

*The School Counselor's Role in
College and Career Readiness*

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College and career readiness continues to be a prominent theme in current school reform initiatives, educational research, politics (Presidential and Gubernatorial speeches and resolutions), community and state-wide initiatives (Prosperity 2020), labor market projections, and more. A sweeping concern across the country is that by 2020-2025 we will need a more educated workforce. It has been determined by local labor market analysts and Utah Workforce Services that by 2020, 66% of adult workers will need post-secondary education to meet job requirements and workforce needs. According to the 2010 census, 44.6% of the adult workforce had attained some postsecondary education and/or training. Educators can begin now to prepare and equip our students with the education, support and guidance, and the social capital they need to be ready for college and career.

Public education and higher education offices have made bold statements about the importance of college and career readiness needs. 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). The 2013 Utah State Legislature passed a joint resolution adopting the twin goals of 90% reading and math proficiency in elementary schools, and 66% of all Utah adults with a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2020. And, more importantly, Granite School District's charge and responsibility asserts: *Students will leave us prepared for college, career and life in the 21st century world.* All reports imply that students need to plan and prepare for high school completion and postsecondary education and training more deliberately and intentionally.

Before venturing into this discussion any further, please understand college has been redefined. College is now considered any higher education and training post high school from a

one-year certificate to a four-year degree and beyond. It is no longer just a four-year baccalaureate pathway. One cannot discount the benefits of education and training beyond high school; increased earning power and employment by nearly 50 percent. A two-year degree or even some college can have a positive impact on the ability to find and keep a job. Basically, the higher the education level, the greater chances of finding and keeping a job that offers better pay, more security, and better benefits like health insurance and retirement plans.

What will it take to prepare all students to be ready for college and career and the workforce needs of the near future? Clearly, improved classroom instruction and implementation of common core standards are critical elements. But from a school counseling perspective, individual/personalized planning is paramount to reaching college and career readiness goals. All students need more structured guidance and support in planning for college and career. Granite School District's school counselors are positioned 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 has been transformed, and in so doing counselors focus on *college and career readiness counseling for all students*. The catalyst for creating a college and career readiness department has been 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 provide 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.

Granite District’s school counseling program and practices through implementation of the *Eight Components of College and Career Readiness* have only enhanced opportunities for all students – especially students from underrepresented populations. School counselors depend heavily on the comprehensive program structure of their work and its four 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 use strategies that take into account the context of the diverse populations in their school and community; multilevel interventions with students, parents, schools, and communities; and use data effectively to inform their work.

Granite School District’s school counselors are committed to comprehensive counseling and guidance program implementation while at the same time strengthening the comprehensive program structure with new emphasis on college and career readiness. They

are experiencing a transformation of sorts as they adjust, modify, refashion, and refocus their work on college and career readiness and the data that support they are making progress. At the same time, school counselors are advocating for equitable educational access and rigorous academic preparation necessary for college and career readiness for all students.

School counselors use available data and to identify students who have high scores on end of level CRTs and are not enrolled in advanced or honors courses. They intervene on behalf of their identified students, validate their academic ability, and inspire and empower them to take more rigorous courses. They have also reviewed enrollment policies and practices that have been barriers to getting into honors, advanced, and/or AP courses. With the support of district leadership, practices are changing and students are “self-selecting” honors, advanced, and/or AP courses knowing the expectations and requirements of their choices. The exciting news is that counselors are seeing results. A powerful example of results data is evidenced by an increase in both the number of AP exams taken and percent passing from 2011 to 2012 (College Board). Data show Granite School District high schools increased the number of AP exams taken in 2011 by 500+ in 2012 and the overall passing rate increased form 67% to 69% for all exams taken. GSD counselors also conducted a college and career readiness student and parent survey in spring 2012. Over 6700 students and 2000 parents from all secondary schools participated. Data findings reported that all students and both senior high and junior high parents ranked preparing for college and career as: 1) the most important service from their school counselor, and 2) the service they need the most help with from their school counselor.

Lest we bask in the success of our work there is more to do. Scaling up the academic planning (individual college and career readiness planning meetings, CCR-Plan) process for

all students (especially in grades 6-12) must become a reality. As previously stated, students need more structured guidance and support in planning for college and career. It's a complex process. Counselors must plan and schedule adequate time for individual CCR-Plan meetings with all students and their parents. The CCR-Plan meetings will incorporate the *Eight Components of College and Career Readiness* as outlined by the College Board at the appropriate levels and also include the recommendations for college and career ready students as outlined by the State Board of Regents and the State Board of Education. But more explicitly, the CCR-Plan meetings must be part of a bigger process and the vehicle through which counselors ensure school success and college and career readiness for all students by high school graduation. This can be accomplished through careful and intentional planning for all students with focus on appropriate placement in school courses; opportunity to explore and review interests and abilities; setting and working toward goals aligned with interests and abilities; a four-year academic plan for school success also aligned with post high school goals; parents who are directly involved in the process; and, accurate information about all of the options and opportunities available. Counselors must facilitate classroom instruction and have ongoing conversations with students and their parents as part of the CCR-Plan process; not limited to just one meeting each school year.

The college and career readiness recommendations outlined by the Utah State Board of Regents and the Utah State Board of Education can be mapped out developmentally and sequentially to guide CCR-Plan discussions.

Build an Academic Foundation:

- Take challenging classes in high school to develop an understanding of different subjects and a solid academic preparation for college-level courses.

- Take Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or concurrent enrollment classes that lead to college credit and provide direct experience in college-level studies. Select concurrent enrollment classes that apply to general education, a certificate, or a degree that fits educational plans.

Develop Intellectual and Career Capacity:

- Select courses in high school that challenge the intellect and develop critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving strategies.
- Practice creative problem solving, increase written and oral communication and teamwork skills and become technology proficient.
- Establish time management and study habits to prepare for the greater amount of independent work required in college.

Evaluate Progress for College:

- Do the very best academic work possible in every class taken from middle school through the senior year of high school.
- Meet with a school counselor about course choices; ask for advice on enhancing college readiness skills.
- Throughout the middle and high school years, use external methods (such as the EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT sequence of tests, or Accuplacer) to determine progress toward college readiness.
- Adjust study habits and school course choices appropriately to address weaknesses and stay on track.

Explore Postsecondary Options:

- Visit at least one college campus; take a guided tour, and ask questions.

- Learn how much college costs. Submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by the priority deadline. Ask a Financial Aid advisor about scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study.
- Complete the steps necessary for college entry: take a college entrance exam (ACT or SAT) and submit an admission application by the priority deadline.

Granite School District's school counselors are excited and enthused by their critical involvement in preparing all students to be ready for college and career. They see the importance of taking intentional action to ensure equitable options and opportunities for all of their students. School counselors are strong advocates for students and they use their skills and expertise to drive positive change in schools. They can convey to school staff and communities 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*. Through their work with students and parents in the CCR-Plan process, school counselors play a significant role in preparing students to be ready for college and career.

References

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