Current trends in California suggest that the future of our state’s economy requires an increasing number of high-skilled workers with higher levels of education. The Public Policy Institute of California projects that by 2020, an estimated 75% of jobs in our state will require some level of college education. More than half of those jobs will require at least a Bachelor's degree.¹

San Diego is projected to be in the top 10 of cities in the United States for job growth through 2025. In the midst of the 21st century economy, the telecommunications, software, and biotechnology industries in our region lead the way as the fastest growing industries.² Already, 6 out of 10 of the fastest growing jobs in San Diego require some form of formal education beyond high school.³ This means that local students who are not prepared in high school for postsecondary training will be unable to take advantage of these high-growth and high-wage jobs in our region.

In response to the changing needs of the local workforce, the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) Board of Education made a commitment to an equitable and quality education by adopting a new set of graduation requirements aligned with the A-G curriculum. The A-G curriculum is a career and college prep sequence of courses that teach English, Math, Science, Social Science, Art and Foreign Language skills that prepare students to become lifelong learners in a changing economy and a changing world.

The A-G curriculum teaches core skills necessary for both career and college: strong reading comprehension, clear writing and verbal communication, critical thinking and problem solving, and an awareness of other cultures and languages. Many career technical education (CTE) courses, which focus on vocational careers, are also certified as A-G and count towards meeting the subject requirements.

In 2007, only 4 out of 10 students in SDUSD high schools were completing the A-G curriculum at the point of graduation.⁴ Students, parents, teachers, and organizations like Alliance San Diego (formerly Equality Alliance) mobilized to bring attention to the discrepancies in career and college readiness, particularly among low-income students, students of color, English learners, and other underrepresented student populations. Many of these students lacked access to A-G courses because their high schools did not offer them in their master schedules.
On June 9, 2009, at the urging of the community, the SDUSD Board of Education promised to implement the A-G curriculum as the district’s default graduation requirement beginning with the Class of 2016. This move aimed to close the A-G completion gap by offering A-G at all high schools, as well as by requiring A-G course completion for graduation so all students access the courses they need to be successful in career and college in the 21st century.

As SDUSD continues to implement the A-G aligned graduation requirements, Alliance San Diego intends to see this policy all the way through by advocating for the supports and interventions that students need to complete A-G. Alliance San Diego’s goal is to ensure that SDUSD prepares all students, regardless of background, neighborhood, or income level, to have the appropriate skills for college readiness and for the jobs of the future.

### A-G Completion & the Class of 2016

This fall, SDUSD will provide a status update on the progress of the Class of 2016 in meeting the A-G requirements. In preparation, Alliance San Diego reviews the status that was reported last year. In October 2014, at the urging of the community, the district released data on how many students in the Class of 2016 (then juniors) were “on-track” to complete the A-G courses. The district defined “on-track” as the following:

“Students that have passed the following courses (or their equivalents): English 1-2, English 3-4, Algebra, Geometry, World History/Geography, Biology or Physics, and at least 4 additional semester credits in any combination of approved science, world language, and visual/performing arts coursework.”

The data highlighted from this October 2014 presentation shows that 59% of students in the Class of 2016 were “on-track” to meet the A-G graduation requirements. See Figure 1.

However, Alliance San Diego believes that nearly 70% of students in the Class of 2016 were “near or on-track” to completing the requirements: 59% were meeting all requirements, 9% were missing only 1 semester in one area, and 2% were missing credits only in Visual and Performing Arts or a Foreign Language. If the district targets appropriate supports and interventions for those students that were nearly on-track (missing only 1 semester in one area or are missing their credits in Visual and Performing Arts or Foreign Language), then the Class of 2016 stands in a better place to meet the A-G graduation requirements. If these students were combined with...
Alliance San Diego is a non-profit community empowerment organization whose mission is to create a San Diego where all people can achieve their full potential. Our work focuses on ensuring that all students have the necessary skills to be successful in the 21st century. We do this by training parents to be lifelong advocates for public education, advocating for equitable school funding, and influencing education policy so that all students are career and college ready.

SDUSD's data indicates that 18% of students in the Class of 2016 were not meeting the A-G requirements due to failing grades. After a closer look, it appears that these students struggle with Math, English Language Arts, & Language Other Than English. This was especially true at schools with high concentrations of English Learners and low-income students. Across the district, 78% of the Class of 2016 was “on-track” to fulfilling Math, 75% was “on-track” to fulfilling English Language Arts, and 61% was “on-track” to fulfilling Language Other Than English.

The lower completion rates in these areas inform why 18% of students in the Class of 2016 were missing more than one semester of credits due to failing grades. This trend of consistent incompletion of the A-G graduation requirements poses a concern across the district of students piling up Fs on their transcripts. The low completion rates in Math, English Language Arts, & Language Other than English compared to higher completion rates in History/Social Science (84% “on-track”), Science (84% “on-track”), and Visual & Performing Arts (62% “on-track”). Although the lower completion rate in Visual & Performing Arts could be a challenge in this data set, it is not an area of concern because students tend to complete those classes later in high school. To see a full breakdown of subject area “on-track” status, see Figure 4.

Alliance San Diego looks forward this fall to receiving updated data from the district about the progress of the Class of 2016 (now seniors) in completing the A-G courses. To support their successful completion of the requirements, we urge SDUSD to consider the recommendations provided in the next section of this report.
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Between January 2015 and May 2015, Alliance San Diego convened focus groups made up of stakeholders in SDUSD to discuss the current status of A-G “on-track” rates among the Class of 2016. This project aimed to record the experiences of educators and community stakeholders at secondary school sites to learn more about how the A-G graduation requirements have impacted the student population.

In these conversations, stakeholders identified effective support systems and interventions for students who are struggling to meet these graduation requirements. The stakeholders that participated in these focus groups included teachers, counselors, principals, district personnel, and community members. The input of a diverse set of educators, whose expertise is working with students on a daily basis, was necessary to ensure that all identified supports and interventions are best practices that are appropriate for struggling students, especially in school sites whose social, economic, and cultural make-up provide for different challenges in the classroom and in the community.

METHODOLOGY

The focus groups with stakeholders across SDUSD employed a hybrid qualitative and quantitative approach. Focus groups were conducted at six high schools that were identified as having student populations most affected by the A-G graduation requirements. All six schools are among the top ten schools in SDUSD with the highest concentration of English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Alliance San Diego chose these schools as ideal sites for focus groups using a mix of criteria such as high concentrations of English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, access to career and college preparedness curriculum from 2007 and 2012 (the year before the Class of 2016 entered high school), and growth of career and college preparedness rates as defined by A-G completion between 2007 and today. In addition to the six school sites, one focus group was conducted with a group of counselors from various school sites around the school district.

The focus groups took place during staff meetings, Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings, and administrative meetings. Within these focus groups, Alliance San Diego provided an overview of how SDUSD came to adopt the A-G curriculum as its default graduation requirements and led a conversation about students at that particular school site and progress in regards to A-G completion. Part of the discussion also focused on possible supports and interventions to raise A-G “on-track” rates. Lastly, Alliance San Diego distributed a quantitative survey for participants to fill out.

We conducted the following focus groups: San Diego Media Visual and Performing Arts, Crawford High School, Kearny School of International Business, Hoover High School, San Diego Sci-Tech, Lincoln High School, and a focus group with counselors.

In addition to these focus groups, Alliance San Diego distributed surveys to parents across SDUSD about the progress of A-G in our district. More than 100 parents responded to this survey.
SURVEY FINDINGS

A survey with eight Yes/No/Maybe questions was given to stakeholders across SDUSD. Each question asked individuals to share their opinion on specific interventions aimed at supporting students with the A-G graduation requirements. Prior to conducting the survey, research was done on feasible interventions and supports employed by similar districts across the state that were in compliance with the University of California Office of the President (UCOP). This research generated the suggested interventions and supports reflected in the eight survey questions. A total of 268 surveys were completed by teachers, counselors, administrators and community members across SDUSD. The results are as follows:

Q1: DO YOU THINK THE DISTRICT SHOULD PURSUE THE GOAL OF SMALLER CLASS SIZES TO HELP STUDENTS MEET THE A-G COURSEWORK?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current class-cap size for SDUSD secondary level schools is 36 students per class. The survey results indicate that 90 percent of stakeholders who took the survey believe SDUSD should pursue smaller class sizes to help students meet the A-G graduation requirements.

Q2: DO YOU THINK THE DISTRICT SHOULD OFFER SUMMER SCHOOL NOT ONLY FOR CREDIT RECOVERY, BUT FOR ADDITIONAL CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP STUDENTS MEET THE A-G COURSEWORK?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>91%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SDUSD has identified summer school coursework as a possible intervention to help students meet the A-G graduation requirements. The survey results show that 91 percent of stakeholders who took the survey believe summer school for additional credit opportunities would be an effective intervention.

Q3: DO YOU THINK SUMMER SCHOOL FOR ADDITIONAL CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR SELECT STUDENTS? I.E. ENGLISH LEARNERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This question was designed to see if certain student groups should be given a priority for summer school for additional credit opportunities. Data shows that 65 percent of stakeholders who took the survey believe summer school for additional credit opportunities should be open to all students, not just specific groups such as English Learners.

Q4: DO YOU THINK THE DISTRICT SHOULD OFFER AFTER-SCHOOL COURSES/EXTENDED SCHOOL DAYS TO HELP STUDENTS MEET THE A-G COURSEWORK?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>83%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With this question Alliance San Diego wanted to know if stakeholders believed after school classes or zero periods are an effective intervention. SDUSD has identified extended day options as a possible intervention to help students meet the A-G graduation requirements. Data shows that 81 percent of stakeholders who took the survey think that this would be an effective intervention in helping students meet the A-G graduation requirements.

Q5: DO YOU BELIEVE ONLINE COURSEWORK SHOULD BE PURSUED AND PROMOTED TO HELP STUDENTS MEET THE A-G COURSEWORK?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This question sought to assess the attitude of stakeholders on the effectiveness of online coursework to help students meet A-G. UCOP allows students to meet certain requirements of the A-G curriculum through approved online coursework. SDUSD already offers online coursework and has identified it as a possible option to help students meet the A-G graduation requirements. According to the results, 57 percent of all surveyed stakeholders believe online coursework should be pursued to help students meet A-G.
In addition to taking the survey, teachers, counselors, and administrators engaged in conversations about A-G readiness at their school sites through focus groups. They were asked about:

- Strategies that are working at the sites in helping students meet A-G
- Factors that impair students from meeting A-G
- Input regarding interventions and support systems for students in helping them meet the A-G graduation requirements at their specific school site

Teachers, counselors, and administrators provided the following information and remarks:

**Unmanageable Class Sizes**
Each focus group mentioned that it is important to pursue smaller class sizes to help students meet the rigor of A-G. Classes with 36 students (the district’s cap size) is not conducive to learning and does not allow teachers to cover all of the material in time provided. Some science teachers, fearing for the safety of their students, opt to have students work on computer-simulated lab experiments instead of hands-on lab experiments due to unmanageable class sizes.

“My son has 38 students in his math class. That is unacceptable because he does not receive individual help from his teacher. We need less students in the classroom so they can get help with the material that they do not understand.” – Parent at SDUSD

**Limited Counseling Staff**
Stakeholders believe that limited numbers/allocations of counselors per school site is a factor that impairs all students from meeting A-G. Counselors shared that current student caseloads make it very challenging to track the A-G progress of all students while concurrently supporting their social/emotional needs. Teachers expressed the need for thorough transcripts analyses and the importance of accurately assessing and placing students in adequate-level coursework. This correlates with survey results show that 72 percent of all surveyed stakeholders believe more accurate assessment and placement will help students meet A-G. Counselors expressed that their current caseload is 450. However, the ideal caseload that would allow them to adequately track the academic progress of each student would be 250, while a manageable caseload would be 350.

“Counseling needs to review student transcripts often and early to be sure students are placed in the right classes and have the right plan to meet the new A-G graduation requirements.” – Teacher at Lincoln High School

**Need for Summer School**
According to stakeholders, summer school for credit recovery as well as additional credit opportunities is an effective intervention for students struggling to meet A-G. Many students do not have space in their schedules to complete the A-G coursework. This is the case for English Learners, particularly newcomers, who have to take...
additional courses and show proficiency in the English language. Teachers argue that English Learners experience a summer learning gap that impairs their ability to meet the A-G graduation requirements on time.

“There is a time issue—schooling must be structured in a way where it shows that completing 6 years of English for New Arrival students and English Learners is possible.” – Teacher at Crawford High School

A-G Preparation Prior to High School
During focus groups, participants stated the need to prepare students for A-G at the elementary and middle school level. They shared that many times, when students enter high school, they are unaware of the A-G requirements and do not have the adequate skills to be successful in completing A-G coursework. Stakeholders suggested more accountability at the elementary and middle school level in providing students with a strong foundation for the rigor of A-G. It was also noted that SDUSD should ensure World Language alignment between middle schools and high schools in the same cluster to help students fulfill the World Language requirement of the A-G.

“We need to inform students and families about the A-G requirements in the 8th grade and make sure that students are having 4-6 year plans made to guide their educational paths!” – Teacher at Hoover High School

CONCLUSION
Although data shows that there has been improvement in the number of students that are career and college ready, there is still work to be done. Certain school clusters are disproportionally affected by the A-G and are struggling to meet the requirements. SDUSD should stand by its commitment to the A-G graduation requirements and provide necessary interventions and supports to ensure that all students, regardless of neighborhood or income level, are career and college ready.

RECOMMENDATIONS
As a result of the findings in this report, Alliance San Diego recommends that SDUSD do the following:

1. Reduce Class Sizes
The district should reduce class sizes in secondary schools to ensure a more effective classroom environment that can engage all students in the rigor of the A-G. The majority of stakeholders that participated in this study agreed that smaller classes are needed to help all students meet the A-G graduation requirements.

   • We recommend a cap size of 32 students per class at the high school level.
   • Priority should be given to schools with high concentrations of English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

2. Increase Counseling Staff
   • The district should allocate more counselors to sites with student populations that are struggling to meet the A-G. We recommend a more manageable caseload of 250:1 so that counselors may adequately assess, place, and track the A-G completion progress of all students.
   • Classified staff that assists counselors with the technical aspect of their caseload must also increase. We recommend that the district ensure one full-time registrar at each school site to help counselors better track the progress of A-G completion.

3. Offer More Opportunities for Students to Meet A-G
The district should increase opportunities for students to meet the A-G graduation requirements. We recommend that the district:

   • Expand summer school for additional credit opportunities to all students
   • Offer English Learner Summer Academy for long-term English Learners and foreign students new to SDUSD
   • Summer school sites must be accessible to all students so that commuting is not an issue for students.
• Create extended school day options (zero period or after-school class) for additional credit opportunities for schools with lower A-G on-track rates.
• Administer the Language Other Than English (LOTE) Exam more frequently and in more languages to allow students who are already proficient in another language to satisfy the World Language requirement and free up space to work towards meeting other A-G requirements.

4. Begin A-G Prep Before High School
The district should increase parent engagement and collaboration on A-G graduation requirements at the elementary and middle school level. We recommend the following:

• Educational workshops regarding A-G for the parents of all students entering middle school.
• Full-time Parent Academic Liaisons at all secondary school sites, with a priority given to sites with high numbers of English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.
• World Language alignment between middle schools and high schools within the same clusters to help students meet the A-G World Language requirement. For example, students who take Mandarin at the middle school level should be able to continue to take Mandarin in high school.

5. Provide School Sites with Accurate and Customized Access to Data
Counseling staff should have open and timely access to the data they need to assist students with diverse backgrounds and situations. Each student is different and they are sequenced based on their individual interests. Counselors should have customized information to advise students regarding the different pathways to meet the A-G graduation requirements.

• We recommend that the district invest in data services that will support their early-warning systems for students who are not on track to meeting the A-G graduation requirements.

NOTES:
1 Sarah Bohn, California's Need for High Skilled Workers, September 2014: www.ppic.org.
4 California Department of Education’s Dataquest website: http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/
6 Class of 2007 Data from Dataquest report on UC/CSU Eligible Graduates (completed A-G with a grade of C or better); and Class of 2016 data from SDUSD Presentation on Percent of Students On Track to Graduate with A-G Requirements (with a grade of D or better) presented at 10/28/14 board meeting (item E.5.). According to the data that is available to us, we can deduce that there has been an improvement in career and college readiness since 2007.