We know that school is supposed to prepare students for the real world, but what does that preparation look like? There’s a future electrician’s need the same high school preparation as a future professor. The answer comes when you look at the data first. Students go out to do many different things in the world. You might think that their high school preparation should vary as much as their goals, but is this really the case? It turns out that no matter what students do after high school, whether they enter good jobs or good colleges, they all need challenging courses in high school.

I took a look at these math problems. There was a time when only college-bound students were expected to solve them. In fact, these problems were taken from an entrance exam for electrician’s apprenticeship program. Looking at data on high school graduates shows us why. The ACT, which is able to link the performance of high school students to the skills they need in college and entry-level jobs, examined what successful high school graduates have in common. They found that the math and reading skills needed by electrician’s construction workers and plumbers were the same as the math and reading skills needed by first-year college students.

Unfortunately, my research also found that not all students leave high school with those skills. The ACT calculated that of the students taking its college entrance test, only one in four was college ready in English, math, reading, and science. Increasing student skills means increasing the rigor or challenge of their curriculum. For instance, a student taking more challenging courses would take a fourth year of math like trigonometry instead of stopping at algebra two or maybe she would take chemistry instead of stopping at biology. Those two simple steps have amazing consequences. The Center for Public Education’s regional research paper, chasing the college acceptance letter, found that doing so would raise those students’ chances of getting into college more than if they had raised their grade point average is
from a B- to an A
and as we saw before there's no difference between being a student to
ready for college
and a student ready for a good job in the real world
to improve the rigor of the curriculum in your school track data from the answers
to these questions
which students are on track for graduation
which students in our high school behind
which treatments are enrolled in rigorous courses
these questions give you leading indicator data
a term we explain elsewhere in the learning center
depending on the answers to those questions you might also want to ask
what are the graduation requirements for our schools
are they required of everyone
how do they compared to what's required to succeed in college or a good job
these questions give you data on aligning your schools resources which is an
important part of the data cycle we feature on this site
be sure to track what happens to students after they finish high school
because the point of school is to succeed in the real world
and to make sure students succeed in the real world
you have to look at the data first