

The Importance of College Readiness (Introduction)

Attaining a college degree has been shown to open up various opportunities for higher advancement. While many students will be able to start college and finish, some students will be unable to finish their degree due to a multitude of barriers that can affect college readiness. College readiness, whether students attend a four-year university, junior college, or technical school is vital to upward mobility and increases job security. According to the Digest of Education Statistics, 20.4 million students are expected to attend American colleges and universities this fall. Although students are enrolling in college, the unfortunate truth for some is that they will not complete their degree. Many freshmen go through incoming class seminars where it is explained to them that at least 56% of college students who start out with at their four-year college or university dropout (College Atlas, 2016). Two-thirds of students will not finish their education due to lack of collegiate prep and training that should have begun in high school, if not earlier. While student gaps in educational aspirations across race and ethnicity and income have fallen, significant and in some cases widening gaps remain in college readiness, access, and success across these groups. For this reason, we must focus on improving college access and readiness for all high school students.

Roderick, Nagaoaka and Coca (2009) believe it is imperative that researchers and policy makers must clear about which sets of knowledge and skills shape college access and performance and about how best to measure those skills. They identify four essential sets of skills: content knowledge and basic skills; core academic skills; non-cognitive, or behavioral, skills; and “college knowledge,” the ability to effectively search for and apply to college (p. 185).” Colleges focus heavily on content knowledge and skills high school graduates must possess in English and mathematics. College readiness depends on more than academic success, especially for students who are considered lower-income. Their needs are greater because they

may not have the knowledge or tools to prepare themselves to not only get into college, but to succeed and complete their degree in four to six years.

According to Achieve, within the last decade research conducted by ACT has shown a strong convergence in the expectations of employers and colleges in terms of the knowledge and skills high school grads need to be successful, especially in English and mathematics. Economic reality reflects these converging expectations. Students without a college degree will make 35 percent of \$21,000 than someone without a degree (College Atlas). In addition, 40 percent who are unable to complete degrees have parents without degrees (College Atlas). As counselors it is imperative to prepare all high school graduates for postsecondary education and/or training if they are to have options and opportunities in the job market and as a means of defeating a cycle of poverty. Counselors must also be aware and have a step by step plan of attack. This will require parental, communal and student involvement. Results that are data-driven and inclusive to all will work to produce the caliber of students who are not only ready for college, but are well equipped to complete their degree. This will lead to multi-level increases in income, success, and self-esteem for students of color and lower income.

Counseling Advocacy Issue Description

One major issue that can be seen in lower income communities would be the access to college preparation tools and skills for college readiness. Families who are considered lower income usually have problems gaining access to college preparation materials that better prepare their children for college. According to the Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 - 2015 American Community Survey there were 8,447,400 low income families calculated from the years of 2011 through 2015. The Population Reference Bureau defines “low- income” as meeting all three of these measures: (1) the family income was

less than twice the federal poverty level; (2) at least one parent worked 50 or more weeks during the previous year; and (3) there was at least one "own child" under age 18 in the family. During the last five years in Georgia, there has been a three percent decrease in the number of teens ages 16 to 19 who are not enrolled in school (full time or part time) and do not have a job (full time or part time). In 2012, there were 62,000 Georgia teens or 11% that fell into this particular category. In the year 2016, Georgia only had 46,000 teens or eight percent of teens that fell into this category. These statistics directly correlate with the fact that more school counseling programs are progressing to have students college ready, whether they actually go or not.

Similar to the progression of the creation of a comprehensive school counseling program, getting students to be college ready has been an on-going effort. "Although the college aspirations of all U.S. high school students, regardless of race, ethnicity, and family income, have increased dramatically over the past several decades, significant disparities remain in college readiness and enrollment (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009, p. 185)." These disparities can be seen in lower income families and how the schools that educate the children in these families. Many of their parents do not have time, or the knowledge in some cases, to be able to help their children be college ready. While they may not have the tools, they do not lack the desire to attend college or other higher education realms. "Nationally, the share of tenth graders who stated that they hoped to earn a bachelor's degree or higher doubled, from 40 percent in 1980 to 80 percent in 2002. These rising aspirations were shared across racial and ethnic groups, with low-income students registering the greatest increases (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009, p. 187)."

Although there has been a significant increase with four-year institutional enrollment, unfortunately, this rise in enrollment does not translate into considerable increases with African-

American and Latino students who earn a four-year college degree (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009, p. 187). There are many barriers when it comes to educational attainment for students who are lower income, African American or Latino. These barriers mostly stem from financial, racial, and parent's educational attainment status. Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca (2009) describe closing the achievement gap for these students:

“The bottom line is that closing the aspirations-attainment gap requires more than increasing the number of students who enroll in college. It ultimately requires improving students' likelihood of completing degrees, and this will require improving college completion rates among students who enroll. (p. 188)”

Addressing the aspirations-attainment gap is one of the most difficult problems that education is currently facing. In order to deal with this issue, we must ensure that all of our students leave Southwood High School with the academic skills, coursework, and qualifications that they will need to complete a four-year degree. The counselors of Southwood High School will advocate for an improvement in college readiness using the model listed in Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca's article by increasing students' content knowledge and basic skills, core academic skills, non-cognitive skills and norms of performance, and college knowledge.

Advocacy Plan for College Readiness

Preliminary Steps of Change

School counseling programs that advocate for students and ensures that all students are served should address the issue of college readiness at every educational level. Students need the guidance and support of a school counseling program that promotes college readiness by providing access and pathways for all students to achieve. The professional school counselor must address this problem using a data-driven process that recognizes the need for multicultural

competence, multilevel and appropriate interventions for the particular school and student population. The school counselor must also work with students, teachers, administration, and families to effect change.

Clarify Possible Systemic Contributions to Problem

There are many factors that influence college readiness. Students who are disadvantaged have more barriers than learning to overcome when considering college as a viable option. Families of low-income status may not see college as an option because of the growing costs and the overwhelming debt associated with student loans. Many believe that a large pool of students qualified to attend college are prevented from enrolling by a lack of adequate income or other social or demographic hurdles (Greene & Winters, 2005 (as cited in Powell, R., & Subedi, B., 2016)).

Assess the Risks of Action and Non-Action

By allowing students to continue graduating from our nation's high schools without the necessary support and knowledge for college enrollment and success in higher education, professional school counselors and other school professionals are accepting a future where students are not prepared to face challenges of the world around them, nor will they be able to globally compete. As professionals dedicated to educating the future leaders of our world, it is our first priority to ensure students will have the opportunities, skills, support, and knowledge to lead productive and empowered lives. With data-driven, student-centered action, we can be sure that the educational system in this country truly aims to develop world-class citizens with the education they deserve to make a difference.

Action Steps

Clarify Source and Focus of Problem

There are eight components of college readiness outlined by the College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy. Each of the eight components are an essential focus for professional school counselors to use in a comprehensive school counseling program to ensure all students have an opportunity to be considered ready to enter college and achieve success while enrolled. The eight components are designed to build aspirations and social capital, offer enriching activities, foster rigorous academic preparation, encourage early college planning, and guide students and families through the college admission and financial aid processes. The Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling are as follows:

1. College Aspirations
2. Academic Planning for College and Career Readiness
3. Enrichment and Extracurricular Engagement
4. College and Career Exploration and Selection Processes
5. College and Career Assessments
6. College Affordability Planning
7. College and Career Admission Processes
8. Transition from High School Graduation to College Enrollment

Although each component is an important aspect, this plan will focus on College Aspirations, Academic Planning, and College Affordability Planning. These elements highly affect whether a student has an interest in college and its offerings, and the practical preparation needed to make college dreams a reality (College Board Advocacy and Policy Center).

Delineate an Action Plan with a Timeline

Fostering a culture within a school that understands and represents the importance of education, with a push toward college education, requires the involvement of the professional school counselor, teachers, students, administration, and student families. A focus will be placed on early college awareness by giving students the confidence to aspire to college and the resilience to overcome challenges to their college dreams. Students who believe that college is attainable are more likely to succeed. Fostering the belief that college is for everyone addresses the component of College Aspirations.

Students who want to attend college and be successful there must understand the pathways that are available. Having an academic plan that involves rigorous coursework, course outcomes that demonstrate true understanding of knowledge and proficiency, and the individual interests of students places students on a path toward achieving college and career goals. Students are encouraged to understand how to invest in their educations and create, follow, and assess their plans for academics. Students, parents, and educators collectively need to have an active role in the academic preparation and planning to ensure college readiness.

In order for students and families to have a realistic goal for college, they must be aware of the costs, paying options, financial aid, and scholarships associated with college attendance. Understanding these things at the early stages of planning help families create realistic goals related to the types of colleges their students attend, the academic achievements their students should attain in the case of meeting scholarship requirements, or one of many other paths their students can take to receive a college education. This can happen through military involvement or special programs for students with financial barriers. With this information, families can make informed decisions and the major barrier for students entering college is likely to be overcome.

Identify Sources of Conflict and Opposing Opinion

Addressing College Aspirations, Academic Planning, and College Affordability Planning all involve multiple players for success. The work cannot be completed simply by the professional school counselor. Teachers, administration, parents, students, and professional school counselors have to work in conjunction with one another to achieve the goal of college readiness. It can be difficult to get others to play an equal part and it will be important for everyone to keep the goal of College Readiness in view so as not to lose focus.

Making sure that everyone involved is committed to creating a change can be a source of conflict. Additionally, teachers may have to up the rigor in their curricula, expectations for themselves and their expectations for student achievement. Creating a school climate that promotes college aspirations and preparedness is not an easy task and there may be resistance from people that want to maintain the status quo and people who do not want to do “more work”. It will be important to have administrative support in order to change the school climate and help students achieve at higher levels conducive for college success.

Take only Realistic Action

Enlist the Support of Influential People & Policy Makers

In order to support the students’ college readiness efforts, it will be important to not only have the support of people inside the school environment, but also those in the community. Through the school’s advisory council, the professional school counselor can enlist the support of members already associated with the school, and also use community connections to get business owners and organizations to support the school in its efforts to increase college readiness.

The school counselor can use these methods to raise funding for supplies, such as computers, books, college entrance exam study materials and plans that will provide additional access to education and resources for students of the school. In addition to raising funding for school projects and needs, the professional school counselor could enlist the help of admissions or higher education professionals to engage in programs at the school to give students, teachers, and parents a perspective on the college admissions process and what is necessary for a student to have success in that level of education.

The professional school counselor also should advocate for policy changes that reflect the needs of the students in the communities that are served by local politicians and school board officials. These officials can ensure that proper funding is being given to the community schools in the case of providing specialized positions that promote college readiness, such as a college and career counselor whose job is specifically designed to accomplish the goal of graduating students who are college and career ready. Also funding for professional learning opportunities for teachers, administration, and professional school counselors to ensure they are equipped with best practices on the topic of college and career readiness.

Evaluate Progress

In order to evaluate the progress towards the goal of all students being college ready, it will important to collect data. In understanding the impact this plan has on promoting College Aspirations for students we can look at their level of engagement. We can look at how often students are in school, the behaviors they exhibit while in school, and how they are performing academically. Information related to the following areas can be measures of engagement:

1. Attendance
2. Dropout

3. Discipline
4. Promotion
5. GPA

When reviewing this data, it will be important to break this information down into student groups, and to especially look at populations of students who have historically been underserved in schools. It will also be important to compare the data and ask questions about the disparities in the data like, “How do promotion rates of students from low-income backgrounds compare to those of students from high or more affluent backgrounds?”.

To assess academic planning we will need to collect data related to the following:

1. Proficiency in state tests for English, math and science
2. Students enrolled in and completing of essential math course such as Algebra I
3. Students enrolled in and completing Advanced Placement (AP)/ International Baccalaureate (IB) courses
4. Students enrolled in and completing courses required for in-state university admission

Understanding the information related to student enrollment and completion in rigorous courses as well as essential courses gives professional school counselors and other professionals an idea about how students are performing and how they are being prepared or not being prepared to handle college level instruction. Questions to ask about the collected data can provide particular insight into how the different student groups compare like, “How do enrollment and completion rates in AP/IB classes compare for males and females? Do low-income students complete courses required for in-state college admission at the same rate as their more advantaged peers?”.

In collecting data related to College Affordability planning, professional school counselors and other school professionals should look at information related to the following:

1. Participation in early awareness financial literacy and financial aid initiatives
2. Participation in financial aid planning processes
3. Scholarship application completion
4. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion

This data provides insight into the planning process that students and families use when understanding the costs, paying methods, and financial aid opportunities they have when they enroll in college. With this data we can see how students in different groups planning for college affordability and how to help those that are disadvantaged or who lack the financial literacy necessary to understand the costs, paying methods, and financial aid opportunities associated with college attendance. In looking over this data, the professional school counselor can ask questions to gain particular insight into how the different student groups compare like, “How do FAFSA completion rates for white students compare to those of Asian students? and “Do students from low socioeconomic backgrounds participate in financial literacy/financial aid opportunities at the same rates as their more advantaged peers?”.

Reflection about the project

This project is one that could be completed by a professional whose single responsibility is to promote college readiness among high school students. With this in mind, it will be necessary for the professional school counselor to plan effectively to ensure that appropriate time is spent on the advocacy plan as well as the other responsibilities held by a professional school counselor. Time constraints and potential pushback from teachers, administrators, or students will be hurdles to overcome with the changes in place that are necessary to raise the level of achievement for all students. With the proper support of administration and community leaders and members, all students served by the counseling program can make strides in developing their

college aspirations, academic planning for their futures, and financial planning for college and higher education.

Intervention/Techniques

| Family Involvement | School Based | Partnerships |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -FAFSA Night event -Financial planning for college event -SAT Prep courses -College Night event -Applying for college roadmap/timeline -Parent and student college visits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -College visits -AP/IB Course fair -Teacher as college experts (teachers have information about the college they attended in their classrooms and signs on their door they say “Ask me about ____ University/College”.) -Student behavior incentives -Student attendance incentives -Classroom guidance -Individual guidance with students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -College Bridge programs -College fairs -SAT payment vouchers -Dual enrollment programs -PTA student scholarships -Companies/organizations provided scholarships -Career Day -PTA teacher scholarships for supplies -Student workday (Students spend one day working with a community partner learning about the career, its qualifications, and pathways to the career) |

Guidance Activity

Title of Lesson: What Does it Take? (60 minutes)

Delivery Method: Classroom guidance

Participants: High school-10th grade students

Outcome or Standard:

B-LS 6. Set high standards of quality.

B-LS 7. Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/ emotional goals.

Learning Objective(s):

1. Students will learn about the academic requirements for high school graduation.
2. Students will learn about the academic requirements for admissions to 3 Georgia universities.
3. Students will set short-term/long-term academic goals.

Materials:

Kahoot! Game, poster paper, paper, lesson evaluation, college information sheet, question/individual meeting request cards, Question box

Developmental Learning Activities:

Introduction: KWL Chart- Getting into College. Have students create a KWL chart on a sheet of paper. Students will write what they already know about the college admissions requirements in the **K** section, what they want to know about college admission requirements in the **W** section and leave the **L** section for after the lesson to write what they have learned. (5 minutes)

Activity:

1. Kahoot! game with information related to the academic requirements for graduating high school and getting into college. After each question, professional school counselor will talk with students about the answer and discuss how that information may differ from the answers chosen by students. (20 minutes)
2. Think-Pair-Share: Students will receive and look over a handout with information about the admissions requirements for state and private schools in the state of Georgia. Students answer the question, “What can I do now to prepare myself? What goals can I set? Am I

setting low standards of high standards for myself?” Students will think about these questions and make notes. (5-10 minutes) *Counselor will provide an example of a specific step and a general step (General: I will study to get good grades. I will do good on college entrance exams. Specific: I will devote 10 extra minutes daily to courses that I struggle with. I will take an SAT prep course before I enter the 11th grade.)*. Students will discuss specific steps they plan to make or specific changes they may need to make to meet the admissions requirements for schools they would like to attend in groups of 3. (5 minutes) Each group will share with the class some of the steps they can and will take to meet the requirements by writing 1 or 2 items on a poster board titled, “In order to get into college I will. . .”. The poster board will be displayed in the homeroom classroom. (10 minutes)

Conclusion:

- Students fill in the L of the KWL chart at the end of the lesson. (5 minutes)
- Students fill out a card where they can write any remaining questions to be placed in a Question Box or write meeting requests for the counselor. (5 minutes)
- Students hold-on to college information sheet to be completed in next session about financial obligations of attending college.

Assessment/Evaluation: Student survey using Likert scale. (See Appendix A)

Academic Integration: Core subject teachers provide students with a subject specific checklist for graduation requirements to help students set academic goals for their core classes. The checklist should include all course offerings for the subject, standardized tests, and an academic timeline for course completion. (Ex. Math teachers give students info about the math classes offered,

when they could take those classes, the end of course tests for the classes and classes for which they can receive college credits).

Conclusion

Higher educational attainment can prove to be very difficult for students who from are lower-income families. Higher education leads to more opportunities and upward mobility to allow these students to begin to break the cycle of poverty. While going to college may not be the only option, making sure students are prepared for college is an essential part of preparing them for the world beyond high school. A college degree will allow these students and their families to be able to experience parts of the world and life they have not experienced before. As a school counselor, you are an advocate for the child so ensuring their proper preparation, including post-secondary education would be especially beneficial to your plight of advocacy.

Making the tools available for college readiness will be one of the most exponential things you can do as a counselor and advocate for your students. Giving them the options, helping them make plans, following up with parents and community leaders, all will open doors to a level of educational attainment most low-income students will never be able to do alone. Data driven and student-centered plans will ensure that this will not only be used to help students with entering college, but also after completing their degree. Having a plan with the data to back it up, allows the school counselor to make changes or keep the tools that work best for students.

The main goal is to not only help students get to college, but be prepared for the academic rigor, the financial responsibilities, and most importantly finish their education. As the professional school counselor, you have the opportunity to put tools in place to help students achieve the dreams they have set for themselves, break down economic and motivational

barriers, and end a cycle of poverty. Changing their life trajectory will increase their motivation and self-esteem, a gift they will carry throughout their lives.

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Appendix A

Classroom Guidance Assessment

| Questions | Survey Scale: 1-Strongly disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Not sure; 4-Agree; 5-Strongly disagree |
|---|--|
| I know more about college admissions requirements than I did prior to the lesson. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| The lesson provided information I need to make plans for college. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I know how to use the information to help me make short-term academic goals. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I know how to use the information to help me make long-term academic goals. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| The goals I set reflect a high standard of quality. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| This lesson has/will help me make decisions about my academic future. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Additional comments: | |

Appendix B

Admissions Information for 10 Georgia Colleges

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Emory University Avg. GPA: 3.72 Avg. SAT: 1430 Avg. ACT: 31 Deadline: Jan 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>Mercer University Avg. GPA: 3.9 Avg. SAT: 1290-1300 Avg. ACT: 28 Deadline: Feb 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>Georgia State University Avg. GPA:3.2-3.7 Avg. SAT:950-1160 Avg. ACT: 20-25 Deadline: Mar 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>Savannah State University Avg. GPA:2.3 Avg. SAT: 830 Avg. ACT: 25 Deadline: July 15</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>University of Georgia Avg. GPA:3.98 Avg. SAT:1256 Avg. ACT:29 Deadline: Jan 15</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> |
| <p>Georgia Tech Avg. GPA:3.98 Avg. SAT: 1450 Avg. ACT:32 Deadline: Jan 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>Georgia Tech Avg. GPA:3.98 Avg. SAT: 1450 Avg. ACT:32 Deadline: Jan 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>Georgia College and State University Avg. GPA:3.3-3.8 Avg. SAT:1100-1240 Avg. ACT:23-27 Deadline: April 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>Albany State University Min. GPA:2.0 Avg. SAT:830 Avg. ACT:20 Deadline: July 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> | <p>Morehouse College Avg. GPA:3.13 Avg. SAT:1021 Avg. ACT:21 Deadline: Feb 1</p> <p>Tuition Semester: Year: Room/Board: Add. Fees: School offered scholarships: Y / N</p> |

Appendix C

Professional Counselor Work-shop Evaluation Form

1) What is your overall assessment of the workshop? (1 = insufficient - 5 = excellent)

1 2 3 4 5

2) Which topics or aspects of the workshop did you find most interesting or useful?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3) Did the workshop achieve the advocacy plan objectives?

Yes No

If no, why?

4) The knowledge and information gained from participation at this event:

Met your expectations Yes No Somehow

Will be useful/applicable in my counselling work

Definitely Mostly Somehow Not at all

5) How do you think the workshop could have been made more effective?

6) Please comment on the Southwood High School presentation

(1 = insufficient - 5= excellent)

1 2 3 4 5

7) Comments and suggestions (including activities or initiatives you think would be useful, for the future)

Further comments or suggestions

THANK YOU!