

Building Capacity for College Readiness Indicator Systems

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As schools and districts face new, higher national expectations for college readiness, they must develop better ways of identifying students who are struggling and connect them to supports.

Over the last decade, a growing consensus has developed that for our nation’s students to succeed in twenty-first-century economic and civic life, high school graduation is no longer sufficient. Labor-market analyses have shown that high-wage positions increasingly require postsecondary education and training, and students must now graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college and career. In response to these changes in the economy and labor force, policies are being adopted across the country such as the Common Core State Standards and accompanying assessments. These standards, to be implemented in 2014 in most states, codify the new skills required for students to be proficient in mathematics and English language arts.

The codification of these broad college and career aspirations into policy opens up the possibility of a new era of equity, in which all students, including those who have historically been poorly served by the public education system, have the same access to and preparation for higher education that affluent families take for granted. At the same time, the new requirements present a colossal challenge to school systems. Not only must they get better at identifying which students are struggling, they must figure out how to use that information to support those students.

THE COLLEGE READINESS INDICATOR SYSTEMS INITIATIVE

Three years ago, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (AISR) joined two other university-based partners – the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University (Gardner Center) and the University of Chicago Consortium for Chicago School Research (CCSR) – and five urban sites,¹ with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to address these challenges. The goal of the College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS) initiative was to develop a model for systems that would not only generate data

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¹ In addition to the work in four sites described in this issue of VUE, AISR conducted research on partnerships for college readiness in the School District of Philadelphia. See <http://annenberginstitute.org/publication/partnerships-college-readiness>.

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for districts on whether each student was on track for college readiness, but would also tie those data to supports and interventions that would help keep students on track.

We reported on the early work of the CRIS project in the Fall 2012 issue of *Voices in Urban Education (VUE 35) – College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS): Building Effective Supports for Students*.² At that time, the four school districts and one school support network involved in CRIS – Dallas Independent School District, New Visions for Public Schools in New York City, the School District of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh Public Schools, and San Jose Unified School District – were collecting and analyzing large amounts of information about their students and schools. Several of them, including Dallas and New Visions, had identified key indicators for students veering off-track to graduate high school, such as course failures in ninth grade and poor attendance. Others, such as San Jose, had created a culture of high expectations for students where the district had adopted a college-ready “A–G curriculum”³ and reduced barriers to students wanting to take Advanced Placement courses. Still others had been building community support for college readiness. In Pittsburgh, for instance, the nonprofit community organization Pittsburgh Promise guarantees college scholarships for all the district’s high school graduates who meet the academic criteria.

LESSONS LEARNED

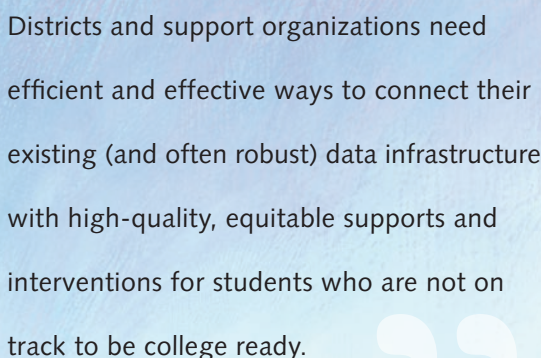
Over the past year, the development of our sites’ work and the work of the project’s institutional partners – AISR, the Gardner Center, and CCSR – has deepened. We collectively understand the urgency that higher standards, reflected

in the Common Core, demand of our teachers and students. We recognize that districts and support organizations need efficient and effective ways to connect their existing (and often robust) data infrastructure with high-quality, equitable supports and interventions for students who are not on track to be college ready.

And we believe that districts and schools cannot do this work alone. There is a wealth of resources and expertise on college readiness in community-based organizations, local higher education institutions, civic agencies, and the broader community that often goes untapped.

But engaging and enlarging the circle

of local supports can broaden the notion of “system leadership” beyond the K–12 system, as well as build mutual and shared accountability for our young people’s success in college and the workforce.



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² VUE 35 is available online at <http://vue.annenberginstitute.org/issues/35>.

³ The A–G curriculum is a series of college preparatory courses that high school students must take to enter the University of California and California State University systems (see collegetools.berkeley.edu/resources.php?cat_id=22).

The contributions to this issue of *Voices in Urban Education* reflect the lessons of three years of work on the CRIS project. Collectively, they frame our current understanding of college readiness and show how college readiness indicator systems are being infused into the day-to-day work and culture of our sites.

The issue begins with the view from the sites where CRIS is being implemented on the ground.

- Shane Hall, CRIS site liaison for Dallas Independent School District, discusses the district's long history of developing college readiness indicators, the impact of new district leadership and community-driven organizations on preparing young people for college and career, and several district schools' pilot testing of new interventions to raise students' college knowledge. Jayda Batchelder and Courtnee Benford add an additional perspective from Education Opens Doors, a grassroots nonprofit in Dallas that aims to address the opportunity gap in students' college knowledge and "soft skills."
- Jared Carrano, CRIS site liaison for New Visions for Public Schools, notes his organization's unique perspective as a school support organization that provides district-like support services to a network of schools in New York City, and he describes how New Visions is linking academic tenacity to the Common Core. Daniel Voloch of iMentor describes his community-based organization's college readiness support for the city's students through an ambitious mentoring program.
- Peter Lavorini, CRIS site liaison for Pittsburgh Public Schools, writes forthrightly about his district's longstanding challenge of moving beyond easily collected data and the district's work with other local community partners to leverage greater resources to move all students to being college ready.
- Lambrina Kless, former CRIS site liaison for San Jose Unified School District, describes how the district positioned CRIS within the framework of its new strategic plan and performance measures and how the district used "data intervention cycles" to build a districtwide culture of evidence-based practices in support of college readiness.

The next article, a collaboration of the three CRIS thought partners, addresses a major goal of the CRIS work: to develop a comprehensive framework, grounded in practical lessons from the sites, that would clarify the connections between district leadership, indicator selection, cycles of inquiry, evidence-based data use, effective supports and interventions, and community-based resources, showing how all adults in an educational system can work in alignment around a common goal of college readiness. Graciela Borsato of the Gardner Center, Jenny Nagaoka of CCSR, and Ellen Foley of AISR outline major features of the framework. Among the points they highlight are:

- College and career success requires academic preparedness, but also requires support for students in two other crucial dimensions: academic tenacity and college knowledge.
- Students and schools do not exist in a vacuum. Measures of college readiness must go beyond individual students to address supports for college readiness at the school and system levels.

The issue goes on to present a powerful example of the possibilities that communities can provide to their young people in accessing and succeeding in institutes of higher education. Saleem Ghubril, executive director of the Pittsburgh

Promise, spoke with VUE guest editor Jacob Mishook about the work of the Promise, how it measures success, and the evolution from a primarily scholarship-based program to one that coordinates and brokers supports for students in high school and at the post-secondary level. Angela Romans and Rebecca Boxx of AISR offer a perspective on the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet, a cross-sector coalition that includes the district and the mayor's office tasked with actualizing a community-wide vision for children's success, from cradle to career.

We close with an article by Jenny Nagaoka and her colleagues from CCSR on "noncognitive skills" – the beliefs and strategies, such as academic tenacity, that are crucial to students' academic performance and persistence in post-secondary education. Educators increasingly recognize the impact of these "soft" skills, but they are often hard to measure. The article provides a lucid summary of the literature on noncognitive skills that spans multiple disciplines and points the way toward effective supports and interventions to address students' skills in these areas. The authors observe that noncognitive factors for college readiness are not only an individual attribute of students, but also depend on the college context.

Schools and districts are being asked to take on more and more functions and responsibilities, often with ever-tighter resources. To help support school systems in this challenging environment, CRIS can provide a common language, understanding, and set of measures around college readiness; offer continuity in the face of leadership transition; help align and leverage cross-sector collaboration; and keep equity at the center of college readiness efforts by linking all students to the supports they need to be successful. We hope that lessons shared in this issue of VUE suggest how college readiness indicator systems might help other school communities navigate the challenges and realize the promise of the new national aspiration: college and career readiness for all students.