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**Core Function:** High School/Opportunity to Learn

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**Effective Practice****Prepare students for postsecondary options**

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**Overview:** High schools must provide key programming to prepare students for college and/or career. They must offer rigorous coursework, convey the expectation that all students can be successful, and provide the appropriate level of support to ensure their success. Rigorous academic preparation may include access to AP courses and/or IB, early college, and dual enrollment programs. Predictive data allow schools to provide early interventions and supports such as tutoring, maximizing out-of-school time, and mentoring. Information and programming for college and career readiness is particularly critical for low-income, minority, and first-generation college students who often lack the “social capital” to participate in effective decision-making within the college preparation process. All students need career guidance and support, and comprehensive programs such as work-based learning and career academies allow students to experience various work environments and vocational settings while also completing college preparatory coursework to ensure they are well prepared for whatever future they choose.

**Evaluate Your Practice:** What process does your school use to offer dual credit, AP, and IB classes, and how is equitable access for all students ensured? What process does your school use to provide early interventions in academic and supplemental supports for all students challenged by rigorous college readiness curricula? What supports does your school need from the LEA to implement these supportive structures? How does your school help students without significant social capital (e.g., first generation college students) navigate the college-going experience? What does your school do to provide students with hands on opportunities to investigate a variety of careers and occupations? How can your school build outside career and occupation connections for students? What protocols does your school have to assist students in choosing and applying to their best match colleges and universities?

### *Introduction*

While high school graduation and college-going rates have increased over the past 10 years, significant gaps still exist between minority and majority students and between students living in lower versus higher income communities (Strauss, 2016). High schools must provide supportive programs and structures to ensure that students are capable of successfully transitioning from the high school setting into college and/or a productive career after graduation. Initiatives that help encourage and provide resources for students to pursue postsecondary education or careers are particularly essential in high-poverty communities where many students lack these resources and connections. Students need opportunities to take rigorous coursework, learn about college and career options, and have support throughout the process in order to make decisions that are appropriate for them. As many students, especially in disadvantaged communities, are the first in their families to attend college, schools cannot assume that they inherently have this information or know-how. Therefore, schools need to provide supplemental services, experiences, and opportunities for students to help them be ready for the college or career that best suits them.

*How can high schools provide academic rigor, support, and guidance to prepare students for a variety of postsecondary options?*

In order to enhance college/career readiness, schools must have high expectations for *all* students to achieve, provide opportunities to pursue higher-level coursework, and have in place supports for students so that they can succeed (Adelman, 2006). In some schools a culture shift must occur to aim to provide a college preparatory experience for students. Messaging and opportunities around the new norms and values of the school must be available to all students and shared with parents, and all staff must internalize these norms and work to help each student have the

opportunity to go to college (Schneider, 2006). In addition, rigorous coursework and appropriate supports and guidance are essential to ensuring students are college and/or career ready.

### **Opportunities and support for rigorous coursework.**

Research shows that enrollment in advanced coursework increases the likelihood of attending college (Coca, Johnson, & Kelley-Kemple, 2011; Kelley-Kemple, Proger, & Roderick, 2011). Unfortunately, low-income students are typically not steered towards taking these courses, leading to lower rates of college attendance and completion (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Removing the “opportunity gap” and increasing access to rigorous coursework for low-income or high poverty students is therefore an essential task of educators. *Advanced Placement (AP)* is a program of individual college-level courses that can, depending on students’ exam scores and requirements of postsecondary institutions, substitute for college credits. *International Baccalaureate (IB)* programs provide a holistic experience of academic rigor and personal growth to juniors and seniors (Kyburg, Hertberg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007; Mayer, 2008). IB programs require significant teacher training and integrated courses in six subject areas that lead to special diplomas for graduating students (Burris, Wiley, Weiner, & Murphy, 2008). A large study of the IB program in Chicago revealed that students participating were significantly more likely to attend and persist in college and to report that they were well prepared to succeed and excel in their coursework (Coca et al., 2011). AP and IB courses can contribute to disrupting high-end achievement gaps; however, students from disadvantaged and rural communities are often missing out (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Theokas & Saaris, 2013). Educators should remove any unnecessary barriers to enrollment, increase student awareness of the courses and their importance, and ensure high expectations for enrollment of traditionally underrepresented student groups (Theokas & Saaras, 2013).

High schools can also increase students’ access to rigorous courses by offering *Dual Enrollment* programs. Dual Enrollment programs allow high school students to take courses at a local community college and earn college credit. These programs provide students with more rigorous or discipline-focused course options that may not be available at their high schools, especially for those who are interested in vocational or technical programming (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Dual enrollment

programs have been associated with positive outcomes such as high school graduation and college enrollment rates, college grade point averages, and progress toward college completion (Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong & Bailey, 2007). Early college programs, which typically serve high-needs populations, allow students to pursue college credit during high school, usually at no cost to their families. Some research has shown that early college students outperform their peers in high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates (Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Garet, Knudson, & Hoshen, 2014). *Online courses* can allow students to take courses (e.g., AP courses) that they might not otherwise be able to access, either because of lack of in-person availability or time. Online courses can be accessed “anytime, anywhere,” allowing students to work at their own pace and from any location. These courses can provide personalized learning experiences for students and enhance their engagement and academic performance (Patrick, Kennedy, & Powell, 2013).

Initial data on students entering the school is essential to understanding students’ contexts and backgrounds prior to placing them in their first high school classes. Predictive analytics systems that determine college readiness using student information (such as course rigor and academic performance) enable teachers to develop early interventions that target specific student needs (Education Commission of the States, 2014). High schools must also use this performance data to help provide the proper scaffolding or system of academic supports for students to succeed in rigorous courses (Mayer, 2008; Tierney et al., 2009). High schools should not expect all students to earn college credits or attain IB diplomas but should provide exposure to this coursework and the supports needed for them to do well (Mayer, 2008). These supports include peer or staff tutoring, which have been shown to be cost- and time-effective interventions (Mayer, 2008; Tierney, et al., 2009). Maximizing out-of-school time—such as afterschool, Saturdays, or summer—for this purpose can be especially helpful for students who need extra time and exposure to the material they are struggling to master (Mayer, 2008). These academic supports should be supplemented by social supports, including adult mentoring programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) that provide cultural capital to low-income students to encourage college-going behaviors (Bernhardt, 2013; Black et al., 2008; Peabody, 2012). Additional supports include smaller learning com-

munities and peer advisory groups that allow students to bond with their peers and with trusted staff advisors and instructors (Bangser, 2008; Schneider, 2006).

### **Support and guidance for college/career pathways.**

Students need supportive and informative networks as they plan their transition out of high school. There is a significant “social capital gap” between students who have access to critical information and support on how to prepare and effectively participate in college/career decision-making and those who do not (Roderick, Nagao, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). Low-income, minority, and potential first-generation college students are most often lacking information about college and career planning (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009). *All* students should have access to individualized college and career counseling, standardized test preparation, college visits and college fairs, and support in completing applications and financial aid forms (Schneider, 2006). Bell et al. (2009) found that as students progress through high school, their reliance on families for information about college decreases, and the school becomes the primary source of information; therefore, trusting relationships with school personnel are critical for college and career readiness. Programs that increase access to college advising have been shown to increase college matriculation and receipt of scholarships (Bettinger et al., 2010). In addition, mentoring/advising programs such as Talent Search that provide close-age peer advisors have been shown to positively affect graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment (Cahalan, et al., 2004). Further support for college preparation can be provided for students financially. Recent “college promise” programs that connect high-poverty schools with local community colleges encourage students to strive towards postsecondary education by providing financial incentives ranging from savings accounts to free two-year tuition (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

High school students need information, experiences, and skills that will help them navigate the start of their careers in a directed and purposeful way. All students need access to these purposeful career development efforts, regardless of future plans, abilities or disabilities, gender, and ethnicity, and to have their individual needs considered and met (Haimson & Deke, 2003). Typical career development activities include job shadowing, group worksite tours, employer presentations, career counsel-

ing, and career interest inventories. More comprehensive programs include:

*Work-based Learning (WBL)* provides vocational or technical experience in work settings. About 72% of U.S. high schools provide WBL opportunities for students (NCES, 2011). WBL has been found to help students apply and extend classroom learning, increase motivation and understanding, explore careers, and develop critical understanding of the work environment (Brown, 2003; Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein, Bempechat, & Seltzer, 2010). High school students who participate in WBL activities achieve at the four-year postsecondary level as well as or better than students who do not participate in these activities (Swail & Kampits, 2004).

*Career academies* provide a systematic way to connect students with vocational knowledge and work experiences. Career academies are typically “schools within schools,” where students work with a team of teachers around a common vocational theme (e.g., healthcare, technology occupations). The school forms partnerships with businesses and other organizations within the community who provide employees who work in these areas to serve as mentors, guest speakers, and internship providers (Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 2010). Coursework is designed to promote college readiness and ensure that students earn the credits they need to graduate and attend college, and academic rigor is equally important to the vocational experiences provided. Research has shown that career academy students had higher rates of on-time graduation, attendance, and engagement, as well as lower dropout rates, when compared with similar peers not in an academy (Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Stern et al., 2010). To provide implementation support for schools implementing career academies, the Exploring Career and College Options (ECCO) program provides students with a more structured series of seminars around their college and career visits to help them establish connections to program components. ECCO was found to greatly boost the capacity of schools to provide the non-academic resources that have been found to be most influential for students’ future paths (Visher, Altuna, & Safran, 2013).

**Indicators to Support the Effective Practice**

The school provides all students with opportunities to enroll in and master rigorous coursework for college and career readiness.

The school provides all students with academic supports (e.g., supplemental interventions) when needed to enable them to succeed in rigorous courses designed for college and career readiness

The school provides all students with supports and guidance to prepare them for college and careers (e.g., career awareness activities, career exploration, college visits, advising).

All teachers integrate college and career guidance and supports relevant to their subject areas into their taught curricula.

The school routinely provides all students with information and experience in a variety of career pathways

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