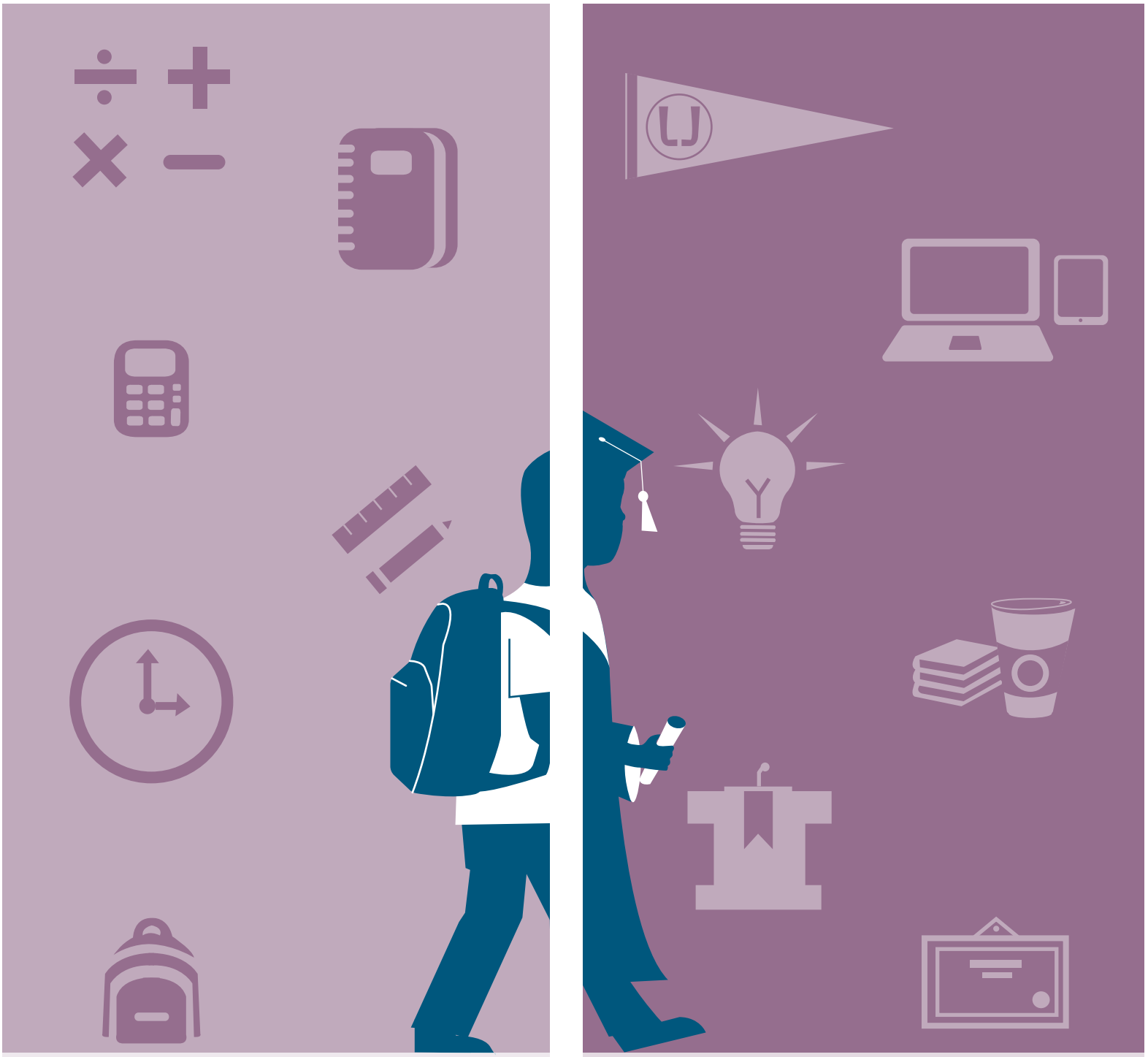

HOW HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES CAN TEAM UP TO USE DATA AND INCREASE STUDENT SUCCESS

By Michael Grady, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Ready or Not: It's Time to Rethink the 12th Grade | Jobs for the Future | August 2016

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, it is widely accepted that effective use of data is essential to improving just about anything, and increasing college and career success is no exception. Test scores, course grades, demographic details, and attendance records are just a few of the ever-growing types of student data that public schools and higher education systems collect on a continual basis. Yet, despite its proliferation, student information remains surprisingly underutilized, even in efforts to ease the critical transition from high school to college.

This report is part of a series that encourages high schools and higher education to share responsibility for improving college completion rates by co-designing, co-delivering, and co-validating supportive experiences for all 12th-grade students through the first year of college, especially those who so often struggle in this period. (See box on "co" principles.) The effectiveness of those interventions rests in no small measure on the quality of data use that informs the work. This paper argues that collaboration by K-12 and postsecondary educators can significantly improve data use, research, and analysis, and thus enhance the cooperative activities proposed in this series for a "shared transition zone."

Collaborative data inquiry has the potential to deepen knowledge about key factors, such as predictors of student success, benefits of interventions, and policies that can enhance student progress through education and career pathways. Such efforts have particular potential to benefit low-income and first-generation college students, who are overrepresented in time-consuming, costly, and often ineffective developmental education courses and underrepresented in the ranks of college graduates.

The ultimate goal of improving the high-school-to-college-transition is to launch every student on a smooth path toward completing college and earning a postsecondary credential—associate degrees, bachelor degrees, and certificates—that lead to good jobs and careers. This series suggests the value of establishing a clear interim benchmark of progress: whether students have completed at least one credit-bearing, college-level introductory course in English or math by the end of their first year. These courses are the gateway to more advanced courses in general education and technical curricula. Achieving this goal would demonstrate that students are prepared for college-level work and are building momentum toward completing a credential.

Generating, analyzing, and acting on data to propel students toward this goal—and continued success—pose many challenges for K-12 and higher education systems, to be sure. Debates over data security and student privacy concerns dominate news coverage. But other practical considerations may pose even bigger barriers. Data collaboration requires substantial commitments from both secondary and postsecondary sectors, beyond what either traditionally has made, particularly agreement to work closely together.

The overriding question this paper addresses is how to realize the largely untapped potential of K-12 and higher education systems to use data more effectively to help ease student transitions to college. How can leaders of school districts and colleges advocate for investing in cross-sector research, analysis, and action? What are the components of a cross-sector data infrastructure that are essential to supporting this agenda? What specialized expertise is required to maintain these cross-sector partnerships? How might education systems rethink the incentives needed to sustain the engagement of higher education faculty and their K-12 counterparts? This paper seeks to answer these and other questions by exploring cooperative strategies that high schools and colleges can employ to use data to inform the closer collaboration needed to promote postsecondary readiness and success.

> How can K-12 and higher education systems collaborate and use data more effectively to ease student transitions to college?

The first section summarizes the case for school-college partnerships to lead this work. The next section identifies essential elements of collaboration that secondary and postsecondary institutions should keep in mind and highlights promising practices from the field. The final section addresses the challenges of creating and sustaining data collaborations between K-12 and higher education systems and recommends specific steps that each can take to establish and maintain meaningful partnerships.

Guiding Principles for Secondary-Postsecondary Partnerships

Co-Design

Deciding on and designing together courses, curricular pathways, and support systems, as well as professional development opportunities and data platforms, that impact ***what*** and ***how*** students learn.

Co-Delivery

Sharing and coordinating faculty and staff, facilities, and other resources to carry out the co-designed learning experiences and supports.

Co-Validation

Accepting agreed-upon assessments, successful completion of performance tasks and experiences, and other indicators of learning as evidence of proficiency, including for placement in credit-bearing, college-level courses.

THE CASE FOR **COLLABORATIVE** DATA USE

National and state education leaders, philanthropists, schools, and colleges are redoubling efforts to improve rates of college completion that have remained stagnant and low over the past decade. A substantial investment of both public and private resources has created new opportunities for educators to use data to inform more effective policies and practices that support students on their paths to productive adulthoods. Federal and state education agencies have created incentives to promote more cross-system data sharing and analysis. This work has produced new capacity for data-based inquiry, including longitudinal data systems in every state with information on students in preschool through college,[1] data analysis and reporting applications, and professional development for system leaders and practitioners.

Still, there are few examples of high-quality and well-documented data collaboration between K-12 school districts and institutions of higher education. As with other kinds of collaboration between secondary and postsecondary systems, there are multiple reasons it remains rare. Most important may be the longtime historical and cultural divide between the two educational systems. Each system tends to operate in its own separate orbit with distinct responsibilities for the students currently in its classrooms, rather than high schools attending to the fate of students after they leave and colleges focusing on the preparation of students before they arrive. And there have been few system-level inducements to collaborate.

However, interest in collaboration may now be growing out of necessity. Social and economic forces increasingly limit life options for individuals without some form of post-high school education. It is becoming commonly accepted that students from all backgrounds need to graduate high school with broad knowledge and skills—including specific abilities to help them handle the transition to postsecondary education—in order to succeed in college and careers.[2]

Over the past decade, several national initiatives have yielded new models of data-based research collaboration focused on improving different aspects of the high school to college transition. For this paper, I draw on lessons learned from three cross-sector efforts:

- **Lumina Foundation's Community Partnership for Attainment** since 2013 has awarded grants to 75 cities to develop community-based, systemic strategies aimed at dramatically increasing the number of residents with postsecondary credentials.[3] Each city partnership includes school districts, colleges, universities, and a wide variety of community-based organizations. The partnerships provide data tools, significant technical assistance, flexible funding, and the ability to customize attainment plans to each community's needs.
- **The Gates Foundation's Leaky Pipeline Project** was an effort to link secondary and postsecondary data in New York City, the nation's largest public school district, with the City University of New York, where roughly 40 percent of NYC graduates enroll within one year of graduating high school.[4] In 2010, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided funds that allowed the data-sharing partnership that had begun a few years earlier to further analyze the college outcomes of its students and the factors that promote postsecondary readiness. The project used the findings to inform policy and create student support services.
- **The Citi Foundation's Postsecondary Success Collaborative** was launched in 2008 to improve college and career readiness in 10 public high schools in Miami-Dade County, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. The collaborative served more than 12,000 low-income and first-generation college students through 2013, designing a coordinated, cross-sector approach that increased college enrollment and persistence rates.[5] FHI 360, a nonprofit human development organization, developed an "asset mapping" tool to help partners identify strengths and weaknesses and prioritize next steps.

I also call on my own experience, while deputy director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, co-leading a research collaborative aimed at building the capacity of K-12 schools and systems to use data in ways that enhance college readiness and success[6]:

- **The College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) initiative**, supported by the Gates Foundation from 2010 to 2014, involved five urban school districts and three national university-based research organization centers—the Annenberg Institute, the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, and Stanford University's John Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. The school systems were Dallas, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Jose, and New York City, whose participation was via the nonprofit New Visions for Public Schools.[7] The national research partners synthesized lessons learned and published the results.

A significant finding from the CRIS initiative was determining the "essential elements in implementation" that are required to build and sustain effective systems of college-readiness indicators and supports to promote college readiness and success across school districts. Despite different starting points, strengths, and challenges, the school systems' experiences each highlighted the need to build these common elements: engaging leadership commitment, building data infrastructure, strengthening adult capacity around data use and college readiness, connecting indicators with supports to promote college readiness, and developing partnerships with community institutions and institutions of higher education.[8] In all of the CRIS districts, building these essential elements required the development of new structures, routines, behaviors, and supports. According to the CRIS Resource Series: "Each site approached this work somewhat differently, depending on existing capacities and investments, available resources and commitments, and their local contexts."

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE DATA COLLABORATION

There are no models for the precise work this paper aims to promote. The CRIS initiative provides important lessons about what is necessary for school districts to engage in serious data inquiry about college readiness and to sustain these models over time. But CRIS involved only K-12 districts; it did not follow students into their college years. Considered in combination with lessons learned from the national cross-sector efforts noted above, though they focused more broadly than data, it is possible to extrapolate the core capacities necessary for data collaborations between K-12 and higher education systems. They reflect many of the same conditions—such as leadership commitment and staff capacity—that are needed for high schools and colleges to partner to the degree promoted by this series in co-designing, co-delivering, and co-validating a shared transition zone for students.

I propose that these are essential elements for implementation of effective cross-sector data collaboration to increase college readiness and success:[9]

- Secure broad-based leadership support.
- Build cross-sector data infrastructure.
- Strengthen staff capacity to use data effectively.
- Forge strategic partnerships among K-12, higher education, and community organizations.

A description of each element below is followed by key lessons from the field and an example of a recent cross-sector effort that illuminates promising practices.

1) SECURE BROAD-BASED LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Senior leaders from K-12 and higher education, at both the institution and system levels, play critical roles in advancing collaborative efforts to use data to increase postsecondary readiness and success for all students. Without strong leadership commitment, the endeavor risks being marginalized from the larger agenda of each sector. School district superintendents and college presidents, in particular, can take concrete steps to strengthen the planning, implementation, and impact of these partnerships. Creating cross-sector leadership coalitions that include not only public schools and colleges, but also community organizations and municipal agencies, can significantly expand the resources available to promote student success.

Efforts are most likely to succeed when leaders have the capacity and will to articulate a clear vision that resonates among all stakeholders, from central office administrators to faculty, staff, students, families, and community members. Setting measurable, achievable goals that are connected with other system and institutional priorities is essential. This can help sustain the work over time and through inevitable leadership transitions. Leaders also can foster a collaborative data-driven culture by setting expectations for data analysis to inform decision making, investing in high-quality data tools and infrastructure, and building professional capacity to use this technology, evaluate results, and collaborate across sectors on interventions.

> Community organizations and municipal agencies can help public schools and colleges significantly expand the resources available to promote student success.

Key lessons from the field include:

- Leadership can help create momentum for collaborative data use through high-profile endorsement of the significance of the work; leaders can help maintain momentum by using the results of the analysis to inform changes in policy and practice.
- Leadership must make the financial commitment needed to establish and sustain collaborative data work over the long haul. It is particularly important to invest in data tools and infrastructure that can deliver timely information in a user-friendly format and clear a path for cross-sector data sharing.
- Leaders can encourage long-term commitments to the collaborative efforts by designing new incentives to reward school staff, college faculty, and municipal employees for their sustained participation.

Promising Practice

Rhode Island Takes Community-Wide Approach to Increase Attainment

Since 2013, Lumina Foundation's Community Partnership for Attainment has awarded grants to 75 cities to develop community-based, systemic strategies to dramatically increase the number of residents with postsecondary credentials. The collaborative efforts provide data tools, significant technical assistance, flexible funding, and the ability to customize attainment plans to each community's needs.

In its work in Providence, RI, the initiative exemplifies how a broad-based leadership coalition can advance the goals of college completion through collaborative data use. In 2013, the initiative brought together civic leaders from an array of 60 organizations committed to increasing college readiness and success. Under the auspices of the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet (CYC), the team includes the Providence Public Schools, the state's Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, and numerous nonprofit organizations, including College Visions, which promotes college enrollment, persistence, and graduation for low-income and first-generation students. These agencies contributed both data and technical expertise to reveal the nature and magnitude of the degree attainment challenge in Rhode Island.

Analyzing publicly available data on college completion, the Providence team discovered an urgent need to improve the educational attainment of Latino students, the state's fastest-growing demographic group. Currently, only 16 percent of Latino adults in Rhode Island hold an associate degree or higher, compared to 43 percent of adults statewide.[10] Likewise, the postsecondary attainment rate for Rhode Island Latinos is four points lower than the 20 percent national average for Latino adults.

In 2015, the CYC called for a "profound transformation" in how Rhode Island prepares its citizens for college and careers—including using a sharp focus on data to target supports for postsecondary students who are struggling to

persist in school and complete a credential.[11] Specifically, the CYC urged each of the state's higher education institutions to complete an in-depth analysis of the needs of its current student population, disaggregated by demographic group, and to set targets for increasing enrollment, retention, and completion rates. The CYC also recommended that educators and policymakers form strategic partnerships with community-based organizations and businesses, and that they replicate promising strategies already operating across the state.

The Providence team secured the strong endorsement of the presidents of Rhode Island's 11 public and private colleges and universities.[12] This commitment aims to increase data use, programs, and student support strategies that lead to improvement in attainment overall and, in particular, for Latino students and others from backgrounds underrepresented in higher education.

The ultimate goal is for each of the state's postsecondary institutions to offer a system of flexible supports that can meet the needs of all students. For example, the system may include some combination of: multiple pathways to graduation and job placement; integrated academic, personal, financial, and career services; and faculty and peer advising. Undergirding everything is targeted outreach to Latino communities, along with data collection and evaluation of promising but not-yet-validated programs.

2) BUILD CROSS-SECTOR DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

The potential for K-12 and higher education systems to collaborate effectively to smooth the transition from high school to college depends in large part on their ability to generate and share high-quality data about students. The importance of data quality cannot be overstated: nothing sidetracks a line of inquiry faster than the loss of confidence in the reliability of data. Technical experts can advise on improving database systems—most critically, ensuring that K-12 and postsecondary systems can "talk" to each other. They can also recommend analytical tools and reporting mechanisms. However, it is important to acknowledge that the financial constraints of publicly funded school district and college budgets are likely to limit purchasing power. Most systems will need to gradually improve technology, or delay certain upgrades until they can secure sufficient funding.

Yet, a strong data infrastructure consists of more than its technological parts. Organizational practices are equally important. For example, when different data systems, say, college admissions and course taking, are managed by different staff or different departments, it is extremely challenging to collect information into a unified report. Collaborative data use also requires the selection of a manageable number of key indicators of readiness and progress, to help faculty and staff zero in on their system's priorities, and continuous feedback from stakeholders about their usefulness. Careful field testing with practitioners and policymakers can help assure the user-friendly nature of reporting formats. Further, the information must be as timely as it is reliable, so educators can use it to inform interventions and support strategies to help students before it's too late. And, most important, K-12 and higher education must work together to analyze the data and make decisions based on it through the co-design, co-delivery, and co-validation processes described in this series.

A strong data infrastructure consists of more than its technological parts.

Key lessons from the field include:

- Clear and explicit data-sharing agreements between K-12 and higher education institutions and systems help ensure the integration of data necessary to improve student transitions between the sectors.
- Collaborative working groups of K-12 and higher education faculty and staff must include individuals with a broad base of expertise—technical and educational—to help ensure that data use produces knowledge that strengthens practice and policy.
- A critical role of school district-higher education collaboratives is to produce high-quality indicators communicated using practitioner-friendly tools and reporting formats so that all stakeholders have easy access to the information they need.

Promising Practice

New York City's Public Schools and Colleges Learn How to Share Data

In 2008, the nation's largest urban school district and largest public university system launched a groundbreaking partnership to plug "leaks" in the K-16 education pipeline and increase rates of college persistence and completion. The "Leaky Pipeline Project," as it was originally called, was a collaboration between researchers in the New York City Department of Education and their counterparts at the City University of New York. What brought the two organizations together was a mutual commitment to improving outcomes for the significant number of students "shared" by the two systems. Roughly 40 percent of NYCDOE graduates enrolled in a two- or four-year CUNY college. Similarly, roughly 70 percent of entering CUNY freshmen were graduates of NYC public high schools.[13]

The Leaky Pipeline project began as a data exchange to answer basic questions about the success of NYCDOE students in the CUNY system. It marked the first time that the school department had the ability to follow students' progress as they made the transition from high school into college and to analyze how well high schools are preparing young people for postsecondary education. The partnership, which continues today under the auspices of Graduate NYC!, formalized its compact with a memorandum of understanding which spelled out the terms of a two-way data sharing agreement. Under the agreement, the DOE sends course, grade, and exam data for its students to CUNY, which in turn shares detailed performance data with high school principals. All researchers working with the data signed non-disclosure agreements to ensure student confidentiality.

The effort expanded in 2010 into a more extensive research collaborative with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. By then renamed the College Readiness and Success Working Group, its mission was to study the relationship between specific aspects of the high school experience that lead to higher rates of college performance and completion. Specific goals were to conduct data analysis that would generate new knowledge about high school predictors of postsecondary success, identify student supports, create school resources, and inform policy. The Working Group added valuable data sources, such as the National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker, which provides college enrollment and degree attainment information for students attending institutions both in and out of state.

The NYC public school and university systems came together out of a mutual commitment to improve outcomes for the many students who attend both.

The collaboration resulted in new ways of analyzing data, eventually leading to NYCDOE's development of new accountability metrics to identify and refine the kinds of supports schools need to provide students in order to prepare them for college. The analysis revealed the following academic indicators to be the best determinants of strong performance in college:

- Score of 3 or higher on AP tests
- Score of 4 or higher on the International Baccalaureate exam
- Grade of C or better in a dual-enrollment course
- Earning a Regents Diploma (which has higher standards than a local high school diploma)
- Score of 75 or higher on the English Regents Exam (or 480 on SAT-Critical Reading)
- Score of 80 or higher on the Math Regents Exam (or 480 on SAT-Math)
- Passing grades in college preparatory courses

NYCDOE added several of these college-ready metrics to its school progress reports to help schools identify and increase support to students. Research completed by the Working Group also informed a number of other key products, most prominently the NYCDOE's "Where Are They Now?" reports, which offered every high school in the city an interactive profile of recent graduation cohorts. Hailed as a state and national model, the information included the number of students enrolled in two- and four-year colleges; the number requiring remediation, by subject; and the percentage persisting post-remediation. The reports also disaggregated student outcomes by demographic characteristics.

In 2014, under a new NYCDOE administration, the department suspended distribution of the "Where Are They Now?" reports pending the implementation of a new student information system and changes to school performance evaluations. The department was also seeking ways to increase the use of the reports by school principals. While some found them helpful, others found them overwhelming.

3) STRENGTHEN STAFF CAPACITY TO USE DATA EFFECTIVELY

Over the past decade, states and school districts have rolled out enhanced data systems designed to enable rapid analysis and targeting of supports to keep high school students on track for graduation and prepared to make strong transitions to college. And many states and the federal government have invested in creating longitudinal data systems that connect student-level data across K-12 and postsecondary institutions. However, the preparation of practitioners has not kept pace. In most K-12 and postsecondary systems, few faculty and staff have the ability to use data to strengthen their own practice and deploy supports for students.

For K-12 systems, barriers to effective data use include: limited experience in data analysis and interpretation to inform student support strategies and a lack of time to work collaboratively in teams.[14] To promote continued gains in college readiness and success, K-12 and higher education systems must pair their investment in technical and organizational infrastructure with an investment in the professional capacity of educators to use data effectively. They need to know how data analysis can help them to improve classroom practice, increase student learning, apply appropriate interventions, and track student outcomes once enrolled in college.

Key lessons from the field include:

- Teachers report strong interest in further training in the following areas related to effective data use: design and use of basic analytic tools, strategies for "translating" data into student support strategies, and evaluation of supports and interventions to determine relative effectiveness.
- School-based data teams can be effective mechanisms for diagnosing student learning needs and deploying evidence-based interventions.
- Higher education and high school faculty need new and reliable indicators of college readiness beyond academic performance in order to plan transition supports. Indicators of noncognitive skills (e.g., goal setting, persistence, communication, and collaboration) and college knowledge (e.g., ability to navigate institutional systems) deserve exploration.

Promising Practice

Philadelphia Adds Capacity to Align High School and College Writing Expectations

The Citi Foundation launched the Postsecondary Success Collaborative in 2008 to improve college and career readiness in 10 public high schools in Miami-Dade County, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. The collaborative served more than 12,000 low-income and first-generation college students through 2013, designing a coordinated, cross-sector approach that built internal capacity and external partnerships to better prepare students for postsecondary success.[15] One partner developed an "asset mapping" tool to help schools identify strengths and weaknesses in their college preparation strategies and prioritize next steps. Philadelphia's asset mapping led to a focus on literacy, and a new partnership of high school and college writing instructors significantly changed secondary instruction to help students better meet postsecondary expectations.

> It is critical to invest in expanding the professional capacity of both K-12 and postsecondary educators to use data effectively.

Research identified the "strong implementation traits" schools were using to increase successful transitions to college. One was the use of school-level data from the asset mapping tool, which was a detailed survey created by FHI 360, a nonprofit human development organization, based on the work of David Conley of the University of Oregon, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and others. The anonymous survey, administered to all staff working in or with a school, yielded valuable information on the school's college readiness strengths and challenges. Data from the survey helped a school choose and implement priorities to increase its capacity to support students in four key domains of postsecondary readiness: context skills and awareness of college admissions requirements and expectations, learning behaviors and academic tenacity, cognitive strategies, and academic content.Philadelphia developed a collaboration between high school teachers and their college faculty counterparts at Temple University and the Community College of Philadelphia. Asset mapping survey data highlighted the pedagogical divide between high school and college-level writing. High school teachers teamed up with college instructors on "instructional rounds" in which they observed each other's writing classes, shared lesson plans, and reviewed samples of student work.

By collectively examining what they saw, heard, and learned from the rounds, teachers and professors as well as their administrators gained a stronger appreciation for writing practices and performance expectations at both high school and college levels. Faculty in both institutions used the rounds data to modify teaching strategies, lesson plans, and course content. Early successes of the instructional rounds strategy led to making the rounds an annual process. Each spring, the rounds culminate in a citywide institute organized by the Philadelphia Education Fund (the lead intermediary) and attended by staff from the university, community college, school district, participating high schools, local partner organizations, and funders.[16]

4) FORGE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Increasingly, public schools and colleges are sharing data with community partners to extend and strengthen the web of academic and social supports for students both in and beyond the traditional school day. Interagency efforts involving education, social services, health care, faith institutions, youth development, and college access programs promote the delivery of comprehensive services that is only possible through cross-sector collaboration. Collaboration increases the potential power of the co-design, co-delivery, co-validation model to include services and supports beyond the formal K-16 education realm. Building students' abilities in the noncognitive and college knowledge domains of college readiness are a particular strength of the community provider organizations which complement the academic focus of the regular school day.

Community-based organizations have become significant providers of college access supports and are collecting valuable data on youth development they can share with high schools and colleges.

- Community-based organizations have become significant providers of college access supports and, increasingly, are collecting valuable data on youth development, especially in the noncognitive domain.
- Given this expansion in influence, community providers could be valuable members of a cross-sector approach to collaborative research.
- Adding community providers as a source of student supports requires careful coordination with educators to ensure alignment with what students are experiencing in school and college.

Promising Practice

New York City Educators Team Up with Community-Based Organizations

LINCT to Success is a New York City-based partnership between New Visions for Public Schools, CUNY, and other education and college access organizations serving public high school students in NYC.[17] Launched in 2008, the program formerly known as At Home in College provides college access and transition supports to over 2,000 high school seniors attending 60 New York City public high schools. The overall program aim is to increase students' college enrollment, persistence, performance, and completion rates.

LINCT provides a wide array of academic supports for students in the transition zone from the high school senior year through the first year of college. While still in high school, students take the CUNY placement exam and use that data to develop an individualized learning plan with the appropriate range and intensity of academic supports needed to qualify for credit-bearing college coursework once they enroll in college. For students who require a more extensive level of support, LINCT offers accelerated courses in English and math. Students are allowed to retake the placement assessment at multiple points in their course of study to chart progress and adjust their learning goals as progress dictates.

In addition to academic assistance, LINCT provides students with other key college access supports such as completing college applications, seeking maximum financial assistance, and visiting campuses. A summer "bridge" program supports students in the period between high school graduation and college enrollment and provides first-year advising services. As part of a rigorous, multi-year evaluation, researchers compared the postsecondary readiness and enrollment rates of LINCT students to a matched group of high school peers. In 2014, LINCT students outperformed the comparison group by 15 points on the ELA readiness benchmark and by 5 points in math readiness. Likewise, 4 percent more LINCT students graduated from high school and 5 percent more enrolled in CUNY following graduation than the comparison group.

HOW TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN SECONDARY-POSTSECONDARY DATA COLLABORATIONS

The examples of data collaborations in Philadelphia, Providence, and New York demonstrate the potential for progress when K-12 and college educators join forces to increase postsecondary readiness and success. Unfortunately, these impressive efforts continue to be the exception rather than the rule. Few high schools and colleges attempt to create cross-sector data partnerships, and few of these are strong enough to survive the challenges of cross-system collaboration.

As noted above, building and sustaining data collaborations requires significant commitments—of leadership, infrastructure, capacity, and staff—from both K-12 and higher education systems. The final section of this paper offers specific recommendations for developing the momentum necessary to establish durable research collaboratives. While the recommendations have implications for both high school and higher education partners, the main focus is on encouraging change at the postsecondary level. Colleges generally have been far less willing to step up and share responsibility for students in the "transition zone" from 12th grade to freshman year. K-12 systems have serious work to do, to be sure. But if we aspire to long-term, productive partnerships between K-12 and higher education, the impetus may well need to come from postsecondary institutions, given their greater inherent interest in college completion and their deeper knowledge about how to help students on their campuses succeed.

1) PROMOTE LONG-TERM LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

Leaders of our K-12 and postsecondary education systems can play a critical role in championing this work. The chances of research and data collaboratives taking root increase significantly when college presidents and provosts, school superintendents, and other civic leaders, make long-term public commitments of support. These commitments can take different forms judging from the experience of cities where K-16 research partnerships have flourished. Leaders can help clear a path for data sharing between colleges and schools, a process that can get bogged down in the system bureaucracy. Leaders can make multi-year commitments of institutional resources and staff time in their budget forecasts. Likewise, forging alliances between research collaboratives and local and corporate funders, community and business leaders, and allied research organizations can serve to expand the reach and stability of nascent efforts. And leaders can help establish the legitimacy of research collaboratives by giving serious consideration to the policy implications of their reports.

Leaders can help establish the legitimacy of research collaboratives by giving serious consideration to the policy implications of their reports.

2) INVEST IN CORE OPERATING CAPACITY

Lessons from the New York City data collaborative underscore the importance of dedicating sufficient capacity to support the partnership's core activities. Initial investments of funding, staffing, and time are required to connect data systems, provide training, and set up a research partnership. Ongoing needs include the most prominent functions such as data management, sharing, and analysis, plus design, delivery, and validation of evidence-based supports. But behind-the-scenes services, such as grant writing, are also essential to support a research enterprise. Short-term seed funding from K-12 and higher education systems can enable a collaborative to take root, but grants and contracts are necessary for establishing a funding base and sustaining operations over time. Communications capacity is also critical, though it may not come immediately to mind. But the ability to convey lessons learned from the research collaborative—and eventually to show evidence of increasing student success—is essential to the endeavor.

3) DEVELOP FACULTY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

Many research collaborations between colleges and school districts rely on voluntary participation from staff, faculty, and institutional researchers. While this type of activity represents a valuable form of community service, it rarely produces the sustained level of engagement needed to produce positive change in policy and practice. Universities, where so many current incentives are weighted toward publication, would be wise to develop incentives to promote participation, such as offering short-term fellowship appointments that allow faculty to reduce their teaching load in order to commit meaningful time to the research collaboration, much like faculty take turns in academic leadership positions or government service. These formal, career-advancing appointments could also give faculty an opportunity to work with scholars in other disciplines and from other universities and education agencies. If the collaborative is successful in raising funds, the cost of these fellowship appointments could be offset by the research collaborative.

4) EXPAND PARTNERSHIPS TO ENGAGE OTHER AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

Although the most important partners in any collaborative effort to increase college readiness and success are public schools and colleges themselves, community-based nonprofit organizations play a growing role, particularly for traditionally underserved students. Groups such as LINCT to Success in New York and College Visions in Rhode Island provide vital supplemental college access and success supports that help thousands of young people make it to and through college. Many of these groups are collecting valuable individual-level data on students' noncognitive behaviors such as engagement, efficacy, resilience, and motivation, and thus have much to add to research partnerships. The involvement of community partners and youth may well lead to questions, research methods, and data sources that are strong complements to more traditional social science and policy research. Expanding alliances could go a long way toward producing relevant knowledge that informs changes in strategy, practice, and policy.

CONCLUSION

When considering an investment in K-16 research collaboration, school and postsecondary system leaders must grapple with how to justify committing scarce resources on research and development when many systems are cutting back on core academic and support services. This is especially acute for urban school districts and two-year colleges where enrollment pressures remain strong and the need for student support most urgent.

Leaders who have experienced success in advocating for new research capacity often point to system performance outcomes which fall far short of expectations. Nationally, fewer than 3 in 5 four-year college students will attain a degree within six years and fewer than 1 in 3 two-year college students will attain a degree within three years. It stands to reason that doing more to support students through the challenging transition zone between high school and college will result in increased student persistence and completion.

Strong transition learning opportunities depend on robust data systems to target student supports; stable predictors of college success that enable high schools to do more to prepare their graduates for successful transitions; and promotion of programs with a strong evidence-base, and retirement of those that do not. With 21 million students currently enrolled full or part time in U.S. degree-granting institutions, a gain of just one percentage point in completion rates would place several hundred thousand more Americans on a path to more fulfilling, prosperous, and productive adulthoods.

ENDNOTES

[1] Data Quality Campaign. 2016. Time to Act: Making Data Work for Students. Washington, D.C.: Author. Available at: http://dataqualitycampaign.org/resource/time-to-act/

[2] This paper defines "college and career readiness" as a three-part framework: 1) academic knowledge and skills—including content knowledge and academic skills such as critical thinking, writing, and argumentation; 2) noncognitive skills—including affective dispositions and nonacademic skills such as time management, perseverance, and goal setting; and 3) college knowledge—including the knowledge, tools, and assets required to navigate the transition to college.

This framework draws on the work of other scholars, including David Conley's "Four Keys to College and Career Readiness" model and the "College Readiness Indicators Systems" initiative.

For more information, see:

Conley, D. T. 2012. *A Complete Definition of College and Career Readiness*. Portland, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center.

Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University; John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities, Stanford University; & University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. 2014. Beyond College Eligibility: *A New Framework for Promoting College Readiness*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

[3] Lumina Foundation. n.d. "Community Partnership for Attainment." Available at: https://www.luminafoundation.org/community-partnerships

[4] Wilkes, S., Brohawn, K., Mevs, P., & Lee, J. 2012. Data Collaboration in New York City: *The Challenges of Linking High School and Post-Secondary Data*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

[5] FHI 360. n.d. "Postsecondary Success Collaborative." Available at: http://fhi360.org/projects/postsecondary-success-collaborative

[6] The author was a member of the CRIS steering committee and served on the Pittsburgh site team.

[7] The work continues among some of the school districts, but the university-based research organizations are no longer involved.

[8] John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities, Stanford University. 2014. *Essential Elements in Implementation*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

[9] These are adapted from the CRIS initiative's five key implementation elements, as described in: John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities, Stanford University. 2014. *Essential Elements in Implementation*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

[10] Providence Children and Youth Cabinet. 2015. *Minding the Gap: Increasing College Persistence in Rhode Island*. Providence, RI: Author

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Wilkes, S., Brohawn, K., Mevs, P., & Lee, J. 2012. *Data Collaboration in New York City: The Challenges of Linking High School and Post-Secondary Data*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

[14] John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities, Stanford University. 2014. *Essential Elements in Implementation*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

[15] A national third-party evaluation reported significant gains in both college enrollment and two-year persistence for the classes of 2012 and 2013 in the 10 targeted high schools. For example, college enrollment increased by 30 percent and college persistence by 26 percent, compared with increases of 5 percent and 7 percent, respectively, in the three school districts overall.

The OMG Center for Collaborative Learning. 2014. *Building Community Partnerships in Support of Post-Secondary Completion: Final Evaluation Report*. Philadelphia, PA: Author.

[16] For more information, a brief video about the instructional rounds in Philadelphia is available at: http://www.fhi360.org/media/videos/instructional-rounds-video

[17] See: http://lincttosuccess.cuny.edu/about-us/our-model.

Fairchild, S., Farrell, T., Gunton, B., Mackinnon, A., McNamara, C., & Trachtman, R. 2014. *Design and Data in Balance: Using Design-Driven Decision Making to Enable Student Success*. New York, NY: New Visions for Public Schools.

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