Partnerships for College Readiness

CRIS
COLLEGE READINESS INDICATOR SYSTEMS

prepared by the Annenberg Institute
for School Reform at Brown University

ABOUT THE COLLEGE READINESS INDICATOR SYSTEMS PROJECT

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) at Brown University and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University have each received three-year grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to work together to select a network of sites and develop models for College Readiness Indicator Systems. As part of this collaborative effort, AISR and JGC develop, test, and disseminate effective tools and resources that provide early diagnostic indications of what students need to become college ready. The two organizations work closely with the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, which also has received a grant from the Gates Foundation to develop and test CRIS-related tools based on their work with the Chicago Public Schools. The CRIS sites are Dallas, New Visions for Public Schools (New York City), Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and San Jose, California.

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Rather than providing a specific reform design or model to be implemented, AISR's approach is to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts and communities strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.

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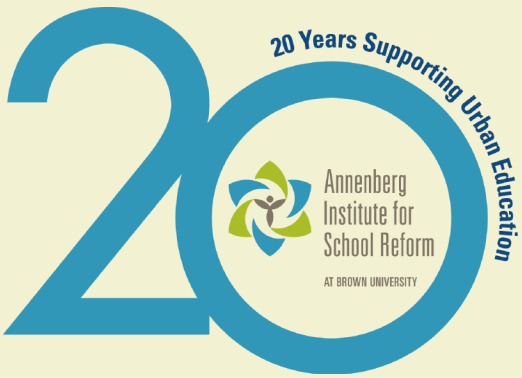

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University proudly celebrates its 20th anniversary and reaffirms its commitment to urban public education reform and our mission to ensure equitable, high-quality learning opportunities for all children and communities.

Contents

1 Introduction

Districts and Their External Partners: What We Know 1

About This Study 2

3 Findings

Differing Approaches and Levels of Engagement 3

Formal Data-Sharing Partnerships 4

Informal Partnerships 5

The Role of Intermediary Institutions 6

A New Focus on College Completion 9

Key Challenges 10

12 Building Robust Partnerships for College Readiness

Lessons Learned about Data-Sharing Partnerships 12

Community-wide Approaches to College Readiness: Emerging Best Practices 13

14 References

Partnerships for College Readiness

Introduction

In recent years, the education spotlight in the United States has shifted from high school graduation to postsecondary success, along with the recognition that to thrive in today's economy requires more than just a high school diploma. In response, local, state, and federal policymakers and practitioners, working with their community partners, have turned their attention to equipping students with the skills and knowledge required to obtain a postsecondary degree.

This shift has been accompanied by a wealth of policies and initiatives aimed at preparing students to enter and succeed in college, led by education policymakers, philanthropies, and nonprofit organizations, along with an increasing role for intermediary organizations – those which act as brokers, facilitators, and mediators between other entities that may have very different roles, cultures, and expertise. The goal of college readiness is embedded in federal priorities such as Race to the Top, multi-state initiatives such as Common Core State Standards, and assessment consortia tied to these new, higher standards.

Some of these initiatives have created new opportunities for community-based organizations (CBOs) and universities to partner with K–12 school districts and schools around college readiness. It is clear that districts cannot do this work alone in an era of heightened expectations, increased student need, and shrinking education budgets. Community-based organizations, higher-education institutions, civic institutions, and parent and student organizing groups all have an interest in preparing young people for higher education – and they have capacities that can help communities reach college readiness goals.

As more partners collaborate with each other and work with students, many have begun to recognize that sharing data among the different organizations can help measure the impact of their strategies, reduce redundancies in their efforts, and provide targeted student aid. But, while there is a robust literature around district-community partnerships and their sharing of data, there is much less written about such partnerships specifically designed to bolster college readiness. Thus, our interest in this exploratory study was to learn how districts and their external partners collaborate through data sharing and systems of early indicators of progress toward college readiness goals in five sites where the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) at Brown University and its partners are supporting the College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) initiative (see sidebar on next page).

Districts and Their External Partners: What We Know

There is a long history of school districts partnering with community-based organizations and higher-education institutions. We know from research that successful partnerships have the following qualities:

- *Shared visions, norms, and responsibilities* (Bennett & Thompson 2011; Goldring 2005; Edens & Gilsinan 2005). Research has found that successful partnerships require shared visions, responsibilities, and cultural norms among involved partners (Bosma et al. 2010; Goldring & Sims 2005; Núñez & Oliva 2009; Bruce et al. 2011). To establish and maintain this mutual commitment, some scholars recommended that decision-makers and on-the-ground practitioners come together to decide collectively on implementable interventions and supports for students (Dougherty, Long & Singer 2009; Moran et al. 2009; Núñez & Oliva 2009).

ABOUT THE COLLEGE READINESS INDICATOR SYSTEMS INITIATIVE

AISR's interest in better understanding the connection between districts and external partners grows out of our work as part of the College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS) initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. CRIS brings together three thought partners – AISR, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, and the Consortium for Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago – and five large, urban districts and support organizations – Dallas Independent School District, New Visions for Public Schools in New York City, the School District of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh Public Schools, and San Jose Unified School District – to jointly develop, test, and disseminate effective tools and resources that provide early diagnostic indications of what students need to become college ready. One of AISR's key roles in this partnership is to develop knowledge and tools that help districts and their community partners thoughtfully and productively collaborate around college readiness.

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- *Use of data to strengthen internal capacity and inter-relationships* (Moran et al. 2009; Dougherty, Long & Singer 2009; Vernez et al. 2008). Data can strengthen not only individual organizations' internal capacities, but also the relationships between partners (Dougherty, Long & Singer 2009; Sanders 2008). Data are also instrumental for organizations to discuss their partnership progress and alter interventions and supports for students when necessary (Moran et al. 2009).

About This Study

While prior research has focused on after-school and higher-education collaborations with districts, there has been less written about collaborations that are specifically focused on college readiness. As states begin to implement the Common Core State Standards, there will be a greater need for collaboration between districts and their partners to support students, especially as many school districts are simultaneously facing a time of increased budget austerity. Furthermore, calls for greater collaboration across citywide institutions (e.g., Broader, Bolder Approach to Education) may underestimate the technical, cultural, and institutional challenges for such work to be effective. This study provides useful examples from the CRIS network for districts and cities considering greater collaboration around data and indicators related to college readiness.

Given the gap in knowledge about partnerships for college readiness and recognizing their importance, this exploratory study examined the following research questions:

- How are CRIS districts and their local external organizations – higher education and community-based organizations – collaborating around issues of college readiness?
- How are partners developing, sharing, and acting on college readiness indicators?
- What are some of the current challenges – institutional, cultural, and technical – to these partnerships?

The five sites involved in this study represent diverse urban districts, ranging from approximately 25,000 to 150,000 students, and were selected based on their work emphasizing college readiness. After a preliminary literature review, we conducted forty-three interviews in the sites with members of the district office, CBOs, higher-education institutions, and other key stakeholders. See the sidebar for more detail on interview methods.

Findings

Several clear findings emerged from the five CRIS sites.

- There are *multiple types of partnerships and levels of engagement* between districts and partners, ranging from informal, ad hoc groups of organizations who meet to discuss common interests in college readiness to formal partnerships with memoranda-of-understanding and detailed data-sharing agreements.
- *Data-sharing around college readiness* is a key feature of many partnerships, though there are significant technical and potential privacy issues that make sharing data difficult.
- *Intermediary organizations* are emerging in many CRIS sites to raise the profile of college readiness across their communities, as well as play "air traffic controller" to help coordinate the many groups focused on preparing young people for higher education.
- A number of partners are now *extending their supports from college readiness to college completion* as many recognize that college entrance does not guarantee students' success in college.

INTERVIEW METHODS

We developed three separate interview protocols: for district office, CBOs, and higher-education institutions. We used a snowball sampling method, beginning with our site liaisons and their partner organizations, including CBOs and higher-education institutions. We also used web searches to identify additional CBOs for interviews. The interviewees recommended further contacts as well as key stakeholders in their respective sites. These key players included university faculty and researchers, foundation staff, leaders of parent engagement organizations and other organizations involved in college readiness issues, and chamber of commerce staff. In-person and phone interviews were each about one hour in duration.

Differing Approaches and Levels of Engagement

While the importance of cross-sector partnerships around college readiness was echoed at all our site interviews, the levels of engagement and approaches varied widely across the five sites. Some already had a well-established data system shared among the partners. Some have recently begun developing formal data-sharing agreements and analyzing their data. Others continue to rely on their personal relationships and student waivers to provide college readiness supports and evaluate their programs' effectiveness. Many respondents regretted their lack of current capacity to develop a contractual agreement around data sharing, which has proven to be the stronger model for college readiness partnerships.

Nonetheless, given the challenge of data sharing, especially with community-based organizations, CBO partners pointed out that their current relationships, either as ad hoc groups or personally, served them well in responding to their school district and school partners' need and providing supports to students. Regardless of the partnership type – data sharing or non-data sharing – many partners recognized that shared visions and goals are critical in developing cross-sector partnerships to support their students for college and career.

Formal Data-Sharing Partnerships

Developing contractual partnerships – for example, by signing a memorandum of understanding or a data-sharing agreement – was noted by partnering organizations as critical in establishing effective partnerships, especially around data sharing. Research asserts that successful partnerships require shared visions, responsibilities, and cultural norms (Bosma et al. 2010; Goldring & Sims 2005; Núñez & Oliva 2009; Bruce 2011 et al.), and formal contracts can serve as a tool to promote effective communication between partners, providing opportunities to develop shared goals and responsibilities (Bennett & Thompson 2011). Observations in our sites confirmed that their contractual data-sharing partnerships, while mainly addressing ways of collecting and sharing data, also served as a critical instrument in establishing shared goals and priorities in supporting students for college and prompted further collaborations beyond data sharing.

Formal agreements between two organizations (usually a district or school and a nonprofit or university) encourage them to consciously address many elements that make a partnership effective. A contract can:

- clearly define each group's roles, which research has shown to make the partnership more effective (Bennett & Thompson 2011) – e.g., the college application process includes various areas of challenge in which students may need support, and splitting up these responsibilities between organizations can be greatly beneficial;
- provide increased incentives for organizations to connect and communicate, sometimes leading to individuals from each organization being placed within their partner's premises (e.g., a district allowing external college access providers to be co-located with school-based counselors on a campus);
- help ensure that partners have a more equal role in decision making and reciprocal support, rather than the more powerful partner dominating the partnership (Edens & Gilsinan 2005).

Partnerships with Postsecondary Institutions

Partnerships based on data-sharing agreements have been especially prominent between school districts and postsecondary institutions.

While K–12-postsecondary partnerships have been practiced for many years (Núñez & Oliva 2009), collaborations at the district level that were specifically around college readiness data were found to be promising in supporting students at a scale larger than on a school-by-school basis. For example, a data-sharing partnership between CRIS network member San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD) and the University of California at Berkeley (UC Berkeley) allowed low-performing schools in the district to provide college readiness supports based on the reports generated by the UC Berkeley's Transcript Evaluation Service program. For this partnership, the district shares the students' transcripts with UC Berkeley to be evaluated based on the university's admission benchmarks.[1] In return, UC Berkeley uses this information to support their guidance counselor fellowship program (UC Berkeley Fisher Fellows Program) and the participating schools to better serve SJUSD students in preparing for college.

[1] For the University of California admission requirements, known as A-G Eligibility, see http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/freshman/requirements/index.html.

Another partnership under this data-sharing agreement is centered around pre- and post-surveys on college knowledge administered to all students who are enrolled in schools participating in the Transcript Evaluation Service. SJUSD uses the results to understand what knowledge students need in order to succeed in college. Through the district-postsecondary data-sharing collaboration, the Transcript Evaluation Service has not only increased the number of students applying to and enrolling in University of California systems, but has also helped shape a strong guidance counselor fellowship program at UC Berkeley.

Partnerships with Nonprofits

Pittsburgh provides an example of a partnership between a district and a nonprofit that includes a formal agreement around data. United Way's Be a 6th Grade Mentor program enlists community volunteers in Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) to mentor middle school students weekly for at least one school year. The program includes both close partnerships with school-based staff and a memorandum of understanding between United Way and the district.

United Way and local university evaluators worked with the district to develop indicators around attendance and grades. United Way receives data from PPS around these indicators for participating students through a formal data-sharing agreement, which enables them to more effectively evaluate the program. In return, United Way also shares its internal survey and evaluation results monthly with partners, including the district, for both individual schools and the program overall. According to a United Way staff member, the data-sharing agreement was the result of a lengthy and intense process with the district, which ultimately served to strengthen the partnership and ensure access to information that would improve services to students and the program overall.

Informal Partnerships

While all CRIS sites agree on the importance of data, not all districts have the conditions and/or the capacity to readily establish contractual partnerships around data with their external partners. Nevertheless, without data-sharing partnerships in place, some sites showed some promising practices through varying levels of engagement that emerged as critical in developing strong partnerships on college readiness indicators and supports.

Informal Access to Student-Level Data

In contrast to postsecondary institutions, not many CBOs had formal data-sharing agreements with school districts. CBOs often struggled to get student-level data and were limited to aggregated data. While many CBOs pointed at the local policies on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as a barrier, some also mentioned the difficulty of working with schools and districts due to their distinct organizational structures and timelines. In fact, research has found that distinct organizational structures and work pace can be significantly challenging in public-private organization partnerships, especially for K–12-CBO partnerships, and access to information is especially challenging for CBOs in getting timely data to support their students (Acar & Robertson 2004).

As an alternative, many CBOs and some private postsecondary institutions request waivers from their students and parents directly or rely on their partnering organizations' staff to obtain data on students they serve. For instance, Dallas Independent School District (DISD) has partnerships with a number of CBOs to collaborate specifically on college knowledge. Under this agreement, partnering organizations' college advisors come to campus to work with counselors and provide direct services to students. However, due to their non–school staff status, these advisors rarely have access to campus data systems and have to rely on school counselors, who are already burdened with high caseloads, to run data for them.

After three years of this informal access to student data, DISD was finally able to solve this limited access by developing a data portal that counselors and partnering college advisors can equally access and input data of the students they serve together. Thus, although CBO partners' access to data is limited to the students they serve, many agreed that this informal access to data is the best alternative for them to keep track of the students they serve and measure their programs' effectiveness. Thus, many CBOs reiterated the importance of maintaining strong relationships with their district and postsecondary partners.

Non-data Partnerships

Distinct from data-sharing partnerships, which often require some type of a contractual agreement, most non-data partnerships take place without establishing any formal contracts. They primarily focus on identifying shared visions and goals, as well as addressing the gaps in supports provided by different organizations. While some of these partnerships were created in clearly structured ad hoc committees, many of the partnerships observed in our sites seemed more informally established through personal connections between groups or individuals.

Within the CRIS network, the Philadelphia Futures organization illustrates the strengths and challenges of informal partnerships between districts and external organizations. Philadelphia Futures is a nonprofit that works to build college knowledge and academic preparedness in high school students starting in ninth grade, match them with a college that fits their ability and interests, and support them throughout their time in college. Although this organization has a rich history of helping students in Philadelphia and has several formal partnerships with Pennsylvania universities, it has only an informal partnership with the School District of Philadelphia.

However, through their strong personal relationships with local high school guidance counselors, Philadelphia Futures continues to work with students recommended by counselors and provide professional development workshops for counselors. Philadelphia Futures described their approach of working on a school-by-school basis as effective, in spite of the limited time and resources at the central office level to engage in a formal partnership. Although Philadelphia Futures needs to collect and rely on individual student waivers to access their students' data, due to the lack of a data-sharing agreement with the district, they highly value their current partnerships with individual schools, which are based on trust and a shared vision – important elements of a strong partnership. A Philadelphia Futures representative stated, "We have really good relationships with counselors. When people understand what we provide, they trust us."

The Role of Intermediary Institutions

As different stakeholders come together to collaborate around college readiness efforts, intermediary institutions have begun surfacing in some of our CRIS sites and taken up the role of strengthening college readiness partnerships in their communities. The role of intermediary organizations is especially critical in mediating between organizations of different backgrounds – public and private – and facilitating their collaborations in supporting students for college readiness. Ellen Goldring and Pearl Sims (2005) note that while partnering organizations often need to represent their respective organizations, intermediary organizations will always represent the interest of the new partnership (pp. 233–234). At our sites, we observed two types of intermediary organizations: one that is led at the community level ("umbrella" organizations) and another led at the district level.

The Emergence of Community-Led Umbrella Organizations

Intermediary organizations, also referred to as umbrella organizations,[2] are seen as advocates and leaders to advance the common interests and goals of its partners. Through the emergence of umbrella organizations, some community partners, including CBOs and business organizations, began to proactively participate in their school districts' decision-making processes and support college readiness for their community's students. For instance, Commit! Dallas is a nonprofit organization operating as an umbrella organization that comprises about fifty local partner organizations from different sectors – local funders, school districts, higher-education institutions, faith groups, and business organizations.

For a large county like Dallas, Commit!'s leadership and collaborations of different sectors were especially critical in supporting their students to increase the number of college graduates and skilled workers in the county.[3] With a student population of over 300,000 in fifteen school districts, Dallas-area education leaders have always found the issue of student mobility – about one-third of students cross district boundaries yearly – to be especially challenging for individual school districts in supporting their students. Recognizing the need for coordination across districts and local support organizations, Commit! has begun to emerge as the "backbone" entity, not only connecting partners, but also linking common indicators and shared measurement systems of student learning across districts and advocating for a data-driven community.

A similar approach has emerged in Philadelphia through the Council for College and Career Success, an initiative led by the mayor's office.[4] Under the Council, the College Ready committee's three work teams – data, postsecondary readiness, and college completion – have convened stakeholders from higher-education institutions, school districts, and CBOs to develop and provide support and intervention at the city level. According to a College Ready committee leader, CBOs in Philadelphia have been very proactive in providing support to students for college and career readiness. However, they often do not have a unifying vision that aligns their work to the needs of the school district. Thus, the Council's work teams see their goal as aligning the community's work and the school district's priorities.

In addition to bringing partners together, College Ready work teams play a critical role in linking data systems among higher-education institutions. In the case of Philadelphia, the majority of universities are private and the state has no governance over them to require any data sharing. Thus, data exchange is especially challenging, not only for the school district, but also among universities. As an intermediary entity, the College Ready work teams have been leading the collaborations among postsecondary institutions – public and private – to develop and use a common data-measurement system. This partnership has examined data specifically on Philadelphia students to better inform and support the district in preparing its students for college readiness and success.

[2] The term "umbrella" organization derives from its role of embracing different partners under one shared mission and set of goals and of representing the partners as one entity.

[3] Commit! was modeled after the collective impact strategies of Strive Cincinnati (www.strivetogether.org). Commit! was established based on examples learned during a tour around the country organized by the chamber of commerce and some school district board members to identify best practices of partnerships in urban districts.

[4] The Council has three committees: Work Ready, Project U-turn, and College Ready.

School Systems as Intermediary between Schools and CBOs

Another type of intermediary capacity has been observed with district office staff as the moderators between schools and CBOs. In this case, CBOs work directly with schools to provide customized supports based on the campus's specific needs, while they sign a formal contract with the district central office – which, as the main contractor, manages a systematic procedure of reporting and evaluations for all participating CBO partners.

This intermediary role also exists at a more informal capacity, as observed in New Visions for Public Schools, a school system supporting a network of over seventy schools in New York City. Identifying the right support in a large city like New York City is equally difficult for both CBOs and schools. New Visions plays a critical role in identifying the specific needs of a school and connects them to appropriate CBOs that can meet those needs. According to some of the CBO partners working in New Visions schools, they do not have any formal agreements with New Visions, but their long-term relationship with New Visions has allowed them to earn schools' trust and develop strong partnerships with schools they serve. While CBOs can approach schools directly, CBO partners and schools both seem to value the role of New Visions as an intermediary organization that elevates the level of trust between the partners.

AN INTERMEDIARY THAT ALIGNS K–12 AND POSTSECONDARY COLLEGE READINESS: GRADUATE NYC!

Nearly 40 percent of New York City public school graduates enroll in the City University of New York (CUNY) system in the first fall after high school graduation, and New York City public school graduates make up 70 percent of CUNY students. In 2010, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) and CUNY won a $3 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to accelerate their work of aligning the two systems to improve college readiness and success. One of the major initiatives of this partnership, called Graduate NYC!, is a linked K–16 data system that allows tracking of individual students and the development of "Where Are They Now?" reports that provide all New York City high schools with data on the persistence and success of their graduates who enroll in the CUNY system.

Recognizing the central role of CBOs in supporting college readiness and access, Graduate NYC! has developed several initiatives to support CBOs' access to data and better connect schools, students, and programs. Through one of these initiatives, ACCESS Data, CBOs can define a cohort of students, provide unique identifiers, and receive a cohort-level report on CUNY persistence and achievement data. Graduate NYC! uses the linked database to assemble these reports. In addition to providing the data, participating CBOs attend workshops on using data for program evaluation.

In fall 2012, Graduate NYC!, CUNY, the NYCDOE, and Options Center at Goddard Riverside, which provides college access counseling and professional development for counseling professionals, launched the NYC College Line. College Line includes an online directory of college access programs searchable by neighborhood, program focus, language, and many other features, as well as a comprehensive collection of online resources and videos and a feature that allows young people to ask questions of college advisors. Graduate NYC! also hosts a series of "community best practices forums" throughout the year that highlight topics of interest to college access providers, such as New York City–specific data tools and supports for undocumented students.

For more information on the NYCDOE/CUNY data-sharing collaboration, see http://annenberginstitute.org/publication/data-collaboration-new-york-city-challenges-linking-high-school-and-post-secondary-data.

As John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011) noted, a successful collective impact is seen when participating partners "abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement" (p. 36). However, mainly focusing on the partnership goals or developing a common approach is often challenging for those who also have to manage their organization's own agenda. Therefore, intermediary organizations have emerged as an important asset in making sure that the collaborations around college readiness and success can be sustained under a unifying vision and set of goals and provide resources that can facilitate the partnership between organizations from different sectors.

A New Focus on College Completion

A change that we noticed across all partnering sectors is the shift in focus from college readiness to college completion. A researcher at a postsecondary institution in Philadelphia explained that the college dropout issue is becoming more serious among students entering junior year than those in freshman year. According to recent statistics from this institution, about 75 percent of its first-year students take remedial courses, and 50 percent of those drop out in their junior year. For years, postsecondary institutions provided academic and emotional support to first-year students, but few supports exist for students beyond the first year. Similar concerns were also raised among CBOs that have supported students for college readiness, especially those who serve students who are from low-income families and first-generation college-goers. Recognizing that college entrance is not enough to ensure students' college success, some partnerships have begun to extend their collaborations of support beyond high schools.

This shift to supporting students for college completion is especially prominent among CBOs working with students from low socio-economic backgrounds and low-performing schools. Having had little adult support for college readiness outside of school, many students continue to need guidance even after enrolling in college. Recognizing this need, some CBOs – like Philadelphia

A DISTRICT-CBO PARTNERSHIP: Dallas Independent School District's Academic Readiness and College Access Program

The Academic Readiness and College Access Program (AR&CA) is a formal partnership between the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) and CBOs to share data and provide supports to students for college readiness and success. This collaboration was created to support DISD's needs in helping high school students prepare for college (e.g., college entrance exams, parent engagement in college application, the financial aid process). In the 2011-2012 academic year, advisors from the three selected partners – Education Is Freedom, Academic Success Program, and the Princeton Review – provided direct services to over 6,000 high school seniors (about 80 percent of the senior class) in close collaboration with campus staff, especially counselors.

In addition to the programmatic support, the partnership requires DISD and AR&CA program partners to establish a formal data-sharing agreement to exchange data on students served on campus. While AR&CA partners receive each student's grades and schedules, DISD collects monthly reports and updates on the progress of their students. One of the benefits of this partnership is that the partners can now use a common template, allowing DISD staff to have a comparable set of indicators to measure and evaluate AR&CA partners' effectiveness. All service providers meet once a month with the district's Director of College and Career Readiness to discuss their progress and receive updates on students' FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) completion status and improvements at the schools they serve. Although the AR&CA partners do not collaborate directly, these monthly meetings have also served as a networking mechanism among the partners.

Futures in Philadelphia, Bottom Line in New York City, and Academic Success Program in Dallas – have prolonged their commitment throughout college by providing academic supports, as well as advising on employability, financial aid, and other life and non-cognitive skills. In some instances, some students decide to drop out of college for family reasons or other personal challenges. At Philadelphia Futures, they maintain a policy that their staff continues to work with these students until they return and complete college.

In some cases, this shift to college completion is prompted by state policy changes. For instance, Texas has recently announced that the community college funding formula will be based on college completion rather than enrollment.[5] This state-level funding policy change has created a sense of urgency in some school districts and postsecondary institutions, especially in large districts. Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD), the largest community college district in the state, enrolls about 72,000 students in degree-granting programs every fall,[6] yet two-thirds of their enrollees end up in remedial classes.[7]

This issue was also a particular concern for Dallas Independent School District (DISD), since 60 percent of its students enroll at DCCCD. Given their shared concern, DCCCD and DISD agreed that supports for remediation and completion should be streamlined from K–12 through college to ensure their students' success. Although DCCCD and DISD[8] have been providing supports to students in their respective sectors, for the first time they are collaborating on developing remediation strategies and holding themselves mutually accountable for their students' college readiness and success.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only about 58 percent of students enrolled at a four-year institution graduate in six years (USDOE 2012), and this rate is significantly lower for minority and low-income students. This result is especially distressing as the demand for college degrees in our current economy continues to grow. While recognizing the need to extend their support even after college enrollment, various stakeholders have also acknowledged their limited capacity to provide that support independently. Thus, collaborations between K–12, CBOs, and postsecondary institutions have become critical in ensuring that students receive a continuum of support as they graduate from high school, matriculate into higher education, and move through postsecondary institutions to completion.

Key Challenges

The districts and external organizations described in this study are, to a large extent, forging new territory in developing partnerships around college readiness. As these relationships grow and deepen, several key challenges have emerged.

Partnership Alignment under the Concept of "College Readiness"

Districts, schools, and partners already had missions and values in place before "college readiness" emerged as a goal for all students. They are now in the process of realigning mission, resources, and supports and services to better reflect that goal. One challenge is that schools and districts are under enormous pressure to help students pass standardized exams required for graduation, which are often not aligned with college expectations and

[5] College completion may be defined differently. For instance, a student who finishes the remediation class, a student who transfers to a four-year college, or a student who earns an associate's degree while enrolled in a four-year college can all be considered as college completion.

[6] If non-credit students are included, about 120,000 students are enrolled at DCCCD.

[7] Interview with a DCCCD representative.

[8] According to a DCCCD representative, the district's data showed that the number of DISD's graduates taking remedial courses has been decreasing over the years. This promising outcome was another reason why DCCCD wanted to establish a partnership with DISD.

can distract from college readiness goals. As we noted earlier, research on effective cross-sector partnerships has demonstrated the importance of regular, ongoing communication and shared decision making about supports and interventions for students. But the shortages of time, resources, and staff facing urban schools and many community and higher-education partners make communication difficult. Many interviewees identified high rates of district and staff turnover and the large caseloads of guidance counselors and other student support staff as hindrances to aligning vision and goals. Intermediary organizations, either school districts themselves or outside "umbrella" organizations, may be best positioned to help schools and a wide array of higher-education and community partners establish shared goals, measures, and mechanisms for communication.

District Leadership Turnover

The challenge of college readiness alignment across districts and external partners is exacerbated by frequent district staff turnover. Several CRIS districts have had significant changes in district leadership in the past two years. This potentially not only threatens the continuity of college readiness as a key goal but also disrupts relationships built between districts and their partners.

Supporting Students between High School Graduation and College Matriculation

The period of time between high school graduation and matriculation into higher education is a critical period for effectively preparing young adults for the demands of college, but supports are often not geared toward this "bridge" between the two systems. A number of CBOs have begun to explore strategies for supporting students during this critical transition point. For example, CUNY's At Home in College program and Bottom Line in New York City recruit current college students to act as summer caseworkers, checking in regularly with new graduates and ensuring that they are taking appropriate steps to enroll and prepare for their first semester of college.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH COLLEGE COMPLETION: BOTTOM LINE

Several CBO and higher-education partners working with New Visions have developed supports that follow students through their college careers, recognizing that even well-prepared students often struggle once they enroll in college.

One such partner is Bottom Line, which was founded to provide college access supports for low-income students and first-generation college-goers in Boston and has since expanded to several other cities. Bottom Line's strategy includes two programs: College Access and College Success. In New York, Bottom Line partners with seven New Visions high schools to provide tutoring, college match assistance, and intensive support with college applications and essays through ten to fourteen highly structured one-on-one sessions across students' senior year. Graduates of College Access who matriculate at a target college (current target colleges include fourteen four-year colleges in the CUNY system and two four-year SUNY colleges) continue to receive one-on-one and group support focused on four areas: academic success, employability, life skills, and financial aid through the College Success program. An external evaluation of Bottom Line's work in Boston found that participation in the College Success program increased a student's chances of graduating from a four-year college by 27 to 45 percentage points compared to participation in only College Access.

Building Robust Partnerships for College Readiness

Adopting college readiness as a goal is a critical first step for districts and partner organizations, but the work of developing coherent systems that utilize their capacities and talents in a collaborative fashion is a tremendous challenge. The CRIS sites we studied provide a rich source of lessons learned and promising best practices.

Lessons Learned about Data-Sharing Partnerships

Sharing data is an important foundation for a successful partnership for college readiness. We found several elements that have helped maintain and create effective data-sharing partnerships in CRIS sites.

Formal agreements and strong student data systems are the most effective ways to match interventions with student need.

One of the most important elements in maintaining shared goals in the area of college readiness is a firm data-sharing agreement between partners. If external partners do not have broad access to student information from the school or district that they work with, it will greatly inhibit their ability to match student indicators with interventions. It can be very effective if universities and districts engage in data-sharing partnerships, as it allows for the longitudinal data for every student to be collected. If universities do not connect their own student records with high school student records, it can be very difficult for school districts to measure which of their current practices are effective in preparing their students for college.

CRIS districts that have entered into data-sharing agreements on the district level have shown promising results in matching interventions with the students who need the most help (New Visions and CUNY, DCCCD and DISD, San Jose and UC Berkeley). Data sharing does not only happen when formal agreements are in place, but it is most effective to share data systematically, on a district level. If districts focus on installing strong student data systems internally, they will have an easier time sharing these data with external partners. It is important to note that colleges and universities are usually capable of either housing or analyzing district-level data and can be valuable partners in creating effective data-sharing systems.

All partners should have common visions and goals surrounding their data needs.

When organizations are sharing or receiving data from a district, their use of the data should have clear goals that match the vision of the district, and help their group promote college readiness. An example of such an arrangement is the Pittsburgh Promise's use of high school student data (GPA, attendance, enrollment history) in determining eligibility for its scholarships. Without these data from the public schools, it would be very difficult for the Pittsburgh Promise funds to reach the appropriate students.

It is important to connect data systems.

Limited access to data not only occurs between partnering organizations, but also internally within a district and its schools. For instance, college advisors from ASP Dallas work with counselors and students on high school campuses. However, due to their non-school staff status, these advisors rarely have access to school data systems, and have to rely on district guidance counselors who are already burdened with high caseloads to run data for them. A similar problem occurs among counselors who do not have the same access to data that teachers have. These disconnected data systems often frustrate practitioners – both internal and external – in collaborating to support students. As an alternative, some CBOs and postsecondary

institutions now request waivers from students and parents to access their students' data. However, respondents explained that this approach, though helpful, is limited and creates misalignment of data among the partners. More promisingly, both DISD counselors and external college access partners have access to the district's new data portal, which has information on students' progress on college readiness (e.g., FAFSA completion).

When entering into a data-sharing agreement, it is important to have a deep understanding of local and federal FERPA interpretations.

One of the challenges raised in the interviews was around the local policies on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Some interviewees explained that despite FERPA's flexibility at the federal level, states and districts often have strict interpretations resulting in data-sharing limitations. Fortunately, with the recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, some states revised their definition of data sharing among institutions, and facilitated the exchange of student-level data across districts and postsecondary institutions. However, this change does not apply for most CBO partners, who receive only aggregated data and expressed the need of student-level data when providing direct services to students.

Community-wide Approaches to College Readiness: Emerging Best Practices

All of the communities profiled in this study have developed promising work in at least one area of college readiness partnership. For example, several sites, including Dallas, San Jose, and New Visions, are working through thorny data and privacy issues to provide a comprehensive and longitudinal look at students' college readiness. Sites are also working to build, through cross-sector partnerships, system-wide buy-in, ownership, and mutual accountability around college readiness. Commit! Dallas and the Pittsburgh Promise are helping to align entire communities and regions around college and career readiness outcomes. These kinds of partnerships may also lead to better transition supports for young people as they transition from high school to college, as with several of New Visions' partnerships, as well as better targeting of community and higher-education supports for students in the K–12 system.

The issues of siloed systems, disconnected data, and unclear goals for collaboration are certainly not unique to college readiness work, or even to education. The growing recognition that supporting students to succeed in college and career requires a broad range of cross-sector partnerships has nurtured a rich field of collaboration that raises important questions and promising solutions for partnerships built on data and evidence. The work of the CRIS sites provides important examples of the kind of necessary community-wide approaches to college readiness that move beyond the purely school district-centered models to ones based on collaboration, mutual accountability, and trust.

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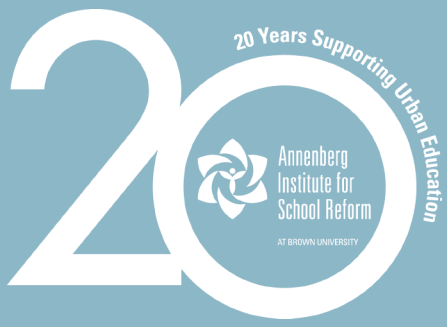

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