



PATHWAYS
TO COLLEGE
NETWORK

www.pathwaystocollege.net

Action Alert for School Superintendents & Middle & High School Principals

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

The K-12 school system has primary responsibility for ensuring that all students leave high school ready for postsecondary success. Superintendents and principals must articulate the vision of college-readiness for all and help their staff confront misguided beliefs about student achievement and college access. Leaders must develop school cultures that help all students master a rigorous curriculum and make clearly defined postsecondary plans.

Curriculum Development

- Make the college-preparatory course sequence the core curriculum for high school graduation.
- Create middle/high school teacher teams to facilitate understanding of competencies students need for success in high school college-preparatory and advanced level courses.
- Align middle and high school standards so that students are academically prepared for a college-preparatory curriculum; align curricula within subject areas to provide academic continuity from year to year.

Instructional Development

- Understand that student cognitive development depends on repeated exposure to inquiry-based and problem-solving learning over time; design courses and teaching strategies to contribute to these skills.
- Develop systems to identify underperforming students early and accelerate their learning in college-preparatory courses.
- Reallocate professional development resources to focus on English language arts and mathematics.
- Partner with higher education institutions to provide teachers with content training in mathematics and sciences and help uncertified teachers become credentialed.
- Infuse classrooms with multicultural experiences that affirm students' backgrounds, using their language, culture, and experiences as instructional tools.
- Provide class release time and stipends to train teachers to implement improvements in their instructional methods and to learn from and share with colleagues.

Social Support

- Develop structures that facilitate supportive relationships for students with caring adults and peers.
- Integrate counseling, supplemental academic support, and college access programs to help students in greatest need of assistance.

Assessment/Using Data

- Collect and use data to track student performance in college-preparatory courses. Disaggregate data to ensure that all students are making progress.
- Arrange for all students to take the PSAT, PLAN and/or college placement tests no later than 10th grade in order to assess their progress toward college-readiness.
- Provide ongoing assessment of progress and feedback for teachers, students, and parents using measurable outcomes of students' academic progress.
- Incorporate data on students' high school achievement into middle school decision-making and planning, and include data on college achievement in high school planning.

College Planning/Transitions

- Partner with higher education institutions to provide early and ongoing college planning information and exploration activities, and college and financial aid application assistance.
- Develop partnerships with higher education institutions, college access programs, and school-to-career programs that provide support to assist students with making successful transitions from high school through the first year of college.

Parent/Family Involvement

- Seek guidance from families about what information and resources they need in order to support their children's college aspirations.
- Familiarize families with school academic support and college planning services; make it easy and comfortable for them to use these resources.
- Establish clear goals for parent involvement; seek parent input in creating "family friendly" schools.
- Embrace the cultural, social, linguistic, and community backgrounds of parents and families; tap into values that support student achievement and college aspirations.

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.