



PATHWAYS
TO COLLEGE
NETWORK

www.pathwaystocollege.net

Action Alert for Higher Education Leaders

Preparing all students to succeed in college and other postsecondary programs—especially underserved students who are the first generation in their families to go to college, low-income students, underrepresented minorities, and students with disabilities—is a necessity in today’s world. Education systems at all levels must support high achievement and the development of life-long learning skills for all students, regardless of background.

The Pathways to College Network, an alliance of national organizations to improve college access and success for underserved students, is committed to research-based reform of education policies and practices so that a college education becomes a realistic expectation for all young people in our society. We want an education system that prepares all students for 21st century careers and citizenship roles, not for yesterday’s jobs and marginal status in society.

Principles for Change

Through a synthesis of extensive research, the Pathways Network has established six core principles to guide educators and other stakeholders in efforts to improve college access and success:

- 1 Expect that all underserved students are capable of being prepared to enroll and succeed in college.
- 2 Provide a range of high-quality, college-preparatory tools for underserved students and their families.
- 3 Embrace social, cultural, and learning-style differences in developing learning environments and activities for underserved students.
- 4 Involve leaders at all levels in establishing policies, programs, and practices that facilitate student transitions toward postsecondary attainment.
- 5 Maintain sufficient financial and human resources to enable underserved students to enroll and persist in college.
- 6 Assess policy, program, practice, and institutional effectiveness regularly.

These principles underpin a series of recommended actions for leaders, including government officials, school superintendents and principals, higher education leaders, outreach program directors, and community leaders and family advocates. We urge these leaders to work with leaders in philanthropy, business, and in all sectors of society to help bring about change and to build a strong foundation of support to meet the needs of underserved students.

Time for Action

College and university leaders, including presidents, vice presidents, deans, and others can effect needed change by creating and supporting partnerships with middle schools and high schools enrolling underserved students and by implementing and reinforcing key policies on campuses. Higher education has two crucial roles in creating clear pathways to a college credential. One is as a partner with K-12 schools: preparing teachers, clearly conveying the academic skills needed for first-year college work, and collaborating with schools to prepare students for college success. The other role is providing meaningful learning experiences and support, including adequate financial aid, to enable underserved students to achieve successfully in college.

Admissions/Transition to College

- Provide high school leaders with specific, clear information about the knowledge and skills that students need in order to succeed in first-year college courses without remediation.
- Partner with high schools and community-based college access programs to assist students, families, and staff with college and financial aid awareness and planning.
- Offer dual enrollment and other bridge programs to help underserved students make successful transitions to college.

School Partnerships

- Initiate and support college access programs; provide supplemental services to schools with large low-income populations and low college-going rates.
- Reinforce school efforts to provide academic support for students challenged in college-preparatory courses, including tutoring and reading, math, and study skills development.
- Provide content area professional development for mathematics and science teachers.
- Collaborate with school leaders to recruit, prepare, and support new teachers to work in schools with large numbers of underserved students.

Financial Aid

- Target low-income students for need-based aid; make grants the primary form of aid for the neediest students; limit loan burdens and the necessity for students to work more than 15 hours a week.
- Use equitable criteria for merit aid so underserved students are not excluded from these programs.
- Offer low-income students more grant aid in their first two years. Monitor the effects of different types of financial aid packages on the level of student engagement and student work hours.
- Design aid programs that commit grant aid to students in middle school or early in high school.

Support

- Address parents' concerns and expectations regarding their children's college experience; provide them with information and advice to help support their children's college achievement.
- Develop a system to identify underprepared students early in order to accelerate their learning and to monitor student progress over time.
- Focus on first-year students, providing comprehensive services that are prescriptive and proactive.

- Integrate academic support with teaching and learning, including tutoring, supplemental instruction, learning communities, tailored developmental instruction, and study skills instruction.
- Provide social activities and personal counseling that affirm the cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds of underserved students.
- Strengthen relationships between community colleges and baccalaureate institutions to support the transition of students to four-year degree programs.
- Provide support to help underserved students make successful transitions to work and/or graduate school.

Assessment

- Implement measurable goals for retaining underserved students and evaluation processes that provide for program improvement and evidence of effectiveness.
- Track and follow up underserved students to determine effectiveness of specific retention interventions; provide feedback for program improvement.
- Disaggregate data to identify and address gaps in performance based on income, race, and other factors.

Resources for Leaders

The Pathways to College Network has produced *A Shared Agenda*, a call to action based on our research, as well as an array of resources to help leaders meet the needs of underserved students, including:

- More than 30 papers, policy briefs, and other resources summarizing research findings related to improving college access and success.
- An annotated bibliography of 650 studies on which the Pathways recommendations are based.
- More than 100 examples of policies, programs, and practices reflecting research-based principles and actions.
- Action Alerts tailored to key leadership groups.
- “Tool boxes” to assist educators and leaders in implementing action strategies.
- SPIDO, a searchable database of state policies related to college access.

These and other resources, including helpful information on a range of college access topics and effective action strategies, are available on the Pathways Web site and Clearinghouse at www.pathwaystocollege.net. For further information, contact the Pathways to College Network, The Education Resources Institute, 31 St. James Avenue, Boston, MA 02116. Tel. 617-556-0581.