Standards/Expectations Alignment Dissertation Survey

Hello,

My name is Kelsey Buchholz, and I am a high school English teacher in South Dakota. I am currently pursuing my doctorate in education through the University of North Dakota and am focusing on ELA standard alignment between high schools and colleges for my dissertation. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about standards expectations and alignment.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will answer some survey questions about your own expectations of incoming freshmen and their abilities for introductory level English/composition courses. The results from this study will help me complete my dissertation on what is needed to better align standards between high schools and colleges in the English discipline, making sure students are best prepared to not only pass but exceed expectations in their college courses, reducing the need for remedial or repeated course work.

This is completely voluntary as you can choose to participate in the study or not. The survey is expected to last about 10-15 minutes. There is no compensation for your time, but your input is greatly appreciated. If you'd like to participate, please click on the link below to fill out the survey online.

https://und.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_aateBxMjeSK2yHk

[Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management](#)

The most powerful, simple and trusted way to gather experience data. Start your journey to experience management and try a free account today.

Und.qualtrics.com

Thank you for your time. I greatly appreciate your feedback. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Appendix C
Collegiate Educator Survey



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
Institutional Review Board Study Information Sheet

Title of Project: Need for vertical alignment between secondary and post-secondary education standards and expectations
Principal Investigator: Kelsey Buchholz Email: Kelsey.aakre.1@und.edu
Advisor: Dr. Jared Schlenker Email: Jared.Schlenker@und.edu
Phone: (701) 777-3584

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to find ways to better prepare students for their next educational journey. Currently there is a gap between what is required to graduate high school and what is expected when entering college, causing students to have to take remedial courses or retake courses. Data and literature reviews suggest that needing to take remedial courses or repeating a course in college has detrimental effects on graduation rates as well as financial flexibility. The goal of this research is to identify which standards align appropriately and which ones are showing gaps in expectations. Then through a document analysis and survey responses, be able to craft a document proposing changes and better alignment between the South Dakota Department of Education (K-12 Public Education) and the South Dakota Board of Regents (College Governing Board).

Procedures to be followed: There are different components to this study, including a document study of high school standards compared to collegiate standards/requirements. To round out this mixed methods research two separate surveys will be sent out: one to high school teachers and one to college professors.

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choose to participate in the study or not. The survey is expected to last about 10-15 minutes. There is no compensation for your time, but your input is greatly appreciated.

- For college professors: If you decide to participate in this study, you will answer some survey questions about the preparation of incoming students to your introductory level course. It will include an analysis of students' strengths and areas/skills are lacking in. The results from this study will help me complete my dissertation on what is needed to better align standards between high schools and colleges in the English discipline, making sure students are best prepared to not only pass but exceed in their college courses, reducing the need for remedial or repeated course work. This is completely voluntary as you can choose to participate in the study or not. The survey is expected to last about 10-15 minutes. There is no compensation for your time, but your input is greatly appreciated.

Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Benefits:

- The results from the survey can lead to better alignment between high school content standards and collegiate expectations and standards. This will help make the transition to post-secondary easier and more successful.
 - Currently when students struggle in their collegiate classes, requiring remedial or repeated courses, they have increased financial strains as well as a higher likelihood of not completing their degree. Working to bridge the gap can help increase student success rates, allowing for a more successful collegiate career and future as well as having a stronger applicability for needed high school content.
 - Possible benefits to others include the knowledge of contributing to a more purposeful and effective academic base for high school students in high school English classes and better prepared students in introductory collegiate English/composition classes.
 - You may learn more about yourself and how effectively you implement the standards/prepare your high school students for the next level of their education.
- Duration: It will take about 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

Statement of Confidentiality: The survey does not ask for any personally identifiable information. It does ask for respondents to select which state they currently work in, and which grade levels/classes they teach, but it does not get any more specific thus anonymity is maintained. If this research is published, no information that would identify

you will be included since your name is not asked for nor would it be linked to your responses. All survey responses that we receive will be treated confidentially. However, given that the surveys can be completed from any computer (e.g., personal, work, school), we are unable to guarantee the security of the computer on which you choose to enter your responses. As a participant in our study, we want you to be aware that certain “key logging” software programs exist that can be used to track or capture data that you enter and/or websites that you visit.

Right to Ask Questions: The researchers conducting this study are Kelsey Buchholz, doctoral student, supported by advisory Dr. Jared Schlenker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Dr. Jared Schlenker at (701) 777-3584 during the day. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or UND.irb@UND.edu. You may contact the UND IRB with problems, complaints, or concerns about the research. Please contact the UND IRB if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is an informed individual who is independent of the research team. General information about being a research subject can be found on the Institutional Review Board website “Information for Research Participants” <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html>

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this research. You can stop your participation at any time. You may refuse to participate or choose to discontinue participation at any time without losing any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this research study. Completion and return of the survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to participate in the research. Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

I teach at a post-secondary institution in ____.

- South Dakota
- North Dakota
- Minnesota
- Other

I teach English/Composition

- Yes
- No

I teach _____. (Select all that apply)

- Intro Level English/Composition classes
- Required English/Composition classes
- Advanced English/Composition classes

I have been teaching at the post-secondary level for _____.

- 0-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15 + years

I have previous experience teaching high school English/Language Arts.

- Yes
- No

I taught high school English/Language Arts for _____.

- 0-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15 + years

The Common Core Standards focus on 5 anchor ideas to prepare students for the next level of their education. Please rank in order on which one you think is most important for incoming students to be proficient in at the collegiate level. #1 being the most important and #5 being the least.

- Language
- Reading Literature
- Reading Informational Text
- Writing
- Speaking and Listening

The Common Core Standards focus on 5 anchor ideas to prepare students for the next level of their education. Please rank in order on which one you find most students are able to execute effectively in their first few weeks of college-level English/composition. #1 being the most effective in student performance and #5 being the least.

- Language
- Reading Literature
- Reading Informational Text
- Writing
- Speaking and Listening

I feel very confident in my abilities to effectively teach the standard and students be able to apply the skills appropriately. Please slide the bar to best represent your feelings on each specific anchor standard. “0” being not confident at all, “100” being extremely confident. If you wish to leave the slider bar where it is, please click on it to register your response.

- 0
- 10
- 20
- 30
- 40
- 50
- 60
- 70
- 80
- 90
- 100

Language

Reading Literature

Reading Informational Text

Writing

Speaking & Listening

There are set standards (created by the school, department, state governing body, etc.) that I follow when organizing and teaching my intro-level English/composition course.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Concerning the LANGUAGE standard, I feel like students come in with the necessary skills for success at the college level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the LANGUAGE standard, please rank the substandard that students are MOST proficient in when coming into the entry level English/Composition class as #1, next most proficient skill as #2 and so on.

_____ Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

_____ Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

- _____ Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- _____ Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade appropriate reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- _____ Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- _____ Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

Concerning the READING LITERATURE standard, I feel like students come in with the necessary skills for success at the college level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the READING LITERATURE standard, please rank the substandard that students are MOST proficient in when coming into the entry level English/Composition class as #1, next most proficient skill as #2 and so on.

- _____ Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- _____ Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- _____ Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama
- _____ Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
- _____ Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

- _____ Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.
- _____ Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem.
- _____ Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar these or topics.
- _____ Read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems at the high end of the appropriate grade text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Concerning the READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT standard, I feel like students come in with the necessary skills for success at the college level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT standard, please rank the substandard that students are MOST proficient in when coming into the entry level English/Composition class as #1, next most proficient skill as #2 and so on.

- _____ Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- _____ Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- _____ Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
- _____ Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.
- _____ Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
- _____ Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

- _____ Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- _____ Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use the legal reasoning and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy.
- _____ Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational US documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.
- _____ Read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the appropriate grade text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Concerning the WRITING standard, I feel like students come in with the necessary skills for success at the college level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the WRITING standard, please rank the substandard that students are MOST proficient in when coming into the entry level English/Composition class as #1, next most proficient skill as #2 and so on.

- _____ Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- _____ Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- _____ Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- _____ Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- _____ Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- _____ Use technology, including the internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

- _____ Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- _____ Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answer the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- _____ Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- _____ Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Concerning the SPEAKING & LISTENING standard, I feel like students come in with the necessary skills for success at the college level.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Concerning the SPEAKING & LISTENING standard, please rank the substandard that students are MOST proficient in when coming into the entry level English/Composition class as #1, next most proficient skill as #2 and so on.

- _____ Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade appropriate topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- _____ Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
- _____ Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.
- _____ Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization,

development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

_____ Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

_____ Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Overall, I feel like my students are LEAST prepared for college-level English in this one of the Common Core Standards.

- Language
- Reading Literature
- Reading Informational Text
- Writing
- Speaking & Listening

Overall, I feel like my students are BEST prepared for college-level English in this one of the Common Core Standards.

- Language
- Reading Literature
- Reading Informational Text
- Writing
- Speaking & Listening

Please describe a project/assignment that you give to your college students that allow them to showcase their proficiency in English/composition.

The most important skill(s) my students need to have in order to be successful in college-level English classes is _____.

The skill(s) my students are MOST LACKING when coming into college-level English classes is _____.

Appendix D
Initial Email Contacting Potential Participants, Professors From Universities

Subject: Standards/Expectations Alignment Dissertation Survey

Hello,

My name is Kelsey Buchholz, and I am a high school English teacher in South Dakota. I am currently pursuing my doctorate in education through the University of North Dakota and am focusing on ELA standard alignment between high schools and colleges for my dissertation. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about standards expectations and alignment.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will answer some survey questions about your own expectations of incoming freshmen and their abilities for introductory level English/composition courses. The results from this study will help me complete my dissertation on what is needed to better align standards between high schools and colleges in the English discipline, making sure students are best prepared to not only pass but exceed expectations in their college courses, reducing the need for remedial or repeated course work.

This is completely voluntary as you can choose to participate in the study or not. The survey is expected to last about 10-15 minutes. There is no compensation for your time, but your input is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please click on the link below to fill out the survey online.

https://und.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_aateBxMjeSK2yHk

[Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management](#)

The most powerful, simple and trusted way to gather experience data. Start your journey to experience management and try a free account today.

Und.qualtrics.com

Thank you for your time. I greatly appreciate your feedback. Please let me know if you have any questions.