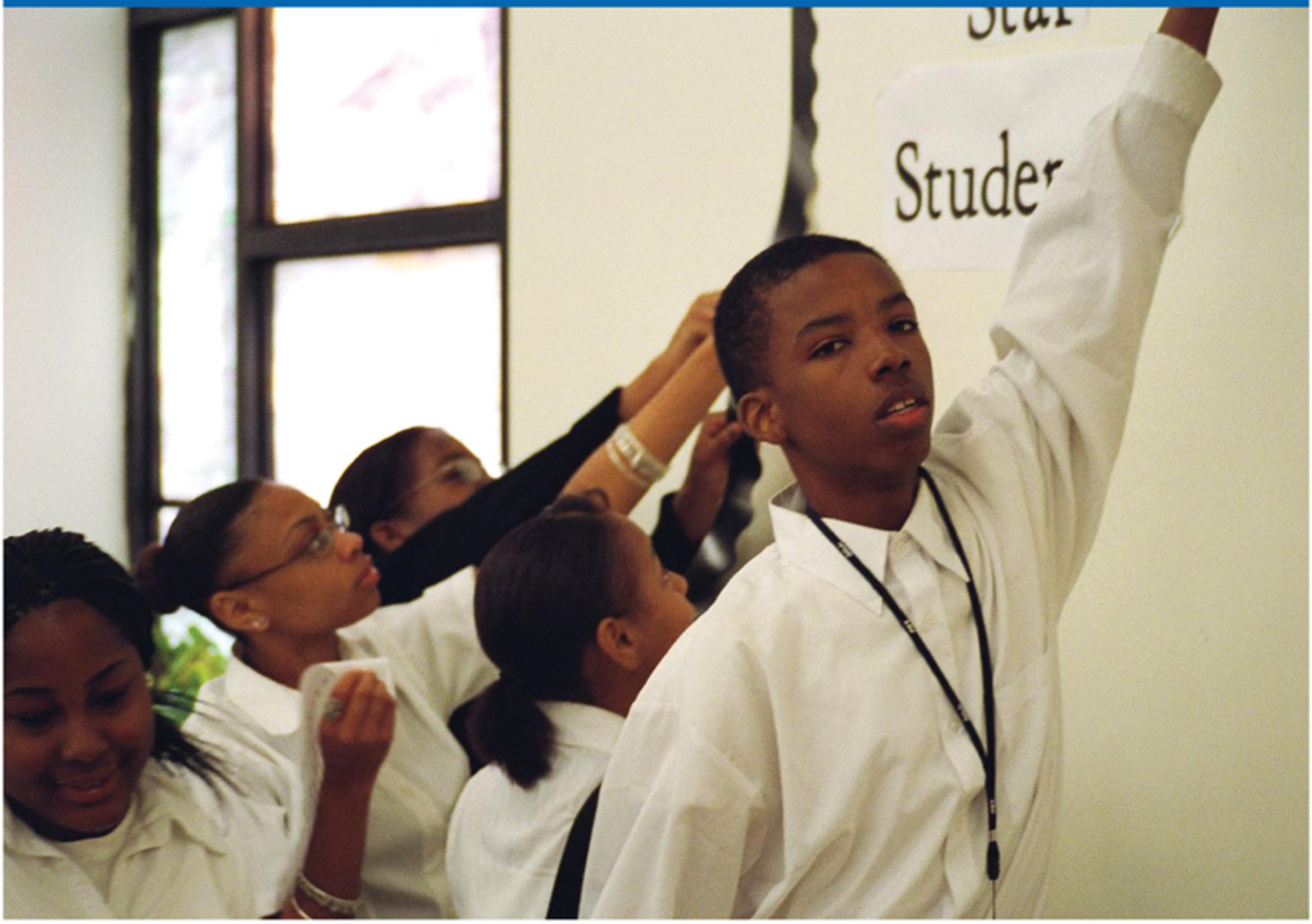
# Increasing College Access

## through School-Based Models of Postsecondary Preparation, Planning, and Support




By Carol Miller Lieber

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EDUCATORS for SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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**Increasing College Access through School-Based Models of Postsecondary Preparation, Planning, and Support**



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# Table of Contents

# *Increasing College* Access through School-Based Models of Postsecondary Preparation, Planning, and Support*

## Introduction

In the last decade, educational leaders and policymakers have placed the improvement of academic and postsecondary outcomes of urban learners at the heart of the reform agenda for public schools in the United States. Changing the outcomes for urban high school students, in particular, has proven far more challenging than many reformers anticipated. An achievement gap (as viewed through graduation rates, exit test scores, Advanced Placement (AP) test scores, and college admission tests scores) persists between inner-city, low-income, and mostly minority students and their suburban, middle-to-high-income, and mostly white peers. Moreover, comparisons of college-going and college completion rates between these two groups indicate that the outcome gap actually widens after students leave high school.

External college access programs and some newer school-based postsecondary initiatives are positively impacting the numbers of underrepresented students who enroll and succeed in college. Yet these programs only reach a small percentage of low-income, minority youth (Tierney and Hagedorn 2002; Gandara 2001).

Urban high schools have a responsibility to shift the paradigm of college access from working intensively with some students to supporting and guiding the future aspirations of all the young people in their care. Thus an essential feature of urban high school reform must include the development of more comprehensive school-based models of postsecondary preparation, planning, and support in order to reach more youth.

This paper examines the barriers to college that face urban students and methods for reducing them, models for developing college access programs to support all students in urban high schools, and policy supports to adequately implement them.

Section One offers a set of organizing principles and promising practices drawn from external college access programs and high schools that have developed strong college-going cultures. These principles and practices are linked to increased college enrollment and can serve as benchmarks for assessing and strengthening all school-based postsecondary programs.

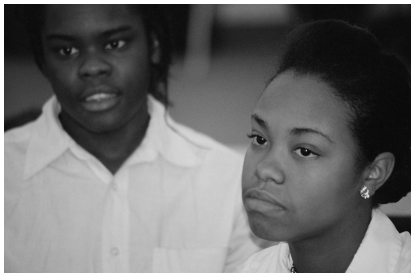
Section Two introduces four school-based models of comprehensive postsecondary preparation, planning, and support that hold the promise of serving all urban students more effectively as they plan their futures after high school. These models have emerged during the most recent decade of urban school reform.

Section Three concludes with suggestions for leveraging federal, state, and district policies in ways that can build a deeper public commitment to providing more comprehensive postsecondary preparation, planning, and support in urban high schools.

***College**, unless otherwise stated, refers to “any accredited educational institution beyond the high school level, including apprenticeship, certificate, associates, and bachelors degree programs” (NCAN 2008).

# Section One: Organizing Principles and Promising Practices that Reduce Roadblocks to College Access and Increase College Enrollment

## *Roadblocks to College Access for Underrepresented Students*



The roadblocks to college access, especially for underrepresented students and first generation college goers, present ample evidence that current school-based models of postsecondary preparation, planning, and support provide inadequate and unequal services to their students (Venezia, Krist, and Antonio 2003, 37–43).

Too few urban students experience a college-going culture in high school that expects every student to complete a personal learning and postsecondary plan that includes applying to, being accepted to, and enrolling in a college (Roderick 2008). In addition, too few students are aware of the variety of college options, from four-year academic college, to four-year cooperative education, to two-year community college and transfer programs, to certificate programs (NCCE 2008). Many students engage in the college-going process without vital information about specific colleges and programs that have proven track records of higher graduation rates for underserved and underrepresented youth (Fry 2004; Roderick, Nagaoka, and Moeller 2008).

In most high schools, access to quality postsecondary preparation and support is uneven. Students with the most promising college potential often receive intensive ongoing support while a majority of students struggle with the college-going process on their own with little or no adult-mediated guidance or regularly scheduled conversations. For many students, deliberate college preparation and planning may not even begin in earnest until senior year, and the college search and match process may be limited, superficial, and haphazard (Hossler 1999).

In addition, many academically able urban students experience a mismatch between their academic qualifications and the selectivity of the college of their choice, enrolling in non-selective colleges that are less likely to provide a distinct and demanding academic culture in which students are expected to persist and graduate (Roderick 2008).

Another complicating factor is that many school counselors (and social workers and teachers who serve as advocates and advisors) are not trained to take on the specific responsibilities of college counseling and postsecondary advisement (Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar 2004). School staff may not have access to adequate or accurate "college knowledge" that should inform their postsecondary conversations with students. Many teachers who have responsibility for supporting students' college-going process report feelings of inadequacy in the role of postsecondary advocate (Venezia, Krist, and Antonio 2003, 37).

Schools may not always be culturally responsive to the needs of low-income minority students. A lack of insider information, often referred to as social and cultural capital, can disadvantage low-income and first-generation college-goers who are unfamiliar with the social and academic networks, norms, and expectations that will prepare them for college and "nurture students through college" (Tierney and Hagedorn 2002).

Finally, many families new to the college-going process don't have accurate information about costs and affordability of college options and may not receive adequate hands-on assistance throughout the college and financial aid application process.

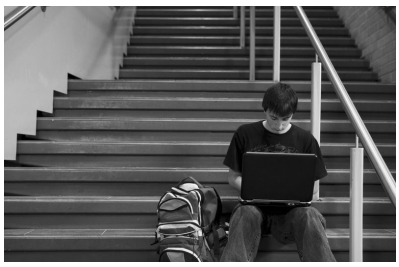
## *Organizing Principles that Reduce Roadblocks and Increase College Access*

**High schools that have dramatically raised college acceptance and enrollment rates incorporate the following organizing principles within their postsecondary preparation programs:**

- **Build a strong college-going culture in which all adults support students' postsecondary aspirations.**
  A college-going culture is measured by prior college-going rates of alumni; selectivity of student's college choices; partnerships with colleges and universities; the extent to which adults have accurate information about the college-going process and accurate local "college knowledge" that can inform students' decision making; the extent to which the schedule, calendar, events, and grade-level activities are organized around postsecondary planning and the college-going process; and most importantly, the level of faculty belief in all students' capacity to go to college (Roderick, Nagaoka, and Moeller 2008).
- **Adjust the college-going process to meet students' needs.**
  Developmentally appropriate postsecondary and college preparation activities and conversations begin where students *are*, not where they *should be*. Quality postsecondary preparation programs assess how students are imagining their futures early on in high school so that adult advocates can adjust the pace and entry point of conversations as well as the activity content for students. This sensitivity is particularly important for students who resist even imagining a future self, who make vague assertions that they are going right to work after high school, or who simply don't know what the future might hold for them.
- **Make a postsecondary plan an exit requirement for every student.**
  Communicate the expectation that every student must graduate with a completed personal learning and postsecondary plan that includes applications to a recommended number of colleges, the requirement to complete Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms, and enrollment in the college program of a student's choice. This is the most direct route to ensuring that all students have access to the services and support they need.
- **Establish a formal schedule of college and career labs, deadlines, and "sign-offs" for completion of specific college preparation and career planning documents at every grade level for every student.**
  "Supporting students in the college search and application process requires that high schools be organized to maximize information and guidance for students as they cross critical hurdles" (Roderick, Nagaoka, and Moeller, 2008 1). When schools provide the structure, time, and support for every student to engage in specific college-going activities, all young people get the message that this experience is not just for some students—*it's for everyone!*
- **Build the counseling staff's postsecondary knowledge, skills, and expertise.**
  Although the guidance/counseling staff should drive school-based postsecondary preparation and support, many counselors need additional training and mentoring to reach a level of comfort and competence in this leadership role. Many school counseling frameworks offer guidelines for building postsecondary capacity of the school's counseling staff. (Education Trust 2007; ASCA 2008; Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis 2008; NCANb 2006).

- **Provide every student with attentive, regular, and timely guidance, assistance, and support throughout the entire college-going process.**

This includes extensive discussions with students about their college search, college match, and college fit. Students repeatedly cite the quality and quantity of personal conversations with counselors, advisors, and teachers as a major source of support and influence on their thinking about college (Roderick, Nagaoka, and Moeller 2008). Few other activities communicate an adult's belief and confidence in a student as powerfully as one-to-one conversations in which an adult listens responsively, asks thoughtful questions, and provides helpful feedback.



- **Provide continued support to students and families between high school graduation and college enrollment.**

One factor that contributes to the gap between the rates of students who are accepted to college and those who actually enroll is the lack of support, guidance, and encouragement that many students need to follow through on decisions that will alter their lives dramatically (Gandara 2001; Tierney and Hagedorn 2007). Schools need to think through how to create a "high-touch" check-in system throughout the summer months and continue with financial aid and college financing counseling.

## *Lessons Learned from External College Access Programs*

There are literally thousands of local and national external college access programs across the country, designed and delivered by federally- and state-funded organizations, university partners, private foundations, and nonprofit fee-for-service providers. The common goal of all programs is to increase college access for groups of underrepresented students who match the selection criteria associated with particular programs (from students who are at high risk for dropping out, to high achievers that lack the financial resources to enroll in their college of choice).

Although external programs provide "a safety net for thousands of students who do not get the level of support—academic and social—to be college ready" in their home schools, one estimate concludes that no more than 11.4% of African Americans and 5.3% of Latino students are served by these programs at any given time (Tierney and Hagedorn 2002, 16; Gandara 2001, viii).

Most external college access programs share principles of youth development that create a foundation for balanced programming and support students' academic, social, and personal development. This includes feeling a sense of belonging and membership; a strong peer group; student initiated and directed projects and activities; frequent and regular contact with the same group of students over an extended period of time; opportunities to develop and master new skills; a strong sense of purpose; and opportunities for teamwork (AYPF 2003; Tierney, p. 67-68; NYDIC 2008; Tierney and Hagedorn 2007).

They also provide intensive support for a specific group of young people, from transition programs for 8$^{th}$ grade students who are most likely to drop out of high school to programs that work with underserved, academically talented teens who aim to gain admission to one of America's selective colleges.

Mentors and advocates in these programs support and follow individual students over an extended period that can begin as early as elementary school and continue through high school and even during college-going years. Program coordinators rely on strong partnerships with school-based staff to identify and recruit students and may opt for a peer cohort structure to provide a social network of support for the students.

Programmatic components might include: college preparation, career development, and personalized support through the college-going process; mentors or advocates who meet regularly with their individual mentees or student cohorts over the course of the program; academic interventions, test preparation, tutorial support, and advanced academic learning opportunities; parent outreach and involvement; special field trips to cultural institutions, college campuses, and workplaces; and special community events and motivational speakers.

# External College Access Program Delivery Models

**The tables below include examples of college access programs that typify three different delivery models: out-of-school-time programs; in-school and out-of-school-time partnerships; and in-school collaborative programs.**

## Out-of-School-Time Programs

These programs tend to be the most "student-centered" in the sense that they follow and support individual students who may or may not attend the same school.

**The POSSE Foundation** identifies, recruits, and trains student leaders from public high schools to form multicultural teams called "Posses," who are clustered at one of 30 top-tier colleges and universities. Posse Scholars are awarded full four-year scholarships and are prepared through an eight-month Pre-Collegiate Training Program to pursue their academics and to help promote cross-cultural communication on campus.

**The Harlem Center for Education** is a one-stop youth development center that serves over 3,000 students from grades 6-12 through programs that range from Talent Search High and Middle School Programs, to Summer Scholars and Math & Science Enrichment. The center also provides tutoring; college, financial aid, and career counseling; SAT prep classes; college campus visits; and cultural and educational trips.

**Sponsor-a-Scholar** matches at-risk youth with a mentor who stays with them for five years, from 9th grade through their first year of college. The program also provides tutoring, SAT prep, summer opportunities, and personalized college advisement.

**UCLA Outreach** partners high school students and teachers with university faculty in a college-level summer course in which the whole group reads and discusses college level texts in seminar and works in teams to conduct and present action research.

## In-School and Out-of School-Time Partnerships

In these year-round programs, organizations partner with a school to provide services to a cohort of students during the school day, as well as after school, on weekends, and during the summer months.

**GEAR UP** (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a federally funded program that is intended to serve an entire cohort of students, beginning no later than the 7th grade and following the cohort through high school. Program components are designed by local schools and their partners. Over half of GEAR UP programs are housed on college campuses and include workshops, classes, field trips, tutoring or mentoring, college preparation, and special events that take place during the school year and in the summer months. Program goals include helping students make the critical transition from 8th - 9th grade, supporting students to stay "on track" to graduate within four years, and increasing the number of low-income students who are prepared to enroll in and succeed in college.

**The I Have a Dream Foundation** (IHAD) is a national organization, with local affiliates that support whole classes of students beginning in elementary school and provide long-term support through high school and financial assistance to ensure that all students have access to college. Most IHAD programs provide one-on-one tutoring, mentors, after-school programs, a summer learning program, career and college awareness, enrichment activities, and field trips. Some IHAD programs hire a college advisor who guides students through the college-going process.

## In-School Collaborative Programs

These programs are embedded in the school in which external partners train school staff to facilitate some key components of the program during the school day.

**AVID** (Advancement Via Individual Determination) targets students in the academic middle who are typically the first in their families to go to college, have academic records that may fall short of their potential, and indicate a willingness to work hard and accept the challenges of a more rigorous curriculum. Instead of remediation, AVID students enroll in honors, AP, and accelerated courses. In addition, students take an AVID elective every year where they learn organizational and study skills, strengthen critical thinking and questioning skills, get academic help from peers and college tutors, and participate in enrichment and motivational activities that make college seem attainable.

**Puente Project** students take a two-year English class sequence with a special focus on Mexican American and Latino literature and culture; work with a Puente counselor, who introduces them to college and career opportunities and helps them navigate the college admissions process; meet with a college or adult mentor from their community who has been successful in school; and visit college campuses and professional workplaces.

**College Summit** trains student Summit Leaders for four days in the summer who then help create a college-going culture in their schools. Summit staff also train and support school faculty to become college advisors.

## *College Access Program Practices That Can Build Strong College-Going Cultures in High Schools*

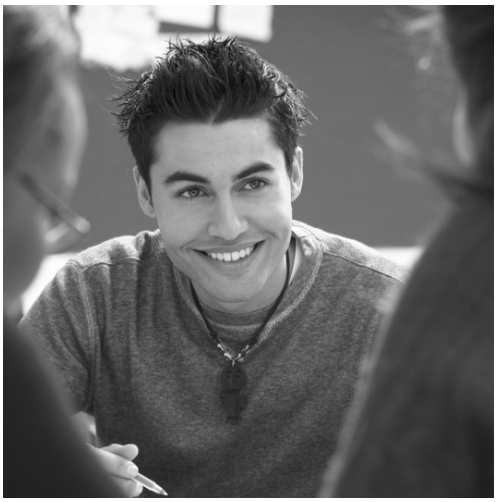
Two recent college access program reviews summarize core practices that build strong external college preparation programs and are positively linked to increased college access for underrepresented students (Tierney and Hagedorn 2007; Gandara 2001). These practices can be replicated in school-based postsecondary access programs to build strong college-going cultures.

**1. Long-term investment in students that usually includes a key person who is attached to each student and monitors and guides her/him over many years through frequent, regular contact:**

There is no substitute for a consistent and supportive relationship with a caring adult. Ideally, a seminar, advisory, or mentoring structure provides regular opportunities for one-to-one conferencing, communication with the student's family, personal and academic advisement, monitoring of the student's academic progress, and coaching and support throughout the student's development and execution of his or her postsecondary plan (Tierney and Hagedorn 2007; Gandara 2001; Steinberg 2000; Quint 2006).


**2. A strong focus on academic college readiness skills:**

High schools that offer a rigorous college and career-ready curriculum to all students have higher percentages of students who apply and gain acceptance to college (Roderick, Nagaoka, and Moeller 2008).



**3. A strong peer group that supports students' academic/college aspirations and also provides social and emotional support:**

Research indicates that students who are engaged in the college-going process with a cohort of peers are more likely to persist in their college plans (Bedsworth 2006). High schools need to develop structures (advisory, seminar, or small college counseling cohorts) that enable the same group of students to meet regularly over multiple years as they engage in postsecondary preparation and planning.

**4. A supportive counseling and college advisement environment and curriculum:**

High schools need to develop an articulated postsecondary preparation curriculum and sequence of activities and tasks that serves all students beginning in freshman year. (Tierney and Hagedorn 2007; NCAN 2006). See Appendix A: A Suggested Outline for a Postsecondary Preparation Curriculum on pp.27-28.

**5. Direct financial assistance and scholarships:**

Although most high schools cannot provide direct financial assistance and scholarships to students, high school counselors can explicitly support students in their search and application process for financial aid and scholarships.

**6. Program content and processes that are responsive to and affirm students' ethnicity and backgrounds:**

"Imagining a possible self" as an academic achiever is enhanced by relationships with older peers and adults who share the same cultural/racial identity of the student (Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar 2006). A culturally responsive process is also sensitive to the norms and values of students' families in order to design and schedule activities that will maximize family participation in planning for college (De La Rosa and Tierney 2005).

**7. Family involvement in which families are considered a vital resource in supporting students' aspirations and commitment to academic achievement and postsecondary success:**

Parental involvement and support in a student's postsecondary and college-going planning has a major influence on their children's decisions (Hossler 1999). High school parents tend to be more responsive and supportive when school-sponsored parent events and activities include direct contact with an adult who knows their child and is personally invested in their child's progress and aspirations (McDonough 1997).

**8. Strong partnerships with local colleges and universities:**

Research and case studies about first-generation college-goers indicate that the students who felt better prepared to take on the demands of college work and adjust to a different way of living were the same students who had had more firsthand experiences on college campuses—from special summer campus programs, to dual enrollment, to direct contact with college mentors, to networking opportunities, to personal connections with college-going students and college graduates throughout their years in high school (Cushman 2005 2006; Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien 2006).

The organizing principles and practices described in this section can serve as a framework for high schools to assess what is in place, what can be put in place within a year or two, and what will require greater resources, a shift in personnel, or a multiyear commitment to move from planning and design to implementation and sustainability.

# Section Two: Four School-Based Models for Postsecondary Preparation, Planning, and Support

The academic study of college access for underrepresented students includes very little formal research focusing specifically on the impact and success of either school-based or district-wide models that rely on school personnel to design, organize, and deliver a comprehensive array of postsecondary services and supports to all students within a school (Tierney and Hagedorn 2002, 95).

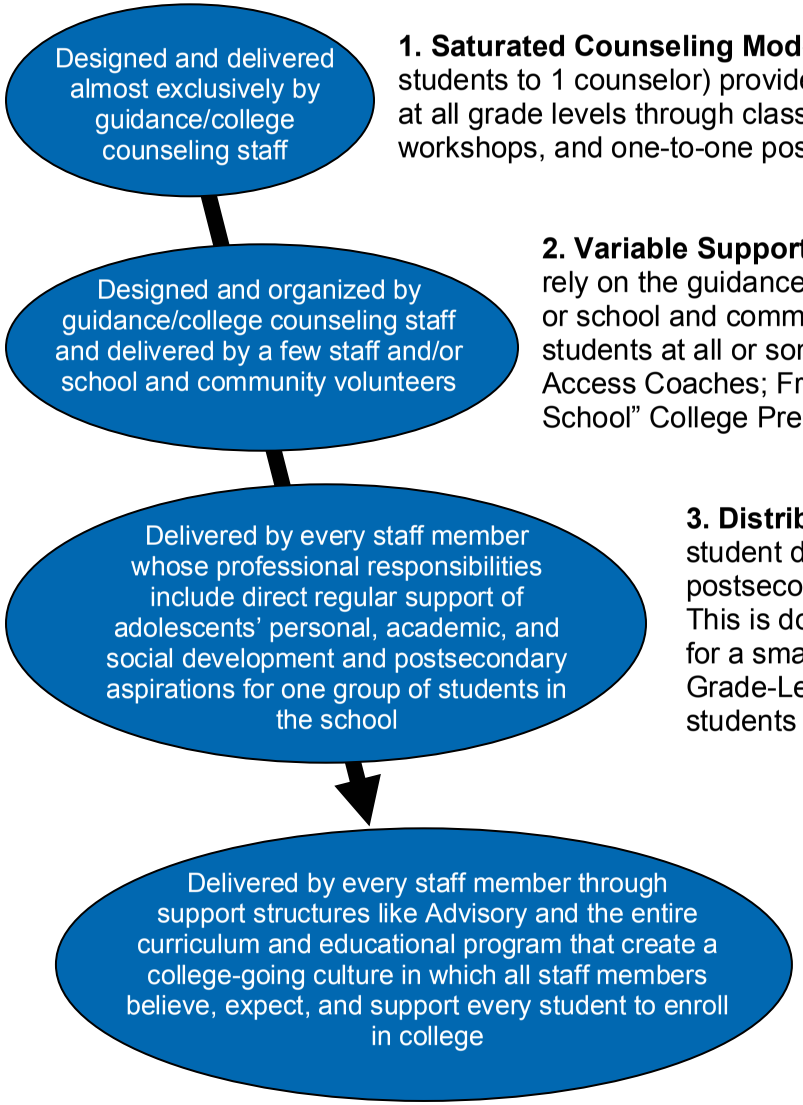
Drawing upon what has been learned and documented in the most recent decade of urban high school reform, several promising school-based models have emerged. Although in early stages of development and evaluation, four school-based models are presented in this section. Each model incorporates many of the organizing principles and promising practices described in Section One in order to provide quality and equitable postsecondary preparation and support to all students. In addition, each model discussed elevates the importance of postsecondary preparation and support to be provided and successively increases the responsibilities of faculty and others in the school to support students' postsecondary aspirations.

- From a vague mission supporting some level of learning and achievement for every student, to a singular, focused mission that expects and supports every student to be college-ready and graduate with a postsecondary plan that includes college enrollment. This is the most important step in building a college-going culture because the mission communicates that "this is how we do things" (Deal and Peterson 2003). "This is what we believe and expect. And this how we will help you reach this goal."
- From quality college counseling for a select few and hit-or-miss postsecondary guidance for some, to an organizing structure and an articulated curriculum that provides intensive postsecondary preparation and support for *all* students throughout their high school careers.
- From college counseling as the exclusive province of the guidance department, to the expectation that all adults are responsible for supporting *all* students through the postsecondary planning and college-going process.
- From a traditional in-school academic curriculum, to a more inclusive curriculum that offers advanced learning opportunities for every student through early college courses, dual enrollment, or AP courses, *and* emphasizes integrated disciplinary studies, academics with real-world applications through project-based learning, or "place-based" learning and 21st-century skills offered during the school day.

The following diagram introduces the four school-based models to be discussed.

# Four Comprehensive School-Based Models for Postsecondary Preparation and Support

In successive models from 1 to 4, faculty responsibilities shift from a singular focus on academic instruction to more holistic instruction, coaching, and support that foster students' learning, achievement, personal development, and postsecondary success.




**1. Saturated Counseling Model** A large guidance/college counseling staff (ratio of less than 100 students to 1 counselor) provides direct, ongoing postsecondary preparation and support to all students at all grade levels through classroom visits, grade-level class meetings, small group seminars and workshops, and one-to-one postsecondary advisement.

**2. Variable Support Models** A combination of postsecondary programs and supports that rely on the guidance/college counseling staff *and* a few faculty or postsecondary specialists or school and community volunteers. More intensive postsecondary support is provided to students at all or some grade levels through Graduation Coaches; Senior English/College Access Coaches; Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and/or Senior Seminars; Saturated "In-School" College Preparation Programs; or Volunteer Mentoring Programs.

**3. Distributive Faculty Support Models** The guidance/college counseling staff or a student development design team supports every faculty member to facilitate postsecondary preparation activities and support for at least one group of students. This is done through Advisory (every faculty member serves as an advisor/advocate for a small group of students over an extended period of time), or Extended Period Grade-Level Seminars (every faculty member works with one grade-specific group of students he or she teaches throughout the year).

**4. Integrated Whole School Models** The mission, curriculum, and support systems create a seamless effort to provide a fully integrated program of academics, advanced and early college courses, student support, postsecondary preparation, personal and career development. This maximizes opportunities for *every student* to develop academic and non-academic college readiness skills and attributes and to link learning to their personal interests, strengths, and postsecondary aspirations.

**This paper makes no recommendations of one model versus another. The particular model a school chooses to develop is highly dependent on its personnel, union issues, financial resources, location, accessibility to external postsecondary partners, faculty commitment to support all students' future aspirations, and short- and long-term capacity to change school culture and faculty norms.**

## *1. Saturated Counseling Model*

A saturated counseling model of postsecondary preparation, planning, and support relies almost entirely on a well-trained guidance staff to deliver all postsecondary preparation activities in the school. It is the least radical departure from the organizational structure and typical professional roles found in most high schools. In fact, this is the preferred model in many private and suburban schools that pride themselves on providing the kind of intensive support to all students that will help them make good decisions related to their college search, college match, and college fit (McDonough 1997, 45–57).

Several conditions, however, need to be in place if a saturated counseling model is to be effective in urban high schools. First and foremost, the ratio of students to school counselors or postsecondary specialists should be reduced to 100:1 in order to provide regular ongoing conferencing and planning with all students at all grade levels. In a study of first-generation college students (and how to support them more effectively), the Pell Institute recommends that student-counselor ratios be reduced "drastically" (Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien 2006). Although the American School Counselor Association recommends a high school student to counselor ratio of 250:1, conversations with urban counselors confirm that ratios higher than 100:1 are not sufficient to support individual student academic planning, coordination of high school testing, delivery of guidance curriculum, ongoing postsecondary advisement, and responsiveness to the ordinary and crisis issues of high-need students.

Lowering this ratio would require a profound shift in the allocation of human resources in most urban high schools. School principals must also take the lead to ensure that all counselors and postsecondary specialists have received adequate training in postsecondary education; are prepared to serve the entire range of students within the school; know their case load of students and their needs intimately; and bring a savvy familiarity with local, state, and national "college knowledge" to every encounter with students.

In addition, a commitment to equity and access of services for all students must be an operational principle for the school and for everyone on the guidance/college counseling staff. Structures must be in place to avoid unconscious or deliberate bias, where some students receive far more attention and services than others. Two successful organizing strategies combine to reduce bias and maximize direct contact with every student in the school. One strategy involves the coordination and development of regularly scheduled postsecondary preparation activities that are delivered to small and large groups of students at every grade level, through their classes, grade-level meetings, weekly small group guidance seminars, and required "pull-out" clinics and workshops in which all students participate. The other strategy calls for each school counselor or postsecondary specialist to arrange regularly scheduled conferences with individual students and their families who are part of their caseload. At the freshman level, this might involve only two or three required appointments, while during junior and senior years the number of required conferences is likely to double or triple. In this model, the guidance department takes on all responsibilities for arranging all of the other activities that are part of the college-going process, from collecting and signing off on all critical paperwork, to assisting with the coordination of external college access programs, to organizing campus visits, college recruitment interviews, and family events and activities related to the college-going process.

One of the biggest benefits of this model has to do with flexible use of time during the school day. Because counselors are not assigned regularly scheduled courses, they have the flexibility to arrange their schedules to maximize direct contact with students. In addition, building the capacity and expertise of a selected and smaller group of adults (vs. all adults in a school) can increase the integrity and consistency of program delivery and ensure greater fidelity to the goals and purposes of the postsecondary program.

One more benefit is worth noting. Trained school counselors and postsecondary specialists are much more likely to be comfortable using the toolbox of skills critical to quality postsecondary support: a greater ease with student and student-parent conferencing; more effective communication skills to handle the emotional underpinnings of students' conversations about their futures; a greater understanding of adolescent development to address the range of needs, desires, and barriers that different students bring to the college-going process; and a singular dedication to helping each student through the college-going process to college enrollment.

In traditional guidance departments, a primary focus on college preparation and support can be easily diverted by the burden of other counseling responsibilities, unless the guidance staff has deliberately organized time, tasks, roles, and responsibilities differently (Education Trust n.d.; ASCA 2008). Because of their flexibility, school counselors are often assigned additional non-counselor duties that can mitigate the good intentions to set aside more time for college advisement. With respect to the allocation of human resources, this model requires the equivalent of one full-time position for every one hundred students; thus, a school would be required to rethink personnel expenditures, search out external sources of funding, add new hires for this position while perhaps eliminating other positions, and/or increase the numbers of adults who would serve in this role by reassigning or retraining current personnel. Two other personnel issues place constraints on this model. Some urban districts are experiencing a shortage of qualified school counselors, and even newly certified school counselors may never have taken a course in postsecondary preparation.

Finally, when the responsibility for postsecondary preparation and support resides exclusively within the guidance department, these efforts may not translate into building a more powerful college-going culture across the school or expecting all faculty members to support postsecondary aspirations, planning, and college access for all of their students.

## *2. Variable Support Models*

Variable support models provide different dosages of postsecondary preparation and support to different groups of students at various points in their high school careers. Different versions of variable support do have some common features that cross all configurations of the model.

First, all variations of this model involve the guidance staff and a combination of other specialized support staff, faculty, or community members who are the primary deliverers of the model. To be clear, this means that just a few faculty members are directly involved in implementing these models. Furthermore, these models may not necessarily have an impact on the rest of the school culture.

Second, although all students receive postsecondary preparation and support at every grade level from the guidance staff, the dosage of preparation and support varies from year to year and may include more saturated doses for some groups and not others. The following examples illustrate these variations:

### Big Dosage/All Students/At One Grade Level

#### *Freshman and Senior Seminar*

Many high schools saturate students with college preparation and support in the freshman and senior years with little attention on college in the interim. Students in these schools participate in seminars three to five times weekly that focus on the issues of transitioning to or from high school; personal, social, and leadership skills; metacognitive and study skills; college preparation; and career exploration. Usually a small group of faculty members volunteer to teach all of the seminars and receive extensive training to do so.

Two big benefits are associated with this model variation. First, because only a few teachers are responsible for delivering the curriculum, it is easier to build capacity, competence, comfort, and consistency within the delivery group. Second, counselors can be attached to seminar groups and provide direct services to students within the group.

There are several limitations, however. Most students need to receive college preparation and support during all four years of high school, not just at both ends of the process. In addition, because seminars are scheduled like regular academic courses, with 25 to 30 students in each seminar, students may not receive the direct one-to-one conferencing regularly that is so vital to the college-going process. Finally, if the teachers involved perceive this initiative as merely teaching new content rather than an opportunity for students' development to serve as the course content, the seminar becomes rote and inauthentic for students and teachers.

#### *Senior English/College Access Coaches*

These teachers often make the tradeoff to teach fewer classes (ideally from five preps down to three) in exchange for responsibility to support all seniors in their charge through the entire college-going process during senior year, from college searches, to writing and editing personal essays, to college and FAFSA applications, to using designated periods for workshops with college counselors and college recruitment interviews. In schools where this resource exists, the construct creates a strong environment for learning and postsecondary preparation.

The teachers are able focus on the students they coach without the distractions of teaching a full course load. As a result of teaching fewer classes, their daily schedule can accommodate one-on-one conferencing with students more easily. For students, senior English becomes more than a class: performance assessments are real and efforts to revise, redo, and complete are directly linked to their future plans.

The upside of this model is the opportunity to build teachers who excel at college coaching and will give equal support to every student. The longer a Senior English/College Access Coaching model exists in the school, the more the position accrues respect, status, and desirability. The downside, of course, centers on how a school actually finds or can develop a group of teachers who will make this commitment. Another significant negative for many students concerns timing; for some, the saturated support in senior year may come too late.

## Big Dosage/Some Students/At Various Grade Levels

### *Graduation Coaches or Specialists*

This model has emerged from the state of Georgia and is being replicated in schools across the country (Communities in Schools Georgia 2006–2008). A graduation team uses student data to examine the barriers to graduation and college that students experience; identifies students who are most at risk; and then develops a comprehensive plan to increase high school graduation and college-going rates.

Graduation coaches serve as graduation team facilitators and managers of the whole process. In addition, most coaches also provide direct services to students, through close monitoring of their grades, credit accumulation, and completion of their postsecondary planning and college-going process.

One of the notable benefits of this approach is the identification of one adult in the school whose responsibilities focus exclusively on collection of student data and the development, coordination, and tracking of all the opportunities, interventions, and supports associated with graduation and college-going, especially for at-risk students.

If the school sees this effort as a campaign in which all adults have a role to play, many faculty may be inspired to take on additional responsibilities to directly support students' personal, academic, and postsecondary development, inside and outside the classroom. However if volunteers are limited and resources are not available to support the plan, the graduation coaches may spend too much time filling the void in guidance services that continue to inadequately support many of the students they serve.

## Big Dosage/Some Students/All Grades or Some Grades

### *In-School College Access Programs for Some*

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a student-centered "in-school" college access program, is a useful example of this variation (see p. 6). In schools that are trying to increase their college-going rates, AVID becomes the centerpiece of the school's college-preparation program.

Even though only a portion of students may experience the AVID elective every year and other AVID opportunities, the school may choose to promote the principles of AVID college readiness and preparation within the larger school culture, the larger faculty may infuse some of the AVID academic tools into their own teaching, and the guidance staff may choose to replicate some of the college-preparation activities and protocols in their own work with students during the college-going process.

One benefit is the trickle-down effect of the AVID program. It can eventually have a positive impact on the school culture and on non-AVID students. However, without more resources for postsecondary preparation and support for non-AVID students, the typical "hit-or-miss" delivery of services that characterizes traditional guidance efforts remain in place.

### *Community-Based Mentoring Programs for At-Risk Students*

One would expect community-based mentoring programs, especially for at-risk students, to be identified as an important strategy for supporting and widening future aspirations among urban young people. Although mentoring programs that aim to "decrease truancy, dropping out, drug use, and fighting" seem to have a positive impact on students, "programs that target academic achievement, in which mentoring is the sole intervention, tend to show a very modest impact on academic outcomes, or none at all" (Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar 2004, 92).

One study of the Puente Project does suggest that students whose academic ranking tended toward the middle, and who had strong relationships with their mentors for a year or longer, did perceive their mentors as having a positive influence on their post-high school plans (Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar 2004, 107; Puente Project 2008).

Other issues make community mentoring a problematic college-going strategy. These programs are labor intensive and involve significant costs for handling recruitment, screening, and matching of one professional or college volunteer to one student. In addition, it is difficult to provide consistent training for volunteers or to monitor, regulate, and supervise the quality of the student-mentor experience and content of mentoring activities.

### *School-Based Mentoring Programs*

Although short on quantitative evidence, school-based mentoring programs offer plenty of anecdotal evidence that make it a promising intervention, especially for students at risk of not graduating from high school (Communities in Schools Georgia 2006–2008). In most iterations of this strategy, teachers volunteer to mentor one or more students for at least a year and meet with them informally to discuss academic progress, problem solve, and explore future plans.

Although school-based mentoring makes it easier to communicate clear expectations and facilitate more consistent mentor training, the quality of the mentoring experience is still likely to vary widely. A major drawback of mentoring some, but not all, students is the inability to schedule a specific time slot during the school day that is devoted to the mentoring experience. Consequently, the frequency and timeliness of student-mentor encounters is entirely dependent on the mentor's commitment to the relationship with the student.

## *3. Distributive Faculty Support Models*

Advisory or grade-level seminar is the key structural change that makes a distributive faculty support model possible. These models are characterized by a major shift in teacher roles and responsibilities. Every faculty member meets with a group of students regularly—weekly, several times a week, or daily—typically for a total of between forty-five and eighty minutes. Dedicating a weekly block of time for student development has a significant impact on high school culture.

First and foremost, students' developmental needs, their interests, and their personal and social growth are at the heart of this experience. Students' development *is* the content of the curriculum. Second, this model has the potential to personalize the learning environment for every student, ensuring that each student has a relationship with at least one adult who knows them well and communicates, "I'm on your side and on your case."

The dedicated student development period also provides a unique opportunity for all adults in the school to share a common purpose and experience a set of common activities with students, regardless of professional roles or teaching disciplines. All adults are learners together as they build their own skills to become better advisors and seminar leaders. Regarding postsecondary preparation and the college-going process, this model offers the opportunity for the entire faculty to receive the same information and develop a shared expertise about "college knowledge."

Distributive faculty support models help send a powerful message to faculty that teaching in the 21st century entails more than quality instruction in the classroom. Supporting students' healthy social development builds a more respectful and caring learning environment. Supporting students' personal aspirations and postsecondary planning establishes a stronger academic and college-going culture.

Advisories and seminars offer opportunities for all students to:

- Experience the kind of adult support, academic advisement, and encouragement that fosters success in school and in life.
- Participate in an articulated set of grade-level sequenced activities that focus on personal development and career exploration, college preparation, and the completion of a postsecondary plan.
- Enhance study skills and metacognitive skills that promote goal setting, self-assessment, time management, and planning.
- Learn and practice 21st-century life skills.
- Have a greater voice in school life and develop and strengthen their capacity to engage in respectful dialogue and civil conversation about things that matter to them.
- Create stronger bonds with peers, usually cutting across the typical exclusionary social groups that form in schools (Poliner and Lieber 2004).

Successful distributive faculty support models meet several conditions that build faculty investment and sustainability. Although a student development team (which includes teachers, administrators, and guidance staff) needs to drive the design process, the entire faculty needs to be involved in major decisions around the goals, teacher expectations, content, scheduling, and student groupings.

Even more important, professional development must be ongoing (at least monthly) to help teachers become comfortable and competent in this new role; strengthen facilitation and conferencing skills; prepare and rehearse the activities they will be delivering; and share best practices, challenges, and successes. One caution should precede any school's development of a distributive faculty support model. Agreements and understandings with union representatives and their members must be negotiated regarding instructional minutes, preparation time, consecutive minutes of instruction permitted, and other details, so that a school's plans are not thwarted in the middle of the design process.

One of the strengths of advisory programs is their flexibility. Schools can select their goals and configure their own design to create small groups of students that are led by an adult who gets to know them well over time. Another strength is their equal focus on a curriculum and the relationships that teachers and students develop. Advisory combines instructional activities for the group; one-on-one conferencing with individual students and contact with parents; and self-perpetuating routines and rituals that make advisory a safe place and help students to become a cohesive group.

The most daunting hurdle that advisory programs face is some teachers' resistance to expanding their own learning and taking on a new role. Lack of solid planning, a coherent curriculum, and adequate professional development can leave students confused about advisory's purpose and leave teachers feeling frustrated and unprepared. Schools that do advisory well make a significant investment of time, money, and resources over many years. Advisory can't be an afterthought in a high school's redesign and school improvement efforts.

One feature of the seminar model is very appealing to faculty: teachers work with a group of students whom they already teach. Some teachers may have more motivation to take on this new role and new content when they work with students they already know. During a designated period of the day, all teachers extend the grade-level class they are teaching by forty-five to sixty minutes to create the seminar group. Many schools pair teachers so that faculty who are not teaching during the designated period will team up with teachers who are.

One major constraint of this model is scheduling all students into grade-level-specific classes during one period of the daily schedule. Few classes in most schools are restricted to students in one grade level. For some teachers, another challenge is transitioning from teaching course content to facilitating seminar with the same group, in the same room, in a contiguous time slot. Unless planners value the relational opportunities that seminar can offer and make one-to-one conferencing a critical feature of its design, seminar loses many of the benefits of an advisory program.

As mentioned before, if teachers view seminar as merely teaching new course content versus an opportunity for students' own development to be the content, seminar can become rote and inauthentic for students and teachers.

## *4. Integrated Whole School Models*

The standout feature of integrated whole school models is a sharpened focus on a school mission that drives the educational program, thus creating a distinctive school culture that is the same for everyone—students, faculty, and families. Many small high schools and smaller learning communities in large high schools are specifically designed as integrated whole school models. The mission, curriculum, and support systems in whole school models create a seamless effort to provide a fully integrated program of academics, advanced and early college courses, postsecondary preparation, and personal and career development for *every* student in the school.

In this model, all faculty members fully expect every student to engage in the college-going process and enroll in college, and they support them in this endeavor. In fact, developing a college-going culture for students and families is a primary aim of integrated whole school models. One teacher at an Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) small school captures this vision: "I don't want a doubt to enter a student's head…I want them to say, 'I'm going'" (Allen, Nichols, Tocci, Hochman, and Gross 2006, 24).

Another feature of whole school models is the deep belief that academic press, "an emphasis on academic achievement as a normative experience for students," and high social support, the "sources of assistance (teachers, parents, peers, community) that bolster students' efforts to excel academically," go hand in hand in developing a learning environment that promotes quality instruction and high levels of achievement (Lee, Smith, Perry, and Smylie 1999, 12).

This commitment to teaching and supporting the whole student often translates into two major structural changes in the use of time during the school day:

1. Grade-level advisory or seminar that supports students' academic, social, and emotional development and their post–high school aspirations is a centerpiece of the school design and drives the school culture. Advisors tend to stay with the same group of students for all four years of high school and have major responsibilities through the college-going and postsecondary planning process.
2. Colleagues who work with the same students in their grade-level teams or learning communities meet daily or weekly to develop shared practices, examine student data and reflect on student work and learning, and discuss the progress of their students with the goals of exploring how best to meet the needs and challenges of students in their team or grade level.

The ISA core principles show how an integrated whole school model layers supports and services to support every student's learning, achievement, healthy development, and postsecondary aspirations (Freeman 2003). These core principles include:

- Team collaboration and integration of counseling strategies.
- A dedicated counselor integrated into the team.
- Teachers as advisors.
- Academic, social, and emotional student-support structures and interventions including individual student case conferencing and advisory.
- Consistent communication with parents including frequent and regular conferences about their child's performance.
- A four-year sequence of college preparation activities, tasks, and events delivered through advisory and the entire educational program.

Integrated whole school models require a "fundamental shift in mindset regarding the teacher's role—it requires teachers to think about their responsibility for students' success. It demands a change from a largely passive stance, as in, for example, 'I teach and the rest is up to the students,' to a proactive one, as in 'I find the ways to connect to my student and give them every chance to succeed'" (Allen, Nichols, Tocci, Hochman, and Gross 2006, 17).

A final feature distinguishes integrated whole school models from earlier models presented in this paper. The curriculum is less likely to look like the traditional academic curriculum of typical high schools and less likely to push some groups to excel in advanced classes while others endure a less challenging and engaging course regimen.

A fundamental principle of integrated whole school models is the development of a rigorous and engaging curriculum for everyone that provides all students with opportunities to enroll in advanced courses, from AP courses to early college courses and dual enrollment. Academic college readiness and daily public conversation about students' futures take center stage in the learning culture.

Equally important, schools in this model integrate opportunities throughout the curriculum where students can discover and deepen their personal talents and interests through project-based and independent learning. In addition, these schools tend to push the boundaries of education beyond the school walls through "place-based" learning, internships, intensive service learning projects, and courses on college campuses.

The following three examples demonstrate how radical changes in the design and delivery of curriculum can increase achievement, engage learners more deeply, and prepare to students to access the postsecondary education they need to live and work in the 21st century.

## Three Designs That are Working Well

**New Technology High Schools** are designed around three essential principles: *personalization*, *adult world connections*, and *common intellectual mission*. The design principles permeate every aspect of life at a New Tech High: the small size of the school, the openness of the facilities, the personalization through advisory, the emphasis on student exhibitions, required internships in the community, and the provision of ample planning time for teacher teams during the workday. New Tech High combines applied career and technology skills with life skills through project-based learning that cuts across traditional academic disciplines. "Interpersonal skills, presentation skills, and leadership skills are among 10 'learning outcomes' that students must master as they progress through all their academic subjects" (Gewertz 2007). Every day, students are preparing for their postsecondary futures by making connections between their intellectual and interpersonal development, academic and practical knowledge and skills, and college and career readiness.

The **Early College High School Initiative** is driven by a dramatic departure from more typical strategies to improve achievement for underperforming students. Instead of remediation, the solution is challenge, acceleration, and support for students who are unlikely to attend college. Jobs for the Future (JFF) has helped intermediary organizations develop and sustain early college partnerships between high schools, colleges, and community-based organizations. Early college schools realign and reinvent traditional curriculum sequences, find creative ways to integrate high school and college experiences, and provide the academic and social supports students need to succeed in an intensive and engaging program of study. Across the country, early college students are earning both a high school diploma and up to two years of transferable college credit or an associate's degree.

At **Fenway High School** in Boston, Massachusetts, the humanities curriculum is one example of how a re-imagined curriculum can alter students' personal and collective engagement in learning. Humanities courses rotate on a three-year cycle, so that all students in grades 9–11 are addressing the same historical periods, social and political issues, and literary themes concurrently. The course content is organized around one essential question each year, such as "What does it mean to be human?" or "How do you do the right thing in the face of injustices?" The curriculum is interdisciplinary in design, presenting skills and concepts from language arts, literature, social studies, and philosophy, and offers deep instruction and practice in the habits of mind.

Although much of the course content centers on the history and development of American society, other countries are also represented through thematic projects. Students have the opportunity to explore their own cultural roots as well as others through interaction with a wide range of research opportunities, guests, primary source documents, and media. Fenway's integrated whole school model embeds these curriculum shifts within its small school structure, low counselor-to-student ratios, and intensive advisory program that mutually reinforce high support and high expectations for postsecondary planning (Fenway High School website 2008).

### Summary

All of the examples cited in this model are small schools where adults and students work together to construct a learning culture that will meet the needs, interests, abilities, talents, and aspirations of every student. The goals of providing a re-imagined curriculum, a coherent college-going culture, and a personalized learning program for every student require that all adults in the school commit themselves unwaveringly to the school's mission. This is the model's greatest benefit and its most challenging limitation. Small schools have fewer faculty members; thus every adult must be willing and competent to serve students inside and outside the classroom and play multiple roles within the organizational structure of the school.

## *The Challenge of Coordinating and Integrating External and School-Based Postsecondary Programs*

One conclusion of our research is that all students can benefit from participation in both external college access programs and ongoing postsecondary preparation, planning, and support within their home high schools. We do not see external and school-based postsecondary programs as an "either/or" proposition, especially for underserved and underperforming youth in urban high schools.

Most students seem to thrive in college access programs that provide a special place to belong, a peer-centered social network, intensive academic intervention and enrichment opportunities, and personalized support and college guidance (Tierney and Colyar 2006). External programs play a vital role in college preparation, but they fall short when it comes to serving all groups of students, regardless of their future aspirations.

Public high schools, unlike external college access programs, have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that every student gets the right dose and the right kind of postsecondary support. Schools must build the capacity to provide preparation and support to the student who seeks a certificated training program to achieve her dream with the same commitment and expertise that typically shape the college-advising experience of a highly qualified student who is seeking admission to a highly selective school.

*All* students deserve a cadre of caring adults who are always on the lookout for opportunities that match students with their needs, interests, and aspirations.

High schools face enormous challenges, however, as they consider how best to coordinate external and school-based programs into a seamless whole. How do schools organize and manage multiple postsecondary initiatives in order to provide the right set of experiences at the right time to a full range of students who are at different entry points on the postsecondary continuum?

From the broadest perspective, many schools simply do not allocate the time and personnel necessary to coordinate and integrate programmatic efforts delivered within the school and by external college access program partners. One particular frustration emerges when schools attempt to systematize completion of key tasks within the college-going process and discover that external college access programs are engaging some of their students in the same tasks at different points in the calendar year. This creates confusion and a sense of incoherence for students, school personnel, and college access partners.

The Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis suggests several practices that can help build more successful and sustainable partnerships between schools and college access partners (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis 2004):

- Develop clear, mutually derived, and attainable goals in a shared vision.
- Conduct intensive planning.
- Ensure that a leadership team has primary oversight responsibilities for coordinating all postsecondary activities.
- Create mutual relationships and trust.
- Foster frequent, open, and ongoing communication.
- Create clear decision-making processes.
- Designate funds, staff, materials, and time for coordination and collaboration.
- Conduct ongoing assessments and annual evaluations.

### Three other practices should be added to this list.

- Before choosing a partnership, assess its impact on the whole school culture and weigh the benefits of the partnership in relation to the number of students it serves and the expenditure of school time and resources it will take to make the partnership work effectively.
- Bring all external partners together before the school year begins to celebrate the mutual commitment to young people and work out the details for creating a master schedule.
- Build the capacity to electronically track individual students' postsecondary benchmarks inside school and through external programs, so that the school can continually monitor whether and how all students are being served equitably.

## Before Choosing a College-Access Partner:

1. Analyze the Costs and Benefits of the Partnership
2. Collaborate and Celebrate Before the School Year Begins
3. Build Electronic Tracking Tools to Measure and Monitor College Progress

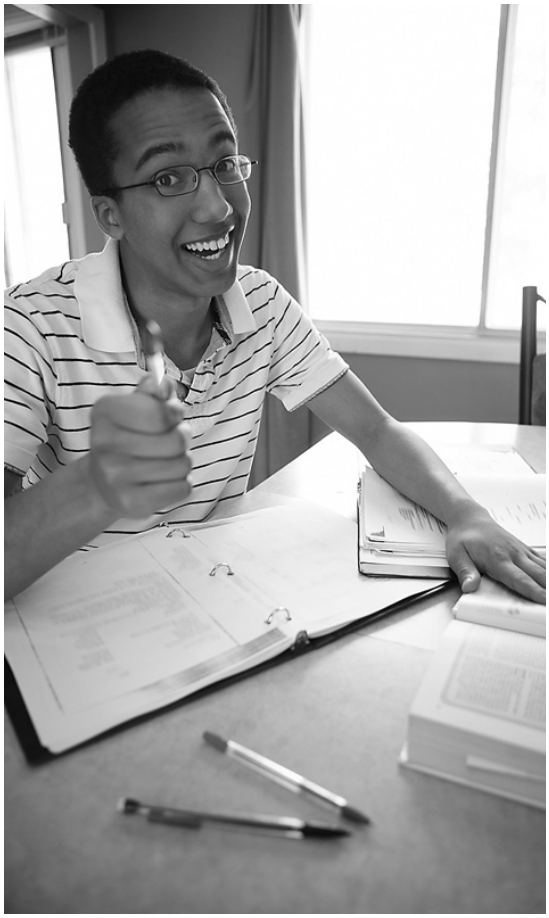
# Section Three: Leveraging Federal, State, and District Policies and Support for Comprehensive School-Based Models

Shifting the paradigm for providing college access to include all students in a school-based model of student support cannot be accomplished without federal, state, and local leaders thinking in new ways about the policies and practices that drive this inclusive school-centered approach. College access can no longer be constructed as an opportunity for a select few but must be seen as an institutionalized set of postsecondary planning practices that benefits all students. Only by ensuring that policies and practices are well aligned to this new ideal can this new school-based model be effective. For this reason it is critical that federal, state, and district policies and practices are leveraged so that they complement this comprehensive school-based model.

## *Federal Policy, Programs, and Practices*

**Refocus No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to be accountable for all students graduating from high school with a postsecondary plan for success in college.**

Using NCLB legislation as a driver in the development of this new framework, federal policies can play an instrumental role in institutionalizing school-based models of postsecondary planning. By aligning this new paradigm with the tenets of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 that call for "access for all" and by holding administrators and faculty accountable through mandated Adequate Yearly Progress assessments, federal legislation can help create a school culture that supports postsecondary planning for all students.



The *Building on Results* policy priority in the reauthorization of NCLB, for example, highlights the importance of preparing high school students for success by "promoting rigorous and advanced coursework and providing new resources for schools serving low income students" (www.doe.gov/nclb).

Although the development of an informed postsecondary plan for all students may be implied in the idea of rigorous coursework, the inclusion of language that more explicitly supports the connection between academic coursework and postsecondary planning can accent the importance of this work and begin to lend credence to the holistic approach to student support for faculty and administrators alike. Through reshaping the language of federal legislation and refocusing the priorities in NCLB, schools will be accountable not only for the achievement of all students but also for the development of an informed postsecondary plan, so that students graduate from high school prepared to succeed.

**Expand funding and access for successful programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP.**

The three Federal TRIO Programs began with Upward Bound back in the 1960s and expanded to include Talent Search and Student Support Services, which are designed to identify promising students, prepare them to do college-level work, provide information on academic and financial aid opportunities to adults, and provide tutoring and support services to students once they reach college (US Dept. of Education 2008).

Though many of the TRIO outreach programs effectively help students to access higher education, these programs often limit the number of participants to a select few, and the interventions are not always fully integrated into the school culture so that the postsecondary planning needs of all students can be addressed.

As mentioned in the chart on page 6, GEAR UP is a federal outreach grant program for high-poverty middle and high schools that focuses on the systemic needs of schools, so that the needs of an entire school can be addressed and the culture of the school community can be focused on post-secondary planning (US Dept. of Education 2008).

With a six-year funding cycle and the flexibility to offer a range of activities to community members (i.e. direct support to students, professional development to teachers, and whole school models that support postsecondary planning), GEAR UP is one example of an existing federal program that can support a comprehensive school-based model and should thus be considered in the development of a new universal paradigm. With minor modifications to the outreach program and increased federal funding to support the systemic approach to college access, GEAR UP could be leveraged as an effective strategy by the federal government.

**Make access to financial aid simpler for students and families and raise the cap on Pell Grants to make college affordable for all students.**

Although federal policy and outreach programs are important large-scale ways to support a comprehensive school-based model to promote college access, it is often the details of the process that can hinder a student's ability to access postsecondary training (ACFSA 2005). Changes to the federal mandates are important to consider when thinking about the practicalities of this new paradigm.

Applying for and receiving financial aid, for example, is currently a convoluted process and can deter students from pursuing formal training after high school. Advocates have argued for years that the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is an overly complicated form that requires information from students and their families that can be difficult to collect when families do not understand the language or requirements. Furthermore, under the current set of FASFA questions students who have been convicted of a drug-related crime, who have not registered for Selective Service, or are not legal residents of the country are not eligible for federal financial aid, which can be yet another obstacle for many students.

US secretary of education Margaret Spellings recently unveiled a plan to simplify the process. Under the plan the form would be cut from its current 102 questions to only 27 (Lederman 2008). Although this is a step in the right direction, there are still issues to be grappled with to determine the right balance of information needed to determine students' financial aid packages. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Congress move forward as quickly as possible on revisions to the FASFA to simplify the process for students and their families.

Federal Pell Grants, need-based grants for low-income students, can play a major role in financing higher education for urban students (US Dept. of Education 2008). One problem with Pell Grants is that they are capped at around $5,000 per year, requiring students to seek other options to fund their education, which often means amassing substantial debt that must be repaid. As access to loans through public sector credit markets continues to tighten, more and more students find themselves unable to finance their plans for college.

Moreover, as federal dollars for financial aid decline, and as merit-based aid continues to play a prominent role in the funding strategy of some colleges, students from many urban districts will likely continue to be plagued by the high cost of college and the declining assistance from national sources. Federal legislation, through the Higher Education Act, needs to examine these issues of access, eligibility, and funding to support students in pursuing a degree after high school.

**Go beyond reallocation of resources: fully fund public education for all students.**

According to a recent report by the Forum for Education and Democracy, the United States has a three-to-one spending disparity between high- and low-wealth schools in most states. “Current federal funding, less than 10 percent of most schools’ budgets, does not meet the needs of under-resourced schools where many students struggle to learn” (FED 2008).

The challenge goes beyond reallocating the funds already available to schools; if we are to improve college access for all students, additional federal, state, and local funding will be necessary to expand successful existing programs and implement new strategies as they are developed. It is not enough to send only a select number of students off for college exploration trips—the resources to send all students from a school must be made available in order to serve all students equally.

## *State Legislation, Frameworks, and Professional Development*

**Pass legislation to provide in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students.** If we are to attain the goal of providing access to *all* underserved and urban youth, the issue of secondary education access for undocumented students must be addressed. Although ten states have made special arrangements for undocumented students to attend state colleges at the in-state tuition rate, far too many states have struggled with the legislation to allow this to happen for their undocumented students (NCSL 2006; AASCU 2003).

Thus one critical way that states can help support the college access needs of all students is to pass legislation that would help make higher education in the state system possible for everyone. Without formal and recognized opportunities to pursue an educational or professional path, students are less likely to stay in school, engage in classroom work, or talk with faculty and staff about their futures (DPE 2006). By making it legally possible for them to attend state colleges, undocumented students will be more likely to work through the school-based model to support their college aspirations.

**Allow high schools and colleges the flexibility to fund dual-enrollment programs.** Providing an opportunity for students to experience college life while they are still in high school through dual-enrollment programs is a recognized way to motivate and engage students about college. No longer are dual-enrollment programs solely for the top achievers in a school; they can also be used for students in need of credit recovery or remediation.

Dual enrollment can also be a powerful vehicle by which faculty from higher education and high schools can come together to work through issues of curriculum alignment, student performance, and seamless academic pathways that can ensure success for students in high school and college.

A challenge with dual enrollment remains the lack of funding in many states to support this initiative. As a result, colleges and schools are scraping money together to provide this opportunity to a handful of students. By encouraging state policymakers to allow both high schools and colleges to collect the regular state Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funds as well as the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) funds for students enrolled in dual-enrollment programs, dual enrollment can be an important statewide strategy to provide opportunities for all students to engage in college life before graduating from high school.

**Professionalize the role of school counselors to support adequate post secondary planning for all students and reduce student-to-counselor ratios to 100:1.**

Thanks to the national frameworks established by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), many states are working to redefine the role of the school counselor so that counselors can provide a more holistic approach to student support in schools (ASCA 2008).

In this attempt to professionalize the school counselor role and provide benchmarks to which counselors will be held accountable, the state school counselor associations and departments of education have been able to provide structure and clarity to the school counseling field. With responsibilities ranging from collaboration, advocacy, systemic changes, and leadership, school counselors' framework is not limited solely to the provision of direct service to students but includes such things as professional development for faculty, leadership roles in the curriculum development and support of advisories, and partnership coordination with outside agencies.

By capitalizing on this new model of supporting students and being very deliberate about the ways in which "college access for all" strategies are included in these statewide frameworks, school counselors can be empowered to play an important role in the delivery of this comprehensive school-based model of postsecondary support. One way for states to become more active in the development of a comprehensive model of school-based student support is to focus more intensively on the issues of college access and postsecondary planning for urban students in the state license requirements for school counselors.

A commitment must also be made to increase the number of counselors available to meet the needs of all students. Although ASCA recommends a 250:1 student-to-counselor ratio (and many high schools exceed this ratio), urban counselors provide ample evidence that the ideal ratio in urban high schools would be closer to 100:1 (ASCA 2008).

By including more exposure to the issues of college access for urban youth in graduate programs and mandating that school counseling include significant opportunities to learn about a broad range of postsecondary services, states can begin to ensure that schools have leaders who can execute a comprehensive model of school-based postsecondary planning.

### *District Key Strategies and Critical Interventions*

**Build in time and funding for teacher professional development around the college-going process, and work with teachers and union representatives to reexamine contracts regarding new roles that support the academic and personal development of all students.** Administrators and teachers may be inclined to view new approaches to the delivery of schools with resistance and apprehension in this era of accountability, diminishing resources, and increased demands on educators.

While teachers in urban districts may gain insight into student's lives and want to help, connecting with students in this way is often viewed as beyond the scope of the position and the teacher's personal choice. Professional development and support are needed for teachers to become more active in assisting students to explore their postsecondary options, and time needs to be allotted in the school day to accommodate such activities.

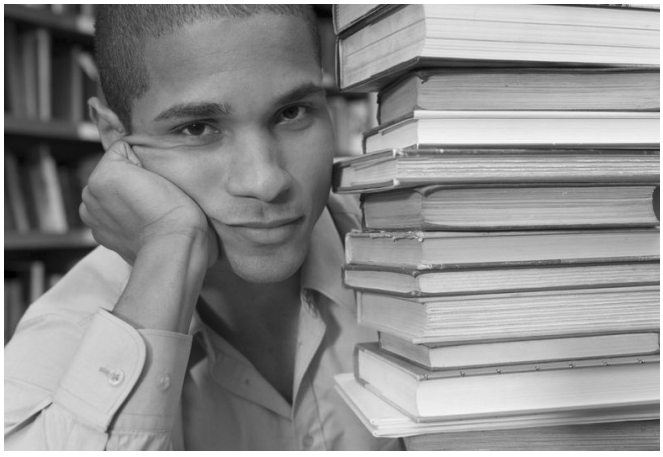
For example, training teachers to provide one-on-one academic advisement as a routine element of a school advisory program can go a long way toward supporting the climate of expectation for students. By leveraging the relationships built into an advisory program, teachers can guide students in discussions about their interests and aspirations for college and beyond. Redefining teachers' roles to take on academic advising and student support as part of their regular duties can make a significant difference in college access for students. Teacher contracts must be reexamined in many districts in order to allow for this kind of role expansion, and working together with teachers and union leaders to craft the kind of agreements that will allow for innovation is critical to the success of such efforts.

**Create linkages between federal, state, and district efforts to support college access for all students.** To realize the new paradigm of ensuring college access through school-based models of student support for all students, it is important to create linkages between federal, state, and local efforts to provide postsecondary exploration and preparation for all students.

Although federal and state policy can help frame the work in schools, strategies and practices implemented in schools are the linchpin for changing the culture of schools and providing a more holistic approach to student support.

## Conclusion

Until the time comes when urban public school students attend and graduate from college at the same rate as their peers in suburban and private schools, there is a lot of work to be done in the preparation and support of students in postsecondary planning. All students, not only those who are fortunate enough to be part of a specialized program, need the information, guidance, and personalized support to ensure that their life after high school matches their personal goals, academic skills, and professional aspirations. Only by focusing our attention on the policy, practices, and strategies necessary to support all students can we support a comprehensive school-based model of postsecondary planning.



# Appendix A: A Suggested Outline for a Postsecondary Preparation Curriculum * *Italicized type indicates products or presentations that all students are expected to complete.*

## Personal, Academic, and Postsecondary Advisement during ALL FOUR YEARS

- Students keep a personal learning and postsecondary planning folder/portfolio in which they record their progress report grades and update credit accumulation, standardized test information and scores, participation in youth development activities inside and outside of school, and their personal and academic accomplishments.
- Students set realistic and achievable academic and personal goals and review them regularly with counselor or advisor.
- Students frequently review and assess academic progress and personal learning plans with counselor or advisor.
- Counselor or advisor engages in "on-track" monitoring of freshman year (and all other years) to ensure that students participate in academic interventions and credit recovery as early as possible.
- Students and a parent or adult ally, and counselor or advisor meet at least twice a year to discuss academic progress, high school course planning, and postsecondary aspirations and college-going.
- Students discuss and identify youth development activities and special opportunities that they will pursue during the school year and in the summer.
- Students' metacognitive development is a visible component of academic advisement and postsecondary planning.
- Students engage in end-of-year assessment and reflections: What have I accomplished? What have I learned that links my school work and youth development experiences to my future? How have I become more college and career ready? What new personal and academic challenges and opportunities do I want to take on this summer and next year?

| | Personal Learning and Postsecondary Plan | Non-Academic College Preparation and the College-Going Process | Career Development |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year 1 | Preparation of personal learning and postsecondary folder and portfolio<br>Development and assessment of personal learning profile and assessment of learning strengths and weaknesses<br>*Written personal story*<br>*First resume*<br>*Completion of "Step-up" requirements to attain sophomore status* | Induction and orientation to a college-going culture, the ideas of college readiness, and electronic and print college access resources<br>Introduction to college types, options, and programs<br>*First "College is Possible" project linking students' hopes and dreams for the future to possible college options*<br>First college campus visits and college fairs with pre-visit preparation and post-visit reflections<br>"College is Possible and Affordable " school-based events throughout high school for students and families, including community-based activities that promote the cultural wealth of students' families, neighborhoods, and community partners | Introduction to "Mapping My Future"<br>First career-interest inventory and related activities<br>Exposure to careers and speakers that capture students' interests<br>Introduction to electronic and print career development resources<br>Introduction to 21st century life skills<br>*First career pathway project including interviews and research*<br>Introduction of workplace knowledge and links between high school, postsecondary learning, and living wage jobs |
| Year 2 | Revised four-year course plan to maximize academic college readiness<br>*Revised resume and personal business card*<br>Participation in external college access programs and other student development experiences during the school year and in the summer<br>*Completion of "Step-up" requirements to attain junior status* | *First draft of personal statement/college essay*<br>*First college search and research project that matches possible academic, personal, and career interests and aspirations*<br>HS exit test and college admission test preparation and academic interventions<br>At least two college visits<br>Interview and group dialogues with current college students and alumni or college buddies/mentors<br>"College is Possible and Affordable" events for students and families to discuss financial planning including information for undocumented students and families | *Completion of at least one job application*<br>Second career-interest inventory and related activities and continued exposure to careers, speakers, and career fairs<br>Continued activities that enable students to develop and demonstrate 21st century work skills<br>*Investigation of three career clusters that match students' interests, talents, strengths, personalities, and future aspirations*<br>*Job shadowing preparation, site visit, and reflections* |

| | Personal Learning and Postsecondary Plan | Non-Academic College Preparation and the College-Going Process | Career Development |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year 3 | "Half-cap" ceremony to begin junior year<br>Revised course plan for junior and senior year that maximizes academic college readiness<br>*Revised resume*<br>Participation in external college access programs and other student development experiences during the school year and in the summer<br>*Completion of "Step-up" requirements to attain senior status*<br>Assessment of stage of academic college readiness | *Revision of personal statement/college essay*<br>*Second college search and research project that refines college matches so they align with academic qualifications and personal, and career aspirations – present to adults/peers*<br>HS exit test and college admission test preparation and test taking<br>At least two college visits including one intensive campus experience during the school year or in the summer (whole day shadow visit, dual-enrollment, or campus college access programs)<br>Current college student and alumni interviews, buddies, and group dialogues<br>"College is Possible and Affordable" events for students and families including financial planning, personalized conferencing and support with school postsecondary advocate, student, and parent/adult ally, and information for undocumented students and families<br>Participation in at least one advanced academic learning experience<br>Introduction to "college knowledge" and transitions from high school to college<br>Beginning scholarship search<br>*Prepare reference information form and collect at least two references* | *Completion of at least one job application*<br>Third career-interest inventory and related activities<br>Continued activities that enable students to develop and demonstrate 21st century work skills<br>Continued exposure to careers, speakers, and career fairs<br>Career days in which student groups (advisory, for example) plan and organize a half day or whole day field experience around a specific career cluster<br>*Investigation of three career clusters that match students' interests, talents, strengths, personality, and future aspirations*<br>*Place-based learning experience or career internship including preparation and written reflections* |
| Year 4 | Revised senior course plan that maximizes college readiness<br>Assessment of "on track" for graduation status and stage of academic college readiness<br>Participation in external college access programs and other student development experiences during the school year and in the summer<br>*Completion of Senior portfolio*<br>*Completion and "sign-off" of postsecondary plan and defense of plan to a group of adults and peers*<br>Voter registration | *Finalizing resume, college essay, and references*<br>*Final college search and research project that narrows and compares colleges before submitting at least four college applications*<br>HS exit test and college admission test preparation and test taking<br>Participation in at least one advanced academic learning experience<br>Preparation and scheduling of college interviews and college visits<br>*Personalized, guided step-by-step support with school postsecondary advocate, student, and parent/adult ally through all tasks and deadlines related to college match and applications, FAFSA and scholarship paperwork, and final college selection and enrollment that is the best match and fit for student*<br>More intensive activities related to "college knowledge" and transitions to college<br>Follow-up monitoring, support, and check-ins during summer between graduation and college enrollment | Fourth career-interest inventory and related activities<br>Continued activities that enable students to develop and demonstrate 21st century work skills<br>Career fairs<br>Participation in career networking experiences or a career mentor program<br>*Final career cluster investigation that aligns with students' college search, application, match, and fit with personal, academic, and career interests, strengths, and aspirations*<br>*Place-based learning experience or career internship including preparation and written reflections* |

* Sources include Institute for Student Achievement, Chicago Public Schools, National College Access Network, and publications and documents from Educators for Social Responsibility.

# Appendix B: Types of Postsecondary Electronic Resources

This resource page is not an attempt to identify and vet the hundreds of postsecondary support resources that have flooded the internet. Rather, the list illustrates the ***types*** of electronic resources that should be available to students and about which, counselors, postsecondary advocates, and advisors should be extremely knowledgeable:

### Web-based planning, college and career search, portfolio, and document management systems:

School-wide use of one electronic postsecondary management system enables students, school staff, and parents to track the college-going process and the development and completion of all required documents. These systems all contain a career-interest inventory that can jumpstart the search process and can be revisited continually throughout high school as students' interests and aspirations change over time. Every student has an ID number and can log on at any time in or out of school. All of these programs are fee for services, but offer substantial discounts to schools and districts.

***EXAMPLES:***

www.bridges.com

www.naviance.com

www.myroad.collegeboard.com

www.kuder.com

www.ecos.princetonreview.com

www.prephq.com

www.careercruising.com

### Development of student profiles:

***EXAMPLES:***

www.zinch.org

### General college and career resources for school counselors, postsecondary advocates, and advisors:

***EXAMPLES:***

www.collegeaccess.org

www.collegeinfo.org

www.collegeboard.com

www.act.org

www.pathwaystocollege.net

www.acrna.net

www.ncan.org

### College and career searches:

***EXAMPLES:***

www.act.org/explore

www.intocareers.org

www.pertersons.com

www.collegeboard.com

www.collegenet.com

www.collegeanswer.com

www:khake.com

www.acrna.net

www.nnkol.org

www.careerexplorer.net

www.careervoyages.gov

www.jobprofiles.org

www.onetcenter.org

www.mycoolcareer.com

### Financial aid:

***EXAMPLES:***

www.nasfaa.org

www.finaid.org

www.collegeboard.com/paying

http://studentaid.ed.gov

www.fafsa.ed.gov

### Scholarship searches:

***EXAMPLES:***

www.wiredscholar.com

www.uncf.org/scholarships

www.800headstart.com

www.srnexpress.com

### Application assistance:

***EXAMPLES:***

www.collegelink.com

www.commonapp.org

### Other useful sites

Americorps
www.americorps.org

Corporation for National Service
www.nationalservice.org

College Savings Plan Network
www.collegesavings.org

Social Security Administration
www.ssa.gov

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