

Published December 2009

# College Summit & Race to the Top

A GUIDE FOR MEETING THE STATE SUCCESS FACTORS

# Part I

## CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

On November 12, 2009, the U.S. Department of Education issued its final Race to the Top Guidelines, which included a significant change from the draft version that all state applicants should note as they prepare their proposals.

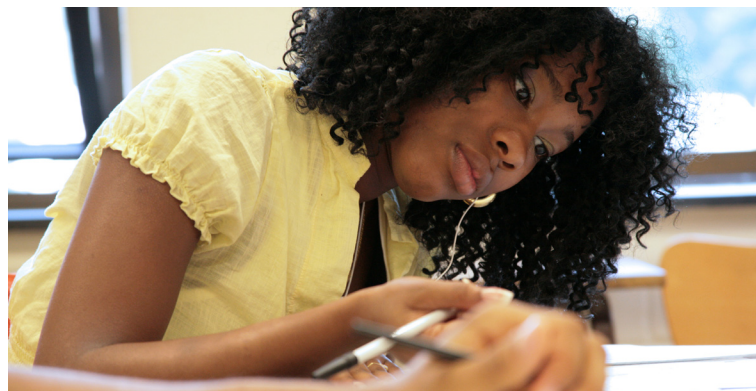
In the final guidelines, the U.S. Department of Education has asked states and districts to present their plans to **increase college enrollment and college proficiency rates** — that is, the rate at which high school graduates complete one year's worth of credits applicable to a degree in two years — as part of the Race to the Top fund. With these success outcomes, the Department has provided a framework through which it expects states to articulate how their efforts across the four assurances drive towards their ultimate goals of reform.

The inclusion of these measures as priority “State Success Factors” in Race to the Top is the latest in the U.S. Department of Education’s efforts to highlight college enrollment and college proficiency issues in its implementation of the Recovery Act. It builds on efforts to incorporate college-going measurements via the Recovery Act’s State Fiscal Stabilization Fund: in his guidance on Phase I funding issued earlier this year, Secretary Duncan asked states to build longitudinal data systems capable of reporting college enrollment and college proficiency information. In Stabilization Phase II guidance finalized in November 2009, the Department has asked states to report college enrollment and college proficiency by high school.

### ANALYSIS

The final Race to the Top program guidelines require state applicants to describe their plans to progress against all of the “State Success Factors” — a new section described by the administration as the “biggest” change to the guidelines. This section is meant to be both foundational and complementary to the now-well-known “four assurances.”

The first of these success factors is a requirement that states articulate their overall education-reform agenda and how local school districts fit into their plans. The Department describes success in four ways: (1) increasing student achievement in reading and math; (2) closing achievement gaps in reading and math; (3) increasing



high school graduation rates; and (4) increasing college enrollment and college proficiency rates.

The administration describes the latter goal as follows: “increasing college enrollment...and increasing the number of students who complete at least a year’s worth of college credit that is applicable to a degree within two years...” An applicant must articulate how its coordination with LEAs will allow the State to reach this “ambitious yet achievable” goal.

Collectively, the “State Success Factors” account for a major portion — 25 percent — of the points available to Race to the Top Applicants. The only other category that gets a greater apportionment of points is “Great Teachers and Leaders”. Though points are subdivided further, the Success Factors’ purpose is to encourage states to create a holistic education reform agenda and build statewide capacity to implement this agenda.

To this end, the administration asks states at the outset to connect their detailed programmatic strategies against the four assurances with the ultimate goals of raising college-going and college proficiency.

The U.S. Department of Education is demonstrating a simultaneous commitment to learning outcomes (i.e. student achievement) and success outcomes (i.e. college enrollment and college proficiency). Without this precise vision, states would have, in the words of the Department, approached the Race-to-the-Top selection criteria “like a checklist” — each one independent and lacking a clear objective.

An effective application, therefore, would not mention the importance of increasing college enrollment and college proficiency rates only once; instead, these would be themes underlying the reforms described throughout the application.

# Part II

## COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE: AN INTRODUCTION

One of the most credible ways to demonstrate a commitment to increasing college enrollment and college proficiency rates is through a strategy that increases academic rigor and develops college-going culture so that students and faculty commit to the rigor. Modifications to academic standards, improvements to curriculum, and increased use of data alone do not boost postsecondary attainment; indeed, the lesson of College Summit's fifteen years of work across the nation is that schools must pioneer a sophisticated approach to strengthening their college-going culture in order to raise expectations and increase student engagement in what schools have to offer.

### RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

Other organizations have reached strikingly similar conclusions in their research. The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago has found that college-going culture is one of the two most important drivers of student academic performance in high school.

*The Silent Epidemic*, a seminal report on the perspectives of high school dropouts published by Civic Enterprises for the Gates Foundation, found that 81 percent of students said that it would be helpful for students to see the connection between school and getting a good job. Indeed, illustrating the connection among high school, college, and post-college employment is an essential element of college-going culture.

The U.S. Department of Education agrees, having recognized the importance of college-going culture, notably in its inclusion of "college-going culture" as a key approach to turning around low-performing schools in its Recovery Act spending guidance issued in April.

### EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMIC COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

In 2003, Chicago Public Schools developed a comprehensive postsecondary initiative, largely in-house, that coordinates programmatic interventions related to college-going culture, and ensures their equitable and

strategic distribution within the district. In the four years following the beginning of this effort, the enrollment of Chicago high school graduates in two- and four-year institutions rose from 43.5 percent to 50.0 percent. The enrollment in four-year institutions had an even sharper increase – from 60.2 percent to 68 percent.

St. Louis Public Schools has co-developed a district-wide postsecondary intervention with College Summit, which provides, according to Assistant Superintendent Dr. Dan Edwards "a successful college application and awareness process for our students." Since 2004, St. Louis City has increased its college enrollment rate by 37.2 percent; the county in Missouri with the second highest college enrollment rate increase, Jefferson County, increased its rate by 8.4 percent.



In 2001, Kanawha County, West Virginia set a goal of transforming college-going culture in all public high schools serving the state capital, and wanted to do so in such a way that sustained the innovation into the future. To achieve this goal, Kanawha County forged a partnership with College Summit. For the last two years, schools have been raising their school-wide college enrollment rates on average by more than 15 percent over baseline, while the college enrollment rates for low-income students nationwide has increased by only 4 percent. In 2004, there was a nine percent difference in Kanawha County Schools' in-state enrollment rate versus the state average; two years later, after two years of College Summit implementation throughout the school system, the difference had increased to 22 percent.

# Part III

## RECOMMENDATION: COLLEGE SUMMIT AND COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

College Summit's proven method for increasing college-going culture across schools and districts can be used by states in constructing their plans for increasing college enrollment and proficiency rates.

Founded in 1993, College Summit is a national non-profit organization that partners with school districts and states to increase their college-going rates by fostering a high school culture where college-going is the expectation, not the exception. College Summit is the largest provider of college-going culture support in the United States, currently reaching 28,000 students at 170 schools in 12 states and the District of Columbia. In 2008, College Summit was named United States Social Entrepreneur of the Year at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

College Summit's program has raised school-wide college enrollment rates at partner schools an average of 15 percent over baseline. Given that middle-income college enrollment rates are 30 percent higher than low-income rates, this means the low- to middle-income gap is effectively being cut in half in College Summit schools. Students at partner schools are persisting in college at a rate of 67%, on par with the national rates for students from all income levels.

Headquartered in Washington D.C. since its inception, College Summit has collaborated with Congress and the U.S. Department of Education towards the establishment of federal legislation and funding guidelines tied to increasing college-going rates. The organization has released two national policy reports on this topic: the first, released in 2008 at The Aspen Institute, called *High Schools as Launch Pads: How College-Going Culture Improves Graduation Rates in Low-Income High Schools*; and the second, co-published with the Center for American Progress, titled *The Promise of Proficiency: How College Proficiency Information Can Help High Schools Drive Student Success*.

College Summit has spearheaded the involvement of national leaders from the corporate and higher educa-



tion sectors in the movement to equip high schools to increase their college-going rates. In August 2009, the CEOs of Deloitte, PepsiCo, Google, Princeton University, and others all submitted public comment to the Department requesting that the use of Recovery Act dollars - in contexts such as the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund and Race to the Top - be tied to a commitment to improve college enrollment and college proficiency rates.

### A. STATE-WIDE COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE ASSESSMENT AND SOLUTION STUDY

Schools, districts and states can start their effort by first conducting an assessment of the maturity level of college-going culture within their institutions, to know their starting point, set improvement goals, and evaluate progress.

College Summit begins its assessment with a state-level analysis of college-going performance across districts and high schools, leveraging the state's college-going data to present a complete picture of current college-going performance across the state. The next step is a site assessment with a diversity of high schools across the state, representing a cross-section of performance and demographics, to determine the college-going culture maturity level.

### Part III - Recommendation: College Summit and College-Going Culture Continued

The assessment methodology includes the collection of more than a dozen research-backed variables that predict college-going culture levels.

The assessment, which includes recommendations for implementation strategies and some basic tools for high schools, is delivered to school leaders. This assessment informs the state's approach to addressing challenges faced by its lowest-performing high schools.



#### **B. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO USE POST-SECONDARY DATA & RAISE EDUCATOR EXPECTATIONS**

Over the coming years, every public high school in America will have access to their graduates' post-secondary performance, and will have the *opportunity* to use that information to improve their efforts to prepare students for post-secondary success. Leading states will be those that invest in translating data into information that educators can use to take action.

As part of a project with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the National Student Clearinghouse, College Summit is currently working with three states to train educators in how to take data from simply numbers to become the basis for strategic decision-making. Over its 15-year history, College Summit has pioneered professional development that serves to raise the level of expectations that educators have for their students' potential.

Together, this combination of professional development solutions can be provided as part of a comprehensive effort to raise college enrollment and college proficiency rates, and build college-going culture, across a state. The professional development is designed to be capacity-building and action-oriented, so educators leave feeling empowered and energized.

#### **C. TURNING AROUND LOW-PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A FOUR-PART COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE INTERVENTION**

For the lowest-performing high schools in the state, College Summit can provide its comprehensive intervention to increase college-going culture in a way that supports the schools' overall turnaround strategy.

College Summit provides four basic tools: (1) 9th-12th grade curriculum on high school and postsecondary planning; (2) Professional development and college-going expertise for teachers and counselors; (3) Data reports offering clear month-to-month metrics on college planning, application, and college enrollment and retention rates for schools/districts; and (4) Transformative leadership training to equip a select group of influential seniors to build college-going culture in their school.

As noted above, College Summit has used this framework to raise the school-wide college enrollment rates at partner schools an average of 15 percent over baseline.

#### **D. NEXT STEPS**

Now is the time to spread the success of this college-going culture framework across all American high schools, districts, and states - especially with Race to the Top having put a stake in the ground regarding college enrollment and college proficiency as a paramount goal of public education in America.

College Summit is available to support states in the creation of their respective reform agendas to increase college enrollment and proficiency. For more information, please contact Rishi Jaitly at [rjaitly@collegesummit.org](mailto:rjaitly@collegesummit.org) or (202) 319-1763 ext. 245.