

College & Career Readiness



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Introduction

Congratulations on your purchase of the *College & Career Readiness: What Families and Students Need to Know and Do Now* Resource Kit. This kit contains the tools you need to engage families of middle school and high school students in planning and preparing for higher education and a successful entry into the workforce.

More than two decades of research has associated family engagement in postsecondary planning with an increased likelihood of a student's enrolling in higher education, including two-year and four-year degree programs, technical school or trade school. With this *College & Career Readiness* Resource Kit, you'll be able to keep families involved all year long.

The value of family engagement in college and career readiness

Every day, your school staff works hard to ensure your students will be as well-prepared to succeed in life after high school graduation as possible. That success depends on the students' college and career readiness. In today's world, career success often depends on a student's ability to pursue and complete postsecondary education.

Family engagement and knowledge about college is one of the strongest predictors of college entrance and completion.

In 2020, approximately 63 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. That's down from 68% in 2010. Among the graduates who enrolled in college in 2020, 43 percent attended four-year schools and 20 percent went to two-year schools.¹ For low-income students, the college enrollment rate is closer to 50 percent.² And, according to the Southern Education Foundation, the majority of U.S. public school students come from low-income families.³

By working together, schools, students and families can make the goal of college and career readiness a reality for more students. Research shows that involving families in their students' education has a positive effect on achievement, including postsecondary school enrollment.

Family engagement in postsecondary planning predicts success

Several studies conclude that family engagement in postsecondary planning is a predictor of a successful transition to college and a career.^{4,7} The research suggests that, to engage effectively in this planning, families need information about:

- College admission requirements.
- Career requirements.
- Student assessments.
- Financial aid.
- Required testing.
- The college application process (including deadlines).

According to a Texas Comprehensive Center review of the literature, "academic preparation, access to information and parent involvement and knowledge about college are the strongest predictors of college entrance and completion, especially for disadvantaged students."⁴



Engage families in planning for CCR *(continued)*

Get families engaged

The research presented in the previous section shows how the support and guidance families provide can make all the difference in students' academic progress and eventual success.

You can be right in step with that research by implementing the ideas presented in this kit.

Some families may be overwhelmed by personal circumstances and feel there are too many hurdles to overcome to consider higher education for their child. It's time to reach out and get the conversation started! To engage families in navigating the path to college and career readiness:

- **Let families know how much you value their support** and how important their involvement is to their child's future success. Ask families to work with you to help students reach college and career goals.
- **Send out a survey** to find out what CCR information families need most.
- **Invite families to CCR programs and events** throughout the school year.
 - Use sample letters and invitations; post posters.
 - Show the video presentation, *The Road Map to College & Career Readiness*, whenever and wherever families gather at your school.
 - Schedule a College and Career Readiness presentation. Use the presentation and Leader's Guide provided in the kit to help families navigate the path to college and career readiness. Host the event several times a year.
 - Schedule a meeting to discuss financial aid.
 - Invite college representatives; invite guest speakers from careers of interest.
 - Host panel discussions with students and families who have been through the process.
 - Check the calendar in Section 5 for ideas to engage families all year long.
- **Use the CCR Family Guide** to provide families with strategies for navigating the college preparation process.
- **Provide a CCR Action Plan** for each family.
- **Welcome all questions and suggestions.** Use the evaluation form. Consider having a "Questions/Comments" box at your school or post one on your website.
- **Keep up the momentum.** Use all avenues of communication. See Section 5 for sample eTips messages to keep families informed via social media. Engage members of the community in your education goals, as well.

Reinforce your message

Some families and students may still feel that college is not the right choice, and students may want to join the workforce right after high school graduation. Reinforce the message that the skills required to be ready for a successful career are the same skills required to be prepared for college. And most well-paying jobs require some sort of training after high school graduation. Encourage families to continue to support their children's learning and study habits.



Work with language barriers

Encouraging strong family involvement is an important step toward getting your students on track for college and career readiness. But an increasingly diverse population in today's schools adds to the challenge of building that engagement. Schools rich in linguistic, ethnic, racial and cultural diversity often have families who don't speak English or don't speak it well enough to communicate comfortably—or to understand the college preparation process.

When it comes to a college education for their children, some families who are unfamiliar with higher education in America may have misconceptions, including:

1. **Students automatically move on to college** if they meet high school graduation requirements. No other action is required.
2. **Postsecondary education is not affordable.** While they may have aspirations for a college education for their children, families are concerned with meeting basic needs—food, employment, health care, transportation, child care, language classes, etc.

It's not surprising that many non-English-speaking families don't know how to begin the college preparation process. It can be overwhelming. The sooner your school can get these families engaged and provide them with information about education options, application and admission criteria, tuition costs, etc., the more likely they are to believe that a college education is possible for their children.

So what are some strategies for inviting families with limited English proficiency to attend informative meetings? Here are some ways to promote two-way communication:

- **Get to know the families.** Learn their stories. Be respectful of situations at home. In some families, parents may work multiple jobs, leaving other relatives to care for and support their children. In others, students may have adult responsibilities.
- **Create a mentoring program.** Recruit other families at your school to act as mentors for newcomers. If possible, match up families who speak the same native language.
- **Translate materials** sent home or posted on your website. Don't rely on students to translate. Education jargon can be difficult to interpret and understand—even for native speakers. Don't run the risk of having important information get lost in translation.
- **Personalize invitations.** Nothing beats a personal invitation from a teacher or principal.
- **Use interpreters at meetings.** If you do not have a bilingual parent liaison on staff, ask for volunteers from the community. Interpreters may also be available through foreign language programs in high schools, universities and community colleges.
- **Provide information about the American school system.** People who were educated in other countries might be unfamiliar with some aspects of the United States education system.
- **Go into the community.** Non-English-speaking families may feel uncomfortable coming to the school. To share information about college and career readiness with all families, be creative and flexible. Meet families where they might be more likely to attend, such as at a local community or religious center, or public library.
- **Host small-group meetings.** Participants are more likely to speak up if they can meet in small groups with families that have similar issues and questions.



Work with families of students with special needs

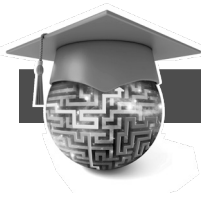
You want all students in your school to be college and career ready, and that includes students who are receiving special education services.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students with disabilities have the right to accommodations so that a postsecondary education is accessible to them. The ADA covers all public and private colleges, universities and vocational schools. And an increasing number of postsecondary schools are going above and beyond ADA requirements by actively recruiting students with disabilities and providing a wide variety of programs, accommodations and even scholarships.

But not all families of students with special needs may be aware that postsecondary education is within their children's reach. That's why it's critical that your college and career readiness program includes specific strategies for engaging families of students with disabilities.

- **Send personalized invitations** to your school's college and career events. Have special education teachers help students make invitations for their families.
- **Host small-group meetings.** Families may be more comfortable asking questions about their children's specific needs in a smaller group.
- **Invite representatives from disability services** offices at local colleges to speak with families about academic programs, campus life and available services for students with special needs.
- **Reach out to former students** who received special education services at your school and went on to pursue postsecondary education. Ask them to talk to families about their successes and challenges.
- **Have members of your school's IEP team** speak with families about how IEP goals can be aligned with the preparation, knowledge and skills students need for college. They can also explain how IEP goals can be aligned with your child's specific college and career goals.
- **Have your school counselor maintain a list** of colleges that offer special programs and scholarships for students with disabilities. Share that information with families.

Families of students with special needs may not be aware that postsecondary education is within their child's reach.



Sample agenda for CCR meeting

Distribute a meeting agenda to students and families who attend your “Road Map to College & Career Readiness” meeting so they can follow along with the main points you’ll cover. Below is a sample agenda. You’ll find a customizable version in the online portal which you can adapt to your needs.

(High School Name)
**The Road Map to College & Career Readiness
Meeting Agenda**

- [7:00] Welcome
- [7:05] Introductory video: “The Road Map to College & Career Readiness”
- [7:20] Presentation: “What Families Need to Know and Do Now”
 1. Make a commitment
 2. Build a support network
 3. Select the right classes
 4. Discover interests and strengths
 5. Learn about education options
 6. Make a financial plan
 7. Learn about college entrance exams
 8. Get involved
 9. Strengthen study skills
 10. Boost chances of success
- [8:00] Question & answer session
- [8:10] Student panel
- [8:20] Breakout stations (career corner, academic planning, education options)
- [8:50] Meeting evaluation



Promote CCR throughout the year

Your school may have a strong school counseling department, host a variety of college and career events and maintain a website packed with college and career information—and yet, according to a national survey, many families feel that they don't have enough guidance or information about preparing students for life after high school. What else can schools do?

The secret to keeping families informed and engaged is to provide a consistent stream of communication and events throughout the year. Consider these monthly ideas:

The key to engaging families is consistent communication.

August

- **Create a College and Career Readiness Team** made up of teachers, counselors and families. Ask the team to plan regularly scheduled events, seminars, meetings and activities to inform and guide families—and to create a college and career ready culture in your school. In addition to supporting CCR events throughout the school year, the team can also plan and organize a “College and Career Readiness Month.”
- **Send home surveys to families** to find out what topics they are most interested in learning more about. See a sample included with this Resource Kit. Use the results to guide your communication efforts and school events.
- **Help families get digitally connected to your school.** Let them know about the digital tools you will use this school year to keep them informed. Send home a link to the school counselor section of your school website. Encourage them to follow your school on social media. Post timely information about college and career readiness and planning on all of your digital platforms.
- **Publish a list of school clubs and student organizations** available at your school. Let students and families know that the activities students choose to participate in during their free time have a significant impact on college and career readiness. And remind students to keep a record of their activities. Distribute the “Get involved!” and “Create a CCR portfolio” handouts from the Family Guide—located in Section 6.

September

- **Host a college and career readiness event** to present information on navigating the path to college and career readiness. You'll find PowerPoint presentations, Leader's Guides and a Family Guide in Sections 3, 4 and 6.
- **Share information about upcoming standardized tests.** Remind families of test dates and registration deadlines. Distribute the “Learn about college entrance exams” handout from the Family Guide to families—or post it on your school website. Direct families toward free or inexpensive online prep programs and books to help students prepare. Send home information about test registration fees and test fee waivers.



Enlist community support

When students graduate from high school ready for college and a career, everyone benefits. The students have more options for higher education, they are better prepared to enter the workforce and they are more likely to become productive members of the community. Schools, students, families and the community are all stakeholders in student success.

Reach out to community partners and ask if they might provide funding, volunteers and resources for your college and career readiness events. Consider establishing a committee of staff and parent volunteers to develop partnership goals and recruit community partners. Look to some of the following organizations or community members for help.

Local colleges, universities, and trade and technical schools

- **An admissions officer** could talk to families about what the school looks for in prospective students and provide information about the application process.
- **A panel of college students** could answer questions about college life and how to prepare for it. Aim for a panel that reflects the cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of your students.
- **A representative** could talk to families about dual enrollment and summer enrichment programs available to your students.
- **The admissions or outreach office** could arrange a group tour for students and families.

Leaders from diverse communities

- **College-educated members of the communities** that make up your school's diverse population might speak to families about how they handled concerns including:
 - The challenges of being a first-generation college student.
 - Student concerns about the well-being of their families if they are away.
 - Family fears that a student away at college will lose cultural values.
- **Diverse community leaders** may be able to help you provide translators or interpreters for your events.

Local businesses

- **Business leaders** from a variety of professions could speak about their careers and education paths. They could explain the education and experience required for positions in their fields. They might also discuss the specific skills that they look for in applicants, such as problem-solving, and spoken and written communication.
- **Human resources professionals** could conduct workshops for students and families on interviewing skills or resume writing.
- **A business** might hold a “behind the scenes” event where students and their families visit the workplace to see what jobs look like in action.



Sample eTips™ messages for families

When you have important information to convey to families, it helps to do it in as many ways as possible. That's where eTips™ messages can help. You can use these short, practical tips to remind busy families of the many ways they can help their children prepare for college and a career. Establish a schedule to post the eTips™ messages using email, social media, texts, your school website and your parent portal. An adaptable version of these tips is included in the online portal. For more information on The Parent Institute's daily eTips™ service, visit www.parent-institute.com/eTips.

[School name here]

The first step on the path to postsecondary education is commitment

Getting to college takes work and commitment from students and their families. Writing an education goal statement is a great way for your child to reinforce that commitment. Then write about goals and plans for achieving them. Your child's interests and ideas will likely change over time, so review the statement regularly.

[School name here]

A support network can smooth your teen's way to success

Students don't have to prepare for college and a career alone. Teachers, counselors, coaches, supervisors, family and friends can provide guidance and resources to help your teen on the path to a successful future. Encourage your teen to build a support network by establishing respectful relationships and sharing plans to go to college with these important people.

[School name here]

Start now to make sure your student is ready for the future

You may think that students who have a high school diploma are automatically prepared to move into college or a career. But college admission requirements often differ from high school graduation requirements. Whatever grade your child is in, now is the right time to schedule a meeting with the school counselor. Develop an academic plan to make sure your child takes the classes needed to achieve goals.

[School name here]

Choose a challenge over an 'easy A'

College may be years away, but taking the most challenging classes your teen can handle now is a key way to prepare for college courses. Rigorous classes will help your teen succeed on college entrance exams and show admissions officers that your teen can master challenging material. Your teen may even be able to earn some college credits while still in high school—which might reduce the future tuition bill.

[School name here]

The future starts now: Help your teen consider careers

It's not too early for your teen to begin thinking about a career. Notice strengths and interests. Then help your teen research the types of jobs that use those strengths. Encourage your teen to talk to the school counselor to learn which classes might be required to pursue interesting jobs. The choice of a career must be your teen's, but your support will make it easier to achieve goals.



Take the right classes

Many families are surprised to learn that fulfilling high school graduation requirements may not be enough to prepare for higher education. For example, some students select classes that differ from those required for college admission. Many colleges expect students to take foreign language classes and additional science and math classes.

That's why it's essential for students to create an academic plan for their high school years as early as possible. But before students create their plan, they should carefully consider three things: high school graduation requirements, college admission requirements and the quality of their course work.

High school graduation requirements **may differ** from college admission requirements

1. Understand requirements for high school graduation

Whether your child is in middle school or high school, now is the time to find out which classes fulfill graduation requirements. Specific information can be found on the school website or in the counselor's office.

2. Find out requirements for college admission

Once students know the classes they need to take in order to graduate, they should compare them with college admission requirements. According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling, most four-year colleges are looking for students who have successfully completed the following high school classes:

- **4 years** of English
- **4 years** of mathematics
- **3–4 years** of lab sciences
- **2–4 years** of foreign language
- **2 years** of social sciences
- **1 year** of fine arts

Admission requirements vary, so students should visit the websites of colleges they are considering in order to determine the exact classes they should take. Student athletes need to make sure their classes meet the standards of the NCAA Eligibility Center.

3. Plan a rigorous course load

College admissions officers are not impressed by high grades when they are all earned in easy courses. They are impressed by the quality of a student's course load. That's one of the reasons it's important for students to take the most challenging classes they can handle. Trade and technical schools are impressed by applicants who have taken Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses.

Studies have shown that the rigor of a student's high school curriculum is an important predictor of success in college. Taking rigorous courses also gives students the skills they need to succeed on college entrance exams and in their future careers.



Discover ways to pay for college

Families often wonder if they will be able to afford a college education. And some students don't even consider going to college because they assume it will be too expensive. However, experts believe that almost everyone can find ways to pay for college.

The U.S. Department of Education awards approximately \$150 billion a year to students in the form of grants, low-interest loans and work-study programs. And each state receives \$5 million a year in vocational school assistance for students. Many colleges, private companies and community organizations also provide financial aid. Now is the time to start exploring the variety of ways your family can pay for a college education.

You can afford a college education!

Understand the types of financial aid

Financial aid is money that is given or loaned to students to help them finance a college education. Here are the main types of financial aid:

- **Grants and scholarships.** These are gifts of money that can come from federal or state governments, schools, individuals, private companies, nonprofit organizations, religious groups and professional organizations. Grants and scholarships do not need to be repaid. They are awarded for merit (students must meet standards set by the scholarship or grant giver) or based on financial need (students qualify based on family income).
- **Loans.** Many families borrow money to help fund a college education. Loans typically come from the federal government, schools or banks. They must be repaid and are subject to varying interest rates.
- **Work-study program.** This federal aid program provides part-time jobs for students so they can earn money toward their education while they are enrolled in college. The program encourages students to work at jobs related to community service or their course of study.

Apply to qualify—fill out the FAFSA

For the best chance of receiving financial aid, complete and submit the FAFSA—the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This application determines students' eligibility for federal financial aid and gives eligible students and their families access to the largest pool of financial aid dollars and loans with the best terms.

While families can't submit the form until a student's senior year in high school, the earlier they learn about the FAFSA, the better! So start exploring the FAFSA website today at www.studentaid.gov.