

College and Career Readiness for All Students

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College and career readiness continues as popular rhetoric in current school reform initiatives, educational research, joint resolutions in the Utah State Legislature, community and state-wide initiatives (Prosperity 2020), labor market projections, Presidential speeches, and more. While the vast majority of America's high school students (86%) report that they expect to attend college, too few are graduating from high school *ready for college* (US Department of Education, NCES 2010-170). This education deficit is an urgent concern for the future of our nation, our state, and our local communities. Students may lack the educational preparation, support and guidance, and/or the social capital they need to be ready for college and career.

Utah's public education and higher education offices are making bold statements about the importance of college and career readiness needs. The Utah State Office of Education prepared a report to the State Superintendent, *Strengthening the Senior Year – College and Career Ready*, aimed at increasing relevance and rigor in the high school experience and aligning post-secondary education and workforce needs (Utah State Office of Education, 2010). The Utah System of Higher Education's *2020 Plan for Higher Education* states that by 2020, 66% of jobs in Utah will require education beyond high school, postsecondary degree/training (Utah System of High Education, 2011). Both reports delineate that all students need to plan and prepare for high school completion and post-secondary education and training more deliberately and intentionally.

Needless to say there is work to do, and Granite School District's school counselors are ready to do their part. In January 2011, Granite District's Board of Education approved a new department, *College and Career Readiness*. Through this department's leadership, the work of secondary school counselors will transform, and in so doing counselors will focus on *college and*

career readiness counseling for all students. The catalyst for creating the College and Career Readiness Department is the College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) and Granite District's involvement in NOSCA's Urban School Counseling Initiative (USCI). NOSCA promotes the value of school counselors as leaders in advancing school reform and student achievement as supported through their vision and mission. NOSCA's vision is that every student exits high school with the educational preparation and social capital necessary for college success and full participation in a global society. NOSCA's mission is to endorse and institutionalize systemic school counseling practice that advocates for equitable educational access and rigorous academic preparation, achievement, and attainment for all students (College Board, 2010). NOSCA outlines *Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling* that provides a systemic approach, across grades K-12 and beyond, to ensure equity in both process and results.

Eight Components for College and Career Readiness Counseling (College Board, 2010)

1. *College Aspirations* – Build a college going culture based on early college awareness by nurturing the confidence to aspire to college and the resilience to overcome challenges along the way. Maintain high expectations by providing adequate supports, building social capital, and conveying with conviction that all students can succeed in college.
2. *Academic Planning for College and Career Readiness* – Advance students' planning, preparation, participation, and performance in a rigorous academic program that connects to their college and career aspirations and goals.
3. *Enrichment and Extracurricular Engagement* – Ensure equitable exposure to a wide range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities that build leadership, nurture talents and interests, and increase engagement with school.

4. *College and Career Exploration and Selection Processes* – Provide early and ongoing exposure to experiences and information necessary to make informed decisions when selecting a college or career that connects to academic preparation and future aspirations.
5. *College and Career Assessments* – Promote preparation, participation, and performance in college and career assessments by all students.
6. *College Affordability Planning* – Provide students and families with comprehensive information about college costs, options for paying for college, and the financial aid and scholarship processes and eligibility requirements, so they are able to plan for and afford a college education.
7. *College and Career Admissions Processes* – Ensure that students and families have an early and ongoing understanding of the college and career application and admissions processes so they can find the postsecondary options that are the best fit with their aspirations and interests.
8. *Transition from High School Graduation to College Enrollment* – Connect students to school and community resources to help the students overcome barriers and ensure the successful transition from high school to college.

The transformation of Granite District’s school counseling practices through implementation of the *Eight Components of College and Career Readiness* will only enhance opportunities for all students – especially students from underrepresented populations. School counselors will depend heavily on the comprehensive structure of their work and its program delivery components (guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support) to offer enriching activities, foster rigorous academic

preparation, encourage early college planning, and guide students and families through the college admissions and financial aid processes. To implement each component successfully, school counselors must use strategies that take into account the context of the diverse populations in their school and community; use multilevel interventions with students, parents, schools, and communities; and use data effectively.

Although the transformation will not be officially introduced and rolled out to counselors and administrators until the new school year 2011-2012, preliminary information sharing through professional development has occurred. In fact, some school counselors have taken what little information they have about the transformation process, and they are looking at available data and identifying students who have high scores on end of level CRTs and are not enrolled in advanced or honors courses. They plan to intervene on behalf of their identified students, validate their academic ability, and inspire and empower them to take more rigorous courses. Other counselors plan to review enrollment policies and practices that can be barriers for how students get into honors and/or AP courses.

Granite District's school counselors are excited and enthused by this new direction. They plan to take intentional action to change the future options for all of their students. School counselors can be strong advocates for their students and they can use their skills to drive positive change in schools. They can convey the expectation that all students, regardless of backgrounds and economic status, can succeed in college. School counselors can be leaders in advancing school reform and student achievement when they advocate for equitable educational access and rigorous academic preparation that leads to *college and career readiness for all students*.

References

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America's High School Graduates 2009. Retrieved April 13, 2010 from National Center for Education Statistics Web site: <http://nces.ed.gov/>

Utah State Board of Education. (2010). *Strengthening the Senior Year – College and Career Ready*. [Special Report]. Salt Lake City, UT: Utah State Office of Education

“I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training . . . every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country.”

President Barack Obama
Address to Congress
February 24, 2009

