



# Helping Students Navigate Pathways to Adult Success Toolkit

## **RECOMMENDATION 1: THE FOUNDATION**

Ensures that all students receive a foundation of sufficient academic rigor to enable them to pursue a variety of challenging and engaging postsecondary preparation opportunities.

### **THE FOUNDATION — COURSE PREPARATION AND GUIDANCE**

Getting ready for the future is what school is all about. Whether youth are bound for college or career, school and district educators must ensure that a few short-term and long-term basics are firmly in place.

- Require courses and course sequences that maintain options for college and career goals starting in middle school, accessible to all students, without participation barriers.
- Construct clear pathways for:
  - core academic courses, particularly STEM
  - foreign language and arts electives
  - career tech courses and certifications
- Consider course sequence when assigning students into courses. Revise the master schedule if necessary to enable equity-driven access; review and modify entry requirements for courses required for future success. Provide a school-level, stigma-free parallel system of support for students in challenging classes; require their participation when indicators show their need for it, so all students can succeed in these rigorous courses.
- Teach all students in middle and high school the course names, sequences, and minimum grades they need for college and career access. College access requirements vary by state and type of college; career access varies by regional workforce needs and availability of structured internships and apprenticeships. Work with local and regional employers to provide informal experiential learning and career exposure; for example, career days, job shadows, speakers, etc.



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- Emphasize that minimum grades are floors, not ceilings. To succeed in higher education and the workplace, students should aim for grades and skill development far beyond the minimum. Stress that while D is usually a passing grade, a D average is not enough to get into and succeed at college or a good job. Help students develop motivation, interest, commitment, knowledge, skills, and lifelong learning habits so they can enjoy success in a chosen field.
- Monitor student progress with frequent grade and transcript analysis. Assign mentoring or tutoring as needed to get students who are behind back on track. Use report card conferencing and/or student-facing on-track reports to help students take responsibility for their own progress. The college model of co-requisite assistance is one option, building extra time and credits into essential courses for tutoring on concepts taught that day or week.
- Require students to develop a plan for their future in late middle school, reviewed in annual one-on-one update meetings and occasional group check-ins during the school year. To supplement counselor capacity, train volunteers from partner organizations to understand district and state graduation requirements and post-secondary preparation needs. This “distributed counseling” pool of adults should work closely with counselors, learning from them while bringing fresh perspectives and awareness.
- Teach parents the same information on courses, sequences, goals for grades, and regional career opportunities, in comfortable, peer-facilitated conversational gatherings. Use parent, neighborhood, community, and faith-based networks to offer parents and families the knowledge they need to guide their children wisely.

### THE FOUNDATION — HOW TO PROVIDE ACADEMIC SUPPORT

“Providing academic supports to increase postsecondary readiness” means providing students with genuinely challenging academic instruction so that they are prepared for success at the college level; providing extra help and acceleration to those who enter middle or high school already behind grade level in key academic areas, particularly English and math; and supporting less well-prepared students to succeed in “advanced” college prep classes beginning in the middle grades. [Read More](#)



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## **RECOMMENDATION 2: EXPOSURE & EXPERIENCES**

Young people enter high school with widely varying levels of clarity regarding their future goals and what they need to do to attain them. Encouraging them to dream and then mesh dreams with reality is an important responsibility of the adults in their lives.

### **EXPOSURE AND EXPERIENCES TO RAISE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS**

Young people enter high school with widely varying levels of clarity regarding their future goals and what they need to do to attain them. Encouraging them to dream and then mesh dreams with reality is an important responsibility of the adults in their lives. Students need experiences and opportunities that will help them keep their options open, make wise postsecondary plans, and embark and persist on individual paths to adult success. Here is a checklist of ways schools and their partners can help young people and their families broaden career and educational aspirations.

- Organize field trips or day trips to local businesses, agencies, museums, zoos, parks, nature centers, and other community resources, with engaging presenters and age-appropriate choice of locations and formats. Design such trips to help students envision career possibilities in their community, as well as 30, 60, and 100 miles away. Also, bring the outside world in through career days, speakers, or hands-on experiences in STEM, art, and “maker spaces.”
- Work with local businesses and employers to offer career-focused learning experiences: job shadows can begin in middle school; by high school, add internships, work-based learning, and volunteer experiences.
- Design age-appropriate college experiences to expose students to the big picture and concrete “to-do’s.” Build on the foundation of course preparation by having college representatives address students in middle or early high school, as well as in later years of high school.



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- Organize trips to nearby college campuses, beginning in late elementary school, and definitely by middle school. Most students ultimately attend college within 50 miles of home, so knowing regional options is essential. In the upper grades, expose students to more distant campuses, including more selective colleges that generally offer students greater support towards graduation. One rural high school principal required all students to participate in six college visits before graduation, including an overnight trip to a flagship university. Potential college athletes are fully aware of multiple campus opportunities and outcomes; the same should occur in academic and technical contexts.
- Consider the crossover of content offered in college and career exposures.
- Beginning in upper elementary grades, start the discussion by asking, “How does a job differ from a career?” Trips should help students consider the differences between college/ workplace and home.
- By late middle school and early high school, help students and parents learn about types of colleges (community/technical; open-access four-year; and selective); various credentials and degrees offered; and how for-profit and not-for-profit institutions compare. College and workplace representatives can help.
- Help upper-grade students and parents develop understanding of the varying returns on investment from degrees and credentials, as well as variations by focus area. (Two-year associate degrees in engineering offer substantially higher earnings than many bachelor’s degrees in the humanities.) Explore these using accessible language, in student- and parent-friendly settings.
- Make options such as dual high school/college enrollment clear for students and families, especially whether credits gained are transferable to institutions other than those in which they were earned, and/or count towards college majors, certificates, and professional credentials.
- Help students and parents learn about options and requirements for transfer from two-year colleges to four-year institutions. Many states guarantee transfer when certain conditions are satisfied; these conditions must be clear in advance, so students can plan and take courses appropriately in two-year institutions.



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- Organize more complex college visits for juniors and seniors to learn about different housing options, fees, transportation, and other lifestyle and cost logistics, which vary by college type (e.g., most community colleges are not residential).

### **EXPOSURE & EXPERIENCES**

Postsecondary exposure refers to programs that help students make decisions, set goals, and succeed after high school by exposing them to postsecondary educational opportunities as well as career options and possibilities. [Read More](#)



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### **RECOMMENDATION 3: STEPS, SUPPORTS & CO-NAVIGATORS**

It will engage supportive adults to accompany students and their families as they navigate the complex world of postsecondary planning and decision-making.

### **NAVIGATION STEPS, SUPPORTS, AND CO-NAVIGATORS**

Research has shown that people do well in navigating complex decisions when they know how to ask for support, and when others know how to respond. Young people face the daunting challenge of finding the path to post-secondary opportunity; helping them do so is the responsibility of adults as advisors and co-navigators.

Here are some steps that should be on a navigation checklist:

- Require students to meet with college/career counselors annually, starting in 9th grade, to set and revise goals and organize personal schedules. A “distributed counseling” pool of adults (see above) can enhance existing counseling capacity.
- Help students and families understand “match,” “under-match” and “stretch” goals in college aspirations and/or work opportunities in relation to high school achievement. Many students “under-match,” perhaps choosing what seems easiest and most accessible (e.g., community college), not realizing that pursuing a more selective option could open the door to much greater institutional support that would greatly improve their chances of earning a degree.
- Include parents and families in all matters related to college and career planning.
- Teach students to manage standardized test timelines, finances, and requirements, especially where “gatekeeper” assessments (SAT, ACT, ACT Benchmarks, Work Keys, ASVAB, etc.) are required for college or career access. They must register for assessments, pay or obtain waivers, and take tests early enough to meet deadlines or retake them if necessary.



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- Guide students through the college admissions process starting in the fall of senior year: different institutions' requirements; application, acceptance, and enrollment deadlines; information and orientation sessions; vaccination and health requirements; tutoring, mentoring, and credit opportunities; and major selection. Help students and families overcome fears and understand options. For immediately career-bound students, provide guidance on work-place opportunities, choices, and needed skills.
- Help students and parents become financially literate concerning:
  - cost differences between two-year and four-year institutions in their region
  - submitting the FAFSA on schedule
  - grants and scholarships: how to research and apply for them
  - loan debt (what is reasonable and how to minimize it)
  - tuition aid, work-study, and part-time employment options
  - Monitor progress, reinforce, nag, nurture, and support.

### HOW TO PROVIDE POSTSECONDARY GUIDANCE

Providing good postsecondary guidance involves helping students identify their interests and aptitudes, learn about career and academic opportunities that match those interests, and select courses they need to take in preparation. [Read More](#)



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## RECOMMENDATION 4: PERSISTENCE

It will help students develop the persistence and resilience needed for success in postsecondary training, occupations, and life.

### SUPPORT FOR POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE

There is some consensus on ways the community, educational institutions, and employers can support students for success in first two years of postsecondary life. A short list of these recommendations follows; stakeholders should also collect and analyze data to hold themselves and students accountable for outcomes and to analyze root causes for these outcomes. This analysis will enable stakeholders to monitor and continuously improve supports for young adults' success, to their benefit and that of the community.

Recommended actions include:

- Help students [navigate across institutional boundaries](#) as they transition from high school into college: attending information and orientation sessions, learning about tutoring, mentoring, credit options, and choosing a major. Between high school and college, young people are under the purview of neither institution (unless enrolled in a summer bridge program), so collaboration is crucial. Except in the most selective institutions, twenty percent of those who accept admissions offers fail to register in the fall.
- Support immediately career-bound students in the transition into work-force expectations and skills.
- Provide and require mentoring/tutoring and co-requisite courses as needed for first-year college students.
- Monitor data to identify students encountering difficulties promptly and get advisors to them. Advisors can be peer- or near-peer mentors: third- and fourth-year students who have succeeded in their disciplines and understand the barriers that first-timers encounter. Ensure in advance that needed human and technological capacities are in place. Offer incentives to potential mentors (e.g., part of practicum or internship course credit, federal work/study, or other campus opportunities), as well as training and support.





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- Provide small bridge grants/loans, depending on state law, to cover gaps between scholarships and loans, unexpected life and family incidents, and tuition and fees due immediately. These are usually less than \$750.
- Work with community, education, and business collaborators to learn about young people's experiences during the first two years after high school. Align with higher education and business organizations to gather valid data and work together to develop indicators of college and career persistence in the first two years.

### **LIFE & SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULT SUCCESS**

There are multiple types of learning that are beyond the academic content taught in class, yet essential for students to become responsible, well-rounded adults. [Read More](#)