Pathways to College:
What High Schools Can Do to Prepare Students for College Admission and Academic Success in Higher Education

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"We Americans have long been dedicated to the idea that hard work should pay off — that even those from the most humble origins should be able to work their way to the top.

That still happens, of course. Antonio Villaraigosa, the high school dropout from a poor Latino family in East Los Angeles who went on to graduate from UCLA and is now mayor of the second largest city in America. Tom Vilsack, the orphan who grew up to become governor of the state of Iowa. Colin Powell, the son of Caribbean immigrants who climbed his way through the City College of New York to become the first African-American Secretary of State. We repeat these stories over and over.

But despite how important these achievements are to our sense of who we are as a nation, this kind of upward mobility happens far less often than most of us realize."

- *Katie Haycock*

Not only is this American dream of equal opportunity for those who work hard in jeopardy, it is eroding very quickly. In fact, there is now *less* social and economic mobility in the U.S. than there was twenty years ago, and we lag behind many other developed nations in providing opportunities for economic advancement, including France, Germany, Denmark and a whole list of European countries. According to Haycock and her colleagues, the reason for this sorry state of affairs is education – or, more precisely, the *lack* of education. "In the Information Age, education — particularly higher education — is key to a healthy income. Almost no amount of hard work will make up for the lack of it." (Haycock, August, 2006).

Certainly, skilled workers and those in the trades can still earn a comfortable living. But those jobs are also changing rapidly as electronics become more complex, sophisticated computer software and applications dominate business environments, new building materials require very specialized knowledge for their use, and the sophisticated technology in most automobiles far surpasses that found in the Apollo space missions. Fewer and fewer occupations, and certainly not the highest paying ones, can be mastered "on the job." Post-secondary education and continuous training have become the new standards for full participation in a global economy.

Sadly, "educational opportunities in America have been reshuffled and the role of higher education has been transformed. Instead of expanding and equalizing opportunity in our country, much of higher education has simply become another agent of stratification. *Today, our highest-achieving low-income students actually go directly on to college at rates about the same as our lowest-achieving students from wealthy families*. (Emphasis added.)" (Haycock, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1994, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

Why does this inequity exist? And, if we know the causes, why is it continuing to grow? The answers are simple to state, but devilishly difficult to resolve (Haycock, August, 2006):

1. Urban and rural high schools that don't even offer the courses students need to be admitted to many colleges, much less succeed in them.
2. Rapidly escalating college costs, without the commensurate increases in student aid necessary to help low-income families pay those costs.
3. A Byzantine financial aid system, which is especially hard for first-generation college students to navigate.
4. And many federal and state policies that reflect the view it is more important to use available dollars to support the interests of middle- and upper-class college students and their families, rather than making college affordable for low-income students.

The table below shows how college access is distributed over different income groups, regardless of a student's achievement level. In essence, ability to succeed may have less to do with college attendance than does ability to pay.

College Going Rates by Income and Achievement Level

Achievement Level (Quartile)	**Low Income Students**	**High Income Students**
First (Low)	36%	77%
Second	50%	85%
Third	63%	90%
Fourth (High)	78%	97%

Source: Haycock, 2006; NELS: 88, Second (1992) and Third Follow-up (1994); in, USDOE, NCES Condition of Education 1997 p.64

Fortunately, very recent changes in federal student aid programs may reverse this trend. However, the thought of trying to accumulate thousands of dollars to cover the cost of college is still daunting, especially for parents who have low-paying jobs or find it difficult to pay their expenses every month.

Good News, Bad News

The bad news is that some of the problems – particularly those dealing with costs and how financial aid is distributed – are well beyond the control of the school. The good news is that the research on college-going can be heartening as well. There is considerable evidence that schools and the adults who work in them may exercise serious influence on whether a student attends college (or some other form of post-secondary education) and if she succeeds when she gets there.

Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do

In one of the most comprehensive and rigorous studies ever undertaken, Tierney and his colleagues (2009) reviewed nearly 30 years of research on factors affecting college attendance. More important, they focused explicitly on the actions that high schools can take to help prepare students for and facilitate college attendance. In addition to the recommendations, they indicate the strength of the evidentiary base for each one – in other words, which recommendations are most thoroughly supported by the research. According to their report, these recommendations have sufficient research support to merit the attention of high school leaders.

1. Offer courses and curricula that prepare students for college-level work, and ensure that students understand what constitutes a college-ready curriculum by 9th grade.

- Implement a curriculum that prepares all students for college and includes opportunities for college-level work for advanced students.
- Ensure that students understand what constitutes a college-ready curriculum.
- Develop a four-year course trajectory with each 9th grader that leads to fulfilling a college-ready curriculum.

2. Utilize assessment measures throughout high school so that students are aware of how prepared they are for college, and assist them in overcoming deficiencies as they are identified.

- Identify existing assessments, standards, and data available to provide an estimate of college readiness.
- Utilize performance data to identify and inform students about their academic proficiency and college readiness.
- Create an individualized plan for students who are not on track.

3. Surround students with adults and peers who build and support their college-going aspirations.

- Provide mentoring for students by recent high school graduates who enrolled in college or other college-educated adults.
- Facilitate student relationships with peers who plan to attend college through a structured program of extracurricular activities.
- Provide hands-on opportunities for students to explore different careers, and assist them in aligning postsecondary plans with their career aspirations.

4. Engage and assist students in completing critical steps for college entry.

- Ensure students prepare for, and take, the appropriate college entrance or admissions exam early.
- Assist students in their college search.
- Coordinate college visits.
- Assist students in completing college applications.

5. Increase families' financial awareness, and help students apply for financial aid.

- Organize workshops for parents and students to inform them prior to 12th grade about college affordability, scholarship and aid sources, and financial aid processes.
- Help students and parents complete financial aid forms prior to eligibility deadlines.

Although this list is relatively brief, some of the recommendations require big changes in the school's culture and climate, academic approaches, staff training and professional development, relationships with the parents and community, and social supports provided to students. Fortunately, the authors provide well-documented guidance on how schools can meet these important recommendations in clear, unambiguous language. For example, the authors suggest that recent graduates who are attending college can provide valuable mentorship support for students still in high school. Making this work can be tricky, so the panel offers the advice quoted below (Tierney, et.al., 2009):

1. Provide mentoring for students by recent high school graduates who enrolled in college or other college-educated adults.

The panel recommends linking students to adults who can serve as college-going role models and build students' interest in college. High schools can recruit college-educated professionals to serve as volunteer mentors by reaching out to local businesses interested in partnering with schools in the community. High schools also can identify volunteer mentors by recruiting local college students—particularly graduates of the high school—or partnering with a college that has service-learning opportunities for college students willing to work with high school students. Individuals who share the same background as students, such as high school alumni or professionals from the local community, may understand the types of challenges students face in reaching college. Mentors can take on a variety of roles for students:

- **Serve as college-going role models.** Mentors can serve as examples of college-going adults from the community and share their experiences in preparing for college, completing a college degree, and pursuing a career.
- **Assist with the college entry process.** The one-on-one relationship mentors have with students allows them to provide individualized assistance with the college application and selection process for students interested in pursuing a four-year degree. This might include helping with a college application, reading an application essay, assisting with a financial aid application, or researching college options.
- **Monitor academic progress.** Mentors can monitor students' academic progress by reviewing report cards and discussing students' high school coursework. Mentors can advocate for students who are struggling academically to receive tutoring or additional help.
- **Listen and advise.** A mentor can simply serve as a caring adult who listens to the student, discusses his or her issues or concerns, and offers advice as needed.

To fulfill these roles, mentors need to communicate regularly with students. The panel recommends that mentors communicate or meet at least monthly with first year and

sophomore students, and at least weekly with juniors and seniors who are engaged in the college application and selection processes. High schools also can schedule social events or recreational activities that bring together mentors and students. An initial mentor training can prepare mentors for their role. Providing examples of activities for mentors and students to complete together can support the mentoring relationship. In addition, high school staff should monitor mentor relationships by checking in with students and mentors to ensure that mentoring relationships are supporting students.

Roadblocks and Remedies

Recognizing that schools can face challenges to launching even the most practical, cost-effective strategies to boost college attendance, the authors conducted a "roadblock review" for each recommendation, identifying the conditions that may keep schools from implementing them. The report offers practical, feasible ways for schools to work around these roadblocks, usually without large expenditures of additional funds. An example of how some schools deal with roadblocks to providing accurate financial information to students and parents is shown here:

Roadblock 5.1. *Our school does not have staff who are trained on financial aid policy.*
Suggested Approach. Financial aid officers in local colleges will be knowledgeable about financial aid and can be invited to assist students during a workshop or through one-on-one sessions. High schools also could invite the financial aid officer to train teachers on financial aid and the application process so that they can assist students.

Roadblock 5.2. *Guidance counselors may not have information about college costs or information about the changing nature of college costs.*
Suggested Approach. The panel suggests that high schools identify and train staff at the school who are willing to learn about financial aid and to serve as a resource for students. Math teachers or family consumer science teachers may have backgrounds that are useful for understanding the financial aid process. Establishing contacts with financial aid staff at local colleges can make it easier for teachers to stay current with information on college costs. The financial aid staff from local colleges could be useful for training teachers and other staff at the high school on financial aid topics.

Academic Preparation for College

Studies of successful college students show that their academic preparation in high school is linked clearly to college performance. This includes providing courses that are required for entry into a two- or four-year college and providing rigorous academic coursework that prepares students for the demands of college. Table 1 presents examples of college preparatory course requirements recommended by six college-attendance support programs. Although there are slight differences in the requirements, all include four years of English, at least three years of mathematics, two to three years of science and social studies, and one to two years of a foreign.

Because college preparatory course requirements have not changed much in the last decades, these recommendations are generally familiar to most educators, college-educated parents, and students who have been advised to pursue college throughout their K-12 education. These requirements are likely to be much less familiar to first-generation college bound students or those from impoverished backgrounds where college attendance may be little more than a vague dream.

Table 1. Examples of College preparatory course requirements

Program Requirements	**English**	**Mathematics**	**Science**	**Social Studies**	**Additional Courses**
High Schools That Work	Four years	Four years: Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II and a fourth higher-level math course	At least three years: biology, chemistry, physics or applied physics, or anatomy-physiology	Three or more years	At least one computer course
State Scholars Initiative	Four years	Three years: Algebra I, Algebra II and geometry	Three years: biology, chemistry, physics or physical science	Three and half years: U.S. and world history, geography, economics, and government	Two years of a language other than English
California's A-G Requirements	Four years	Three years: Elementary and advanced algebra and geometry	Two years: biology, chemistry, physics or physical science	Two years: world history, cultures and geography; U.S. history	Two years of language other than English; one year of visual-performing arts, one year of college prep elective
Indiana's 'Core 40' Curriculum	Four years	Three years: Algebra I and II and geometry	Three years: biology, chemistry or physics, and one additional course	Three years: U.S. history, U.S. government, economics, world history or geography	Three years of world language, fine arts, and/or P.E.
Academic Competitiveness Grant Requirements	Four years	Three years: including Algebra I and a higher level class	Three years: biology, chemistry, physics	Three years	One year of language other than English
KnowHow2Go.org	Four years	Three or more years: including Algebra I and a higher-level class.	Three or more years	Three or more years	Possibly foreign language, arts, computer science

Source: Tierney, et. al, (2009).

Academic Planning

Making college eligibility a reality for all students requires that each one have an explicit, concrete plan for getting the right courses and developing the proper skills to succeed in a demanding academic environment. Excellent planning tools are available from a number of sources, but one of the most comprehensive is available from the IES Practice Guide, *Helping*

Students Negotiate the Path to College: What High Schools can Do (Tierney, 2009). This form, and others like it, assure that student advising meets a number of key conditions for success:

- It is comprehensive. It provides a plan for the student's entire high school experience, including courses, other academic experiences, and, in some cases, academic-related extracurricular activities.

- It is concrete. The plan contains explicit course titles, the schedule on which to take them, and benchmarks for monitoring student progress.

- It is monitored. Students meet regularly with their advisor to review their plan, discuss their progress (including grades and other evaluations), and look for other opportunities to strengthen their college preparations.

In essence, the plan is both a map for selecting the right experiences and a guide for assessing student progress. Regardless of its format, it is an essential part of students' high school experience.

Counselors and Advisors

In the past decade, schools have seen the erosion of counseling resources and the redirection of their remaining resources to numerous roles other than college advising and counseling. Among the most inventive schools, many have adopted the *college advisor* model – where faculty assume responsibility for advising students in course selection, academic performance, and getting the most from their school experience. These advisors also monitor student progress, often through the use of technology, and pay special attention to students who seem to be slipping behind.

In school settings, these advisor-advisee relationships are sometimes managed individually, where advisors meet with students one at a time, or in group settings where an advisor can give direction to a group of students and still address questions or issues that may arise for individual students. Typically, these group advisory sessions are held during a designated advisory time, or even a homeroom period.

Re-thinking Readiness for College

In a report from the Educational Policy Improvement Center in Eugene, OR, David Conley (2007) encourages educators to think in terms of broad intellectual and academic skills and dispositions rather than narrow lists of courses as preparation for college. These skills and attitudes, he argues, can be developed across a wide range of courses, and may comprise a way of aligning virtually all courses in the high school curriculum with the goal of preparing students to succeed in college or other forms of post-secondary education.

According to Conley, beyond content knowledge that prepares students for rigorous academic courses, two "overarching" academic skills are essential for college success: writing and research.

*"**Writing**:* Writing is the means by which students are evaluated at least to some extent in nearly every postsecondary course. Expository, descriptive, and persuasive writing are particularly important types of writing in college. Students are expected to write extensively in college and to do so within short timeframes. Students need to know how to pre-write, edit, and rewrite a piece before it is submitted. Once a piece of writing has been submitted and feedback has subsequently been provided, they often must repeat this process. College writing requires students to present arguments clearly, substantiate each point, and use a style manual when constructing a research paper. In addition, college-level writing is expected to be largely free of grammatical, spelling, and usage errors." (Conley, 2007, p. 14).

***Research**:* College courses increasingly require students to be able to identify and use appropriate strategies and methodologies to explore and answer problems and to conduct research to explore a wide range of questions. To do so effectively, students must be able to evaluate the appropriateness of a variety of source material and then synthesize and incorporate the material into a coherent paper or report. They must also be able to access a variety of types of information from a range of locations, formats, and source environments." (Conley, 2007, p. 14).

Conley adds that two other specific academic behaviors are particularly crucial for college attainment, and that they, too, are developed most effectively across the curriculum and through advising and mentoring rather than strictly through individual course enrollments. These are self-monitoring and study skills. His eloquent discussion of these behaviors offers guidance to school leaders who wish to infuse their curriculum with both the content knowledge and academic skills and behaviors necessary for academic achievement at the college level.

"Self-monitoring is a form of metacognition, the ability to think about how one is thinking. Examples of metacognitive skills include: awareness of one's current level of mastery and understanding of a subject, including key misunderstandings and blind spots; the ability to reflect on what worked and what needed improvement in any particular academic task; the tendency to persist when presented with a novel, difficult, or ambiguous task; the tendency to identify and systematically select among and employ a range of learning strategies; and the capability to transfer learning and strategies from familiar settings and situations to new ones. Research on the thinking of effective learners has shown that these individuals tend to consciously monitor, regulate, evaluate, and direct their own thinking." (Conley, 2007, p. 16)

"Another important area of college readiness is student mastery of the study skills necessary for college success. The underlying premise is simple: academic success requires the mastery of key skills necessary to comprehend material and complete academic tasks successfully, and the

nature of college learning in particular requires that significant amounts of time be devoted to learning outside of class for success to be achieved in class.

Study skills encompass a range of active learning strategies that extend far beyond reading the text and answering the homework questions. Typical study-skill behaviors include time management, preparing for and taking examinations, using information resources, taking class notes, and communicating with teachers and advisors. An additional critical set of study skills is the ability to participate successfully in a study group and recognize the paramount importance of study groups to success in specific subjects. Examples of specific time-management techniques and habits include the following: accurately estimating how much time it will take to complete all outstanding and anticipated tasks and allocating sufficient time to complete those tasks; using calendars and creating "to do" lists to organize studying into productive chunks of time; locating and utilizing settings conducive to proper study; and balancing study time with competing demands, such as work and socializing." (Conley, 2007, pp. 16-17).

Contextual Skills and Awareness

One of the most intriguing parts of Conley's thesis is that student predispositions are as important as academic preparation to assure college success. These dispositions stem from what Conley calls "contextual skills and awareness," and are especially critical for students who come from environments and backgrounds where college-attendance was not the norm.

"The importance of this broad category has only recently been highlighted as an ever-wider range of students apply to college. Contextual factors encompass primarily the privileged information necessary to understand how college operates as a system and culture. This lack of understanding of the context of college causes many students to become alienated, frustrated, and even humiliated during their freshman year and decide that college is not the place for them. Examples of key context skills and awareness include a systemic understanding of the postsecondary educational system combined with specific knowledge of the norms, values, and conventions of interactions in the college context, and the human relations skills necessary to cope with and adapt to this system, even if it is radically different from the community in which a particular student was raised.

This does not necessarily mean that students need to disown their cultural backgrounds, heritage, and traditions—merely that they need to understand the relationship between their cultural assumptions and the assumptions and expectations that are operating within the college environment. The likelihood for success in college is higher among students who possess interpersonal and social skills that enable them to interact with a diverse cross-section of academicians and peers." (Conley, 2007, p. 17).

The Special Case of Poor, Low-Performing Students

Children from impoverished circumstances and those who have no family history of college attendance require special attention and support to assure that they have access to higher education and a reasonable chance of success. Ascher and Maguire (2007) studied thirteen

New York City high schools in order to discover how they managed to bring low-performing 9th graders from economically disadvantaged circumstances to successful high school completion and, ultimately, college success. Their research uncovered four clusters of best practices that serve as a guide for other schools working with disadvantaged youth.

According to the authors, "The beat the odds (bto) high schools use four key strategies to help some of the city's most disadvantaged students move successfully through high school graduation and on to college.

Academic Rigor
Standards for curricular rigor and student work across all disciplines are shared by all faculty in the schools, and Advanced Placement courses and/or opportunities to earn credit at nearby colleges are available to all students. Rigor is further reinforced through a culture of mutual respect between adults and students, including ground rules for both academic effort and behavior.

Networks of Timely Supports
The schools meet with students in advisories and conduct regular reviews of student transcripts to track students' academic progress, credit accumulation, and areas of need. They also employ a range of timely short-term interventions, from communicating with parents or guardians to after school tutoring, Saturday school, and lunchtime classes to enable students to revisit skills, master curriculum components, and practice for tests.

College Expectations and Access
The schools make clear to entering ninth graders that the next four years will involve disciplined academic work directed to graduation and college or another form of postsecondary education necessary to their chosen career. Prominent visual and physical space is devoted to college going. Schools are staffed with full- or part-time college counselors, and annual college and career fairs and visits to colleges are big events for students. Parents are involved in college planning through workshops on testing, college requirements, and financial aid. Relationships with local community-based organizations provide an array of critical resources, from student internships to help with college essays.

Effective Use of Data
Although administrators believe they can do better in this area, school- and district generated data are used to track student progress, identify student weaknesses and strengths, provide feedback on curricula, and shape academic interventions. Some of the schools also attempt to keep track of where graduates go to college and how well they do." (Ascher and Maguire, 2007, pp. vii-viii)

In order to turn these global recommendations into reality, Ascher and Maguire offer dozens of the best practices used in these BTO schools to achieve key objectives, often in the most impoverished and challenging school environments. Virtually all of these strategies can be employed, with minor modifications, in any school setting – urban, suburban or rural.

The Special Case of Rural Students

The lagging educational attainment rates of rural areas is a national issue. An Oregon University System Issue Brief, "Rural Area Education Issues and Outreach," outlines some of the challenges at the national level and within Oregon. "While some rural economies are moving away from traditional roots in such industries as agriculture or mining, many have not yet realigned new infrastructure needs with the education and skill requirements for knowledge-based jobs, as recently reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In Oregon, many of these traditional industries – such as timber and agriculture – now utilize a level of technology in their machinery and processes that requires their employees to have higher levels of educational attainment than a high school diploma. The last decade has shown a slightly widening gap nationally between rural and non-rural educational attainment rates, according to the U.S Department of Agriculture. In 2000, only 15.5% of U.S. adults living outside of metropolitan areas held bachelor's degrees, compared with 26.6% of adults living within metropolitan areas."

The brief continues, "rural Oregon, which officially includes twenty -four counties, encompasses approximately 80% of the state's land mass, and 20% of the state's population. Two measures – the percent of the population pursuing higher education at Oregon's public institutions, and the percent of the population who attained a bachelor's degree – both indicate a discrepancy between the educational rates of rural and non-rural Oregonians. Both rural and urban college goers divide their attendance between 2- and 4-year institutions in the same proportion, with just over half attending a 4-year college or university. But within those attending OUS, freshmen from Oregon's rural counties graduate at a rate that is 4 to 5 percentage points lower than their urban counterparts. Approximately 16% of the adult population of rural Oregon holds a bachelor's degree or above, compared with over 30% in metropolitan and surrounding areas.

In 2007, Oregon proposed a rural outreach initiative. "This proposed $1.6 million initiative would launch an extensive high school program to (1) increase college preparation, aspirations, and attendance by making college education in rural Oregon more accessible and affordable; (2) increase the percentage of rural high school graduates attending college in 2015 to the state average; and (3) contribute to increased investment in economic development in Oregon's rural areas. The funds would:

- establish outreach centers and mentor programs in high schools and other locations throughout rural Oregon;
- focus on 7-9th grade students; and
- provide outreach to parents regarding admissions, financial aid, and other postsecondary educational processes."

These three activities are key features of any program designed to promote college attendance among rural youth.

Research by Guiffrida (2007) digs more deeply into the issues faced by rural students, particularly when they attend a larger institution away from home. "The literature suggests that rural students may have a more difficult time than urban and suburban students

- adjusting to the increased size of the campus and surrounding community;
- becoming comfortable with racial/ethnic diversity;
- becoming accustomed to expanded social, academic, and career options;
- adapting to broad cultural differences between urban and rural cultures;
- and accessing student support services.

These challenges are likely to have contributed to the high rates of mental health problems experienced by rural college students, low college persistence rates at large institutions, and high rates of transfer." (p. 18)

Guiffrida continues: "Rural school counselors can … take a number of steps to help prepare their students who decide to attend large colleges and universities…by

- encouraging their students to become acquainted with the campus before they attend and to help them become comfortable with racial and ethnic diversity throughout their high school experiences;
- assisting students in their college transition by encouraging them to join extracurricular activities and to be prepared for more passive forms of involvement than they may be accustomed to in their rural high schools;
- exposing students to a plethora of occupations beyond those typical of their home environments [to] help reduce the risk of students becoming overwhelmed by the extensive choices available to them at large colleges and universities;
- encouraging them to adapt to their surroundings and to seek help from student support services including counseling and advising services, as needed. (pp. 18-19).

Other researchers (Chenoweth and Galliher, 2004; Yan, 2002; Grimard and Maddaus, 2004) have uncovered similar conditions affecting rural students' attendance and ultimate success in college. Among the most pressing of these issues is the culture of rural life itself. Rural students tend to imagine their futures as intimately connected to their community, and, because of limited professional employment opportunities in many rural communities, have a fear that going away to college means going away for good. It is a fear shared by parents as well. In one study (Grimard and Maddaus, 2004) this fear becomes very real and affects students' willingness to participate in a college bound program in their community. "Some students felt the social pressure from family and friends to drop out of the Upward Bound program before completion. During the interviews, some students indicated that the idea of being away for six weeks (even with most weekends back home) was terrifying, especially if the student had never been away from his or her small rural community. Parents echoed similar reasons: being away from family (54.1%) and being too far from home (24.3%) as concerns for their children in applying to the Upward Bound program." (p. 33)

<u>Programs that Work</u>

Some communities have attempted to mediate these fears by engaging the entire family in the college orientation process, including carefully structured visits to college campuses while accompanied by counselors and familiar school staff. These have been particularly effective when coordinated with local college recruitment and admission personnel who can help reassure both potential students and their families about both the opportunities that abound in college and steps that can be taken to keep students connected with their families and home communities.

Other communities have helped students by delaying when they must actually leave their community to attend a larger school. In Converse County, Wyoming, for example, students at Douglas High School, with careful planning and good advising, can complete requirements for the first year of college before they graduate from high school. If they stay for a year beyond high school graduation, they can complete the second year of college through an agreement with Eastern Wyoming College. Although they do not benefit from the "college experience" in the same way a residential student might, they have the opportunity to begin their college studies in the comfort of their home community and gain additional maturity and academic credentials before heading off to the state university several hours away. (Weigel, 2004)

Dozens of variations on this program exist in other communities as well. The judicious use of dual-enrollment courses, AP classes and other advanced options can help students earn college credit before they actually have to leave home to complete their degree. Partnerships with local 4 year and community colleges are invaluable in establishing this transition programs.

Why Bother?

The answer is simple: college pays off. Not only do college graduates earn more money in the course of their careers, they are less susceptible to lay-offs, down-sizing, and other vagaries of the workplace. College graduates also enjoy "softer" benefits as well, including better health, higher levels of "happiness," and more job fulfillment.

More important, college seems to benefit disadvantaged youth the most. A recent study by Jennie Brand and Yu Xie (2010) reported in *Education Week* found "that college graduates whose demographic and academic backgrounds suggested they'd be among the least likely to go to college – including black, Latino and low-income students, and those whose parents did not attend postsecondary education – got the biggest bump in income from their degrees."

Many districts and state agencies promote college attendance with direct mailings to students and parents. One of the best examples is from rural South Dakota, where every 8th grade student receives an attractive and very clear message from the state Board of Regents. It tells students:

1. "You need to go to college," and supports that claim with earnings and unemployment information based on level of education in South Dakota.
2. "You must take the right courses," and provides a list of courses to be taken during each year of high school.

3. "You can afford it," and proves its point by showing the actual cost of college for a South Dakota resident along with sources of financial aid.

Although the brochure is sent to 8th graders, the message is also focused on parents. It helps them begin to understand that their child's future depends on securing a postsecondary education and that higher education is within reach, as long as their child works hard and plans early for his or her academic success.

A Goldmine of Strategies

There are literally hundreds of innovative and effective strategies being used by schools across the nation to promote college attendance and student success. The resources that follow provide a goldmine of these strategies and good descriptions of how they are actually used in real schools. Use them to think comprehensively and systematically about how you will help the kids who need it most create their pathway to college.

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