



College Access: Research & Action
CASE STUDY

Riverside High School

REALIZING COLLEGE FOR ALL

A close look at the three year process one school went through to create opportunities for all students to explore post-secondary pathways, navigate the college application process, and receive the support needed to matriculate into a well-matched college.



Coaching Case Study

Riverside High School*

Background

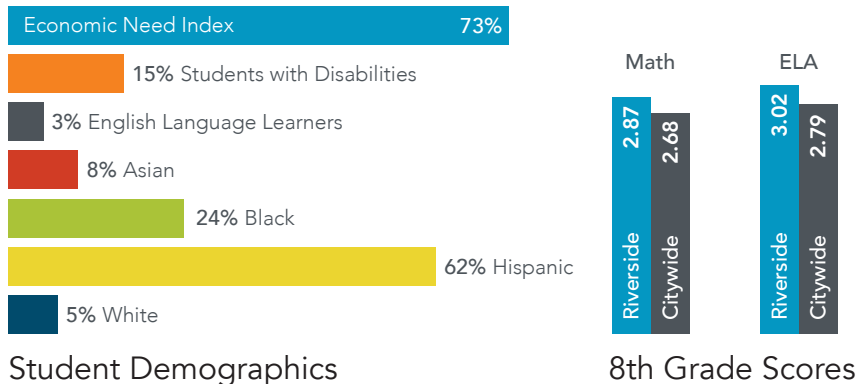
Riverside High School is a small 9-12 high school serving a population of mostly low-income students of color who enter in 9th grade with test scores that are close to citywide averages. In June of 2012 the principal, who had come to the school in 2005, recognized that while he had been successful in his work to increase graduation rate, from 35.5% to over 85%, students' post-secondary enrollment rates were not keeping pace. He had made a few important changes that he believed would yield improvements – he assigned one of his guidance counselors to focus on college 90% of the time, added AP classes, established a partnership with College Now – but he knew he needed to do more to close the gap between graduation and post-secondary enrollment.

He was committed to doing whatever he needed to ensure more graduates were matriculating into “good match” colleges. His analysis of the problem was that the school needed to address post-secondary planning earlier and in more systematic ways. His **change idea** was to integrate lessons in grades 9-12, providing increased opportunities for post-secondary exploration. He developed a partnership with College Access: Research & Action (CARA) that would provide a comprehensive curriculum and a coach to develop and support implementation of action plans. Within three years, Riverside High School had largely accomplished its goals of narrowing the gap between high school graduation and college enrollment, and of sending students to a more diverse range of colleges.

*“As you’re **righting the ship**, you realize that you can’t do it all at once and then you have to **look inwards** and decide what is the identity of your school, and how’s that going to be reflected in your **master program** and your budget.”*

- Principal

2016: Riverside High School Profile



* pseudonym

YEAR 1: Mapping & Goals

How did Riverside High School Get There?



Riverside High School's Path

In September 2012 a group of 9-12 teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators gathered at a lunch meeting to discuss what was, and what was not, happening at the school around post-secondary planning and support. The principal bought lunch for all, which helped to maximize the short time they had together. A coach from College Access: Research & Action (CARA) led them through a guided assessment of the structures and practices at the school and there were a few critical takeaways:

- > *Most staff saw it as the mission of the school to prepare all students for college*
- > *Most students did not begin high school thinking of themselves as college-bound*
- > *Most seniors received individual support from the college counselor in 12th grade*
- > *Students received little formal college exploration or individualized support in grades 9-11*
- > *Staff members, outside of the college counselor, had limited understanding of the college process despite providing frequent informal guidance to students*

A survey administered to 9th graders to assess their understanding and exposure to college underscored the importance of the school building in opportunities for all students to learn more about college and the college process. While 89% said they wanted to go to college, they did not have a clear vision of what college actually was or could be and they had limited knowledge of how to get there. Moreover, most worried about a host of things getting in the way of their going.

The committee believed that the most critical next steps were to develop opportunities for all students to learn about college and the college process beginning in 9th grade. They realized that if they did not do this, most students would get to 12th grade without having developed the knowledge needed to make informed choices, leaving one counselor to pick up the pieces. Furthermore, students would not take advantage of opportunities throughout high school that would better position them to attend good-match colleges. They wanted students to understand early that there are a range of college experiences and that there was a set of knowledge and resources that could help them to navigate the college process. Their intention was to focus on the 9th grade in the first year and expand the work to the other grades in future years.

Mapping

At the committee's next meeting a map was developed that outlined what should be addressed in each grade and where lessons could happen. The goal was to touch on the following categories in each grade: the landscape of college options, the application process, financial aid, and careers. Even though the committee members had planned to begin with only 9th grade, they realized they wanted to make some changes in grades 10-12. By the end of the mapping process, the committee was excited to see the work spread to other staff members, the college research process start early, and more attention to career exploration.

9th Grade

Freshman Seminar

As a part of the school's commitment to doing more to transition 9th graders into high school, they had instituted a Freshman Seminar which the committee thought would be a perfect place to reach all students and send a message about college-going expectations. The seminar would begin to address college and career exploration in the spring, giving students the chance to first transition to high school. The class met two days a week and the six sections were taught by a mix of staff members: the assistant principal taught two and the other four were taught by 9th grade teachers who had the space in their program to take on an extra two period/week class. By the end of the year the goal was for all 9th graders to have completed over 25 lessons and gone on at least one college visit. The assistant principal established the pacing calendar and distributed materials to the rest of the team; the team met twice per month to discuss progress during a weekly common planning period when 9th graders were engaged in a grade-wide peer mentoring program.

10th Grade

Monthly Workshops in Global Literature and Health Class

There was no dedicated seminar or advisory time for 10th grade and not a lot of wiggle room in academic classes given Regents demands. The committee thought that it made most sense for two of the guidance counselors to push into the Health and Global Literature class once a month. As an elective, the class had the flexibility and the guidance counselors had the ability in their schedule to push into the class once/month. Workshops would explore the same key areas as the 9th Grade Seminar and additionally time would be dedicated to introducing the structure and content on PSATs. The plan was to have completed 10 lessons by the end of the year and to ensure that all 10th graders went on at least one college visit during the academic year.

11th Grade

Workshops in ELA

The committee decided that by the end of 11th grade students should have a college list and a personal statement. Because the 12th grade had nested college work in the ELA class, they decided it made sense to do the same in 11th grade. The plan was to map out the necessary lessons and have the ELA teachers integrate them into their class. They didn't commit to any particular number of lessons for 11th graders.

12th Grade

Workshops in ELA

The school had already been using a period a week during the fall in Senior English for the college counselor to co-teach a class dedicated to the college process. The focus, to date, had been in the fall to get through the application and financial aid process. The plan was to keep the co-teaching model through the spring to provide support around financial aid, college decision making and preparing for the transition to college but no specific scope was defined.

"The difference between what happens NOW and what we want is big and overwhelming"

- Guidance Counselor

Reviewing Goals

Reviewing Year 1: Planning & Next Steps

By the spring of 2013 the 9th and 10th grades had made steady progress with the goals they had set, though there were struggles with some of the 9th grade teachers in terms of their comfort level and commitment to the program. The 11th grade made less progress, but it was agreed that since the focus had been 9th grade in year 1, more frequent meetings and a more detailed scope and sequence would help in year 2. The committee was aware that in order for the work to spread more widely they needed whole-staff professional development time. A meeting was set for early June to share the work the committee had been doing and to begin planning for their second year.

The Agenda

- DISCUSS** city and national statistics on college going
- ANALYZE** school data
- EXPLORE** case studies of a selection of graduates' post-secondary journeys
- LEARN** about committee's work during this academic year

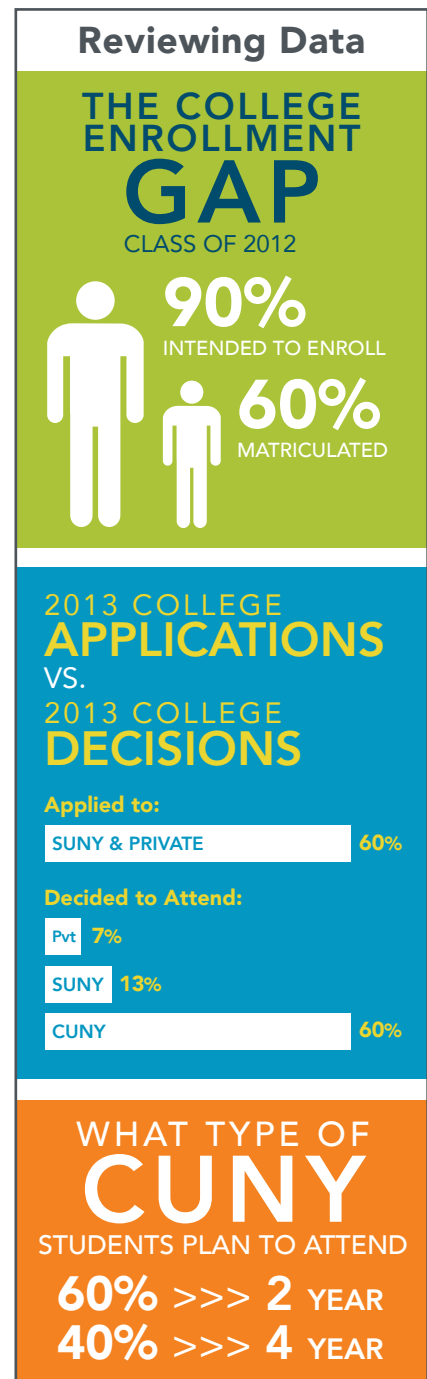
Surprising Information Learned

- > The disconnect between students' aspirations (the types of colleges they talked about wanting to attend), average GPA and SAT scores, and actual college matriculation data.
- > When asked where they wanted to attend college, the most frequently cited ones were: Columbia University, Stanford, Duke and Harvard.
- > Less than 15% of seniors had 90 and above averages.
- > Majority of students had SAT scores in the 900s and below.

Moving Forward

With an increased sense of urgency across all staff members to improve the college-going culture of the school, grade teams did more fine-tuned planning for the next year. The principal also decided he would increase college supports for students by:

- > Partnering with College Bound Initiative (CBI) to hire a full-time trained college counselor.
- > Participating in CBI's Bridge to College program to have a trained alumni provide summer support to graduated seniors to ensure matriculation into college.
- > Partnering with CARA's Right to College program to train 8 high school seniors to support the college work of the school – for this program the school would pay the high school students and provide them with supervision.



YEAR 2: Implementation

Systematically Integrating Lessons into All Grades

As shown in the curriculum map (page 7), the plan for year 2 was to systematically integrate lessons into all grades 9-12 with an increasing amount of time spent on college exploration from 9th to 12th grade and a focus on career exploration in 9th and 10th grades. The committee used what it had learned in year 1 to develop plans for year 2, but they were nervous about changes the school was undergoing in its college office with a transition from their long-time college counselor to a CBI counselor. Despite the changes, important strides were made to reach the goal of providing more opportunities for students to explore post-secondary pathways.

9th Grade

The main thing that changed between year 1 and year 2 was the teaching staff for Freshman Seminar. While in the first year teachers had been selected based on their availability, the second year there was more purposeful selection. The administration felt the course was too important to have teachers assigned to it who were not comfortable teaching out of their content-area, and more specifically who were not comfortable engaging in curriculum that raised socio-emotional issues. The administration freed up a guidance counselor who was teaching Spanish to teach two sections and had an English teacher teach another two sections. This required some shuffling of staff but the administration was committed to prioritizing Freshman Seminar.

10th Grade

With the hopes of doing more with 10th graders, the guidance counselor team decided to push into Global Literature and Health classes on a weekly basis throughout the year. In the spring they had support from the seniors who had been trained over the summer to support the school in its college work (called Youth Leaders); the Youth Leaders, in collaboration with the guidance counselors and the college counselor, planned and facilitated a set of 3 workshops for the 10th graders. Supervising the Youth Leaders proved to be difficult for the college counselor to manage on her own. Mid-way through the year the school brought in support from both CBI and the 12th grade ELA teacher who had attended the Youth Leader summer training.

11th Grade

Implementing the plans was remarkably challenging and the ELA teachers felt enormous pressure to ensure that all of their students passed the New York State Regents exam, and scored high enough to place out of CUNY remedial courses. Additionally, there was an AP English section left no room for anything outside of the AP curriculum. The ELA teachers did not feel it made sense to take time away from the curriculum to address largely unrelated topics. The administration analyzed the schedule and saw that juniors had one unneeded gym class per week. They decided to convert that period to a college seminar and have the college counselor teach it. This would be a good way for the college counselor to get to know the juniors and at the same time would honor the demands of ELA teachers. Unfortunately, the plan did not go well; juniors often skipped the college seminar, going to gym class instead.

12th Grade

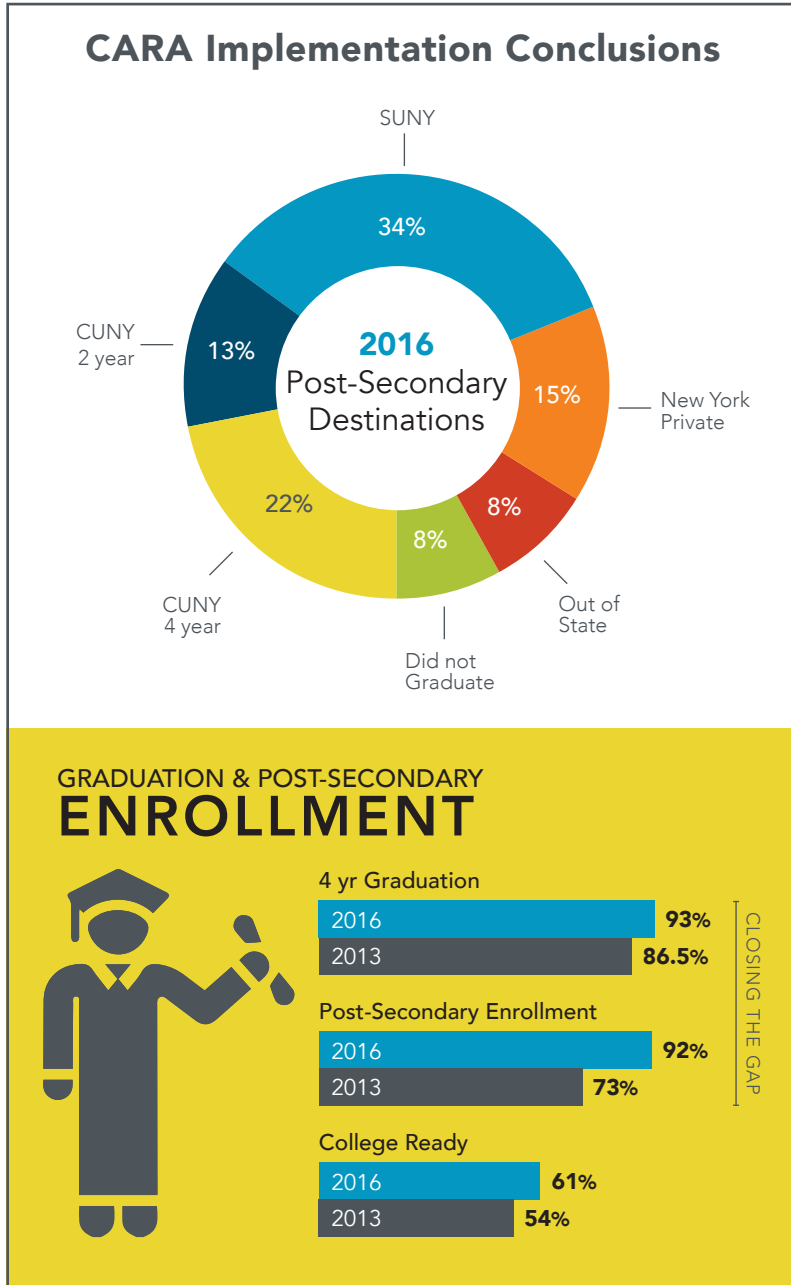
When the shift was made for the juniors to have a college seminar in the spring, the college counselor had to move away from her weekly push-in to ELA with the seniors. Having worked with the college counselor all fall, and with the support of the senior Youth Leaders, the ELA teacher was confident that she could keep the weekly college-focused class intact. She planned her curriculum to address topics related to the transition to college and the college counselor still pushed in when the topic was specifically related to financial aid. The ELA teacher worked closely with the Youth Leaders to have them facilitate a select number of workshops throughout the spring.

*“ There are **NOW** so many points of contact for the kids... every kid, every year, has a full year of college exploration”*

- Principal

YEAR 3: Closing the Gap

Capacity Developed to Maintain and Grow the Work



By the third year, many of the kinks had been worked out for the school and, luckily there was little staff turn-over. The core committee maintained its focus on making key changes in school structures and practices to progress the work. The new plan for the 11th grade was for the college counselor to push into 11th grade ELA classes on a bi-weekly basis in the spring semester, after the 11th graders took the January ELA exam; additionally, the ELA teachers received professional development from Story2College and did an extended unit on the personal statement. Between the ELA classes and one-on-one meetings with the college counselor and Youth Leaders, by the end of their junior year every student has a well-researched college list and a personal statement.

It took some time to work through the structural challenges but within three years Riverside High School had integrated a 9-12 curriculum. Because the school had made a choice to limit the number of staff members working most intensively on implementing college access programming, there was not too much whole staff time spent on professional development in this area. Staff looks at college-going data on a regular basis but does not do much more. The college counselor meets regularly with the 11th and 12th grade ELA teachers who are most involved to discuss progress of students.

*“My school put everything in **focus** because college is a whole other world in itself – without **my school**, I’d be lost and drowning in all of the information – it was really **helpful** to have all of the information organized and we had **set time** to do it.” - Student*

With the additional focus on college access, Riverside High School successfully narrowed the gap it set out to close. The principal invested a lot of resources to enable more people to support students through the entire college process.

Riverside High School

9–12 CARA Curriculum Mapping Chart

PROGRAM	9th Grade: Freshmen Seminar	10th Grade: Global Lit/Health	11th Grade: English / Seminar	12th Grade: Senior Seminar
Mapping the Landscape of College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveying Students' College Knowledge • College Sort • College Interviews • Alumni Panel • First in the Family • Pre-College Visit Bingo and College Visit Observation Guide/Reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Sort • College Matching • Alumni Panel • CUNY Info Session • SUNY Info Session • Pre-College Visit Bingo and College Visit Observation Guide/Reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First in the Family Video • College Majors Observation Guide • SUNY Scavenger Hunt • CUNY Scavenger Hunt • College Matching • Comparing Colleges • College Search Matching Program • Pre-College Visit Bingo and College Visit Observation Guide/Reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is college going to be like anyway? • Literature on College • Exploring Course Catalogues • Looking at College Schedules • Using College Resources
College Application Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcript Review • What's in a College Application? • College Application Steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcript Review • What's in a College Application • Application Steps • Reach, Match, Safety: Matching Students with Schools • Analysis of Completed College Application • PSAT Workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mock Admissions • Year Ahead Plan • Application Steps • SAT Registration • Reach, Match, Safety • Annotated College List • Review completed applications • Personal Statement Writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annotated List • College Application Completion • After Hitting Submit • Transcript Review • Future Plan
Paying for College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing Financial Aid Packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking at Financial Aid packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are Educational Opportunity Programs • FAFSA4caster • College Costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAFSA Steps • FAFSA Completion • Public vs. Private • Loans & Interest Rates • Paying Back Loans • Making Sense of Financial Aid Letters • Looking at College Bills & Budgets
Exploring Careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majors and Career Pathways • Career Jeopardy • Career Sort • Online Career Exploration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resume Dissection • Resume Development • Resume Peer Review • On-Line Career Exploration and Career Research 		