

# What Works Clearinghouse

## Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do

Webinar Event Transcript – October 8, 2009



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## **HELPING STUDENTS NAVIGATE THE PATH TO COLLEGE: WHAT HIGH SCHOOLS CAN DO**

**WWC Webinar  
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### **Patrick**

Welcome to today's webinar. I'm glad to have you all here. Today's webinar will take the following format. We will begin with presentations from each of our panelists, and our panelists are Jill Constantine, who is Deputy Director of the What Works Clearinghouse and Associate Director of Research with Mathematica Policy Research; Matt Gandal, Executive Vice President of Achieve; and Nicole Farmer Hurd, Office of Undergraduate Admissions, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and the Executive Director of the National College Advising Corps. One quick note – I'm sorry. The order will be Jill Constantine, then Nicole Farmer Hurd, then Matt Gandal. And when they have given their presentations, we will move on to a question and answer session. And if you would like to submit any questions to the panelists, you can enter them in the Q&A box down in the bottom right-hand corner. If we do not have time to get to all of those questions, please email them to me. I'll provide my email address at the end of the webinar, and you can send them directly to me and we will try to answer them in written form. If you have any technical questions, you can address our very wonderful producer, Christian; and with that, I will send it over to Jill to introduce us to the What Works Clearinghouse and talk about the latest practice guide on college readiness. Jill?

## **Jill Constantine**

Thank you, Patrick. Good afternoon, everyone, or good morning, if that's what time it is where you are. Thank you very much for joining us to discuss this topic that's of interest and importance to all of us. As Patrick indicated, I'm a Deputy Director of the What Works Clearinghouse, so I'm going to be playing two roles here. I'm going to provide an overview of practice guides and I'm going to focus specifically on the process of how we get to recommendations. I was also a panelist for the guide we'll be focusing on today, *Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do*. So I'll read off a series of remarks on that, speaking from my perspective as a researcher on the panel.

I'm going to start by giving an overview of the What Works Clearinghouse. I'm not sure how familiar people are with the Clearinghouse. You all made it to this, so I'm hoping you have some familiarity, but I just want to provide a little background. The Clearinghouse was established in 2002 to provide educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public—all of you—with a central and trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education, so the phrase to be a central and trusted source of scientific evidence is central to the mission. And how we implement that mission is based on a few pillars you see listed below. First we set standards for education research. Specifically, we designate which studies of programs, curricula, services, anything you're doing in your schools, we have standards for which studies are well designed, that give us confidence that the services that you're trying, and not something else about your students or the school, have really improved outcomes for your students. In addition to that, we conduct extensive and systematic reviews of all the

research in an area, so we don't rely on just one researcher's input. We search the area broadly so that we can be confident that our research summaries are not reflecting one particular point of view. So our reviews are based on standards and are based on systematic reviews, and the way we make it central is that what the WWC really is, is a website – [whatworks.ed.gov](http://whatworks.ed.gov). You can go to that website and you can find all the information that we produce on different education interventions, from the kind of services we'll be talking about today to reviews of particular curricula.

So let me talk particularly about a practice guide, one of our very popular products. Practice guides are evidence-based, research-based recommendations and strategies for classrooms and schools. All WWC products are based on the evidence in an area, but the key feature of practice guides is that they include specific recommendations that a panel of researchers and educators think schools and districts should try. So let me talk a little bit about the process for how we come to the recommendations. So the recommendations are designed to be ways to address educational challenges, such as what we'll talk about today, getting students ready for college and making sure they access college, based on the strongest research available. What happens is a set of panelists, researchers and educators, practitioners come together. We develop a set of recommendations, based on the research. The recommendations are specific. We'll provide an overview summary of what we think schools and districts should try, but then we'll include concrete steps for how you implement those recommendations. The other key feature is that we'll weight the strength of the evidence supporting those recommendations. That rating is based on a combination of the breadth of the research, or how much of it there is, how many

different contexts it occurs in, and then also the quality of the research. And then the final important section we present, since we have researchers and educators with practical experience on the panel, we indicate the common roadblocks to implementing the recommendations and we suggest solutions.

So let me talk a little bit more about strength of the evidence supporting recommendations. We have three categories for levels of evidence. Our top category is strong. Strong means the panel has high confidence that implementing this recommendation will work for your students. Okay? That high confidence is based on the fact that there are several strong studies with very high-quality research design, and they've been conducted in a variety of places and a variety of contexts. Our next level of evidence is moderate – we have some evidence that this recommendation will work for your students. The reason it's not as high as the top category is usually either because we don't have quite as many high-quality studies or we don't have the breadth. We may have some high-quality studies, but they're not done in as many places. So, for example, we might not be sure that a recommendation works in all contexts or the research base isn't there to indicate that. And then our last category is low. That means this recommendation is not supported by a specific strong research base. Okay? Sometimes people have some confusion about what that means. It doesn't mean that recommendation won't work and the panel is recommending it because we think you should use it. It just means we're not pointing to specific studies to support that research. We're either inferring across studies, we're extrapolating, there may be some studies that just don't have a very strong research design, so it's more suggested evidence, or it's based on practical experience.

Okay, so all of our practice guides, as are all the What Works products are available at [whatworks.ed.gov](http://whatworks.ed.gov). If you go to that website, you can come to this section. I'm trying to highlight this here. There we go. Oh, not a very good color. Sorry. You go to Publications and Products, and that will bring up a list of products and that will include practice guides. You'll see the list of all the practice guides. You can just link on those and PDF files. The guide will appear. You can also click on this link. We are always looking to educators, practitioners for ideas for practice guides, so you can also click on this link here and suggest a topic for a practice guide.

Okay, I'm going to shift gears a little bit here and talk about my experience as a panelist on the practice guide, and I'm going to focus specifically on how we use research to inform practice, and in particular in developing the recommendations, and some of the issues you face sometimes when you are looking at the research base supporting a recommendation. So the best way for me to illustrate that is to point to a few specific recommendations that were in this guide, and describe the research base behind them a little bit and describe how we come up with these different ratings. So recommendation 4 and 5 were both supported by a moderate level of evidence. I'm going to focus on 5. The overall recommendation for 5 is to increase families' financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid. And some of the concrete steps underneath that include sit down with the students or bring in people who can sit down with the students and actually make sure they fill out that FAFSA. Don't just say, "Oh, there's financial aid available." Make sure they fill it out. The moderate, the evidence on this was moderate because that step is discrete and it's easy to interpret. Therefore, it's been fairly well tested. People do research designs where some kids were able to get

these services, some weren't, and so we really can test the difference and what happens when you offer students these services. So the research base on that was stronger than the research base on the other recommendations.

For example, if we compare that to recommendation 3, surround students with adults and peers who build and support their college-going aspirations, and some of the specific steps are around peer mentoring. That task generally in the research, it's less discrete, mentoring a curve, but you don't always know how much, how universal. You frequently don't know exactly what went on in the mentoring situation, if it was just general spending time together mentoring versus mentoring around, "Hey, come and visit my college, and I'll show you what it's like and I'll show you how to fill out an application." So the research base there is not as strong, both because it's harder to understand what was happening and it's harder to test that kind of service with a strong study design.

Another study in contrast, another recommendation that had a relatively low research base focuses on recommendation 2, which really focused on the panel's definition of what it means to be college ready. Research is low in that area because, in general, the secondary, as many of you know, the secondary and the postsecondary community have not coordinated very well on what it means to be college ready. So this panel describes, defines college ready as when you complete high school, you ought to be able, at a minimum, to enroll in a two-year institution and not be in need of remediation. Okay? We know that remediation, spending time in courses that do not earn credit is costly to students. It's one of the reasons they drop out and never finish a degree. So this recommendation says to utilize assessment measures throughout high

school, so that students are aware of how prepared they are for college and to assist them in overcoming deficiency. So here we're telling high schools they need to understand what kinds of assessments are used to determine college readiness at two-year colleges, and make sure they have those assessments or comparable assessments, and make sure students are getting the feedback. Now this is an area where the recommendation is just a bit ahead of the research. The ability to do this, to assess students, to track it, to coordinate data across districts over time, potentially with postsecondary institutions, that infrastructure has developed dramatically in the last five years. So the panel believes this is a good idea, believes this is what high schools should be trying to do in conjunction with their local postsecondary institutions. But the research base showing on whether this is really improving outcomes for students just isn't there yet. So these are the kind of issues that we grappled with in developing these recommendations, and just to show you the state of where the research is and the kind of areas that we should look at in the future.

So I'm going to turn it over now to my colleague on this panel and on the practice guide panel, Nicole Farmer Hurd, and she's going to talk a little bit more about some of these recommendations, in terms of the program she directs.

### **Nicole Farmer Hurd**

Thank you, Jill. So I want to go over with everybody a couple of the recommendations specifically and then talk to all of you as a fellow practitioner about how you might implement, some of the recommendations we talked about. So Jill mentioned one of our recommendations is on mentoring. We think mentoring can be a

very effective way to get young people to think about college, to think about their aspirations and actually to get into the college application and financial aid application processing. So the mentor recommendation really focused on serving young people as college-going role models, finding young people that might be college students themselves, recent graduates, recent alums, as well as caring adults to talk to young people about the scary process that is college admissions, helping them with the college admissions process, so that everything from sitting down and proofing that essay for the second, or third or fourth time to talking about, you know, where? What size school do you want to go to. Do you want to go far away from home? Do you want to stay close to home? But really having thoughtful conversations about the college-going process. The importance of finding mentors who will listen; as you know, a lot of our young people are very intimidated by the college-going process, and so someone that can serve as a role model, but also serve as a sounding board and think about, you know, again, what's the best fit, what's the match? Is this young person finding someplace where there's the right major, where there is going to be aid for all four or five years, where there is going to be mentoring, and bridge programs and a nurturing environment, and making sure that we find the best match or fit for a young person.

Programs with peers, again, there's not a lot of research. This is a growing area. The program I oversee is actually based on a near-peer model. But, again, the power of using 17-, 18-, 19-, 20-year-olds, or even 23-, 24-year olds, to talk to our young people about the college-going process. There is no one more powerful than a peer, who can say, "Look it, I was a low-income first generation student myself, and if I can do it, you can do it, too. Let's sit down and fill out these papers together." Or, "I was working. I had

sticker shock about college myself. My parents had sticker shock, and this is how we got through it and this is how I got through college, so let's sit down and fill out the FAFSA together." So, again, I think we're trying to encourage people to think about peer outreach and, again, providing folks the opportunity to have a hands-on experience for students to do different career exploration, to helping them align their postsecondary plans with those career aspirations. So the importance of just saying to a young person, "What do you think you might want to do as a career?" and then explain to them, "Okay, if you want to do X, then you're going to need to go to college. Or if you're going to do Y, you need to go to community college." So really then making sure that 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders in particular think about these questions early and so they can align those ambitions with the right curriculum, so that they're college ready when they graduate.

The next recommendation I wanted to go over is the one about engaging and assisting students in completing those critical steps. There is actually a map in the practice guide itself, if you download the guide, showing an example of a roadmap for a student and a parent to use during the senior year, when they're going through this process. But we need to make sure that we ensure our parents and our students that they prepare for and take those SATs and ACTs, those entrance exams, and take them early. There's nothing more heartbreaking as a practitioner than to see a young person that has the grades, but didn't take the test. Again, [it's] what we talked about a little bit with the peer and the mentoring piece, assisting them in their college searches. Again, your senior year is too late to begin your college search. So [it's important] to really start thinking about size, fit, geography, majors, all those things early on in the high school process. Coordinating college visits, there's also a roadmap in the guide on what a good

college visit looks like. And, again, we don't want our young people to just set foot on a college campus, but to really think about what should happen at a college visit – go visit a class, talk to the admissions office, talk to the financial aid office, stay in a dorm. Again, our colleges can be very intimidating places for folks, so making sure that you reach out to the outreach office and to the admissions office beforehand and let them know you're coming, and make sure that you have a really substantive visit and not just a drive-by of a college campus. And finally, assisting them in those applications. Again, these forms can be very intimidating, so helping with an essay, helping to really reach out to a college, if you have a problem with a question. Colleges are here to answer those questions. So if somebody has a problem with question 10, say, "Okay, let's pick up the phone together and really see what we can do to answer question 10 together, with that university's help."

The final recommendation I wanted to touch on very quickly is on the financial aid piece and really increasing financial awareness of our families and then helping students apply for that necessary aid. And, again, we look to the high schools to really play a role with community leaders and others, churches. This is something the community can do together to have workshops for parents and students and inform them prior to their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year about college affordability, scholarships and the financial aid process. And, again, our young people have such sticker shock from what is out there about the cost of college. We really want to make sure that students know ahead of time that there is aid, how to access that aid, how important it is to make deadlines, when trying to get access to that aid. And then the second step, which is crucial, is actually helping young people complete those forms. The FAFSA is being

revised and it's a much more user-friendly document than it's been in the past, but, again, we had over a million students start their FAFSA last year and not finish it. So the importance of really sitting down and not just doing one Saturday, but multiple events, where students can come together with caring adults and make sure those forms get filled out.

Just to give you a little bit about a practitioner and my experience with this, we actually place recent graduates as full-time advisors alongside the guidance counselor in high school to help them do exactly what we just talked about, to plan their college searches, get through their admission and financial aid applications, and then enroll in those schools that will serve them well. And so just to kind of give you a checklist of things and, again, we've talked about a lot of these already, the importance of advising, making sure that kids are taking the right classes, filling out those applications and making those deadlines, the importance of mentoring, the importance of workshops. Again, these are workshops where mom and dad might have a babysitter that's there onsite, might have food that's there onsite, so they don't have to worry about babysitting and food that night, things that could be user friendly to families in the evenings and on the weekends, the importance of, again, field trips and college visits that have some substance to them and have classroom visits involved, college fairs, making sure that you get a variety of colleges coming to visit your school, parent outreach – we know parents are incredibly important in this process – and then really again just trying to make sure that our young people have the tools they need to navigate this process. And I really encourage you to download the guide and look at some of the best practices that the panel thought would be effective in your high schools or in your access program

throughout the country. Next I'm going to pass this off to my colleague, Matt. Matt is going to talk to you now.

**Matt Gandal**

Thanks a lot, Nicole, and thank you to Jill as well. My organization has not been involved in helping to create the guide. We were asked to provide a kind of an outside context, and I have to say I'm very impressed with the work and the recommendations you've come up with. Achieve, my organization, is a group that works with states. We were created about a dozen years ago to work with governors and state education leaders to help raise achievement and expectations in the nation's public schools. So all of our work is really centered around academic expectations in the K-through-12 system. But we've been very focused over the last several years on this question of ready for what, with all the effort to set standards, and to test, and to have accountability, and all the things that folks know are going on from the federal and the state level. To what end are we putting those standards, and are we sure we're getting our young people ready for their next steps in life? And that's really what we dedicated the mission of our organization to over the last several years.

I want to talk about two things. What does it mean to be ready for college, and what we learned in our research are the skills young people need, and then what are states beginning to do to play a leadership role in getting young people ready, and helping you in your systems and in your schools do that as well? First of all, the problem, as already defined on this call and in the guide, but just to reiterate it, it's really twofold. It's not enough kids getting to college, and all the work that we have to do to

make sure they not only graduate, but then apply, and get accepted and go. But also, as we all know, once they get there, there are far too many young people for whom college is an empty promise because they're not really ready for credit-bearing courses, as I think both Jill and Nicole mentioned. And the vast majority, 2/3 to 3/4 of those who end up taking remedial courses, drop out of college without earning a degree. And this is just an array of data that tells you both from the college perspective and employers how many of our young people who do graduate high school arrive on their doorsteps and aren't adequately prepared. In today's job market, the data is very clear that the vast majority of the jobs that are available that pay well enough to support a family require some level of education after high school.

So here's the challenge. We did some work several years back to try to better understand what the knowledge and skills young people need to be ready, when they leave high school, to succeed in credit-bearing college courses and ultimately in their careers. It was a project called the American Diploma Project. It did a significant amount of research with higher-education faculty and employers, and identified a set of knowledge and skills in English and mathematics that are must-have skills, if you're going to be successful in that transition. And one very important and unexpected finding was the strong convergence in that knowledge and skills set, when you talk to college faculty and when you talk to employers. And we did not find employers saying that young people need a lower or different set of skills, particularly in reading, writing, communications and math than we heard college faculty talking about. It really has become a common core and that is important to keep in mind, as we all do our work in schools, and school systems, and states and, frankly, at the federal level.

The second thing we did was we looked at what states were expecting of students in order to earn a diploma, and what we found was the academic standards, the course-taking requirements and the tests that were given to students, in order to measure whether they were ready to graduate, all aimed lower than what college faculty and employers said those knowledge and skills were to be ready for students' next step. So we called that an expectations gap, and in our organization our work has really been all geared toward helping states close that gap. Speaking of states, the good news here is there are a lot of states committed to this work, at least at the state level, trying to figure out how to raise expectations and provide the right level of supports and opportunities for you to do your jobs in the school system that really get young people ready. This is a group of 35 states that joined the American Diploma Project network, launched by Achieve at the request of these states, in order to find ways to work together on this important agenda. And these are the commitments those states have made, and the folks involved range from the governor to the state commissioners of K-12 and higher education, business leadership, legislative leadership, state boards, the people responsible for making decisions at the state level. And they've agreed to a pretty ambitious agenda. Some of these ideas are very much reflected in the practice guide, and this is what the state can do to help clear the way for those practices, as I said, in schools and school systems – alignment of standards, alignment of course-taking requirements, having better assessments in high school that states give that truly measure whether students are ready for college, and ultimately changing how we talk and think about accountability, to be holding schools accountable and providing tools

and incentives for them to get young people ready for college, making that a real centerpiece of what we talk about, when we talk about accountability.

Just briefly, there's been a lot of movement across the country on putting policies like this in place over the last several years. We put out an annual report, where we track these policies, and this slide here gives you some flavor in each of these areas of how many states have put these things in place over time. So up close to half the states now have aligned their academic standards in high school, at least in English and Math, with what college faculty and employers say are the requisite skills needed for success when they enter. Twenty states, 19 or 20 have put graduation requirements higher. Fewer states have moved on assessment and on data systems, that is aligning your K-12 and higher education data systems so they can speak to one another and you can follow students, once they leave your high schools, and see how they do in college. But there's real traction and movement, and we think that's the good news.

Just to give you a little more flavor about in 2005, when we launched this work, only two states required students to take a rigorous college-ready curriculum, in order to earn a diploma. In those states, you had to opt your way in, and we all know, unfortunately, the students who are either counseled out or never even get the opportunity to take those courses. Today, 19 states now require students to take and provide students the opportunity to take that rigorous college-ready curriculum, as was discussed in this guide. In some states, students can opt out, but they no longer have to opt their way in and fight their way in. So that's a big change in policy, again, that we think can help those of you in the schools and in school districts that are working so hard to make this work on behalf of students.

On the assessment front, most state assessments given in high school do not measure college readiness. They aim lower than that. But there are a group of states that have begun to get more ambitious about what they're measuring in high school and aiming higher. Again, these are not usually high-stakes graduation tests. They're more signaling tests to tell students whether they're ready for college before they leave high school, and then allowing schools and districts to do something to help them before it's too late. And there are various methods states are taking on that. End-of-course assessment is the most popular method. Some are trying cumulative tests at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade and others, a few others have actually taken the SAT or the ACT, and adapted it and made it their own statewide test. The strategy to me is far less important than the ultimate goal of signaling readiness before students graduate.

The last thing before I close, just to bring it back to the students, there's a really interesting set of polls that have been conducted recently nationally that I think when you put them together paint a really important picture for all of us. When you ask students while they're in high school, "Are you on a path to be ready for your next step, whether it is college or the workplace?" the majority of them think they are, think they're doing the right thing, and taking the right courses and getting the right level of preparation. When you ask them a year out of high school, "How ready were you for your freshman courses, if you're in college, or for the work you had to do in the workplace?" the numbers drop precipitously, as you can see on this chart. When you ask their employers and professors, "How ready were the young people that came your way?" you can see the numbers go even lower. So all the work that this guide recommends and I know many of you are working hard to do is so critically important to

try to change this data and help those students, while they're still in high school, and we can give them the preparation they need. Thank you.

**P:** = Patrick  
**JC:** = Jill Constantine  
**NH:** = Nicole Farmer Hurd  
**MG:** = Matt Gandal

P: Perfect. Okay, so now we're going to enter the question and answer portion of our webinar. So if you have any questions for our panelists, please you can submit them through the Q&A box that is at the bottom right hand of your screen. Simply type your question into the textbox and click send and we can pose them to our panelists. And, again, if we don't have time for your question today, please email them to me at pmurray@commworkslc.com and we will try to get you a written answer from one of the panelists. So if everyone's ready, we can go on to our first question. Panelists, can you recommend a tool or instrument that is useful for assessing the presence of a college-going culture in a school and/or for assessing attitudes regarding preparation for applying for college or for motivating for applying?

NH: So this is Nicole. I would say the first thing I would do is run your student data through the National Student Clearinghouse, so that you know where your young people actually are. One of the things that we see when we go into high schools to help with the college access and success work is that a lot of high schools have an idea of where their young people went, but they don't have verified data that shows where their young people went. And by running your class list through the National Student Clearinghouse, it will let you know with pretty good accuracy where they ended up going. I think knowing your actual college-going rate, and seeing the schools that your young people are going to, and then seeing if they retain and succeed there is vital in your advising process, that if you really want your young people to go to college and

then persist and succeed to a degree, it's very important not to just have their aspirational data, which is that at the end of the year they say, "Yes, I'm going to college," when the reality is that maybe 40, 50, 60% of them actually do go to college. So I think the first thing I would do as a principal, or a superintendent or a guidance counselor is try to get that verified data, so you can actually touch what your college-going culture already is, and then think about moving the needle from there.

JC: This is Jill. I'm not sure if everybody on the webinar would know what the National Student Clearinghouse is, but that's an organization. It actually was started with resources from a number of sources, including the US Department of Education, but now is largely supported by postsecondary institutions, who join that, who enter to provide all their enrollment information and degree verification information, so that anybody who's interested in that – employers, school districts, researchers – can just go to that central location. You don't have to contact individual institutions' registrar's office for example. So that is an organization that states are increasingly entering partnerships with to provide data, that you can track your students from high school all the way through college, as Nicole suggests, and districts themselves can enter into that arrangement, so that's a very good resource. I don't know of any; the question about a school-wide culture, I don't know of any tools or instruments, save a survey one. There are individual instruments for students that look at motivation and college aspirations, but the school-wide culture is a difficult thing to get a sense of. So I reiterate Nicole's first step is high schools really need to be trying hard to understand where their students go. Most of what high schools do is in the spring they say, "Okay, who is planning to go to college and where do you think you're going to go?" But the leap between the spring

plan, or even the spring acceptance, and actually showing up at the door of that postsecondary institution in the fall is a big leap, and there can be a real falloff between those two time periods. So understanding what happened to your students and where they actually enrolled, it's critical for understanding college going in your schools.

P: Okay, we can move on to the second question. And I just want to let everyone know that the PowerPoint will be available for download. I will send out a link where you can access the PowerPoint, as well as a recording of this webinar later. I will email that out to you. And now we can move on to our second question. What is the best answer to parents, who argue that their children are quote/unquote "not college material," and therefore don't need a college prep curriculum in high school?

MG: This is Matt. Maybe I'll take a shot at that. I think there is some very powerful data available at the national level to suggest that all students from all backgrounds, wherever they live and wherever they go to school, with proper support and encouragement are capable of learning what they need to, taking the right courses and going to college. So, "My kid is not college material," while parents may have a legitimate concern about their children and how well prepared they are, I think all of us should try to disavow them that some are capable and some are not. Now, what kind of supports and interventions, how early do they need to occur, that's all really important to talk through and understand, but innate ability to go to college or not, I think we really have to move beyond and help parents understand that. The other thing that I think parents need to understand is how critical some level of college education is going to be for their children's futures. As I mentioned earlier, the economic data is very clear that despite the current troubled economy, long term opportunities in this economy will come

to those students who have some level of postsecondary education – two-year degree, four-year degree. The vast majority of jobs, 75%, for example, that are coming available now require that level of education, and those are the jobs that pay better, that allow for upward mobility, provide benefits, etcetera. So if this is about keeping the maximum number of doors open to a parent’s children, it’s really important they understand that getting beyond high school in their education is going to be critical, and I think we all have a job to do to help parents understand that.

NH: This is Nicole. I just want to echo what Matt’s saying. I think part of it is making the economic argument that, I mean the most recent statistic I saw was 90% of the fastest-growing jobs in this economy, especially after the economic hardship we’re all feeling right now, that 90% of those jobs is going to require a college degree. You have the simple fact that, again, looking at the data, most college graduates are going to have a million-dollar income differential over a lifetime than a non college graduate. So I think part of it is taking to parents the clear message that this is an economic imperative, but it’s also – there’s a real practical piece, when we talk to our parents, especially our first generation parents that might not have gone to college themselves. There is a real fear. It’s a scary thought to lose your young person to an institution that you didn’t attend or an institution that might be far away from home. And I think, again, taking a parent on a college visit, and not so much taking them to the scary structure that looks like the dean’s office, but as my fellow panelist, Bill Tierney, who’s a professor at UNC likes to say, “Have your parent sit down and have a soda on the bench and just see that there are young people that look like their children and talk like their children all over our campus.” So I think part of it is dispelling the myth of how scary higher ed, and

part of it is just the practical imperative that this economy is going to demand the kind of competitiveness that a college degree will help them attain.

P: Okay, we can move on to our next question. Do you have any recommendations for working with students and families in middle school to help them start planning for college as early as possible?

JC: This is Jill. I'll start with that one. I'm sure others want to weigh in. That's a very good question. When we developed or planned on the scope for this guide, so that it was a set of research and recommendations that would be manageable, our charge was to focus on high school, but we did spend a lot of time saying, "Well, even 9<sup>th</sup> grade is too late." So this guide shouldn't be viewed as a de-emphasis or indicating that middle school is not important. It is also important. So we talked a little about it, but we didn't want to get too distracted from the must-dos in high school. But middle school is critical. Some of the same steps simply extend back. The same steps of, okay, well, if these days you have to; if these days there's a strong indication that completing algebra 1 by 9<sup>th</sup> grade is important for being college ready by the time you're 12<sup>th</sup> grade, then you'd better be ready to enter algebra 1 by 9<sup>th</sup> grade. So something has to happen in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So middle schools are crucial. That alignment we're talking about between high schools and postsecondary institutions for readiness, the same alignment needs to occur between middle school and high school. In addition, things that should be, again, more easy and straightforward with the development, the infrastructure on data systems, those schools have to make sure they're sharing information. That doesn't always happen in districts very well, that it's clear what the student has completed in middle school, what those assessments were. That information needs to

flow and it needs to follow the students, wherever they come from, to their high schools, if they came from somewhere outside of that high school . . . ., that that information gets to the high school. So bridging that gap in the other direction is also crucial and just the basic first steps.

MG: This is Matt. I would just say ditto to all of that, and I think there's a lot of work to do to make sure that that is a seamless transition, middle to high school. It just reminded me of a program I'm sure many of us are familiar with, the International Baccalaureate. It's clearly all about preparation for students' next steps. They recently realized that you can't begin that process in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade years, even though that's where their program was really focused. So they have a whole middle years' program that I'm sure many of the folks on the webinar are familiar with that attempts to start that dialogue and start that preparation, both with parents and teachers and students much earlier, and I think that is really the key.

P: Moving up next, we have a request to hear more about the effectiveness of community mentors for at-risk high school students, especially with limited resources and programs being cut. How does mentoring compare with college application assistance, college tours, job shadowing visits, internships, et cetera?

NH: This is Nicole. I would argue that mentoring should include all those activities, so I would use the mentoring to be one and the same. So a good mentor would not only just help the young person discuss their curriculum and some of the things they're doing in the high school. A good mentor would also talk about the application process, take them on those tours, help them think about careers. I think one of the things that we talk about kind of is college-ready or college-power language

being used all the time. So even if the young person is being mentored by somebody for a career, make sure that the mentor not only talks about the career, but then links them back to college. I think the more that any mentoring activity can point to college, so even if, even for a public service opportunity. So, for example, if you're doing a public service opportunity, where a young person is working [or looking] in the field, and they're helping clean up the community or they're helping paint a building, making sure that the mentors still have that college language in their heads. So when they're painting that building with that young person, they can say, "Hey, have you filled out your application yet?" or, "Hey, have you thought about going to college?" There's a lot that can happen, in terms of mentoring, where, yes, they can talk about other things, but that college language, that college completion piece is always part of the conversation. So I'd actually argue that those are not all separate or siloed activities, that we should have college kind of flow through, be a common thread through all sorts of activities that high school students do.

JC: This is Jill. Let me follow up on that because I think the question said something about what's the evidence. So we spend a lot of time on the panel on mentoring for the reasons I suggested initially. The research base on mentoring is pretty mixed, so I just want to reinforce what Nicole said. Mentoring that's focused on these kind of activities, on getting these discrete steps accomplished, can be very useful. But if you want to; evidence on what I call feel-good mentoring is really not so compelling, and not that I don't like people to feel good – I certainly do – but that's where I think we have to learn and glean what we can from the research. Nicole is absolutely right. There's no reason you can't take mentoring and partner it with these activities that we

know matter. You can still make that student, that young person feel valued and they're getting the adult attention that may be important, but you're focusing on these important things that have to happen. So if you're spending time with them and making them feel good, but without any attention to this, it's not going to get them to college. You're just kind of hanging out with that person in their community. So I think taking mentoring and applying this focus could be important for making that, the effectiveness more universal.

P: Okay, move on to our next question. Our organization is working to develop a set of recommendations of things school districts can incorporate into their induction of students or adopt to foster a college-going culture. Can you recommend any best practices that a school district can adopt?

NH: So this is Nicole. I would say a lot of those are in the practice guide, in terms of the recommendations the panel put forward. There's also some discrete things that I'm sure you'll see in the guide, that I can just make a couple of examples real quickly. I mean there's some pretty simple things that can be done, in terms of the college-going culture. I'll give you one example of a program I saw recently, where the advisor, the near-peer advisor that we work with was frustrated that – she's in a very low-income high school, less than average students – that the students she was working with kept saying, "There's nobody in my circle of friends, there's nobody in my family that's gone to college. I don't know anybody that went to college, so why should I be thinking about going to college?" And our advisor, just as a best practice in her own creativity, decided that the way to handle this was she went home that day, and went and put the name of every teacher and where they went to college, and every staff member went to college and hung it up on their door. So instead of a door saying, "Mrs.

Jones, English,” it said, “Mrs. Jones, English, the University of Texas.” Or instead of saying, “Mr. Spears, Biology,” it says, “Mr. Spears, Biology, the University of Massachusetts.” And so the beauty is that all of a sudden these kids came to school and said, “Of course you know kids that went to college,” I mean people that went to college. “You’re surrounded by people who went to college all day.” And there was this aha moment in the school that, “Wait, we do have a college-going culture. Our teachers, our staff did go to college.” And I actually got a call from a principal who said, “This is the most amazing thing because now the students are going up to their faculty members and asking them, ‘Hey, Mr. Jones, I never realized you went to the University of Texas. Tell me about it,’ or, ‘Hey, Miss Smith, I never realized you went to X community college. I’m thinking about going there.’” So I think there’s little things that can create a college-going culture that are very fine, discrete pieces, and there’s also I think some recommendations in the practice guide that build a bigger systemic college-going culture.

JC: I think some of the other things, as Nicole mentioned, many of them are in the guide. But I think the guide, we talk about what high schools can do, but the fact is the high school can’t do some of these things without support and working hand in hand with the district. So we talked about this earlier, but things like assessments, accountability assessments, well, they may be statewide, although Matt has talked about what some states are trying to do, shift this all the way down to district. But if your state doesn’t have an assessment system that is convincing, in terms of making the students college ready, then your district should make that a priority for your district and work with the folks in secondary institutions, the local community college in that district

to make sure that that is bridged. Also, it takes resources, it takes expertise to do this, and Nicole has been talking about her program. There's lots of college access to programs that come from the community, that come from postsecondary institutions themselves that are supported by federal grants. And, you know, you'll hear some about some of these programs that say, "Well, we can't get into that high school. They won't work with us." Why would any high school not work with these programs? Well, you'll hear sometimes a school is constrained in some way, like district rules about who can do what, when and where, and things like that. So making sure that the district has a priority on making high schools open particularly for this kind of support, and not throwing up barriers to having that kind of support come into the high school, if that's what's needed, I also think is important, because a lot of our solutions to the roadblock was, "Go find that help. Go find the kind of expertise and support that will really target college access and college readiness."

MG: This is Matt. Let me just build off. I think this is such an important question, because I agree that schools themselves, while they're the most important unit, can't do everything without help from the district and ultimately the state. I want to just emphasize the importance of public awareness and support for this work, and how important a role say the school district can play in really elevating this issue to the top of its priority list, and making college readiness perhaps the overarching goal, for example, for everything that it does. And if you do that, you begin to look at prioritization of resources. You begin to be open to providing some more flexibility for how schools approach issues, if they're improving college readiness of their students, a different look at the way you present data. You could highlight schools, based on the college going

and college success rates of their students and make that an overriding issue in your reporting and accountability model. You could change the way you look at how you're providing data to high schools and ultimately to middle schools. If your state hasn't said that a college-ready curriculum is going to be the expectation for all students, let the district do it. San Jose, California, did just that and made it the default curriculum for all students, when the State of California wasn't prepared to do that for everyone in the state. So I think there are a lot of things that leaders in school districts could and should do to really make this college-going culture a reality in the schools.

P: Okay, we're going to answer our next question. A lot of schools are currently doing a lot of the recommendations included in the report, and people are curious as to when looking at things like for grant money, what are some good data to use to prove the need and the effectiveness of college-ready programs?

JC: Well, I think in terms of the data showing the need, and I didn't weigh in on this question on how you can convince parents that they shouldn't write off their kid as not college ready, and I was glad that Nicole and Matt went to the economic answer. I am an economist, so I was afraid I would sound a little mercenary, but they're absolutely right that having some training after high school is critical to success in the labor market. People with just a bachelor's degree have seen their earnings not stay stable, decline in real terms in the last few decades. So there's lots of economic, there's lots of data indicating from the Department of Labor, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Department of Education, the National Center for Education Statistics indicating, showing what's happened to people with and without some postsecondary training over the years, so I think that's a crucial data source. The practice guide itself, it's in the

appendix. It's in the research part, lists all the studies that we looked at on, again, largely college access programs, and sorts them by the ones that met the highest evidence standards and ones that didn't, and then shows which ones showed some evidence of effectiveness. So that kind of research synthesis, we certainly recommend. We compiled it as part of our work as a panel and, like I said, it's in the appendices, but there's quite a bit of detail, and you can find a lot there, and you can look at those studies and then can reference other studies.

MG: This is Matt. There's two other websites I'd recommend. One is the Education Trust, the national organization some of you may be familiar with that has a very good website, web resources for making the case that, first of all, that all kids can't do college level work or do the work necessary to go and succeed in college, and how powerful a gap closer it is between advantaged and disadvantaged students, if you give them those opportunities. So their website is packed with really good information, and data and case-making material on that. And then at Achieve.org, my organization has also compiled data to convince policymakers that it's really worth pursuing policies like this because it's good not only for the students, but also for the states and the nation in a variety of ways. So those are two places to go, but there are likely others, but these are two places where it's really housed in a fairly easy to access manner. So Achieve.org and then the Education Trust, the national organization, as well.

NH: I would just say as a practitioner, you know, there are local, regional, community, state, national organizations that all are interested in the subject, that might be partners for you in a grant-making situation. I would say knowing your own data is crucial, and being able to demonstrate the need of your community is crucial to that. So

the comments we made before about the National Student Clearinghouse and knowing your real data, being able to capture what's really going on in your school, the demographics of your school, the need in your school. I think the more that you can show a compelling picture of what your school looks like, the more successful you're going to be in trying to capture the funds to get some of the programming that we're talking about.

P: Okay, I think we have time for one more question. I find that the college experience that many mentors or program staff have had is very different than the college experience most of their mentees will have in terms of financial capability, academic preparation. How do you manage this gap?

NH: So, again, I think the crucial thing is to find mentors that are near peers or have near experiences. So you might have a lot of folks that have good will and want to help with this work, and it might be great to use them for a FAFSA workshop, or it might be great for them to proof essays, but when it comes down to really giving somebody a conversation about a college search or the stress of trying to pay for college, you know, one of the things that we do in our program is that over 60% of our advisors are first generation, underrepresented students themselves. So I think part of it is making sure that they find mentors that do have similar experiences. Reaching out to people that do have the capacity to talk about the stresses that are on these young people's minds is important. So it's making sure that you really match the mentor with the mentee in a way that they not only, as Jill said, have that feel-good experience, but they can have some real practical experience. "Hey, look it, I did this. I've been in your shoes, and if I can do it, you can do it, too."

JC: This is Jill. Looking at that question, somebody gave a few examples that I think are true and interesting, particularly, you know, say for minority students. You know, they may have a mentor that when they went, they went from a historically black college because that's all, that was the main opportunity for them at the time, or students, parents are immigrants or from different racial and ethnical backgrounds. They are, they may be more likely, as the landscape has changed more rapidly, to have a different experience, although the same thing can be true for low income students. So I think there are populations where you're going to have to think about that harder than other populations, but it does reinforce what Nicole is saying. Then it might be particularly important to find a near peer, who has been through the postsecondary system recently, or if you don't have that available, to make sure the peers who may have gone through college in a different time take it upon themselves to understand the landscape now for students or for that particular group of students, if it's changed in particular for disadvantaged or minority students. So I think people just have to think hard about that central gap and be aware.

P: Okay, well unfortunately I think that is all the time we have today. I want to thank everyone again for logging on and participating in this webinar. Again, if you have any questions or we didn't have a chance to get to your question today, you can email me at the email address you see on your screen, pmurray@commworksllc.com. And if you'd like more information on any of the issues we talked about today or any of the organizations that our presenters represent, you can go to their websites here. And, again, a recording of this webinar and the PowerPoint will be posted, and I will be

sending out the URL as soon as that is up and ready to go. Thank you again and thank you to the presenters for your time in talking with us today.

END OF WEBINAR