Southwest College and Career Readiness Research Partnership (SWCCR)

Partnership goals

The Arkansas Vision for Excellence in Education includes two goals related to college and career readiness:

- ▸ Each student will meet or exceed educational milestones along pathways to graduate prepared for college, a career, and community engagement.
- ▸ Each student will be actively engaged in college, career preparation, military service, and/or competitive employment one year after graduation.

This vision is also at the core of the Arkansas Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. To support the state's mission to help all students graduate from high school ready for college, a career, and community engagement, REL Southwest is partnering with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to support the following goals:

- ▸ Develop and refine indicators of college and career readiness and postsecondary success for Arkansas students.
- ▸ Build state and district capacity to use data systems and data visualization techniques to understand Arkansas students' progress as communicated through Student Success Plans designed to prepare students for college and a career.

Projects

Through the partnership with REL Southwest, members engage in a learning cycle that includes training, coaching, technical support, applied research, and engagement activities to support the goals of the SWCCR partnership. This work reinforces member capacity to use research in solving high-leverage education challenges. To learn more about our current projects, please visit https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/partnerships/swccr.aspx.

Over the course of the partnership, REL Southwest and members will support Arkansas's priorities to increase data literacy and deepen understanding around college and career readiness. Through partnership-driven research and technical support, REL Southwest staff will support the state by identifying indicators that most accurately predict postsecondary readiness and success as defined by ADE, along with hosting trainings for state education staff to support communication and decisionmaking related to indicators for postsecondary readiness and success.

Engaging our region

Engaging stakeholders is crucial to the REL mission of translating research into practice. Sharing research, learnings from training and coaching sessions, and insights from partnership members with stakeholders in the region is critical to SWCCR's mission to build data literacy and understanding around college and career readiness. For example, REL Southwest produced a blog post highlighting the partnership and the connection between applied research and actionable trainings.

Visit the REL Southwest website and follow us on Twitter to learn more about our work. You can also sign up for the REL Southwest Spotlight newsletter for regular updates and browse our upcoming events.

Identifying indicators that predict college and career readiness

More than a third of students leave high school without acquiring the skills to be ready for college or a career.[1] Postsecondary readiness rates are thought to be even lower among students of color and students with disabilities.[2]

To better understand what helps or hinders college and career readiness, researchers and policymakers are working together to identify data-driven indicators that correlate to a higher likelihood of postsecondary readiness and success.[3,4]

Research has highlighted several high school indicators that can be useful for identifying and supporting students who may be off track, along with predicting positive student outcomes. These indicators include the following[5,6]:

▶ Strong academic content knowledge.

▶ Effective use of cognitive strategies (for example, problem formation, interpretation, and communication).

▶ Metacognitive skills or "soft skills" (for example, goal setting, persistence, and time management).

▶ Specific knowledge and skills about starting college or a career (for example, being aware of financial aid options and understanding workplace norms).

States can use these indicators to provide districts with information about students who may be off track for graduating college or career ready from high school. In turn, districts can use this information to provide individualized supports and help students get back on track.

Arkansas is recognized as a leader in developing rich educational data systems, such as the state longitudinal data system and data warehouse, which includes reports on student enrollment in specific courses, student dropout and withdrawal, school configurations, teacher certification, and more. ADE is now focusing on strategies to connect data elements and increase staff capacity to understand and act on data. In addition, ADE is working to refine the state's set of college and career readiness indicators using a solid research evidence base and a plan for communicating about key indicators. The SWCCR partnership's work on these indicators can inform refinements to the state's ESSA plan and support for college and career readiness.

References

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