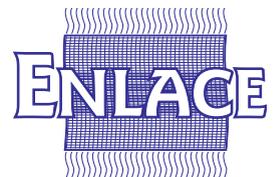




ENLACE

Creating College-Focused Centers in the Schools:
Learning from the ENLACE Experience





Background on the Issue

Students in the United States have higher educational aspirations than ever before. Eighty-eight percent of America's 8th graders expect to participate in some form of postsecondary education, and these numbers cut across ethnic and racial lines. Yet, by the time Latino students graduate from high school, many are not academically prepared for college. Lack of rigorous coursework and placement in a non-college preparatory curricular track as early as middle school are the primary barriers to college entrance.

An additional barrier, however, are the myths, misconceptions, and absence of accurate information about what it takes to get to college. This issue is particularly critical for students who are the first in their families who have the opportunity to go to college. Course requirements for college admissions, the required admissions tests, and the intricacies of applying for financial aid are some of the areas that students and their families are expected to understand.

ENLACE Experiences

To fill these gaps, several ENLACE sites created college-focused centers in local high schools. The centers are staffed by a mix of high school guidance counselors, staff from community colleges and universities, high school teachers, and college student interns and mentors. Activities include one-on-one counseling, financial aid workshops, events for parents, test preparation tutoring, and self-directed research about colleges.

Working through their partnerships, these ENLACE sites creatively channeled resources toward the centers. For example, local community college staff held joint positions at the high schools to support the centers, while college-age mentors worked with high school students to help them complete college application forms.

The centers served as a nexus that brought information about higher education into one place. Outside institutions knew where to bring their information, and high school students, teachers, and parents knew where to get information and support. Symbolically, having a physical location signaled the importance of higher education and became a key part of creating a college-going culture in the schools.



Good Practices for College-Focused Centers in the Schools

Serve students across the P-20 educational pathway

Develop a mentorship or internship program with local community college or university students to support the college-focused center. With proper training in both how to work with younger students, and in the intricacies of the college application and financial aid process, these mentors can be a valuable asset to a college-focused center. Paying stipends to the college mentors both formalizes their work, and allows for lower-income college students to participate. Having mentors with backgrounds similar to the students they work with can provide an added richness to the relationship.

Offer internships to high school students to work in their own college-focused centers. This supports ownership and buy-in to the center from the students they serve.

Create a college-focused center not only in the high school, but even in the middle school. Particularly for first-generation students, there needs to be early reinforcement that they have the opportunity and potential to go to college, and the preparation to support that goal.

Integrate activities of a college-focused center into the academic and daily life of the school. Engaging teachers in the centers, and helping them incorporate college into their academic curriculum brings the centers' work into the heart of the school.

Closely evaluate the impact of the college-focused centers. The college application and attendance rates for local high school students should be tracked at the school district level and connected to center activities. As one of the ENLACE partners at a college-focused center stated, *"If we don't start to see an increase in the numbers of our students going off to college ... we have to ask ourselves, 'What's going to shake things up?'"*

Engage parents, families, and communities

Open the college-focused centers to family members of the students. Staying open late and opening periodically on weekends for specific workshops and events can bring family members into the process. Food, child care, transportation support, etc., can create a welcoming atmosphere for families.





Develop a steering committee to support the college-focused centers. Besides school staff, invite family members, students, and community members, including nonprofit leaders and business leaders to participate.

Support policy change for impact

Connect with existing local educational reform movements to channel resources toward a college-focused center in the high school. The case can be made that college centers at high schools contribute to improved academic standards, advance the diversity goals of local universities, and encourage greater higher education involvement with secondary schools.

Engage staff from local higher education institutions in the centers. Informal connections can be formalized and deepened through institutional policy support that allows community college or university staff time to spend more time working with local high schools.

Explore policy opportunities at local higher education institutions that could result in waived fees for college applications, college entrance exams, college preparatory classes, etc.

For more research and good practices for developing a college-focused center, please see:

www.collegeaccess.org/NCAN/ The National College Access Network website provides information about college access programs around the country.

www.pathwaystocollege.net/collegereadiness/toolbox/index.asp The College Readiness for All Toolbox provides resources to support the efforts of educators, counselors, outreach professionals, and policymakers.

To learn about the experience of developing a college-going center, please contact the following ENLACE sites:

New Mexico State University – Las Cruces, New Mexico
<http://www.nmsu.edu/~senlace>

Santa Ana College – Santa Ana, California
www.sac.edu/community/partnerships/enlace/

Texas St. Edward's University – Austin, Texas
www.idra.org/enlace/stedwards



**W.K. KELLOGG
 FOUNDATION**

One Michigan
 Avenue East
 Battle Creek, MI
 49017-4012
 USA
 269-968-1611
 TDD on site
 Facsimile: 269-968-0413
www.wkcf.org