

## Toolkit for Developing a College-Going Culture in a Middle School

### Priority Summary for Hope Prep

Part I. Matrix of Hope Prep’s strengths and weaknesses in nine college-going culture components (from McDonough, n.d.)

*Data from interviews with faculty and staff, student focus groups, student and parent surveys*

Components	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>College Talk:</b> A college culture includes clear, ongoing communications with students about what it takes to get into college, so that they understand what is required and expected of them if they want to stay on a college path. Faculty and administrators share their own experiences and discover their own assumptions about their roles in preparing students for college. Through this College Talk, a college culture becomes clearer and the college preparation process becomes more effective. (pg. 10)</p>	<p>Faculty, staff, and students all consistently stated that they held high expectations of all students.</p> <p>School had alumni in college return to campus to talk with students and parents.</p>	<p>Faculty often could not point to examples of how they integrated college into their classroom beyond decorations or saying to students, “When you get to college you’ll have to…”</p>
<p><b>Clear Expectations:</b> All students are to be prepared for a full range of post-secondary options. The goals of this preparation must be clearly defined, communicated, and a part of the daily culture of the school, so that students, family, teachers, administrators and staff recognize the role that each goal plays in preparing students for college. (pg. 12)</p>	<p>School held high academic standards for all students.</p>	<p>The school tends to focus on improving state standardized test scores more than in understanding what academic and non-academic skills students will need to be successful in college.</p>
<p><b>Information and Resources:</b> Students must have access to information and resources related to college. This information must be comprehensive, up-to-date and easily</p>	<p>Middle school students are able to attend college prep sessions targeted toward high school students.</p>	<p>The college counselor unable to focus on college counseling (focused more on guidance counseling).</p>

<p>accessible. Although counselors are likely to have the primary responsibility for collecting and maintaining resources, school faculty should be aware of what's available and incorporate it into daily classroom practices. (p. 14)</p>	<p>School has a college counselor.</p>	<p>The school does not provide college-focused information targeted towards middle school students.</p>
<p><b>Comprehensive Counseling Model:</b> In a school with a successful college culture, all counselors are college counselors and are informed about college issues. All student interactions with counseling staff become opportunities for college counseling. All decisions about students' coursework and careers are made with all post-secondary options in mind. (p. 16)</p>	<p>The school has a college counselor who works with students in middle school and high school grades.</p> <p>While the college counselor does not focus on college counseling, the academic advising she conducts is with the aim to prepare students (at least academically) for college.</p>	<p>The college counselor is unable to focus on college counseling (focused more on guidance counseling).</p>
<p><b>Testing and Curriculum:</b> Standardized tests like the PSAT and SAT are critical steps on the path to college. Students must be knowledgeable about these tests and be aware of testing dates. Moreover, the school must make a commitment to providing the resources necessary to ensure both that students are prepared for the tests and that testing fees are not a barrier to any student taking the tests. This includes ensuring access to preparatory coursework, like algebra and geometry; and access to coursework that ensures their eligibility to apply to college upon graduation. (p. 18)</p>	<p>89% of students realized they'll have to take a special test to get into certain colleges and 76% realized they'll have to take certain courses in high school to get into local public universities.</p> <p>All students expected to take Algebra I in eighth grade.</p> <p>Based on conversations with the college counselor and notices on the school's walls, there seems to be significant preparation for the SAT, PSAT, and ACT for the high school students.</p>	<p>Only 56% of middle school students have an idea of what courses they'll have to take in high school to prepare them for college.</p>
<p><b>Faculty Involvement:</b> School faculty must be active partners in the creation and</p>	<p>Faculty shared similarly high expectations for all students.</p>	<p>Faculty consistently noted that they wished they could do more to support students in</p>

<p>maintenance of a college culture. They should be kept up-to-date on important information related to college knowledge (such as admissions requirements and types of institutions) and be provided with ongoing professional development so they can play an active role in preparing students to aspire to, apply to, and attend college. This should include integrating college information and the very idea of college into regular classroom activities. Faculty must make themselves available to parents to answer any questions and make decisions about students' academic futures. (p. 20)</p>	<p>Faculty were very interested in knowing and doing more for students in promoting college readiness.</p>	<p>preparing for college, but weren't sure what they should do (and noted that they didn't have time to do more).</p> <p>Language barriers between faculty and parents limit non-essential conversations.</p> <p>Faculty did not receive college information from administrators or the college counselor.</p>
<p><b>Family Involvement:</b> Parents and/or other family members must become informed partners in the process of building a college culture. They must be provided with opportunities to gain knowledge about the college planning process, and be made aware that their children are "college material." The counseling staff must make themselves available to family members to answer any questions and help make decisions about students' academic futures. (p. 21)</p>	<p>Parents are sent a newsletter with updates on school activities.</p> <p>The school calls parents via a mass-phone-message delivery system. It was indicated that this was used regularly.</p> <p>Parents are invited to school-wide parent meetings.</p>	<p>Dialogue between the school and parents seems limited; parent attendance at school-wide meetings is generally low (although it is not clear if these meetings promote dialogues).</p>
<p><b>College Partnerships:</b> Forming active links between the school and local colleges and universities is vital to the creation of a college culture. This facilitates the organization of college-related activities, such as field trips to college campuses or college fairs, and the</p>	<p>Early College connects the school with a community college that offers dual credit courses for students (including a handful of middle school students).</p> <p>Students are encouraged to apply for summer</p>	<p>The school has a partnership with a four-year university, but this relationship seems to be nonexistent.</p> <p>Posters on the wall in the high school wings indicate that there may be colleges that visit</p>

<p>provision of academic enrichment programs, all of which raise awareness of and aspirations toward college. (p. 24)</p>	<p>enrichment programs, which are often sponsored by colleges.</p>	<p>the school.</p> <p>The school does not have college trips, college fairs, etc. for the middle school students.</p> <p>Although the college partnerships have enabled students to take dual enrollment courses taught by college faculty, the partnerships have not brought other college resources to the school that could increase the college culture, such as identifying expectations for college readiness, collaborating with college faculty on curriculum development and alignment, common planning of a coordinated scope and sequence, coordinating student supports, providing non-credit academic workshops, etc. (See <a href="#">Ensuring College Success: Scaffolding Experiences for Students and Faculty in an Early College School</a> to learn how one early college school executes this.)</p>
<p><b>Articulation:</b> Students should have a seamless experience during which a college message is communicated from kindergarten through 12th grade. As such, there must be ongoing communication between counselors and teaching staff among all schools in a feeder group. Work being done at each school site should be coordinated with activities at other levels. (p. 25)</p>	<p>Students share an understanding that they are expected to attend college.</p> <p>The school has set aside time for professional development one afternoon each week.</p> <p>The principal meets weekly with each teacher to discuss lesson planning and covering state standards.</p>	<p>There are no consistent conversations between staff (across and within departments, grade levels, and staff-counselors-administrators aside from the principal).</p>

Part II. Highest level priorities to support a college-going culture:

- A. **Develop curricula that support the college-going culture.** Content-wise, these curricula would not only have high level academics, but also begin to systematically and deliberately introduce students to information about college and the college-going process. Moreover, these curricula would provide activities that excite and motivate students.
- B. **More fully-integrate college counseling into the school.** The school's college counselor should be assured the time to focus on how to support students in preparing for college and helping the school community (including faculty, staff, parents) support students.
- C. **Connect to the families.** The school needs to push further its relationship with parents. This relationship should go beyond passing along information but should be a partnership in support of students.

Reference:

McDonough, P. M. (n.d.). *Building a College Culture: Needs, Goals, Principles, and a Case Study*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from [http://collegetools.berkeley.edu/resources.php?cat\\_id=9](http://collegetools.berkeley.edu/resources.php?cat_id=9)