

# Helping Students Navigate the Path to College

Gaining access to college remains a challenge for many low-income and first-generation students who (a) are not academically prepared or (b) lack knowledge about how to apply to and pay for college. A panel of experts has identified four research-based recommendations for improving access to postsecondary education.

## Assess and Intervene

- Identify existing indicators to provide an estimate of college readiness
- Use performance data to inform students about their college readiness
- Create individualized plans for students who are not on track



## Assist With College Entry

- Ensure students prepare for, and take, the appropriate admissions exams early
- Assist students in their college search and in completing college applications
- Help students and families understand and complete financial aid forms



## Prepare Students Academically

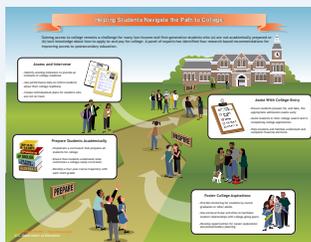
- Implement a curriculum that prepares all students for college
- Ensure that students understand what constitutes a college-ready curriculum
- Develop a four-year course trajectory with each ninth grader



## Foster College Aspirations

- Provide mentoring for students by recent graduates or other adults
- Use extracurricular activities to facilitate student relationships with college-going peers
- Develop opportunities for career exploration and postsecondary planning





This visual diagram depicts the research-based recommended practices from the practice guide, *Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do*. The practice guide offers educators, administrators, and policymakers recommendations designed to increase postsecondary access, particularly for underserved, low-income, or first-generation college-going students.

The guide was developed by an expert panel convened by the Institute of Education Sciences and is the foundation for all the Doing What Works content on increasing postsecondary access. For the purposes of this website, the five recommendations presented in the guide have been condensed into four practices.

These practices do not necessarily represent a sequence, but a set of interconnected and ongoing actions to support students in being prepared for and in accessing higher education. The pathway leads to college and is lined with the practices that will help students reach their destination. Along the pathway, there are many individuals such as parents, counselors, teachers, and other adult role models who can help students realize this goal.

## Prepare Students Academically

The first practice, prepare students academically, is at the left of the diagram. Being prepared for the demands of a two- or four-year college is essential. Schools should provide Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and/or honors classes and also help students understand exactly which course trajectories or sequences will best prepare them academically for college. Too many students face a slate of remedial courses when they enter college; this can be addressed with early information and guidance on coursework.

## Assess and Intervene

The second practice, assess and intervene, describes the school's role in identifying indicators of college readiness and is key to academic preparation. Schools should use multiple sources of data—grade point aver-

age, course completion, and local college entry exams, for example—to keep students informed about their progress. For those students who are not on track, schools should work with them to develop individualized plans to ensure they know what they need to do to be prepared for college. Schools can implement a system of early warning indicators to identify students in need of extra assistance early on in high school.

## Foster College Aspirations

The third practice, foster college aspirations, includes developing a college-going culture at school, providing mentoring for students, and developing opportunities for career exploration. Inside and outside of school, students can have relationships and experiences that nurture their interests. Having relationships with mentors or current college students, as well as adults working in their fields of interest, can help to motivate students and also alert them to the preparation

required for various career paths. For some students, just envisioning college as a possibility is the first step.

## Assist With College Entry

The fourth recommended practice, assist with college entry, means helping students with the steps and processes involved in applying to college. Many students do not have access to important information that will pave the way to their success, including knowledge of appropriate admissions exams and application deadlines, opportunities to visit colleges, or the steps involved in financial aid applications. Communication with students and their families is critical.

School leadership teams, and guidance counselors in particular, can develop clear communication systems, support networks, and a motivating environment for students who may aspire to a college education, but may lack the guidance and resources to get there.