



CORE & MORE: GUIDING AND PERSONALIZING COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Implementing higher and clearer common expectations in core subjects is a big step forward for American education. Blended and online learning offer the complementary potential of stronger engagement, customized pathways and equalized opportunities.¹ But helping more students reach higher standards will take more than updated core academic programs; it will require more robust guidance and support services as well. In a culture where coffee orders and cell phones are customized, there is an emerging opportunity to better support individual students' success through:

- » **Motivation**—building sustained relationships with students, exploring areas of interest and related careers, addressing barriers to school attendance;
- » **Customization**—helping students set short and long term goals, track progress, and experience success in class, in job settings and in community services; and
- » **Equalization**—broadening exposure to college and career options, providing high touch/high tech decision support for postsecondary planning for all students.

The intent of this paper is to clarify the central mission of student guidance systems, sketch the architecture of information systems and encourage aggregated demand that we hope will lead to more investment and innovation in next-generation guidance systems.

Better student guidance isn't a fix all for all problems, nor will it fulfill all the readiness keys described or guarantee that all students meet the rigorous Common Core State Standards (CCSS). However, strong guidance systems will take on a more integrated and comprehensive role in supporting academic and career readiness.

Thousands of purpose-built secondary schools have been developed in the last 15 years that have incorporated teacher-led advisory systems and distributed guidance services. Combined with stronger relationships, these structures and services are central to why these schools generally have much higher graduation rates than traditional high schools. However, these practices and structures have not become the norm, in part, because of a lack of curriculum and information systems. Most teachers were not trained to participate in distributed guidance and many teachers introduced to advisory structures find the multiple missions and lack of support systems confusing and frustrating.

In many high schools, the shuffle of a discipline-based, big-catalog master schedule can lead to a lack of sustained relationships and increased risks for students to fall through the cracks. Important outcomes get little attention with the lack of an advisory spine. Strong advisory structures, however, allow for college guidance, career guidance, homework help, academic monitoring and other guidance functions to be delivered in an integrated manner.

New tools and structures will not only provide better information to students and parents, they will hold the potential to:

- » Create within students a stronger sense of purpose for school;
- » Give students more supported responsibility for setting goals and tracking progress toward college and career readiness;
- » Provide a better early warning system and stronger academic and social safety net;
- » Support better choices during and after high school;
- » Better prepare students for 21st century careers;
- » Facilitate better home-to-school partnerships; and
- » Equalize opportunity in order to provide access for all students.

In practice, the best student guidance systems are **blended** (leveraging technology and in-person instruction and services), **distributed** (leveraging staff in addition to school counselors), and **scheduled** (utilizing an advisory period) to ensure effective implementation and attainment of outcomes. They must connect academic preparation, thought patterns, interests and learning to students' college and career aspirations.

"Core & More: Guiding and Personalizing College & Career Readiness" begins with an introduction that establishes key definitions, describes the functions of student guidance and explains why now is the time to investigate the role of technology in creating a next-generation system of student guidance and support.

The section entitled Beginning with the End in Mind establishes the importance of getting goals right and builds the case for creating a strong culture in support of student guidance.

The report then moves through two comprehensive sections—Guidance for College and Guidance for Career—that each offer details on process, existing tools and current examples of best practice.

The section on Advisory Structures describes a new vision for advisory, provides school and district examples and describes unifying strategies necessary to ensure impact and success.

The authors conclude with an acknowledgement of both the opportunities and challenges, explaining that more robust guidance systems can play a critical role in tracking progress, boosting college and career readiness and empowering better choices. With rapidly expanding online choices, better guidance systems will be critical to ensuring that self-blends and customized pathways add up to better preparation—a key to equity and excellence, and a necessity if we are to graduate a new generation of students equipped to thrive in college and career.

INTRODUCTION

EXHIBIT 1: KEY DEFINITIONS

Before delving specifically into the role of guidance to help students achieve Common Core State Standards and become college and career ready, let's be sure to use common language:

C **Common Core State Standards (CCSS).** [CCSS](#) is a state-led education initiative in the United States that details what K-12 students should know in English language arts and mathematics at the end of each grade. The state-led initiative is sponsored by the [National Governors Association](#) (NGA) and the [Council of Chief State School Officers \(CCSSO\)](#) and seeks to establish consistent education standards across the states as well as ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter two- or four- year college programs or enter the workforce.

r **College and Career Readiness.** A go-to expert on these topics is David Conley, author of “Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common Core,” and founder of the Educational Policy and Improvement Center ([EPIC](#)). Conley’s working definition of college and career readiness:

College and career readiness refers to the content knowledge, skills, and habits that students must possess to be successful in postsecondary education or training that leads to a sustaining career. A student who is ready for college and career can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses without the need for remedial or developmental coursework.⁶

Further, Conley describes four keys to college and career readiness: key cognitive strategies (THINK), key content knowledge (KNOW), key learning skills and techniques (ACT), and key transition knowledge and skills (GO). These are important to know because student guidance can and SHOULD contribute to all four keys—for example, intentionally teach about academic mindset (THINK) and monitor academic progress (KNOW).

g **Student Guidance.** At the broadest level, guidance is advice or information aimed at resolving a problem.⁷ As we look at guidance in the context of college and career readiness, the “problem”—or opportunity—is that of navigating through school and life into college and career. This paper refers to student guidance in a broadest sense:

Guidance is an articulated process that provides information, experiences and support to students as they pursue current and future academic and career opportunities.

p **Personalized Learning.** According to the [National Education Technology Plan](#), “personalized learning” is paced to student needs, tailored to learning preferences and customized to the specific interest of different learners. We believe personalized learning also includes daily engagement with powerful learning experiences, flexibility in path and pace and the application of data to inform the individual learning trajectory of each student.

Less than a third of the students in the United States are college ready²—and fewer yet are career ready.³ Despite more than a decade of advocacy for 21st century skills and better preparation for college and careers, most states continue to focus solely on the 3R's, and most secondary schools still lack the structures, tools and culture that students need in order to be college and career ready. Even those schools that take a programmatic approach to student guidance often do so separate and segregated from the academic workings of the school. As a result, for many students, high school is a collection of courses with little goal clarity or sense of purposeful direction toward a path to college and career readiness or personal aspirations.

A closer look at the issue at hand:

Post-Secondary Attainment Issues. Students are not making it. According to the Educational Policy Improvement Center, of 100 middle school students, 93 want to go to college. Of those, 70 graduate from high school. Of the high school graduates, only 44 enroll in college, and just 26 of those enrolled in college will successfully earn a college degree.⁴ Contrast that with current data that 81 percent of U.S. jobs are middle- or high-skilled and require at least some postsecondary education, be it a two-year or four-year degree, technical certification, apprenticeship or another training program. The remaining low-skilled jobs typically offer lower pay and less job security.⁵

App Gaps. A recent [Get Schooled](#) report catalogues the growing array of college access apps but identified three market gaps:

- » First, there are few sites that target the needs of younger students, despite growing evidence that stresses the importance of early awareness of college options, costs and requirements.



100 middle school students



93 want to go to college



70 graduate from high school



44 enroll in college



26 earn a college degree

Source: [Educational Policy Improvement Center](#)



WHY NOW?



COMMON CORE:

We're all reconsidering curriculum & instruction.



MINDSET MATTERS:

Success is more than mastering the 3Rs.



BLENDED MODELS:

New structures and staffing compel guidance planning.



ONLINE LEARNING:

Increased course choice requires complementing guidance.



INVESTING IN INNOVATION:

We'll get what we ask for.

- » Second, there are few sites that offer end-to-end assistance throughout the college application process that empower and support students directly, without requiring the support of a parent or school.
- » Third, the most well-designed sites have not yet found their audience. Even well-intentioned programs like the [College Knowledge Challenge](#) do not have a marketing or distribution strategy to connect the tools to students who need them most.

Segregated Guidance Activities. Too often, guidance and counseling activities exist only in the outdated career center with dusty college brochures and a few old desktop computers—outside of instead of within core academic activities of the school. But guidance is not just about getting in to college and surviving emotional crises—it's also about supporting academics and cognitive activities and helping young people think about who they want to be and what they want to do.

The question then becomes: *What type of personalized guidance do students need to graduate ready for college and career?*

WHY NOW?

Guidance has always been important, so why is it worth reconsidering now? There are four reasons this is a timely topic: Common Core State Standards, mindset, blended learning and potential for investment.

Common Core State Standards. The adoption of CCSS is causing school systems to reconsider and restructure curriculum, instruction and associated implementation plans. This is the perfect time to refine student guidance outcomes so that they directly contribute to, and go beyond, achievement of CCSS. In order to meet higher standards, students need stronger guidance and support. Many specific suggestions for achieving the CCSS are provided by [Achieve](#), including resources specifically targeted at [administrators](#) and [counselors](#).

Mindset Matters. Amidst disappointing data on college completion rates, there is a growing awareness and body of research on the importance of mindset and habits of success to increase opportunity for success. Mindset is a simple idea regarding the connection of thinking and learning identified by Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck through decades of research on achievement and success. She contrasts the fixed and growth mindsets and urges practitioners and students to adopt practices that foster a growth mindset:

In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits.... They're wrong. In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have had these qualities.⁸

Many schools, such as San Diego's [Kearny High School of Digital Media & Design](#) offer student-centered projects stressing mindset, habits of mind and perseverance.

In an environment that promotes a growth mindset, students understand that learning can feel frustrating at times and are praised for the effort required to persevere.

Blended Models. With a rapid increase in the development and adoption of blended school models, the need to re-examine student guidance intensifies. Students need support, and often new skill sets, to meet changing course expectations, technologies, schedules, and learning activities that often require increasing levels of student initiative. New structures and strategies are often required to provide such support.

Online Learning. Due to students' expanded access to part time online learning, even "non-blended" schools that do not widely integrate technology need to provide "blended guidance." At minimum, schools must be aware of the ballooning number of course choices available and how they align with district policy and graduation requirements. States such as Louisiana are leading the way to allow students to customize their education plans through the [Louisiana Course Choice](#) initiative, which increases options for students but also raises the need for additional counseling support to help inform those decisions.

Investing in Innovation. Aggregated demand for better tools would boost investment and innovation in student guidance and college and career readiness. By putting technology and innovations directly in the hands of students, the opportunities for personalization, growth and effectiveness are exponential.

FUNCTIONS OF STUDENT GUIDANCE

With the context above, student guidance isn't a fix-all for all problems, nor will it alone fulfill all readiness keys or guarantee that all students meet the rigorous CCSS. However, strong guidance systems will take on a more comprehensive and integrated approach than has been traditional, and they will contribute to all four of the key areas of college and career readiness. In practice, the best student guidance systems are **blended** (leveraging technology), **distributed** (leveraging staff in addition to school counselors) and **scheduled** (utilizing an advisory period) to ensure effective implementation and attainment of outcomes. They must connect academic preparation, thought patterns, interests and learning to students' college and career aspirations.

There are ten guidance functions that are important enough to warrant dedicated time every day, ongoing staff development, strong coordination, an adopted curriculum and personalization tools. Further, since functions are ideally distributed, they necessitate role discussions. Norm Gybers, author of [Developing & Managing Your School Guidance & Counseling Programs](#), emphasizes an all staff approach:

A comprehensive, developmental program of guidance is based on the assumption that all school staff are involved. At the same time, it is understood that professionally certified school counselors are central to the program. School counselors not only provide direct services to students but also work in consultative and collaborative relations with other members of the guidance team, members of the school staff, parents and members of the community.⁹

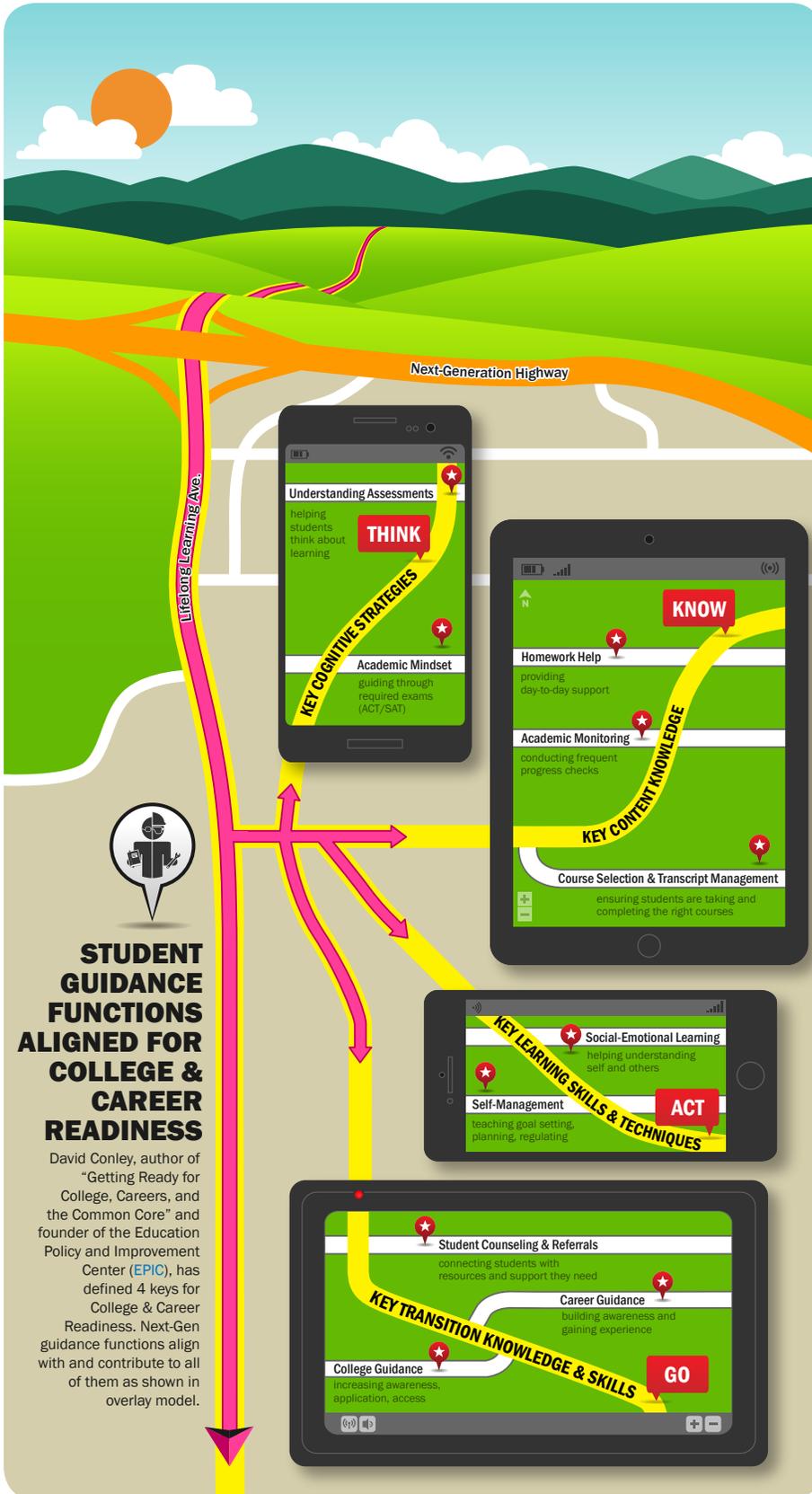


EXHIBIT 2: STUDENT GUIDANCE FUNCTIONS

This exhibit specifically models how the 10 functions of guidance align with Conley's four readiness keys: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills and techniques, and transition of knowledge and skills.¹⁰

STUDENT GUIDANCE FUNCTIONS ALIGNED FOR COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

David Conley, author of "Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common Core" and founder of the Education Policy and Improvement Center (EPIC), has defined 4 keys for College & Career Readiness. Next-Gen guidance functions align with and contribute to all of them as shown in overlay model.

The design principles of a blended, distributed and scheduled guidance system come to life through the 10 functions of guidance, which make up the spine of a next-generation secondary school. Accordingly, when done well, these functions enhance all aspects of readiness and are interconnected.



ACADEMIC MINDSET & CULTURE

Readiness Key: Cognitive (THINK)

How students think about their learning matters. Dweck's concept of mindset is impacting the culture of readiness by encouraging practices and beliefs that foster a growth mindset. Launch Expeditionary Learning Charter School starts the day with Crew, a 30-minute advisory period where students practice and discuss the shared habits such as accountability, craftsmanship, wonder, mindfulness and compassion. [Carpe Diem](#) schools are known for their highly effective blended learning model in urban environments and recognize that culture, along with personalization and relationships, form the foundation for a new way of learning.¹¹



UNDERSTANDING ASSESSMENTS

Readiness Key: Cognitive (THINK)

In addition to knowing what will be expected of them under new assessments aligned with CCSS, students need explicit support to understand and successfully complete assessments such as the PSAT, ACT, SAT, ASVAB, state assessments and more. Advisory periods are perfect places to help prepare for and debrief after assessments. At [Wyandotte High School](#) in Kansas City, Kansas, teacher advisors not only help students prepare for the ACT, they talk about students' experience on the practice test and discuss strategies for powering through boring prompts and presenting themselves well on the test.¹² Some schools encourage students to follow [@ACTStudent](#) or [@OfficialSAT](#) on Twitter to stay abreast of exams and access tips.



ACADEMIC MONITORING

Readiness Key: Content (KNOW)

[Response-to-Intervention](#) (RTI) has brought the importance of frequent monitoring to the forefront. Whether part of a sophisticated RTI system or a simple check of grades and assignments, regular academic progress assessments are key. Next-gen platforms (e.g., [EAA Buzz](#) and [Summit Activate](#)) provide daily progress reports facilitating timely conversations between advisors and students. Another form of monitoring is to use one of many [GPA Calculator](#) apps to track progress.

4 HOMEWORK HELP

Readiness Key: Content (KNOW)

The advisory period can be a place for students to connect with a little extra help, including online tutoring resources such as [Tutor.com](#), [Khan Academy](#) or [OpenStudy](#). Advisors can point students toward phone-friendly apps such as [iStudiez Pro](#) that support scheduling, deadline tracking and homework planning.

Parchment

is changing the way transcripts are protected, processed and shared by not only digitizing the process, but also connecting all parts of the system from student to high school to post-secondary school. Parchment's new [College Match Tool](#) evaluates students' credentials, test scores, interests and preferences to reveal a wide set of college options. This new tool, complete with simulations, provides a real-time, empirically based approach to the timeless question "Where can I get admitted?"

5 COURSE SELECTION & TRANSCRIPT MANAGEMENT

Readiness Key: Content (KNOW)

Ultimately, a critical prerequisite for college and career readiness is a transcript that reflects readiness. Given increased personalization through the growth of course options and online learning, helping students build a thoughtful pathway and secure transcript is critical (see Parchment sidebar). New systems will be needed to help securely store and share student credentials earned through projects such as Mozilla's Open Badges. Universities and employers will also need to recognize new competency-based credentials that students will earn through various experiences inside and outside of school.

6 SELF-MANAGEMENT

Readiness Key: Skills (ACT)

Development of habits of self-management can be discussed in advisory and reinforced with curriculum and productivity apps (e.g., [Remember The Milk](#)). Author James Davison Hunter encourages development of self-direction and describes character as 1) the self-restraint to say no, 2) making affirmations of ideas bigger than self, and 3) making a choice.¹³ Equipping students with process skills such as goal setting, planning, time-management and decision-making is key to personalization.

7 SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Readiness Key: Skills (ACT)

Closely related to self-management skills and mindset, social and emotional learning can help students understand who they are and how to interact effectively with others. [Summit Public Schools](#) encourage [habits of success](#) based on the [CASEL](#) framework. States such as Illinois have begun adopting [Social & Emotional standards](#).

8 COLLEGE GUIDANCE

Readiness Key: Transition (GO)

Good schools build college talk into their culture, college knowledge into their curriculum, and arrange lots of college visits; at [IDEA Public Schools](#), for example, students visit 15 to 20 colleges before high school graduation. Upper division advisories coordinate the college application process using resources including [Naviance](#), [College Board Big Future](#), [Zinch](#) and [College Appz](#). Initiatives such as [College Advising Corps](#) and [Strive for College](#) use recent graduates and data to help students make the best possible post-secondary choice.

9 CAREER GUIDANCE

Readiness Key: Transition (GO)

New tools are helping to boost awareness of career options (e.g., [Mytonomy](#), [Mapping Your Future](#)). Mapping Your Future includes the online interactive game [Show Me the Future](#). School networks like [Cristo Rey](#) use an advisory period to prepare students for work-study or to coordinate work-based learning experiences and internships.

10 STUDENT COUNSELING & REFERRALS

Readiness Key: Transition (GO)

In a distributed counseling model, teachers and advisors are often the first to spot potential problems, provide first line support and refer students to a school counselor. At [Wyandotte High School](#) in Kansas City, Kansas, the Family Advocate System helps families navigate high school with their child and prepare for the next step. Guidance works well when many of these issues are referred externally to a web of community support groups through a partner like [Communities in Schools](#).

It is important to recognize both the relationships between and the distinctiveness of each function. For example, consider a student's enrollment in an upper level math course such as Algebra II/Trigonometry. Here are just a few examples of how each aspect of guidance is important:

- » **College Guidance:** knowing this course is required for admission to a four-year college.
- » **Course Selection and Transcript Management:** choosing to take the course.
- » **Academic Monitoring:** ensuring adequate ongoing progress to meet course standards.
- » **Homework Help:** providing the daily academic support needed to succeed in the course.

This example could be extended to additional functions, such as developing the academic mindset to believe mastery is possible and understanding assessments enough to know that in-class learning (or lack thereof) will impact SAT or ACT scores.

**BEGINNING WITH
THE END IN MIND**

GOOD GOALS

College and Career Ready Standards

Civic, digital, financial, health and career literacy

Habits of success: mindset, personal management, collaboration

Schools participating in a six-year **College Spark Washington College Readiness Initiative**—which emphasizes guidance goals and the implementation of advisory, college and career planning curriculum, student-led conferences, and culminating projects—have 20 percent higher graduation rates than comparison schools.¹⁴

GETTING GOALS RIGHT

A [review](#) by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research and a couple of popular books suggest, “[We don’t teach the most important skills.](#)” While the CCSS provide a valuable foundation, there are critical K-12 outcomes that are outside of the CCSS that are also important. These include civic, digital, financial, career and health literacy (including knowledge, skill and dispositions, as well as habits of success such as persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit and self-confidence).

With so much attention and so many resources being directed toward helping students meet CCSS (and rightfully so), let’s make sure we also address those standards that go beyond, and can actually guide students to achieve the CCSS. Simply stated, when students understand why they are learning what they are learning, what thought patterns help them learn, and how learning helps them achieve preferred future goals, they will be more successful in completing school.

Schools participating in a six-year College Spark Washington College Readiness Initiative—which emphasizes guidance goals and the implementation of advisory, college and career planning curriculum, student-led conferences, and culminating projects—have 20 percent higher graduation rates than comparison schools.

Schools engaged in the School Improvement planning processes know how important it is to analyze standards in the context of larger goals, and CCSS allow for students to demonstrate proficiencies and meet standards across multiple content areas. For example, writing standards can be realized using social studies or career exploration content.¹⁵

Whereas guidance hasn’t traditionally been part of the core curriculum, CCSS create an opportunity to integrate guidance with core instruction. Examples of standards specific to student guidance include the American School Counselor Association’s [National Standards for Students](#) and the Partnership for [21st Century Skills’ Framework for Learning](#). Accessing such resources can help schools plan to meet guidance and Common Core State Standards concurrently.

DEVELOPING A STRONG CULTURE

A critical component to advance successful guidance with college and career readiness is a strong school culture. At the core of a strong culture are high expectations, a high level of support and strong relationships.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS



HIGH SUPPORT



STRONG RELATIONSHIPS



STRONG CULTURE

A Case Study in Creating A College and Career Ready Culture

Trevor Greene, named High School Principal of the Year in 2013 by the [National Association of Secondary School Principals](#), built a strong culture of success for his students and staff at [Toppenish High School](#) (Washington). The school serves a high minority (95 percent) and high poverty (100 percent) population, and the focus on culture led to a rapid increase in graduation rates, jumping from 84.6 percent in 2008 to 98.3 percent in 2010.

A key strategy was leveraging an advisory structure that distributed the guidance process by providing a college and career planning curriculum, academic monitoring and an ongoing relationship between student and advisor. “I attribute our graduation rate increase directly to what we’ve been doing in our advisory. I am a true believer,” asserts Greene. This advisory structure reinforced the building of a strong culture through:

High Expectations. Toppenish students know that they are expected to graduate and prepare for their futures. The advisory program reinforced high expectations by emphasizing goal setting, academic monitoring and future planning. Concurrently, Toppenish High School expanded and supported academic opportunities, adding 27 high-profile engineering and biomedical [Project Lead The Way \(PLTW\)](#) classes, a [Microsoft IT Academy](#) class and a robotics class. Further, many students took advantage of dual credit options and the number of students with college-ready transcripts increased from 28 percent in 2008 to over half of students in 2013.¹⁶

High Support. Administrators, counselors and teachers worked together to establish the purposeful advisory periods while increasing support for the more rigorous academic focus. Advisory curriculum was blended; students completed a portion of the curriculum through online, self-guided lessons, along with traditional classroom discussions, activities and conferences focused on goal setting, college admissions, study skills, financial aid and more.

Strong relationships. The pieces of the puzzle for a strong culture are solidified through strong relationships. What follows is a brief story that demonstrates how high expectations, high support and strong relationships interacted to shape a student’s academic pursuits.

A Toppenish student and his advisor (who was also a [PLTW](#) teacher) were discussing registration plans. The student expressed how much he loved taking the STEM engineering classes and that he wanted to sign up for another. The advisor inquired further saying, “You’ve taken four of these STEM classes—what’s your career goal?” After the student indicated he wanted to be an engineer, the advisor helped him connect the dots. “I see you still haven’t taken trig. You’re taking all these engineering classes because you enjoy them, but you aren’t backfilling what you need to go forward.” By simply having that conversation, the student decided to take the math he needed.

Greene states, “It was because of the ongoing relationship between student and advisor that this conversation happened.”

GUIDANCE FOR COLLEGE

Since the concept of college readiness is so expansive, very few resources and tools exist that address all aspects. This college guidance process **MUST** be connected to all other functions of guidance and fit into the context of Conley’s keys. Nonetheless, when moving from framework to implementation, it can be helpful to narrow the focus specifically to guidance for college. Guidance for college can easily be confused with college readiness, but it is really a subset that focuses on obtaining knowledge and skills for admissions readiness, financial readiness and planning readiness.

BUILDING AWARENESS IN ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE YEARS

Early exposure to thinking about college and career is critical. Elementary years are key in shaping thought patterns, expectations, goals and view of self. Explicit instruction regarding college admission, finances and planning should begin no later than middle school. Listed below are examples of outcomes appropriate for middle school students, each of which establishes initial understanding and belief that college is indeed possible.

The [Spring Branch](#) and [Spokane](#) districts’ “T24” campaigns to teach students they can go to “technical, two-year, four-year” schools.



1 ADMISSIONS READINESS FOR COLLEGE: UNDERSTANDING & BELIEVING

- » The student understands the different types of post-secondary institutions.
- » The student understands admission requirements of each type of institution.
- » The student understands which types might be a good match for individual interests and skills.

2 FINANCIAL READINESS FOR COLLEGE: UNDERSTANDING & BELIEVING

- » The student understands the value of an investment in post-secondary education.
- » The student understands the projected costs of post-secondary education.
- » The student understands how families can cover the costs and basics of borrowing and budgeting. Families are engaged in this process so they can plan accordingly.

3 PLANNING READINESS: UNDERSTANDING & BELIEVING

- » The student understands the academic knowledge, skills and habits needed for college success.
- » The student believes he/she can achieve academic readiness.
- » The student establishes plans and goals, integrating other aspects of readiness, including academic pursuits, mindset, self-management and course selection.

GUIDING THE PROCESS IN HIGH SCHOOL YEARS: PLANNING & ACHIEVING

Throughout high school, students should engage in developmental activities that lead to the outcomes listed below.

1

ADMISSIONS READINESS FOR COLLEGE: PLANNING AND ACHIEVING

- » The student visits at least three post-secondary institutions.
- » The student practices writing effective admissions essays.
- » The student prepares for and takes the ACT and/or SAT.
- » The student applies to at least three post-secondary institutions.
- » The student succeeds in a college-level course and receives credit where possible.

2

FINANCIAL READINESS FOR COLLEGE

- » The student completes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form.
- » The student researches and applies for grants and scholarships.
- » The student applies for financial aid from his or her institution.
- » The student practices developing and living within a budget for post-secondary education.

3

PLANNING AND PERSISTING READINESS FOR COLLEGE

- » The student uses a planner to manage time and achieve goals.
- » The student self-monitors the process of applying to post-secondary institutions and adjusts plans and actions to complete all requirements in full and on time. This includes plans specific to admissions, finances and course completion.
- » The student understands and engages in processes of goal-setting, self-management, building positive relationships and persistence, and knows his/her strengths and weaknesses.
- » The student demonstrates strategies for persisting through difficulty such as problem solving and asking for help.

While of the above activities often occur within an advisory program (as described in a subsequent section), many schools are also incorporating college and job readiness learning into language arts and social science courses. These courses provide opportunity to use college essays, cover letters, and business email etiquette as units in writing and critical thinking courses, thereby meeting Common Core State Standards and guidance outcomes concurrently.

EXHIBIT 3: NAVIANCE

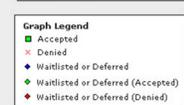
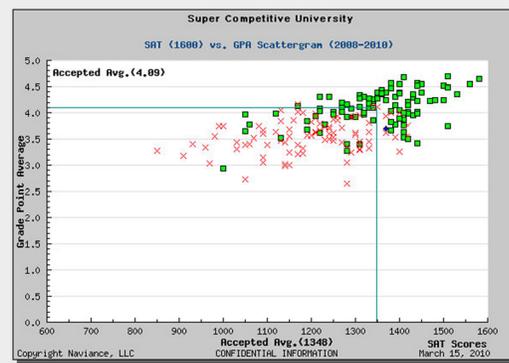
Naviance seeks to “connect learning and life” for students—along with their parents and adult advocates—in their 7,500+ subscribing schools. Naviance offers a comprehensive platform (Web-based and device-friendly) that addresses four key areas of self-discovery, career exploration, academic planning and college and career preparation. While Naviance began primarily as a counselor tool to manage the college admissions process, it has evolved to address many of the functions of guidance described in this paper, thereby supporting a more distributed model of guidance.

For example, Naviance has long supported the college guidance and career guidance functions through its portal offering easy college research tools. Students can be matched with colleges and results filtered based on career interest, geography, size of school, selectivity, available majors and more. A scatterplot feature helps students see how they stack up in terms of GPA and test scores with other students admitted to various institutions.

Naviance’s Course Planner supports the function of high school course planning to meet college and career requirements. The College Power Score distribution report (pictured below) assesses a student’s course rigor and includes a “Step it Up” prompt, based on prior course enrollment and performance, that suggests a more rigorous class if appropriate to maximize each student’s readiness.

In spring of 2014, Naviance launched a new curriculum, which adds the development of an academic mindset and social-emotional learning to college and career guidance, to help students start to make connections between what they’re doing in the classroom and what they aspire to do in life after school.

In addition to connecting several of the functions of guidance, Naviance connects the people involved in the guidance process. Dan Obregon, Vice President of Product Management and Marketing, states, “We continue to ask ourselves not only how to provide students with meaningful and engaging tools that capture their goals and plans, but also how we can provide educators and adult advocates with actionable data about student performance, so they can in turn deliver better guidance.”



APPS AND DIGITAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT COLLEGE GUIDANCE

Most existing apps and digital resources appeal to the high school level. We have organized a condensed list of resources based on those featured in the [Get Schooled Report](#).¹⁷

School counselors

play a critical role in the overall student guidance process and the college planning process. They deserve access to great resources that help them to maximize efficiency and effectiveness as they serve students. Some of the above tools appeal to both counselors and students; others, such as [School Counselor Central](#), target counselors specifically by providing them with student tracking tools and reports.

Plan Readiness	Admissions Readiness	Financial Readiness
Cappex	Applyful	College Abacus
College Board	College Confidential	College Up
Know How 2 Go	College Greenlight	FAFSA4Caster
Mapping Your Future	College Mapper	Fastweb
My College Option	College on Track	Find Tuition
Mytonomy	College Prowler	Graduate Strikeforce
Naviance*	College Reality Check	My College Dollars
NextStepU	College Week Live	Sallie Mae
Parchment	KnowHow2 Go	Scholly
Persistence Plus	Unigo	Scholarship Experts

*Naviance addresses all three areas of plan readiness, admissions readiness, and financial readiness.

IMPROVING ACCESS

Knowing how to go to college isn't always enough. Many students, especially those who are the first in their family to attend and/or are under-resourced, need additional support throughout the college preparation process. Effective guidance has the power to increase access, change lives and equalize opportunity. According to 2009 U.S. Census Bureau data, 80 percent of college degrees went to the students in the top two family income quartiles. Only seven percent of degrees went to students in the bottom quartiles.¹⁸ Implementation of the 10 Guidance Functions aimed at all students can make a difference, yet it would be naïve to consider this data and think that alone would be enough for all students.

Thankfully, there are numerous examples of programs targeted at under-resourced youth. Some, such as [Strive for College](#) and [College Possible](#), focus primarily on college guidance aspects such as admission readiness, financial readiness and/or plan readiness. Others, such as [AVID](#), concurrently provide direct support in the area of academic readiness.

The Strive for College example below represents only one program that makes a difference by supporting students through the application and admission process.

Strive for College is a mentorship program that pairs high school students with college students who provide support through the application processes for colleges, scholarships and financial aid. The program began when CEO Michael Carter learned that many well-prepared but low-income students didn't enroll in four-year college. He decided to do something about this access problem by forming Strive for College. He began by recruiting his college classmates to support high school students' post-secondary planning.

Strive for College has increasingly leveraged technology to maximize its impact for students through the development of [UStrive](#). What began as a college selection platform to support the decision-making process is now an interactive site using social media and predictive analytics to engage and inform students. UStrive "is like eHarmony for admissions instead of dating," says Carter. "It tells students where they are likely to get in and graduate." Students can drill down into details and find out, for example, that Latino males have a 40 percent chance of graduating at a particular school versus 80 percent at another school. The team is adding social media features so that students in a given high school can all work on applications concurrently.

A recent innovation that has further broken down access issues and leveraged technology is the addition of virtual mentoring. Instead of relying on geographic proximity to college students, the virtual process relies on video conferencing and the UStrive platform. According to Carter, initial trials of virtual student mentoring have been very positive, and he predicts that virtual mentoring will become a widely-used strategy in blended counseling systems.

Even programs emphasizing admissions can have effects that spill over into academics. A Pennsylvania junior mentored by students at Carnegie Mellon quickly increased her GPA from 2.7 to 3.2 after learning what GPA she would need to attend her target universities. Carter said, "We weren't supporting her academically; she just did it because we helped her understand her goal."

In order to equalize opportunity and close the gap on college completion data, it is critical that the 10 functions of guidance are implemented for all students and that additional support aimed at improving access is provided to students who would benefit.

GUIDANCE FOR CAREER

An understanding of what is meant by career readiness can help schools provide good guidance for careers. The [Career Readiness Partner Council](#), comprised of well-respected entities such as [Achieve](#) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development ([ASCD](#)), define career readiness as follows:

A career-ready person effectively navigates pathways that connect education and employment to achieve a fulfilling, financially secure and successful career. A career is more than just a job. Career readiness has no defined endpoint. To be career ready in our ever-changing global economy requires adaptability and a commitment to lifelong learning, along with mastery of key academic, technical and workplace knowledge, skills and dispositions that vary from one career to another and change over time as a person progresses along a developmental continuum.¹⁹

BUILDING AWARENESS

If the college planning process does not first consider career interests and goals, it would be analogous to planning a wedding without preparing for a lifelong marriage. As will be discussed in the advisory strategies section, this interplay between college and careers is critical. Just as college visits are important to college readiness, opportunities such as job shadows, career days and internships are important to career readiness.

Career awareness standards supported by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) are listed below, along with examples of how they can be achieved, typically through an advisory structure.²⁰

- » **Develop career awareness.** Students can begin to think about career groups such those based on cluster, industry or required level of education. [O*Net](#) and the U.S. Department of Labor's [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) provide general information about occupations along with databases of statistics, occupational outlook data and more.
- » **Develop employment readiness.** [P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning](#) emphasizes student outcomes (a blending of specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies) along with innovative support systems (standards and assessments, curriculum and learning environments). P21 also maps out how developing employment skills can align with core disciplinary content (e.g., language arts courses can emphasize technical writing skills).
- » **Acquire career information.** There are many websites to support this process, including [Bureau of Labor Statistics for Kids](#), [California Career Zone](#) and [O*Net](#) to name a few. [XAP's](#) product [Bridges](#) includes an online portfolio and ways for students to explore. Technology leader [LinkedIn](#) offers a student program that analyzes LinkedIn data entered by members regarding their educational background and later career outcomes.

- » **Identify career goals.** [Career Cruising](#), XAP's Transitions and Choices products, and [Naviance](#) all not only provide information about careers, but also have a user-friendly interface for goal setting.
- » **Acquire knowledge to achieve career goals.** The [National Career Development Association](#) (NCDA) provides standards along with links to hundreds of sources of information for job leads and career information, including a [curriculum](#) developed in cooperation with Junior Achievement.

GAINING EXPERIENCE

The ASCA career standards don't stop with these five components—students are also expected to “apply skills to achieve career goals.” In order to apply skills, students need to be provided with a variety of targeted opportunities such as those described below.

Career-Focused Academic Opportunities. Opportunities to apply skills are generally readily available for students within their schools' curricular offerings. [The Association for Career and Technical Education](#) (ACTE) leads the way for articulated programs ranging from horticulture to athletic training to engineering. The national [STEM Education Coalition](#) seeks to promote deep and applied learning in these fields. [Project Lead the Way](#) (PLTW) is an example of a specific curriculum program within the STEM field. Students can take college credit programs throughout their high school career in areas such as biomedical science, engineering and robotics. Many schools, including [PREP-KC](#), provide Career Academies. At PREP-KC, students can participate in bioscience, health science, engineering, business & finance and supply chain & logistics academies and thereby attain college credit and career-area and work-ready credentials.

Job Shadows. Maryland's [Salisbury Township School District](#) students who are identified as gifted and talented participate in the Thinking and Doing (TAD) program, which allows them hands-on experiences with potential careers as they shadow professionals. Elementary school students recently created development plans that would transform a parcel of land in the community. Supporters say the TAD program helps set students up for success in college and career—and teaches them about investing in their own communities.

Internships. Historically, internships have been emphasized at the college level, but they are now becoming increasingly available at the high school level. The [100-school Big Picture](#) network does an outstanding job of identifying student interest and creating related internships. [Met East](#) in Camden is also excellent in these areas. Beyond these examples of a school-wide programmatic approach, there are numerous digital tools that can help. There are internship match and management tools such as [Koofers](#). Also, [DoInternships.com](#) and [Fastweb](#) have resources for high school students. As part of President Obama's Pathways programs, high school internships are available through the U.S. Office of Personnel Management ([OPM](#)). Many universities offer research internships to high school students as a recruiting mechanism.

Mentorships. Adult mentorships and near-peer role models are key to the social scaffolding of learning and to the personalization of the guidance process. In the Guidance for College section, Strive for College’s near-peer mentoring was described as one such strategy. Likewise, mentoring is important for career development.

[Communities In Schools](#) coordinates dozens of academic and nonacademic supports that help students stay in school and succeed in life, with mentoring playing a key role. While meeting basic needs is important, it’s the accumulation of support services that turns students around, including a caring adult who models a productive life and career. Without a caring adult, all of those other important supports are compromised.

Building a relationship with a caring adult is the foundation for many great things. Students who are at risk desperately need the sense of security that high quality mentoring can offer. It’s about fostering trust and opening up a young person’s mind to possibility regarding his/her future and career—creating that self-fulfilling prophecy of success in spite of an environment that might be filled with failure.

That’s not to say that mentoring is some kind of magic bullet. Failed mentoring relationships can actually lead to negative outcomes. At-risk students need more than a buddy to take them to the occasional baseball game and buy them a giant foam finger. They need caring adults who are both committed to the long term and trained in the best practices of the mentoring field.

LEVERAGING STUDENT STRENGTHS

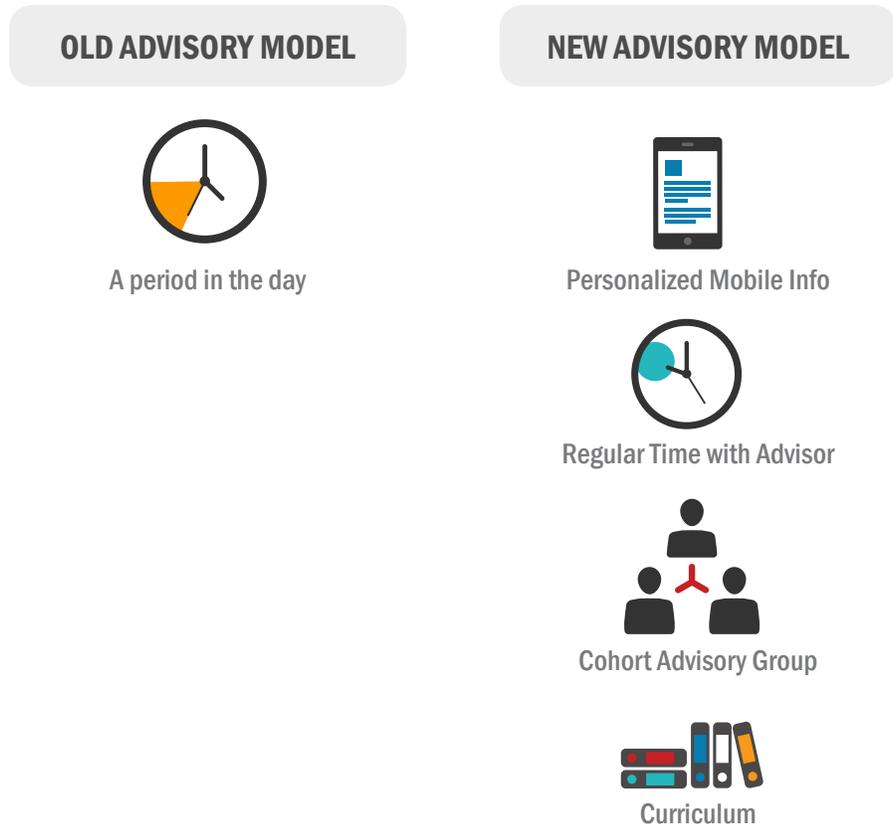
It is important to leverage students’ strengths and potential interests, of course, as they relate to career planning with an eye toward fulfillment and satisfaction. The process is much more aligned when students can “begin with the end in mind” by first knowing who they are, what they like to do and where their strengths/weaknesses are, and then creating a plan for college and career through that lens. A good guidance program helps students become aware not only of what careers are available, but also how those careers connect to personal interests and skills. Numerous interest inventories provide connections to potential career interests. A few examples are [Do What You Are](#) (based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), [Kuder](#) Inventory, and the interest section of the [ACT Explore](#) test. These sorts of assessments, when combined with time spent reviewing the information, can be extremely helpful to students and ensure there are connections between interests, abilities and career preparation.

ADVISORY STRUCTURES

Because advising in the '80s and '90s was largely focused on relationship building, advisories varied in structure, function and effectiveness. Today, many identified [great high schools](#) have a strong distributed student guidance system and an advisory structure that promotes a sustained relationship with an advisor, academic monitoring and management, and links to services. Next-generation advisory will combine daily (or at least three times per week) meetings with desktop apps that surface data from a variety of sources to provide real-time guidance. It also will fulfill or coordinate the 10 functions in Exhibit 2, thereby unifying efforts.

A NEW VISION OF ADVISORY

Given the assertion that guidance is blended, distributed and scheduled, the concept of advisory ought to be as well, serving as a “hub” for guidance. We envision a model where advisory is no longer just a period in the day, but rather a structure through which many of the guidance functions come together. We picture students, parents and advisors with mobile apps providing real-time data showing whether students are on- or off-track regarding multiple dimensions of college and career readiness. Readily available data and digital tools will form the foundation of ongoing check-ins between student and advisor. Additionally, students will be part of an advisory cohort that together experiences a combination of open and structured time for culture building, team building and curriculum delivery.



eSTEM Academy

in Reynoldsburg City Schools uses an advisory system called “Fusion” to augment students’ ability to think of their academic progress as a series of design challenges. Because they are a STEM school, they encourage deep thinking in a design/ problem solving modality. Although the process is not linear, they are able to help students demonstrate analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creativity in the way that they approach their learning.

Effective advisory structures have scheduled activities one to five days per week. Some schools pull off effective, unified guidance programs by meeting less frequently, but by ensuring integration with core academic areas. Daily advisories would likely provide a combination of college and career guidance curriculum (one example show in newly released Naviance [curriculum](#) video), academic intervention and curricular responsibility for subjects such as health, drug/alcohol awareness, mindset, bullying or others.

Best Practices in Advising

What follows are some exemplar activities within effective advisory structures:

At the [Baruch College Campus High School](#), students and advisors exchanged weekly letters about the books they were reading—generating a four-year portfolio containing written reflection on wide ranging topics. In such a competency-based advisory, feedback is ongoing and progress is being made toward meeting CCSS (e.g., writing).

Tacoma’s [Giaudrone Middle School](#) structures daily advisory according to a weekly pattern, with a cohort discussion on Mondays, silent reading and individual student-advisor consults on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, delivery of college planning curriculum on Thursdays, and progress checks on Fridays.

UNIFYING STRATEGIES

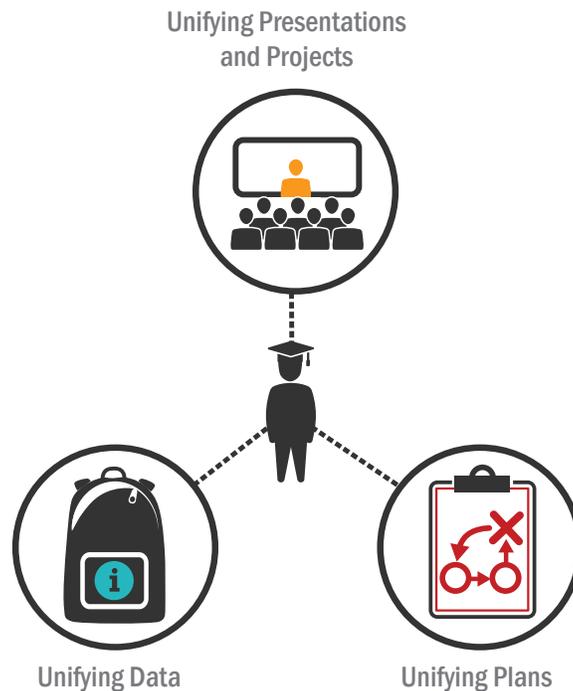
Because guidance is a spine that is connected to all dimensions of learning, it is very important that schools are intentional about helping students unify experiences and make connections. Three key strategies that unify the overall school experience from a student perspective include:

Unifying Plans. Every student deserves a plan. Whether it’s a transition plan, a life plan, a high school and beyond plan, or a post-secondary plan, every child needs a plan for his/her future. Just over half the states in the United States require plans, and it is our policy recommendation that all states adopt this approach. For example, in Vermont students will be asked to develop personalized learning plans tailored to their career interests and future goals. The Vermont Department of Education has launched a [website](#) to help students, families and educators prepare for the effort, which will begin next year with seventh and ninth grade students. Speaking to a high school’s students and staff, Gov. Peter Shumlin said the plans would help all students. “The idea here is—whether you are dyslexic like me and don’t learn traditionally or whether you excel traditionally or whether you’re somewhere in the middle—our job is to have an educational system where everybody succeeds and everybody learns to their potential,” he said.²¹

Unifying Data. A digital [data backpack](#) is a key innovation that could provide better guidance and personalize education. In essence, the data backpack is an expanded common electronic student record: an official transcript that follows students through every transition, grade-to-grade and school-to-school. The backpack includes traditional transcript data such as demographic information, state testing data and supplementary student supports. However, it also includes additional information

in order to represent a more holistic picture of student achievement, such as an expanded standards-based gradebook of standards-based performance data and a portfolio of personal bests. This enhanced data would provide a context for attendance and behavior patterns, supplementary support services, grades and other performance information such as proficiency scores and learning gains.²²

Unifying Presentations and Projects. To optimize ownership and application of learning, effective schools ensure students are engaged in presentations, projects and other experiences that foster integrated learning. In a student-led conference, for example, a student takes the lead with parents and advisors, presenting academic progress, future goals and steps being taken to achieve those goals—a perfect way to synthesize guidance activities. Students typically use a digital portfolio to bring progress, goals and future plans to life. Further, projects are often the best way to incorporate and observe the development of hard-to-measure skills and dispositions. While many states or districts require a senior project, others are now requiring annual projects, and many schools incorporate project-based learning into day-to-day activities related to future areas of study. Many schools and states take this a step further by engaging students in project-based learning, whether specific to future plans or an ongoing process. New Country School, part of EdVisions Schools, values interest-driven work and authentic assessment. Students propose projects and explain how the experience will make them a better person. Students work with experts on their projects and visit local and faraway places as part of their inquiry. At least twice a year, students defend their work product to a community audience.²³



**DISTRICT & STATE
POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS**

Whereas student guidance for college and career readiness has not traditionally been part of the curriculum, CCSS create an opportunity to integrate guidance with core instruction. For that reason, and because effective student guidance is critical to the economic vitality of any state or nation, districts and states are urged to make policy and budget decisions that reflect its importance.

DISTRICT AND STATE POLICIES

STATE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » States should signal the importance of a full range of college and career readiness outcomes.
- » States should engage stakeholders to create their own definitions of college and career readiness and set the stage for collaboration among partners. The [EdFirst](#) publication “Developing and Using a College and Career Readiness Definition” is a helpful resource.
- » States can provide support to schools and students by providing a statewide license or discount pricing for college and career planning curriculum and digital platforms so that all students have access to high quality guidance tools.
- » As states and schools make purchases related to college and career, they should explore opportunities for simultaneously meeting guidance and digital literacy standards
- » States should adopt a “High School and Beyond” plan requirement, where students are required to update a plan annually reflecting career goals, post-secondary education goals, and the requisite high school courses and activities to achieve those goals.
- » Projects are often the best way to incorporate and observe the development of hard-to-measure skills and dispositions. (See a primer on [performance assessment](#) and [Project-Based Learning \(PBL\) Lessons from Ron Berger](#)). Rather than just recommending a senior project, states could recommend that students complete projects every two years to allow the opportunity for demonstrated growth in these outcome areas (e.g., Mooresville, North Carolina, recently adopted a required sequence of four projects).

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS

- » School and district goals should reflect a broad view of college and career readiness such as that outlined in [The Leader’s Guide to 21st Century Education](#).²⁴
- » Secondary schools should adopt daily advisory structures with a clear mission, common systems and ongoing training.

- » Districts should allocate dollars for adoption of curriculum and digital resources that will support the student guidance process and provide access to high quality tools for all students.
- » Districts should allocate funds to ensure adequate staffing is in place to ensure funding needed to execute student guidance functions.

INVESTMENTS

Innovators and investors would be wise to focus on provision of resources and tools to make the guidance process more effective, efficient and accessible. Areas where they could make an impact include:

- » Expand efforts to improve access to underserved populations.
- » Create a mobile data dashboard of college readiness predictors, such as attendance, grades and test scores, which can inform decisions and interventions.
- » Design Mobile apps that coordinate the college admission, financial aid and planning processes.
- » Implement a blended guidance curriculum that integrates outcomes related to college planning, self-management, mindset, career planning and more.
- » Share information that connects parents, students and schools throughout all aspects of the guidance process.
- » Research to disseminate best practices of a blended, distributed, and scheduled guidance program.

CONCLUSION

The exponential growth of learning options for K-12 and post-secondary creates new opportunities for students but also adds demands to student guidance systems. The expansion of blended learning strategies and options signals the need for a more robust blended, distributed and scheduled guidance system.

Ironically, in this information age, there is also an information gap. As students and their families prepare to make one of the most expensive, most important decisions of their lives—selecting a post-secondary path and school—the information they need is not available in a cohesive, meaningful manner or in a format applicable to a student perspective.

Throughout this paper, we have visited the 10 functions of a robust guidance and advisory system. Looking at this from a student perspective, there are 10 benefits (a Bill of Rights of sorts) that secondary students and their families should expect and encourage:

- 1 Environment.** Every student should be able to attend a school and be part of a broader learning community where he/she is known, respected and safe.
- 2 Advocate.** Every student should have an advocate—one person who shares responsibility with that student for navigating high school and who knows the student's goals and aspirations.
- 3 Options.** Every high school student should have the choice of several relevant, rigorous courses of study in which he/she thinks, reads and writes about things that matter and that provide a bridge to college and work. Students should have access to guidance that, without barriers, supports academic decisions aligned with goals.
- 4 Academic support.** Every student should get the time and attention he/she needs to succeed—any subject, any time. Upper division high school students should have the opportunity to experience success in college-level courses and on college campuses.
- 5 Career awareness.** Students deserve the opportunity to learn about the range of career options and experience a wide range of work settings.
- 6 Post-secondary decision support.** High school students deserve encouragement and support in post-secondary goal setting, exposure to a wide range of options, and guidance that results in the best possible choice of post-secondary learning opportunities.
- 7 Prep & aid.** Students should be aware of and prepared for applicable college entrance exams and supported in their application for financial aid.
- 8 Support services.** Students should feel supported by a web of youth and family services.

- 9 **Mentors and role models.** Students should have the opportunity to be around adults they can imagine themselves becoming (to paraphrase [Debbie Meier](#)).
- 10 **Full expression.** Every student should develop self-awareness and direction by participating in the arts and extracurricular activities, using current technologies and serving the community.

We have long believed in the importance of motivation, customization and equalization to the learning process.²⁵ Nowhere does this appear to be more important than in the guidance process. As an action step, schools and communities may begin to ask themselves questions around these foundational pieces:

- » **Motivation.** What are we doing to connect with students and their individual goals on a personal basis?
- » **Customization.** How are tools and processes customized and personalized?
- » **Equalization.** Are we improving access to student populations who traditionally lack access and support to college and career decisions, such as first-generation college students?

Technology allows us to navigate successfully everything from a trip across town to a journey around the globe. We can access online tools and tutorials to learn and to make almost anything. In a culture that increasingly employs technology to improve our efficiency and help us meet our own goals—from learning a foreign language before a trip to fixing the sink without the help of a plumber—why not offer students the same navigation tools in service of college and career preparation?

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Mary is a consultant with a blend of education, business and technology experiences. Her career began as a high school teacher, coach and administrator. Mary then served at district and state leadership levels, as Curriculum Director in districts in Washington and Minnesota, and leading the Navigation 101 college readiness initiative for the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Washington). Mary led business and technology initiatives as VP for Envictus Corporation, a tech start-up company delivering an online college and career readiness program. She holds a B.A. from Gustavus Adolphus College, an M.Ed. in Education Administration from Whitworth University and Superintendent's Credentials from Gonzaga University, where she has also served as Adjunct Professor.

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DISCLOSURES

Digital Learning Now is a Getting Smart Advocacy Partner. Tom is a partner in Learn Capital, a firm whose portfolio companies may be mentioned herein. Mary worked as a consultant on the “Do What You Are Report” cited herein.

ENDNOTES

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