



Indicator: The school provides all students with supports and guidance to prepare them for college and careers (e.g., career awareness activities, career exploration, college visits, advising). (5132)

Explanation: The evidence review suggests that high performing districts and schools provide all students with real time, hands on opportunities to investigate a variety of careers and occupations. Doing so assists students in choosing study paths aligned to future work world ambitions. Commonly, and early, schools help students identify career interests, which in turn serve as an entry point into post-secondary planning. Schools also build connections between students and outside professionals/occupation mentors as well as role model alumni. These individuals can assist students in understanding and acquiring the knowledge needed that will equip them with the skill sets necessary for the college and career. In addition, high performing districts and schools have protocols in place to assist students in choosing and applying to their best match colleges and universities.

Questions: What process will the school use to provide students with real time, hands on opportunities to investigate a variety of careers and occupations? What process will the school employ to survey students regarding their career and occupation interests? How will the school use the data gained from student career interest instruments to assist them in selecting a study path aligned to their ambitions? How will the school build outside career and occupation connections for students? What processes will the school use to monitor and guide students to calibrate post-secondary planning with their career ambitions? What protocols will the school have in place to assist students in choosing and applying to their best match colleges and universities?

What is a college and career ready school culture?

College preparation and career exposure are two critical, yet overlapping responsibilities for high schools. In order to fully prepare and empower students to be successful on their future paths, Schneider (2006) and Corwin and Tierney (2007) advocate for a school-wide college-going culture. Corwin and Tierney (2007) define a college-going culture as when “a high school cultivates aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in college” (p. 3). Such a culture is evident in schools in which a common theme throughout courses and activities is that “matriculation to a post-secondary institution is an attainable goal” (Schneider, 2006, p. 3). Students who may not have grown up with such messaging may benefit from repeated reminders that they are capable of reaching the goals that they set and choosing the school and/or career path that is best for them.

However, these messages are not always delivered equitably. Haimson and Deke (2003) noted that students on a college-bound path were more likely to report that they had participated in career development activities in high school. Bell, et al. (2009) also cite that access to college preparatory assistance at the school level was found to vary by student ability level. The explanation for this disproportionate advising could be attributed to numerous factors – such as relationships between students and staff, intrinsic motivation, or career development built into college preparatory work – but the disparity is still critical to acknowledge and address. Instead of creating a college-going culture only in a certain academy within a school or targeting a higher-achieving population, it should truly be open

to all students and reflected in the mission statement and services provided at the school. All students should have access to individualized college counseling, standardized test preparation, college visits and college fairs, and support in completing applications and financial aid forms (Schneider, 2006). This is true of career preparatory activities as well.

Why Students and Families Need Accurate Information and First-Hand Experiences

According to Schneider (2006), students need to have adequate information about the college process in order to properly prepare and to make the best decisions for their unique situations. Bell, et al. (2009) support this and emphasize that students with more information about college increase their odds of actually attending. They found that black and Latino students, as well as those who are the first in their families to attend college, are often most lacking in information about postsecondary plans. This was applicable to career information as well; often, students of these demographics were often unaware of educational requirements for the careers they desired or had other misinformation about what a particular career field entailed.

Haimson and Deke (2003) rightfully point out the instability in the college and career goals of typical high school students. In their study, they found that most recent graduates change their career goals not long after they complete high school. This is significant in the context of career preparation – they question how students who are limited to particular career fields for their explorations and experiences during high school are able to make their own career choices without having had broader experiences. It is therefore important to increase student exposure to a variety of options so that they can make an informed decision about which postsecondary route to take.

Exposure to real-world experiences and counseling rooted in realistic information is critical for helping students make these informed decisions. For example, financial planning for college must be individualized for each student, as every family's situation is different; having information that is overly generalized may cause students to make a decision that does not meet their needs (Schneider, 2006). Similarly, Tierney, et al. (2009) recommend using information from a career inventory assessment for students to guide the types of

experiences each student will have, such as tailored job shadowing or internship opportunities. Using interests or experiences personal to the student can help lead to bigger discussions about that student's career trajectory or postsecondary plans.

Especially for students who are first-generation college goers, or whose families may lack the means to help them prepare for college, the onus is on the school to provide preparatory services and support. This includes one on one college counseling, assistance preparing for standardized assessments, college visits, and assistance with applications. Schools also need to make themselves available as resources to families as they navigate the financial aid process, hosting workshops and meetings with parents prior to senior year, as well as providing hands-on assistance with challenging financial forms (Tierney, et al., 2009).

This need for information is just as critical in preparing for a future career. Haimson and Deke (2003) identify six primary types of career-based activities in high school and found that nearly all of the students in their study had experienced one or more of them. These include: "job shadowing, group worksite tours, employer presentations, career counseling, career interest inventories, or the selection of a career area to plan for" (p. xv). Kemple and Snipes (2000) highlight the option of career academies, which are college-ready learning environments that also provide hands-on career experiences where students can gain skills and information in real-world settings.

Importantly, these forms of career readiness should not occur in isolation from college readiness, as both are intertwined. Leveraging a student's potential career interests may lead to discussions of what education is needed to make their goals a reality.

The Importance of Relationships for Students and Families

Corwin and Tierney (2007) emphasize that all stakeholders should be integrated into the college-going culture – from students and families to administrators and teachers to community members who can provide resources. Trusting relationships with and between adults, students, and families are of critical importance in the scope of college and career readiness work. This trust is essential,

especially for families who may not have had college experiences themselves, as the school will take responsibility for the majority of the college planning process with their children. Bell, et al. (2009) found that as students progress through high school, their reliance on families for information about college decreases, and the school becomes the primary source of information. Counselors and teachers were especially strong sources of guidance for students as they neared the end of high school.

Positive, trusting relationships will assure families that the school is working in the best interest of their child. One suggested way to build these relationships is a daily advisory period, where one teacher is paired with a group of students for the duration of high school (Schneider, 2006). Relationships between peers and between students and the advisory teacher become very close knit and supportive, as the students and teacher are with each other every day of their high school careers. Tierney, et al. (2009) also discuss how college access programs can leverage positive peer groups around the goal of going to college; in these guided groups, students can support each other as they move through the same process together. Kemple and Snipes (2000) emphasize that students in career academies need these strong interpersonal supports as well, as they work through their experiences and process their newfound information and opinions.

Schneider (2006) and Tierney, et al. (2009) also emphasize the importance of mentoring relationships in college and career readiness. Mentoring relationships with college students or college graduates not only provide role models for students, but they can also serve as a caring adult who supports and guides them through this stressful time in their educational journeys. Additionally, mentors in potential fields of interest are critical for high school students to better understand the worlds of college and careers from someone having those experiences daily and to help them determine what schools or jobs might be a good fit.

Students need to have opportunities to take rigorous coursework, learn about college and career options, and have support throughout the process so that they will be able to make decisions that are appropriate for them. As many students, especially in disadvantaged communities, are the first in their families to attend college, schools cannot assume that they inherently have this information or know-how. Therefore, schools need to provide

supplemental services, experiences, and opportunities for students to help them be ready for the college or career that best suits them. The three messages that are most important to prepare for college and careers are to take the right courses, do well in those courses, and to learn to manage time wisely (Schneider, 2006). Schools need to ensure that students and families are receiving these messages and are supported throughout the process of making postsecondary plans.

References and Resources

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