Collaboration Pathways to Adult Success Toolkit

RECOMMENDATION 1: INITIAL FOCUS & PRIORITIES

Consider the current situation to prioritize local needs and determine the initial focus of collaborations to be developed.

AREAS OF INITIAL FOCUS

Select areas of initial focus based on the needs identified and the strengths/resources available. Possible focus areas might include:

- Strengthening school outcomes as the best precursor to later success
- Supporting students' transitions and persistence during and following preK-12 education
- Recovering young people in their mid-to-late teens who are disengaged from both school and the workforce (sometimes called "opportunity youth")
- Improving skills to help youth meet employer workforce needs, leading to strengthened economies that benefit everyone
- These are all are worthy goals, but they cannot all be accomplished at once. Careful prioritization is essential.

ASSESS EXISTING COLLABORATIONS

Identify and assess collaborative relationships already established. For example, these may include:

- PreK-12 districts and schools
- Community and nonprofit service organizations
- Local two- and four-year colleges
- Businesses and other potential employers
- Local government or health and wellness partners

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Consider the strength of each collaborative relationship, the ways partner organizations currently contribute to supporting young people's success, and their potential capacity for additional investment.

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Conduct an assessment of needs and strengths that engages multiple stakeholders.

- This should include all current collaborative partners as well as parents, community members, and current and/or recently graduated students.

- Also reach out to those with whom you would like to develop a stronger relationship (for example, this might include local employers or colleges).

- Give particular attention to outcomes for subgroups of students who face greater challenges (for example, English language learners, foster youth, students with disabilities, etc.).

USING DATA TO EVALUATE

Use the best data currently available to evaluate postsecondary preparation and outcomes for your students. In addition to school-level data such as test scores and graduation rates, seek information on college application, admission, enrollment, and persistence as well as workforce engagement and perseverance. While precise data for a given cohort of students may not be immediately accessible, proxies such as perseverance and completion rates at local community colleges, universities, and job-training programs can provide a starting point.

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RECOMMENDATION 2: IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The process of assessing needs and strengths and selecting focus areas will bring awareness of collaborative efforts that must be strengthened or developed in order to achieve the goals envisioned. These collaborations will usually include both information sharing and working together practically to support young people. Developing organizational collaborations is an organic process that requires time and effort, and usually encounters bumps along the way.

TIMELINE & SCOPE

Be realistic regarding timeline and scope in developing collaborations.

- While short-term partnerships for specific events and services may come about fairly quickly, long-term collaborations with higher impact are usually developed over a period of years.

- Initially, many collaborations will involve just one sector other than districts and schools, to keep the project manageable and experience early success.

- Communities where productive partnerships in support of children already exist may be able to start more ambitiously and draw in additional sectors.

- Document actions and outcomes, reflect on and learn from them, and modify as appropriate. Some learning will focus on the process: decision points, timetables, and unanticipated hurdles and opportunities.

EXISTING COLLABORATIONS

Begin with examining existing collaborations.

- Correlate school data and that of existing partners to refine understanding of students' outcomes, particularly in identified focus areas.

- Based on mutual goals and interests, consider additional ways for partners to work together to support students.

- Determine whether (and which) additional partnerships are needed, or whether strengthening and adapting existing relationships would produce faster results; consider decision points and timetables for developing those relationships.

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STUDENT VOICE

Seek creative ways to incorporate student voice as you develop collaborative plans.

Examples include: focus groups, surveys, and/or student representation in planning groups or steering committees.

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RECOMMENDATION 3: COLLABORATION & COMMUNICATION

The process of assessing needs and strengths and selecting focus areas will bring awareness of collaborative efforts that must be strengthened or developed in order to achieve the goals envisioned. These collaborations will usually include both information sharing and working together practically to support young people. Developing organizational collaborations is an organic process that requires time and effort, and usually encounters bumps along the way.

THE FOUNDATION

For collaboration to thrive and remain effective over time, it is important to clarify objectives, expectations, roles, and responsibilities, and to document these agreements in appropriate ways. This is also crucial considering the likelihood that key personnel changes may occur during the lifetime of the collaboration. How the respective organizations will share, use, and safeguard data is of particular importance. Stakeholders must share data transparently, discuss it frequently, look for strengths and weak points, and devise strategies for improvement and incentives for success for everyone.

ESTABLISH STRUCTURES

Work with partners to establish appropriate structures for collaboration and communication.

- Articulate the common goals, objectives, and purpose of the collaboration.
- Develop protocols and MOUs as needed to clarify roles and responsibilities of each organization.
- Determine communication norms (e.g., frequency of reports and meetings; individual as well as organizational expectations and responsibilities).
- Establish a consensus on how to measure progress toward mutual goals, and what indicators are most relevant to the focus areas selected.

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SHARE DATA

Prioritize data-sharing agreements (DSAs) that enhance each organization's capacity to work effectively.

- Data-sharing is essential to carrying out effective cycles of inquiry: monitoring and analysis of outcomes to improve planning and subsequent interventions.

- Data-sharing with higher education and employment partners helps schools understand students' current outcomes and improve the preparation provided in middle and high school. Data-sharing also helps partners understand how to support incoming students' and employees' chances for postsecondary success.

- Data-sharing with service and health/wellness organizations helps both schools and partners understand the life situation and academic challenges that students face, and the kinds of supports they need to succeed.

- Make sure you know, understand, and fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

- Many organizations have standard DSA templates. These provide a good starting point, but should be reviewed by legal counsel for each of the organizations involved.

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RECOMMENDATION 4: PERSISTENCE

Collaboration among local organizations and entities is an effective way to improve local postsecondary outcomes, for the benefit of the young people involved, their families, and the entire community.

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REGIONAL & STATE COLLABORATIONS

Collaboration at the regional or state level is crucial to support, spark, or enhance local initiatives.

- State-level databases and longitudinal data are crucial to assess and support students' postsecondary success as well as high school graduation, and are especially helpful if in-state college data is incorporated.

- State-level or regional collaborations with preK-12 school districts can help two- and four-year institutions develop strategies to support incoming students' transition to college, particularly for first-generation students and those at greatest risk.

- Regional business councils can provide coordinated guidance to help schools improve CTE and linked learning opportunities.