

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

**Background Information**

**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.