

**Promising Practices Framework:
A Model of College Engagement in the Woodrow Wilson
Early College High School Initiative**

The promising practices framework identifies solutions to problem issues that limit high school graduation, college-readiness, and college-going. It focuses on three essential principles:

- ❖ *Rigorous and connected curriculum*
- ❖ *Rigorous and connected assessment*
- ❖ *Accurate information about college*

The framework emerged from two sources: 1) recent reports, research, and commentary on the negative impact of the systemic disconnects between K-12 and higher education; and 2) innovative practices, created by secondary school and college faculty and administration at Early College partnerships in the Woodrow Wilson Early College High School Initiative, that address the systemic disconnects locally.

THE PROBLEM ISSUES

Many of the problems in secondary education stem from the disconnect between our nation's systems of secondary schools and four-year universities. Not surprisingly, many of the solutions lie therein as well. Currently (and historically) in the United States, high schools and universities do not work hand in hand to build students' knowledge and skills. The chasm between universities and high schools has led to multiple problems – problems that inhibit, and in some cases altogether prohibit, students from attaining the college degree—recognized as the key to success in our society. This divide affects students from low socio-economic populations in particular.

Disconnected and Insufficiently Rigorous Curricula

High school curricula (and pedagogy) are not intellectually challenging enough and are not aligned with university curricular expectations. Thus, many students graduate from high school without the content knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college. At best, students must seek tutoring and additional supports in college. At worst, students are overwhelmed and drop out of college.

Multiple and Insufficiently Rigorous Assessments

High school and university grading scales, assessment tools, and graduation requirements are not aligned. High school grading scales for labs, essays, reports, short answers, and research papers are not designed to move progressively closer to university grading scales as the students move closer to graduation and college work. Furthermore, passing state high school exit exams does not prove college readiness, does not guarantee university admissions, and does not secure placement in college credit-bearing courses. Meeting high school graduation requirements does not automatically result in admission to state universities. Ultimately, students graduate from high school believing they have proven eligibility for admissions and/or certain college coursework without, in fact, being prepared or eligible. At best, costly remediation is necessary. At worst, students are not admitted to college at all.

Inaccurate Information About College

High school students may act under false assumptions about college-going. First generation college students are more dependent on their schools for information about college coursework requirements, college applications and admissions processes, college costs and financial aid, the structure of college courses and the increased personal responsibility for learning than students whose parents went to college. For example, students who do not understand the complicated financial aid application process may not

understand that a) they can, in fact, afford college; or b) they can reduce or defray the costs of college tuition in a number of ways. At best a student misses opportunities to defray costs. At worst, the student does not even apply to college.

THE SOLUTIONS

The Woodrow Wilson Early College High Schools provide potential solutions to each of these problems. By developing a model in which universities and high schools are engaged in meaningful dialogue on a regular and continued basis and in which they are focused on teaching and learning data, our Early College High Schools illuminate a path to improved secondary education and increased college access for underserved students.

Solving the problem of disconnected and insufficiently rigorous curriculum

Woodrow Wilson initiates, expects and supports four-year university faculty to engage in deep and on-going dialogues with secondary school faculty and focuses these dialogues on addressing the problems of disconnected and insufficiently rigorous curriculum. Rigorous and aligned or connected curriculum (6-14) is defined through the following characteristics:

- ❖ Appropriately teaches state high school standards and college admissions standards
- ❖ Gradually increases in level of challenge
- ❖ Mirrors more and more closely the assessments and feedback practices in universities
- ❖ Builds and continually deepens student abilities along argument, analysis and interpretation across academic disciplines

Woodrow Wilson is increasingly aware of the necessary participants and processes to ensure meaningful dialogue across the two institutions (see Roles & Responsibilities framework) and is increasingly able to provide models of 6-14 curriculum that demonstrate alignment and rigor in each of the specific academic disciplines.

Solving the problem of multiple and insufficiently rigorous assessments

Since what is measured in high stakes testing environments is increasingly what is taught, assessments are key in driving the level of challenge, rigor and alignment in the Early College High Schools. Woodrow Wilson supports the high school and university faculties in designing (within their academic disciplines) assessments that capture student understanding of requisite knowledge and skills. By providing support to each site, Woodrow Wilson scaffolds the knowledge and skills of the partnering institutions and enables them to work toward more appropriate and rigorous assessments. Additionally, the shared creation of curricula through dialogues, described above, provides forums in which issues of assessment are addressed.

Solving the problem of inaccurate information

Woodrow Wilson Early College High Schools work to ensure that information about college coursework requirements, college applications and admissions processes, college costs and financial aid, the structure of college courses and the increased personal responsibility for learning are communicated explicitly and repeatedly through college orientation events for every grade level, parents, teachers and administrators. Furthermore, Woodrow Wilson's expectation and support of the college inviting students to campus and bringing the campus to the high school allows high school students to begin to understand the culture of the college and, perhaps most importantly, to identify as a member of that culture. Graduate and undergraduate student mentors and tutors serve as advisors, translators and role models – each role helping students to navigate the admissions to and the culture of four year universities when they are admitted.

Early College Inventory

RECOMMENDATION AREA I: Engage college and high school faculty in the creation of rigorous and connected curricula.

- A. Develop a system for increasing curriculum intensity
1. What is your comprehensive plan for engaging students in rigorous learning early and progressively moving them to higher learning?
 2. Which underlying concepts are essential to developing deep understanding in each of the disciplines—science, math, language arts, and social science?
 3. What system of review and revision is in place to analyze your progress, and thus continually revise curriculum goals?
 4. How have you structured teaching practices so they are adaptable to student learning styles and result in reduced tracking and more heterogeneous grouping?
 5. How have you organized the curriculum so it remains relevant and responsive to students and promotes deep student engagement and ownership of their learning?
 6. What governance structures are in place to review college course and program approval, transfer policies, and college admission policies?
- B. Construct a model that extends new knowledge on teaching, learning and content into the classroom
1. What is your comprehensive plan for promoting faculty collaboration?
 2. What are the goals and outcomes of your extension model?
 3. What system of review and revision is in place to analyze progress towards these goals?
 4. What college incentives and high school structures support ongoing mentoring?
 5. What governance structure is in place to assess school, district and university resources that support professional development?

RECOMMENDATION AREA II: Engage college and high school faculty in the development of rigorous and connected assessment.

- A. Develop flexible and responsive assessment to guide classroom instruction
1. What is your comprehensive plan for using data for instructional decision-making?
 2. What core skills and other information are essential to track for each student?
 3. What system is in place to collect, store, and retrieve student learning data? What system of review is used to evaluate technical and training needs?
 4. How is data being used to guide day-to-day instruction? How is data being used to guide schoolwide decision-making?
 5. How have you structured teaching practices so they are responsive to needs of students as identified through assessment data and result in improved learning?
 6. What governance structure is in place to share data between the college and the high school?
- B. Use performance-based assessment to supplement standardized testing
1. What rubrics are in place to make learning goals clear to students?
 2. What kinds of additional assessment strategies—long and short term projects, exhibitions, portfolios, and senior internships—are employed to deepen and broaden the student assessment system?

3. How do you engage community members, teachers and students in review of student work to develop shared understanding of performance expectations?
 4. What system of review is in place to evaluate the rigor and relevance of performance-based standards and assessments and revise them?
- C. Develop meaningful assessments that map student learning required for a successful transition to college
1. What is your comprehensive plan to assess students' progression towards college readiness?
 2. What collaborative research or other projects are underway to ensure that what you are measuring does in fact prepare students for college?
 3. What structures are in place to align high school grading with college course grading?
 4. Are college entrance exams aligned with high school exit exams? If not, what assessment strategies—like the California State University 11th grade test—should be expanded to assist students and schools in preparing students for college?
 5. What governance structures are in place to evaluate readiness to enroll in an early college credit course and monitor the effectiveness of this policy?

RECOMMENDATION AREA III: Engage college and high school faculty in providing students and teachers with accurate information about college.

- A. Scaffold the college experience for students and teachers
1. What is your comprehensive plan for introducing students to the college experience?
 2. What strategies are employed to gradually break down the barriers between high school and college, and thus prepare students for the rigor of college?
 3. What structures are in place to counsel students on college selection and applications?
 4. What strategies are used to recruit and prepare college faculty for early college teaching and school governance roles?
 5. What permanent structures are in place to engage students in the college campus culture or to bring college faculty into the high school culture?
 6. What governance and planning structures exist to ensure that college and high school faculty are working together on the academic program, student supports, and evaluation?
- B. Instill in students habits of persistence and resiliency
1. What is your comprehensive plan for conveying the message to students and their parents that success is possible and giving up is not an option?
 2. What classroom and school-wide strategies are in place to build with students an attitude to stay with a task until they succeed?
 3. What systems are in place to assess students' emotional and social development?
 4. What system of review and revision are in place to evaluate the supports that best help students meet high expectations?
 5. What strategies are deployed to engage parents and community in supporting students?
 6. What governance structures between the college and high school exist to provide comprehensive support to students as they take early college courses?

For more information about the Woodrow Wilson Early College High School Initiative, including resources for colleges and universities, please visit this website: <http://www.woodrow.org/EarlyCollege/index.php>