



## Research to Practice Brief

Welcome to the fifth University of Minnesota College Readiness Consortium and Educational Equity Resource Center's *Research to Practice Brief*. *Research to Practice Briefs* provide school leaders with information and resources on current Minnesota issues related to closing achievement gaps and preparing students for postsecondary success. School leaders can use the *Research to Practice Brief* as a framework for applying current research to best meet their school's needs.

### Issue Five: College and Career Readiness

#### 2015 Legislation

In 2015 the Minnesota State Legislature passed a bill stating, "The number of Minnesota residents ages 25 to 44 years, who hold postsecondary degrees or certificates, should be increased to at least 70 percent by 2025." Minn. Stat. 135A.012. Currently 49% of Minnesotans ages 25-64 have an associate's degree or higher, but that result varies considerably across racial and ethnic groups. More details are available on [OHE's website](#).

Earlier, the 2013 legislature mandated that all high school students develop plans for a "smooth and successful transition to postsecondary education or employment" by the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Minn. Stat. 120B.125. Coincidentally, the 2013 Minnesota Student Survey found that nearly 99% of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade respondents expected to graduate high school and around 80% expected to attend college, across all racial and ethnic groups (except American Indian students, of whom 66% expected to attend college). While it is encouraging that students indicate high expectations for themselves, the current reality for these students is not so auspicious.

What can K-12 educators do to support these goals, and why does a postsecondary degree or credential matter? That is the subject of this Research to Practice Brief.

#### Principles from the Research

A postsecondary degree or credential is increasingly an entry level requirement for most careers. When we use the word "college" we mean any form of postsecondary education that earns a transferable credential or degree. For example, many growing health care jobs require credentials earned in technical colleges, which also train students for a wide range of trades.

A leading researcher in this field is David Conley, and his books are excellent compilations of the breadth of knowledge, skills and habits needed for success in higher education. Other researchers focus on specific concepts and skills that carry forward from K-12 to college, such as Carol Dweck and growth mindset, Angela Duckworth and grit, and the U of M's own Sandra Christenson's work on student engagement (e.g., Check and Connect).

Students need a reasonable level of academic preparedness, which focuses on analysis and critical thinking rather than a broad set of facts (think of understanding the scientific process versus memorizing the periodic table.) They need career exploration to go beyond the limited job knowledge most youth have, and to backwards map those potential future careers of interest to the postsecondary education needed to succeed in them. That includes identifying colleges that offer those degrees or programs, and the high school preparation needed to enter those colleges. This builds engagement in current learning, as they understand the connection with their future dreams.

Students also need basic “college knowledge”, meaning understanding the differences between different types of colleges, what admission criteria are, and how the application process works. Financial knowledge is critical as well, including basic budgeting, the risks of debt and the value of some debt such as a reasonable amount of student loans.

Finally, students need to develop social emotional skills which are increasingly demonstrated to be foundational to cognitive achievement.

## **How Should School Leaders Apply the Research?**

Effective college readiness takes a system approach and avoids relying on random acts of college readiness such as the occasional “wear your college sweatshirt” day or career fair. These have value but just as no student ever passed the math MCAs because of Pi Day activities, college readiness for all requires an intentional, comprehensive plan enacted across entire schools and systems.



A school or district with a commitment to college readiness will:

1. Develop a culture of college-going where all students are assumed to be heading to some additional education or training after high school, and the only question is where.
2. Begin instilling this message as early as possible, ideally with formal programming beginning no later than middle school.
3. Train all staff to understand the importance of college readiness for all students in today’s global economy.
4. Provide all students with the core knowledge and skills they need to be successful, and opportunities to explore a range of career fields.
5. Provide families with the knowledge to support their students’ dreams, in a culturally appropriate way. Help them understand their youth can obtain a higher education credential without rejecting the community or family in which they were raised.

And yes, we mean *all* students. Students with physical and intellectual disabilities have long been succeeding in postsecondary, and there is a steady expansion of [programs for students with developmental disabilities](#). No one should be determining any child’s future by making decisions on college for them.



## **What Does Effective College Readiness Look Like?**

Entering a school committed to college readiness, the visitor sees many messages about college visits, career fairs, and community opportunities. Students experience regular advisories or classes focused on building college readiness skills and knowledge. They have opportunities to visit job sites and campuses, and community members visit classrooms to talk about their job field, required training and potential for growth. As staff overhear student conversations in the lunchroom or bus lines, they periodically hear discussions about careers or college. Staff, including custodians, paras, and lunch servers, ask students about their postsecondary plans and share their own experiences. If it is near the end of the year, there is a visible record of where students plan to go, and perhaps recognition of those who helped them succeed. Past graduates are honored for their academic and artistic achievements, as well as athletics.

## **Resources**

### **Professional Development**

The University of Minnesota offers a wide range of professional development [programs for educators](#) on topics related to college readiness, as well as other resources.

## **Books and Articles**

**Conley, D. (2012). *College and Career Ready: Helping All Students Succeed Beyond High School*. Jossey-Bass.**  
This book makes the argument for preparing all students for postsecondary success, and demonstrates with case studies how it can be done.

Dweck, C. S. (2010, January). Mind-Sets and Equitable Education. *Principal Leadership*, pp. 26-29.  
This is an easily accessible article, but her book called *Mindset* is equally valuable.

**Savitz-Romer, M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.**

In this easy to understand book, Savitz-Romer and Bouffard take an in-depth look at applying developmental theory to college readiness. Their chapters read like a “how to” on preparing students to be college ready, and marry theory and practice with practical ideas for the adults who work with students, both in and out of school.

**Tierney, W. G., Bailey, T., Constantine, J., Finkelstein, N., & Hurd, N. F. (2009). *Helping students navigate the path to college: What high schools can do: A practice guide* (NCEE #2009-4066). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.** [ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/higher\\_ed\\_pg\\_091509.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/higher_ed_pg_091509.pdf)

This study summarized the most rigorous existing research on strategies for enhancing college readiness.

## **Other Resources**

The University of Minnesota’s College Readiness Consortium offers a school-wide college readiness advisory program, [Ramp-Up to Readiness™](#).

The University of Minnesota offers many [programs for youth](#) which provide educational activities on campus.

## **COLLEGE READINESS CONSORTIUM**

The Research to Practice Brief is created by the U of M’s College Readiness Consortium and the Educational Equity Resource Center. Many thanks to Michael Rodriguez, who contributed ideas and research for this edition. For more information about current education research, read CEHD’s [Vision 2020](http://cehdvision2020.umn.edu/cehd-blog/) blog: <http://cehdvision2020.umn.edu/cehd-blog/> For questions about the Brief, contact Julie Sweitzer, Director, College Readiness Consortium and Co-Director, Educational Equity Resource Center, [sweitzer@umn.edu](mailto:sweitzer@umn.edu).

Copyright © 2016 Regents of the University of Minnesota, All rights reserved.