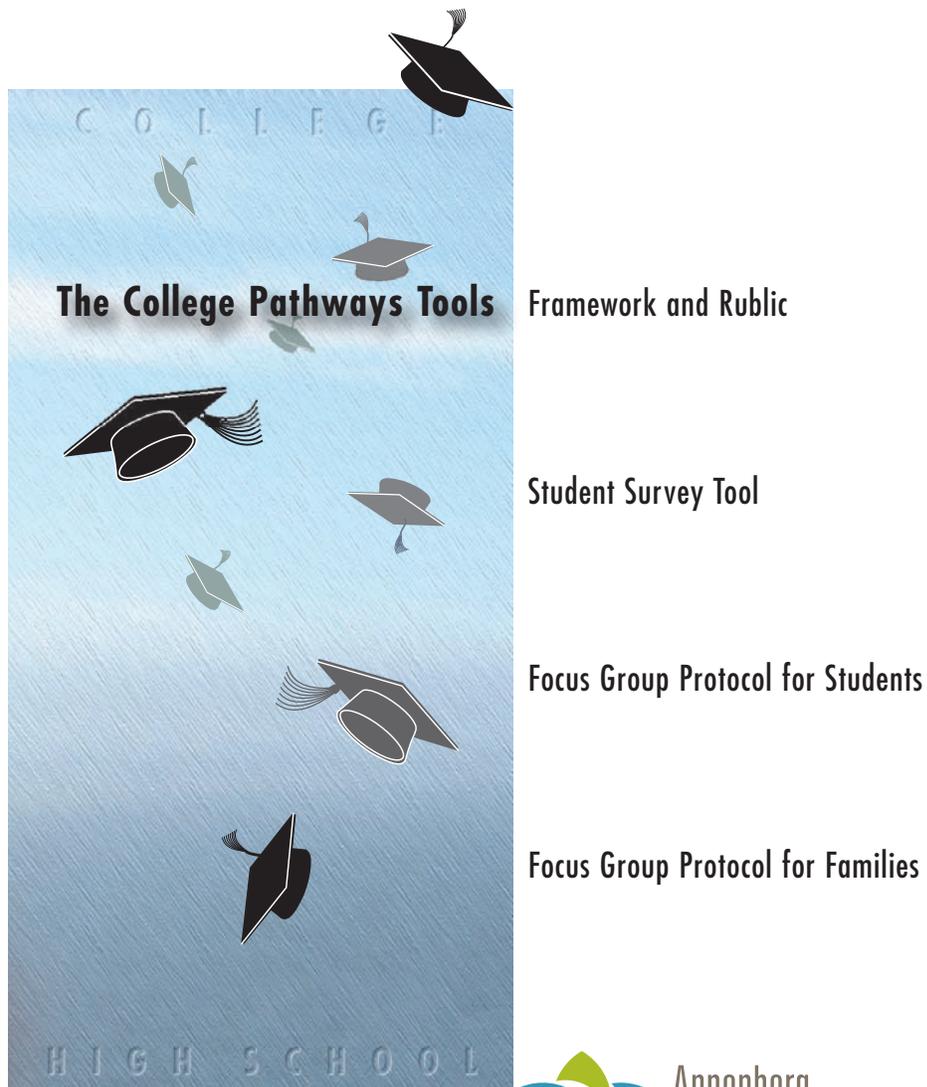


Putting Kids on the Pathway to College

How Is Your School Doing?



Annenberg
Institute for
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY



Putting Kids on the Pathway to College Framework and Rubric

developed by Carol Ascher, Anne T. Henderson, and Cindy Maguire

How well is your high school preparing students, especially low-income students, to graduate on time, ready for college-level work, and with a college or technical school acceptance letter in hand? The College Pathways series (see sidebar) is designed to help schools answer that question, as well as understand and adopt practices that researchers have identified as common to high schools that graduate a high percentage of low-income students and send them on to college.

The tools in this series are intended to be used together in order to involve the full school community – educators, families, students, and community members – in assessing your school’s efforts and finding ways to strengthen them. The tools are: a framework and rubric to help assess how well your school’s practices align with practices in high-performing high schools; a survey to gather data on students’ perspectives; and focus group protocols for students and families to deepen understanding and help people learn from each other. All the tools have been field tested.

About the Rubric

The tool presents four key components, along with indicators of good practice, found in a group of high schools whose low-income students of color are “beating the odds”: although they entered ninth grade with well-below-grade-level skills and test scores, almost 70 percent of these students graduate four years later planning to attend college or technical school (see sidebar).

Key Components: The key components of the tool are based on findings in the literature on high school improvement, as well as on actual practice

and on interviews with students and educators in the schools in the Beating the Odds (BTO) study.

The four key components are:

- Academic rigor
- A network of timely supports
- A culture of college access
- Effective use of data

How the College Pathways Series Was Developed

The College Pathways series grew out of the findings in *Beating the Odds*, a study of thirteen high-performing New York City high schools by Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Each of the schools admitted ninth-graders with high poverty rates and far-below-average reading and math scores but produced four-year graduation rates and college acceptance above the district average, and well above other high schools serving similar students.

To help other schools benefit from what these schools have learned, the Annenberg Institute has developed a set of tools that schools can use to assess their status in the key component areas and to strengthen their practices to put all their students on a path-way to college.

The *Beating the Odds* study and the full set of tools (Rubric, Student Survey and Focus Group Protocol, and Parent Focus Group Protocol) are available at: www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/BTO.php

Indicators of Good Practice: For each key component, there is a set of indicators that define good practice. The eighteen indicators are based on findings from Beating the Odds.

Structure of the Tool

There are five parts to this tool:

1. A **framework** that identifies indicators of good practice for each of the four key components based on the general practices and programs observed in the BTO schools in their efforts to reach all students.
2. A **rubric** that describes three levels of performance, or evidence of implementation, for each indicator, ranging from practices that reach all students to those at the beginning stages.
3. Examples of **practices and programs** at the BTO schools that help students achieve strong results.
4. A **blank rubric** for use in a self-assessment, listing the indicators with space for recording evidence of implementation in your school.
5. A short **resource directory** with links to more information about practices or programs being used in the BTO schools, College Pathways programs, and useful publications or resources.

Suggested Uses

The College Pathways Rubric is an information and assessment tool that can inform the thinking of stakeholders interested in improving high school performance. It can also be used to evaluate the extent to which a school has adopted effective practices in the four key components.

The blank rubric can be used to map where your school's practice falls. For example, a school improvement team could use the rubric to assess their school's college pathways program.

Audiences

The College Pathways Rubric has been designed for use by school improvement teams, school reform organizations, district staff, teacher unions and associations, professional development specialists, researchers, student organizations, community organizers, district leaders, and policy-makers.

Framework for the College Pathways Rubric

Indicators of Good Practice

I. Promoting Academic Rigor

1. **Shared standards for rigor** in courses are developed and maintained through ongoing faculty meetings and professional development.
2. **Uniform course content and teaching quality are monitored** and supported through classroom visits by the principal, teacher colleagues, and other instructional leaders.
3. Students are offered **college prep and AP classes**, as well as **tech/career courses with academic content**.
4. **Students' progress is closely monitored**.

II. A Network of Timely Supports

5. The teacher role is expanded to make an **adult available to every student**.
6. Advisories or other structure(s) include **detailed college-going and career objectives** so that students understand how to reach their post-secondary education goals.
7. There is a structure that **coordinates academic and technical courses with requirements for college**, post-secondary technical education, and future careers.
8. **Timely, short-term interventions** – such as tutoring, extra assistance, and extended-day, -week, and -year programs – **allow students to catch up** quickly.
9. Multiple **strategies** are offered to **improve students' test-taking skills**.

III. A Culture of College Access

10. Students (and families) are exposed to college through college visits and college fairs.
11. **Parents are involved** in planning and supporting the goal of attending college.

12. **Information on required tests and courses, college admissions process, financial aid, and specific colleges in the area is available to students (and families)** including undocumented students, starting in ninth grade.
13. There is a **“college office”** or other place for students (and families) **to get information, fill out applications, and receive counseling on attending college**.
14. **Visits by community members, graduates, and college reps** show students the possibility and value of going to college.

IV. Effective Use of Data

15. Staff **track four- and five-year graduation rates, and percentages of students applying to, and attending, two- and four-year colleges**.
16. **PSAT/NMSQT and SAT/ACT test-taking rates are monitored**.
17. **Data on financial aid and test scores are received by students**.
18. The school keeps **track of graduates' experiences and retention rates in the different colleges they attend**.

The College Pathways Rubric

Evidence of Implementation

The rubric illustrates three levels of performance for each of the College Pathways indicators. The descriptions are based on the extent to which individual BTO schools have adopted practices

associated with strong results; because not all BTO schools have fully implemented each of the indicators, their practice ranges across the rubric.

I. Promoting Academic Rigor

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
1. Shared standards for rigor in courses are developed and maintained through ongoing faculty meetings and professional development.	The school has set standards for curriculum rigor and student work across all disciplines and provides professional development to reinforce the standards.	The school has developed common standards for a cluster of two or more subjects, with the aim of expanding to all disciplines.	The school is still developing agreement about what high-level student work looks like.
2. Uniform course content and teaching quality are monitored and supported through classroom visits by the principal, teacher colleagues, and other instructional leaders.	Administrators visit classrooms and use data to identify: effective faculty, students needing additional help, and weak curriculum and instruction.	Staff are developing practices to assess quality teaching, such as visiting each other's classrooms.	Staff collaborate informally to learn from each other and discuss improving teaching practice.
3. Students are offered college prep and AP classes , as well as tech/career courses with academic content .	The school offers at least two AP courses and/or opportunities to earn college credit by attending courses in local colleges. All students feel encouraged to attend college or postsecondary education.	College-prep classes are available to many, but not all, students. Students are encouraged to take classes in a community college if advanced-level classes in that subject are not offered at the school.	Higher-level classes are being phased in over time.
4. Students' progress is closely monitored.	School staff keep close track of each student's progress (often using computerized systems) and intervene quickly and efficiently when difficulties arise.	Staff are doing their best to keep track of students, such as reviewing all report cards and transcripts.	Staff are working to develop some systems for monitoring students.

II. A Network of Timely Supports

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
5. The teacher role is expanded to make an adult available to every student.	Staff are organized to ensure that no student's academic, behavioral or personal needs go unnoticed. There is a structure for assigning each student to one or more adults on campus.	The school is finding mentors for students from different sources, including community organizations.	The school is beginning to be aware of the need for personalized attention, and some faculty "keep an eye on" certain students.
6. Advisories or other structure(s) include detailed college-going and career objectives so that students understand how to reach their postsecondary education goals.	Preparing students for graduation and college goes well beyond classroom teaching, to providing tutoring, mentoring, counseling and other means to maintain close relationships.	College/other options are discussed regularly with all students.	College/other options are discussed with many students at some point.
7. There is a structure that coordinates academic and technical courses with requirements for college, post-secondary technical education, and future careers.	Different paths are presented to students, including moving directly into a job after high school, attending college after working first, and going directly to college.	Information about college and career options given at different times, starting in ninth grade.	The school is still grappling with how to present college/career options.
8. Timely, short-term interventions – such as tutoring, extra assistance, and extended-day, -week, and -year programs – allow students to catch up quickly.	A range of interventions starts with programs to assess skills of incoming ninth grade. A "recovery system" offers short catch-up classes, allowing students to return quickly to (and succeed in) the assigned course.	Many interventions are offered before, during and after school, but not through a systematic program.	Few interventions are offered.
9. Multiple strategies are offered to improve students' test-taking skills.	Students have many opportunities to prepare for and take the Regents' exams and SAT/PSAT tests, starting in ninth and tenth grades.	Opportunities to prep for tests reach most students and are focused on eleventh and twelfth grades.	There are some opportunities for test prep assistance just before tests are to be taken.

III. A Culture of College Access

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
10. Students (and families) are exposed to college through college visits and college fairs.	The school hosts annual college and career fairs and sponsors college visits for all students. Direct linkages to specific colleges (including former students) offer clear options. The school also works with organizations that mentor students to attend college.	Events and activities such as college fair and overnight trips to expose students to college are offered to students.	Exposure to college is limited to certain students.
11. Parents are involved in planning and supporting the goal of attending college.	The school understands that parents' support for college-going is critical and offers parent nights, workshops, and assistance with financial aid applications.	The school makes several attempts to reach out and inform parents.	The school has sporadic contact with parents.
12. Information on required tests and courses, college admissions process, financial aid, and specific colleges in the area is available to students (and families) including undocumented students, starting in ninth grade.	The school makes it clear to new ninth-graders that the next four years will involve disciplined academic work aimed at graduation and post-secondary education. All faculty emphasize that serious careers depend on post-high school education and specify which programs are needed for specific careers.	The school gets out information about college over time. Most faculty emphasize the importance of college with students.	Serious information about college starts in eleventh grade, or with students most likely to succeed in college.
13. There is a "college office" or other place for students (and families) to get information, fill out applications, and receive counseling on attending college.	The school devotes a prominent physical space to the college-going process. This includes a college counseling office that shows pictures of colleges and offers a quiet, supportive space where students can work on their applications.	School promotes college in various ways, including visits to students in class.	The school has a counselor students can approach.
14. Visits by community members, graduates, and college reps show students the possibility and value of going to college.	The school is connected to community organizations, which provide critical resources such as service-learning, grant-writing, and mentoring.	Community connections offer helpful resources.	Contacts with community groups and alumni are sporadic.

IV. Effective Use of Data

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
15. Staff track four- and five-year graduation rates, and percentages of students applying to, and attending, two- and four-year colleges.	The school uses data to strengthen programs and practice, as well as analyzes graduation rates and reviews other data to keep track of students and inform their programs.	The school collects data and uses it as needed to track informally how students are progressing in the application process.	The school collects data and information but doesn't share it with teachers.
16. PSAT/NMSQT and SAT/ACT test-taking rates are monitored.	The school keeps track of students' PSAT and SAT test-taking rates and results. This information is used to design test-taking skills classes.	The school makes sure tests are given.	The school finds it difficult to keep track of who takes what tests.
17. Data on financial aid and test scores are received by students.	The school keeps close records on financial aid and scholarships for students.	The school is trying to collect some data on test results and financial aid.	The school's efforts are sporadic.
18. The school keeps track of graduates' experiences and retention rates in the different colleges they attend.	The school tracks percentages of students who apply to two- and four-year colleges, tries to stay in touch with graduates about how they're doing.	The school is concerned that they do not have a systematic way to collect this information.	The school has sporadic contact with graduates.

Practices and Programs

Supporting the Key Components and Their Indicators

These examples from the schools in the BTO study illustrate specific ways that they have implemented practices and programs that support the key components. Phrases in bold are further described in the Resource Directory.

I. Promoting Academic Rigor

1. Shared standards for rigor

- Grade-level and department meetings are held specifically to develop and sustain the standards.
- Staff retreats and professional development reinforce standards.
- Principal clearly expects that “All teachers will come to school prepared and spend time skill-building.”
- Shared rubrics for rigor are used across departments and grade levels.
- Accountable talk and the workshop model are used across classrooms.
- An expo is held twice a year to feature quality student work across all grades.

2. Monitoring of course content and quality

- Principal visits classrooms regularly and conducts learning walk-throughs with faculty.
- All teachers use rubrics to assess student work.
- The assistant principal supervises all subject areas.
- The entire staff conducts learning walk-throughs.
- Teacher observations make sure the workshop model is followed.
- Teachers are involved in curriculum design.

3. Offering college prep and AP classes plus academic content in tech/career courses

- The school’s stated goal is for all graduating seniors to have enough academic courses to qualify for college.
- All academic and voc-tech courses are at the college-prep level.
- Grades 9-10 do outside interviews with professionals in their field, then create and do a PowerPoint presentation about what they’ve learned.
- Shop classes ask students to do essay questions, research papers, essays, and reports.
- Students are encouraged and supported to go to local Community College for advanced classes not offered at the school.
- Special Ed students get job placements, then are prepared to go on to community college.
- A peer-judged science fair is held each year in every grade.

4. Monitoring all students’ progress

- Counselor and college advisor closely track specific groups of students. “Both students and teachers’ teaching are on the radar screen.”
- Credit accumulation is watched closely by counselors and home room teachers.
- Struggling students meet weekly with advisors.
- Assistant principal monitors courses and departments where students struggle, then takes action.
- Counselor and principal review report cards every marking period and transcripts at end of year.

- Counselors track their own specific groups of students for four full years.
- School has an on-line program for grade team members to track students' progress.

II. A Network of Timely Supports

5. An adult is available to every student

- The school mission says and means: All students have a caring adult they can turn to at any time.
- The school works with a community program to match African American boys with mentors.
- Each teacher is asked to reach out to five students and, as a result, identify those who need help.
- The coordinator of student activities lives in the community and is the “mother figure” at the school.
- A partnership with a local foundation helps students via mentoring, goal setting, community service, and coaching through the college application process.
- Curriculum advisories (called “pit crew”) meet weekly for forty-five minutes with freshmen.
- Teachers do academic and extra-curricular activities and coordinate conflict resolution.

6. Advisory/other structure promotes college and career objectives

- The school is billed as “college prep” and it is unacceptable for a teacher to say a student can't learn. “Our message: it's not whether you'll go to college, but where you will go.”
- School intentionally hires teachers with multiple skills and interests to sponsor after-school clubs and other activities.
- Advisory system meets with students once a week, to track attendance and academic progress, and to talk about college.

- Ninth-graders' names are sent to colleges, which send materials to students.
- All students have an advisor, who emphasizes social, learning and character goals, and offers college and career support.
- For students reluctant or unable to attend college, the school pursues partnerships with local businesses and community organizations such as Job Corps.
- A bulletin board displays college acceptance letters.

7. Coordination of academic and voc-tech courses with college-career strategies

- A large consortium of work-pre-apprenticeship programs has been developed with big unions for students with shop and academic skills.
- The school makes it clear: “If you want to move beyond laborer status, you need college.”
- Counseling for college and a career begins in the ninth grade.
- A Summer Bridge program for all incoming ninth-graders emphasizes college-prep skill building and careers.
- School covers educational requirements for specific careers in internships and when professionals visit school to talk with students.
- Staff have constant conversations about best strategies to encourage students and create effective programs.

8. Timely, short-term interventions

- Ninth-graders take a freshman survey to assess literacy, math, and science skills, and meet with advisor to assess needs.
- A Summer Bridge program for incoming ninth-graders is designed to prepare them for high school level work.
- Ninth-graders entering at low-performance levels take double math/English sections.

- All students are required to take a three-year sequence in a technical area.
- School offers a ten-week workshop intervention program in writing, global issues, and math.
- School offers after-school, summer school, Saturday academy, extra literacy classes, homework help, and credit recovery programs.
- Students failing all classes are referred to an academic recovery center that creates independent units where they can catch up.
- The Ramp-Up program covers literacy, math, organization and study skills.
- School does diagnostic testing one or two times a semester.
- School offers tutoring and peer tutoring during “lunch and learn.”
- To analyze how better to engage students, instructional coaches support core-subject teachers in weekly 3-hour blocks using student work.

9. Strategies to improve test-taking skills

- An eleventh-grade supplemental class called writing workshop is devoted to test prep.
- Regents prep classes are offered during the last period of the day.
- School offers Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) prep on Saturdays twice a year with all eleventh-graders, and PSAT prep for all tenth-graders.
- A bridge program works intensive test prep into block scheduling.
- Teachers take the Kaplan prep program and use it with their students for SAT and regents prep.

III. A Culture of College Access

10. Exposure to college for all students

- College visits made each year to several private and public schools. Students on each campus facilitate connections. While at these schools, students also visit five or six other universities.
- School hosts visits from colleges as well as a career day with professionals for all grades.
- College Now program covers both academic and technical courses.
- College Fair is held every year with seventy colleges, including Howard University. The school also holds a Hispanic college fair.
- Every student takes the PSAT.
- Annual one-week college tour to Black, Southern colleges, is funded by Colgate and other foundations.
- College trips are organized every year to local college with which school has a special relationship.
- Counselors lobby for undocumented students, steer them toward nonfederal scholarships.

11. Strategies to involve parents in goal of attending college

- School builds trust with families to overcome their reluctance to fill out financial aid forms with confidential information about family income.
- A “gifted” parent coordinator (an alumnus of the school) trains parents through parent academies.
- School hosts forums on financial aid for families.
- Family members serve as paraprofessionals and as informal liaisons between school and parents.
- Evening programs are offered for families on filling out college applications.

- Parents are invited to the college fair. In addition, advisors meet with parents four times a year and parents must pick up report cards at school. The school leadership team includes parents.
- The Freshman orientation, with its message of college prep for all students, includes parents.
- School held a financial aid fair for families and has a parent book club.
- Letters are sent home to parents to notify them on Regents test. Parent coordinator and counselor hold evening and weekend meetings for parents, bringing in experts on financial aid – almost half the parents attend.
- Parent coordinator reaches out to students first, then develops relations with families. He makes nightly phone calls when students are absent.
- Parent coordinator holds a workshop for parents about undocumented status and college access.

12. Information starting in ninth grade for all students

- Guidance counselors meet each year with students to sign off on transcripts. Letter goes home with transcript and describes what's missing.
- Technical students create passports to get into internships, which is a pre-college requirement for technical colleges.
- Starting at ninth-grade orientation, all students attend grade assemblies on tests, college admissions process and requirements, financial aid, area colleges, and requirements for specific careers. All students fill out graduation requirement forms with counselors.
- Guidance counselor is the “point person” for information on college, but info also given to advisors. The school has blocked military recruitment.

- College advisor (also the English teacher) and part-time counselor both help with essays. “Whatever needs to be done, we step up to do it.”
- English classes help students with college essays and help prep for applications and Regents’ test.

13. A “college office” or other place keeps students aware

- The college office has grown eight times in three years. A portfolio is created for each student.
- The college office visits senior classes, follows up with students’ families.
- College advisor has contacts and relationships with colleges.
- College office offers students direct connections with people in careers, who then emphasize college.
- Four weeks a year, English teachers give lessons on writing college essays.

14. Supports from college reps, community members, and graduates, to encourage college

- A partnership with local community college allows students to take college-level courses. Many service-learning placements with community-based organizations (CBOs) result in “large number of students” doing service learning.
- A ninth- and tenth-grade program invites alumni, parents, police, Con Edison, and other technical career representatives to come in and discuss the concept of a career and how to get there.
- Alumni return to speak with students, because the school stays in close contact with first and second cohort of students.
- A community group hosts a college fair, provides tutoring, and offers aid for college trips.
- School has identified fifty programs available with CBOs for service learning credits.

- Relationships with community organizations and businesses provide mentors for eleventh- and twelfth-grade students. “Service learning connects students to successful people, to see alternatives beyond pop culture messages.”

IV. Effective Use of Data

15. Tracking graduation rates and college application and attendance

- School tracks four- and five-year graduation rates, as well as college acceptance rates. Faculty meet to analyze test scores and data via school report cards and other sources.
- Student progress is tracked each marking period. The principal gets scores from teachers and tracks numbers of students applying to two- and four-year colleges.
- School has division of assessment and accountability to look at student data, including report cards and interim reports.
- School keeps a cohort book with every senior’s program and what they need to graduate. Students sign to acknowledge what they’re missing. “Students who become seniors make it.”
- Senior counselor tracks numbers of students applying to college.

16. Monitoring PSAT/NMSQT and SAT/ACT test-taking rates

- Every tenth-grade student at this school is required to take the PSAT.
- PSAT and SAT are given at the school; full-time guidance counselor works with seniors.

17. Data on students’ financial aid and test scores

- The school makes a “tremendous effort” to make sure forms go out and are filled out correctly.

18. Tracking graduates’ college experiences and retention rates

- Several schools “informally” keep track of graduates’ college experiences, through contacts with alumni and staff at colleges with which the school has a special relationship. Many graduates return to teach at the schools from which they graduated.

College Pathways Rubric

Self-Assessment

I. Promoting Academic Rigor

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
1. Shared standards for rigor are developed and maintained			
2. Course content and teaching quality are monitored			
3. College prep and AP classes,tech/career courses with academic content.			
4. Students' progress is closely monitored.			

II. A Network of Timely Supports

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
5. Adult available to every student.			
6. Detailed college-going and career objectives			
7. Coordinates academic and technical courses with requirements for college and careers			
8. Timely, short-term interventions allow students to catch up			
9. Strategies to improve test-taking skills.			

III. A Culture of College Access

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
10. Students exposed to college through visits and fairs.			
11. Parents involved in goal of attending college			
12. Information on tests admissions, financial aid, and colleges available to students			
13. "College office" to get information and counseling on attending college.			
14. Visits by community members, graduates, and college reps			

IV. Effective Use of Data

Indicators of Good Practice	Evidence of Implementation		
	REACHING ALL STUDENTS	REACHING MOST STUDENTS	BEGINNING STAGES
15. Track graduation rates, and percentages of students applying to colleges.			
16. PSAT/NMSQT and SAT/ACT test-taking rates monitored			
17. Data on financial aid and test scores received by students			
18. Track graduates' experiences and retention rates in college			

College Pathways Resource Directory

This directory provides information about specific programs and practices, online resources, and other information and resources.

1. Information about programs and practices highlighted in bold under Specific Practices in BTO Schools

Accountable Talk

According to the Institute for Learning in Pittsburgh, “accountable talk sharpens students’ thinking by reinforcing their ability to use and create knowledge.” Teachers develop accountable talk in their classrooms by modeling appropriate forms of discussion and by questioning, probing, and leading conversations. For example, teachers may press for clarification, require justifications of proposals, challenge misconceptions, or demand evidence for claims and arguments.

For more information, go to:
www.math.utep.edu/Faculty/duval/class/random/ifl.html and

<http://www.instituteforlearning.org/>

The workshop Model

According to Think/Quest NY City, the workshop model allows students to learn reading and writing skills through interactive participation. Instead of taking notes from a blackboard, students work together after a mini lesson on a specific reading or writing strategy. Students also learn from writing their own pieces of literature and reading novels that they choose.

For more information, go to:
www.tqnyc.org/NYCo52376/whatisworkshop_new.html

Learning Walk-through

A “Walk-Through” is when a principal makes a short (5-7 minutes) visit to every classroom in the school, focusing on a specific area for observation, announced ahead of time in the form of a question. Examples of questions include: “Is there enough teacher-student, student-teacher interaction?” “Is there evidence that multiple learning styles are being met?” After completing the “Walk-Through,” the principal analyzes the information and decides how to best help staff.

For an article in Scholastic Magazine, go to:

<http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=7440>

Ramp-Up Program

A component of the America’s Choice School Design program, Ramp-Up provides struggling readers entering middle and high school with daily instruction in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and skills. The program includes regular assessments of students’ reading progress and 500-book classroom libraries, to ensure that students are reading books appropriate for their reading levels.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.ncee.org>

College Now

A joint project of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the NYC Department of Education, College Now is a free program designed to prepare public high school students for college. In most cases, a public high school teams up with one or more of the

CUNY colleges to create a College Now partnership. The program offers academic courses, campus-based tours and cultural events, and scholarships.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/education/collegenow>

2. On-line information on College Pathways programs

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

College Access Now!

<http://www.collegeaccessnow.org/>

The College Access Now program identifies high school students who a) are economically disadvantaged; b) among the first-generation in their families to go to college and c) demonstrate potential and motivation to pursue higher education. Participants receive assistance in: SAT/ACT test preparation, the college admissions process, obtaining financial aid and scholarships; and transition to college.

College Center

<http://www.csocollegecenter.org/index.aspx>

CSO College Center is an initiative of Center for Student Opportunity, a nonprofit organization that works to fill the need for greater college counseling and preparation resources for first-generation and underserved college-bound students.

KnowHow2Go

<http://www.knowhow2go.org/index.php>

Low-income students and first generation college aspirants are underrepresented on college campuses. To turn these students' college dreams into action-oriented goals, the American Council on Education, Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Ad Council launched the KnowHow2GO campaign in January 2007. This multiyear, multimedia

effort includes TV, radio and outdoor public service advertisements (PSAs) that encourage 8th through 10th graders to prepare for college using four simple steps. To help students find real-time, on-the-ground assistance, KnowHow2GO links to a grassroots network of partners, including 10 state coalitions and 60 national partners.

National Association for College Admission Counseling

<http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/ProfessionalResources/Research/collegeaccessanddiversity.htm>

The National Association for College Admission Counseling supports the work of counseling and enrollment professionals as they help students make a successful transition to post-secondary education. The Web site offers links to several reports and studies about college access for students from diverse backgrounds.

National College Access Network

<http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCAN/index.aspx>

The mission of the National College Access Network (NCAN) is to improve access to and success in postsecondary education for first-generation, underrepresented and low-income students. The organization assists a network of state and local college access programs that provide counseling, advice, and financial assistance, by sharing best practices. It also helps communities create college access programs.

Pathways to College Network

<http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/index.html>

The Pathways to College Network is a national alliance of organizations that use research-based knowledge to improve postsecondary education access and success for the nation's underserved students. These include underrepresented minorities, low-income students, those who are the first in their families to go to college, and students with disabilities.

STATE PROGRAMS

Illinois College Access Network

<http://www.illinoiscan.org/>

The Illinois College Access Network (Illinois-CAN) links hundreds of college access providers that support a growing population of low-income and first-generation college students who face academic, financial and social support challenges to college access and success.

Massachusetts: ReadySetGoToCollege

<http://www.readysetgotocollege.com/index.htm>

ReadySetGoToCollege.com was developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education to improve high school graduation rates and increase college readiness. The campaign has three goals: 1) Restore the value of the high school diploma; 2) Close the achievement gap; 3) Use data to hold ourselves accountable. Funding from National Governors' Association was used to create an outreach campaign designed to generate public support around the need for greater college readiness.

Minnesota State University: College Access Program

<http://www.mnsu.edu/cultdiv/cap/>

College Access Programs (CAP) identify and recruit students who show promise of success, and provide support for the transition from high school to college. The program assists students in mastering subject matter, and building and improving basic skills for college success while still in high school, supplemented by a summer residential program. Components of the program include: planned activities to address the unique needs of urban and rural underrepresented students; after-school college prep seminars with information

on financial aid and college admission procedures; provisional admittance for high school seniors to Minnesota State University, Mankato; and a year-round advising and tutoring; a two-year academic performance contract with all of its students.

Ohio College Access Network

<http://www.ohiocan.org/>

O CAN is the first statewide coordinating body for college access programs in the nation. The organization is focused on helping Ohio residents pursue postsecondary education by building and supporting local college access programs throughout the state, through hands-on technical assistance, professional development and grant opportunities. Currently, 35 college access programs serve nearly 205 of Ohio's 612 school districts, touching 173,000 students annually.

Washington State: Dream Project

<https://depts.washington.edu/uwdrmprj/>

The Dream Project is a student-initiated high school outreach program that partners University of Washington students with first-generation and low-income students in Seattle area high schools. The partners help with the college admissions process, including SAT prep, applications, writing essays, applying for financial aid, and finding scholarships.

3. Other resources and information

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Ascher, Carol, and Cindy McGuire. 2007. *Beating the Odds: How Thirteen NYC Schools Bring Low-Performing Ninth-Graders to Timely Graduation and College Enrollment*. Available from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at
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Kirst, Michael, and Andrea Venezia. 2006. *Improving College Readiness and Success for All Students: A Joint Responsibility between K-12 and Postsecondary Education. A National Dialogue: The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Issue Paper*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: GPO. Available online at
www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/kirst-venezia.pdf

Scurry, Jamie E. 2004. *In Their Own Voices: Conversations with College Students from Underrepresented Populations*. The Futures Project: Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World. Providence, RI: Brown University. Available online at
www.futuresproject.org/publications/In_Their_Own_Voices.pdf



Putting Kids on the Pathway to College

Student Survey Tool

developed by Carol Ascher, Anne T. Henderson, and Sara McAlister

How well is your high school preparing students, especially low-income students, to graduate on time, ready for college-level work, and with a college or technical school acceptance letter in hand? The College Pathways series (see sidebar) is designed to help schools answer that question, as well as understand and adopt practices that researchers have identified as common to high schools that graduate a high percentage of low-income students and send them on to college.

The tools in this series are intended to be used together in order to involve the full school community – educators, families, students, and community members – in assessing your school’s efforts and finding ways to strengthen them. The tools are: a framework and rubric to help assess how well your school’s practices align with practices in high-performing high schools; a survey to gather data on students’ perspectives; and focus group protocols for students and families to deepen understanding and help people learn from each other. All the tools have been field tested.

About the Student Survey

Key Components This survey is aligned with the *College Pathways Rubric*, and both the survey and the rubric are based on findings from the study *Beating the Odds* (see sidebar).

The survey covers three key characteristics identified in a group of high schools whose low-income students of color have “beaten the odds” – almost 70 percent of students entering these schools graduate four years later planning to attend college or technical school. These schools all offered academically challenging classes and programs, timely supports

for students to do well, and a culture that emphasizes college or technical school.

How the College Pathways Series Was Developed

The College Pathways series grew out of the findings in *Beating the Odds*, a study of thirteen high-performing New York City high schools by Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Each of the schools admitted ninth-graders with high poverty rates and far-below-average reading and math scores but produced four-year graduation rates and college acceptance above the district average, and well above other high schools serving similar students.

The study identified four “key components” common to these “beat the odds” schools:

- Academic rigor
- A network of timely supports
- A culture of college access
- Effective use of data

To help other schools benefit from what these schools have learned, the Annenberg Institute has developed a set of tools that schools can use to assess their status in the key component areas and to strengthen their practices to put all their students on a path-way to college.

The *Beating the Odds* study and the full set of tools (Rubric, Student Survey and Focus Group Protocol, and Parent Focus Group Protocol) are available at: www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/BTO.php

Survey Questions In Section One of the survey, for each of these three key characteristics, students are asked to agree or disagree with several statements about their experience in school. Questions in Section Two ask about what programs the school offers to support students' timely graduation and preparation for college and about what they themselves find useful. In Section Three, for purposes of analysis, the survey asks students about their personal characteristics.

Administering the Survey The survey can be given on paper for students to fill out, or it can be entered into an online program such as Survey Monkey so that students can respond online. (The first method creates a paper record of what students said, an opportunity for them to express their thoughts on paper, and fewer logistical issues about access to computers; the second method makes it easier to administer and tally.) The survey can be given in a number of settings – at advisory period, in homeroom, during afterschool programs, or in community meetings.

Tallying the Data If the survey is given on paper, the data can be tallied by hand or entered in Survey Monkey, which will tally the results and give you a report. You will see the number of students who strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each question, and you can compare the responses of students from different ethnic groups, gender, age, grade, or home language.

Interpreting the Data To understand what the data suggest, you can ask a series of questions, such as:

1. Do students think they are being well prepared for college?
2. Do some groups of students agree that they have experienced high expectations, timely supports, and a college-prep culture more than other groups of students?
3. Which of the key components of the college pathways program appear to be stronger in students' experience?

4. Do students feel they are receiving enough support at school to do well?
5. What ideas do students have to improve the program?

A Student Project

Conducting this survey can be an excellent project for the student organization at your school, in collaboration with a school-improvement team, school governing council, or other initiative. Students can recruit their classmates to take the survey, enter the data into an online program, tally and analyze the results, and report on their findings.

Is Your School Creating a “Pathway to College”?

A Survey of Student Opinion

We want to know how well you think your school is preparing you to graduate on time, ready to begin college or technical school. We know you have a lot to say about your school, and this survey has been designed so that you can share your ideas in several ways.

The survey has three sections:

- In Section One, you’ll be asked to rate your level of agreement with a series of statements about your experiences in your school.
- In Section Two, you will have a chance to tell us which programs and supports are offered by your school and which you personally use, as well as what the school could do better.
- Section Three asks some questions about you in order to identify how different groups of students feel. This survey is anonymous – NOTHING in any part of the survey will identify you individually.

The survey begins on the next page.

Student Survey

Is Our School a “Pathway to College”?

SECTION ONE

Please check the box that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement below.

Challenging classes and programs	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I have to work hard to do well in my academic subjects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. My teachers don't believe I can do well in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I know how well I am doing in each of my academic classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Some of the courses offered at this school are really hard.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support to do well				
5. My teachers quickly notice if I have trouble learning something.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. It's hard to get teachers or other staff to explain schoolwork.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I have one special adult at school I can talk to about personal problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. My teachers know how I am doing in <i>all</i> my classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. If I do poorly on a test or part of a course, I know how to make up or relearn the work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A culture that leads to college or technical school				
10. I know which courses I still need to take before I can graduate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I feel comfortable asking a teacher or counselor about my grades or my program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. An adult at my school is assisting me in applying to colleges or technical school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. A lot of students at my school are discouraged about what it takes to graduate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I am confident that I will do well in college or technical school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION TWO

Below is a list of programs or activities your school may be offering to prepare you to graduate and go to college. Please check whether they are available at your school, and which ones you have used. The last item asks for your suggestions about what our school could do better.

	Available	I've Used It	Not Available
15. Help with improving my academic skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Test-taking preparation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Special help with tough classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Information on what's expected in college or technical school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Information on what life is really like in college or technical school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Someone I can talk to when I lose confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Tutoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Special makeup classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. What could your school do better to help you work toward graduation and college?			

SECTION THREE

Please tell us more about yourself.

24. Are you: male female

25. What school do you attend? _____

26. How old are you? _____

27. What grade are you in? _____

28. Are you in a college prep program? Yes No

29. Are you planning to attend college? Yes No

30. What is your race or ethnic background? (Check all that apply.)

Asian

African American

Latino/Hispanic

Native American

White

Other (please write in) _____

31. What language do you speak most often at home? (Check all that apply.)

English

Spanish

Other (please write in) _____

32. Please tell us more about what you think: Do you have other comments or suggestions about your school?



Putting Kids on the Pathway to College

Focus Group Protocol for Students

developed by Anne T. Henderson and Carol Ascher

How well is your high school preparing students, especially low-income students, to graduate on time ready for college-level work and with a college or technical school acceptance letter in hand? This tool is designed to help you find out what students think of your school's efforts and what they believe might facilitate their timely graduation and postsecondary study.

The tools in this series are intended to be used together in order to involve the full school community – educators, families, students, and community members – in assessing your school's efforts and finding ways to strengthen them. The tools are: a framework and rubric to help assess how well your school's practices align with practices in high-performing high schools; a survey to gather data on students' perspectives; and focus group protocols for students and families to deepen understanding and help people learn from each other. All the tools have been field tested.

About the Student Focus Group Protocol

A focus group discussion is a good way to find out what students really think about a topic. A small group of six to ten students at similar levels of schooling talking together can deepen understanding, develop ideas, and help people learn from each other. We recommend holding several of these discussions, with different groups of students.

A focus group is a “moderated conversation” of one-to-two hours about a specific topic – in this case, how well students think their school is preparing them to graduate and go to college. A

moderator asks a series of related, open-ended questions and keeps a record of the responses.

How the College Pathways Series Was Developed

The College Pathways series grew out of the findings in *Beating the Odds*, a study of thirteen high-performing New York City high schools by Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Each of the schools admitted ninth-graders with high poverty rates and far-below-average reading and math scores but produced four-year graduation rates and college acceptance above the district average, and well above other high schools serving similar students.

The study identified four “key components” common to these “beat the odds” schools:

- Academic rigor
- A network of timely supports
- A culture of college access
- Effective use of data

To help other schools benefit from what these schools have learned, the Annenberg Institute has developed a set of tools that schools can use to assess their status in the key component areas and to strengthen their practices to put all their students on a path-way to college.

The *Beating the Odds* study and the full set of tools (Rubric, Student Survey and Focus Group Protocol, and Parent Focus Group Protocol) are available at: www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/BTO.php

Conducting the Focus Groups

To understand how different students feel about what is offered at your school, you should hold a series of focus groups, each directed at students at similar points in their schooling.

On the following pages you'll find a protocol with a script for the focus group discussion. Start with the general questions, one at a time; use prompts (a few are suggested for each question) if the discussion lags or students get off track.

Tips on Moderating the Discussion

1. Be clear that the purpose of the focus group is to stimulate a discussion about
 - a. how students are experiencing the academic aspects of high school; and
 - b. how the school could do a better job of preparing them for timely graduation and for college or other postsecondary study.
2. Be sure to explain at the beginning of the meeting that confidentiality is important. Let the students know that no ideas will be attributed to specific students. Also, ask students to agree not to gossip later about what is said in the room.
3. To draw out the full range of opinions, or to see if an opinion is shared by others, you may need to stop the conversation and ask: "This person made this comment, what do other students think? Does anyone have a different take on this issue?" If someone has been quiet, ask if he or she would like to comment.
4. As the moderator, it's essential that you be neutral and that you make it safe for opinions to be expressed freely. Keep your own comments to a minimum. If there's a period of silence, keep quiet to allow others to think. Doing so can create space for more quiet people to respond.
5. Ask one question at a time. Make it clear that all opinions are welcome and will be respected. Give people at least 15 seconds to respond before using a prompt.

6. Start with the general questions and use the prompts to be more specific. To stimulate discussion, you can offer opposing positions on an issue that comes up. For example, you could say: "Some students think that algebra at this school is just for the smart kids, but others think all kids can do it. What do you think?"

Tips on the Process

1. It is useful to put up a sheet of chart paper for each question and ask a student to be the note-taker to record comments. This will enable students to see and reflect on what they have said.
2. If you are planning to audio-record the conversation, make sure you have enough microphones so that every speaker can be heard clearly.
3. Because you will be conducting several focus groups and will want to compare the results, make sure that the same questions are asked to each group.
4. If a teacher or counselor is part of the focus group, that person should be advised in advance not to correct what students say about the school, even if they may be wrong.
5. Student participants will want to know the results after all the groups are held. This would be an excellent topic for an article in the school newsletter or other reports and news bulletins.

Student Focus Group Protocol and Script

Welcome Participants and Introduce Yourself

Begin the session by welcoming everyone and introducing yourself and your co-facilitator/note-taker. Explain your role in the school community.

Explain the Purpose of the Discussion

SAY: “_____ School wants to improve the way it helps students graduate on time, ready for college or more education. The purpose of this discussion is to learn how you think the school is doing, in an atmosphere of safety and confidentiality, with no negative consequences to you or your school.”

Explain What You’re Going to Do and Ask Permission to Record

SAY: “We’re [or I’m] going to ask you a few questions about how the school has worked with you to support your success. We/I also want to hear your ideas about how the school could do a better job. This should take about one class period, or about an hour.

“We want to be sure that everyone feels free to speak his or her mind. Please listen to the ideas of others with an open mind and respect their privacy. What we say in this room should stay in this room – will you agree to do that?”

“With your permission, we’d like to tape our conversation and write down your thoughts and ideas on chart paper. Everything you say will be treated confidentially; no specific opinions will be attributed to any particular student. Is that OK?”

“Any questions before we get started?”

Ask Participants to Introduce Themselves

SAY: “Now, let’s go around the table [room/circle] and introduce ourselves – what is your first name, how long have you been in this school, and what are your plans after graduation?”

Begin the Discussion

Important: Wait at least 15 seconds after asking a question to give students time to respond. Use the prompts only if no one speaks up or to get the discussion back on track.

1. What things about your program at _____ School make you confident about graduating on time?

Prompts (use as needed)

Are your courses tough enough to prep you for college work?

Do your teachers expect enough of you?

Do they believe in you, and expect you to graduate?

Do you get the help you need when you need it?

Do you know how well you’re doing in your classes, and exactly what you still need to graduate?

2. What things about your program at _____ School make you worried about graduating on time?

Prompts

Are your courses tough enough to prep you for college work?

Do your teachers expect enough of you?

Do they believe in you, and expect you to graduate?

Do you get the help you need when you need it?

Do you know how well you're doing in your classes, and exactly what you still need to graduate?

3. What things about your program at _____ School make you confident about going on to college or a technical school?

Prompts

Do you feel your courses are preparing you for college level or other post-secondary work?

Do you know what will be expected of you when you get to college?

Have you been told about the academic help you can get once you're in college?

Do you know the courses you need to get into the college program that interests you?

4. What things about your program at _____ School make you worried about going on to college or a technical school?

Prompts

Do you feel your courses are preparing you for college level or other post-secondary work?

Do you know what will be expected of you when you get to college?

Have you been told about the academic help you can get once you're in college?

Do you know the courses you need to get into the college program that interests you?

5. How could _____ School make it easier for you to graduate and feel prepared for college or technical school?

Prompts

Understanding what it's really like at college or at a technical school?

Thinking about where to apply?

Understanding the programs that are available and what would work for you?

Helping to find the money you need?

Helping with your applications?

6. What do your parents know about what you need to graduate and be prepared for college?

Prompts

Knowing about coursework or credits you need?

Understanding how much it will cost to go to college?

Familiar with the education needed to go on to your chosen career?

Close the Discussion

Assure students that their ideas will be useful. For example, they might be reported to the school improvement team, the student organization, and the parent organization, and a short report might be posted on the school Web site.

Remind students that no one's ideas will be identified by name.

Thank them for participating.



Putting Kids on the Pathway to College

Focus Group Protocol for Families

developed by Anne T. Henderson, Kavitha Mediratta, Carol Ascher, and Sara McAlister

How well is your high school preparing students, especially low-income students, to graduate on time, ready for college-level work, and with a college or technical school acceptance letter in hand? The College Pathways series (see sidebar) is designed to help schools answer that question, as well as understand and adopt practices that researchers have identified as common to high schools that graduate a high percentage of low-income students and send them on to college.

The tools in this series are intended to be used together in order to involve the full school community – educators, families, students, and community members – in assessing your school’s efforts and finding ways to strengthen them. The tools are: a framework and rubric to help assess how well your school’s practices align with practices in high-performing high schools; a survey to gather data on students’ perspectives; and focus group protocols for students and families to deepen understanding and help people learn from each other. All the tools have been field tested.

About the Families Focus Group Protocol

The tool includes a short parent survey that can be used as a handout. A focus group discussion is a good way to find out what people really think about a topic. A small group of six to ten people with a common interest, such as their children’s education, talking together can deepen understanding, develop ideas, and help people learn from each other.

A focus group is a “moderated conversation” of one-to-two hours about a specific topic – in this case, how well families think their children’s school is preparing them to graduate and go to

college. A moderator asks a series of related, open-ended questions and keeps a record of the responses.

How the College Pathways Series Was Developed

The College Pathways series grew out of the findings in *Beating the Odds*, a study of thirteen high-performing New York City high schools by Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Each of the schools admitted ninth-graders with high poverty rates and far-below-average reading and math scores but produced four-year graduation rates and college acceptance above the district average, and well above other high schools serving similar students.

The study identified four “key components” common to these “beat the odds” schools:

- Academic rigor
- A network of timely supports
- A culture of college access
- Effective use of data

To help other schools benefit from what these schools have learned, the Annenberg Institute has developed a set of tools that schools can use to assess their status in the key component areas and to strengthen their practices to put all their students on a path-way to college.

The *Beating the Odds* study and the full set of tools (Rubric, Student Survey and Focus Group Protocol, and Parent Focus Group Protocol) are available at: www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/BTO.php

Conducting the Focus Groups

To understand how different families feel about what is offered at your school, we suggest holding a series of focus groups, each directed at families with similar backgrounds. To reach these families, you will probably need to have some meetings in the neighborhoods where they live. If you have partnerships with community groups or religious organizations, they can invite people who have students in your school to their facility. Just make sure that each group is no more than ten people.

You can also ask your parent organization to sponsor a focus group at the school. To reach out beyond the most involved parents, it may be useful to ask a parent coordinator or other staff member who works with families to help you reach out. You will get more experienced responses from parents whose children have been in the school more than a year. If you want to find out how new families are responding to your activities and programs, do a special group for them.

Following the tips below, you'll find a protocol with a script for the focus group discussion. Start with the general questions, one at a time; use prompts (a few are suggested for each question) if the discussion lags or people get off track.

Tips on Moderating the Discussion

1. Be clear that the purpose of the focus group is to stimulate a discussion about
 - a. how well families think their school is preparing their students to graduate and go to college, and
 - b. how they, as family members, feel they can be most useful in supporting their children's success.
2. Be sure to explain to participants at the beginning of the meeting that everything they say will be treated confidentially. Their ideas will not be attributed to them without their permission. Also ask people to agree not to gossip later about what is said in the room.

3. To draw out the full range of opinions, or to see if an opinion is shared by others, you may need to stop the conversation and ask: "This person made this comment, what do others think? Does anyone have a different take on this issue?" If someone has been quiet, ask if they would like to comment.
4. As the moderator, it's essential that you be neutral, and that you make it safe for opinions to be expressed freely. Keep your own comments to a minimum. If there's a period of silence, keep quiet to allow others to think. Doing so can create space for more quiet people to respond.
5. Ask one question at a time. Make it clear that all opinions are welcome and will be respected. Give people at least 15 seconds to respond before using a prompt.
6. Start with the general questions and use the prompts to be more specific. To stimulate discussion, you can offer opposing positions on an issue that comes up. For example, you could say: "Some people think the college prep program at this school is just for the better-off kids, but others think that it's for all kids. What do you think?"
7. You can end the focus group by passing out the parent survey and asking parents to check where they think the school is in each area. This will give you additional data from parents.

Tips on the Process

1. If the group is larger than ten people, it can be broken into smaller groups that discuss each question and then report back to the larger group.
2. It is useful to put up a sheet of chart paper for each question and assign a note-taker to record comments. This will enable participants to see and reflect on what they have said.

3. If you are planning to audio-record the conversation, make sure you have enough microphones so that every speaker can be heard clearly.
4. Because you will be conducting several focus groups and will want to compare the results, make sure that the same questions are asked to each group.
5. If a parent coordinator is part of the focus group, that person should be advised in advance not to correct what parents say about the activities offered by the school, even if they may be wrong.
6. Although this focus group is for parents, the attendance of a few students can enrich the discussion. So feel free to include students, if they come with their parents. But make clear that the point is to hear from parents.
7. The participants will want to know the results after all the groups are held. This would be an excellent topic for a parent group meeting or an article in the school newsletter or other reports and news bulletins.

Families Focus Group

Protocol and Script

Welcome Participants and Introduce Yourself

Begin the session by welcoming everyone and introducing yourself and your co-facilitator/note-taker. Explain your role in the school community.

Explain the Purpose of the Discussion

SAY: “_____ School is committed to working more closely with families to help all students graduate on time, ready for college or more education. We want to learn from you about how to do a better job of this. The purpose of this discussion is to learn how you think the school is doing, in an atmosphere of safety and confidentiality, with no negative consequences to you or your school. All ideas are welcome and will be treated with respect.”

Explain What You’re Going to Do and Ask Permission to Record

SAY: “We’re [or I’m] going to ask you a few questions about how _____ School is preparing your students, and how well the school has worked with you to support your students’ success. This should take about an hour and a half – or maybe two hours if you have a lot of ideas!

“We want to be sure that everyone feels free to speak his or her mind. Please listen to the ideas of others with an open mind and respect their privacy. What we say in this room should stay in this room – will you agree to do that?”

“With your permission, we’d like to tape our conversation and write down your thoughts and ideas on chart paper. Everything you say will be treated confidentially; no specific opinions will be attributed to any particular person, unless you first give us explicit permission. Is that OK?”

“Any questions before we get started?”

Ask Participants to Introduce Themselves

SAY: “Now, tell us a little something about you. Let’s go around the table [room/circle] and introduce ourselves – what is your first name, how many children do you have in the school, and what grade(s) are they in?”

Begin the Discussion

Important: Wait at least 15 seconds after asking a question to give people time to respond. Use the prompts only if no one speaks up or to get the discussion back on track.

1. How well do you think _____ School is preparing students to graduate with the academic background necessary for college?

Prompts (use as needed)

Does the principal talk to you about the importance of graduating and going to college? Do your child's teachers? Does your child?
What do they [the principal, teachers, your son or daughter] say?
What else could the school be doing? Why do you think that?

2. Do you think that your sons and daughters are being pushed hard enough to do their best work at _____ School?

Prompts

Does your son or daughter do a lot of homework? Does he or she feel they are doing too little or too much?
How do you know?
How could your kids be pushed harder?

3. What are the major barriers to your child going to college?

Prompts

Are the barriers academic, financial, other?
Does your child seem interested in college?
Do you see going to college as something that is important for your children?
What would make going to college easier?

4. How has _____ School reached out to you to make sure your son or daughter graduates promptly and goes to college?

Prompts

Do the teachers or counselors keep you up to date on how your kids are doing?
Does the school let you know what classes your child should be taking?
What other ways do you think you could help?

5. What could _____ School do better to help you make sure your son or daughter graduates promptly and goes to college?

Prompts

Offer information on, or trips to, colleges?
Inform you about financial aid?
Help you fill out forms?

Close the Discussion

It may be useful to close by handing out the Parent Survey, "How Well Is Your School Preparing Students for College?" which is part of the tool set. Parents can fill it out at the meeting and discuss it briefly and/or take it home to discuss further with their families.

Thank parents for participating.

Where appropriate, assure them that their ideas will be reported to the school improvement team and/or the parent organization, and that a short report will be posted on the school Web site.

How well is our high school PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE?

Is our high school doing enough to prepare students to graduate on time ready for college-level work – and with a college or technical school acceptance letter in hand? We want you to help us answer that question.

The discussion you participated in was based on a study of thirteen high-performing New York City high schools (*Beating the Odds*, by Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire). These schools have four-year graduation rates and college attendance above the district average. The chart below shows four qualities these schools shared and what you can look for in our school.

Effective schools...	What's happening at our school?
1. Have high expectations and challenging classes for all students. 	<input type="checkbox"/> All classes are rigorous and challenging. <input type="checkbox"/> All students take college prep and AP classes, even if they're in a tech/career program. <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers and counselors watch carefully to make sure students don't fall behind.
2. Provide timely supports to help students catch up. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Each student has an adult at school they can talk to. <input type="checkbox"/> Counselors or advisors help students set detailed plans so they can reach the goal of going to college. <input type="checkbox"/> Students get help when they need it so they can catch up quickly. <input type="checkbox"/> Students get lots of chances to improve their test-taking skills.
3. Create a college-going climate 	<input type="checkbox"/> Students and parents are invited to visit colleges and/or attend college fairs. <input type="checkbox"/> The school asks you to help plan and support your student's goal of going to college. <input type="checkbox"/> You and your student get good information about tests, courses, applications and choosing a college. <input type="checkbox"/> The school has a "college office" where you can get help and information.
4. Closely track how each student is doing. 	<input type="checkbox"/> The school lets you know what percent of its students graduate and go on to college. <input type="checkbox"/> The school keeps track of how its graduates do when they go to college. <input type="checkbox"/> The school gives you information about how students do on the college tests like the SAT.

More information about the *Beating the Odds* study (published by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University) can be found at: <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/BTO.php>