



Organizing for Access



BUILDING HIGH
SCHOOL CAPACITY
TO SUPPORT
STUDENTS'
POST-SECONDARY
PATHWAYS

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3 YEARS 7 NYC schools



Shifting college outcomes for first generation low-income students of color through successful practices; and reflecting on the challenges schools encounter in transforming their organizational culture and infrastructure.



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Executive Summary



College Access: Research & Action (CARA) spent three years studying the implementation of its College Inquiry and College Bridge programs in seven schools across New York City.



The three areas that CARA has identified as most important in creating this infrastructure are:

Curriculum Implementation

Creating instructional space for teaching college access knowledge in grades 9–12.

Professional Development

Positioning and equipping staff to support students in learning about college access and applying to post-secondary destinations.

Counseling Support

Providing individualized, expert college counseling to all students.

College Access: Research & Action (CARA) spent three years (2016–2019) studying the implementation of its College Inquiry and College Bridge programs in seven schools across New York City. Our goal was to understand both the possibilities and challenges of making structural and cultural changes to the organizational blueprint of high schools, in order to create an effective **college access infrastructure** to serve low-income, first-generation college students in an economy that increasingly requires post-secondary education.

The three areas that CARA has identified as most important in creating this infrastructure are **Curriculum Implementation, Professional Development, and Counseling Support**.

We also found that young people themselves—“peer leaders” in the form of graduates from the high school, now in college, who return to work in the college office—play a critical role in college access work. They both bring additional counseling capacity (at very low cost) and serve as credible messengers from the community who can reach students in ways that adults cannot.

Findings: The following findings emerged in each of these three areas

Curriculum Implementation

- > Schools have successfully innovated with using a) advisory, b) dedicated seminars, c) integration into academic classes, and d) special event days for creating instructional space around college access.
- > A range of these types of instructional spaces can be used successfully for implementing curriculum in early grades (9th and 10th).
- > In the second semester of 11th grade and the first semester of 12th grade, a dedicated seminar is most successful in supporting students through the many necessary exploration and application tasks that are required to apply to a set of good-match colleges.
- > Post-secondary access for first-generation college students requires ongoing conversations—beginning in 9th grade and continuing throughout high school—about career goals and pathways, and the role of higher education in those pathways.
- > Close attention from school leadership in the first few years of implementation, shared ownership and accountability among teachers as well as sufficient time to undertake this new strand of work are preconditions to success.

Professional Development

- > In order to serve all students across the four years of high school, college access work has to move out of the college office and be taken on by a much wider set of school staff.
- > Ensuring that this wider group of staff buys in to a post-secondary- access-for-all mission, and is equipped to give accurate and up-to-date information to students, requires undertaking at least some professional development around college access for all staff. Staff's ability to effectively support first-generation college students through the process depends on their own pathway to and through college, the degree to which they share the racial and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students they serve, and the amount of time since they went to college and how much the landscape has changed since then.
- > More targeted professional development is required for staff doing direct instruction of students, based on the grade they teach and thus the content they are instructing on. In 11th and 12th grade, more expert knowledge is needed to steer students through post-secondary exploration and application and therefore, at least initially, there is a need for intensive investment in professional development.
- > Structures of accountability to peers—and thus staff time to undertake this new work—is the best way to ensure consistent implementation for all students.



In every arena, engaged leadership is critical.



Findings: Counseling Support

- > Moving post-secondary counseling from the old model of “enrichment”—services provided to those who knock on a counselor’s door—to an “entitlement” model that assumes all first-generation, low-income students need and should get extensive individual counseling support requires a significant commitment of school resources to this area.
- > In schools that serve predominantly low-income, first-generation students, the ideal ratio of college counselors to seniors is 1:80 or less.
- > Having a counselor split their time between guidance and college counseling work is not a good model for strong post-secondary counseling, as college counselors need to become experts in the field.
- > Peer leaders are an innovative and cost-effective way to add counseling capacity to a college office.
- > There should never be just one “expert” college counselor at a school who holds all of the expertise in this area; it is important to build a team that can hold this work in the event of turnover or absence.
- > Success in this arena creates more work, not less.
- > Consistently messaged the importance of the work to their staff, in both word and action; and
- > Encouraged staff leadership and ownership.
- > Successfully improving college access outcomes inevitably leads to more work, as more students apply to more colleges, with more complicated processes (e.g., Common Application essays, CSS Profile), and getting them to apply and be accepted at good-match schools requires substantially more work before senior year (e.g., organizing college trips, ensuring students do extracurricular activities, exposing students to career pathways, helping students understand the role of and prepare to take standardized tests).
- > Families play a critical role in supporting their children’s post-secondary pathways. As challenging as it is for already overburdened schools to include and educate low-income, first-generation students’ families (who may not speak English, work multiple jobs, or be under significant stress), they must do so if they hope to increase college matriculation. Families need much of the same knowledge and experience that students do, beginning early and often throughout their children’s high school careers.

Findings: Overarching Principles

Additionally, CARA found some other overarching principles in relation to building strong college access infrastructure in schools:

- > In every arena, engaged leadership is critical. Leaders who accomplished significant and lasting changes:
 - > Made initial commitments of substantial new resources;
 - > Paid close attention to issues as they arose and quickly figured out how to troubleshoot;

All of the research and writing here was done before March of 2020: over the next several years, the educational and economic crises that COVID-19 have engendered will make it more difficult for schools to undertake the work suggested within. And yet, we believe that the best practices for equitable access to post-secondary education remain the same; in fact, the need for them may be even more pressing in the difficult years ahead.

Introduction



CARA is working in more than sixty schools and across a range of school types in New York City to transform school structures to support post-secondary access for all students.



We need to rethink the work of public education; in particular, to see high school not as a terminal educational experience for the majority of students, but rather as an institution that helps launch them into the next phase of their education. Schools are thus responsible for both preparing them academically, and for supporting them as they choose the next step on their journey.

Building College Access Infrastructure

Over the past twenty years, access to and persistence through higher education has become an increasing focus of educational policy across the United States. This attention has continued to grow in recent years, with Michelle Obama’s Reach Higher initiative, the celebrity college admissions scandal, and the call by several Democrats running in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary for free community college education all shining a sustained national spotlight on inequities for young people in accessing college across race and class.

This attention has been matched by a significant growth in the resources devoted to leveling the playing field, with many new nonprofits (including our own) being founded, technological tools created, research studies undertaken, and philanthropic and government funding directed to addressing this issue. There is no question that looking beyond high school graduation to post-secondary education is now on the radar of many high schools (and even some middle and elementary schools) across the country in a way that was simply not the case twenty years, or even five years, ago. At the same time, the current health and economic crises facing the country due to COVID-19 threaten to undermine or halt much of this progress.

As the institutions directly serving the largest population of young people nationwide, public schools and particularly public high schools are the most logical location to rethink how we as a country position the next generation for successful adulthoods. In many ways, we are at a moment similar to the turn of the previous century, when high school education moved from being an expectation for the few to being necessary (in fact, mandated) for all.

As was the case a century ago, this will require us to rethink the work of public education; in particular, to see high school not as a terminal educational experience for the majority of students, but rather as an institution that helps launch them into the next phase of their education. Schools are thus responsible for both preparing them academically, and for supporting them as they choose the next step on their journey. A great deal of this work has been done on the level of classroom learning (i.e., the introduction of the Common Core standards, with a focus on preparing students for college level work). What has become clearer in the past ten years is the need to support students' exploration of post-secondary choices, and their navigation of the multiple bureaucratic processes they need to engage with in order to access college. While the changing landscape of both higher education and the economy are likely to shift the trajectory and timing of college access, it seems unlikely that we will return to a time when it was not expected or needed.

As an organization that has been innovating for the past nine years with whole school change—working in more than sixty schools and across a range of school types in New York City to not just support a smaller

group of individual students to get to college, but to transform school structures to support post-secondary access for all students—we believe that some useful lessons are emerging about how to do so. In this policy brief, we analyze the work of building college access infrastructure in seven schools over the course of three years, and draw what we anticipate to be useful conclusions for school leaders, policymakers, and philanthropists invested in these issues in the years ahead.

While schools are not fully back in session, it may be difficult to implement the suggestions here; but we believe that a clear roadmap will be useful whatever paths high schools take in the coming years.

The National Context for Post-Secondary Access

Research has established that post-secondary education is likely to lead to higher earnings and improved life outcomes.¹ Cognizant of this reality, high school students almost universally report aspiring to go to college, with a greater proportion of low-income students sharing this aspiration than ever before.² In the fall of 2019, 20 million students enrolled in the United States post-secondary system.³

However, this dramatic increase in post-secondary aspirations since the 1970s⁴ has not been matched by matriculation into college across social class: nationally, while 83% of high school graduates from high-income families enroll in college directly after high school, only 67% from low-income families do.⁵ This is true for even the highest performing students: the most academically qualified low-income students (based on national test scores) “were just as likely to

not enroll in college or enroll in a college far below their match (37%) as they were to enroll in a very selective college (38%).⁶ These inequitable outcomes become even more pronounced with college completion: while 62% of twenty-four-year-olds from high-income backgrounds have attained a bachelor's degree, only 13% of twenty-four-year-olds from low-income backgrounds have.⁷ This gulf in outcomes across social class has barely narrowed since the 1970s.⁸

Both research and a wide range of policy reports and journalistic accounts document the myriad obstacles low-income students who are the first in their family to attend college encounter as they try to realize their post-secondary dreams.⁹ These students and their parents often lack access to non-material resources that are the norm among college-educated families, specifically “cultural capital”—an understanding of the landscape of college and the college and financial aid application processes—and “social capital”—access to social networks that can connect students to college-related information and opportunities. And with the costs of attending college rising and federal and state financial aid failing to keep up with inflation, many also lack the “economic capital” needed to undertake higher education, rightfully fearing taking on extensive debt to pay for college.

Research studies over the past ten years consistently document that high school staff across the country working with first-generation students fail to sufficiently understand these obstacles.¹⁰ And while many schools are working to increase counseling resources devoted to supporting students through the college search, application, financial aid, and matriculation

processes, national counseling ratios continue to hover around 1:460 and only about 20% of counseling time is spent on college in more than half of schools.¹¹ Families from middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds can supplement whatever resources their schools provide; low-income students from first-generation families who are dependent on their schools or local community-based organizations for support suffer the most from this lack of resources.

Looking Locally: Post-Secondary Access in New York City

New York City boasts relatively high graduation and college matriculation rates, with 77.3% of students graduating in 2019¹² and college matriculation rates reaching a new high of 62% for students who started high school in 2015.¹³ Over the past ten years, an extensive (and continuously expanding) network of nonprofit and community-based organizations has grown up to tackle post-secondary access and success in the city. In addition, the New York City Department of Education (DoE) and the City University of New York (CUNY) have made significant



The most academically qualified low-income students were just as likely to not enroll in college or enroll in a college far below their match (37%) as they were to enroll in a very selective college (38%)



commitments to addressing disparities in access and success, with the DoE’s “Expanded Success Initiative” and “College Access for All” initiative focusing on broadening access work across the city¹⁴, and CUNY’s ASAP program investing significant funding in raising community college graduation rates.¹⁵

At the college level, ASAP, started in 2007, has posted impressive gains in graduation rates¹⁶; it is somewhat early to expect large shifts from the DoE’s initiatives, but they are already showing growth in SAT taking and some movement in matriculation numbers, with an increase of about 4% since 2014.¹⁷ At the same time, these programs were the very first to be cut by both the DoE and CUNY in the pandemic, with announcements about “College Access for All” cuts made less than five weeks after schools were closed and learning went virtual due to COVID-19. These cuts endanger much of the progress that has been made over the past five years.

Even before COVID-19, large gaps continued to persist between the number of students graduating from high school, and the number matriculating into post-secondary educational institutions—both across race/class in aggregate, and within schools, with schools serving large populations of low-income students of color posting the largest gaps between graduation and matriculation (e.g. with a 93% graduation rate, but 69% matriculation rate).¹⁸

For these students, a lack of high quality, effective post-secondary advisement is a significant barrier as they navigate the road to college: while advisement ratios are significantly better than in other parts of the country, they are still inadequate in relation to the need these students have for individual

counseling. In New York City high schools, one guidance counselor serves an average of 221 students—and at one in six schools, one counselor serves more than 300 students.¹⁹

And meeting the need for individual counseling in junior and senior year is only part of the puzzle of decreasing matriculation gaps. While this is often the most glaring need, for first-generation, low-income students—who in New York City are overwhelmingly students of color—research shows that exposure to post-secondary options needs to begin the moment they walk through the doors of high school (and even earlier).²⁰ These students need—and schools must build in—experiences, knowledge-building, reflection, and conversations with peers and adults throughout the high school day and year, in increasing amounts and complexity as students approach their senior year and the post-secondary application process. But when, and where, and who can do this? At the majority of New York City high schools, the work of answering these questions is just beginning.

Creating College Access Infrastructure: Our Work at College Access: Research & Action (CARA)

Both in New York City and nationally, attention to these questions has been slowly growing since the early 2000s and the publication of Patricia McDonough’s “Nine Principles of a College Culture” (2002).²¹ That schools should have a “college-going culture” is now familiar to many school leaders; however, what exactly this means—or how to create it—is elusive at schools where many students do not arrive already steeped in family experiences with college.

It was to address this complex question that College Access: Research & Action (CARA) was founded in 2011. As former teachers at some of New York City’s early small public schools, we began with a deep belief in building the resources inside school communities—both adults in a range of roles, and young people themselves—as well as an understanding of the complexity of the organizational culture of schools.

Schools realized a decade ago that academic “literacy” cannot be taught in just one class, but must be infused across the curriculum; we believe the same is true of post-secondary access. We have watched with dismay (though also sympathy) as the concept of “college-going culture” has been translated in some schools as superficial changes rather than the provision of intensive and meaningful resources and experiences to students over time. College pennants are hung in hallways, teachers wear college T-shirts on Fridays, students are renamed “scholars,” and classrooms are named after universities; but in far too many schools, fundamental structures have not been changed to reflect the deeper shift in the role of high schools as the penultimate—rather than ultimate—stop on students’ educational journey. In many other schools, supporting post-secondary access has been focused on a small group of students, or outsourced to organizations whose footprint in the school cannot begin to address students’ need for information and support. We believe a focus on these surface changes to “culture,” as opposed to more meaningful, structural ones, accounts for the disappointing progress in actual matriculation outcomes in many schools, despite what appears to be a great deal of attention to this concept.

In this policy brief, we attempt to frame what it means to create a deep college-going culture, what we refer to instead as **college access infrastructure**. We believe this term better names how to actually change organizational infrastructure, which we envision as happening in three critical areas in schools that serve predominantly low-income, first-generation college students.

These areas are what we envision as the three legs of a stool in creating successful post-secondary outcomes for students: each leg makes an important contribution to the stool’s function, but none of them alone suffice. Without all three, the stool is structurally unsound. As we will explain shortly, we believe that utilizing students themselves—in peer and/or near-peer roles—in all three of these areas is a critical, culturally responsive (and cost-effective) way for schools to transform their college-going culture/infrastructure, and to empower the young people they serve with a sense of agency as they make decisions about their lives after high school.



We attempt to frame what it means to create a deep college-going culture, what we refer to instead as college access infrastructure.



Seven Schools, 2016–19

Starting in fall 2016, with support from the New York Community Trust and later the Heckscher Foundation for Children, CARA studied the process of transforming the college access infrastructure at a range of schools across New York City. The seven schools chosen were implementing whole school change through our College Inquiry program, and leveraging youth peer leadership through our College Bridge program.

We deliberately chose schools that represented four of New York City’s five boroughs, ranged from small to large comprehensive, and included various school models (CTE/Career Technical Education; Expeditionary Learning; schools serving mostly English as a New Language learners

(ENL) and/or recently arrived immigrant populations). Some of the schools are located in deeply segregated and impoverished neighborhoods, while others are in rapidly gentrifying areas of the city. These seven schools had relatively strong graduation rates but were conscious of the falloff after graduation in terms of the number of students who went on to college: for the class of 2016, the average graduation rate across the schools was 81.8% while the average college enrollment rate was 60.5%. When they chose to partner with CARA, these schools specifically articulated their work as being about closing these gaps.

Across three years of partnership, we tracked the specific “moves” each school made in building college access infrastructure, and

Figure 1.1 Three Areas for Successful Post-secondary Outcomes for Students

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION: creating instructional space for teaching college access knowledge in grades 9–12. Schools must understand that the landscape of higher education is a subject matter that needs to be explicitly taught to first-generation students, and identify permanent space in each grade, 9–12, for the teaching of that set of information/concepts in an engaging, experiential way with a thoughtful scope and sequence.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: positioning and equipping staff to support students in learning about college access and applying to post-secondary destinations. Building college access infrastructure requires training the school staff that will deliver this subject matter both in the content and in the teaching of the content. This is not any different than, for example, math teachers needing to understand both math and the pedagogy of math, i.e., what their students do and do not know at any given grade level, and how to help them acquire that knowledge.

COUNSELING SUPPORT: providing individualized, expert college counseling. A school’s college staff (e.g., college counselor, guidance counselor, or other trained staff) must develop expertise in the post-secondary search, application, and matriculation process, and be sufficiently focused and resourced to provide individual support to second-semester juniors and to seniors throughout their senior year.

surveyed staff and students. In the second and third years, we also undertook research to capture the experiences and voices of the people taking part in that change. In year two, we conducted observations at all seven schools, watching work in the college office, at professional development meetings, in college prep classes, and at team meetings where small groups worked to design and implement programming. In the year three, we conducted interviews with a range of staff members as well as with a small group of seniors at three of the schools across the course of the year.

In this brief, we offer lessons from across these seven schools (*Note that all names of schools and individuals are pseudonyms*).

CARA's Approach: We lay out the approach of CARA's College Inquiry and College Bridge programs, in order to understand the intervention made at the schools.

The Study: Seven Schools: We analyze the various strategies schools pursued in transforming their infrastructure.

Findings: Curriculum Implementation: We look at the struggles and successes across schools in the area of curriculum implementation.

Findings: Professional Development for Staff: We look at the struggles and successes across schools in the area of professional development.

Findings: Counseling Support: We look at the struggles and successes across schools in the area of individual counseling support.

Conclusion: We draw some larger conclusions about transforming the structures of high schools to encompass preparing students for post-secondary access, whether that be college or something else.

Case Studies: We look more closely at case studies of transformation at two of the schools, chronicling the “mapping” and implementation of programming in year one (where the initial infrastructure for the work is created), and then observing the schools tackling the increasingly complex issues that arise in years two and three, once they begin to better understand the many obstacles their students are facing in accessing higher education. Throughout, the three strands of programmatic intervention inform and interact with each other, rather than living separately. While this makes telling the stories somewhat more challenging, we believe this interaction is extremely important and fruitful.

Across the three years, we watched with admiration as these seven schools—through varying methods, facing varying obstacles, and with varying degrees of success—worked to prepare their students to access post-secondary education. Amidst the many moving parts that all public schools represent on a daily level, doing so was and continues to be a tremendous challenge and the accomplishments continue to be fragile. We believe their work offers a picture of what might be possible, and a roadmap for schools and districts inspired to tackle this important work.

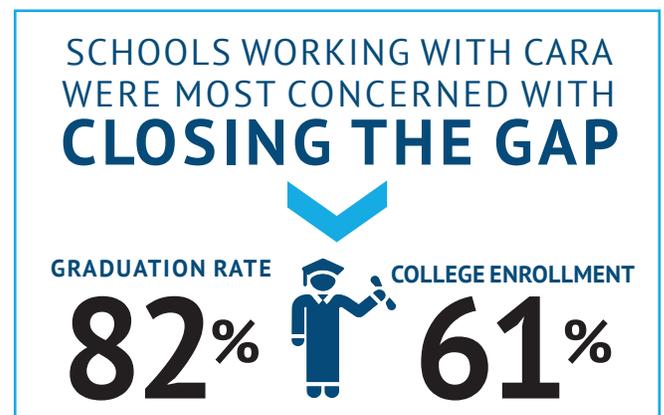


Table 1.1 Demographic and Achievement Characteristics of Seven High Schools Selected (2015–16 School Year)

| Name of School | Career HS | HS for Technology | World HS | HS for Leadership | Centro HS | Arts HS | Neighborhood HS |
|--|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS (%) | | | | | | | |
| Location | Queens | The Bronx | The Bronx | Brooklyn | Manhattan | Manhattan | Queens |
| Type ²² | CTE | CTE | ENL | Consortium | N/A | Arts | Community School |
| Total Enrollment | 545 | 544 | 470 | 357 | 404 | 247 | 1950 |
| Senior Enrollment | 128 | 111 | 114 | 53 | 83 | 49 | 437 |
| STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS (%) | | | | | | | |
| Economic Need | 43.2 | 74.7 | 93.9 | 63 | 71.3 | 60.7 | 64.4 |
| Latinx | 53.6 | 56.8 | 79.4 | 7.3 | 64.4 | 49.4 | 48.9 |
| Black | 15.8 | 33.6 | 12.1 | 91.3 | 26.7 | 37.2 | 12.1 |
| ENL | 1.7 | 6.1 | 76.6 | 3.9 | 1.5 | 1.6 | 21.6 |
| STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (8th grade ratings measured on a 4 point scale) | | | | | | | |
| % HS Graduation | 98 | 81.9 | 65.6 | 72.2 | 93 | 98.2 | 63.8 |
| Avg 8th gr Math Rating | 2.67 | 2.39 | 1.90 | 2.14 | 2.49 | 2.67 | 2.30 |
| Avg 8th gr ELA Rating | 2.95 | 2.51 | 1.78 | 2.44 | 2.69 | 2.98 | 2.49 |

CARA's Approach



CARA's programs aim to develop a comprehensive college-going infrastructure for schools that supports students from post-secondary exploration, to application, to enrollment.



Before diving into the findings of our research, we need to explain CARA's work in these seven schools: how were we attempting to support schools to build deep college access infrastructure?

It is important to note that, to date, our focus has been schools that serve predominantly first-generation, low-income students which, because of the segregation of New York City schools, means that these schools are also made up predominantly of students of color.

Whole School Change: College Inquiry

CARA's College Inquiry program was developed between 2009 and 2011 with support from a College Access Challenge Grant from the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) and the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA). It aims to develop a comprehensive college-going infrastructure for schools that supports students from post-secondary exploration, to application, to enrollment. Its goal is to embed post-secondary exploration in a student's regularly scheduled day, starting in 9th grade, so that by 12th grade they can undertake a well-informed college application process. CARA provides resources and coaches schools across the three critical areas outlined in the Introduction:

- > Implementing a comprehensive, field-tested, inquiry-based curriculum for 9th through 12th grade that covers the four areas that we have found students need increased exposure to and exploration of: mapping the landscape of college; understanding the application process; paying for college; and exploring careers (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 College Inquiry: High School Curriculum

COLLEGE INQUIRY | High School Curriculum

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- How is College Different from High School?
- First in the Family Videos
- Exploring College Majors
- College Matching
- SUNY Scavenger Hunt
- The College Search: What's Important to Me?
- Researching Colleges Online
- First in the Family: Your College Years
- What Are For-Profit Colleges?
- What Types of Classes Do College Students Take?
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College Inquiry: High School Curriculum Sample Lesson

LESSON

Exploring College Majors

Note: Tell students that majors are chosen based on student interests and that not all majors are offered at all colleges.

GOAL

- To help students understand the concept of choosing a "major" in college.
- To help students think about how knowing the kinds of majors offered at a college can help them build their list of colleges to apply to.
- To help students distinguish between a liberal arts college and more career-focused post-secondary options.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Start with a whole group brainstorm:
 - > What is a "major"? What does it mean to "major" in something?
 - > List as many "majors" as you can think of. Sometimes a major can have more than one name such as Women's Studies and Gender Studies.
- 2 Tell the class they will be playing a game called School Scramble. The students will be acting as guidance counselors to 8 fictitious students. The goals of the game are:
 - > To help your fictitious student choose some possible majors.
 - > To help your fictitious student choose 3 schools to apply to that have appropriate majors.
- 3 Split class into 8 groups of 2 - 4 students. Give each group 1 Student Profile, 1 set of College Majors handouts, and 3 Post-it notes. The group should write their student's name on each of the 3 Post-it notes.
- 4 The group should read their Student Profile. They should discuss together some possible majors that would be a good fit based on that student's interests. They should identify colleges that have those majors. Each group should plan three colleges for the student to apply to, using the College Majors handouts as support. Write the name of an appropriate college and possible major on each of the 3 Post-it notes.
- 5 The teacher then explains the rules of School Scramble.
 - > Each group sends one representative to participate in the "scramble."
 - > During the scramble, the group rep needs to find 3 different schools for the student to apply to.
 - > You "apply" by sticking one of your group's 3 Post-it notes on the college signs around the room.
 - > If the slots at the college are filled, the rep must scramble to find a different college and major for the student to "apply" to. Their group members can help. They might need an extra Post-it note.
 - > Each group must be able to justify why their student should apply to each college by showing that there is a major at that school that would interest that student.
 - > Each group that is able to find 3 colleges to apply to, all of which have an appropriate major, wins a small prize.

MATERIALS

- 6 College Signs
Posted throughout the room
- Post-it notes
24 + extras
- Handout: Student Profiles
1 cut into strips
- Handout: College Majors
8 sets

VOCABULARY

Terms students may not be familiar with

- Major

HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM | Mapping the Landscape
Exploring College Majors

- > Building staff capacity around college access, in the belief that students receive information—good or bad, correct or incorrect—from the adults that they spend the most time with: their teachers. CARA provides and helps run whole staff professional development as well as smaller, targeted groups based on the students they work with, e.g., early awareness for 9th graders vs. direct college application support for 12th graders (*see Appendix: Additional College Inquiry Materials*).
- > Creating a high capacity college office that is equipped with sufficient and sufficiently trained staff to individually support 11th and 12th grade students in the application, financial aid, and matriculation processes, in order to increase students’ enrollment into good-match colleges and positively influence their persistence rates (*see Appendix: Additional College Inquiry Materials*).

CARA believes that coaching is an essential component of shifting school infrastructure, and that the process, even at the most high-functioning schools, takes three to four years. At the end of that time, our goal is for schools to have built the capacity to sustain this work, and thus to no longer need CARA’s support.

CARA College Inquiry Coaches have extensive experience working in New York City public schools as well as expertise in college access in the New York post-secondary context, in order to be able to do intensive coaching across these three areas. In the first two years, coaches are at the school approximately once a month, initially creating an action plan and scope and sequence

with a small team, then meeting with representatives from each grade, with the counselor, and with administrators to support, monitor, and troubleshoot implementation. Determining the school’s specific professional development needs and helping to facilitate sessions at whole staff meetings and with smaller groups, or supporting school staff to do this professional development, is also an important piece of coaching work.

Coaching is lighter in years three and four, approximately five or six visits in year three and three or four visits in year four, to continue troubleshooting and revising the school’s scope and sequence, and supporting school staff to step into leadership roles with their peers, both running small group meetings and professional development. We have developed a set of “best practices” (initially based on the work of Patricia McDonough; see Appendix: Additional College Inquiry Materials) and an implementation rubric that we use to help guide schools as they undertake this work (*Figure 2.2*).



CARA believes that coaching is an essential component of shifting school infrastructure, and that the process, even at the most high-functioning schools, takes three to four years.



Figure 2.2 College Inquiry: Infrastructure Rubric

| College Inquiry Infrastructure Rubric | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| College Access: Research & Action <small>Creating Post-Secondary Pathways</small> | School: _____ | | Senior Cohort Size: _____ | |
| | Highly Developed | Developed | Developing | Not Yet Developed |
| COLLEGE AND CAREER EXPOSURE & UNDERSTANDING | | | | |
| # of College Access and Career Lessons Per Year | 9th Grade: 10-13+ 10th Grade: 14-18+ 11th Grade: 15-20+ 12th Grade: 20+ hrs | 9th Grade: 7-10 10th Grade: 10-12 11th Grade: 13-15 12th Grade: 15-20hrs | 9th Grade: 1-4 10th Grade: 5-9 11th Grade: 1-12 12th Grade: 1-14 | 9th Grade: 0 10th Grade: 0 11th Grade: 0 12th Grade: 0 |
| Average Number of College Visits Per Student by End of 11th Grade | 5+ | 3-4 | 1-2 | 0 |
| Average Student Score on 12th Grade College Knowledge Survey | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |
| % of Students Completing Performance Assessment Capstone Projects | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |
| EFFECTIVE COUNSELING | | | | |
| College Counseling Staff to Senior Student Ratio *FT employee = 1; 10 hour/week PL = .25 | >1:80 | 1:81 to 1:100 | 1:101 to 1:124 | 1:125 or more |
| % of 12th Grade Students Engaging in 1:1 Postsecondary Planning Meetings with Trained Staff | 90-100% | 75-89% | 65-74% | Less than 65% |
| STAFF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES | | | | |
| % of 11th Grade Students Engaging in 1:1 Postsecondary Planning Meetings with Trained Staff | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |
| % of 11th Grade Students with a Completed Family Income Form by End of Year | 60-100% | 40-59% | 20-39% | Less than 20% |
| Shared student-level data tracking system for application and financial aid steps for all seniors | Consistently uses a tracking system in order to strategize | Consistently records student progress in tracking system | Tracking system exists but used irregularly or is not easily sharable | Tracking system is non-existent or rudimentary |
| Youth-Led College Access Programming | 12 month program | 10 month program | 4 month program | No Peer Leadership |
| Annual Staff PD Meetings Devoted to Postsecondary Planning | 3+ mtgs | 2 mtgs | 1 mtg | 0 mtgs |
| Frequency of Grade Team Meetings Devoted to Postsecondary Planning | Weekly | Monthly | Irregular or Less than Monthly | Does not occur |
| Demonstrated Baseline Understanding of NYC Postsecondary Landscape and NYC Specific Context: % Correct Answers on Staff Survey Content Questions | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |
| Average Score on Staff Attitude Questions | 3.51-4.0 | 3-3.50 | 2-2.99 | 1-1.99 |
| SCHOOL/PROGRAM OUTCOMES: | | | | |
| <i>Over time, investments in college access infrastructure should manifest in improving leading indicators and ultimately matriculation outcomes.</i> | | | | |
| % of Seniors Completing CUNY application by January 1 | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |
| % of Seniors Completing SUNY/Private applications by January 1 | 50-100% | 49-35% | 34-21% | Less than 20% |
| % of Seniors Completing FAFSA by March 1 | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |
| % of Seniors Committing to a Postsecondary Plan by June 1 | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |
| % of Graduating Seniors Matriculating into College or Alternative Postsecondary Destination within Six Months | 80-100% | 65-79% | 50-64% | Less than 50% |

It is important to note CARA's approach to curriculum here as well. We believe that young people learn best when classroom activities start with their own knowledge, questions, and concerns; when they have a chance to engage in activities, have conversations with peers, and construct knowledge alongside others; and when they are engaging with ideas and concepts that fit their developmental stage.

While many of the schools we work in attempt to bring this approach to English, social studies, or science curriculum, we have found that, too often, conversations about college

take the form of talking at students, trying to give them facts, rather than engaging them in an inquiry about their post-secondary pathways. In addition to increasing the amount of time that schools spend helping students learn about these pathways, one of the important goals of the College Inquiry program is to help schools shift their approach to this work as well. In our view, meaningful structural changes to schools' "college-going culture" must include both creating ongoing spaces for learning about post-secondary education and the kind of teaching and learning that happens in those spaces.

Figure 2.3 Creating a College-Going Culture in High Schools

A college-going culture refers to the environment, attitudes, and practices in a school that encourage students and their families to explore post-secondary options and develop the knowledge and skills needed to make and carry out informed choices. In a school with a strong college-going culture:

- > staff members are dedicated to preparing all students for post-secondary education;
- > students are helped to see themselves as "college material";
- > there are a clear set of structures and experiences dedicated to supporting students, both logistically and socio-emotionally, through the college search, application, financial aid and decision making process.

In particular, a growing body of research supports the importance of cultivating a multicultural college-going identity in students:

"Students see college going as integral to their identities; they have the confidence and skills to negotiate college without sacrificing their own identity and connections with their home communities. They recognize that college is a pathway to careers that are valued in their families, peer groups, and local communities." (Oakes, Mendoza & Silver, 2005)

This goal needs to be reinforced in all aspects of a school's work, through the integration of motivational and experiential opportunities around college, for all students, throughout their high school careers.

CARA formally began this work in 2011 and to date has undertaken some version of it in more than sixty schools; we currently work with approximately twenty to twenty-five schools in any given year. Over time, we have refined the profile of schools with which we think it makes sense to partner, as we found that schools with extremely low graduation rates were overwhelmed with simply getting students to graduation and not yet ready to focus their energy on post-secondary access. (For these schools, we have developed other programming to ensure that students can receive adequate post-secondary counseling; for more information, see [CARA's Right to College](#) program.)

We have also learned that if schools are not committed, up front, to restructuring their schedule to create time to implement curriculum across all four grades, dedicating staff time to professional development, and do not have at least one staff member dedicated to 12th grade college counseling, it is not possible to transform school structures sufficiently to make a positive impact on post-secondary access. Thus, the schools that CARA now partners with all need to meet these criteria. We also insist that the work of post-secondary access in public high schools must serve all students and not a smaller subset of higher performing students, as we believe that the future potential of a fourteen year old should not be determined so early on in their lives. Therefore, we only partner with schools that commit to implementing our work with all of their students.

CARA's College Inquiry Resources

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Figure 2.4 Sample Scope and Sequence Map
9–12 Curriculum: Advisory

| Program | 9th Grade | 10th Grade | 11th Grade | 12th Grade |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| Mapping the Landscape of College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Surveying Student > Knowledge about College > Learning about College Through Interviews > College Visit: Pre/During/Post | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > College Sort > College in America: Myths and Realities > First in the Family Video > College Visit > How is College Different from High School? > Learning about College Through Interviews College Matching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Surveying Student > Knowledge about College > Mock Admissions > College Visits: Pre/During/Post > Learning about College Through Interviews > Exploring College Majors > SUNY Scavenger Hunt > The College Search: What's Important to Me? > Researching Colleges Online | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Surveying Student > Knowledge about College > Learning About College through Interviews: Alumni Panel |
| College Application Process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Transcript Review > What's in a College Application? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Transcript Review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Transcript Review > College Application Steps > Reach, Match, Likely: Matching Students with Schools > Putting the SAT in Context > Making a CUNY College List > College Essay > Creating an Annotated SUNY List | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > College Application Steps > Creating an Annotated SUNY List > Completing the CUNY Application > After Hitting "Submit" |
| Paying for College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What Is Financial Aid? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What are Educational Opportunity Programs? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What Is Financial Aid? > Comparing Financial Aid Packages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Looking at FAFSA > Steps to Applying for Financial Aid > Comparing Financial Aid Packages 2: Public v. Private > Loans and Interest Rates > Paying Back Loans |
| Exploring Careers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Career Jeopardy > Investigating Your Career Interests 1 > Career Interview | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What Makes a Good Job? > Connecting Majors and Careers > Career Fair | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Exploring College Majors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > High School to Career Roadmap |

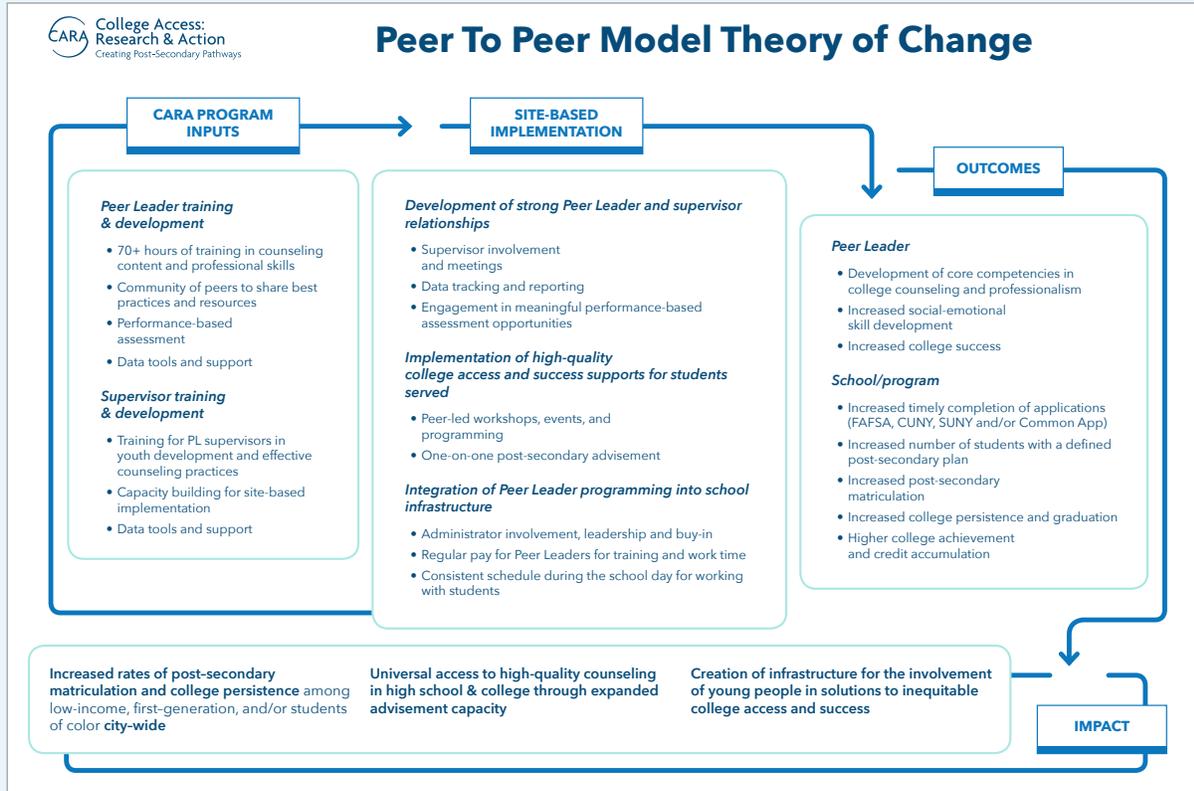
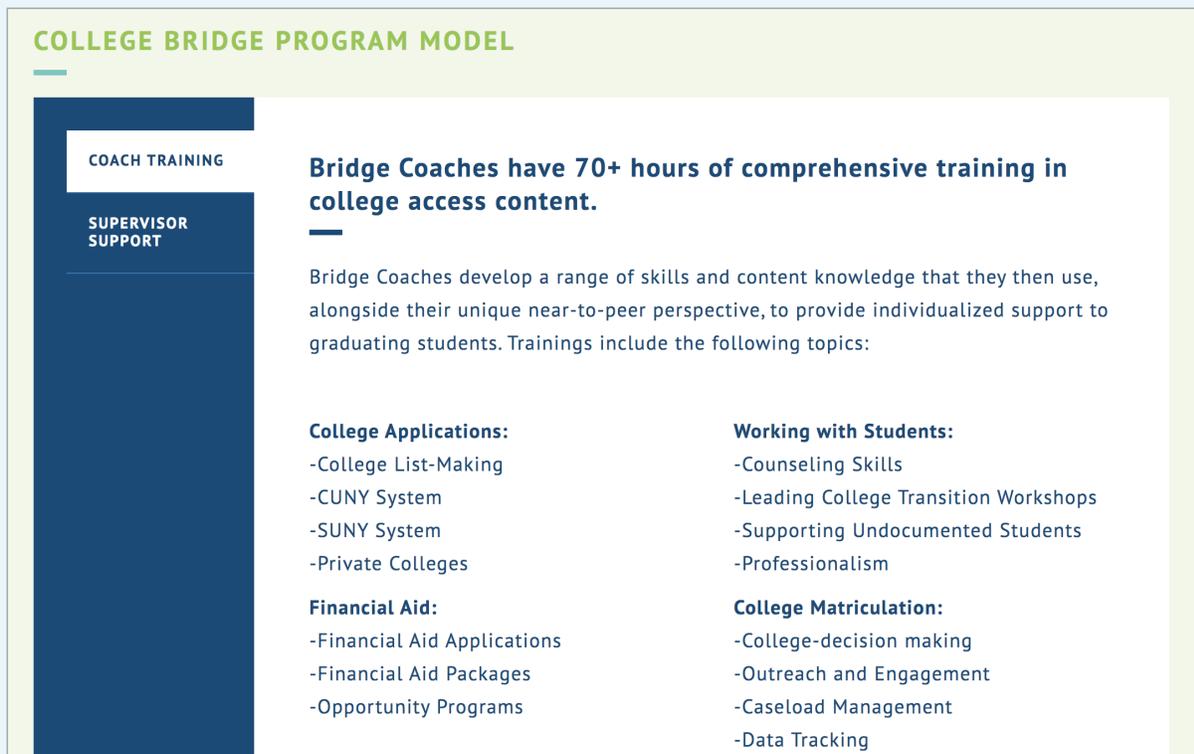
Peer Leadership: College Bridge

Youth leadership has been a central part of CARA's approach to college access work since our founding, and we run three connected programs that make up our Peer Leadership for College Access & Success model, of which College Bridge is one. These programs' genesis lay in our work with the Institute for Student Achievement, as well as organizing by the Urban Youth Collaborative, whose "Get Us to College" campaign advocates for more college access resources with youth at the forefront.¹ The creation of our College Bridge program in 2011 intersected with growing attention to the phenomena of "summer melt" of up to 40% of low-income students² by several New York City organizations, including Urban Assembly, CUNY's At Home in College (now called CUNY LINCT), and CARA, all of whom began hiring graduates now in college to work over the summer to support students in the high schools they had attended.

These college students supported newly graduated seniors through the range of matriculation steps that are likely to take place over the summer after senior year, when high schools are closed and college counselors on vacation. Starting in 2014—based on overwhelming feedback across schools that the biggest change they wanted to see in the program was "start earlier!"—CARA extended the program from a four-month one (May–August) to an eight-month one (January–August) to a full-year one (September–August), allowing the Bridge Coaches to guide students through the whole year-long college application process, and see it through from start to finish.

 Each participating high school embeds a Bridge Coach—usually an alumni of their school—into their college office, under the supervision of their college counselor. With more than seventy hours of comprehensive training, Bridge Coaches develop a range of skills and content knowledge that they then use, alongside their unique near-to-peer perspective, to provide individualized support to graduating students and reduce "summer melt "
 



Figure 2.5 Peer-to-Peer Model Theory of Change

Figure 2.6 College Bridge Program


Since 2015, CARA has been running a full-year program, providing seventy hours of training and then supporting college students to work in their alma mater high school's college office ten hours/week. The additional well-trained counseling resources that they bring to the college office free up counselors from some of the seemingly endless bureaucratic work of the college application process. This allows the counselors to then spend more time on tasks that only they have the expertise to do, such as helping students create good-match lists for private colleges or determining how to fill out FAFSA in complicated family situations.

The move to a full-year program also transformed the role these young people were able to play, positioning them as valuable members of the school staff who got to know seniors deeply and could serve as meaningful role models and guides through the post-secondary process in ways that, for some students, surpassed what adult staff could provide.

As one college counselor who has now had full-year coaches for several years commented: *“College Bridge Coaches are the best bargain in town. They add so much value: they are so skilled, they are our own homegrown talent, they come in with such huge advantages because they know the school, and the students know them.”*

A field note from our observations captures the high level of work an experienced Bridge Coach is able to do.



“Student having trouble with tax verification—requested transcript, but over three weeks and didn’t arrive. Needs to call with mother, but not sure if IRS will have translator. Coach says if there is not translator when student calls with mother today, for them to come in tomorrow and Coach can translate.”

“Another student is having issues with financial aid for CUNY CSI. Already sent FAFSA with commitment forms, but Coach has him print again just in case. Coach shows student in CUNYFirst that there is a financial aid verification sheet the student needs to fill out; prints this out for student as well; shows student how to fill out paperwork and what parts mother needs to do; then helps student fill out the parts of the paperwork he can do himself. ”

“Student then also shows Coach his financial aid package and asks if everything is covered except room and board. Coach googles the cost of the school, and shows student how to calculate. He writes down tuition and fees for the semester and then multiplies by two—shows figure of cost for the whole year for school including room and board and meal plan (about \$19,000) and shows the student the gap between financial aid and total cost with room and board: \$7,789. ”



Figure 2.7 Peer Leader Core Competencies


What we have come to see over the past five years is that young people trained to serve as peer leaders for college access and success serve as *credible messengers*, rooted in multiple ways in the communities that they are serving. This allows them to be effective in a range of ways that adults cannot be:

- > **Peer leaders speak the languages of their communities**, be those Spanish, Mandarin, Bengali, or others. They also speak the language of young people, in the spaces and at the times where young people hang out: in the cafeteria; around the corner after school, on Instagram and Snapchat and TikTok at midnight.
- > **They have walked a mile—or a hundred—in their peers' shoes**, and the stories they have to share go beyond information, speaking to the fears and worries of young people at this momentous time of transition in their lives: fears about belonging, about academic preparedness; worries about finances and career pathways. As one peer leader explained it, "I am a living testimony."
- > **Their knowledge is up-to-the-minute** in ways that adults' knowledge—from when they graduated three years ago, or thirteen, or thirty—cannot be. One peer leader explained that adults "might not have the freshest memories" while another told us: "We keep it real. Sometimes the adults, they come from a perspective where the students might think, oh you went through this process years ago, ages ago, ancient times ago. They see we're going through it now, and if they ask us something, we just keep it real with them."
- > **They are frequently more sympathetic and approachable to a range of young people.** A peer leader told us, "There are certain things they would not go to an adult about because maybe they are like, 'oh you know she is going to judge me.'" At the same time, their own college transition challenges allow them to authentically demand more of the students they work with. "Someone needs to treat them like they're going to college," one peer leader said, shaking his head. "No one there is going to hold your hand."

(For more on this, see [CARA's Op-Ed in The Hechinger Report's Guidance Gap series](#).)



They see we're going through it now, and if they ask us something, we just keep it real with them.



Soon after the move to a full-year program, CARA noticed that schools doing both programs were seeing the highest gains in matriculation outcomes. Since then, we have encouraged schools to do both, suggesting to our Bridge partner schools that they undertake Inquiry coaching, and to Inquiry partners that they hire a College Bridge Coach.

And in quite a few of our partner schools, Bridge Coaches have come to be seen as critically important staff members, returning for a second, third, or fourth year of coaching work and reaching high levels of counseling expertise. We have been inspired by the ways in which their work has transformed schools' approaches to post-secondary access, placing first-generation young people at the front and center of creating meaningful bridges to education beyond high school for their peers.



"If other elements were missing, our post-secondary program could still work. Without youth leadership, we could not have the same success. Based on my experience, without peer leadership, there really is no program to speak of. That's how important it is."



The Study: Seven Schools



In 2016, CARA received a grant from the New York Community Trust to do research on building college access infrastructure in the schools we were serving, with the purpose of being able to inform policy makers and the field.



We will study whether building a school’s college access organizational infrastructure—increasing college access knowledge among staff and students, increasing college access activities across grades 9–12, enhancing school’s college counseling ability, and involving peer leaders as meaningful members of the college team—has the potential to close the gap between high school graduation and college matriculation for this population of students across the city.

Choosing Schools

We believed that we would learn the most from schools most likely to be successful at this extremely complicated task; as noted in CARA’s Approach Section, it was schools simultaneously building infrastructure and utilizing peer leadership (i.e., participating in both our College Inquiry and College Bridge programs) that were showing the greatest gains in matriculation. Anecdotally, these same schools were also showing the biggest shifts in thinking and culture. So, we decided to focus on schools in their second year of doing both Inquiry and Bridge, balancing our experience that not all schools made it to a second year of work with the need for a long enough period to follow their development over time.

Finally, we knew that this work would need to happen very differently across the many school contexts that make up the New York City landscape. City schools range from ones with only 150 students to ones with more than 6,000; they teach young people speaking more than 170 languages; they serve Congressional districts that are the poorest in the nation as well as those that are the richest and the best educated¹; and they do so through a range of models and approaches. For this reason, we deliberately chose to examine implementation across a range of types of schools and boroughs: big and small, pursuing a range of learning philosophies, located in very different parts of the city. With only seven schools in a city the size of New York, we knew this would not be a scientifically representative study but we wanted to be able to speak to as broad a set of contexts as possible.

Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 provide some insight into the students served by the schools, and their post-secondary matriculation outcomes, in 2016, the year before CARA began our research work with these schools.

The Research

And then, of course, we needed schools interested in partnering with us in the research, despite the additional demands on school staff it would represent. In this aspect, CARA's intensive coaching relationships proved crucial: College Inquiry coaches provided introductions to principals and school staff for CARA researchers, and helped researchers understand the complex context and players at each site. Alongside the research work (observations and interviews), College Inquiry coaches shared with research staff their notes and other coaching documentation from of all of their infrastructure-building work with schools, including:

- > A “map” of college support tasks created to capture what the school was and was not already doing when it began working with CARA
- > The initial action plan schools created for their first year of work, articulating two or three priorities to tackle in the first year, based on CARA's best practices
- > A completed initial College Inquiry Infrastructure rubric, locating the school's practices along a continuum of implementation indicators
- > Results of staff and student knowledge surveys
- > Written case study notes of curriculum implementation, professional development, college office practices, and the coaching work that supported them across the three years of the study



We deliberately chose to examine implementation across a range of types of schools and boroughs: big and small, pursuing a range of learning philosophies, located in very different parts of the city.



Table 3.1 Demographic Overview of Schools in Study

| Name of School | Total Enrollment (N) | % Economic Need | % Black & Latinx | ENL |
|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|------|
| Career HS | 545 | 43.2 | 69.4* | 1.7 |
| Technology HS | 544 | 74.7 | 90.4 | 6.1 |
| World HS | 470 | 93.9 | 91.5 | 76.6 |
| HS for Leadership | 357 | 63 | 98.6 | 3.9 |
| Centro HS | 404 | 71.3 | 91.1 | 1.5 |
| Arts HS | 247 | 60.7 | 86.6 | 1.6 |
| Neighborhood HS | 1950 | 64.4 | 61** | 21.6 |

* Career HS: 6.2% Asian, 20.4% White
 **Neighborhood HS: 32.5% Asian, 4.9% White

Table 3.2 Baseline Post-Secondary Outcomes of Study Schools for Class of 2016

| Name of School | Location | High School Graduation (%) | Post-Secondary Enrollment |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Career HS | Queens | 98 | 80.6 |
| Technology HS | The Bronx | 81.9 | 62.1 |
| World HS | The Bronx | 65.6 | 39.6 |
| HS for Leadership | Brooklyn | 72.2 | 43.1 |
| Centro HS | Manhattan | 93 | 69.1 |
| Arts HS | Manhattan | 98.2 | 87.3 |
| Neighborhood HS | Queens | 63.8 | 41.5 |

Additionally, CARA’s research team collected a range of data, including conducting classroom, professional development, and college office observations, interviews with staff members and administrators, interviews with students, and student and staff surveys.

Figure 3.1 Data Collection

| TYPE | AMOUNT |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Staff Interviews | 36 |
| Student Interviews | 75 |
| Staff Surveys | 233 |
| Student Surveys | 3,332 |
| Observations | 70 hrs |

Figure 3.2 Areas of Work

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION:

What kind of early awareness/exposure work was happening in classrooms at the school before 12th grade? How many visits to college campuses did all students get to take part in? What spaces were available to undertake curriculum work as the school began its engagement with CARA?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

How much staff development time (if any) was devoted to helping the whole staff agree on a shared vision around supporting post-secondary access? How much staff development time was devoted (across the whole staff or in smaller, targeted groupings) to ensuring that staff had the up-to-date knowledge and skills to provide accurate post-secondary advice and guidance to their students?

COUNSELING SUPPORT: How much counselor time was devoted to individually supporting seniors through the college application process? Was a staff member doing this work full-time? Half-time along with traditional guidance counselor work? What kind of counselor-to-student ratio did this add up to? How experienced was the counselor, and how connected were they to up-to-date information from colleges and the college access community?

The chart below, Table 3.3, provides a summary of where each of the seven schools began their work in the three areas that CARA has defined as critical to a strong college access infrastructure. It gives a snapshot of the similarities and differences across these schools as they began their work, in terms of the three major areas of work.

Table 3.3 What Was in Place at Each School Prior to Beginning Work with CARA

| Name of School | Curriculum/Experiences | Professional Development | Counseling |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Career HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Strong advisory program, advisors follow students grades 9–12 > 12th grade college planning class > College research project in 9th grade > Internship program > Three 11th grade trips to local schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Regular advisory grade team meetings > No staff PD on college | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher with several years' experience doing college counseling > ½ time college, ½ time teaching > Ratio = 1:256 <p><i>NOTE: A new counselor just out of graduate school, school's first full-time college counselor, was hired just before beginning work with CARA (teacher will be on maternity leave first semester of CARA work)</i></p> |
| Technology HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > CTE classes > Partnerships with excellent internship opportunities > College trips for select students only | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No staff PD on college | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Experienced counselor > Doing college full-time > Ratio = 1:116 |
| World HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 11th grade internship class first semester, with opportunities to discuss college access > Senior mentoring program, with teachers adopting several seniors to mentor through college process > Very few if any college trips | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No staff PD on college | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Counselor previously worked as an English teacher at the school; deep background at school, but new to role and field > ½ time guidance, ½ time college > Had already had a Bridge Coach for several years > Ratio = 1:116 |
| HS for Leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > CTE classes > Partnerships with excellent internship opportunities > College trips for select students only | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No staff PD on college | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Experienced counselor who was part of founding staff of the school > ½ time college, ½ time guidance > Had a Bridge Coach in previous year > Ratio = 1:154 |
| Centro HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Highly structured four-year advisory program with one teacher per grade in advisory leadership role > 9th grade seminar > Counselor pushed in to do college lessons in 12th grade English > College trips & college fair visits in grades 11–12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No staff PD on college | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Slightly experienced counselor > ½ time guidance, ½ time college > Ratio = 1:216 |
| Arts HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Counselor push-in to 12th grade two to three times/month, once a month in 11th, and three to four times/year in 9th + 10th > One college trip for 11th graders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No staff PD on college | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Experienced counselor > ½ time guidance, ½ time college > Ratio = 1:106 |
| Neighborhood HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No college lessons in any grade > No college trips | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No staff PD on college | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Guidance counselor who was moved to do college counseling several years earlier, self-taught > Doing college full-time > Ratio = 1:462 <p><i>NOTE: Through CBO, added full-time college counselor as CARA started work; new to field</i></p> |

The following chart, Table 3.4, captures the college access infrastructure that schools had in place after three years of work with CARA.

Table 3.4 What Was in Place **after Three Years** of Work with CARA

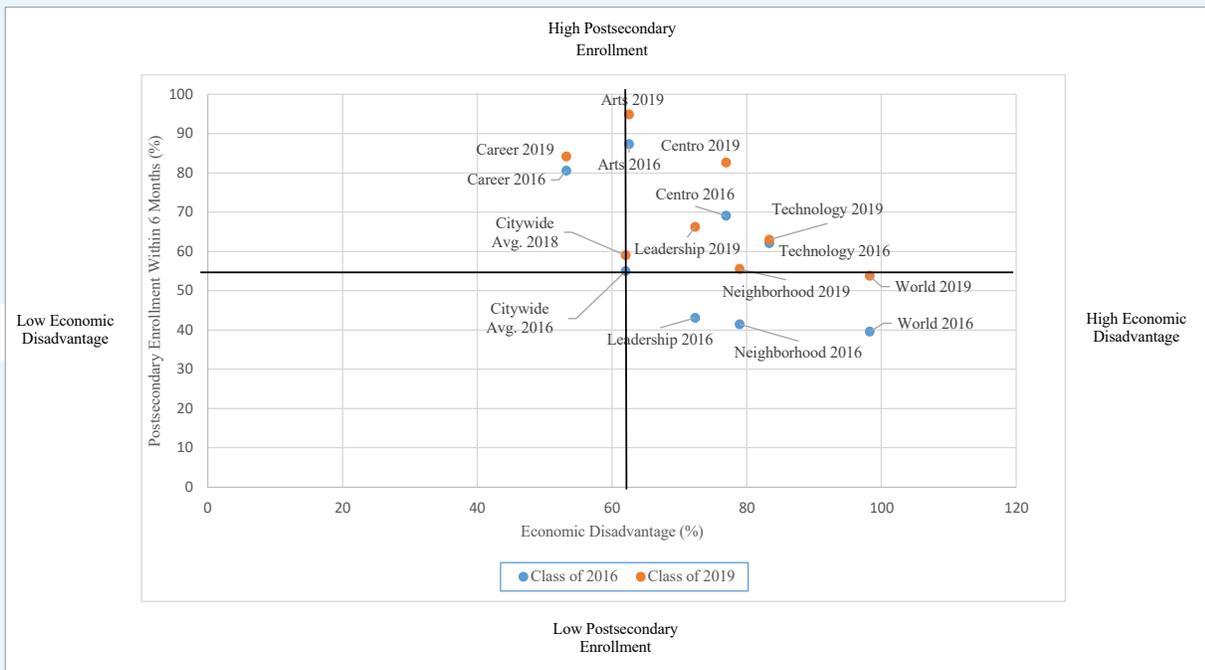
| Name of School | Curriculum/Experiences | Professional Development | Counseling |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| Career HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Strong advisory program incorporating college and career planning activities grades 9–12, responsive to feedback from graduates > 12th grade college planning class, taught by counselor and two Bridge Coaches > Internship program > Large number of overnight trips in multiple grades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Annual school-wide off-site overnight retreats focused on content knowledge for staff and refining advisory curriculum scope and sequence > Regular advisory grade team meetings focused on college and career curriculum implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Full-time counselor with three years' experience > Knowledgeable teacher supporting projects like SAT registration and special event days > Two Bridge Coaches with three years' experience > Ratio = 1:81 |
| Technology HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No information available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No information available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Experienced counselor, doing college full-time > Bridge Coach > Ratio = 1:72 |
| World HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Some lessons incorporated into advisory in grades 9/10 and adapted for multilingual learners > Career lessons in 11th grade internship class > 12th grade lessons in advisory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Three to four whole staff PDs per year on college access, facilitated by college counselor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Same counselor, now experienced, working in role for three years; ½ time guidance, ½ time college > Two Bridge Coaches > Ratio = 1:71 |
| HS for Leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advisory curriculum incorporating CARA lessons in grades 9–12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > One whole school PD per year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Same experienced counselor, ½ time guidance, ½ time college > Bridge Coach > College Advising Corps staff member > Ratio = 1:47 |
| Centro HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advisory curriculum incorporating CARA lessons in grades 9–12 > Additional CARA lessons incorporated in varied academic spaces grades 9–12 (9th grade transition seminar, 10th grade research class, 11th grade first semester college and career class) > Trips in all grades > Access to multiple college fairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > One to two whole school PDs per year > Advisory meetings by grade once/month focused on planning curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Full-time college counselor through outside organization, recommended by CARA (CollegeBound Initiative) > One Bridge Coach working double hours (twenty hours/week) > Ratio = 1:71 |
| Arts HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Full year class in 11th grade > Five lessons/year in 9th and 10th grade English classes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Adopt-a-Senior program with teachers supporting two to five seniors through their college process, one to two PD sessions with them to train them for this work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Experienced counselor > ½ time guidance, ½ time college > One Bridge Coach + family worker spending some time on college > Ratio = 1:69 |
| Neighborhood HS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Spring class for 11th graders that meets daily > Fall class for 12th graders that meets daily > Weekly push-ins by counseling to economics class, 12th grade spring > Piloting five to eight lessons in select 9/10th grade English classes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Full staff PD sessions three times/year on college/career topics > Weekly meetings of college team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Two full-time college counselors (one school-based, one CBO-based), experienced and increasingly networked > Four Bridge Coaches > Ratio = 1:160 |

The next chart, Table 3.5, then captures the post-secondary matriculation rates of 2018 graduates from each of the schools (the most recent data available), after two years of work with CARA.

Table 3.5 Change in Post-Secondary Outcomes of Study Schools from Baseline to Class of 2019

| Name of School | Location | Class of 2019 | % Change |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------------------|--------------|
| SCHOOL INFORMATION | | POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT | |
| Career HS | Queens | 84.2 | +3.6 |
| Technology HS | The Bronx | 63 | +0.9 |
| World HS | The Bronx | 53.8 | +14.2 |
| HS for Leadership | Brooklyn | 66.3 | +23.2 |
| Centro HS | Manhattan | 82.6 | +13.5 |
| Arts HS | Manhattan | 94.9 | +7.6 |
| Neighborhood HS | Queens | 55.5 | +14 |

Figure 3.3 Change in Schools' Post-Secondary Enrollment from 2016 to 2019 by Level of Economic Disadvantage



Overall, five of the seven schools made strong gains in post-secondary matriculation, with four of them seeing gains in the double digits. Of the other two, one school (Technology High School) struggled tremendously in their second year of work with us after their high school graduation rate dropped sharply, precipitating multiple oversight interventions from the city and state. Ultimately, because of budget cuts, they did not do a third year of work with CARA and thus did not complete the program. The other school that saw a drop in

matriculation rates (Arts High School) was at the other end of the spectrum, starting out with a very high 87.3% matriculation rate. However, with the smallest graduating class size of the seven schools (around fifty students), one or two students significantly impact this number, and so it is difficult to know what it means.

In the next sections, we look beyond the numbers to the work that produced them, to see what we can learn from the experience of undertaking this work across three years in these seven schools.



Overall, five of the seven schools made strong gains in post-secondary matriculation, with four of them seeing gains in the double digits.



Findings: Curriculum Implementation



While we report here on the seven schools, the themes that rose to the top echo issues we have seen in our coaching work across the city over the past ten plus years.



For the most part, there are four different spaces into which we've seen schools fit College Access Curriculum. They look somewhat different and can have a variety of names in different school sites, but they share underlying similarities across contexts. Each of these spaces has both pros and cons and there is no perfect choice for this work in already full school schedules anywhere. We saw the advantages and disadvantages play out in our seven case study schools, particularly in their first year of implementation.

Having surveyed the schools that we worked in from 2016–19, we now turn to the first area of building infrastructure: curriculum. What can we learn from these seven schools about implementing curriculum that gives students the exposure and experiences they need to make knowledgeable decisions about their post-secondary pathways?

Since CARA began building our college access curriculum, we have worked in more than sixty New York City public schools. While we report here on the seven schools that we studied much more closely, the themes that rose to the top echo issues we have seen in our coaching work across the city over the past ten plus years.

The first questions that schools face, once they decide to commit to implementing college access curriculum, are: when and where? Given the many demands on instructional time, how to fit this curriculum into the school's already

full schedule? And what is the right space, in terms of frequency, amount of time allotted in a period, groupings of students, and teacher suitability? There are rarely obvious or easy answers to these questions, and much of our work with schools in the first two years is sorting through choosing the least-bad option, honestly evaluating the outcomes after a semester or a year, and adjusting accordingly.

What Is the Right Instructional Space to Teach College Access Curriculum?

For the most part, there are four different spaces into which we've seen schools fit this

new subject matter. They look somewhat different and can have a variety of names in different school sites, but they share underlying similarities across contexts.

Each of these spaces has both pros and cons and there is no perfect choice for this work in already full school schedules anywhere. We saw the advantages and disadvantages play out in our seven case study schools, particularly in their first year of implementation. Figure 4.2 lays out these pros and cons and we then examine each instructional space more closely, with examples from the schools.

Figure 4.1 Creating Instructional Space for College Access Curriculum

ADVISORY (or family group, or crew, or another similar designation): A space, often with a somewhat smaller size than regular classes, meant to address other-than-academic issues, i.e., social-emotional concerns, health, community service, etc.

SEPARATE CLASS/SEMINAR: A specific class meant to address college/career access activities, including exposure and preparedness lessons and actual filling out of college and financial aid applications.

INSIDE SUBJECT CLASSES: Schools might choose to give a particular department responsibility for including lessons in their content classes over the course of the year for all four years, or share this responsibility across departments, e.g., within math in 9th grade, science in 10th, etc.

SPECIAL EVENT DAYS: A set of chosen days throughout the year when regular schedules are put on hold, and an entire school or grade focuses on college access lessons and/or tasks.

Figure 4.2 Pros and Cons of Instructional Spaces

| Model | Pros | Cons |
|--|--|---|
| Advisory: CARA lessons are part of the curriculum in regular 9–12 advisory program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Builds on schools’ existing structures > Schools with strong advisory programs often have teams in place for developing and sharing advisory curriculum > Easy to develop vertically aligned curriculum > Often smaller class sizes with individual attention > If advisors follow students over four years, they may get to know students very well and be familiar with their post-secondary goals > Advisors often have access to a students’ family > Builds capacity and knowledge of all staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Advisory periods may be short > Advisory is often lowest priority for teachers > Lack of teacher consistency in implementation > Involves training every single staff member > Many other things may get tossed into advisory which can displace college and career lessons > Advisory culture (do staff and students expect it to be a study hall or relaxation time?) > Administrative oversight and teacher accountability can be limited > If advisory is not credit-bearing, students may not always take it seriously |
| College/Career Seminar: A specific class, often in multiple grades, designed to prepare students for post-secondary application and transition process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Affects program of fewer staff members > Only need to worry about PD and support for a few key staff members > Creates a special space where students can focus solely on their goals > Is especially powerful in 11th and 12th grades > Can be used in spring of 12th grade to support student transition > Makes it logistically easier for counselor to accomplish specific application and financial aid tasks > A dedicated class signals priority to students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Hard in early grades—students may not be developmentally ready for a lengthy course on college > If taught by college counselor or guidance counselor, continues to position that person as “The Expert” > Hard to program it into students’ schedules if it does not meet daily > If taught by college counselor or guidance counselor, does not build staff capacity > If taught by college counselor or guidance counselor, it may actually detract from that person’s available time for one-to-one support > May have larger than average class sizes because of scheduling demands and teacher availability OR does not fit into some students’ schedules so they miss out |
| Special Event Days: Students forgo their classes to attend a rotation of workshops | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Flexibility in terms of staff (can involve as few or as many as desired and in many different ways) > Great for schools that cannot find other space due to programming issues, staffing concerns, or credit accumulation concerns > Potential to involve youth leaders or peer-to-peer work > Can be a fun, welcome break from regular school routine > Can pack many lessons and experiences in at once > Can signal importance and build energy/momentum in school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Very burdensome at the start to plan and create the structure; becomes easier in subsequent years > A different routine than a regular school day may lead to weak attendance or students not taking the content seriously > Staff may have concerns that students are missing “academic content” on these days > May involve teacher/student pairings that do not happen at other points in the year, which may lead to challenging staff/student dynamics > Space can be a concern—some schools solve this by going off-site |
| Academic Classes: Curriculum is embedded in core or elective classes in each grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Builds on schools’ existing structures > Positions college access as valuable because it is part of students’ regular learning and impacts their grades > Can be aligned with curricular standards that already feel important/worthy to teachers > Builds capacity and knowledge of many staff members, including entire grade levels or departments > Flexible—can be done once a month in early grades; once a week in upper grades > Administration can easily plan to monitor teacher implementation through observation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Lack of teacher consistency in implementation > Involves training many staff members, often through multiple, differentiated trainings > Involves a lot of initial planning to get vertical and grade-wide alignment > Needs administration’s oversight to ensure lessons are actually happening > Less time in the class for other course objectives (can be a problem if it is in a high stakes class like math that concludes with a state exam) > Can be challenging to find a class every student takes, especially in 12th grade |

Advisory

While we—and many schools—initially saw this as a natural fit for post-secondary curriculum because it did not already have set content, there were significant drawbacks to this instructional space. At Centro High School, for example, the length of their advisory period (30 minutes) proved to be a challenging fit with inquiry-based lessons designed to encourage extended conversations or with engagement with complex activities. Most lessons needed to be done over a two-day period, losing student interest and focus in the intervening days or sometimes weeks.

A second major challenge was precisely the fact that advisory did not have set content. At the High School for Leadership, CARA lessons were initially welcomed by advisors. They had often struggled with the loose structure of the advisory space, which did not have a clear scope and sequence or curriculum. However, regularly implementing actual lessons when students had become accustomed to study halls, culture and community-building activities, announcements, and fun activities, proved to be a challenge for many advisors.

The catch-all nature of advisory at the High School for Leadership also meant that any *other* new initiatives were also placed into the space: in the same year that they began their work with CARA, the school began doing restorative justice circles weekly in advisory, and the two initiatives ended up competing for time in the limited real estate of advisory minutes. In the first semester of doing the lessons, the college counselor talked about what she was hearing from advisors:

“We don’t have time to do everything the administration is asking. It feels like too much. We just don’t know when these lessons are going to happen, with so much else going on.”

One of the teachers who had taken leadership around college access with her grade commented at the end of the second year:

“I think the biggest challenge to using the CARA material, just in terms of the lesson plans and the curriculum ... in terms of getting it to be the most effective, the issue has been just competing pressures in terms of delivering that content.”

On the other hand, at Career High School, one Assistant Principal who also served as an advisor of 12th graders and had been with the same group of students since 9th grade noted that the advisory structure allowed staff members to work with families on the important, fine-grained details of decision making:

“What’s happening in advisory, particularly because the advisory teachers know the families so well at this point and know the students so well is, really trying to help them create some pros and cons or sort of project into the future a little bit. Like, what does it mean to stay home for an additional year or two? What does it mean to leave a school in four years with \$60,000 in debt, what will it look like to pay that off, how much money do you have to make?”

The value of these long-term advisory relationships was clear when it came to working with families and really being on the ground helping students make difficult decisions.

College/Career Seminar

Dedicated seminar spaces solve the problem of competing pressures, but raise different issues. For example, at Arts High School, a full-year class twice a week was created for both 11th and 12th graders. The extensive time commitment to this work by the school was a big step forward; however, the teacher assigned was a dance teacher who had space in her program (i.e., needed another class to be teaching her full contractual load). The CARA coach helped her to create a syllabus using CARA lessons, but as she reflected after a visit:

“Maria struggled with classroom management in 11th grade; and while the 12th grade class was engaged in the work, [her] lack of background knowledge on the intricacies of college counseling meant she couldn’t help students with many necessary tasks.”

At Centro High School, a related issue emerged with the lessons that were supposed to be included in 10th grade. The plan had been to add them to a research class taught by the librarian, but she felt overwhelmed and in the first semester, simply neglected to teach them at all. At World High School, where lessons were put into an 11th grade internship seminar, it emerged halfway through the year that the teacher had been educated under the British system and was ill-equipped to teach a subject with which she was so unfamiliar; once again, she simply did not teach the lessons.

On other hand, the strengths of having a single person work deeply with the curriculum became evident at Arts High School in year three, when the 11th and 12th grade seminars were taken over by an Assistant Principal who was herself a first-generation person of color, and who transformed the course by infusing it with her own experiences:

“I introduce a boxing glove, I talk about me fighting every single day for my education in college—which was me humbling myself and being knocked down and getting back up ... I opened myself up to them, so they can understand it’s possible to fail and still succeed at the same time. And if I didn’t take this approach, if I just taught the class with the CARA curriculum as it’s written in the binder, I don’t think that they would have the resilience they need.”

The 9th grade seminar teacher at Centro High School—who was also an Assistant Principal and former college counselor and first-generation college graduate of color—had a similar strong presence and successful outcomes in the college access seminar she taught.

At Neighborhood High School, a core group of teachers took on college seminars for 11th and 12th graders as a large part of their program, and this allowed for targeted professional development for them, a close-knit teacher team that could plan together, and intensive collaboration with the college office. An Assistant Principal there who worked extensively with this group remarked:

“The teachers understand that we’re not working in a silo, we’re working to support the college office and the college counselors—this class needs to serve as supporting the work that needs to get done with the students.”

And at Career High School, the 12th grade seminar classes were a logical and coherent space to bring in Bridge Coaches to teach lessons and support seniors, something that would have been significantly more difficult if lessons were scattered across multiple advisories or different content area classes.

Figure 4.3 Seven Schools’ Approaches to Curriculum Implementation

| Name of School | 9th/10th grade approach | 11th/12th grade approach |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Career HS | > Advisory | > 11th advisory > 12th advisory and full-year seminar |
| Technology HS | > Academic classes | > Counselor push-in to CTE classes |
| World HS | > Advisory | > 11th in internship seminar > 12th advisory |
| HS for Leadership | > Advisory | > Advisory |
| Centro HS | > Advisory > 9th seminar > Academic class in 10th | > Advisory > 11th grade seminar spring semester > Varied academic classes in 11th grade |
| Arts HS | > English classes | > 11th grade seminar full-year |
| Neighborhood HS | > English classes | > 11th grade spring seminar > 12th grade fall seminar |

Other Approaches

Technology High School is the only one of our seven schools that decided to use academic classes as the main vehicle for college access lessons across grades, and this was only after exploring several other unsuccessful avenues. Toward the end of their second year, a guidance counselor took charge of distributing one lesson per grade per month to all of the teachers; the entire school would then do the assigned lesson at the same time. In the next year, however, only two of these lessons were done by teachers across grades.

At Neighborhood High School, this was also a last resort, after trying for two and a half years to find other routes in the 9th and 10th grade that ultimately proved unsuccessful. At the end of their third year, they began doing one lesson per month for 9th and

10th graders in English classes, with English teachers meeting occasionally to discuss lesson implementation and share strategies.

And one school not included in the study has entirely used content classes for access lessons, situating them in math classes in grades 9–11 and discussing implementation at weekly math team meetings. They have found that fitting them in on what they call “strategic days”—i.e., leading up to a vacation or in between units of study—made it possible to adopt this approach without disrupting their content teaching.

None of our seven schools exclusively used special event days to address college access curriculum, and on the whole we do not think it is a reliable enough structure to support the time required to implement a

comprehensive 9–12 curriculum. We do know of one small school that has had success with this for 9th and 10th graders (while holding seminars for 11th and 12th graders), and are currently working with another school that is planning to use special event days as one major space to do college access curriculum.

As noted in Figure 4.3, Centro High School, World High School and Career High School opted to spread curriculum work across multiple areas in particular grades; in all cases, a seminar class and advisory in particular grades and also 9th/10th/11th grade academic classes at Centro (see Figure 4.4 for Centro’s curriculum map). While this provided additional time to engage in college access work—and allowed a variety of kinds of staff to take part—in both schools it got off to a bumpy start, given the amount of coordination required to make the experience coherent for students. Strong intervention by school leadership—and clear identification of who is the “lead” for the work—were important in smoothing the way for this to happen successfully

Other Key Takeaways

Looking across the seven schools (while also keeping in mind our experiences with our other partner schools not in the study), a number of other key takeaways about the conditions required for the successful implementation of college access curriculum across grades 9–12 jumped out at us. In particular, we were struck by similarities that seemed to hold across school types, as those seemed perhaps the most telling about both the challenges schools face and the routes to success. No matter which model a school chose at the outset, they tended to stick with their approach even in the face of evidence of major flaws, so it is important to choose wisely when beginning this work.

What, then, is important to think about when choosing instructional spaces to teach college access curriculum?

- > **There are many possible options for early awareness work in 9th/10th grade:** Centro High School does lessons in a 9th grade seminar; it is done entirely in advisory at Career High School; Neighborhood High School is using subject classes in 9th and 10th grade as a space for early awareness work. Because the content is more general, and the number of lessons is fewer, the work can be approached much more flexibly at this point in students’ high school careers. One caveat to this is for schools like World High School that serve a large percentage of students with English as a new language (ENL). Since most World High School students were ENLs and recently arrived immigrants to the United States, adapting lessons to their needs was more challenging. However, CARA is working with a group of these schools around New York City and they are tackling this work in 9/10th grade, just more slowly and in smaller increments.



We were struck by similarities that seemed to hold across school types, as those seemed perhaps the most telling about both the challenges schools face and the routes to success.



Figure 4.4 Sample Curriculum Map, Centro High School


Sample Curriculum Map

| | 9th Grade | 10th Grade | 11th Grade | 12th Grade |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Mapping the Landscape of College | SEMINAR Surveying Student Knowledge About College College Visits Pre/During/Post for Fall Trip ADVISORY College Sort College in America: Myths and Realities First in the Family College Match College Interviews College Visits Pre/During/Post for Spring Trip | SEMINAR Surveying Student Knowledge About College SUNY Scavenger Hunt College Match (modified to be all about CUNY) Researching Colleges Online ADVISORY Exploring College Majors College Visits Pre/During/Post | ADVISORY Surveying Student Knowledge About College College Matching College Interviews College Visits Pre/During/Post SEMINAR Exploring College Majors Researching Colleges Online The College Search: What's Important to Me | ADVISORY Surveying Student Knowledge About College College Visits Pre/During/Post College Fair Visit Pre/Post Exploring College Majors Spring Advisory or Transition Workshops: Looking at College Schedules Exploring Course Catalogs What Types of Classes Do College Students Take? Using College Resources |
| College Application Process | ADVISORY Activity Log Year Ahead Plan Transcript Review Summer Plan | ADVISORY Activity Log Transcript Review Mock Admissions Committee Making A CUNY List 1 (an introduction to CUNY system) | ADVISORY Activity Log Mock Admissions Committee (spring) SEMINAR Reach/Match/Safety Making A CUNY List 2 Making A CUNY List 3 Making a SUNY List | ADVISORY Brag Sheet Future Plan ELA Essays PUSH IN College Application Steps Completing CUNY App Completing SUNY App After You Hit Submit |
| Paying for College | ADVISORY What is Financial Aid Part 1 | ADVISORY What is Financial Aid Parts 2 and 3 | ADVISORY What is Financial Aid Part 3 Comparing the Costs of Public and Private Colleges What Are Opportunity Programs | ADVISORY Comparing Financial Aid Packages PUSH IN Looking at FAFSA Steps to Financial Aid Making Sense of Financial Aid Letters |
| Exploring Careers | SEMINAR Investigating Career Interests | SEMINAR Investigating Career Interests* Résumé Development ADVISORY Career Sort Career Jeopardy | ADVISORY Career Interview Looking at Career Clusters* Career Jeopardy | ADVISORY Develop materials on professionalism |
| Milestones: | College Trip to Manhattan College Spring CUNY trip | Fall CUNY trip | College Trips: Manhattan and AP for All SUNY | College Trip to SUNY |
| Assessments | Write Up of Interview College Obs/ Guide Activity Log Year Ahead Plan Career Interest Survey Summer Plan | College Research Project Activity Log College Obs/ Guide Career Interest Survey | Write Up of Interviews College Obs/ Guide Career Clusters Survey CUNY/ SUNY Lists | Personal Statement/Essay |

*Can substitute Naviance's career survey for either of these

- > The amount and complexity of college access material and tasks in 11th grade means that this area is much less flexible. Instead, **a dedicated class second semester junior year and first semester senior year** are best suited to accomplishing post-secondary application tasks at this level. At schools that opted for this structure, conversations among staff were about how to improve the structure and content of these classes, while at schools where college access continued to be done exclusively or mostly in advisory, staff voiced facing the same frustrations year after year without seeing progress.
- > **12th graders need so much individual support for much of the year that a classroom space with a single adult is insufficient and multiple adults are needed to address individual needs.** No matter how expert a teacher is—or if a college counselor themselves is teaching a senior seminar—the individualized nature of college application tasks from October of senior year on make it impossible for most of the work to be done in a “lesson” format. At schools with seminar classes, it was possible to bring in peer leaders to help in these spaces, and they acted as critical additional staff that made it possible to provide enough individualized help to keep most students in a class moving forward with the necessary tasks. Schools that recognized the different needs of senior year by, for example, shifting the dates and purposes of family conferences, were better able to meet these individual needs as they arose.
- > As our economy shifts, **it is increasingly important to address the point of post-secondary education and how it links to careers early on and throughout the curriculum**—by exploring interests and talents and understanding how they link to college study and to careers. Many 9th and 10th grade teachers struggle to engage students in thinking about college because it feels so distant to their students, but fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds are at the perfect developmental stage to think about who they are and who they want to be. For older students, a grounded sense of what they want to study in college and beyond will help them hold on to plans in the face of obstacles, and to make wiser choices about schools that make sense for them both educationally and financially.
- > As is true with undertaking any new initiative, **starting small and sustainably growing the work in phases is likely to lead to greater success.** Both Career High School and Neighborhood High School purposefully started with a smaller group of students (Career started with 11/12 and then a later rollout to 9/10; Neighborhood started with a few sections of 11th graders) and have ended up with more solid structures than Centro, the High School for Leadership, Technology High School, and World High School, all of whom tackled everything at once in the first year. This graduated piloting approach allows more room to assess what works and what does not and fix any mistakes before scaling up. This approach also makes it easier to provide the necessary professional development to staff and to build buy-in from both faculty and students.

- > **The value of a piloting approach holds for the number of lessons as well.** At Career High School, 11th grade teachers were overwhelmed by the number of lessons they were supposed to get through in the first year, and failed to teach many of them in the spring. This led to discouragement and a sense of failure, despite how many new things they *had* done. A sense of early success and momentum are crucial for new initiatives, and so, at the beginning, less is more.
- > As with any other school curriculum, **there is a need for accountability for both teachers and students.** While perhaps we wish it were otherwise—that both teachers and students would stick to and take seriously the planned college access scope and sequence because they see it as valuable—this is not the model on which high schools are designed. Attention is paid to things that count toward grades—the currency of schools—and so college access curriculum needs to be woven into this accountability system. Schools approached this in different ways: while

Career and Neighborhood High Schools gave grades for completing tasks in both 11th and 12th grade seminars, Centro made turning in financial documents part of the grade in the 12th grade fall government class. At schools where there was no accountability system for this work, teachers said that their colleagues—and admitted that they themselves—often did not do planned lessons. At the same time, the most successful accountability systems were built not on top-down structures, but teachers’ accountability to their peers, accomplished through shared planning time and shared ownership over the curriculum. In the face of inevitable teacher turnover, durable systems were important to maintaining accountability over time.

- > And finally, no matter which route a school takes to implement a college access curriculum, **leadership plays a critical role in making this new strand of work successful.** This means attending closely to the problems that arise early on, and problem-solving to ensure teachers get the support they need to undertake this new work (for an example of this see Case Study: Career High School.) It means empowering teachers to take on leadership in their work with their peers. It means putting the kinds of accountability systems mentioned above in place and ensuring that they are maintained. It means consistent messaging both directly through words and through actions (the dedication of resources like time and money) that college access work is a priority amidst the many competing priorities of a school.


The most successful accountability systems were built not on top-down structures, but teachers’ accountability to their peers, accomplished through shared planning time and shared ownership over the curriculum.


Findings: Professional Development for Staff



Any new initiative or curriculum needs to be accompanied by adult learning—professional development, in educational parlance—in order to be effectively implemented.



Staff members' ability to effectively support first-generation college students through the process depends on their own pathway to and through college, the degree to which they share the racial and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students they serve, and how much time has passed since they went to college (and thus how much the landscape has changed since then).

As noted at the end of the Findings: Curriculum Section, sufficient support for staff implementing college access work is critical to its success at a high school. What can we learn from the experience of our seven schools about implementation of professional development for staff?

It makes sense in a general way that any new initiative or curriculum needs to be accompanied by adult learning—professional development, in educational parlance—in order to be effectively implemented. However, doing so effectively in high schools is often very challenging because the majority of staff time is scheduled with young people, and the needs of those students spill over the edges of every working hour. It is the rare school initiative that is given sufficient professional development time before it is launched, and even rarer when an initiative is given ongoing time over the course of several years of implementation.

We recognize, then, that every school will be challenged to devote sufficient professional development time to building their college access capacity across the whole staff. At the same time, we have seen quite a few high schools assume that, because all staff members have attended college and the school has a “college prep” mission, they can skip or skimp on professional development when it comes to the particular topic of college access work. We have also seen that it is only with sufficient time and energy devoted to adult learning across the staff that this work can flourish at the highest level.

Why *is* it important to devote significant time to a topic that everyone on staff already has experience with, by nature of having the degree required to become a teacher?

The answer: because their ability to effectively support first-generation college students through the process depends on their own pathway to and through college, the degree to which they share the racial and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students they serve, and how much time has passed since they went to college (and thus how much the landscape has changed since then).

- > Did they go to an Ivy League for four years or start at a community college?
- > Live at home or go away?
- > Go to college thirty years ago or three?

Whatever their background, their experience is likely to be what they talk to students about as “college,” either formally or in the informal conversations that inevitably occur during the many hours

teachers and students spend together over the course of a school year. Thus, during these formative years, students are likely to hear a range of conflicting messages from the adults with whom they spend the most time. Only by devoting sufficient time and resources to developing staff knowledge to a baseline of correct and current information about the landscape of higher education in their own local area—and about access issues for the population of students that they serve—can a school present a coherent and accurate message to students (in both formal and informal spaces) that best supports their needs.

One way to better understand this is to think about initiatives for literacy across the curriculum. At one point, teaching “literacy” skills was viewed as only the province of English teachers. However, most high schools now recognize that learning depends on reading across a wide range of subject areas, and as subject matter becomes increasingly complex across the high school years, science and math and social studies teachers also need to teach literacy skills in their classrooms. Furthermore, the more that a school coordinates these strategies across subject matter—so that students hear the same vocabulary, are given similar scaffolding, and have to meet the same expectations—the more successful they are likely to be.

How, then, to prepare such a wide range of people to successfully support a school initiative in an area with which they have some familiarity, but have not been professionally prepared to do instruction?

Whole Staff Professional Development

First, the staff as a whole needs to be brought on board as to why the school is focusing on this area. How does it fit into the larger vision and mission of the school? In our experience, in relation to college access, while most staff would agree that a college education is an important route to social mobility, there are differences in their views about the preparedness of their students for this work, the routes to higher education that might make the most sense, and the role that the school should play in specifically supporting students' planning.

As noted above, unless schools confront and discuss these varying beliefs and move toward a set of shared understandings and cultural competencies within their staff community, teachers will continue to present very different information to students about post-secondary education based on their own experiences and implicit biases. We know that the informal mentoring teachers do with their students can play an important role for those students; it is therefore critical that information be correct and up to date. As an Assistant Principal at Centro High School noted:

"I think we do need to get better at common language as it relates to college talk and what I mean by that is teachers not necessarily making their own personal

experience what they think a kid should do. I've heard more of that this year, kids saying, 'Well, I'm not gonna do this because the teacher said he didn't do that.' For example, 'I'm not gonna take a loan cause Mr. Whatever said not to.' I'm like, 'Well, Mr. Whatever's father paid for his college.' It's remembering who our kids are and that they need to have all the information to be able to make that informed choice."

It is important, then, to engage the whole staff in conversations about the place of college access in the school's overall work; and then to continue to message that place coherently and consistently over time. An Assistant Principal at Neighborhood High School argued:

"It's really about prioritizing. There are a lot of priorities in the building, and it's really about having someone who's willing to prioritize this work. Having my voice say that for PD day, even though we have 50 million other initiatives that the city is rolling out—we have district priorities, we have Chancellor's priorities, we have school goals, we have an instructional focus, we have 50 million things—the fact is that [this is] so important that we are going to spend dedicated time for this work."

And every time that there's a PD, we're going to spend even more time on this work. So it's not a one and out, it's the dedicated, sustained messaging that this work is important. And then people keep hearing it, hearing it, hearing it; they see the success and then they start to buy into it. But it's a daily grind to get the message out and to stick with the message, even if you have any type of set back. Or if things don't seem to be going as well as you want them to go; it's the persistence. It's a lot of persistence. Cause there's a lot of competing interests at the school level."



It is important to engage the whole staff in conversations about the place of college access in the school's overall work



Another staff member at Neighborhood High School made the point that, in the face of these challenges, celebrating success is a crucial element of helping staff get on board. They described how, at a staff meeting in June, seniors and their post-secondary destinations schools were announced:

“They came up in front of the faculty and we did shouts outs of the schools they were going to and it was amazing—the staff just, you know, everyone loves a success story. So the students really sold it, and the staff really loved it.”

This does not mean that everyone on staff will come around to loving this aspect of their work; at all seven schools, staff reflected on the varying levels of engagement with college access work, even schools where it was a huge part of the advisory work. A teacher at Career High School spent much of an interview talking in detail about his senior advisory, but at the end, admitted sheepishly, “I love my advisory but I just wanna teach math, man.” While a teacher at World High School noted:

“I feel really comfortable helping kids prepare, others do not ... it’s not about information, it might be a humanities/STEM thing, not everyone can be comfortable with college stuff, with advising, and I think it’s fair. It’s a skill. I listen to the conversations [in advisory] and different staff have different comfort levels with talking about things.”

Some of this can be due to the ways in which talking about students’ post-secondary hopes and plans bring staff into contact with issues in students’ lives that their math, science, or language teaching may not. With first-generation students from low-income families, this frequently entails complicated circumstances that staff know about in the abstract, but might not

have experience talking about—issues more often confined to the realm of “counseling,” and ones that feel much bigger than what the school can tackle. An Assistant Principal at Career High School remarked:

“Some faculty members sort of just inherently gravitate or feel more inclined to be able to manage sort of the more social-emotional pieces of the role and of this process where others sort of just want the facts and the steps and support in that way And there are some teachers who are more comfortable sharing about themselves and their personal lives with their students than others are.”

And the Assistant Principal at Neighborhood High School concluded at the end of his interview:

“I don’t know what schools are really addressing social-emotional needs on a large scale. And most of the adults are not trained in dealing; if they had one class in graduate school, or they had to take an abuse training, they don’t have the training.”

And what happens is, adults in schools like this, because of the situation the students are always in, they become almost traumatized, and then they need support. I think about what all the teachers, all the guidance counselors, what they’re trying to do, not just education-wise. Supporting students through some of the most horrific situations you can imagine, and how they process it, and what tools they have to process You carry around a lot of the trauma that students are going through. Because when you care, this is what happens. It’s not just listening, you end up internalizing it also.”

Some staff members are better equipped and more temperamentally suited to take on this kind of work than others.

Figure 5.1

Professional Development Sessions for School Staff

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH SCHOOL STAFF

Planning Post-Secondary Access Professional Development: An Overview

Creating a Future-Ready Culture at Your School

Exploring Beliefs About Post-Secondary Education

Using Data To Understand Your School's Post-Secondary Outcomes

First In the Family: Motivations and Obstacles

Post-Secondary Application Case Studies

Post-Secondary Options: Influences on Student Choices

Mock Admissions

Letters of Recommendation

Increasing Your CUNY Knowledge

> Understanding CUNY Part 1

> Understanding CUNY Part 2

Increasing Your SUNY Knowledge

Understanding How Students Pay for Post-Secondary Education

Differences Between High School and College: Exploring the Implications

Exploring Multiple Post-Secondary Pathways

Is College Worth the Cost?

Tool: Emotionally Supporting Students

Supporting Undocumented Students

Suggested Readings on College Access

Targeted Professional Development Based on Staff Role

These inherent differences can be addressed and mediated to some degree through:

- > Decision-making about when and where curriculum is taught based on particular staff strengths, abilities, and interest in relation to the college access work.
- > School-wide clarity around the 9–12 college access scope and sequence (see Findings: Curriculum Section).
- > Targeted learning on the topics that staff members are responsible for teaching.
- > Ongoing professional development time for teachers to discuss implementation of the curriculum with others who are teaching at the same grade level.
- > Integration of peer leaders into curriculum planning and delivery.

So, for example, staff teaching 10th grade might need to gain familiarity with career exploration websites, while 11th grade staff might need to know more about local community college options and how to help students make good college lists. If 12th grade staff are familiar with financial aid (e.g., FAFSA) and financial aid packages, this will allow them to be helpful to their students, but this kind of training is probably less important for staff working with younger grades. And integrating peer leaders—with their current knowledge and experience of college—into 11th and 12th grade seminars can support staff who have less time to keep up to date with the explicit and ever-changing details of the process.

Professional development provides support and direction for those who might find college access work more challenging, as well as ongoing accountability to their peers for consistent implementation. Career High School provided multiple opportunities for targeted learning as each grade began their access work, as the math teacher noted, “Pretty much the entire staff has gone on multiple retreats to be involved with learning about this college process and coming up with a curriculum for it, for advisory to get those things happening.”

This level of professional development tended to have happened less at the schools that struggled with consistent implementation. At the High School for Leadership, one of the most involved teachers commented:

“I don’t think faculty involvement is very systemic. I think there’s a lack of preparation or knowledge, we are novices. When I speak to the nuts and bolts of the application process, I don’t have the most recent or best information, because my process was so long ago and I grew up in Iowa and I don’t know the New York system. The network of systems wasn’t comparable. I spent a lot of my adult life in California, so I learned some about that system. There are various degrees of personal knowledge based on personal pathways, some on the staff are very familiar, some really not. So we really refer to the college office. It would be nice to have a bit better base of knowledge to speak from.”

The college counselor at the same school concurred:

“I’m not sure we’ve had enough professional development for faculty in the area of college access. We haven’t really had any this year, the PD calendar is filled with instruction and curriculum. Although they are involved in the events, they wear their college gear during acceptance week, there’s not been much professional development. I guess that’s also why I don’t have a sense of how the faculty feel, because we don’t have an opportunity to speak as a group.”

This lack of targeted and sustained professional development then leads to ongoing challenges with the consistency of implementation, and with adjusting the curriculum to be coherent in an ongoing way. A second-year teacher at Centro High School talked about his experience of the curriculum there, and the impact of a lack of clear scope and sequence:

“It’s not super clear what was covered in the 9th grade and how that connects to the 10th grade, and how that connects to the 11th grade. A lot of times, it’s like alright, we’re gonna do this lesson and then you know, we’re gonna do other stuff for a couple weeks and then a CARA lesson will come back. If there was a clearer sequence and some stuff that could follow the students along, then, maybe there’d be more connection but sometimes it seems like the lessons exist in a vacuum.

[It would be helpful to have] a logical sequence of what a 9th grader should know, what a 10th grader should know, what an 11th grader should know, what a 12th grader should know, and here’s everything they’ve done over the four years, to build up to the 12th grade. So, there’s more of a sense that it’s building somewhere as opposed to like, once a week we gotta sweep the floor, like once a week we gotta do a CARA lesson.”

Rising at Their Own Speed

There's no question that doing professional development well in an ongoing and thorough way is a tall order. Even though Neighborhood High School devoted multiple whole staff professional development sessions to college access over the course of their first several years, one of the counselors reflected that many staff still needed more training. He estimated that 85%–90% of the staff had come around to seeing post-secondary access as part of their job, but noted:

“There needs to be a little bit more training. They agree with all of this, but they may not know, because [the] college admissions process is always changing, [the] college landscape; or they may not know how to have those conversations with students. So, I think a little bit more training around that. Cause they're always like, this is great, but how do I do this? Or, how do I talk to my students about this? What should I know about the SATs, or this or that? It's just, they don't know how.”

This professional development work, then, is a long-term project, where progress will often be slow and frequently uneven. As with curriculum implementation, it requires the ongoing attention of school leadership in order to be successful, and requires holding on to a long-term vision in the face of the numerous competing demands and distractions in a high school environment. The Neighborhood High School Assistant Principal talked about the long-term way he saw the work growing:

“Everyone in the building is at such different places with this. Those closest to me in this office here, are fully committed. One of the things is, we went from one or

two people in the building fully committed, to probably, between the guidance counselors, the seminar teachers, the Bridge Coaches, and the college counselors to a total of about twenty people fully committed. So that capacity alone causes a spillover to other adults.

So, I think what happens is that at each level, where the person is committed, we've constantly built at every level, every level is rising at their own speed.”



This professional development work, then, is a long-term project, where progress will often be slow and frequently uneven. As with curriculum implementation, it requires the ongoing attention of school leadership in order to be successful, and requires holding on to a long-term vision in the face of the numerous competing demands and distractions in a high school environment.



Findings: Counseling Support



We endeavor to speak to what we have not seen captured elsewhere, which is: what are the necessary conditions in schools to fully support expert counseling?



CARA’s work helping schools build a strong college office attempts to move them toward a model where post-secondary counseling is an entitlement rather than enrichment. This means creating and putting in place systems where individual counseling work can happen with every student in the second semester of junior year and throughout senior year.

Over the past decade, the importance of college counseling has become increasingly recognized. Charter schools led the way in this arena, with many focusing resources on college application and matriculation early in their school reform work. Within public schools, a growing number of organizations are working to train and place dedicated college counselors into high schools as a critical strategy to increase college access for first-generation students.¹ These organizations hold and are disseminating high-level expertise in the knowledge these counselors need and the kind of work they should be doing, including bringing in college representatives to meet with students in small groups, advocating for students with colleges that they have applied to, working individually with every student to build “reach, match, and likely” college lists, and participating regularly in college counseling professional communities in order to keep up-to-date in the field.² Here we endeavor to speak to what we have not seen captured elsewhere, which is: **what are the necessary conditions in schools to fully support this work?**

How important are highly trained college counselors to college access work? One of the most important things we at CARA have learned since beginning our work is that **exemplary college access work at schools in the early years will not result in changed post-secondary outcomes without extremely strong individual guidance and support in the second semester of junior year and throughout senior year.**

In this section, we explore best-practice conditions for this guidance, and the challenges schools often encounter in implementing those conditions.

Post-Secondary Counseling: Enrichment or Entitlement?

As noted in this policy brief’s Introduction, post-secondary counseling has been and continues to be severely under-resourced. Those figures again: in New York City, one guidance counselor serves an average of 221 students, and at one in six schools, one counselor serves more than 300 students. Nationally, the counselor-to-student ratio is 1:464; both of these ratios include all counseling work, not just college counseling. In New York City in 2017, only 33% of high schools had a full or part-time counselor specifically devoted to college counseling.³ Across the country, a range of programs do this work with academically high-performing students, either through in-school programs such as AVID, or after-school and weekend options from federal programs (i.e., Upward Bound, GEAR UP) to more recent state and local programs. However, all of these programs reach only a fraction of high school students.

Because of the historically overwhelming caseloads of most public high school staff

doing counseling—based on the underlying, twentieth century assumption about these students’ college trajectories, or lack thereof—public high school college counseling work has been structured on the idea that support will be offered to whoever walks through the door asking for it, and not be offered to those who do not. In this model, college counseling is an enrichment activity, akin to an after-school club, rather than an entitlement in the way that four years of English or social studies instruction are.

CARA’s work helping schools build a strong college office attempts to move them toward a model **where post-secondary counseling is an entitlement rather than enrichment.** This means creating and putting in place systems where individual counseling work can happen with every student in the second semester of junior year and throughout senior year. For this to be possible, we believe that **schools need at least one person overseeing and doing this work full time, at a ratio of one counselor to eighty seniors or fewer, in schools that serve predominantly first-generation, low-income students.**

IDEAL COUNSELOR
TO SENIOR RATIO

1:80 OR LESS

FOR SCHOOLS THAT MOSTLY
SERVE FIRST GENERATION
LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

However, we have found that very few schools, even those working hard to increase their matriculation rates, are currently devoting this level of resources to post-secondary counseling work. In the year before they started working with us, only one of the seven schools in this study had someone in this role full-time at anything approaching this ratio. In the other six schools—and countless others we have worked with and encountered across New York City—schools are designating a person to fill this role, but continuing to also give them traditional “school guidance” duties with at least one grade, and often with two grades.

We cannot say this strongly enough: **it is impossible to do sufficient post-secondary counseling with first-generation, low-income students when this work is being balanced with guidance counseling.** We have seen so

many heroic counselors try, and even achieve some significant success, but ultimately, in this situation, it is not possible to provide the level of individual post-secondary support for all students that is needed. What results, then, is either triage, with only some students receiving intensive support, or burnout, with counselors leaving their positions after a short time.

Building a Strong College Office

What does a strong college office look like, and how can schools go about building them? Clearly, the first step is to allocate sufficient school resources. This includes a designated counselor devoted to post-secondary counseling, but we believe it is a mistake for a single person in a school to hold all of this work. Instead, it is important to also distribute it across a range of staff members.

There are various ways of doing this, some of which have been mentioned in Section Findings: Curriculum, such as having counselors co-teaching, or collaborating with classroom teachers of juniors and seniors in designated classroom time focused on post-secondary work. As pointed out throughout this policy brief, trained young people are also immensely valuable resources. In the schools we studied, Bridge Coaches brought not just additional capacity, but potentially transformative near-peer perspectives and advice. Schools that made the greatest transformations in their culture also dug in most deeply with Bridge Coaches, making them part of the staff team. An Assistant Principal at Neighborhood High School noted:

“The Bridge Coaches are really stepping up and advocating for themselves, they’re part of our inquiry meetings, they are inquisitive, they have equal say, and that’s the way we want it.”

Figure 6.1

Initial College Counselor:
Senior Ratio at Study Schools

| SCHOOL | RATIO |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Career HS | 1:256 |
| HS for Technology | 1:116 |
| World HS | 1:116 |
| HS for Leadership | 1:154 |
| Centro HS | 1:216 |
| Arts HS | 1:106 |
| Neighborhood HS | 1:462 |

The Case Studies section at the end of this policy brief detail some of these approaches and their pros and cons; one key takeaway is the need to balance counselor access to/ time with groups of students with preserving time to utilize their expertise for individual student support on tasks that only they can do. Calibrating which work makes sense to take place in classroom spaces (and can be done by people with strong knowledge but not expertise), and which work requires high level expertise—and thus should be the focus of counselor time and energy—is key to a strong college office program. What follows are additional findings from our work across the seven schools.

Building Teams

Devoting sufficient resources to individual post-secondary counseling for 12th grade students is a necessary-but-not-sufficient first step in building a strong college office. No matter how great a counselor is, the work is highly vulnerable to staff absence or turnover; this was a major theme across all seven schools. In particular, turnover and leaves created tremendous instability at these seven schools over the three years that we worked with them.

- > At Career High School, the impetus for starting work with us was their part-time counselor going on parental leave; the new full-time counselor they hired to start in her absence was organized and hard working, but had finished graduate school only months before and was brand-new to the work.
- > At Technology High School, the full-time counselor went on parental leave in the fall of our second semester of work with them; an ATR (Absent Teacher Reserve)

and the Bridge Coach were left to support the college application process with seniors.

- > At Centro High School, the half-time guidance/half-time college counselor went on parental leave in March of our first year of work with the school. In her absence, the school’s remaining guidance counselor—with no college expertise at all—was left to hold down the fort along with the Bridge Coach.

The principal at Technology High School admitted:

“College work is in the culture of the school, because Jasmine is such a big part of the culture. But it is coming from a single source. Jasmine is one stop-shopping.”

A teacher there remarked after Jasmine returned from parental leave:

“Because of who she is, she motivates the rest of the staff to jump on board ... everyone wants to support her because we see how hard she works and we see where she’s trying to go. She keeps us together pretty much; we can’t afford for her [to go on another leave].”

What might a college counseling “team” look like? At Career High School, the part-time guidance counselor continued to support college work with seniors when she returned from parental leave, in addition to the school’s two Bridge Coaches, and the advisors of seniors, who coordinated weekly with the college office.

At Neighborhood High School, the original counselor was joined by a counselor from a community-based organization (using Community School funds) plus four Bridge Coaches and a team of teachers teaching

seminar classes to juniors and seniors. The college counselor there commented:

“Now that we have Joseph and the Bridge Coaches, that was a game changer.”

And at Centro High School, the Bridge Coach explained her role across a range of tasks:

“I’m the backup team: she’s working with these students who need to meet, or meet with their parents or something like that, and I’m making sure I double check with the students who don’t need to have meetings with parents and stuff and make sure they’re doing what they need to do. So, the counselor focuses on cases that maybe I may not have experience in or something along the lines with maybe undocumented students or financial information that’s a little bit different from other students. And I can do all the other pieces in the office the same as her.”

Additional team members at each of these schools worked on several levels: in a best-case scenario, bringing down the counselor-to-student ratio; in a worst-case one, filling gaps in school expertise and continuity in relationships with students when counselors were out on leave. At Neighborhood High School, Diane took a several-week leave in January of 2020; while she was sorely missed, Joseph and the rest of the team were able to continue the work relatively seamlessly in her absence.

However, transitioning from what had been a one-person show into a teamwork model was not without its challenges; while the Bridge Coaches brought additional capacity, supervising them required time and a different skill set, while coordinating

information about student progress through the process across multiple people also required time and could create holes in the system. It took a year of trial and error at most schools for these new teams to become effective, and that process sometimes started over again with school turnover. When the counselor at Centro High School left a year after returning from her parental leave, the new counselor found the approach challenging, noting that it was a change from what she was used to:

“The culture at this school is that everyone is involved in the college process, but it’s a lot of work to keep everyone updated about where students are in their application.”

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Individual Tracking

Another key system for schools to put in place is active tracking of *all* the steps of the college search, application, financial aid application, and matriculation processes for all graduating students. The college application process entails interacting with multiple, interlocking bureaucratic processes (city, state, and private college application portals; state and federal financial aid application portals which require documentation and information from complicated tax systems) through multiple steps over the course of an entire year, with many steps dependent on the completion of a previous one. It is a bewildering and overwhelming process that requires careful monitoring to successfully complete. Missing a single step can significantly impact college matriculation outcomes.

While it might be possible to keep track of all of these steps for one student without some type of tool or system (and just barely, at that), it is impossible to do so for groups of students without such a tool. CARA built a tool for this purpose (EnrollNYC) to support its schools, and a variety of other tools have also been created both within New York City and nationally. Note that while Naviance—in wide use across the country—overlaps with some of this work, its focus is more narrow, covering the college search and application processes, but not the numerous financial aid and matriculation steps that have to happen after students hit “Submit.” These include FAFSA completion, review of financial aid packages, completing loan

paperwork, registering for opportunity programs, sending immunization paperwork, and more.

This kind of tracking then makes possible much more strategic work in the college office, allowing counselors’ time with each student to be carefully focused on exactly what they need to work on in order to move them to the next step in the process.

School Events

Another practice that successful schools have undertaken is utilizing existing school events to get college access work done. There’s simply too much to do, and too little time in the school day, to create a lot of extra events or spaces. Linking application and matriculation steps to senior year events (of which there are many in most schools!) both builds college-going culture, and helps a school support more students through critical tasks.

A few examples from case study schools:

- > At Centro High School, senior portrait day also became FAFSA day, where students would complete the FAFSA on laptops and then duck out for their photos.
- > At World High School, students couldn’t leave graduation practice without verifying their summer contact information and matriculation plans; they were also handed an individual packet of documents they might need in order to complete steps over summer, e.g., their school immunization records.

Figure 6.2 From Application to Enrollment: Tracking Critical Matriculation Steps


HANDOUT

From Application to Enrollment

What are all of the things that have to be completed in order for students to move from completion of a college application to enrollment in a college?

- ① Submit college applications
- ② Send SAT/ACT score report(s) to all colleges
- ③ Submit application fee and verify it was received
- ④ Send supplemental information (including forms for private colleges and Opportunity Programs)
- ⑤ Check application status to make sure it was processed
- ⑥ Make sure all CSS profiles are complete
- ⑦ Prepare for CUNY assessment test (if applicable)
- ⑧ Look for responses from colleges (email and snail mail!)
- ⑨ Take any required placement tests
- ⑩ Compare financial aid packages
- ⑪ Visit colleges you are considering (if not possible, do a virtual tour and talk with a student currently attending the college)
- ⑫ Talk with family members about options (make sure all agree with decision you want to make)
- ⑬ Select college you will attend
- ⑭ Notify Admissions Office at the college, **before the deadline** (let them know you will be attending)
- ⑮ Accept your financial aid award **before the deadline**
- ⑯ CUNY students apply to ASAP (if offered on your campus)
- ⑰ Pay tuition deposit
- ⑱ Complete financial aid entrance interview
- ⑲ Complete loan applications and sign Master Promissory Note (MPN)
- ⑳ Send in housing forms and pay deposit **before the deadline**
- ㉑ Submit NY State Immunization Records (required by CUNY)
- ㉒ Confirm with Admissions Office that you have completed all of the necessary steps to secure your place for entrance
- ㉓ Contact Financial Aid Office to verify forms and secure work-study
- ㉔ If August graduate, obtain a copy of diploma/transcript to present to college
- ㉕ Register for classes
- ㉖ Attend HEOP, EOP, SEEK, CD, ASAP, or other summer programs
- ㉗ Write or call your roommate if your college gives you their contact information
- ㉘ Plan how you will get to the college and what you will pack
- ㉙ Attend first-year orientation

- > Other schools built counselor touchpoints with families into existing times that they are in the building. An Assistant Principal at Neighborhood High School explained that in May:

“During conferencing with students we pulled seniors over to the green screen and filmed them saying, ‘my name is so and so and next year I’m doing X,’ and then the students in our virtual enterprise business path edited those videos together and we played the video at the last community night of the year where families come in.”

Success Creates More Work, Not Less

An unexpected challenge that schools faced as they began to take responsibility for supporting individual students through post-secondary access was that in many ways the work got harder, not easier. The more they honed in on where students were struggling, the more they realized how much they didn’t understand, and how much help they needed. Curriculum work in early grades would hopefully address some of this eventually, but it would be several years before students who encountered the curriculum starting in 9th grade made it to senior year.

And as schools began to support a wider group of students with making college lists, filling out FAFSA, analyzing financial aid packages, and choosing colleges to attend, the clearer it became how many barriers most of their students were facing. FAFSA was a never-ending bureaucratic nightmare that highly trained counselors struggled to make sense of at points; the gaps between the financial aid students were offered and the costs of college seemed to get bigger every year; the myriad situations that made it difficult for students to leave home to attend residential colleges, or to attend college at all, left staff often feeling demoralized and struggling to see the payoff from all of their hard work. One of the Bridge Coaches noted:

“We had a student with DACA, we had to explain to their parents on FAFSA night, they didn’t know that they couldn’t apply. I had to bring them up [to the college office] and break it down to them and mom was crying cuz they were saying all the money will come out of their pocket and the student wants to go to a SUNY.”



An unexpected challenge that schools faced as they began to take responsibility for supporting individual students through post- secondary access was that in many ways the work got harder, not easier.



Counselors' close, individual attention to students also literally created more work as they succeeded in widening the set of post-secondary options that students were considering. This was a triumph by any measure: academically strong students were applying to a wider array of SUNY and private colleges rather than just CUNYs; more students were completing CUNY applications; students who previously did not have any kind of post-secondary plan were applying to vocational programs such as Co-Op Tech or ACCES-VR or deciding over the summer to actually apply to CUNY two-year colleges.

Between its second and third year of work with CARA, Neighborhood High School's CUNY application rate on December 1st jumped from 39% to 55% and its SUNY and Common Application rates by January 1st rose by 11%. However, those private and SUNY applications were three times as much work, including reviewing personal statements and short-answer essays, coordinating the gathering of additional teacher recommendations, and in multiple cases, completion of the CSS Profile. All of this while, as noted above, Diane was out on leave. At the same time, the lightly staffed "College Transitions" office was seeing increasing traffic while working with fewer staff members than the previous year.

For all of these reasons, it is critical that school administrators become much more knowledgeable and engaged managers of college office work. As with management of any other area in a school, they do not need to be experts, but they do need to acquire a working knowledge of the work counselors are doing in order to provide ongoing support, and understand and solve problems

as they arise. At the most successful schools, they became closely tuned in to college application data for their seniors throughout the year, seeing this as a critical moment when all of their work with and on behalf of students over four years paid dividends—or failed to.

The State of the College Counseling Field

Another challenge is the fact that, despite significant national attention, the field of college counseling is in its infancy. Community-based organizations across the country are doing vital work to fill this gap, but face frequent turnover in their staff. Those who do this work within school systems—i.e., have the master's degree in school guidance required to be hired within school budgets—have come through certification systems that do not train them in college access, meaning that most people learn this work on the job. Like any highly specialized field, it takes several years to gain competency and so several classes of seniors in a school may be impacted as newly qualified counselors get their feet under them. However, unlike new teachers working in similar conditions, counselors do not have colleagues down the hall or within the building who are doing the same work, as they are generally the only person in this role at their school.

This has been compounded by the constant flux that the field seems to be in, so that even experienced counselors are scrambling every year to support students to cope with new and often highly imperfect changes in application systems. While each of these changes are improvements meant to address systemic issues, without fail the first year or

two of implementation has created chaos on a day-to-day level. For example, in just the years we were doing this study, 2016–19, some of these changes included:

- > FAFSA changed from using prior year taxes to prior/prior and introduced an IRS data retrieval tool which was then abruptly shut down halfway through the year.
- > SUNY created a new counselor portal and required students to enter their transcript grades, then stopped requiring this.
- > CUNY rolled out an entirely new application with a new portal and new requirements.
- > The DoE created CUNY fee waivers, and delivered individual student waivers to high schools electronically.
- > The DoE created an in-school SAT across the city, which is generally coordinated and run by college counselors at their school sites during the school day.
- > The College Board rolled out a new SAT scoring system.
- > The DoE rolled out its “College Access for All” initiative across the city, with new college access calendars and new data requests of schools.
- > The DoE rolled out a middle school “Access for All” program aimed at getting students visiting college campuses earlier: high schools found it increasingly difficult to book tours for their 11th graders, because they were full of younger students.

- > The previously existing direct link to New York State financial aid (TAP) from FAFSA stopped working from most school-based computers, and then locked students out for three days after completing FAFSA.

Remarkably, in the face of these challenges, all of the schools we worked with did increase both the level of support offered to students, and the sophistication of this support work across the time we worked with them. They began carefully tracking matriculation steps for all of their students; they innovated in all of the ways mentioned above; they found new resources to support their students, either inside or outside the school.

Figure 6.3

Start and End College Counselor: Senior Ratio at Study Schools

| SCHOOL | START | END |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Career HS | 1:256 | 1:81 |
| HS for Technology | 1:116 | 1:72 |
| World HS | 1:116 | 1:71 |
| HS for Leadership | 1:154 | 1:47 |
| Centro HS | 1:216 | 1:71 |
| Arts HS | 1:106 | 1:69 |
| Neighborhood HS | 1:462 | 1:160 |

And these efforts yielded results, with many of the schools increasing their rates of what CARA calls “leading indicators of matriculation,” such as city, state, and private college applications, FAFSA and TAP completion, and students with defined post-secondary plans. In aggregate, their matriculation rate rose by 11% (see Table 6.1, below).

In the face of so many obstacles, this is cause for great celebration.

Table 6.1 Change in Post-Secondary Outcomes of Study Schools

| Name of School | Location | End-of-Year FAFSA Completion | Post-Secondary Enrollment | CUNY Two-Year Enrollment | CUNY Four-Year Enrollment | SUNY Two- and Four-Year Enrollment | NYS Private Four-Year Enrollment |
|--------------------|-----------|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| % CHANGE 2016–2019 | | | | | | | |
| Career HS | Queens | 6.3 | 3.6 | -5.1 | 12.1 | 6.6 | -10.1 |
| Technology HS | The Bronx | 0.4 | 0.9 | 12.2 | 3.4 | -11.7 | -2.7 |
| World HS | The Bronx | 24.9 | 14.2 | 12.9 | -0.8 | 6.6 | 0.2 |
| HS for Leadership | Brooklyn | 10.5 | 23.2 | -11.9 | 8 | 13.5 | 12.4 |
| Centro HS | Manhattan | 15.3 | 13.5 | -1.2 | 13.4 | -2.6 | 2.3 |
| Arts HS | Manhattan | 8.2 | 7.6 | -9.1 | -1.1 | 1.9 | 9.1 |
| Neighborhood HS | Queens | 20.4 | 14 | 11.5 | 1.6 | -0.1 | 0.4 |
| AVERAGE | | 12.3 | 11 | 1.3 | 5.2 | 2 | 1.7 |

Conclusion



We began this policy brief by arguing that, as post-secondary education becomes necessary for most young people, public high schools need to significantly restructure their work in order to prepare young people for successful adulthoods.



We then laid out three critical areas that our research shows need to be addressed by high schools in that restructuring:

Three Areas for Successful Post-secondary Outcomes for Students

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION: creating instructional space for teaching college access knowledge in grades 9–12. Schools must understand that the landscape of higher education is a subject matter that needs to be explicitly taught to first-generation students, and identify permanent space in each grade, 9–12, for the teaching of that set of information/concepts in an engaging, experiential way with a thoughtful scope and sequence.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: positioning and equipping staff to support students in learning about college access and applying to post-secondary destinations. Building college access infrastructure requires training the school staff that will deliver this subject matter both in the content and in the teaching of the content. This is not any different than, for example, math teachers needing to understand both math and the pedagogy of math, i.e., what their students do and do not know at any given grade level, and how to help them acquire that knowledge.

COUNSELING SUPPORT: providing individualized, expert college counseling. A school’s college staff (e.g., college counselor, guidance counselor, or other trained staff) must develop expertise in the post-secondary search, application, and matriculation process, and be sufficiently focused and resourced to provide individual support to second-semester juniors and to seniors throughout their senior year.

In order to examine those areas more thoroughly, we pulled them apart into separate sections; but in reality, these pieces intersect and interact with each other in minute, daily ways in the lives of young people, school staff, and schools as organizations. In the case studies that follow in Case Studies Section, we attempt to show this interaction in the life and work of two schools where we saw particular success at building college-going infrastructure across the three areas.

In the other five schools—from which we also drew all of the lessons included here, but do not profile in as much detail—we saw matriculation successes but feel less confident in the schools having achieved long-term sustainable shifts in school culture and infrastructure. At two schools, lack of professional development over the three years appeared to result in staff frustration and a lack of buy-in to the larger project. Since lessons were placed in advisory at both of these schools, this in turn seemed to lead many teachers to skip planned lessons, or do them only halfway,

thus undermining student exposure and knowledge building. At the other schools, counselor turnover resulted in significant impact on that year's senior class experience and outcomes; while we think this revealed the need for wider distribution of responsibility, we did not always see schools responding to build those structures, and this left us worried.

In the months since schools closed and instruction became remote due to COVID-19, we have been extremely heartened to see many of the schools with strong infrastructures continue their college access work with both 11th and 12th graders, even under extremely challenging circumstances. And we have likewise seen that those with less strong structures have struggled to maintain this work.

As we step back to see the big picture, there are a few additional important patterns that appear to hold across school type and size that we believe are important to mention. These are areas that we think bear further study, albeit under new and unknown circumstances.

The Importance of Engaged Leadership

Perhaps the thing that stood out most about the two schools that seemed to make the most progress across the three areas—despite the tremendous differences in their size, student demographics, and graduation and matriculation rates—was the level of administrator engagement with shifting the school's post-secondary access work. This began, most crucially, with putting significant resources toward the work: both schools added a full-time college counselor and Bridge Coaches, intensive



Perhaps the thing that stood out most about the two schools that seemed to make the most progress across the three areas—was the level of administrator engagement with shifting the school's post-secondary access work.



professional development (including off-site retreats paid for by a grant at Career High School), and teaching resources in the form of shifting faculty to teach dedicated classes (at Neighborhood High School). At Neighborhood, one of the resources the principal put toward the initiative was the time and focus of his most trusted Assistant Principal. Speaking about the role of the principal, the Assistant Principal noted:

“[His role is] to make sure I get the support I need. And if I need something to keep the initiatives moving, I get the supports, the resources, the financing. He has been nothing but supportive of the whole process and whatever I need to get the work done, he’s on board, so with that in mind, we can keep pushing.”

And once the initiative was launched, there needed to be an administrator—someone with control over the school’s structural elements and authority to direct or re-direct staff—paying close attention to its implementation, and figuring out how to overcome obstacles as they arose, in each of the three areas. At Career High School, this meant offering per session to 12th grade teachers in the first semester of the work, when the principal saw that the team did not have enough time to meet to implement the new curriculum. At Neighborhood High School, the Assistant Principal commented:

“The principal, he’s also in favor of experimentation, and he’s not afraid of quick failure. So, sometimes we have ideas of what we’re going to do, and he’s like, go for it. Which really helps.”

This openness to ideas from staff doing the day-to-day work—empowering them to take on ownership over it—while setting priorities for them and keeping up consistent messaging to the larger staff over time, is crucial.

Without this close, sustained leadership attention, while it might be possible to build a strong college office, the more complex work of lesson implementation is fragile and deeply vulnerable to staff turnover and being overtaken by other initiatives. And of course, professional development is most often directed by school leadership, so decisions to spend time and resources in this area also require leadership commitment. The converse to this holds as well, both at our other case study schools, and in our work in other schools across the city: when there was not a school administrator paying close attention to the implementation of the work in the first three years, staff reported that, while the school was doing more work than previously, it was neither coherent nor consistent for either students or teachers, and thus far less effective than it could be.



Once the initiative was launched, there needed to be an administrator paying close attention to its implementation, and figuring out how to overcome obstacles as they arose.



The More You Do, the More There Is to Do

This is true specifically of college office work, as noted earlier; it is also true of this work writ large. One principal emphasized,

“It’s exponential.”

We saw a similar trajectory at quite a few of the schools: some confusion and frustration in year one about tackling something new, but by the end of that year excitement as they saw momentum building and a few notable successes. Heading into year two, there was energy and hopefulness about getting it “right” this time but by the end of the second year, a level of exhaustion and frustration with lack of progress—a sort of “sophomore slump”—about gains that had seemed close but now in some ways appeared *further* away.

In large part, we saw this as a symptom of greater understanding of the complexity of the process, and the tremendous range of needs that were uncovered as schools started digging in at deeper levels. This additional work includes:

At the 9th/10th grade stage:

- > Adding college campus visits. These were nonexistent or almost nonexistent at many schools when we started working with them, and they start seeing the need for them as they begin doing lessons. However, it’s a lot of work to organize these visits, and an ongoing expense to get students to campuses further away.
- > Gaining familiarity with and talking to students about career pathways. These are important for both college-bound and non-college-bound students; college-bound students and their families often

need to see career possibilities in order for the costs of college to seem worth it, and those who might not want to matriculate immediately after high school need help finding pathways that will still result in productive careers that can sustain themselves and their families.

- > Supporting students to apply for and engage in extracurricular activities after school and in the summer, beginning in 9th grade, in order to give them exposure to possible post-secondary pathways and build their résumés for college applications.
- > Beginning conversations about application criteria so that students are aware of the role of their grades and standardized tests (SAT/ACT) in the process from early on, when there is a longer runway to influence these areas.

At the 11th/12th grade stage:

- > Providing SAT/ACT prep, particularly for students whose PSAT scores (roughly 900 or above) indicate that they could make significant improvement through this type of test prep.¹
- > Identifying good “fit” schools/destinations for all students. If students are applying beyond local city systems, this requires a tremendous amount of time and research on the part of students, and knowledge on the part of school staff. However, schools consistently find that if they do not do this work well, students ultimately do not enroll at the schools they choose, or drop out in their first year.
- > Finding spaces and resources to support a (hopefully) growing number of students applying to more competitive schools

with more intensive application processes. These tasks include writing strong personal statements and supplemental essays, navigating the Common Application, and completing the CSS Profile.

- > Building systems for summer matriculation support, so that students’ post-secondary plans aren’t derailed by “summer melt”—the many things that may come up or go wrong over the summer after graduation, when high schools are closed and thus previous supports unavailable, but students are not yet connected to the institutions they plan to attend.
- > Supporting first-generation students through the emotional challenges that can discourage them from pursuing post-secondary dreams: a sense of not belonging, worries about leaving family, financial concerns, and a myriad of other barriers that their more well-off peers do not have to contend with.

Supporting first-generation college students to pursue their dreams is in some ways inherently hopeful work; but in twenty-first century America, doing so also uncovers the

many barriers these students face, and so directly contradicts our narrative of equal opportunity in ways that are painful for both students and staff.

Families Are Central: They Need the Same Things Their Students Do

One crucial element of college access has been missing from this policy brief entirely: working not just with first-generation students, but with their families, to build college knowledge and give individual guidance through the senior year process. In large part, this is because while almost all of the schools named it as an area of great importance, they also reported struggling to feel that they were making any significant progress in this area. In short, we have yet to see—or be able to build—successful “best practices” for schools around working with families.

And yet, it has become only clearer to us through conversations with students, our own Bridge Coaches, school staff, and school administrators, that without significant work in this area, large-scale progress on post-secondary access will be impossible.



Supporting first-generation college students to pursue their dreams is in some ways inherently hopeful work; but in twenty-first century America, doing so also uncovers the many barriers these students face, and so directly contradicts our narrative of equal opportunity in ways that are painful for both students and staff.



Many schools began their post-secondary access work with the view that families were peripheral, because of their lack of knowledge about higher education or in some cases, their desires that contradict the desires of the students. The schools' focus was on the young people in front of them; though they tried to bring parents in, early efforts often yielded disappointing results, from mailings home that got few if any responses to college information or FAFSA nights with underwhelming attendance.

As they dug into the process, however, schools began to see that they could not work around parents. They realized that they needed their income to estimate eligibility for opportunity programs or their taxes to help students fill out the FAFSA. Further down the line, they needed parents to both desire and support the post-secondary destinations that their children were applying to. While inspirational Instagram acceptance posts may cause elation in the moment, they are worth little without family backing, as students were unlikely to actually attend some of the competitive colleges the school had worked so hard to get them accepted to, for financial or other reasons.

Toward the end of their second and the beginning of their third year, both Career High School and Neighborhood High School began to make some progress with families, though what was needed and the mechanisms were very different.

At Career High School, which drew students from a range of areas across New York City, the college office and advisors of seniors combined forces to send weekly emails home to the parents of every student,

letting them know where their child was in the process, and checking to see if they had questions or concerns. The Assistant Principal noted:

“In terms of information and resources, we have a really robust system [of communication tools with families] ... families, this fall in particular, got a weekly update about where their child was in terms of all of the applications, what they did, what they still need to do.”

At Neighborhood High School, where almost all students lived nearby, but many families had traditionally been uncomfortable coming to the school, the counselor talked about how they had shifted their approach:

“So we had our financial aid night. In the past, we did it town hall style. That doesn't work for our school. It's too big—we were always doing this town hall where we'd invite a financial aid person from HESC—but when it comes to the Q&A, no one asks questions at all. And then what we started noticing, after this huge presentation, we would spend more time meeting with families individually.

So this time, we just broke it up into different rooms, so it was smaller groups and it focused on specific things—scholarships, FAFSA—because everyone has different things. They got to go where they wanted, like at a conference, which workshop you want to go to. And then they could go to a different one next. So we started listening to the parents more: what are your concerns? And that works better. Small groups work better. One-on-one appointments work better. Reminder calls work better.”

Other schools tried other approaches: World High School began running family programs on Saturdays, where they would provide metrocards and serve food, and have staff present to work with families around a range of issues, including college support. Technology High School invited parents to attend upstate campus visits.

And several Assistant Principals noted that schools can work with the people they do have in front of them—*their students*—as ambassadors to reach those families who are hardest to reach. The Assistant Principal at Arts High School insists that students have to talk with their families:

“And you have to share your ‘Why’ with your family. Why is this school the school for you? Because I’ve had too many uncomfortable conversations where I’ve had parents saying, ‘I didn’t know that’s where they were applying to—I don’t want my child to go.’ And I’m like [to the student], you didn’t share your college list? Like, what are you doing?!?”

A teacher at Neighborhood High School commented that work with families had been their least successful piece, and reflected:

“We have to build the culture, the messaging, the desire among the students, and we want them to be their own advocate and have that trickle back to home. The students are educating the parents.”

What appears to be the case, then, is that rather than being a separate “to do” list, work with families needs to be done in ways similar to and alongside work with their children. Families need:

- > More knowledge and to be given that knowledge over time, starting in 9th grade. Importantly, what that knowledge is depends on the school. At Arts High School, a significant group of parents had attended college as adults and were committed to sending their children to private colleges that required taking out huge loans: these parents needed to be educated on financial aid and educational debt. At Neighborhood and World High Schools, the work was more around helping them see the value of post-secondary education and for some (depending on their child’s academic profile), explore the possibility of unfamiliar colleges that seemed to exist on another planet.
- > Individual support and counseling alongside their children through the steps of the process. As noted above, Career High School began doing bi-weekly outreach to families of seniors through the advisory. At Neighborhood and World High Schools, where significant numbers of parents did not speak English, Bridge Coaches—many of whom spoke families’ native languages—were invaluable in this area and also supported building families’ knowledge.

Crucially, staff also need professional development and ongoing support to tackle these new areas of work with families.



Staff also need professional development and ongoing support to tackle these new areas of work with families.



Finally

This policy brief has covered a lot of ground. And yet, of course, there are many areas that we have only mentioned, or failed to touch on at all.

As noted in the Introduction, and highlighted in particular areas throughout, during the time we conducted this research, the context of college access shifted in important ways in New York City and in the country. Nationally, increasing attention on the part of foundations, states, and the federal government led to the creation of new tools, improvements in existing systems such as the FAFSA application, and a huge influx of dollars aimed at leveling the playing field. In the final months of writing, COVID-19 threw an entirely unexpected curveball at the entire field; its effects remain to be seen, but are likely to be profound.

In the New York City context, the Department of Education had made systemic progress in several critical areas. These include instituting in-school SAT administration, centralizing and standardizing post-secondary information and resources across the system, encouraging a more comprehensive counseling model through providing access training to thousands of school staff, and directing targeted funding for schools to use on college access. In the city's rich environment of foundations, community-based organizations and nonprofits, and colleges, the result has been a heightened level of services provided to many more young people, and matriculation rates that appear to be rising each year.

Schools cannot do this work alone, and the many partnerships flowering around the city are an important factor in these outcomes. However, as of this writing, many of these gains are in severe jeopardy.

Even under more favorable circumstances, at the school level, the kind of transformation of structures needed to support the twenty-first century reality of the requirement for universal (or near-universal) post-secondary education for all has been slow and uneven. All seven schools that we partnered with and examined here—as well as the many others that we work alongside daily—labored mightily, through shifting terrain and what often felt like insurmountable odds, to support their first-generation students' dreams of the future. We hope that the insights offered in this brief will help them, and others, make smarter, faster progress toward that goal, especially in these most difficult of times.

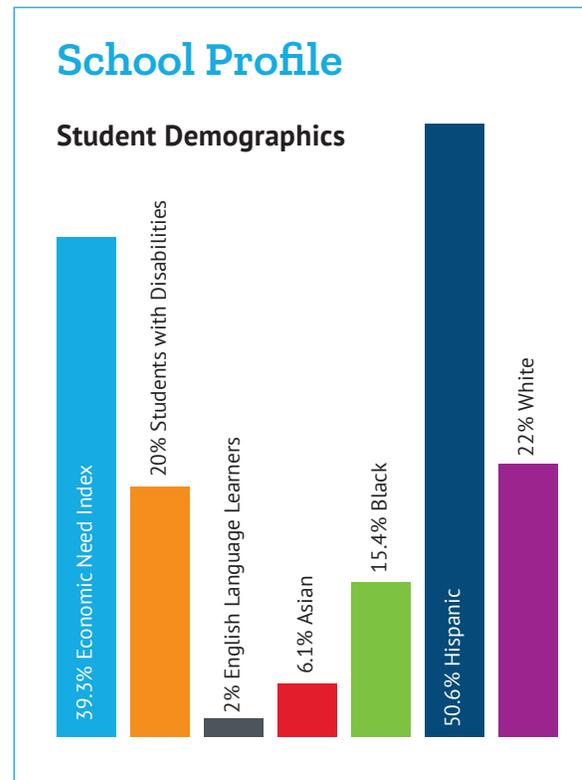
Case Study: Career High School

Career High School is a small school that serves an average senior class of 135 students and is located in a rapidly gentrifying area of Queens.

Career High School has an unscreened admissions process, resulting in a strong mix of students from many races and socioeconomic backgrounds, with a variety of academic profiles as well. Career High School offers a unique mix of CTE (Career and Technical Education) courses and rigorous academic courses, and boasts a 98% graduation rate. The school is known for being high impact, meaning students generally have better graduation outcomes than their 8th grade test data would suggest.

Although most students go on to two- and four-year colleges after graduation, a portion of students went directly into vocational and/or union jobs related to the school’s CTE theme. Staff felt they wanted to honor these students’ choices—even though the school wasn’t given “credit” for matriculation through the NYC Department of Education (DoE)—by presenting them as options equal to going to college. An example of this is a letter that hangs in a prominent spot on the main office’s bulletin board: a parent of a recent graduate thanking the school and listing the many famous television shows for which the student had done on-set electrical work, a skill the school prepared him for.

For the fall, Career High School planned a two-phase rollout to address the 11th and 12th graders’ immediate need for assistance while giving staff time to plan a thoughtful scope and sequence of lessons for the younger students. Each phase of the work would begin with a weekend retreat away from school to orient teachers to the curriculum and to create staff buy-in to the importance of college access. These



retreats would take a lot of resources (time, money, staff commitment), but the principal saw this initial investment as a valuable one to make for the long-term success of the work. The retreats gave staff space to think about big ideas, signaled the value the principal placed on this new work, and also made clear that he would not give them new responsibilities without providing the necessary support and resources. The principal also carefully fit it into an already existing structure and staff role—advisory and their job as advisors—so that it was framed as an extension of something they were already doing. By placing the retreat enough in advance of beginning the work, he made it possible for staff to think about and plan adequately before launching the work. The retreat for 11th and 12th grade staff took place the previous June.

The school also began the year by committing significant new resources to individual college counseling. Beginning in September, the school hired a full-time college counselor, Katie, for the first time. She would be assisted by the existing part-time teacher (when she returned from parental leave) and neither would have any counseling duties—those would be covered by school social workers. The school also hired two Bridge Coaches to work ten hours per week year-round in the college office.

The college matriculation gap was already trending toward improvement and the principal wanted to shrink the gap even more while also making sure students were enrolling at colleges that were the best match for them academically.



One teacher noted how much support they had gotten and the impact: “I think the faculty involvement is probably a place where we do really well ... I don’t know any other friends in other schools that have that kind of thing [a retreat] that has ever happened. Or even like, on a smaller scale, we had the 10th and 11th grade, and then 9th... pretty much the entire staff has gone on multiple retreats to be involved with learning about this college process and coming up with a curriculum for it, for advisory to get those things happening. So I think that’s something that we do really really well.”



INITIAL ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

- > A well-established advisory system with advisors who know students and families extremely well; they follow students from grades 9–12 and meet with them nearly every day of their four years at the school.
- > A 12th grade college planning seminar for completing the FAFSA and CUNY/SUNY applications.
- > Three school-sponsored trips to local colleges in 11th grade.
- > A 9th grade college research project.

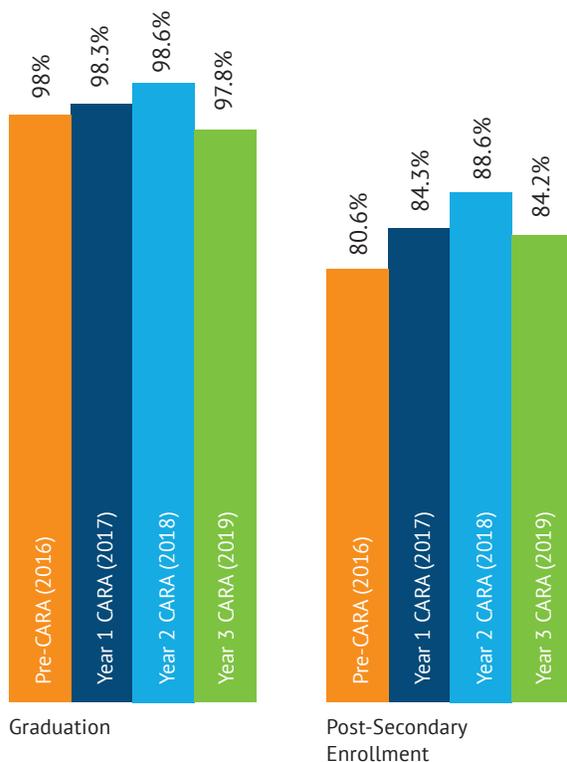
Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

- > Grade level advisory teams that meet once per month, with a member assigned as team leader.
- > No whole staff or small group professional development on college access.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

- > In 2016, the year before beginning work with CARA, a teacher worked half-time as a college counselor and was going on parental leave over the summer.

Graduation and Post-Secondary Data



“Our 9–12th grade advisory teams have an explicit focus and curriculum, around the college exploration, planning, and application process, that’s become really systemic through all four grades. There’s been work both in terms of building the faculty’s capacity around understanding the college process and the elements of it but then also doing the curriculum planning with CARA and implementing that within the advisory system.”



FIRST YEAR PLAN

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

The principal had already decided that advisory would be the space college and career exploration would “live” across grades in the coming years; the remaining work involved figuring out how to plan, roll out, and support college access curriculum in the advisories.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

An initial off-site retreat—paid for with funding from a private funder—would introduce the 11th and 12th grade teams to college access work at the end of June.

Planning for the fall would begin there with full teams of advisors/teachers, and be supplemented by support from a CARA coach in the fall.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

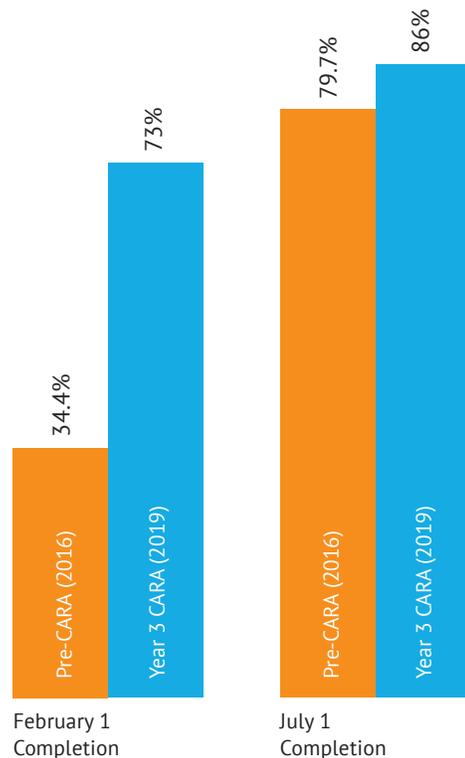
The college counselor sees every senior in a college seminar class; this will be expanded with additional, complementary lessons planned to take place in advisory, taught by 12th grade advisors.



An advisor said, “We understand the basics of the process, understand the basics of how to advise them, but then how do we help them understand the difference between \$10,000 and \$50,000, for a young person who’s only worried about buying McDonald’s and can’t differentiate the value and is it worth spending \$50,000 for an okay private school, versus spending \$10,000 for a strong public school. That’s where I think our counseling work is the next level.”



FAFSA Completion



YEAR ONE FALL: SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2016

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade: Adding more support for seniors through advisory made sense to advisors, but having the work take place in two different spaces was confusing. Which college application steps should happen in advisory and which were programmed into Katie's college and career readiness class?

After some initial weeks of confusion, Katie agreed to send an email a week ahead to preview what would be happening in advisory and in her college prep class. The principal also offered increased time for the 12th grade team to meet, with compensation. His quick attention to problems as they arose helped keep the advisors from getting frustrated; Katie's flexibility and willingness to adapt her practice was also crucial.

11th Grade: Undertaking college lessons in advisory for the first time, the team took a cautious approach to the number of lessons that they scheduled for the fall. However, as advisors taught lessons throughout the semester, they became more comfortable asking for the information they needed to understand the college process thoroughly. Advisors paid close attention to their students' interests and were able to pair that information, along with the knowledge they gained from supporting professional development sessions, to plan for the second semester.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Having decided collaboratively the previous June what lessons and experiences the students would have in that grade, advisors were excited about beginning this work, but there was also trepidation about taking on this new role, and finding enough space in advisory to do the lessons, given all the other things that were already taking place in the advisory class.

Initially, Katie planned the lessons for the 12th grade college access class and the 12th grade advisory just a few days before they were delivered. The 12th grade team felt this was too last minute and did not give them adequate time to prepare. They wanted greater communication between the college office and the teachers, such as an email outlining what the week ahead would entail and an opportunity to preview the lessons together. Katie also wanted more information from the team about the steps individual students had taken toward essay completion and other application steps. She tweaked her tracker (shared with the teachers) to allow for communication about the progress of individual students.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Katie was stepping in to replace a teacher who was on parental leave; this both created space for Katie to make the work her own but also meant she had no one to properly inaugurate her into how the school had done the work previously.

Additionally, Katie was right out of a graduate counseling program and, like most counselors, had received very little training on college access.

The new Bridge Coaches also brought challenges and opportunities. While there was no existing template for how to incorporate them into the school's college access work, both Katie and her two coaches were able to create a new role from scratch in ways that made sense for and to them.

YEAR ONE SPRING: JANUARY–JUNE 2017

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade: Feeling less tentative after rolling out the curriculum in the fall, in the winter the 11th grade team added a robust selection of financial aid lessons to the May and June calendar. With Katie, they set a goal of using advisory time to have students complete drafts of college lists by the end of 11th grade.

However, as winter turned to spring, the ambitious array of activities advisors had planned proved to be more than they could manage. Implementing lessons on financial aid knowledge and college list-making competed with SAT prep and the school's own CTE programming. The exhausted 11th grade team fell behind on the schedule and were only able to complete CUNY lists. SUNY and private college lists would have to wait until students were seniors.

11th Grade: In the new year, the 12th grade had a clearer scope and sequence of lessons, but advisors still found it challenging to manage a class in which every student needed personalized attention because they were at a different point in the application process. Some students forgot or outright refused to hand in key college application documents.

9th & 10th Grade: Knowing that the older grades had had a retreat, the 9th and 10th grade team was primed to begin their own work, and were incredibly engaged and enthusiastic at their retreat in January.

At regular meetings throughout the spring, they asked for more information about topics they were unfamiliar with, such as the types of colleges, post-secondary options for non-college bound students, and financial aid. The teams cemented a scope and sequence, implemented lessons as planned, and asked for support as they needed it. With lower stakes and a much smaller scope of work, 9th and 10th grade advisors found it easier to meet with immediate success.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

At the end of the first year, the school staff took a survey about college access. The results showed how strongly staff were invested in the distributed counseling model: 100% of staff members agreed or strongly agreed that “most staff see it as part of their job to help students in this school go to college,” and “the leadership at this school is committed to improving student access to college.” Forty-four percent of staff members reported talking often “about the topic of financial aid and/or paying for college in my classes.”

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

By the end of the year, Katie had a range of successes under her belt. She had begun to create a network of colleagues to call upon when she needed assistance; she had built communication with the 12th grade advisors and seemed to have an even better rapport with the 11th grade advisors, who would be supporting her work with next year's seniors.

Katie had also built a strong relationship with the Bridge Coaches and become quite effective in her role supervising them, developing their skills and increasingly entrusting them with important work. This was important, because these two college students would be graduating seniors' main point of contact over the critical summer months before matriculation. Katie had prepared them well for that task.

At the same time, advisors who had taken on intensive counseling felt worn out by the work.

YEAR TWO FALL: SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2017

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade: Based on the work their students had done the previous year, 12th grade advisors felt they could slow down and dig into the material rather than rushing through college list making as previous classes had done. Katie happily noted that four out of five of her college prep classes demonstrated understanding of the key content and bureaucratic steps of the college process learned in 11th grade advisory, such as what higher education opportunity programs were. Anticipating that some seniors had not yet fully bought into the idea of attending college, 12th grade advisors proactively planned some activities to compare vocational post-secondary options and explore the dangers of for-profit institutions, hoping to build students' knowledge of educational and labor markets.

11th Grade: The team decided to focus on strengthening and systematizing personal statement writing and career exploration; getting strong students to take SAT II subject exams, teaching students how to navigate the Common Application, and writing supplemental essays in 11th grade. All of these would help students arrive in 12th grade better prepared for the application process.

9th & 10th Grade: Teams in younger grades focused on more early awareness of the college process, including encouraging greater participation in extracurricular activities. Staff noticed that many programs and summer internships were unpaid, and pre-college programs were expensive. While they did not yet have a solution, they realized that students needed more information about the pool of opportunities and that the school needed to pay particular attention to financially viable opportunities for students who needed to contribute to the family economy by working after school or during the summer.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

In the second year, professional development for 11th & 12th grade staff moved beyond gaining content knowledge, and toward tackling some of the deeper challenges of positioning the school to fully support students' transition to post-secondary options. The principal also passed more responsibility for the planning for this work to the staff themselves. The agenda included sessions about Naviance, financial aid, and case studies of former students and their application process. Advisors asked knowledgeable questions about progress on personal statements and when FAFSA completion would occur. Teachers also participated in an activity to identify stereotypes about CUNY, SUNY, and private colleges, acknowledging that staff often unintentionally pass on these messages to students.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Katie came into her second year with a much clearer idea of what work she should do, and what work made sense for the advisors to do. In its second year, the school received a grant to focus on improved college outcomes for the top 15% of students, with the goal of an expanded portfolio of colleges where the students were matriculating. As part of the grant, the school would have funding for a large number of college trips, including destinations in other states. These trips filled a major hole in the school's college access programming and were used to provide exposure for all students, including visits to public and private schools in NYC and ones outside such as Ithaca College, SUNY Cortland, SUNY Binghamton, Lafayette, Trinity College, SUNY Albany, Franklin and Marshall, Union College, and Wesleyan University.

YEAR TWO SPRING: JANUARY–JUNE 2018

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade: In the spring, Katie began deploying the Bridge Coaches to lead lessons in the college readiness class, particularly on the topic of the transition to college. Their role as near peers—and current college students—meant that they could talk to students’ concerns in real-life ways that Katie and other staff could not.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

12th grade advisors raised concerns about how to deal with the many emotions 12th graders were feeling and expressing in advisory as they heard from colleges and had to make decisions about post-secondary pathways. How could teachers address this without becoming students’ therapists, they wondered? In response, the principal suggested that the school’s two social workers plan training for the teachers on counseling skills. They chose a counseling skill called “Motivational Interviewing.” Designed to help face the challenges of change, motivational interviewing skills relied on empathy, which in turn would help teachers develop greater empathy for students. While the training did not take place until June—and thus was too late to directly address this group of seniors’ concerns—it helped staff feel like they were being equipped to tackle challenges as they arose.

For the 9th and 10th grades, a retreat took place in February. Advisors met to learn about financial aid and educational opportunity programs, and to plan out the remainder of the year. They learned about the many hoops students had to jump through senior year to gain access to opportunity programs; even staff who had recently shepherded students through the application process the previous year weren’t aware of these challenges. Teachers agreed that they could lay the groundwork to make the path smoother in 12th grade.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Katie’s college counseling practice improved demonstrably over the course of the second year: she was comfortable with all aspects of the process and knew how to delegate tasks or ask for teacher support when needed. The return to the office of the same Bridge Coaches for a second year—also with much more knowledge and experience under their belt—meant that the college office could more successfully assist all students with the volume of bureaucratic college application processes. This in turn enabled Katie to deliver personalized guidance during one-on-one meetings with seniors.

Katie was thrilled with the class of 2018’s results: there were students planning to attend Johns Hopkins, Spelman, two to NYU, and for the first time a student from the school would attend an Ivy League institution. Many more than usual would be attending out-of-state and private colleges. Katie attributed these successes to students going on more college tours, which expanded their comfort with going away to college and a broader variety of opportunities. Interestingly, Katie saw the increase in college trips as a function of not only the increased funding to the school, but also a result of families taking students on tours because the school had put it on parents’ radars early on.

YEAR THREE FALL: SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2018

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

The team of advisory grade leaders met in September, with new members serving as grade team leaders in 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. The group decided they wanted a four-year curriculum map. To date, each grade had been working on its map individually and rethinking it each year. Though that system fit with the school's general style of curriculum mapping, it was a lot of work each year. To realize their plan, the team decided to spend some staff development time in October working on curriculum mapping; the assistant principal said he would think of a centralized place to house the maps; and the CARA coach offered to pull together the grade maps into one cohesive document.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

In January the school held its final retreat focused on college and career access. For the first time, the principal brought all grades together to reflect on their progress and plan for the remainder of the year. The agenda for the two days was mostly planned by Katie and the assistant principal.

At the retreat, recent alums participated in a panel discussion about their experiences with the college application process and life since graduating from the school. The staff heard several themes about college success. All the alums on the panel, even the most academically strong ones, struggled at CUNY, some socially and some academically. Alums also discussed their lack of preparation for college classes, especially their note-taking skills. Although they were very thankful for the support of school staff, they pointed to some key areas in need of development and reflection.

In keeping with the goals from the start of the year, there was also a professional development session on career pathways, non-four-year degrees, and vocational programs. The staff's key takeaways were that various pathways are really confusing, that certificate programs differ vastly in quality and commitment level required, and that information can be hard for students to find and navigate. To truly support students taking alternative pathways, the staff would need a more supportive plan. They spent the rest of the retreat planning spring curriculum that they hoped would more thoroughly address students' questions about careers and majors.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

The college office was again well staffed, with Katie in her third year and both Bridge Coaches returning for a third year. Katie spoke about her own goal of expanding student understanding of careers and connecting careers and majors earlier in 9th and 10th grades. This tied in with the school's other goal of using the Naviance college-tracking system to its fullest potential. One grade team leader suggested students could take the career surveys the software offered and could learn more about their interests in 9th and 10th grade, perhaps even forming small cross-advisory affinity groups with other students with similar career interests. Naviance would then store this data until students started their college lists in 11th grade.



Our 9–12th grade advisory teams having a much more explicit focus, curriculum, around the college exploration, planning, application process, that's become really systemic through all four grades.



YEAR THREE SPRING: JANUARY–JUNE 2019

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

The team met again in the spring to review their data and outcomes. The grade team leaders and Katie all seemed exhausted. The advisors spoke grumpily about leading their group of students through the lessons. They had consistently completed the curriculum, but the intensity of advisory was burdensome on top of their academic classes.

Thus, in three years the school had mostly accomplished its goals of positioning advisors as college- counselor support staff with a high level of staff buy-in. The staff members were tired, but had been successful.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

The seniors were described as a challenging group to move through the steps toward matriculation and a few students did not have a definitive plan, although all had applied to CUNY at minimum. All in all, outcomes for this class seemed strong relative to the class's academic profile. This year's exhausting work had paid off.

At the same time, the school was now in the beginning stages of a partnership with CUNY and the NYC DoE's 9–14 high school initiative that would allow students to obtain an associate degree before graduating high school. This was sure to have big implications for Katie's practice moving into the next school year and would likely be a whole new learning curve for administration and advisors.

**CAREER
HIGH SCHOOL**
OFFERS A UNIQUE MIX OF
CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION



GRADUATION RATE OF



98%

Students are a strong mix of many races and socioeconomic backgrounds.



One advisor commented, "Knowing what I know now at least, going through the process once, I'm sure that the next advisory will be a little better. But i think every year we'll face that struggle of, you prioritize your classes first, so then, college stuff will come as an afterthought as opposed to giving it as much emphasis as you really can."



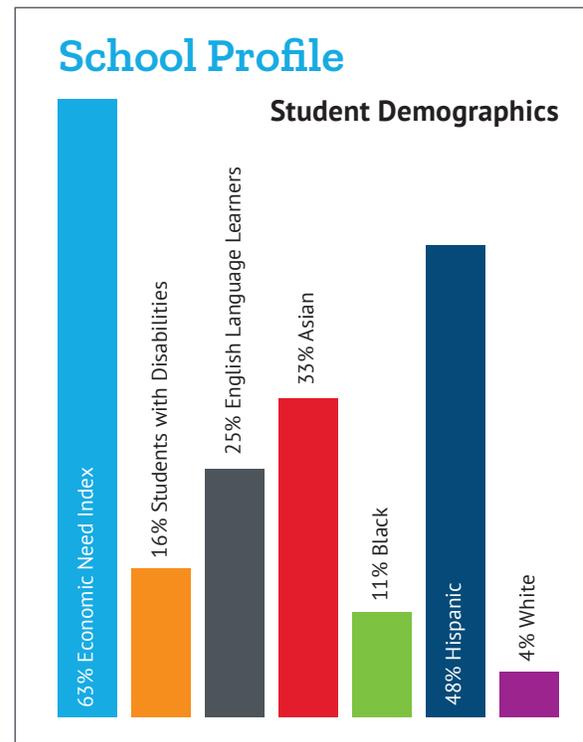
Case Study: Neighborhood High School

Neighborhood High School in Queens serves approximately 1600 students in 9th–12th grades. The surrounding neighborhood has a large population of Latinx families, and an increasing number of immigrants from Bangladesh, all leading to a student population that is increasingly made up of students with English as a New Language/ENLs.

Over a period of several years, the school’s valedictorians and most of the top 10% of the class consistently matriculated into local two-year community colleges. After years of struggling with low attendance, poor academic progress, and safety issues related to weapons in the school, in 2014–15 the school became part of the NYC Renewal school turnaround program.

As part of this program, Neighborhood High School had a change in administration and had to implement a range of accountability measures. It also partnered with a local community-based organization to bring additional resources, including a mental health clinic on the campus, a wide range of afterschool programs, and a full-time on-site college advisor paid for by the CBO. Thus, at the beginning of its engagement with CARA in January of 2017, the school was undergoing significant change in a range of areas that offered both obstacles and

hope. On the one hand, there were new resources to support students and staff; on the other hand, as a **Renewal school**, there was pressure to meet a set of compliance measures, few of which were focused on nuanced post-secondary outcomes.



At an initial meeting, both the new CBO-funded counselor, Joseph, and the existing counselor, Diane, expressed excitement about the work and about having a partner; however, they faced several challenges as their partnership began. First, neither were highly trained or well networked in the college access field. Second, while Joseph and Diane's knowledge and skills complemented each other, they had no systems of communication or regular meeting time so their efforts were not coordinated. The work for the first year, then, would be establishing systems that would support a coordinated and distributed approach to college counseling between Diane, Joseph, and the guidance department.

They both noted that, while they were determined to help more students apply to college, they were concerned that the cultural values of many students' families required students to stay close to home and thus limited their ability to encourage students to enroll in more competitive options or go away to college. Things also got off to a bumpy start between the CBO and the school—for example, the CBO used classrooms for afterschool programs and left them a mess; school staff failed to attend professional development sessions organized by the CBO or to send students to the mental health clinic. Luckily, the assistant principal of guidance, Richard, stepped in quickly to remediate, which allowed both groups to move past the issues.



"I don't think it's necessary for everybody to be involved at the forefront of the work. But I do think it is important for everybody to have some sense and awareness of the work that's going on, and some opportunity to participate in the work, even if it's something as small as a few times a year when I do student conferencing and I have a conversation with kids around their post-secondary planning. Because it keeps teachers aware that this is what the school's culture is, this is what the messaging is that we're trying to push out to students."



INITIAL ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

- > No curriculum prior to beginning work with CARA.
- > No school-based trips.

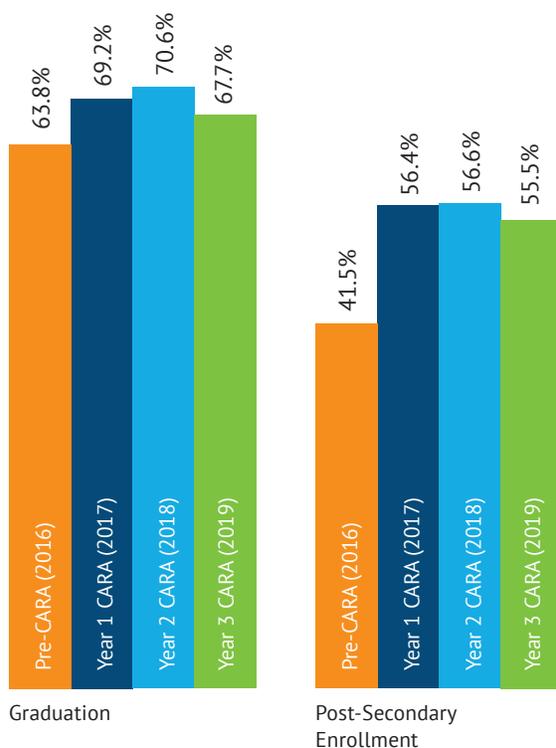
Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

- > None prior to beginning work with CARA.
- > The staff expressed disappointment in the lack of engagement from parents and believed this was a large contributing factor to their students' post-secondary outcomes.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

- > One counselor for a senior class of almost 400 on-track-to-graduate students who had been moved into this role from guidance several years earlier, without any additional training.
- > School counselors and several other staff members had attended training at Goddard Riverside's Options Institute.
- > Several of these guidance counselors (but not all) offered small, informal sessions on issues related to post-secondary planning.

Graduation and Post-Secondary Data



“It’s not a one person show—it relies on all of us, even the college access teachers, knowing which kids need help, when I need to send someone to [the CBO-based counselor], when he’s available ... Their door is always open, and my door is always open for them to come in, especially if there are important messages, where the kids need to receive urgent information from them, about deadlines, about scholarships, those kinds of things.”



FIRST YEAR PLAN

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

Pilot four sections (serving 25% of the class) of a credit-bearing “college access” course, taught by a group of social studies teachers (including the department head) using CARA curriculum.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Regular meetings of teachers of the college access class over the course of the spring semester to adjust the scope and sequence. Supported by professional development on content topics from the CARA coach.

Plan for fall professional development with whole staff on college access for first-generation students.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Addition of new counselor, Joseph, funded by the CBO—young and new to the work (currently in graduate school for counseling).

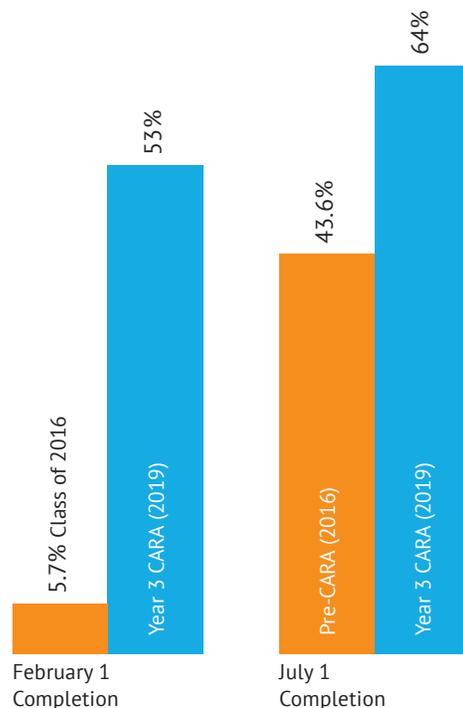
Begin discussions with CARA to add peer leadership in the fall, through the College Bridge program.



“Information is not just staying in the college office, it’s everywhere. Teachers know ... they come into the college office—they see what’s going on. You have staff that are always asking, where did that student get accepted to? They’re asking the students directly—did you hear back from this school, you’ve got this—did you check in with [the counselor], did you check in with [the CBO-based counselor], did you check in with the Bridge Coach?”



FAFSA Completion



YEAR ONE SPRING: JANUARY–JUNE 2017

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

11th Grade Pilot: Classes began in February, with 100 of 400 juniors in four sections which met five days a week.

As the teachers became more confident, classes improved, students were more engaged and informed about the college process, and word began spreading to other students. Richard, the assistant principal, began getting requests from students to add the access course to their schedules, and if the student was in good academic standing, he obliged; however, as these classes grew in size, the larger number of students created new challenges, given the exploratory and reflective nature of the CARA lessons. Nothing was simple.

As the team looked toward the fall, they planned to add extra sections of the junior class the following year in order to reach more students, and thought about how to adapt the CARA curriculum map given what they had learned in the pilot year.

They also drew an important larger lesson: students needed more support to get through the actual college process in their senior year. Thus, they also began to plan for a second major addition to the school's structure: a 12th grade application class in the fall for a large group of seniors.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Even within this small team, it became clear that there were a range of viewpoints: as they looked at the school's post-secondary data, not everyone had the same reaction. The assistant principal of guidance, Richard, and the counseling team were concerned about the high rates of enrollment at two-year colleges, but many of the teachers who had been assigned to access classes wondered aloud whether the school should be focusing more on vocational and trade schools. This teaching staff, who were predominately white and had been teaching for fifteen to twenty years, were unsure of the college for all mission now being articulated by the school. They repeatedly expressed a fear of "pushing college" on students who could not afford it, would not work hard enough, or whose parents would not allow them to attend.

Some challenging conversations ensued. The counseling team, for their part, noted that the staff demographics did not match up with the student body they served and identified this as a challenge. They pointed out that suburban schools were not necessarily suggesting vocational options for students and this allowed the conversation of the group to shift, with more willingness on the part of the teachers to discuss realistic expectations, look at differences between colleges, and reflect on their own college journeys. Important questions were raised about how to navigate those students whose families were less willing—or completely unwilling—to let them go away, especially those who had more recently come to the United States.

They increasingly focused on content-driven professional development that grounded the access teachers and the guidance team in the landscape of CUNY, SUNY, and opportunity programs. The teachers learned how to support students to make college lists, and take financial information into consideration when doing so. The team was also open to pushing their thinking and knowledge about college access and agreed that whole staff and small team professional development would be a priority within the next year.

YEAR ONE SPRING: JANUARY–JUNE 2017 >>> *continued*

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Diane and Joseph began meeting regularly, came up with a coordinated system to track students, and started to work in real partnership with one another. With the time to meet, it became clear that in many ways they were a good team—Joseph was doing things Diane did not have time for, such as networking with admissions, bringing students on trips on breaks, and working with POSSE. They were still challenged by how to collect important components of the application work and did not always honor their weekly meetings but they were making progress.

Junior seminar quickly generated an impact on the college office: juniors began to go to the college counselor with questions and for one-on-one support. The heightened sense of student engagement led the College Inquiry team to focus in on what was happening to that year's seniors, in particular looking at their FAFSA completion rates. While some of the other indicators looked okay—of the 514 seniors, 375 were on track to graduate and 404 took the SAT once—by mid-February only fifty students had completed the FAFSA. They quickly realized that this fact likely explained the limited enrollment in four-year colleges, and college in general, for past graduates.

Unwilling to let another year go by before addressing this situation, the APs, counselors, and APPS teachers agreed to collaborate in an emergency FAFSA plan for 12th graders. Richard led the planning and agreed to change programming for a week. First, two professional development sessions were scheduled, one for counselors and one for access class teachers. Then, using social studies class periods and rotating seniors through the college office and computer lab, every senior spent a class period working on FAFSA. Other senior teachers pitched in to help as well, and a much higher percentage of students completed their FAFSA than in previous years.

The counseling staff and the access teachers also began to tackle work with juniors. They facilitated their first spring financial aid night in June for the parents of the junior class. They utilized a guest speaker and had a separate room for Spanish and Bengali speaking families respectively, and were pleasantly surprised with the attendance.



“The culture of having kids have higher expectations than just getting a diploma is something I think everyone can attest to The culture of the school has shifted over the past few years. It’s headed where we need to be, and heading in a positive direction which can only get better.”



YEAR ONE FALL: SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2017

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade Pilot: The same teachers who had taught 11th grade classes moved to teach the 12th grade classes, so they would know the gaps students were entering with and what to review.

Richard reported that once again he was getting increasing requests from seniors to be added to an access class: he obliged when possible, but the existing classes still were not serving all seniors, or even a majority.

Nevertheless, with students once again clamoring to get into the class, the school had irrefutable evidence: their students were hungry for support with post-secondary planning.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

The team teaching the access course—now working with the same students in their senior year—continued to meet throughout the fall to develop their content knowledge, with a focus on financial aid, opportunity programs, and application completion.

The school devoted a citywide professional development day in November to whole staff work around college access. Meeting with the entire staff in the school library over the course of the day, the CARA coach facilitated a range of discussions about college going for first-generation students, exploring the assumptions staff themselves had about college, and how those assumptions lined up with the messages students received about college. Diane and Joseph facilitated a concurrent staff training around writing letters of recommendation.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Beginning in September, the college office had a further set of resources added: three College Bridge Coaches, whose salaries were paid for by the CBO. While the extra hands on deck were a positive step, the additional coordination they required also presented some challenges.

First, the Bridge program brought a new tracking system, but Diane continued to use her own, which was not aligned with the new one.

Second, it was unclear which one of them should be supervising the Bridge Coaches and ensuring that they attended training; and Joseph struggled with trusting the Bridge Coaches enough to delegate meaningful tasks to them.

All of this led to a great deal of confusion about which tasks had been completed by which student, and led to tension between Diane and Joseph.

More resources were creating new problems in another way: the senior college access classes were helping increase the traffic in the college office because students without a class were seeing their peers completing parts of the application and did not want to miss out. As the fall went on, the main challenge that emerged was supporting these students. Diane and Joseph figured out where the students who were not in a class were grouped, and Diane began to push into those classes to reach the students and support them through the steps of the college process.

Their resources had increased, but so had their work. The upside: more and more students at the school were being engaged and assisted in applying for college.

YEAR TWO SPRING: JANUARY–JUNE 2018

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

11th & 12th Grade: The teachers who taught 12th grade access classes pivoted back to working with juniors—now a new group—with additional sections added in order to serve more students, though still only about half of the grade. And seeing how much of the college process remained unfinished by the end of January— even as they got better at teaching the fall class—Richard, the assistant principal, contemplated adding a full-year 12th grade class the following year.

9th & 10th Grade: The school had planned to add lessons in 9th and 10th grade in the fall, but had failed to clearly identify a space or set of teachers. In the spring, one to two college lessons were added to 10th grade career exploration classes, but the early awareness work did not get off the ground in any systematic way.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Development for the teachers of college access classes—mostly from the history department, but a few others who had also been given access classes in their programs—continued during whole staff professional development days, ensuring that staff had the content they needed to teach the classes effectively.

In early June, the CARA coach led a professional development session focused on the steps of applying to and matriculating into college, helping the staff to understand further the complexity of the process. Perhaps even more importantly, Diane and Joseph shared data on where the school’s 12th graders were planning to go in the fall, celebrating the school’s growing accomplishments in this area.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Throughout the spring semester, Diane and Joseph continued meeting with the CARA Bridge Coaches to knit together the counseling team. They worked to establish a more coordinated system that incorporated the coaches, clarified their use of tracking systems, and utilized the help of 11th and 12th grade counselors to support parent night and to support students and families through the critical issues they were facing. As the Bridge Coaches began to hit their stride, the contributions they had to make as young people became increasingly clear.

As the year drew to a close, there was a lot to celebrate: graduating seniors had significant increases in FAFSA completion and four-year and private school applications, yielding more EOP and HEOP placements for the graduating class of seniors. And in the counseling office, Diane and Joseph planned ahead for next year’s college office systems and added a fourth Bridge Coach to the team. They were hitting a groove.



“The college access classes became so helpful—they are the glue that keeps us togetherThey’re making a difference, a great difference.”



YEAR TWO FALL: SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2018

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade: Additional teachers joined to teach college access classes, including special sections for ENLs.

9th-11th Grades: The school had an existing “Are You Green?” campaign—added when it became a Renewal school—where classes were strategically suspended at the end of each marking period, and the whole staff met individually with 9th–11th grade students to review their report cards and progress toward graduation.

In both spring and fall (three times per semester), a post-secondary element was added to these conferences, using the large data sets they had developed to share information with students in relation to their future planning. Expanding students’ horizons, these meetings now included PSAT score review and Regents score alignment with CUNY entrance requirements.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

The school continued to reserve and use whole staff professional development time to keep college access front and center with staff. In particular, the three citywide professional development days (when teachers were working, but students were not in attendance) were used throughout the year to continue to push staff engagement with—and knowledge about—the topic. A November professional development session focused on stereotypes teachers had about the public city and state higher education systems, exploring and correcting misinformation and building shared understandings about the range of options for their students.

Increasingly the school invited teachers to give suggestions to continue to move the work forward, yielding involvement from several staff members not previously engaged (their ideas included: sharing college information over school monitors; hosting other college-related events). Overall, staff engagement around post-secondary access increased noticeably, with many appearing more in touch with the challenges their students were facing in the process. Several teachers commented that they had worked at the school for fifteen years and had never seen an initiative like this.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

September’s back to school parent night included a college component for the first time; the school also organized a college fair at the school for the first time, and brought a group of students to a SUNY college fair, utilizing CARA lessons in 12th grade classes to prepare for and debrief the visit. The counseling team also made an extensive effort to ensure that every senior would have individual support for the post-secondary planning process. They split this work, with Joseph and the Bridge Coaches focusing on supporting students who were in access classes, and Diane working separately with seniors who, for scheduling or other reasons, were not programmed into one of these classes.

Frustratingly, the newly introduced CUNY application made this work harder than ever. Before they could even fill out the application, students ran into numerous issues with accessing the new portal and unanticipated browser glitches. The team pulled together in the face of these challenges, reaching out frequently to their CUNY representatives, but it was hard to feel like they were making progress, despite all of their hard work and well-laid plans.

YEAR THREE SPRING: JANUARY–JUNE 2019

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade: The school was not able to add a spring class for seniors, despite the amount of work that they realized students still needed support with. However, they created space inside economics classes for college work to get done.

11th Grade: Heading into their third year, the school had a solid curriculum plan in place for spring of junior year. They were now able to run nine sections of access classes (with thirty students each), approximately 90% of the class. This included several sections specifically for ENLs.

9th & 10th Grade: Creating a sustainable space for lessons in 9th and 10th grades was continuing to prove extremely challenging. Several lessons were done in the spring in a few 9th grade ELA classes and in a 10th grade career class that served a subset of the students.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Richard began to convene a “post-secondary team” that met weekly, made up of the social studies department head, one of the access teachers, Diane and Joseph, the Bridge Coaches, and the teacher running the career office. This group continued to think about how to expand their work into new areas and include new groups.

In the spring “Are You Green?” conferencing, they pulled each senior aside in front of a green screen to shoot a quick video about their post-secondary plans. These were then handed over to students in the virtual enterprise pathway and made into a video that was shown at a staff meeting, and at the school’s final community meeting of the year. This continued and consistent messaging to faculty, building it into meetings and into everyone’s work in different ways, was paying off in larger shifts in culture.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Given how slowly the application process had gone in the fall, the work of getting students through applications and FAFSA continued into spring, and really, straight through to the end of the year. Luckily, the school was prepared for this, and through economics classes, Diane, Joseph, and the Bridge Coaches worked with the 12th grade checklist of tasks to ensure that every student completed every step of the process, pulling out those that still had college tasks to complete, particularly financial aid ones.

This year, they also looped in counselors in the Career Connections office, who were helping students with IEPs through the ACCES-VR process. Thus, the college completion checklist was transformed to include all post-secondary options, in order to help all students at the school feel part of the process. The CBO supporting the school joined this effort.

They also expanded their peer-to-peer work in new ways, getting alums to come back to speak to other students and staff, and using 12th graders to lead the spring conferences with 10th graders.

Excitingly, all four of the schools’ College Bridge Coaches would return for a third year the next fall. Now deeply embedded into the team, they were increasingly confident in their expertise, and helped staff see the potential in the school’s students.

YEAR THREE FALL: SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2019

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

12th Grade: All seniors on track to graduate and with room in their schedule were enrolled in access classes: approximately 85% or all but ninety students; the rest of class was served by outreach from the college office and access teachers via email.

9th & 10th Grade: Richard was frustrated by the school’s failure to implement a plan for 9th and 10th grade lessons. However, his ability to continue to push this work forward was being compromised by huge cuts to the school budget; several staff positions had been lost, and the principal asked him to hand off oversight of the college work to the social studies department head and turn his attention elsewhere. Instead of being able to bring additional resources to bear to solve the problem, he was working with fewer resources.

Brainstorming with the CARA coach, they came up with a plan to start small in 9th and 10th grade English classes, drawing on staff who Richard knew were already concerned and engaged with thinking about post-secondary access with and for their students.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

In November, the CARA coach met with a small group of 9th and 10th grade English teachers, who talked about their own experiences with post-secondary access and how it was similar to and different from their students’ journeys; they then chose lessons and committed to teaching one per month in their classes for the rest of the year. Richard committed to meeting with them monthly, and planned for the coach to come back in January to meet with the group again to make adjustments to the curriculum plan. It was not ideal, but it was a start.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Fall had a bumpy start for the counseling team. They had felt so good at the end of the last year; but Richard’s transition away from leading the work and a new person coming in had scrambled the equilibrium they had arrived at. The social studies department head had different ideas about communication between the team members and the flow of work, leaving the rest of the team frustrated and angry. It seemed like their progress was so often hijacked by some change.

Realizing this, Richard looped back in, working with the social studies department head on leadership, and bringing the team back together in more productive ways. By the end of December, things seemed back on track: their college application rates went up significantly from the previous year, and some amazing news arrived: one of their students was accepted early to Harvard, with a full ride. It was the first Ivy League acceptance ever at the school.



“College talk—that’s something I think the Bridge Coaches have really done well this year. Talking about their own experiences, honestly a lot of our seniors this year respond really well with the Bridge Coaches. The Bridge Coaches are amazing.”



Endnotes

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Findings: Counseling

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Conclusion

1. COVID has temporarily shifted this piece and it seems possible that the shift may become permanent; this remains to be seen.

Appendix



CARA is committed to supporting all students to and through college, not just high- or low-performers.



CARA Resource Links

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- > [pg 13 College Inquiry: High School Curriculum Sample Lesson](#)
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- > [pg 20 Peer-to-Peer Model Theory of Change](#)
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- > [pg 101 Leading Indicators that Students are Likely to Matriculate](#)



OVERVIEW

Curriculum Structure and Rationale

The structure of the College Inquiry curriculum is based on two sources: current research into issues of access to higher education for first generation-to-college students, and years of work with these students inside high schools across New York City.

A growing body of research shows that, while high schools across the country are working to raise academic standards, they are not preparing students in another area critical to college access and success, namely the college planning process. Far too many academically prepared students are leading what some call “constrained” college searches, where they fail to look at, and then apply to, a range of colleges that may match their abilities and interests. Others complete this initial step, but then fail to follow through on the necessary paperwork for admission or financial aid. There is a growing consensus in the educational community that high schools need to build the work of supporting students in the college process into their mission and structures if they are to truly provide college access for all of their students.

Research with first-generation-to-college students and their families indicates that they often haven’t had access to experiences that will build their familiarity with this process, including the following key areas:

1 The range of colleges in the United States.

There are over 3,000 colleges and universities, and the number is growing. Thus, students are faced with a bewildering array of choices. Most have heard of Harvard and Princeton and of their local community college, and they might have a sense that the former are “better” than the latter. But what, actually, are the differences? And what are the options in between? Too often, students do not have familiarity with a wider range of colleges that might turn out to be good matches for them.

2 The nature of professional work, the fields of study with which they intersect, and the paths to and through college (and beyond) that lead to them.

While aspiring to professional careers—doctors, lawyers, accountants—first generation-to-college students often have little exposure to adults who work in these fields. They need exposure over time to these kinds of work, as well as the opportunity to explore how their own interests and talents might fit into the world of adult work, and what shape those “fields” take as majors in college study. For some students who are not sure if college is “for them”, exploring the links between personal interests, college majors, and careers is often an important way to begin to connect to post-secondary education as a goal for themselves.



3 The college application process.

In order to understand what schools will be asking about in relation to their high school performance (transcripts, recommendations by teachers and guidance counselors, extracurricular activities) and what they will be asked to produce during the application process itself (an essay, filling out applications, sending transcripts, money to pay for applications, test scores), students need to gain familiarity with this process. Students need to know this starting in 9th grade, and be able to plan their high school career accordingly.

4 The costs of college and financial aid available to help pay for it.

Too many first-generation-to-college students either cross college off as an option because they believe they and their families cannot afford it OR don't take finances into account at all in their college search and application process. Research documents that while these students may apply and be accepted to college under these circumstances, they are unlikely to matriculate to or graduate from college. Student—and their families—need to begin learning about both the costs of college and the financial aid available to help pay a portion of that cost, early in their high school career, and in increasingly specific ways as they get closer to graduation.

Thus, throughout their high school career, students need to be engaged in experiences that will help them to understand:

- > **Mapping the Landscape of College:** What colleges are out there?
- > **Exploring Careers:** How do my interests and abilities connect to college majors and to careers?
- > **The College Application Process:** What does it take to get into a college that will be right for me?
- > **Paying for College:** How can I afford it?



Three important guidelines for this work:

COLLEGE INQUIRY: HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

BEGIN EARLY

Begin in 9th grade—or before—to work with students around these issues. Far too many schools currently wait until students' junior or senior year to directly address the college search and application process; however, research shows (and most schools find) that this is far too late to begin this work.

BUILD STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THESE IMPORTANT AREAS EACH YEAR

With an understanding that the above are four wide areas of need, schools can approach them as four broad curriculum areas to address. Ideally, students would do a range of activities in each area every year. It is less important to hit on every single activity included in the College Inquiry curriculum than to be sure to address the areas each year that students are in high school. Schools' work on these four topics needs to spiral; that is, students need to visit these and then revisit them, building additional understanding each time. Each "visiting" needs to be developmentally appropriate: what 9th graders need to know and understand in each of these areas is not the same as what 12th graders need to know and understand. 9th graders do not need to be ready to fill out a FAFSA, but 12th graders do; looking through a college application to see what you notice and what questions you have is appropriate for 9th graders, but insufficient for 12th graders.

USE INQUIRY

Best practices in implementing college access curriculum mirror those of implementing good curriculum in science, history, and other subject matters. College Inquiry lessons are designed with an eye to positioning students as active inquirers, rather than receivers of information. They also require active engagement by teachers throughout the lessons in order to work best, and will take root most deeply if students see these topics engaged throughout their classes (e.g., through writing their college essays in English class, or figuring out the amount of interest they have to pay on a 5% Perkins loan over 10 years in their math class) rather than only in one particular part of the school day. Working together as teams, teachers can discuss lesson implementation (either before or after lessons, or both), allowing teachers to innovate, learn from each other, and hold each other accountable for completing this work in their classrooms, and to adjust plans based on the needs of the particular students that are sitting in front of them. It is the goal of the College Inquiry curriculum to empower those particular young people with the knowledge they need to make informed choices about their next steps after high school, and beyond.



Best Practices for Creating a College-Going Culture in High Schools

Research on college access consistently indicates the impact of early exposure on post-secondary outcomes. For first-generation-to-college students, whose families and communities might not have access to provide these experiences to young people, schools are a vital source of college access information and support. For schools that predominately serve these students and families, the college-going culture they create is critical to access to higher education for their students.

A college-going culture refers to the environment, attitudes, and practices in a school that encourage students and their families to explore post-secondary options and develop the knowledge and skills needed to make and carry out informed choices. In a school with a strong college-going culture:

- > Staff members are engaged in and equipped to prepare all students for post-secondary education.
- > Students are helped to see themselves as “college material.”
- > There are a clear set of structures and experiences dedicated to supporting students, both logistically and socio-emotionally, through the college search, application, financial aid and decision making process.

In particular, a growing body of research supports the importance of cultivating a multicultural college-going identity in students:

“Students see college going as integral to their identities; they have the confidence and skills to negotiate college without sacrificing their own identity and connections with their home communities. They recognize that college is a pathway to careers that are valued in their families, peer groups, and local communities.” - Oakes, Mendoza & Silver, 2005

This needs to be reinforced in all aspects of a school’s work, through the integration of motivational and experiential opportunities around college, for all students, throughout their school careers.



1 Develop School Staff’s Understanding and Knowledge of the College Search, Application, Financial Aid and Decision-making Process

Research shows that students talk and listen to teachers about their post-secondary plans more than they talk to counseling staff (Roderick, et al, 2008); schools need to make sure that non-counseling staff sends accurate messages about higher education. Furthermore, because the work of preparing students for the college search, application and decision-making process is so intensive, schools need to intentionally spread this work throughout the school rather than locating it solely within the counseling office.

IN PRACTICE: Set aside time throughout the school year devoted to understanding issues of college access and training staff to implement school plans. These meetings can be whole staff, grade-level, and/or curricular teams.

2 Develop the School Counseling Staff’s Expertise in the College Search, Application, Financial Aid, and Decision-making Process

Ideally, every school should have at least one full-time, trained college counselor for every 80 seniors. However, particularly in under-resourced schools, there is often insufficient funding to have a counselor dedicated solely to helping students with college preparation. Social workers and guidance counselors often double as college counselors, or subject area teachers are given release time to do this work. There is a vast amount of technical knowledge needed to guide students through the specifics of the college search, application financial aid, and decision-making process. Whichever adult is selected to specialize in this area needs to receive intensive and ongoing training in order to truly serve students well. It takes approximately three years for a college counselor to develop the skills and knowledge to do their jobs sufficiently.

IN PRACTICE: Ensure that there is at least one person on staff fully-trained in college-access. If it is not possible to have this person act as a full-time counselor, clearly define and limit their other responsibilities within the school.

3 Engage Students in the College Process Through Inquiry-Driven Activities

Inquiry methods in subjects such as science, history and mathematics have been shown to yield optimal gains in learning; the same holds true in the area of college knowledge. This includes engaging students in ongoing self-reflection about themselves as learners from early on in their high school career, so that they can identify their interests, strengths, and weaknesses. By doing so, students will be more confident in making choices about their post-secondary journeys.

IN PRACTICE: Find or create curriculum that helps students explore the questions they have about life after high school and is not just *telling* them information. Be sure they have opportunities to experience and hear from others about college life as much as possible.



4 Develop and Enact a 9-12 College-Ready Scope and Sequence Using a Distributed Counseling Approach

In order to enact a strong college-going culture, schools need to clearly outline what they will accomplish at each grade level, and who will be responsible for planning and implementing it. They should build solid early awareness programs for grades 9 and 10, and then increase the amount of time focused on college access preparation for students in their junior and senior years.

IN PRACTICE: Have available a curriculum for all staff members, on-line or in binders. Staff members should also have dedicated meeting time to review the lessons and discuss them with colleagues. Schools then need to clearly dedicate time in students' schedules to implement this curriculum. This might mean spreading the lessons out across different types of classes, integrating them into an advisory curriculum, or creating a stand-alone class.

5 Engage Families in the College Search, Application, Financial Aid, and Decision-making Process

Families are an often-overlooked resource, and necessary partners, in the transition to higher education. Families have tremendous influence over their children's post-secondary plans and decisions. When family members are either under-informed or left out of the process, students often find themselves without sufficient help, or with conflicting advice, and this can affect both matriculation into and persistence through higher education. Schools should engage families early on around post-secondary planning and continue to work with them throughout their children's high school career.

IN PRACTICE: Create a year-long calendar, in advance of the beginning of the school year, with dates committed to college-access events for parents. Make sure the events begin early (9th grade is not too early!) and that, as with student events, they are inquiry-driven and designed to be inviting. Spring of 11th grade and throughout 12th grade, families should be brought into the school for one-on-one counselor meetings.

6 Track Data Related to the College Process and Use for Program Development and Improvement

Schools need to meticulously track application, FAFSA completion, and acceptance information among other things, in order to properly support all students through their college search process, evaluate the level of support they are giving, and understand how to improve upon their practices.

IN PRACTICE: Use data tracking systems such as EnrollNYC and Naviance to track college-related data and application steps. Schools can also use their existing systems to track and store related assignments required in grades 9-11, such as resumes, college essays, student activity lists, and teacher recommendations.



7 Support Juniors and Seniors Through the College Search, Application and Financial Aid Process

Research shows that even with early awareness initiatives, first-generation-to-college students, in particular, need tremendous supports navigating the college search, application and transition process. Without such supports, many of the small steps required throughout the process are missed, jeopardizing students' chances of matriculating into college. It is also important to note that support must be differentiated for students based on their needs and post-secondary plans: all students should be exposed to the range of post-secondary opportunities, but students should be able to pursue those of most interest to them.

IN PRACTICE: Designate clear times within seniors' schedules to complete college applications and financial aid forms and within juniors' schedules to begin preparation for their own process. There should be facilitated by trained counselors or teachers. There should also be a dedicated space for students to work on their applications that has ample computer and internet access and is open during and after the school day. In addition to whole-group sessions, one-on-one meetings need to be scheduled on an as-needed basis for juniors and seniors, with a minimum of one per student during junior year and three per student during senior year.

8 Train Students to Help Their Peers Through the Process

Young people themselves are an often-overlooked resource in engaging their peers in the college process. Research shows that young people listen to their peers more readily than they do to counselors and teachers. In a process that requires intense one-on-one attention, there is often a shortage of adult staff to help students through the college application process. Several programs have now convincingly shown that having a cohort of trained high school or college students working directly with a college counselor to assist their peers is a powerful strategy for meeting these needs.

IN PRACTICE: Train a group of young people in the college search, application and financial aid process – this can be done through the college counselor, or an outside organization. Once trained, they should be financially compensated for the time they devote to this work. There needs to be a point person who takes responsibility for defining the tasks of the young people and responding to any questions they have throughout the process.



9 Build a Bridge to College by Supporting Students in the Summer Between High School Graduation and Post-Secondary Matriculation

The transition to college does not end at graduation; research finds that up to 40% of students “melt” out of the college pipeline between high school graduation in June and the first day of college classes in August and September. During the summer, graduates are often left disconnected from any institution that can help them - no longer students at their high school, not yet students at their colleges - as they face a series of challenges, including completing financial aid forms, registering for classes, paying bills, buying textbooks, and figuring out transportation. Schools that extend their support of graduates through the summer have found significant increases in college enrollment and persistence.

IN PRACTICE: Be sure there is at least one adult - ideally, the school’s college counselor - who is available several hours a week to help students deal with issues that come up over the summer. Many schools are utilizing alumni from their high schools who are now in college to work as “College Coaches” alongside this adult to check in with graduates and make sure they are completing all the necessary steps to allow them to successfully begin college in the fall.

10 Partner with Outside Organizations

Schools do not have the resources and capacity to do it all – and to do it all well for all students. In most communities, there are a host of enrichment, counseling, and training programs to learn with and from. Schools can partner with outside organizations, including colleges, on a variety of components, including SAT prep, professional development, direct college counseling, and family intervention, among others.

IN PRACTICE: Schools should assess what parts of the college access process they need support with and identify local organizations and colleges that can provide such support. For example, schools often bring outside groups in to do SAT prep classes or rely on local colleges for support with the financial aid process.



Leading Indicators that Students are Likely to Matriculate

End of 10th grade

- > Looked at a college application
- > Visited at least one college
- > Interviewed someone about post-secondary education
- > Completed a career interest survey and done career research
- > Understands basic financial aid terms; understand that most students don't pay college sticker price

End of 11th grade

- > Visited at least 3 colleges, at least one of them outside NYC
- > Completed the year with a college list that includes reach/match/safety schools at CUNY, SUNY, and/or private colleges
- > Able to articulate college majors connected to their career interests
- > Completed a family income form; knows what an opportunity program is and if they are Opportunity Program eligible; created FSAID

End of 12th grade

- > Completed CUNY application along with applications to at least two other colleges by December 30th
- > Completed FAFSA by February 1st
- > Visited the college they intend to matriculate at
- > Committed to a college that requires taking out less than \$8,000/year in loans
- > Reviewed post-secondary plans with family and school counselor

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About CARA

CARA's mission is to ensure that first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color have the knowledge and support necessary to enroll in and persist through college.

CARA's work confronts the gap in post-secondary guidance faced by first-generation college students in New York City.

While New York City public high school students need opportunities to learn about college and career pathways, most of the city's public high schools and institutions of higher education are not structured to provide this assistance. CARA's programs, research, and policy work address these inequities. We work with high schools, community-based organizations, and higher education institutions to craft a tailored mix of programs to meet their students' needs.

CARA is housed within the Center for Human Environments at the CUNY Graduate Center. 365 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016.

Our fiscal sponsor is the Research Foundation of CUNY.

Case Study: Centro High School

Centro High School is a small school in Manhattan serving 415 students in 9th through 12th grades. The school is located in a historically Latino neighborhood that has been at the forefront of debate about gentrification and displacement of racial minority families in New York City. Nonetheless, the school still serves a majority Latino and low-income student population.

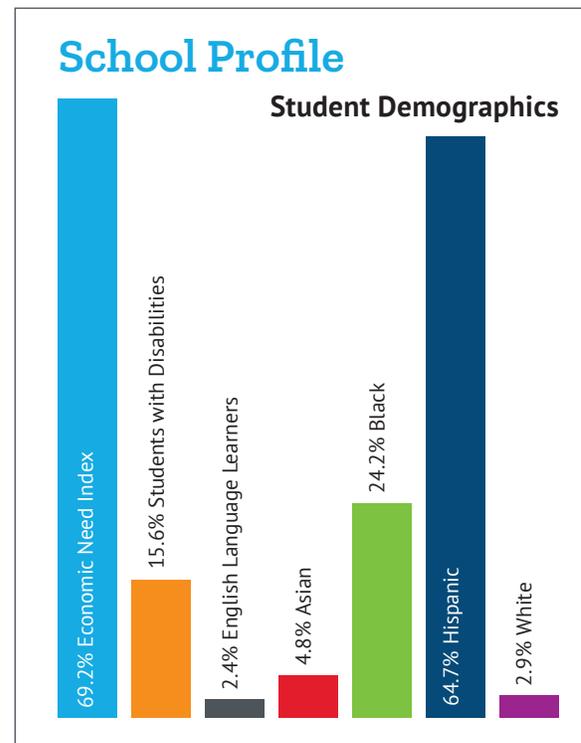
Centro has a dedicated staff, many of whom have been working at the school for three or more years. The school has strong leadership as well, including two hands-on assistant principals and a number of teacher leaders. Administration and staff are good at working together in highly functioning teams to actively develop strong programs and to solve problems as they arise.

Centro High School staff began their partnership with CARA highly motivated to improve the school's post-secondary outcomes. In particular, they hoped to reduce the large gap between graduation and matriculation and to increase the proportion of seniors enrolling at private and/or out of state colleges. The staff set a goal of increasing matriculation rates at well-matched post-secondary destinations by implementing a 9-12 college/career exploration curriculum and developing the capacity and expertise of the college office.

The college access team at Centro High School consisted of lead teachers from each grade, two assistant principals, the college counselor, and the guidance counselor. Together, this team reviewed the assets and challenges and decided to (1) build on

existing structures in the school and find clever ways to carve out more time from these structures, and (2) create some new structures to accommodate the curriculum.

Before the start of the year, the planning team members, one per grade, met individually with the coach for 45 minutes to plan the lesson sequence for their grade. The whole team also agreed to meet for 90 minutes after school once each month of the first semester to discuss progress.



INITIAL ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

- > The school had an existing highly structured 4-year advisory program, which they were able to prioritize twice per week by shortening classes a few minutes to add a 30 minute midday advisory.
- > The school had a 9th grade seminar, which was created to ease students' transition to high school.
- > A counselor pushed into 12th grade English classes and there was an Annual College Day; that was the extent of formal college and career exploration. The push-ins were too late in students' high school careers to make much of an impact and focused on application "to do's" rather than exploration of post-secondary choices.
- > Some college trips and college fair visits existed, but not in the 9th and 10th grades. Students needed to see schools earlier on to understand the landscape of higher education.

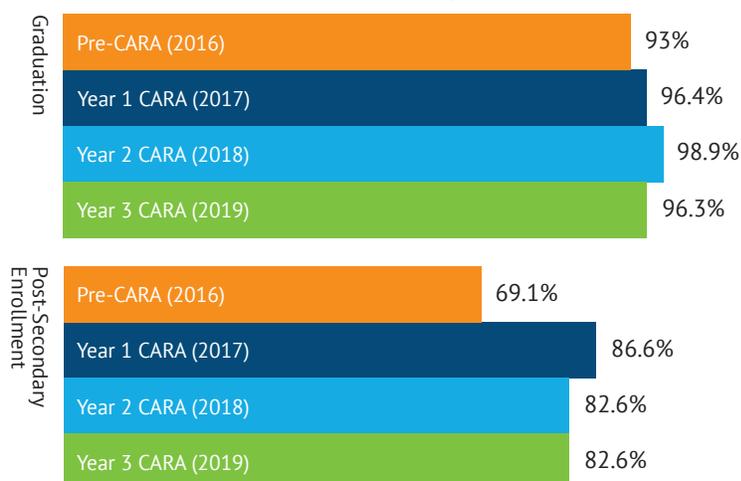
Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

- > One teacher per grade leads advisory—their responsibilities include: determining the advisory content calendar, sharing resources, and loosely supervising their colleagues in advisory implementation. These teachers were highly invested in the college process.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

- > The college counselor has been in her role at the high school for several years. She was hard working and passionate, but lacked a wider network of counselor colleagues and on-going training to support her work. She counseled 2 grades per year and carried a heavy student caseload with over 110 seniors. Students needed more time to interact with the college counselor, but she was spread thin.
- > The counselor felt there was an opportunity to increase the number of applications to private colleges through HEOP, but didn't have the existing relationships with admissions officers to help pave the way for accomplishing this.

Graduation and Post-Secondary Data



Students needed more time to interact with the college counselor, but she was spread thin with a heavy student caseload of over 110 seniors.

FIRST YEAR PLAN

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

College planning lessons would be added to the advisory curriculum for each grade, despite the limitations of the short, 30-minute advisory sessions.

The college counselor shifted from pushing into English class to having her own 12th grade college seminar in the fall and 11th grade seminar in the spring (1x/week for 50 minutes).

Topics relevant to college access and financial aid would be integrated into the 9th grade seminar.

The librarian, who taught a research class for 10th graders, would focus the research topic on career and college choices.

Two in-city college trips were planned for 9th graders, as well as an in-house college fair.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Training for advisory leaders who lacked knowledge about the college process was planned.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

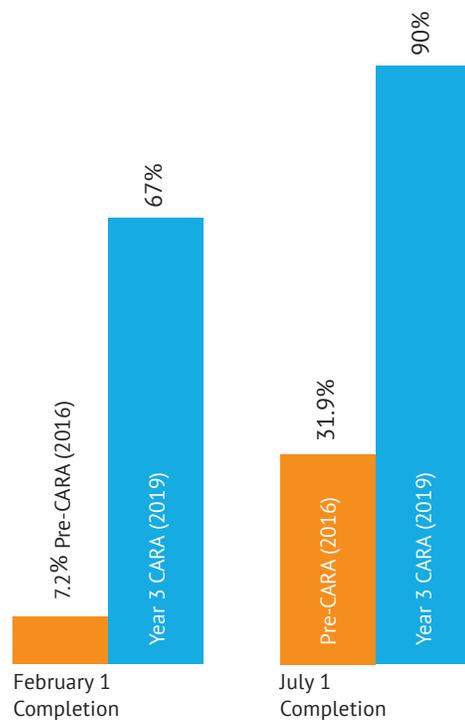
CARA's College Bridge coach program brought two near-peer leaders to the school to support the college counselor and serve as additional resources for the large 12th grade class.



One teacher commented: "I do like to share my college experience because I grew up here and have a similar background to the kids. I tell them I went away, took out loans, and am still paying them off. I also tell them about my sister, who stayed at home and went to Hunter [CUNY], they paid for everything and she graduated with no loans. And we both had a good experience, so I like to share both sides."



FAFSA Completion



YEAR ONE: FIRST SEMESTER

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

Dedicated Space in Each Grade: The school’s implementation structure presented some immediate hurdles. Although the grade level leaders were the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic members of the faculty, they were not the staff who actually delivered the college readiness lessons in advisory. Thirty minutes for advisory sessions was also much too short. Indeed, once the school year began, the college access team began to see that recruiting busy teachers to implement the curriculum was challenging. The 10th grade advisors did not start doing the lessons on time; 11th grade went off track and got involved with other pressing items; and the librarian for the 10th grade seminar had excluded lessons about college and career from her syllabus. To increase teacher engagement, the 10th grade lead teacher built on her existing relationships and invited her advisors to stay after school (bribing them with pizza) to meet with the CARA coach to work out a solution.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Professional Development for All Teachers: The kicked off the school year with a whole-school PD introducing the new curriculum. School leaders used representative student profiles to explore new ways to support students around college access. The staff could see for themselves where the “holes” in the school’s college access structures existed and were enthusiastic to begin the work of filling those holes.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

College Office Team in Fluxa: In the college office, the counselor felt overwhelmed and spread thin during application season and found that, while her Bridge Coaches were equipped with many skills, there was a set of things they weren’t prepared to take on independently. The college access team developed some potential solutions:

- > The coaches could be deployed to help seniors with CUNY applications, the area where they were most knowledgeable, thus freeing the counselor to help students develop lists of private colleges.
- > The Parent Coordinator could do more parent outreach to get family financial information so that the Bridge Coaches could work one-on-one on FAFSA with the students who already had their paperwork together.
- > The assistant principal, recognizing that strong supervision wasn’t yet in the counselor’s skill set, offered to help the counselor prepare for her mid-year planning meeting with the Bridge Coaches.

These steps helped the counselor to feel other staff members were invested in the success of the program and were there to support her.

YEAR ONE: SECOND SEMESTER

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

The librarian was overwhelmed by the number of lessons related to career exploration, which she felt detracted from the time to teach research skills, so she was given license to modify the lessons to use on-line research databases already familiar to her. At the end of the first semester, the librarian reported that 10th graders were bored with so much of a focus on career and pushed back on the number of lessons she was asked to conduct. For the second iteration of the 10th grade plan, the assistant principals lightened the librarian's load so the lessons felt more doable.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

Taking stock of the early challenges, the planning team agreed that whole-staff professional development was needed to increase teachers' capacity, knowledge, and enthusiasm. They requested that college knowledge be put on the school's professional learning calendar, resulting in a half-day PD in January with a protocol that helped teachers see the gaps between graduation and matriculation, a session on financial aid, and a "Mock Admissions Committee" activity.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Organizing the work of the college office was especially important as the counselor began to plan for maternity leave in March. Although most applications would already be in, there were major concerns that the many tasks that occur after a student hits submit would not be tracked. Who would be responsible for nudging students towards the finish line? Who would supervise the Bridge coaches? The plan was that the 12th grade advisors would assume the role of "college counselor" during the counselor's maternity leave, with the Bridge Coaches offering training to students on key items and the school's other guidance counselor filling in for the seminar class.

However, the plan fell apart when the college counselor unexpectedly left for maternity leave three weeks early. The remaining guidance counselor scrambled to balance her existing workload with the college work that had been added to it. Then, the 12th grade team leader took a sudden medical absence, leaving the senior advisors unaware of the important role they were charged with in the college counselor's absence. Some seniors proactively asked for help, but the majority were not getting support. There was no clear system to get information flowing between students, advisors, and the college office.

To ensure students stayed on track with application tasks, the guidance counselor distributed a matriculation checklist, enlisting senior advisors to ensure each student completed one. In April, as the May 1st deadline for making a college choice drew closer, the guidance counselor and one of the assistant principals started to meet with each senior to review acceptances and aid packages. Many of the students were reluctant to bring their financial aid letters to the counselor. The counselor hoped students would be more keen to talk with their advisors and began updating the college tracking database regularly to generate reports on student progress. She distributed these reports to 12th grade advisors to nudge them to offer their advisees robust support in making a college decision.

The guidance counselor and advisor successfully figured out how to work in sync despite the challenges, and by mid-May, 86% of seniors had chosen a college and made a deposit. Progress was also being made in preparing rising seniors, as the 11th grade lead teacher planned a parent night, ensured juniors had draft CUNY and SUNY lists, and planned to enlist the Parent Coordinator to gather financial documents from parents over the summer.

YEAR TWO: FIRST SEMESTER

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

During the last week of August, the college access team met to revise and tighten the scope and sequence of college and career lessons they'd built the previous year and begin planning curriculum implementation at each grade level for the coming year.

9th Grade: The Assistant Principal, who served as the 9th grade leader, was really happy with the lessons and experiences planned for her seminar in the fall. She wanted to think about how to continue the enthusiasm and engagement in the spring through Advisory, when there would not be a seminar.

10th Grade: Advisory had plenty of space to add college exploration, especially more financial aid information, which the team identified as a need. The librarian and the new 10th grade lead teacher planned to work together to choose lessons that complemented each other's classes.

11th Grade: Juniors needed more guidance on careers and majors, which the college counselor would lead in seminar. To strengthen financial aid exploration, an additional lesson would be added to advisory and the team would host a financial aid night the same week for families.

12th Grade: Seniors graders would finish personal essays in English, in time for SUNY applications. The counselor would push into 12th grade classes to complete application tasks. Advisory would contain additional information about careers, majors, and college fairs.

Come October, however, many of the ideas from the summer meeting had not yet been implemented: only the 9th grade team had turned the ideas into a concrete curriculum map for advisory. The 10th grade lead teacher intended to give her advisors more lessons to teach, but her colleagues were reluctant to share the research class curriculum map so they could compare notes. Also of note was the inconsistent delivery of the curriculum. While many teachers were actively engaging in the lessons, others went through the motions or hadn't bought into the importance of giving students space to explore post-secondary options in advisory. This was reflected in the survey results, which showed that the Centro's students had less content knowledge than students in schools devoting similar amounts of classroom time to college knowledge.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

The school would continue the robust PD from the previous year, making use of Chancellor's Days.

Although the administration had prioritized professional development so that teachers would be familiar with the content, teachers needed to follow through on the curriculum and be held accountable to delivering the lessons in order to ensure consistency in students' knowledge. While the grade teams' cooperative style had always seemed an asset, perhaps it would be more efficient to have a leader who ensured tasks were completed.

YEAR TWO: FIRST SEMESTER >>> *continued*

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

The team hoped this new system of distributing college planning would engage 12th grade advisors to a greater extent in addition to freeing the counselor to spend more time one-on-one with students. The counselor was eager to start the school year, although she felt she didn't know this year's seniors very well since she had been on maternity leave the previous spring. Luckily, the class was 10% smaller than the prior senior class and a skilled, knowledgeable CARA College Bridge coach would be returning this year to assist with the college process 20 hours per week.

Things seemed to be going better for the college counselor as she instituted some powerful new practices. In November, she leveraged Senior Portrait Day, a don't miss event for 12th graders, to complete their financial aid applications. Students brought their financial documents to the event and completed FAFSA right after their portrait. It was held on Election Day, which minimized school-day distractions for the counselor. 75% of seniors finished FAFSA that day, and the remaining 25% were mostly those with more complicated financial situations. With the "easy" kids out of the way, the counselor had plenty of time to follow up with the more complicated cases over the course of the winter. The counselor had also increased the number of individual meetings with students to help craft their list, emphasizing private colleges with opportunity programs which hadn't been on student radars in previous years. Through these individual meetings she noticed that a group of her highest achieving students were talking with each other frequently about their lists, but were feeding each other misinformation about the grades and test scores required for some top tier colleges. She reached out to these students' families with her concerns, but felt they weren't responding positively. The counselor drew on the support of the CARA coach to develop strong, reasonable lists to share with the high achieving students and to build her counseling skills in trying to impact. It would be up to her to use her counseling skills and relationships with students and parents to try to impact where they actually applied.



As one 11th grade advisory teacher reflected, "It's not super clear what was covered in 9th grade and how that connects to the 10th grade and how that connects to the 11th grade, a lot of times, it's like 'alright we're gonna do this lesson and then we're gonna do other stuff for a couple weeks and then a college and career lesson will come back...if there was a clearer sequence...maybe there would be more connection, [because] sometimes it seems like the lessons exist in a vacuum."



YEAR TWO: SECOND SEMESTER

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

The issue of engaging families in college planning also surfaced over the winter. During a 9th grade seminar class, many students remarked that while it was not hard to talk about differing options for college and career in class, it could be challenging to have these conversations at home. Some students said their families wouldn't understand or listen, that college was too complicated, or that their parents would say "you just need to graduate." The AP leading the class reminded students that talking with their families about college is important, even as young as 9th grade. "And even if ... you feel they're not that savvy, they're plenty of opportunities and they should know they can come into [the school] and ask about how we can support you. Sometimes kids think you do have to come from the best high school to go to the best college, and that's not necessarily true."

Centro High School reached the end of the year without having resolved issues with spotty implementation of the curriculum, as some advisors didn't complete the lessons as planned. Lessons that got especially short shrift were intended for seniors to learn about the transition to college, college schedules, using campus resources, and looking at course catalogues – critical information for ensuring graduates actually enroll in college come the fall. It wasn't clear if this was due to poor planning, lack of follow up, or other pressing content getting in the way. There was surely more work to be done linking together the lessons in a consistent way that makes sense for students.

Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

In January, the CARA coach held the second of three whole-staff PDs around college access, demonstrating the level of commitment the administration had to build staff capacity to improve college outcomes at Centro High School. Over the course of the year, teachers would learn about financial aid, CUNY and SUNY admissions, and special programs and highlights of the CUNY and SUNY schools their graduates most frequently attended. In the January session, teachers had to work in small groups to help a sample student construct an appropriate list of CUNY and SUNY colleges to apply to. In one session, staff discussed their role in students' college planning process, which surfaced some differing opinions amongst teachers. One teacher said "our role is to either help students figure out what they need to know or direct them to the people they need to know – it's not our job to regurgitate our college experience onto the students".

Throughout each session, the college counselor drew connections to recent graduates with whom teachers were familiar, which grounded teachers in the real work they were doing with their students. The counselor also used the January PD as an opportunity to educate the staff about the complications of paying for college for undocumented students.

YEAR TWO: SECOND SEMESTER >>> *continued*

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

The second semester brought successes, challenges, and changes at Centro. For the first time, there was virtually no gap between the proportion of students on track to graduate and the number planning to matriculate at a college in the fall. Students were matriculating at a wide variety of colleges and an increased number of private colleges, although not all of the financial packages at the private schools were strong. The counselor had managed to talk a student out of attending a pricy for-profit institution. Numerous challenges emerged around financial aid this year, particularly for undocumented students and parents who did not file taxes; FAFSA verification and opportunity program verification required the college counselor to direct some families to visit the IRS in person to obtain necessary paperwork. The counselor was able to support students in coping with these urgent hurdles in April and May because the Bridge coaches had become adept at assisting seniors with important application and matriculation tasks, such as submitting immunization forms, scheduling placement exams, and applying for special programs such as CUNY ASAP. June then brought news of turnover in the school counseling office: the counselor was leaving to work at a school much closer to her home, and her replacement would be focused on guidance rather than college access. To direct the college access work, the school would be partnering with College Bound Initiative in the next school year.



“Every year we have a student or two who don’t end up going to college because they are undocumented, and not every student is a “dreamer” meaning they have DACA...those students who are not Dreamers cannot get financial aid from the government- the institution they attend can ie. Connecticut College, but a CUNY or SUNY student can’t get financial aid, and those students will have to pay their way through.”



YEAR THREE: FIRST SEMESTER

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

The grade team leaders remembered the challenges they'd had in Year 2 following through on lesson implementation. They stated that this year they wanted to make a concerted effort to focus advisory on college access lessons, build those lessons into the calendar, and then fill in other advisory material as needed. One leader reminded the team that would allow for staff to have plenty of time to preview and plan for the lessons they'd be facilitating. They used the meeting time to revamp the curriculum map based on teacher feedback from the previous year. One person pointed out that advisory time was short and often interrupted by announcements on the loudspeaker; the assistant principal said she could look into other ways to get information out to the student body that would not disrupt college exploration time. Grade team leaders had remarked in the past on the inconsistency of lesson implementation at Centro, but there also continued to be bright spots. In October, a 9th grade advisory teacher and her students seemed engaged in crucial discussions about higher education: in one lesson, students explored their beliefs about college by, walking around the room recording their comments using boldly colored markers on large sheets of white chart paper, they respectfully disagreeing with one another about the most important thing one gains from college, or whether private or public colleges are better options.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

The last week of summer the team convened to plan for the coming school year. They were happy the new 12th grade guidance counselor, Lauren, was in attendance and were looking forward to welcoming the CBI College Counselor, Pilar, to the team. The team was very excited about her arrival and about the resources CBI brought such as college visits and fairs and rich expertise in counseling first-generation students.

While in the past the college office had made strides to distributing counseling and involving staff in college and career exploration, the new college counselor, Pilar, seemed to be off to a bumpy start integrating with the college access team. Pilar did not have much information from the previous years' graduating classes to build on, which made it challenging to meet administration's high expectations. Teachers and counselors complained that they offered Pilar help, which she did not take. Administration at Centro High School had invested in two years of training teachers on key college processes and had tried to build whole staff buy-in around the notion of distributed guidance. In Pilar's experience at previous schools, the college office was not well-supported by other staff, so their desire to be involved and have detailed information on various students was a change for her. Pilar acknowledged "the culture at this school is that everyone is involved in the college process, but that it's a lot of work to keep everyone updated about where students are in their applications." She understood the expectation to keep staff in the loop and felt that she was doing this, but not necessarily at the pace expected or that staff were accustomed to.

YEAR THREE: FIRST SEMESTER >>> *continued*

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

Winter: By January, the tension between the college office staff and the other members of the college access team had grown. At issue was the school's core value of shared responsibility for guiding students. As one teacher noted, "we have a culture here where if someone says 'you need to do these things', people do it - it's not like people are kicking the can down the road and just passing it off to someone else." However, Pilar preferred to answer students' questions about college herself to make sure they received the right information and requested teachers send students to the college office. Lauren complained that Pilar did not consult school counselors about seniors' unique situations in a way that would help push forward a student's application process. Early CUNY application numbers had sharply decreased from the previous year, which was true for many high schools across the city because of the introduction of a new application form, so it was difficult to discern if the conflict of culture was contributing to the decline. While Pilar perceived herself as putting emphasis on the class' lower performing students, administration seemed focused more on future prospects for the stronger academic students. Pilar chose to focus on expanding counseling in other ways, such as bringing more college admissions representatives to the school and identifying 5-10 seniors to speak with those representatives in private.

All staff reported holding difficult conversations with students. Pilar spoke with one young woman about the general lack of funding to attend the HBCUs to which she aspired. She explained to another young person that if he was admitted to the prestigious private college he'd applied to, he would need to take loans because his family income was higher than that of his peers.



The grade team leaders remembered the challenges they'd had in Year 2 following through on lesson implementation. They stated that this year they wanted to make a concerted effort to focus advisory on college access lessons, build those lessons into the calendar, and then fill in other advisory material as needed.



YEAR THREE: SECOND SEMESTER

Creating Instructional Space for College Access Work in Grades 9–12

There were hard conversations in younger grades. One advisor spoke about a lesson in which younger students considered their current college prospects: “We just did a lesson where they got their GPAs, they got their PSAT scores and they’re trying to look at which CUNYs do they have a shot at. And there’s students who, there’s a lot of schools that like, according to the numbers, they’re not gonna have much of a shot at. So there’s a lot of talk to about, it’s not the end of the world to start at a 2 year school and like get some core credits and move to a four year school after that but there’s still a stigma...”

Advisors were still implementing curriculum, but management of that had taken a back seat to the challenges of those working with the older students: for example, a meeting intended for focusing on curriculum implementation in the 11th grade seminar was instead dominated by discussion of each senior’s college choice.

Providing Individualized Expert College Counseling

The coach visited close to Decision Day and although seniors had made much progress, administration was clearly unhappy with outcomes for the top students and with the many students who still hadn’t committed to a college. Pilar and her teammates were not seeing eye to eye, although all were working hard to ensure students choose an appropriate option. Administration asked for data reports that Pilar did not have with her and Pilar could not understand their desire to examine each student’s outcome in such detail. The big problem was that many CUNY 4 year colleges had not responded to applicants by May 1st which left students unable to make an informed decision. The culture and communication issues at the school did not allow for the team to make a collaborative plan to solve the problem. Pilar and her assistant ended up tackling CUNY mostly alone and the school would end the year with strong matriculation numbers. For the following year, a new CBI counselor would be coming on board.

CENTRO HS

IS A SMALL MANHATTAN SCHOOL
SERVING 415 STUDENTS



GRADUATION RATE OF

 **96%**

Serves a majority Latino and
low-income student population



There’s students who, there’s a lot of schools that, according to the numbers, they’re not gonna have much of a shot at. So there’s a lot of talk to about, it’s not the end of the world to start at a 2 year school and like get some core credits and move to a four year school after that but there’s still a stigma.”

