Building a College Going Culture:

Principles and Examples

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An important economic policy issue


- Six out of ten future in our economy depend a college degree.

- Pathways to College Act aimed at increasing the number of low-income and first-generation students enrolling and succeeding in college by providing grants to high-need school districts to improve school counseling, build college cultures, and increase student access to postsecondary planning and information.
What was your educational journey?

- What messages did you receive (or your child), both negative and positive, about your ability and your potential to go to college? From whom?

- What high school preparation did you or your child receive? Did you or your child have a choice of preparation?

- What generation college are you or your child? 1st in family or so many you can't keep track? Who paid?
Key Predictors of College Attendance

- Having college plans by the 7th grade
- Having family support
- Attending a college-focused school
How to Improve College Access?

- Lower financial barriers
- Better academic preparation
- Better counseling availability
- Increased college information
- Engage families
 Unmet financial need is increasing, college costs are rising, student loan debt is mounting, and merit aid is increasing.

 22% of low-SES, academically-qualified students don’t attend college because of affordability concerns.

 Children given information about need-based financial aid were more likely to say that they would study for longer that day and expected to do better in school than students who were told about college expenses but not aid.
Better Academic Preparation

- Best predictor of college enrollment and completion--the rigor of HS courses, esp. math

- Raising student achievement helps meet increasing demands for accountability

- Current P-12 accountability systems like exit exams and achievement tests are misaligned with college admissions requirements
High School Counseling

✧ Few resources devoted to college counseling
✧ Counselor-to-student ratio nationally is 1:477, and in the largest cities it averages 1:750.
✧ Most counselors are not trained in college or financial aid advising and don’t have accurate, up-to-date information
Primary Counseling Tasks

- Scheduling
- Testing
- Discipline
  - Dropout Prevention
  - Suicide Prevention
  - Drug Abuse Prevention
  - Pregnancy Prevention
  - Crisis Counseling
  - Personal Counseling

Maybe if there is time, college counseling!
Counselors’ Greatest Impacts

- Organizing info & activities to support aspirations, preparation, & decision-making;
- Assisting parents in supporting aspirations, expectations, & motivation;
- Focusing school on its college mission

Actively advising (not just disseminating information) results in increases in four-year college enrollments, especially for low-income, urban and rural students as well as students of color.
Information Needs

- Adequate information, received early enough to complete the necessary prerequisites for college.

- Low-SES students and students of color are the least likely to receive this info by 8th grade, in time to enroll in college prep high school classes.

- Clear, accessible information about affordability, received repeatedly, with increasing complexity.

- Only 18% of all high school students and 30% of parents report having information on college costs.
Families As Partners

Family encouragement stimulates students forming college plans.

Family support and early college plans predict:

- developing and maintaining college aspirations,
- sustaining motivation and academic achievements, and
- actual college enrollment.
Teachers As Partners

- Teachers affect academic preparation, self-esteem, motivation to achieve, and opportunities to learn.

- Teacher quality accounts for much of the opportunity gap from which minority and low-income students suffer.

- Teachers’ expectations of students are influenced by beliefs about race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

- Teachers’ assessments of students’ ability and motivation affects: how they interact with and support students, whether and how many opportunities they provide to students to learn and excel, the advice they give students, and their interactions with students’ families.
• An organization’s underlying values, beliefs, and meanings which are deeply held, static, and enduring.

• Culture influences daily operations through: expectations; assumptions; language; flow of information; content of information; and specific options highlighted or downplayed.
Creating a College Culture

- Changes school structure and culture for all
- Involves long-term, systemic change
- Has broader implications
- Requires full “buy in” and additional resources
College Culture Goal

- All students are prepared for a full range of post-secondary options through structural, motivational, and experiential college preparatory opportunities.
College Culture Objectives

- School leadership is committed to building a college culture

- All school personnel provide a consistent message to students that supports their quest for a college preparatory K-12 experience

- All counselors are college counselors

- Counselors, teachers, and families are partners in preparing students for college
Principles of a College Culture

- College Talk
- Clear Expectations
- Information & Resources
- Comprehensive Counseling Model
- Testing & Curriculum
- Faculty Involvement
- Family Involvement
- College Partnerships
- Articulation
College Talk

Clear, ongoing communication about college, so that all students develop a college-going identity.

**Indicators:**

- Newsletters, newspapers, posters
- “Your Educational Journey” campus-wide
- College Club for middle school students
- Essay contest based on college application questions
Explicit goals of college preparation must be defined and communicated clearly, consistently, and in a variety of ways by families and all school personnel.

Indicators:

- School mission statement
- Four-year plans for all students
- Frequent communication with students about their college options
- Ongoing opportunities to discuss college preparation, define goals
Students must have access to up-to-date, comprehensive college information and schools must build college knowledge infrastructure.

**Indicators:**
- College-related periodicals
- PSAT/SAT/ACT materials
- Financial Aid materials
- College catalogs
- College choice guides
- CD ROMS on college planning
- Workshops on test prep, financial planning, and high school coursework planning.
Comprehensive Counseling Model

All counselors are college counselors and all student interactions with counselors are college advising opportunities.

Indicators:
- All high school counselors attend state college conferences
- Counselors at all grade levels have ongoing collaboration
- Counselors distribute college information to all students, faculty, and staff
Students must be informed about necessary tests, must be given the opportunity to prepare for these tests, and testing fees must be taken into account.

Indicators:

- PSAT given on school day to all 10th graders in a district is free
- Master schedules changed to make more college prep classes available
- Students learn organizational skills
Faculty Involvement

Faculty must be active, informed partners with counselors, students, and families and professional development opportunities must be available.

Indicators:

- Classroom decorations and “college corners”
- College Talk in class time
- Mathematics teachers work with PSAT-takers
- Teachers understand their roles in college prep
- Teachers visit counseling office
Family Involvement

Family members must have opportunities to gain college knowledge and understand their role.

Indicators:

- College Fairs for students and their families
- Evening/weekend parent workshops to learn about college preparation, financial planning
- Parents supported in their belief that their children are “college material”
College Partnerships

Have active links between K-12 schools and local colleges and universities that can lead to field trips, college fairs, and academic enrichment programs.

Indicators:

- Students at all grade levels have visited local college campuses
- College dress days, door decoration contests, guest speakers
- Tutoring programs
- Pen pal program with college students
Articulation

Students should have a seamless experience from Kindergarten through HS graduation, with ongoing communication among all schools in a feeder group, and work at one school site should connect with activities at other levels.

Indicators:

- Students hear a consistent message at all grade levels
- Middle schools connect with students as young as fifth grade
- As early as kindergarten, students are seeing themselves as college material
- High school and middle school counselors are pooling resources and making connections
Keep in mind...

- All nine principles are interrelated
- Remember to build on all nine principles
- Every school has existing resources to draw upon
- Think BIG, but remember the details
Action Steps

- Request college financial aid officers to speak at your schools.
- Bring more teachers and counselors to college campuses.
- Request undergraduates from local colleges to volunteer at your schools, preferably from service learning courses where you know they will have some training and support.