Aligning Systems to Ensure College Readiness For All Students

In an effort to support community-based collaborations among key sectors—education, business, policy, and nonprofit and community organizations—the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is providing a series of primers that will help communities increase their postsecondary attainment. This primer explains the college readiness challenge and how different sectors can support student progress, starting in middle school, along the pathway to college readiness and success. Each primer in the series will be followed by a tactical guidebook that provides further detail.

The College Readiness and Alignment Challenge

Communities must better **PREPARE** students along the pathway to college. All students must be given equitable access to opportunities through supports and programming that enhance academic, personal, and college knowledge readiness.

Readiness efforts must **TARGET ALL STUDENTS**, not only traditional students who transition directly from high school to college; it is also vital to support adult learners and young people who have become disconnected from school in returning to the college path.

Stakeholders must **ALIGN** the systems responsible and the resources necessary for preparing students along the pathway to college. Local school districts and higher education institutions must coordinate high school exit and college entrance and placement requirements.

Communities need to **ASSESS** the performance and progress of their students and systems. By setting goals around key indicators, communities can benchmark their progress and hold stakeholders accountable. Equity gaps among students should be of utmost concern as communities seek to improve readiness among underserved groups.
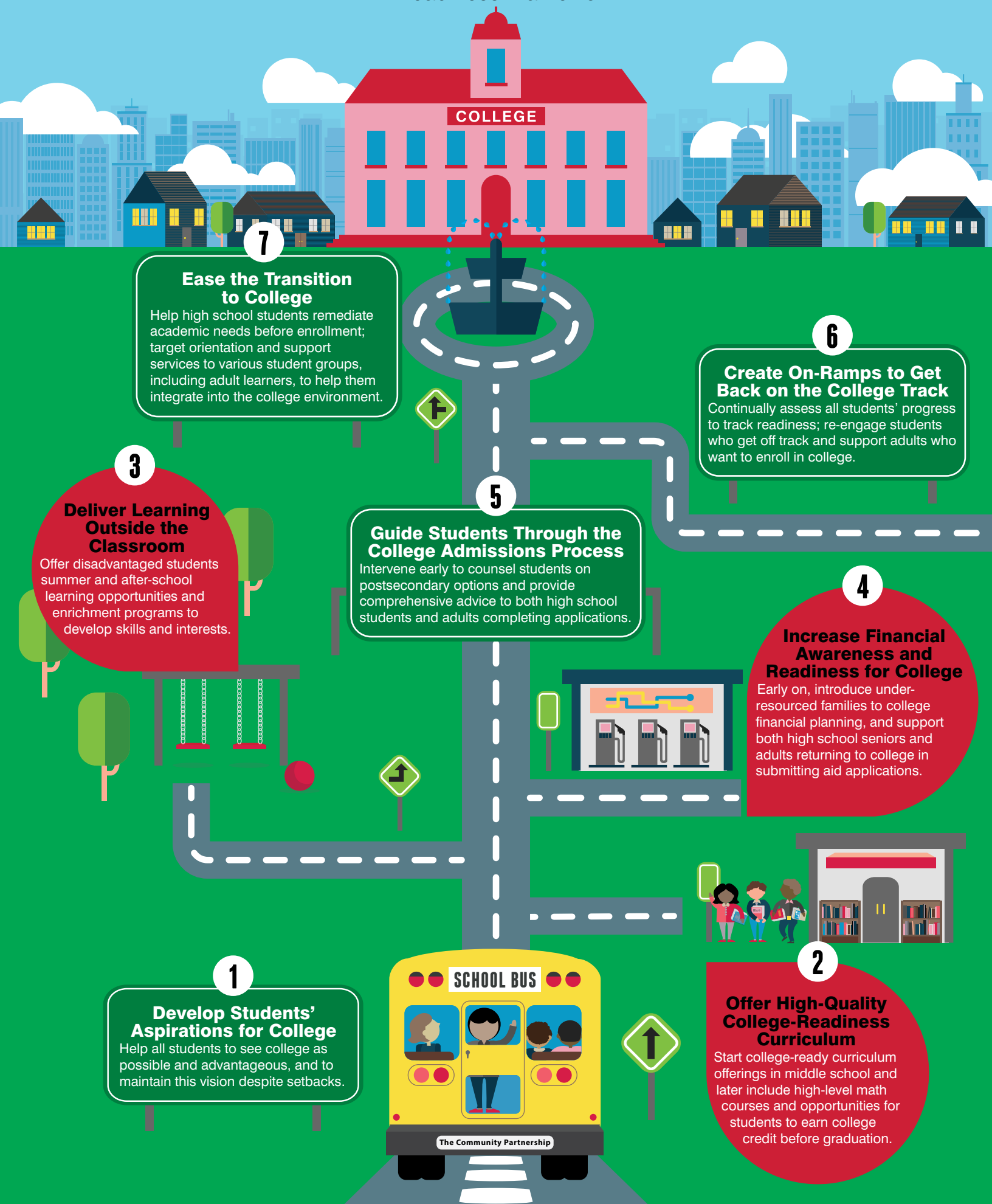
K-12 schools, higher education institutions, community-based organizations (CBOs), employers, and community leaders must **PARTNER** to underscore the community-wide imperative for increased college enrollment and attainment.

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THE PATHWAY TO COLLEGE
A Readiness Framework

COLLEGE

7 — Ease the Transition to College
Help high school students remediate academic needs before enrollment; target orientation and support services to various student groups, including adult learners, to help them integrate into the college environment.

6 — Create On-Ramps to Get Back on the College Track
Continually assess all students' progress to track readiness; re-engage students who get off track and support adults who want to enroll in college.

3 — Deliver Learning Outside the Classroom
Offer disadvantaged students summer and after-school learning opportunities and enrichment programs to develop skills and interests.

5 — Guide Students Through the College Admissions Process
Intervene early to counsel students on postsecondary options and provide comprehensive advice to both high school students and adults completing applications.

4 — Increase Financial Awareness and Readiness for College
Early on, introduce under-resourced families to college financial planning, and support both high school seniors and adults returning to college in submitting aid applications.

1 — Develop Students' Aspirations for College
Help all students to see college as possible and advantageous, and to maintain this vision despite setbacks.

2 — Offer High-Quality College-Readiness Curriculum
Start college-ready curriculum offerings in middle school and later include high-level math courses and opportunities for students to earn college credit before graduation.

SCHOOL BUS

The Community Partnership

Readiness Strategies

In order to help students progress along the college readiness pathway, stakeholders must work together to ensure that they are supporting all dimensions of readiness: academic, personal, and college knowledge.

Academic Readiness
Schools and postsecondary institutions must work closely to align standards for high school graduation and placement in credit-bearing college courses by offering all students a rigorous, college-ready curriculum, starting in middle school. This includes equitable access to high-level math courses and opportunities to earn early college credit (e.g., dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses). It is crucial to assess students' readiness regularly and to intervene early to remediate academic needs before college enrollment. Access to summer and after-school programs bolsters skills and mitigates learning loss to keep students on the pathway to college.

Personal Readiness
Students must be encouraged to see postsecondary education as an essential part of their future, supporting their career and life goals. Multiple community sectors should collaborate and share data to assist underserved students and families, providing services that address financial, emotional, and social challenges. Easing the transition to college includes helping students enhance key skills such as time management, self-awareness, and goal-setting.

College Knowledge Readiness
Students—especially first-generation-college and low-income students—face significant barriers to postsecondary education without adequate college counseling. Families need guidance as early as middle school to prepare financially, along with help completing aid applications during senior year. Frequent, personalized counseling is key for students as they explore and apply to colleges. Higher education institutions can enhance outreach efforts among underserved populations and target financial aid to students with the most economic need. Community-based organizations are central to supporting returning adults, disconnected youth, and students in under-resourced schools in pursuing postsecondary education.

Here are some promising examples of cross-sector collaboration and alignment from communities across the country that are helping students advance along the pathway to college.

Develop Aspirations for College and Increase Financial Awareness and Readiness

Washington State's *College Bound Scholarship Program* is open to low-income 7th and 8th grade students and foster youth and serves as a financial incentive for students to meet academic requirements in high school and pursue college. When students submit a FAFSA and enroll in college, scholarship funds and other state aid cover the cost of public college tuition and a book stipend. In South Seattle/South King County, efforts from the *Road Map Project* have seen increased scholarship sign-up rates as K-12 schools and CBOs work together to reach students.

Create On-Ramps to Get Back on the College Track

The Partnership for College Access and Success links the NYC College of Technology, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, and the *Youth Development Institute* (YDI), supporting youth who dropped out or struggled in high school to enter and complete college. Staff members provide continuous support to students in the fields they know best. The college provides access to academic supports such as tutoring and summer bridge, while YDI offers one-on-one counseling sessions, engages family members, and helps students develop action plans to achieve their goals. A CUNY Student Liaison works with students and their YDI counselors until they graduate. Young people in this program *graduate at twice the rate* of a comparison group of peers.

Guide Students through the College Admissions Process

The San Antonio Education Partnership, a coalition supporting increased college attainment in the city, manages *Cafécollege*. At this downtown one-stop, funded by the city, College Access and Success Advisors provide free assistance to high school students, their parents, and adults who stopped out of college and are planning to return. Staff members help visitors with college admission applications, financial aid, SAT and ACT preparation, and career exploration.
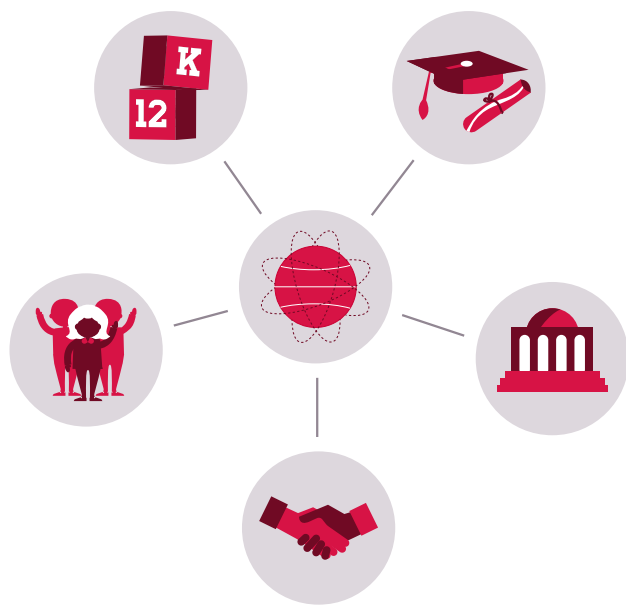
Ease the Transition to College

The *Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS)* program partners all 13 state community colleges in Tennessee with local high schools to run blended learning math labs, required for seniors who are behind on readiness indicators. Last school year, 70% of participating seniors completed every competency unit, thereby avoiding the need to take any remedial math courses in college. Community colleges train high school teachers to use the courseware, send field coordinators to schools for pedagogical and logistical support, oversee academic progress, and offer guidance to SAILS students on college entry and success. SAILS is supported by the Governor's Online Innovation Fund as part of the state's Drive to 55 initiative.

Stakeholder Resources

For Any Sector:
A Complete Definition of College and Career Readiness (2012: Education Policy Improvement Center)

Conducting a Scan of your College Access and Success System (2010: OMG Center for Collaborative Learning)

Taken together, these two reports enable communities to examine college readiness from 1) the student perspective of a developmental pathway, and 2) the community perspective of the interaction of various stakeholders who support college access and success. The Education Policy Improvement Center's paper provides a definition of college and career readiness that can be used to assess school and community supports in four key areas of readiness: think, know, go, and act. The OMG Center for Collaborative Learning's report explores the role of important stakeholders in a local college access and success system. Initiatives in two cities (Philadelphia and Miami) are discussed in more detail.

For K-12 Systems:
Barriers to College Attainment: Lessons from Chicago (2009: The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago)

This report draws on findings from a multi-year research project on Chicago Public Schools designed to identify determinants of students' postsecondary success and levers for improvement, which may serve as a case study for other communities. It argues that high schools must shift from a focus on building college aspirations, which are already high, to establishing a clear pathway for students to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education. This includes building college-going cultures in high schools to improve students' academic performance and increase the information and counseling students receive to access good-fit colleges and financial aid.

For Postsecondary Institutions:
A Path to Alignment: Connecting K-12 and Higher Education via the Common Core and the Degree Qualifications Profile (2013: Lumina Foundation)

This report discusses how educators could use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) to align academic goals across high schools and colleges. The DQP creates a framework for postsecondary institutions to broadly identify what a college graduate should know and be able to do across disciplines. This exercise is intended to help educators across both systems understand how to build on the Common Core State Standards to improve both student readiness for and success in college.

For Local Government:
Municipal Action Guide: Reconnecting Youth through Dropout Reengagement Centers (2013: National League of Cities)

This municipal action guide profiles strategies across the country that city leaders can use to help disengaged students finish high school, prepare for postsecondary education, and gain valuable workforce skills. The guide offers numerous examples and ideas for city leaders who are considering how best to add reengagement to their local youth-serving infrastructure. These are drawn from a growing national network of reengagement centers, which offer a range of services such as individual academic assessments, opportunities to explore different education options, and referrals to appropriate schools and credential programs.

For Business Sector:
Corporate Investments in College Readiness and Access (2008: Institute for Higher Education Policy)

This report discusses general trends in business involvement in college readiness and access initiatives and takes a detailed look at two case studies: General Electric and Time Warner. It finds an increasing interest in policy change, as well as programmatic support and a move toward partnerships with nonprofits (such as mentor programs), as opposed to traditional "checkbook philanthropy." It notes that businesses can play a key role in bringing stakeholders to the table.

For Community-Based Organizations:
Partnerships for College Readiness (2013: Annenberg Institute for School Reform)

Using collaborations around data in the College Readiness Indicator Systems project as a basis, this report discusses how school districts, postsecondary institutions, and community-based organizations have built partnerships to improve college readiness. It examines the emergence of community-led umbrella organizations involving CBOs, elected leaders, philanthropy, and business. It takes a closer look at such organizations in New York, Boston, and Dallas and examines common challenges and lessons learned for effective partnerships.