

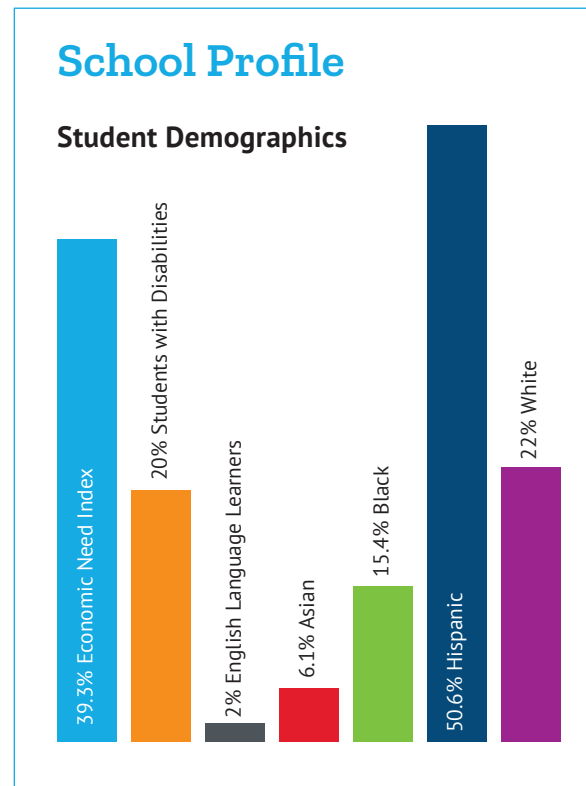
Case Study: Career High School

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.

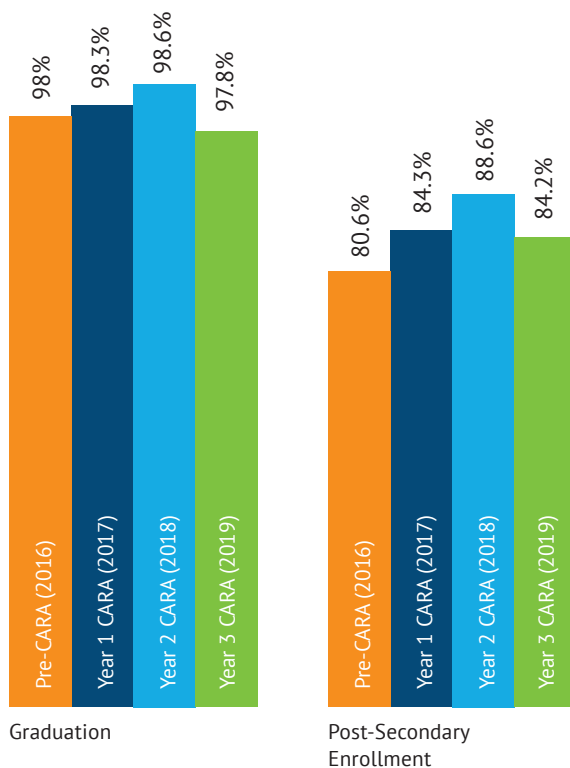
Positioning and Equipping Staff to Do College Access Work

- > 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

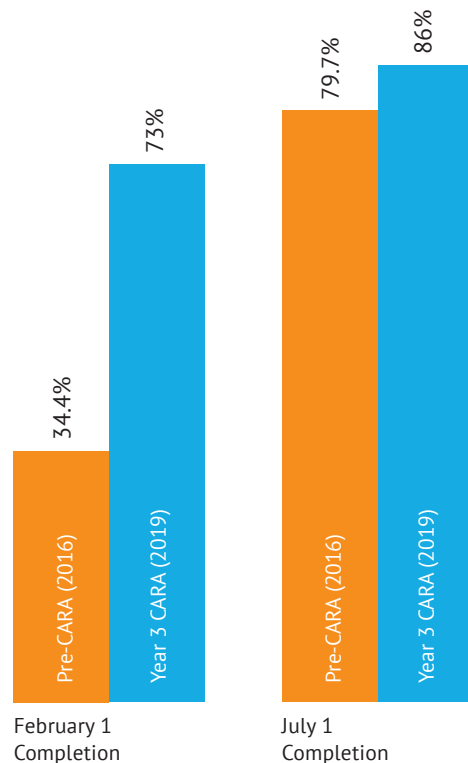
The college counselor sees every senior in a college seminar class; this will be expanded with additional, complementary lessons planned to take place in advisory, taught by 12th grade advisors.



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."

