

How Well Is Your School Preparing Students for College?

A Sampling from the College Pathways Tool

Developed by Carol Ascher, Anne T. Henderson, and Cindy Maguire
Community Involvement Program, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

How well is your high school preparing students, especially low-income students, to graduate on time ready for college-level work -- and with a college or technical school acceptance letter in hand? This new tool can help you answer that question.

The College Pathways Tool is based on a study of thirteen high-performing New York City high schools called *Beating the Odds*, by Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire. These schools admitted ninth-graders with high poverty rates and far-below-average reading and math scores, but produced four-year graduation rates and college attendance above the district average, and well above other high schools serving similar students.

This five-part tool will help anyone with a stake in improving high schools assess the extent to which a school has adopted practices that researchers have discovered in high-performing high schools. Anyone interested in improving high school performance can use it to assess a school's college pathways program. It's been designed for use by school improvement teams, school reform organizations, district staff, teacher unions and associations, professional development specialists, researchers, student organizations, community organizers, district leaders, and policy-makers.

The complete tool is available for free download at:
www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/CollegePathwaysRubric.pdf

What is in the tool?

1. The **framework** identifies indicators of good practice for four key features of BTO schools in their attempts to reach all students.
2. The **rubric** describes three levels of performance, or evidence of implementation, for each indicator. The levels range from practices that reach all students to those at the beginning stages.
3. **Specific practices at BTO schools** offers examples of programs and practices for each indicator that the schools have used to help students achieve strong results.
4. A **blank rubric** is provided for use in a self-assessment. It lists the indicators with space for recording evidence of implementation in your school.
5. A short **resource directory** provides links to more information about practices or programs being used in the BTO schools, College Pathways programs, and useful publications or resources.

Framework for the College Pathways Rubric

I. Promoting Academic Rigor

1. **Shared standards for rigor** in courses are developed and maintained through ongoing faculty meetings and professional development.
2. **Uniform course content and teaching quality are monitored** and supported through classroom visits by the principal, teacher colleagues, and other instructional leaders.
3. Students are offered **college prep and AP** classes, as well as **tech/career courses with academic content**.
4. **Students' progress** is closely monitored.

II. A Network of Timely Supports

5. The teacher role is expanded to make an **adult available to students**.
6. Advisories or other structure(s) include **detailed college-going and career objectives** so that students understand how to reach their post-secondary education goals.
7. There is a structure that **coordinates academic and technical courses with requirements for college**, post-secondary technical education, and future careers.
8. **Timely, short-term interventions** – such as tutoring, extra assistance, and extended day/week/and year programs – allow students to catch up quickly.
9. Multiple **strategies** are offered **to improve** students' **test-taking skills**.

III. A Culture of College Access

10. Students (and families) are **exposed to college** through college visits and college fairs.
11. **Parents are involved** in planning and supporting the goal of attending college.
12. **Information on required tests and courses, college admissions process, financial aid, and specific colleges in the area is available to students (and families)** including undocumented students, starting in ninth grade.
13. There is a **“college office”** or other place for students (and families) to get information, fill out applications, and receive counseling on attending college.
14. **Visits by community members, graduates, and college reps** show students the possibility and value of going to college.

IV. Effective Use of Data

15. Staff **track four- and five-year graduation rates**, and percentages of students applying to, and attending, two- and four-year colleges.
16. **PSAT/NMSQT and SAT/ACT** test-taking rates are monitored.
17. Data on financial-aid and test scores are received by students.
18. The school keeps track of **graduates' experiences and retention rates** in the different colleges they attend.

Note: The 18 indicators listed here are based on findings from *Beating the Odds: How Thirteen NYC Schools Bring Low-Performing Ninth-Graders to Timely Graduation and College Enrollment* (Providence, RI and New York: Brown University, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2007). www.annenberginstitute.org/CIP/publications/2007/beating-the-odds.pdf

A Page from the Rubric

III. A Culture of College Access

Indicators	Evidence of implementation		
	Reaching all students	Reaching most students	Beginning stages
10. Students (and families) are exposed to college through college visits and college fairs.	The school hosts annual college and career fairs and sponsors college visits for all students. Direct linkages to specific colleges (including former students) offer clear options. School also works with organizations that mentor students to attend college.	Events and activities such as college fair and overnight trips to college are offered to students.	Exposure to college is limited to certain students.
11. Parents are involved in planning and supporting the goal of attending college.	The school understands that parents' support for college-going is critical and offers parent nights, workshops, and assistance with financial aid applications.	The school makes several attempts to reach out and inform parents.	The school has sporadic contact with parents.
12. Information on required tests and courses, college admissions process, financial aid, and specific colleges in the area is available to students (and families), including undocumented students, starting in ninth grade.	The school makes it clear to new ninth-graders that the next four years will involve disciplined academic work aimed at graduation and post-secondary education. All faculty emphasize that serious careers depend on post-high school education and specify which programs are needed for specific careers.	The school gets out information about college over time. Most faculty emphasize the importance of college with students.	Serious information about college starts in eleventh grade, or with students most likely to succeed in college.
13. There is a “college office” or other place for students (and families) to get information, fill out applications, and receive counseling on attending college.	The school devotes a prominent physical space to the college-going process. This includes a college counseling office that shows pictures of colleges and offers a quiet, supportive space where students can work on their applications.	School promotes college in various ways, including visits to students in class.	The school has a counselor students can approach.
14. Visits by community members, graduates, and college reps show students the possibility and value of going to college.	The school is connected to community organizations, which provide critical resources such as service-learning, grant-writing, and mentoring.	Community connections offer helpful resources.	Contacts with community groups and alumni are sporadic

A Sampling of Practices and Programs from BTO Schools

III. A Culture of College Access

10. Exposure to college for all students

- College visits made each year to several private and public schools. Students on each campus facilitate connections. While at these schools, students also visit five or six other universities.
- School hosts visits from colleges as well as a career day with professionals for all grades.
- **College Now** program covers both academic and technical courses.
- College Fair is held every year with seventy colleges, including Howard University. The school also holds a Hispanic college fair.
- Every student takes the PSAT.
- Annual one-week college tour to Black, Southern colleges, is funded by Colgate and other foundations.
- College trips are organized every year to local college with which school has a special relationship.
- Counselors lobby for undocumented students, steer them toward nonfederal scholarships.

11. Strategies to involve parents in goal of attending college

- School builds trust with families to overcome their reluctance to fill out financial aid forms with confidential information about family income.
- A “gifted” parent coordinator (an alumnus of the school) trains parents through parent academies.
- School hosts forums on financial aid for families.
- Family members serve as paraprofessionals and as informal liaisons between school and parents.
- Evening programs are offered for families on filling out college applications.
- Parents are invited to the college fair. In addition, advisors meet with parents four times a year and parents must pick up report cards at school. The school leadership team includes parents.
- The Freshman orientation, with its message of college prep for all students, includes parents.
- School held a financial aid fair for families and has a parent book club.
- Letters are sent home to parents to notify them on Regents test. Parent coordinator and counselor hold evening and weekend meetings for parents, bringing in experts on financial aid – almost half the parents attend.
- Parent coordinator reaches out to students first, then develops relations with families. He makes nightly phone calls when students are absent.
- Parent coordinator held a workshop for parents about undocumented status and college access.

12. Information starting in ninth grade for all students (and families)

- Guidance counselors meet each year with students to sign off on transcripts. Letter goes home with transcript and describes what’s missing.
- Technical students create passports to get into internships, which is a pre-college requirement for technical colleges.
- Starting at ninth-grade orientation, all students attend grade assemblies on tests, college admissions process and requirements, financial aid, area colleges, and requirements for specific careers. All students fill out graduation requirement forms with counselors.
- Guidance counselor is the “point person” for information on college, but info also given to advisors. The school has blocked military recruitment.
- College advisor (also the English teacher) and part-time counselor both help with essays. “Whatever needs to be done, we step up to do it.”
- English classes help students with college essays and help prep for applications and Regents’ test