Indicator: The school tracks the post-secondary school placements and experiences of their graduates and reports the results to the school board, faculty, and school community. (5190)

Explanation: The evidence review suggests that high performing schools establish a protocol for measuring their success in preparing students for postsecondary life. This often resembles a tracking system/process that collects and analyzes the movements of their graduates. Doing so informs a school about its strengths and areas of need in preparing its students for college and/or careers. This type of longitudinal data collection and analysis is shared among key stakeholders both in and outside of the school to determine which interventions are working to prepare and sustain students in their college and career experiences.

Questions: What process will the school use to design and implement a protocol for measuring its success in student post-secondary preparedness? Who will review this collected data to determine what strategies the school does well and what strategies the school can strengthen to prepare students for college and/or career? What plans does the school have to share the data with key stakeholders with the school and district? What plans does the school have to share the data with key stakeholders outside the school and district community?

Why Should we Track Data from P-16?

In 2005, 11 organizations collaborated to help states begin to build longitudinal data systems that track students from preschool through postsecondary endeavors, known as a P-16 system (L'Orange & Ewell, 2006). While many track only K-12 data or higher education data or both, few states have the infrastructure in place to connect the data systems of P-12 and higher education. However, a P-16 system offers many benefits to educators and policymakers on all ends of the educational spectrum.

Such a system allows educators not only to keep track of students who graduate from their schools, but also to connect their students' postsecondary outcomes with the preparation they received in their primary and secondary schools. This type of feedback can help schools and districts adjust their practices so as to better prepare their current cohorts of students. Higher education institutions are also able to provide feedback to schools in order to positively impact their future students (L'Orange & Ewell, 2006). With shared information, there can be increased collaboration between the higher education and primary and secondary educational sectors (Bloom & Kissane, 2011).

L'Orange and Ewell (2006) state that the first goal of a longitudinal data system is to inform stakeholders of what is and is not working within their educational system. Second, a P-16 system should have the capability of identifying successful programs, schools, and students. Properly aligned data systems can also help provide supports for students at key junctures in their educational careers. These benchmark events include kindergarten readiness, reading on grade level in elementary school, taking Algebra I by the start of high school, graduating prepared for post-secondary work, and graduating from postsecondary programs (Krueger and Rainwater, 2003).

What Data Should be Collected?

In order for longitudinal data tracking to be effective, it is important to know which data points should be tracked and analyzed. The National College Access Network (NCAN) writes that, "These data points

include demographics like race and gender, information on the nature and intensity of services received, and outcome data like postsecondary attendance or completion" (p. 1). Groups such as NCAN and the Data Quality Campaign have developed lists of the specific data points that are essential for this type of tracking system to assist states and organizations who are creating them (Bloom & Kissane, 2011; NCAN).

Ewell, et al. (2003) also argue that state systems should be linked with each other, in order to provide information about students who transfer across state lines. It is possible that some students who appear to have dropped out of a school in one state have in fact transferred to another institution. Independent state systems may not present the whole picture of a student's trajectory.

How Can Schools Track this Data?

Most of these systems are statewide and are far beyond the capacity of individual schools; however, there are organizations and vendors now creating systems for schools to use in tracking their own students (Bloom & Kissane, 2011). These include Naviance, College Greenlight, and Beyond 12. The NCAN brief provides a side-by-side comparison chart of numerous platforms that are capable of or already involved in P-16 data tracking (p. 15).

One system that is particularly noteworthy is the partnership between the Naviance and the National Student Clearinghouse, an organization that provides data verification for thousands of higher education institutions across the country. Naviance is a system that high schools can use to track their students' college applications and progress; this partnership allows schools to continue tracking their students after they graduate and enroll in higher education institutions. Through this program, called Alumni Tracker, schools are able to learn where students enrolled, how far they have progressed in their programs, and what degrees they earned. Schools can then share this information with their communities and use it to set goals for future cohorts of students (Spackey, 2013).

Arnold, et al. (n.d.) argue, however, that these systems do not fully capture the scope of data needed to truly help students, especially those from low-income backgrounds. While systems like Alumni Tracker capture the basic information needed to understand a student's progress, they cannot know the context or circumstances that led a student to transfer schools or leave a program, for example. Their team aimed to learn about alumni through their former advisors from high school, with whom they had kept in touch. Because many staff members in this particular school network had kept in touch with students either formally or informally, using them as intermediaries provided some contextual information on the students. This method is subject to non-responsiveness, but the researchers found that this personal approach was largely successful. While most schools will not have the capacity for the subsequent data tracking and coding that Arnold, et al. used, it is likely that many schools also have staff members who systematically keep in touch with their alumni. In addition to the more quantitative data tracking from a system such as Alumni Tracker, expanding on existing communications is a strategy that could easily be adapted for schools interested in keeping track of their graduates and fully understanding their stories after high school.

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