



# REACH HIGHER

Complete your education. Own your future.

## Reach Higher Progress Report

January 6, 2017

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## *Introduction and History*

Aware of the opportunity gap, and specifically, inequitable access to high-quality school counseling based on her own personal experience, First Lady Michelle Obama launched Reach Higher, her signature initiative to support [President Obama's 2020 North Star Goal](#) of increasing the share of American citizens who earn a postsecondary credential. Reach Higher aims to expand opportunity for our nation's students by inspiring every student in the United States to take charge of his or her future by completing his or her education past high school, whether at a professional training program, a community college, or a four-year college or university. This means making sure students understand what they need to complete their education, and the First Lady recognizes school counselors as instrumental partners in providing postsecondary supports to students, especially those who are first in their families to attend college and those from low-income families and/or from underserved areas. As a first-generation alumna of Princeton University, Mrs. Obama knows firsthand how tough it can be to navigate the college application process, access financial aid, and enter a new culture really different from one's own. As First Lady, she's talked about her memories of being a college freshman, from confusion in picking classes to getting lost on campus to being shocked at fellow students driving BMWs. Inspired by her own experience, the First Lady wanted to make sure high school and college students had access to the people and resources to help ensure they were able to thrive in their education and in the world – and she knew that the best way to do that was to further enable school counselors to provide the best support possible for their students. It also meant connecting directly with students so they could hear her story and realize that if they worked hard and reached a little higher, they too could be successful. The purpose of this paper is to provide a high-level summary of the powerful and growing grassroots movement Mrs. Obama inspired through her Reach Higher Initiative. From her remarks at the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), galvanizing a movement of support from school counselors across the nation, to her inspirational commencement speeches, College Signing Day and Beating the Odds events, the First Lady has not only inspired students through her own words, but generated a broad network of support to help guide students to success.

Making sweeping progress in college attainment rates has never been more essential for this nation and for the lives of Americans across the country. In 2013, Mrs. Obama approached then-Secretary of Education Arne Duncan with a clear mission: she wanted to help students beat the odds, much like she had, despite being told that a school like Princeton University was beyond her reach. Reach Higher began from a short conversation and has since spread far beyond the White House to a burgeoning national

college opportunity movement that is only just getting started. As former Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan stated in August of 2013:

*The completion challenge is not just hurting far too many individuals, it's costing us as a nation on an international scale. Even as a degree has become critical in a global economy, America has fallen from first in the world in the college completion rates of our young people to twelfth. There can be no pride in that. College also must be an equalizer of opportunity, but the richest quarter of students are four times more likely than the poorest quarter to earn their bachelor's degree. Whether we look at overall completion rates or inequality of opportunity, clearly we are not close to where we need to be [...] The decisions we face here will define our generation. In the choices we make, we will decide what kind of country we are, and who gets to share in the nation's success.<sup>1</sup>*

The Administration responded by increasing efforts to make college more affordable, connecting more low-income students to schools that best fit their needs and strengths, thus ensuring more students graduate, and leveling the playing field in college advising.<sup>2</sup> Doubling investments in financial aid by increasing the maximum Pell grant by over \$1,000 and establishing the American Opportunity Tax Credit, which provides a maximum credit of \$2,500 per year or up to \$10,000 over four years, has enabled an average of 2.5 million additional students to receive a Pell Grant each year. On average, these investments cut college costs by an average of \$3,700 for 8 million families last year, and cut \$18 billion in taxes for families supporting a college student. Efforts to streamline the FAFSA and allow students and families to apply three months earlier have made the process for completing the form less burdensome.<sup>3</sup> These enhancements can ensure that hundreds of thousands more families receive the aid for which they are eligible, that students and families save well over half a million hours in paperwork, and that schools can transfer three million hours from verifying information to advising students and making financial aid awards. As Department of Education Under Secretary Ted Mitchell has said, "Paying for college remains the best investment anyone can make in their future. Pell grants and Federal student loans make that dream a reality for millions of students."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Toward a New Focus on Outcomes in Higher Education." Remarks by Secretary Arne Duncan at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County (UMBC), July 27, 2015. <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/toward-new-focus-outcomes-higher-education>

<sup>2</sup> "FACT SHEET: The President and First Lady's Call to Action on College Opportunity." *Whitehouse.gov*, January 16, 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/16/fact-sheet-president-and-first-lady-s-call-action-college-opportunity>.

<sup>3</sup> "FACT SHEET: Providing Students and Families with Comprehensive Support and Information for College Success." *Whitehouse.gov*, September 28, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/28/fact-sheet-providing-students-and-families-comprehensive-support-and>.

<sup>4</sup> Prepared remarks of U.S. Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell at the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Servicing Summit in Atlanta, GA. December 1, 2014. <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/prepared-remarks-us-under-secretary-education-ted-mitchell-federal-student-aid-fsa-servicing-summit-atlanta-ga>

These improvements have already had a significant impact on FAFSA completion rates across the country. In fact, within the first month of the FAFSA's earlier launch date this year, FAFSA completion nationwide has outpaced that of previous years by over 10 percent and has increased for first-generation, low-income, and Pell-eligible students. Building on these simplifying innovations, next year the FAFSA will have a streamlined sign-up and password recovery process for an FSA ID, which is the first step to accessing federal financial aid, and will direct students to the [College Scorecard](#), which for the first time gives students and their families' access to comprehensive data on college costs, graduation rates, loan repayment rates, and employment outcomes in one easily accessible source, allowing students to select colleges that will be good investments and that will support them in college persistence and completion. These investments and improvements are not only transforming the lives of students across the country, but also contributing to the economy: analysis by the Council of Economic Advisers suggests that the Obama administration's increase in the average Pell Award over the last eight years will lead to an additional \$20 billion in aggregate earnings, a nearly 2:1 return on investment.<sup>5</sup>

As the administration continued to explore strategies to ensure students had the support and guidance they needed to be successful in their postsecondary endeavors, statistics revealed that about 850,000 high school students did not have access to a school counselor at the time of their lives when guidance is crucial for many in taking those next key steps toward their futures.<sup>6</sup> With an average national student-to-counselor ratio of approximately 500-to-1—and reaching close to 1000-to-1 in states like California and Arizona—the administration recognized that the important work of school counselors could not be ignored.<sup>7</sup> According to one study of the data, only 16 percent of the highest-poverty districts and 14 percent of the highest-minority districts meet the American School Counselor Association's minimum recommended ratio of 250-to-1. Even more striking, only four percent of urban districts meet that minimum ratio.<sup>8</sup> What's more, the 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that more than 20 percent of schools do not have a school counselor, and

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<sup>5</sup> "FACT SHEET: Providing Students and Families with Comprehensive Support and Information for College Success." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/28/fact-sheet-providing-students-and-families-comprehensive-support-and>.

<sup>6</sup> "Five Eye-Opening Figures from the U.S. Education Department's Latest Civil Rights Data Dump." *Washington Post*. Accessed November 3, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2016/06/07/five-eye-opening-figures-from-the-u-s-education-departments-latest-civil-rights-data-dump/>.

<sup>7</sup> "United States Student-to-Counselor Ratios." *American Counseling Association*. Accessed November 3, 2016.

<https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/public-policy-faqs-and-documents/2013-counselor-to-student-ratio-chart.pdf?sfvrsn=2>; "Most US School Districts Have Low Access to Student Counselors." *Carsey Research, University of New Hampshire*. Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1285&context=carsey>

<sup>8</sup> "Most US School Districts Have Low Access to Student Counselors." *Carsey Research, University of New Hampshire*. Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1285&context=carsey>

1.6 million students attend a school that employs a sworn law enforcement officer but does not employ a school counselor.<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of these enormous gaps in support for students, sixty percent of low-income students expect to graduate college – but less than fifteen percent actually do so.<sup>10</sup> We know that earning a postsecondary degree brings benefits to students and their families both economically and personally. Growing and strengthening this counseling support network will help prepare more students, especially those from underserved communities, for a successful transition to college.

In light of this and to support the President’s 2020 goal, elevating the work of school counselors became a cornerstone of the Reach Higher initiative. The impetus came in the spring of 2014, when Reach Higher Executive Director Eric Waldo organized a White House meeting with the White House Domestic Policy Council, leaders from the Department of Education and staff from the Office of the First Lady to discuss the role of school counselors in college access and completion efforts. External participants included researchers, practitioners, advocates, and other leaders from the school counselor community. After the meeting, Mrs. Obama accepted an invitation to speak at the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) conference in Orlando where she spoke about the goals of Reach Higher and recognized school counselors for their important work, encouraging them to partner with her to increase college access and completion. In her remarks she declared, “School counseling is a necessity to ensure that all of our young people get the education they need to succeed in today’s economy.” Demonstrating her commitment to school counselors, Mrs. Obama brought the first School Counselor of the Year Ceremony to the White House in January 2015, and has subsequently celebrated the ceremony every year. This support inspired a groundswell of engagement from school counselors and counselor educators who believed in her charge and were ready and eager to make a commitment to increasing educational equity through professional college and career readiness counseling and poised to extend their work into research, practice and policy (Savitz-Romer & Liu, 2014). This initiative marked the first time a national leader called for improvements to the school counseling profession, with a specific focus on college readiness counseling.

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<sup>9</sup>“Persistent Disparities Found through Comprehensive Civil Rights Survey.” *U.S. Department of Education*. Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/persistent-disparities-found-through-comprehensive-civil-rights-survey-underscore-need-continued-focus-equity-king-says>

<sup>10</sup> “The Hard Work Has Just Begun.” *US News & World Report*. Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/2015/07/13/study-shows-just-how-hard-it-is-to-get-low-income-kids-through-college>; “Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002) - Overview: Purpose.” Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/els2002/>.

This collaboration with school counselors combined with the powerful tactics Mrs. Obama has used to reach students directly are moving the needle and inspiring a generation of youth to go on and complete their postsecondary degrees. With education close to her heart, Mrs. Obama is committed to continuing to inspire and guide students to reach their fullest potential.

### **Overview of School Counselor Movement & Reach Higher Convenings (2014-2016)**

Building on the momentum generated by the [First Lady's remarks](#) at the ASCA conference, leaders and advocates in school counseling sought to provide a place for professionals in the school counseling field to disseminate best practices and shared experiences. This led to the first Reach Higher convening in July 2014. In collaboration with the White House [College Opportunity Agenda](#), experts in school counseling from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education brought together 140 school counselors and college access professionals from across the nation to discuss how improvements in school counseling and college advising can bring about greater postsecondary opportunities for all students, particularly first-generation, low-income students. Entitled "College Opportunity Agenda: Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising," the **Harvard National Reach Higher Convening**<sup>11</sup> addressed the importance of pre-service and in-service training for counselors and equitable student access to high-quality counseling and shared evidence-based counseling practices.<sup>12</sup>

The Harvard convening was a catalyst for two more national convenings in San Diego and Florida, giving birth to a national movement with school counselors at center stage as dedicated partners in the college opportunity agenda work to increase college opportunity for all students (Chart 1.1). To support this momentum and provide expertise, the National Consortium for School Counseling and Postsecondary Success (NCSCPS) was formed, increasing interest and growth from states across the nation.<sup>13</sup>

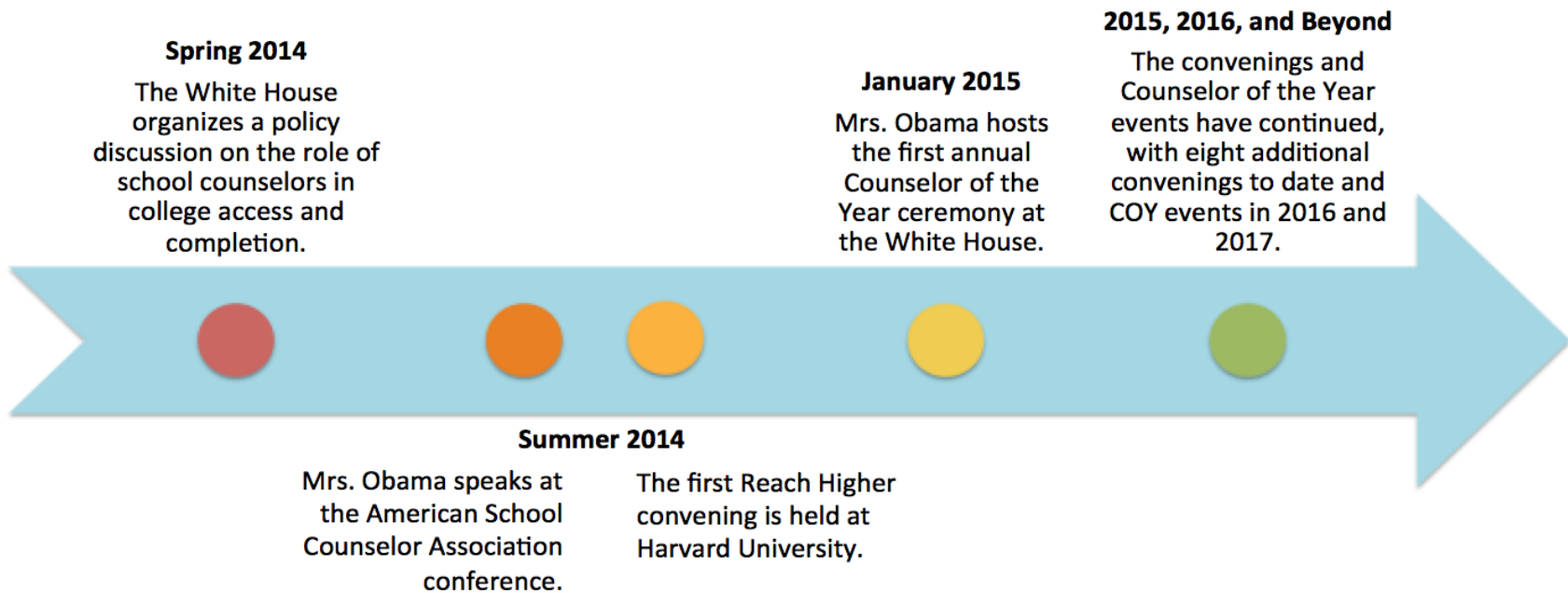
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<sup>11</sup> "Counselors and the Road to College." *Harvard Graduate School of Education*. Accessed January 3, 2017. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/14/11/counselors-and-road-college>.

<sup>12</sup> "Pre-service training" refers to training that educators receive in preparation for or apart from their employment as school counselors. "In-service training" refers to training that educators receive as part of their employment as school counselors.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to their convening support, the NCSCPS has undertaken a comprehensive research project, which includes two unique literature reviews and an empirical scan of the field. The findings from these efforts will bolster statewide efforts to create strong postsecondary pathways and provide a blueprint for the fields of school counseling and college and career readiness.

**Chart 1.1: The Origins of School Counselor Movement**



*Chart 1.1 summarizes the origins of Reach Higher, providing a timeline of early events that transformed Reach Higher into a nationwide movement.*



The **National Reach Higher convening at [San Diego State University](#)**<sup>14</sup> (link includes access to convening report) brought together 369 participants from 33 states, with representation from 50 universities and 44 school districts, to develop guidelines for effective counseling and advising for postsecondary preparation, access and success. In a follow-up report on the two-day event, SDSU and CESCAL identified a number of key college opportunity issues participants committed to addressing, including school counselor preparation, curricular standards for the credentialing of school counselors, partnerships between universities and school districts, and strategic external partnerships. In November 2015, the third national Reach Higher convening took place in partnership with the University of North Florida. With emphasis on dialogue between different sectors and industries, technical assistance for educational institutions in implementing change, strategic planning, and best practices in data and collaboration, the agenda for **[Florida’s National Reach Higher Convening](#)**<sup>15</sup> featured presentations from several states as well as U.S. Department of Education officials.

Reach Higher learned early on that school counselors were eager for information that could help them in their work; through its convening power, it has provided states across the country with the opportunity to be exposed to new evidence-based practices being used by colleagues in other parts of the country. These convenings also exposed them to new trends in the sector including how connecting students to workforce opportunities can increase student outcomes and how professional development in cultural competence can help school counselors better connect with their students and help them reach their greatest potential. Demonstrating its commitment to helping school counselors, and therefore their students, be successful, today Reach Higher celebrates the completion of nine school counselor convenings, six of which took place in 2016 (see Chart 2.1). As a result, 42 “Reach Higher State Teams” have formed, representing a coalition of supporters engaged in the work galvanized by the First Lady, twenty-one of which have committed to reaching long-term metrics tied to increasing postsecondary success for underserved youth.

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<sup>14</sup> Hatch, T., & Owen, L. (2015). *Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising: San Diego State University White House Post Convening Report*. San Diego, CA:

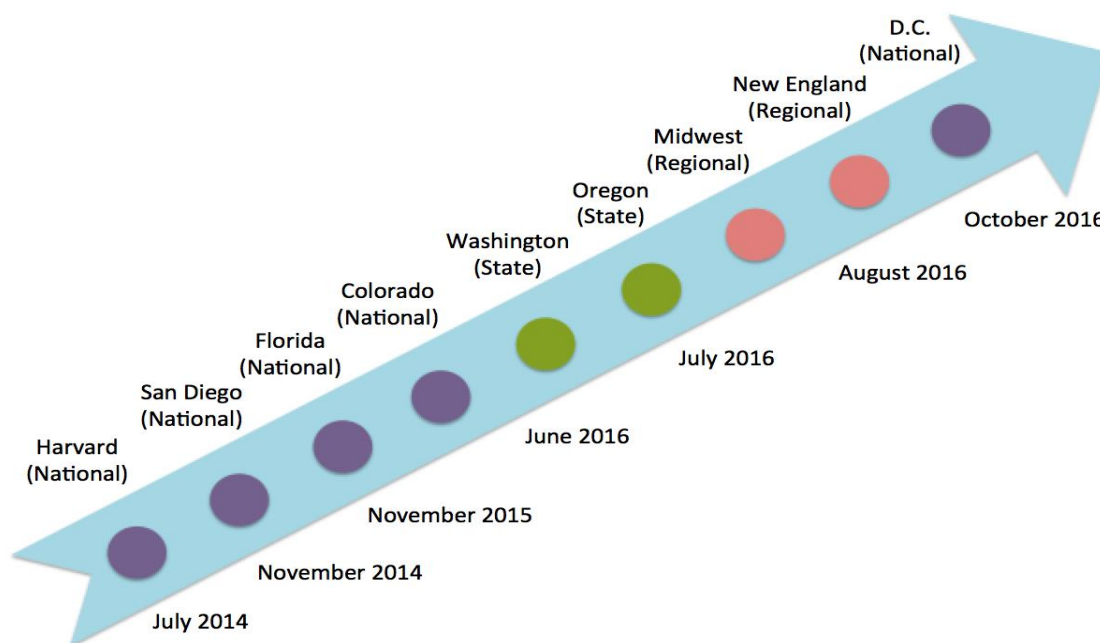
<http://www.cescal.org/documents/White%20House%20Post%20Convening%20Report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> White House Convening – Measurement, Mobilization, Moving Forward: Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising; Nov 2-4, 2016; University of North Florida:

[https://www.unf.edu/uploadedFiles/aa/fie/Convening%20Agenda%20for%20Web%20\(10-30-15\).pdf](https://www.unf.edu/uploadedFiles/aa/fie/Convening%20Agenda%20for%20Web%20(10-30-15).pdf)

Information about these convenings along with the work of these 21 states is captured in this section of the progress report.<sup>16</sup>

Chart 2.1: Reach Higher Convenings to Date



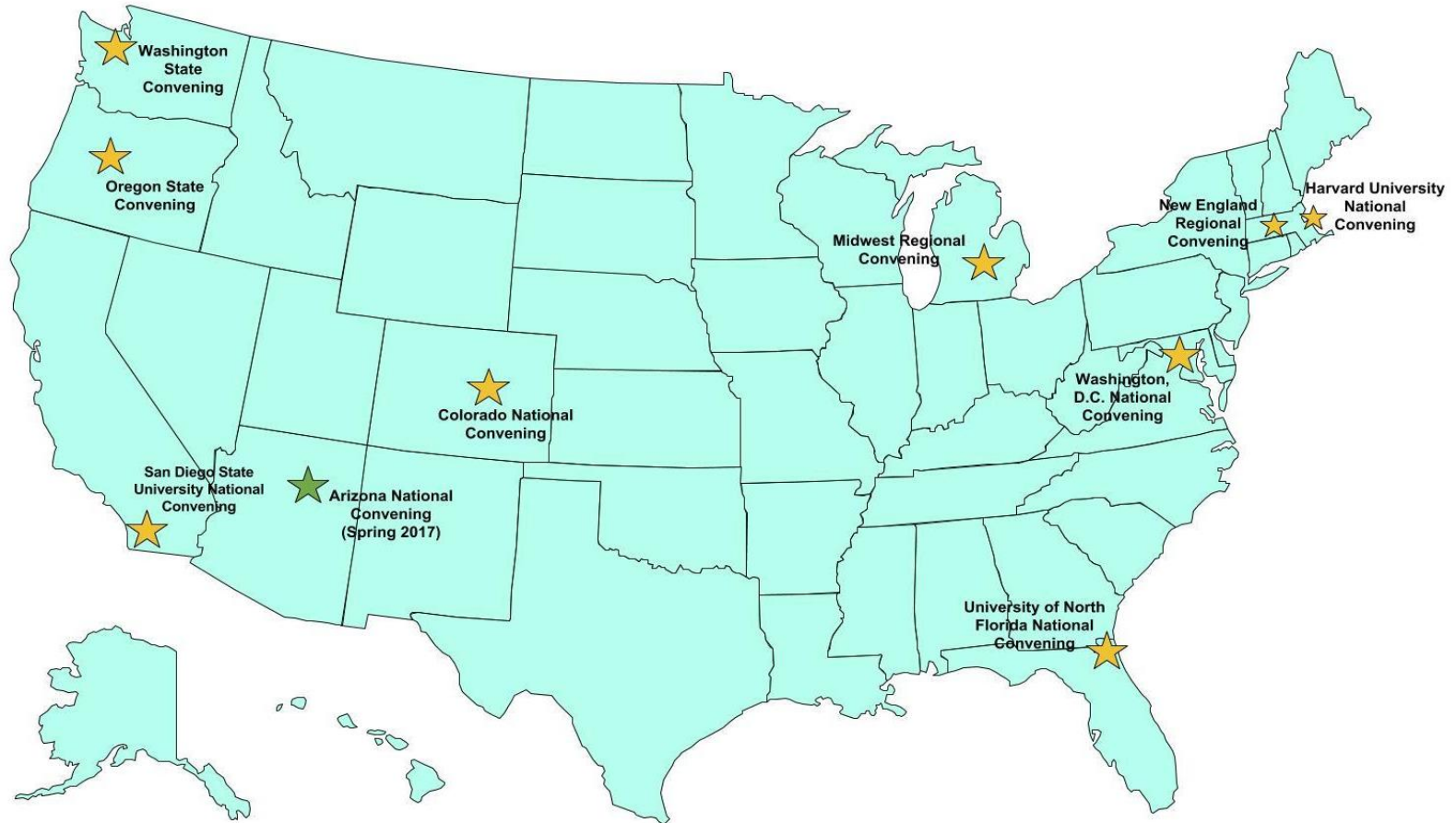
*Chart 2.1 provides a timeline of the nine national, regional, and state Reach Higher convenings that have taken place since the launch of Reach Higher.*

As the movement continued to grow and additional states expressed interest in hosting convenings, NCSCPS and Reach Higher worked closely with them to maximize the convenings’ effectiveness and advance a consistent set of metrics/outcomes. Hosting states were encouraged to select topics that had strong evidence-based practices that lead to an increase in postsecondary outcomes. Simultaneously, and as discussed later in the Reach Higher State Teams section of this paper, Reach Higher State Teams were encouraged to make commitments associated with metrics to increase postsecondary outcomes. Below are highlights of the incredible work done by school counselors to host convenings in the states of Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Michigan, Massachusetts and D.C.:<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> “Persistent Disparities Found through Comprehensive Civil Rights Survey.” *U.S. Department of Education*. Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/persistent-disparities-found-through-comprehensive-civil-rights-survey-underscore-need-continued-focus-equity-king-says>

<sup>17</sup> Comprehensive reports from the convenings can be found in Appendix A.

**Chart 2.2: Reach Higher Convenings, 2014 – 2016**



*Chart 2.2 demonstrates the broad reach of the Reach Higher convenings spanning from east to west, enabling broad participation and fostering the development of state teams located in each region as shown in Chart 3.2. A tenth convening is scheduled for the spring of 2017.*

- Location/Date(s): Colorado; June 14 - 16, 2016; [Colorado Department of Education hosts National Reach Higher Convening](#)<sup>18</sup> at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs.

Title/Focus: “Preparing High School Students with Work Ready Skills.” Thirty Reach Higher State Teams came together to discuss intersections between education and business and how to inspire young people to continue their education past high school. Participants engaged in panel discussions, breakout sessions, and site visits focused on best practices for student learning opportunities in real-life workplace environments or, “work-based learning” opportunities.

Participants: Business, workforce, school, and state agency leaders.

Notable Keynotes: Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper, Lieutenant Governor Donna Lynne, and Tanya Clay House, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education.
- Location/Date(s): Washington; June 30, 2016; Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington School Counselor Association and the Washington College Access Network host [Reach Higher Washington State Convening](#),<sup>19</sup> in Olympia, Washington.

Title/Focus: Expanding opportunity for more students to enroll and succeed in college, especially low-income and underrepresented students, towards a stronger economy and a middle class for Washington State.

Participants: 300 educational professionals, school counselors, partners, and advocates throughout the state.
- Location/Date(s): Oregon; July 19 - 20, 2016; Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising Center at Central Oregon Community College hosts [Reach Higher Oregon State convening](#)<sup>20</sup> in Bend, Oregon.

Title/Focus: "Mobilizing Career and College Advising Supports for All Students" to strategize on how best to: 1) mobilize counselors, administrators, college advisors, financial aid officers, and

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<sup>18</sup> Reach Higher National Convening in Colorado – Preparing Students with work-ready skills, June 14-16, 2016, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs: <http://www.uccs.edu/reachhigher/index.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Reach Higher Washington State Convening, June 30, 2016, Olympia, WA: <http://www.wcan.org/reach-higher>.

<sup>20</sup> Reach Higher Oregon State Convening on Strengthening School Counseling, July 19-20, 2016, Oregon State University: <http://education.oregonstate.edu/third-white-house-convening-strengthening-school-counseling>.

mentors across the state to provide all students viable and affordable pathways to postsecondary success; and 2) dramatically accelerate progress toward Oregon’s 100% graduation rate vision.

Participants: Over 375 school administrators, school counselors, student advisors, and college access professionals from Oregon attended.

- Location/Date(s): Michigan; August 1 - 2, 2016; Michigan College Access Network hosts [Reach Higher Midwest regional convening<sup>21</sup>](#) at Michigan State University, Lansing Michigan.
- Title/Focus: “Improving College and Career Readiness: Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising.” Before the convening, five of the seven participating states took steps to formalize their Reach Higher Teams. Each team determined its membership and adopted, minimally, a shared mission, values statements, and chosen priority areas. The overarching goal of the convening was to energize the state teams and mobilize their membership to execute strategies related to their priority areas.

Participants: The convening drew 52 participants from 7 midwestern states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The teams included individuals who attended the convenings in San Diego or Jacksonville or who represented stakeholder groups at the state level such as state school counselor associations, university counselor educator programs, departments or boards of education, and college access and advising programs.

- Location/Date(s): Massachusetts; August 16, 2016; Assumption College hosts [Reach Higher New England Regional Convening<sup>22</sup>](#) in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Title/Focus: The New England convening was designed to provide the opportunity for three Reach Higher states to begin their efforts and the other three to explore new work and collaborations.

Participants: 250 school counselors and college access, financial aid, and higher education professionals from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.

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<sup>21</sup> Reach Higher Midwest Regional Convening, August 1-2, 2016, Michigan State University, <http://www.micollegeaccess.org/about/news/press-releases/1226-mcan-hosts-regional-reach-higher-convening>.

<sup>22</sup> Reach Higher New England Regional Convening, August 16, 2016, Assumption College: <https://www.assumption.edu/news/“reach-higher”-assumption-will-host-conference-advance-white-house-initiative-increased-access>.

- Location/Date(s): Washington, D.C.; October 28 - 30, 2016; [American University hosts National Reach Higher National Convening<sup>23</sup>](#) in Washington D.C.

Title/Focus: “Connecting the Dots: Cultural Competence, Counseling, and College and Career Readiness of Underserved Youth.” 30 State Teams examined personal and cultural biases, breaking down barriers to enable and promote “courageous conversations” about equity and cultural differences within their schools and communities to successfully drive college and career readiness (CCR) outcomes for underserved youth.

Participants: Approximately 250 college access and business professionals together from 30 states.

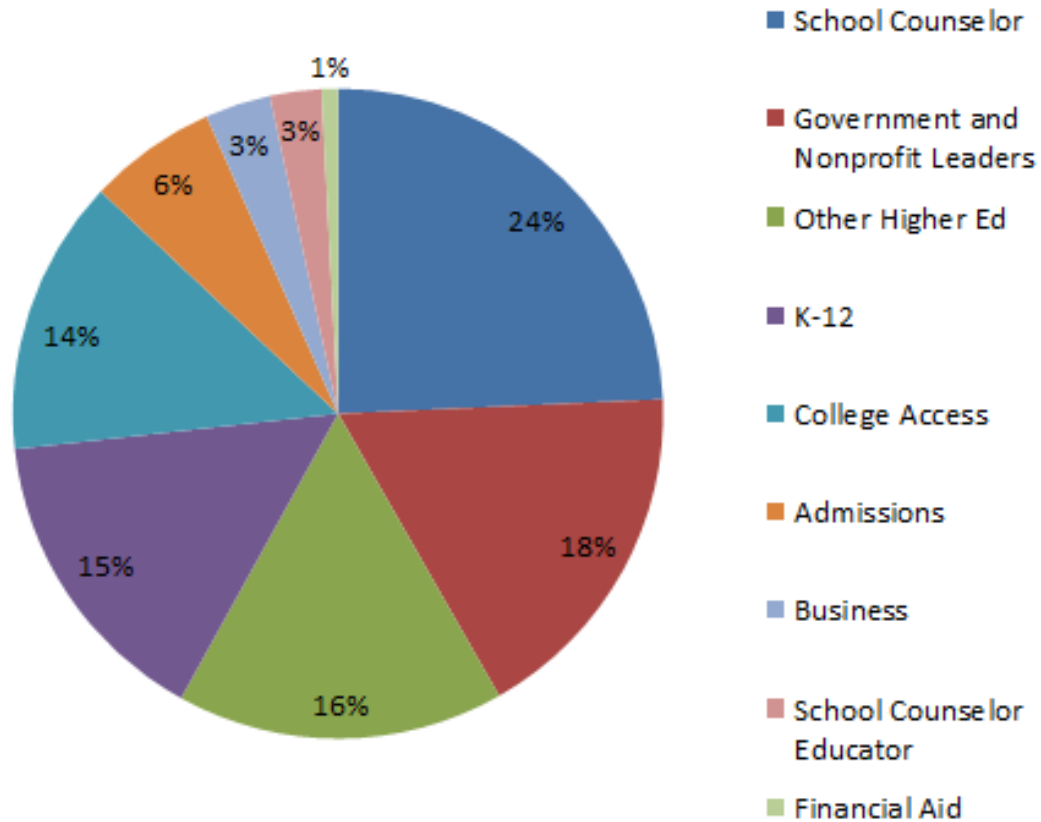
With an average of 223 participants per convening, and with consistent Reach Higher state team presence at each, the convenings have become a catalyst of the college opportunity movement across the nation.

The plurality of participants in the convenings are school counselors, but as Chart 2.3 below demonstrates, a wide variety of other stakeholders participate as well, including school counselor educators, financial aid administrators, K-12 educators and administrators, and college access advocates. Notably, a large portion of participants are government and nonprofit leaders – state agency staff, legislators, policy leaders, and philanthropists, all committed to generating state action in college opportunity.

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<sup>23</sup> Reach Higher National Convening in Washington, DC; October 28-30, 2016, American University, <http://www.american.edu/ucm/news/20161101-Reach-Higher.cfm>.

**Chart 2.3: Attendees at Reach Higher Convenings by Profession**



*Chart 2.3 shows the broad and diverse composition of Reach Higher convening attendees by profession.*

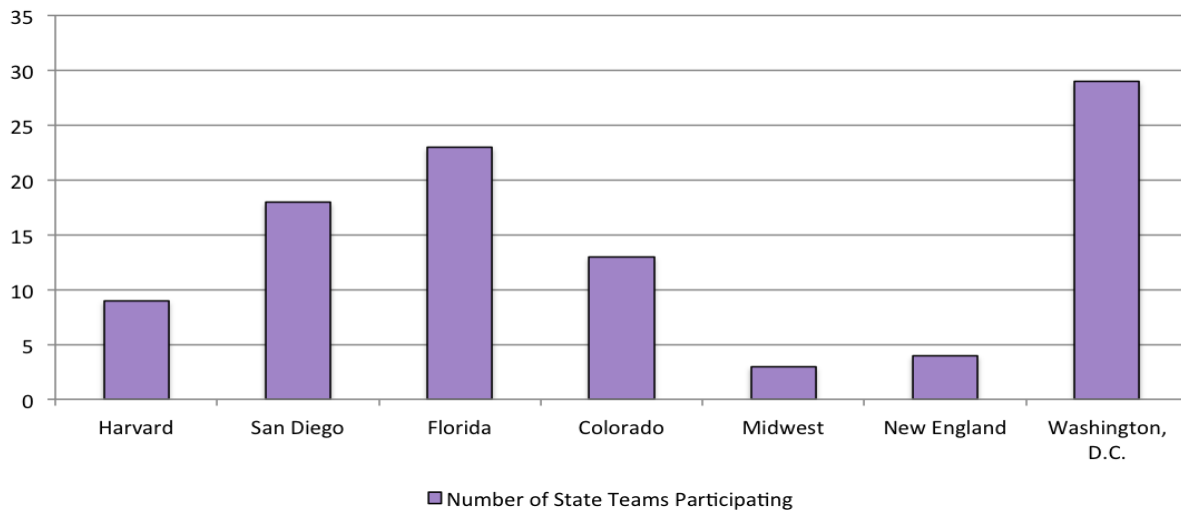
The Reach Higher convenings have produced and increased collective state efforts toward adopting concrete goals and metrics as part of their commitments to the college opportunity agenda, improving outcomes for students.

**Formation of Reach Higher State Teams**

Reach Higher and NCSCPS realized stakeholders involved in this work needed a vehicle through which to channel the innovative ideas, best practices, and policy ideas collected at these convenings into action in their home communities and states. School counselors and stakeholders were invited by state to participate in Reach Higher convenings and placed at the same table, offering a unique opportunity to exchange promising practices across-sector. These collective learning experiences marked an important

shift towards greater collaboration among school counselors, college access professionals and statewide officials, which is critical to the development of stronger college readiness counseling systems. It also led to the development of 42 Reach Higher state teams by October of 2016. Chart 2.4 below demonstrates the strong state team attendance at the convenings, which has allowed states to grow in their college opportunity work and to connect with other State Teams across the nation.

**Chart 2.4: State Team Participation in Regional and National Convenings**

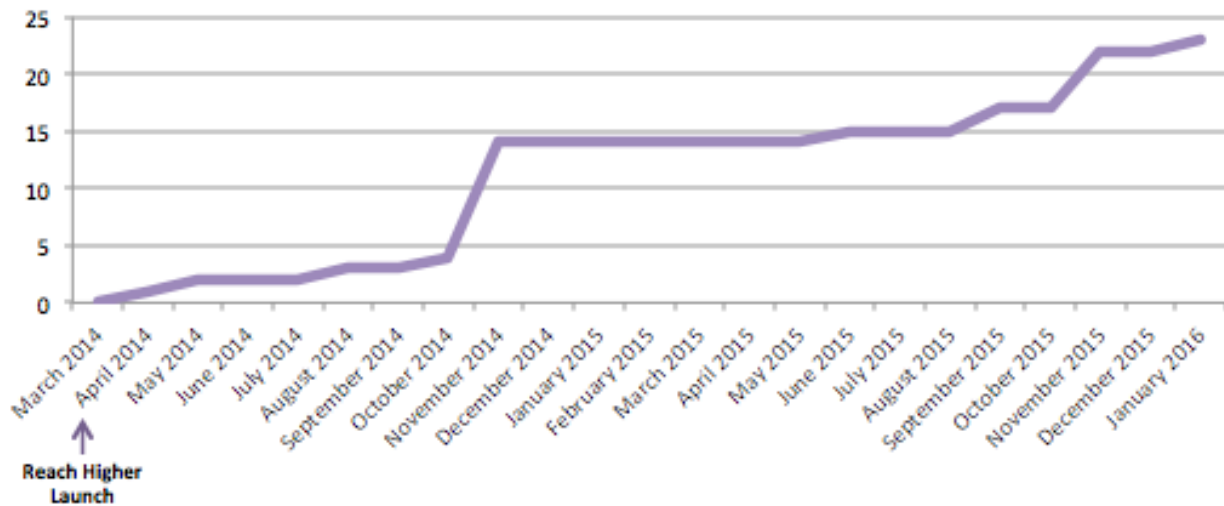


*Chart 2.4 shows the number of state teams that participated in each regional and national convening to date. Note: This chart represents only those states for which we have data on their convening attendance.*

With at least 14 state teams forming by fall of 2014 and an additional ten emerging throughout the following year (see Chart 3.1 below), we saw 42 Reach Higher state teams emerge in just over two years, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.



**Chart 3.1: Growth of Reach Higher State Teams Over Time**



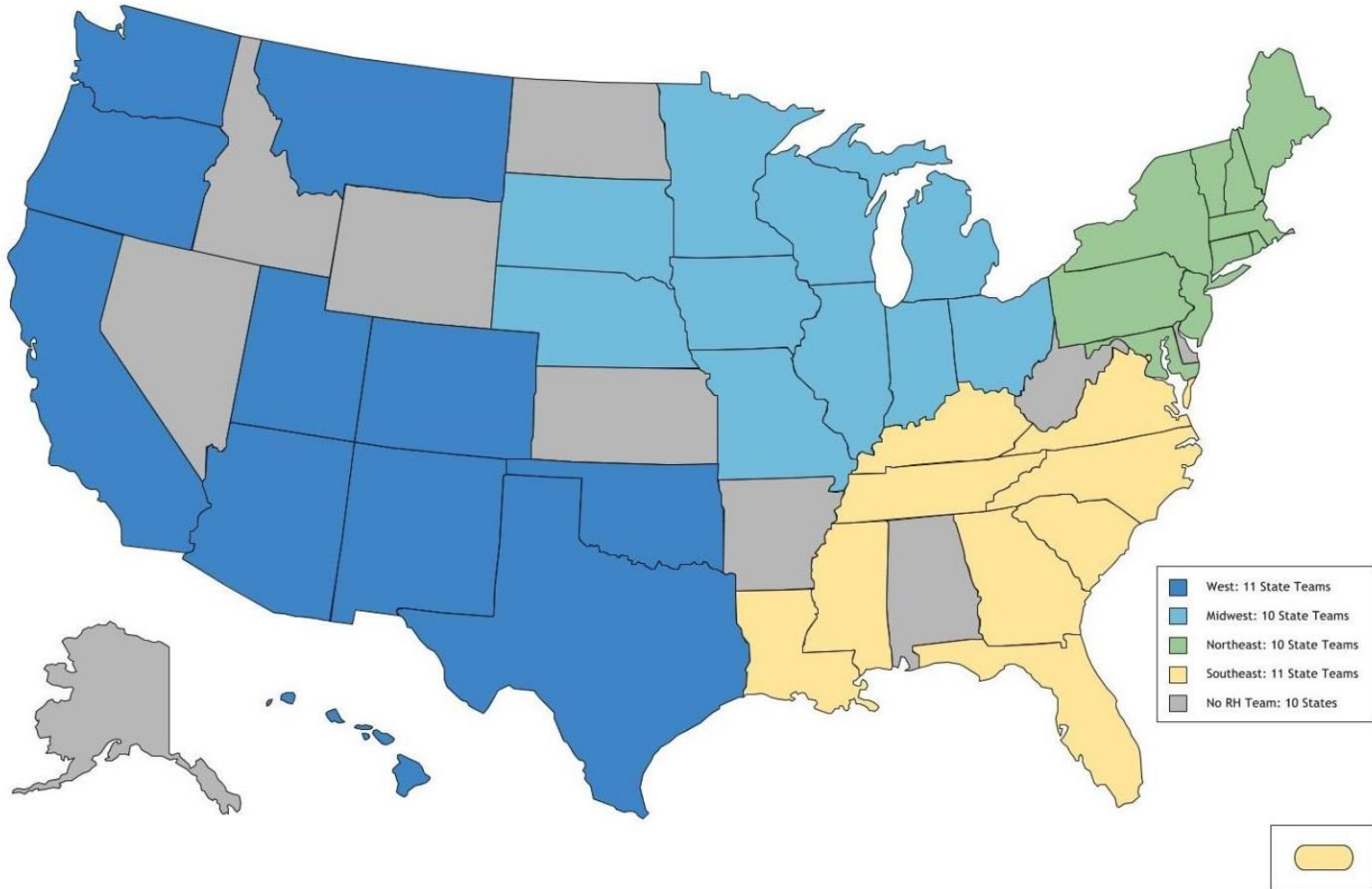
*Chart 3.1 illustrates the spread of Reach Higher State Teams over time.  
Note: This chart represents only those states for which we have data on the date of their RH team launch. To date, there are 42 Reach Higher State Teams.*

As Chart 3.2 below demonstrates, Reach Higher State Teams are present in every region across the United States. In fact, of the approximately 50 million public elementary and secondary school students in the United States, ninety-three percent live in a state that currently has a Reach Higher state team.<sup>24</sup> With representation across the Southeast, Midwest, West, and Northeast, the work of Reach Higher has spread considerably in just a few short years.

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<sup>24</sup> This statistic was calculated by adding up the student populations of each of the states with a Reach Higher State Team and dividing that sum by the total number of public elementary and secondary school students. All of those student population figures can be found at the following: “Digest of Education Statistics, 2013.” National Center for Education Statistics. Accessed January 5, 2017. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_203.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_203.20.asp).

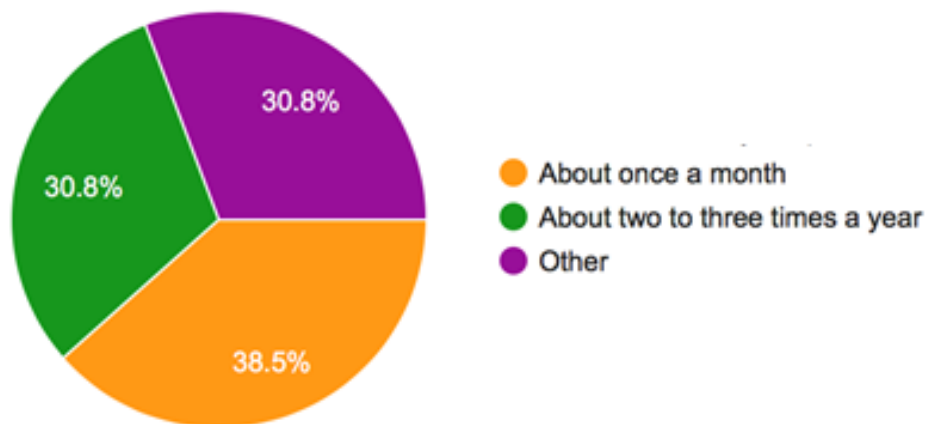
**Chart 3.2: Reach Higher State Teams by Region**



*Chart 2.3 shows all of the Reach Higher State Teams to date, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, by region.*

To help organize this work on the ground and outside of the federal government, Reach Higher State Teams are led by one or two “Reach Higher State Leads.” With professional backgrounds in school counseling and college advising, and as proven by the coordination and submission of their state’s commitments to the goals of Reach Higher, lead volunteers have demonstrated leadership and vision for Reach Higher efforts in their state. Chart 3.3 provides a snapshot of current voluntary engagement by states. As indicated by Chart 2.3, teams represent a wide array of professional perspectives.

**Chart 3.3: Reach Higher State Team Meeting Frequency**



*Chart 3.3 demonstrates the frequency with which Reach Higher State Teams meet. The “other” category largely includes teams that meet quarterly, as well as some who meet on an ad hoc basis.*

### **Commitments from Reach Higher State Teams**

As referenced earlier, to help drive progress and impact beginning in the early days of the Reach Higher movement, the White House encouraged Reach Higher State Teams to identify and make commitments, tied to metrics, to demonstrate their contributions and respond to the First Lady’s call to action and the President’s goal to increase postsecondary outcomes and once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. To help with this, Reach Higher convenings organizers chose a broad range of topics and evidence-based practices to cover during their convenings. Chart 3.4 includes the list of the key metrics first identified to contribute to Reach Higher efforts:

**Chart 3.4: Key Initial Metrics Identified at Reach Higher Convenings**

Counselors	Grades K-8
Counselors Earning Advanced Degrees	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading and Math Scores
	6 <sup>th</sup> Graders Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks
	On-Track to Graduation Indicators

Grades 9-12	Postsecondary
9th Graders Passing Algebra	College Enrollment Following High School
% of Schools offering Dual Enrollment Courses	College Remediation Enrollment Rates
% of Students Participating in College Visits	College Persistence/ Attendance Rates
% of Students Demonstrating AP Potential	Postsecondary Completion Rates
% of Students Earning College Credit	Industry Credential
% of Students Participating in Employment, Internship and Job Shadowing	Work-based Learning
ACT/SAT Completion	
College Applications Completed	
FAFSA Completion Rates	
Rigorous Course Enrollment	
High School Graduation Rates	

*Chart 3.4 lists the initial metrics that were identified at Reach Higher convenings. Since then, Reach Higher State Teams have added to their metrics and goals to more fully encompass the work happening in each of their states. The analysis to follow is based on these more comprehensive commitments, but the metrics in the chart above demonstrate the origins of these commitments and states' focus on outcomes even from the early days of Reach Higher.*

The next section provides information on the commonalities in commitments made by 21 Reach Higher state teams as well as on how this work is trending across the country and in different regions.

### **Reach Higher Commitments - National Trends Analysis**

The 21 states that shared their contributions to this work expressed their commitments in the form of broad goals, supported by specific metrics and key strategies that represented a broad range of policy interventions to increase college opportunity.<sup>25</sup> Analyzing this data across the states, we evaluated for each state which policy interventions the state addressed most frequently through its college opportunity

<sup>25</sup> All analysis in this section is based on data shared by 21 Reach Higher State Teams.

agenda, for all of the interventions each state described (see Chart 3.6 below for a list of the college opportunity policy interventions addressed by the Reach Higher commitments). We then took these state-specific numbers (e.g., college enrollment represented about X percent of all the key policy interventions state Y discussed in its commitments) and calculated the average of these state-specific rates for each of 14 key policy interventions included in college opportunity, generating national averages for each of these policy interventions. Additionally, we organized the policy interventions into larger categories to better examine patterns across the country. Therefore, all the policy interventions can be broken down into student-focused versus counselor-focused (plus “other”), as well as further subcategories, as illustrated by Chart 3.6.

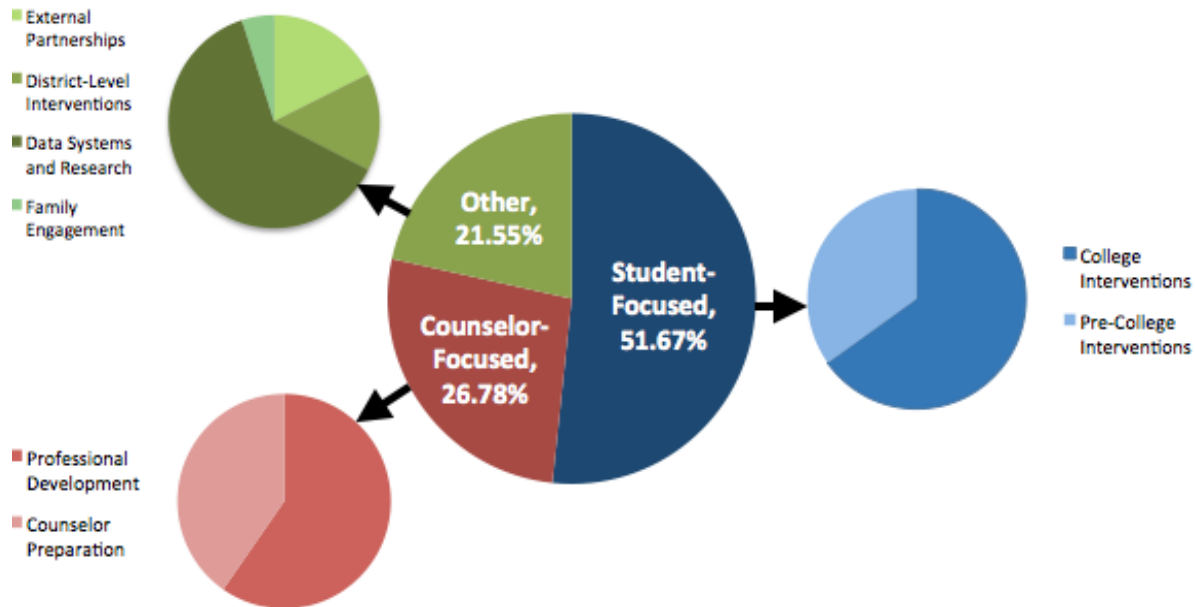
**Chart 3.6: College Opportunity Policy Interventions Addressed in States’ Reach Higher Commitments**

Student-Focused Policy Interventions		Counselor-Focused Policy Interventions		Other Policy Interventions
Pre-College	College	Preparation	Professional Development	
College Culture	Access	Advanced Credentials	Evaluation	District-Level
Academic Preparation	Enrollment	Student-to-Counselor Ratio	Professional Development	Data
	Completion	Pre-Service Training		Partnerships
				Family Engagement

*Chart 3.6 lists the college opportunity policy interventions addressed in states’ Reach Higher commitments. In our analysis, we evaluated each states’ commitments for the extent to which they addressed each of these policy interventions. The sections to follow discuss those results.*

For context, there are a few things to keep in mind about the available data. First, the percentage of state efforts focused on each policy intervention may seem low. Each state discussed an average of six policy interventions across all of its commitments, so just one of the interventions would only constitute about 17 percent of that state’s efforts in our data. Secondly, because states tend to focus on only a few interventions at a time, there will more often than not be fewer states focusing on a given intervention than there are states not focusing on it in their Reach Higher commitments. This drives averages across the states lower.

**Chart 3.7: Policy Interventions by Average Frequency Addressed across States<sup>26</sup>**



*Chart 3.7 displays the average percentage of Reach Higher state teams' policy efforts that are focused on each of the above types of policy interventions. For example, on average, each state addresses student-focused policy interventions in just over 50 percent of its interventions. Of those student-focused interventions, on average per state, about two-thirds are college-level interventions and one-third are pre-college interventions.*

Charts 3.7 and 3.8 provide a broad overview of the analysis of the policy interventions addressed by states' efforts in their commitments. As shown in Chart 3.7, it is clear that student-focused policy interventions are the most common focus of Reach Higher state teams, by a wide margin. They comprise over 50 percent of the policy interventions mentioned in each state's commitments on average, with counselor-focused policy interventions representing about a quarter of the interventions mentioned. Within those student-focused interventions, activities associated with college-access, enrollment (like FAFSA Completion) and completion make up an average of about a third of the policy interventions included by each state in their commitments. Pre-college interventions involving activities like building college-going cultures (through college application completion, internships, etc.) and academic

<sup>26</sup> Chart 3.7 displays how much states are focusing their efforts on different types of college opportunity policy interventions: counselor-focused, disaggregated into preparation and professional development; student-focused, disaggregated into pre-college and college; and other. Chart 3.8 displays a list of each of those college opportunity issues ranked by the average frequency with which states address them.

preparation (through college entrance exams, advanced coursework, academic milestones, etc.) make up less than a fifth of the policy interventions discussed by each state, on average.

On the counselor-focused side, states address in-service professional development most often, comprising about 16 percent of the interventions described by each state in their commitments on average. Counselor preparation—which includes increasing the advanced credential attainment rate, developing certification for school counseling, adjusting and developing counselor preparation curriculum at institutes of higher education, and improving student-to-counselor ratios—makes up about 11 percent of each state’s policy interventions for their Reach Higher state commitments, on average.

As for the “Other” category of State Teams’ policy initiatives, this encompasses a variety of issues, including district-level practices, data collection and system development and research on data-driven practices, partnerships with external entities, and family engagement efforts. Notably, data improvements and research is tied for the third most frequently mentioned policy intervention by states in their commitments, representing on average about 12.3 percent of the policy interventions addressed by each state. As a hallmark of the Obama administration’s education agenda both in P-12 and higher education policy, this movement toward evidence-based and data-driven efforts is clearly an important piece of states’ long-term strategies to increase college attainment rates. In fact, ten states – over a third of those whose commitment data we accessed – mention utilizing or expanding their data systems in some capacity, conducting surveys for evaluation purposes, or researching and mapping existing resources and effective best practices in their own state and across the states.

**Chart 3.8: States' Focus on College Opportunity Policy Interventions**

<b>Policy Interventions</b>	<b>Average Frequency Addressed</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Counselor Professional Development	14.79%	1
College Completion	12.59%	2
College Access	12.34%	3
Data Improvements and Research	12.33%	4
Academic Preparation	11.20%	5
College Enrollment	8.72%	6
College Culture	6.83%	7
Pre-Service Counselor Training	4.68%	8
Advanced Counselor Credentials	4.54%	9
External Partnerships	3.48%	10
District-Level Interventions	2.92%	11
Student-to-Counselor Ratio	1.57%	12
Counselor and School Evaluation	1.19%	13
Family Engagement	0.97%	14

*Chart 3.8 displays a list of each of the college opportunity interventions ranked by the average frequency with which states address them in their commitments.*

Breaking Chart 3.7 down even further, Chart 3.8 ranks all the interventions chosen, with the top three focused on professional development for school counselors, followed by developing interventions towards college completion, and college access and data improvements and research close behind. Interventions associated with each are explained in further detail below.

#### *College Access*

Tied for third in policy interventions addressed across the state commitments (see Chart 3.8), State Teams' **college access** work centers around **FAFSA completion rates**. Altogether, the federal government provides nearly \$180 billion in financial aid. The first step to accessing any of this aid is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. As previously mentioned, making the FAFSA more accessible to students across the country has been a centerpiece of the federal government's college access efforts, helping students utilize the billions in federal Pell grants left on the table every year for financial aid for higher education. Since the President took office, over 160 million FAFSA forms have been completed, the majority of which were submitted by first-generation and Pell-eligible students for whom a scholarship can mean the difference between earning a degree and not.

In accordance with these efforts, many Reach Higher State Teams are rolling out major FAFSA completion campaigns and tracking their students' FAFSA completion closely. There are concerted



efforts by counselors nationwide to host FAFSA support and completion workshops as well as financial aid trainings, equipping students and families to access federal student aid and make informed financial decisions. In particular, utilizing school-by-school and regional data on FAFSA completion is a key component of many states' Reach Higher commitments. In fact, this FAFSA season, all 50 states will be able to participate in the FAFSA Completion Initiative that the President and First Lady announced in 2014. Through the FAFSA Completion Initiative, states partner with districts and schools to provide student-level FAFSA completion data so that advisors and teachers can track exactly which students have filled out the FAFSA, allowing districts and schools to tailor their outreach and advising to ensure all students can complete the FAFSA. The President and First Lady have been working to build the movement for higher FAFSA completion rates across the country, and as the data here shows, the state-level work of state Reach Higher teams across the country clearly aligns with these efforts to expand college access.

### *College Completion*

College completion is the second most common policy intervention addressed across states' Reach Higher commitments, in keeping with President Obama's North Star goal (see Chart 3.8). In December 2014, the White House [College Opportunity Summit](#) brought together national leaders in education with partners such as school counselors, educators, and advocates to discuss the growing movement towards attaining President Obama's North Star goal. President Obama, Mrs. Obama, and Vice President Joe Biden all spoke about the path forward for college completion.<sup>27</sup> Attending and graduating from college is fundamentally transformative in students' long-term outcomes. A college graduate earns \$1 million more than a high school graduate over her lifetime. Furthermore, as First Lady Michelle Obama has said herself, "College did everything for me. It built my confidence. It taught me that I could leave home and be successful [...] It taught me how to open up, how to try new things that are scary, how to buck expectations and beat the odds."

However, as previously mentioned, 60 percent of low-income students expect to graduate college, but less than 15 percent do so. Earning a college degree has never been more crucial. In the years following Reach Higher's launch and the College Opportunity Summit, Reach Higher State Teams across the country have been partnering with Reach Higher to help more students graduate from college. In fact, college completion comprises an average of about 13 percent of each state's policy interventions in their Reach Higher commitments. These State Teams are targeting a range of critical issues related to college completion; beyond college degree attainment, many states are also tracking and addressing college remediation rates, college credit gain, college persistence, and industry credential attainment, utilizing a range of tools from dual enrollment programs to grant competitions to increase college completion.

### *Counselor Professional Development*

While states discuss student-focused efforts most frequently across the Reach Higher commitments, the single most frequently mentioned policy intervention for college opportunity is counselor professional development, which comprises an average of 15 percent of each state's policy interventions in their commitments (see Chart 3.8).

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/12/03/white-house-college-opportunity-summit>

As previously discussed, with a national student-to-counselor ratio of about 500-to-1, further supporting and equipping our school counselors to succeed is critical for transforming student college enrollment and attainment. Reach Higher State Teams have undertaken a rich array of initiatives around counselor professional development (PD). Perhaps most common across states' PD efforts is the emphasis on college and career readiness training, striving to ensure that counselors have the tools they need to support students' transition to college and careers. State teams are developing college access trainings and career awareness trainings for counselors, setting goals around the number of financial aid sessions held, and tracking educators' usage of and engagement with training modules. Furthermore, the Reach Higher State Teams have made commitments around building out the PD opportunities in their states, working to target professional development based on data and to clearly communicate and map all existing PD resources. Efforts are underway across the nation to provide a stronger framework for counselor PD, connecting counselors with professional organizations, conferences, trainings, and coaching. Finally, Reach Higher State Teams demonstrate an awareness in their commitments that school counselors cannot do the crucial work of supporting students on the path to college if they are spread too thin or have too many other responsibilities unrelated to counseling. State Teams across the country are working to strengthen and champion the role of the school counselor, even administering surveys to get counselors' feedback on where they most need additional training and support.

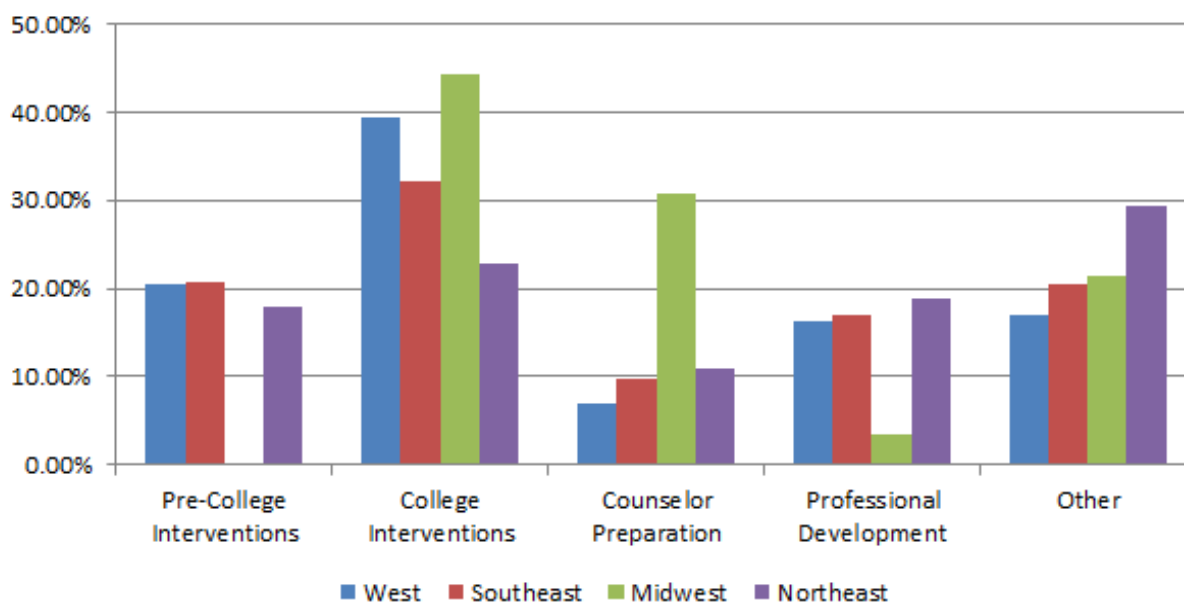
As Charts 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8 above demonstrate, there is a wide variety in states' commitments to the Reach Higher mission of college opportunity and attainment. These diverse responses provide opportunities for states to learn from each other, utilizing the networks of counselors spreading across the country to share best practices and experiences at Reach Higher convenings at the state, regional, and national level. As Reach Higher State Teams continue to connect and collaborate through their own networks and at Reach Higher convenings, they will continue to learn from one another and build off of each other's work. These State Teams are bringing progress at the local level to bear on a national scale and supporting students across the nation that over time will move the needle in support of our nation's students.

### **Regional Analysis Highlights Advantages in Diversity**

Across the regions of the United States, there is remarkable consistency and cohesion in how states are rolling out their visions for college opportunity. For example, states across the country are shoring up their data efforts, implementing data improvement initiatives and utilizing data for student and counselor success. Still, one of the hallmarks of this country is its diversity, allowing states to unify around common

goals like Reach Higher’s mission while introducing innovation and implementing best practices at the state and local levels. Each state has their own distinctive strategies to advance college enrollment and attainment, making them all the more equipped to learn from one another in the important work of college access, affordability, and attainment.

**Chart 3.9: States’ Policy Interventions by Region and Type**



*Chart 3.9 represents the average frequency with which each region’s states addressed four types of college opportunity policy interventions in their commitments: of the student-focused policy interventions, (1) pre-college and (2) college-level; and of the counselor-focused policy interventions, (3) preparation (pre-service) and (4) professional development (in-service). For example, of all the policy interventions discussed by Western states in their commitments, pre-college interventions represented an average of about 20 percent of each Western state’s college opportunity efforts.*

As Chart 3.9 above demonstrates, the regions have much in common even as they differ in their emphases on different policy interventions. For example, nearly all the regions’ commitments focus a fair amount on college-level policy interventions – access, enrollment, and affordability. Other interventions vary more: for example, college-level interventions range between averages of about 20 percent and 40 percent of the interventions each Reach Higher region’s State Teams are addressing through their commitments. Based on the average frequency with which states in different regions address different policy interventions, the West seems to be the Reach Higher region focusing most on student-focused policy interventions. The Southeast and the West are the Reach Higher regions focusing most on pre-college policy interventions, and the West is also the region focusing most on college-level policy interventions.

For instance, of the six states with 20 percent or more of their college opportunity efforts focused on college access, four are from the West. Additionally, the Southeast is definitively the region focusing most on student academic preparation.

Meanwhile, the Midwest is the region focusing most on counselor-focused policy interventions. In fact, Midwestern states constitute 40 percent of the states focusing more than 20 percent of their policy interventions on counselor preparation. Across all the states, most are focusing on improving pre-service counselor training (curricula, practica, etc.) rather than increasing advanced credential attainment or recruiting more counselors. Meanwhile, the Northeast is the region focusing most on in-service professional development for counselors. Across all the states, very few are focusing on counselor evaluation, with the vast majority that are addressing professional development working to expand and enhance in-service training and support. The Northeast is also the Reach Higher region focusing most on data, although all of the regions are undertaking data improvement and research to some extent.

The consistency and strength across the Reach Higher regions is truly noteworthy. Each region has hosted at least one Reach Higher convening, each region has an array of strong commitments to the mission of Reach Higher, and all of the regions are actively working to increase college opportunity across the United States.

### **Examples of Commitments and Best Practices from Reach Higher State Teams<sup>28</sup>**

#### *New York*

The New York Reach Higher state team provides a strong example of forward movement on two components crucial to the future of school counseling: counselor support and training and high-quality data systems and usage. New York's first Reach Higher commitment is to "establish statewide comprehensive college and career training for school counselors and college advisors, both pre-service and in-service." On the pre-service side, the state team is working to convene educators to design and implement school counseling program guidelines that include college and career readiness as well as data-driven practices. On the in-service side, the New York state is working to assess the current landscape of

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix B for more examples of commitments and metrics from Reach Higher State Teams.

school counseling professional development and identify key gaps, after which the state team plans to partner with organizations across the state to begin addressing those gaps.

The second of New York’s Reach Higher commitments is to “identify and development a common data set.” The state team is focusing on data for four critical indicators: chronic absenteeism, high school graduation rates, postsecondary intentions, and FAFSA completion. Collecting baseline data and evaluating progress against goals for each of these indicators, the New York state team aims to identify gaps in student outcomes across a range of underrepresented demographic groups. In addition to this fundamental data, the state team noted three additional indicators that are important for student outcomes but are not currently collected and reported across the state: Algebra 2 mastery; postsecondary enrollment, remediation, persistence, and retention; and relevant data from students’ individual academic and career success plans. The New York state team will work to develop strategies for building out the data systems on these three aspirational indicators.

### *Tennessee*

In the past year, the Tennessee State Board of Education approved a full revision of the state’s Comprehensive School Counseling Model of Practice and Student Standards, which provide clear guidelines for all of the state’s school counselors serving students from kindergarten to 12th grade.<sup>29</sup> The revision, which will go into effect for the 2017-2018 school year, brings Tennessee into alignment with national school counseling standards and incorporates the perspectives of school counselors across the state. Notably, the updated standards aim to clarify and strengthen the role of the school counselor, better aligning their responsibilities to student needs and outcomes.<sup>30</sup>

The Tennessee Reach Higher state team’s commitments reflect these efforts. The team aims to “position school counselors to do work that is aligned to their training and expertise, removing unrelated roles and responsibilities and reducing counselor to student ratios so that counselors have more time to spend advising and supporting students in meeting their postsecondary goals.” In executing this, the state will

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<sup>29</sup> “School Counseling: Revised School Counselor Model & Standards Policy.” Tennessee Department of Education. Accessed January 5, 2017. <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/school-counseling#sthash.SjtWR6KN.dpuf>

<sup>30</sup> “School Counseling: Revised School Counselor Model & Standards Policy.” <https://www.tn.gov/education/topic/school-counseling#sthash.SjtWR6KN.dpuf>; “Frequently Asked Questions: Revised School Counseling Model of Practice and Standards.” Tennessee Department of Education. Accessed January 5, 2017. [https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/ccte\\_counseling\\_FAQ.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/ccte_counseling_FAQ.pdf)

continue to implement revisions of its model of school counseling and school counseling standards, providing professional development for school counselors on the revised model and standards. In addition, the Tennessee state team is exploring licensure policy revisions as well as further developing pre-service programs to address college and career advising. In evaluating its success on these endeavors, the team plans to use survey data from school counselors, administrators, and district-level leaders; student-to-counselor ratios; and key outcomes data such as FAFSA completion rates and graduation rates.

### *Colorado*<sup>31</sup>

In 2008, Colorado created a School Counselor Corps Grant Program to improve access to effective school counseling across the state and, consequently, to increase Colorado's college completion rates. The program was designed to grant funds competitively to school districts, allowing districts to spend those funds to hire additional school counselors and to improve school counselors' effectiveness. From 2010 to 2015, the School Counselor Corps program granted \$16 million to 59 schools. Seventy-one percent of the students at the participating schools identified as students of color, and 59 percent were low-income, qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. The program's results thus far have been significant, giving the program a strong return on investment. The schools' student-to-counselor ratio was lowered from 363-to-1 to 216-to-1. Dropout rates lowered from 5.5 percent before the grant program to 3.7 percent in the final year of the grant,<sup>32</sup> and postsecondary enrollment increased from 31 percent to 44 percent.<sup>33</sup>

### **Better Make Room: Meeting Students Where They Are**

As a part of her Reach Higher initiative, Mrs. Obama also launched Better Make Room in October 2015 to change the cultural conversation about college among young people, raise awareness about the importance of attending college, and meet students where they are. Better Make Room seeks to build a college-going movement from the ground up by engaging students directly and providing them access to the support they need in enrolling and graduating from college, while dispelling common myths about college. Better Make Room does not duplicate efforts already underway; rather, it adds unique value to the college access movement by leveraging the First Lady's star power, megaphone, and ability to elevate

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix C for the text of the report (see footnote 33 below) on Colorado's School Counselor Corps Grant Program.

<sup>32</sup> "How Adding High School Counselors Saved Colorado More than \$300 Million." *Chalkbeat*, July 19, 2016.

<http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2016/07/19/how-more-high-school-counselors-saved-colorado-more-than-300-million/>.

<sup>33</sup> Arredondo, S., Jesse, D., Billig, S. H., & Weston-Sementelli, J. (2016). *Colorado School Counselor Corps Grant Program: Early experiences and lessons learned*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. <http://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/colorado-school-counselor-corps-grant-program-early-experiences-and-lessons-learned>

success to engage the minds of young people. Mrs. Obama has used traditional means of engaging students, such as commencement speeches and summits, but also used social media and text-based interventions as well.

In 2016, Mrs. Obama provided three commencement speeches at two postsecondary institutions ([Jackson State University](#) and [City College of New York](#)) and one high school ([the Santa Fe Indian School](#)). Just as she has done in previous years, the commencement addresses targeted institutions with high proportions of low-income, minority, and first-generation students. For example, she has provided the commencement address at a Historically Black College and University every year since the launch of Reach Higher, including at Jackson State University in 2016. Her commencement speech at the Santa Fe Indian School was the first time a First Lady had visited a public school with a 100 percent Native American student population.

For the third year in a row, Mrs. Obama also hosted her [Beating the Odds Summit](#) at the White House. Beating the Odds has a special focus on celebrating low-income, minority, and first-generation college students who have overcome tremendous barriers to graduate from high school and attend college. Last July, Mrs. Obama welcomed 140 low-income, minority college-bound students to the White House for the Summit. These students represented a wide range of communities—urban, rural, foster, homeless, immigrant, special needs—who overcame great odds to go to college, and many were the first in their families to pursue further education after high school.

Mrs. Obama has also built a national movement around [College Signing Day](#), an effort to celebrate the commitments made by low-income minority youth to attend and graduate from a postsecondary institution. In April 2014, when she hosted her first College Signing Day in San Antonio, Texas, there were only twelve other schools hosting their own College Signing Day events. In April 2015, when she hosted her second College Signing Day in Detroit, Michigan, more than 600 hosts around the country held their own events in conjunction with the First Lady’s event. In 2016, the number of College Signing Day hosts more than doubled to 1,240, and a College Signing Day event was held in all 50 states.

The First Lady has also met students where they are by engaging through creative uses of her social media channels. [Better Make Room](#) has established a broad and influential online presence; for instance, the #BetterMakeRoom hashtag alone has secured over 800 million social media impressions across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, averaging millions of views and engagements per week (this number does not include the billions of social media impressions made by the #CollegeSigningDay and



#ReachHigher hashtags). Better Make Room is currently on pace to meet its original goal of one billion social media impressions prior to the end of the Obama Administration. Other examples of successes have included over 700 media hits, and a [“Go to College” rap video](#) starring Mrs. Obama and Jay Pharoah that was viewed nearly five million times on Youtube.

Better Make Room has also engaged students directly through the use of text messaging, as opposed to more traditional means of communications such as e-mail, to help them navigate the complexities of the college-going process. [Up Next](#), Better Make Room’s evidence-based texting intervention, provides nearly 100,000 students, families, and educators across the country with personalized reminders, encouragement, and connections to assistance with the steps to and through higher education. Designed and implemented by Professor Ben Castleman, a senior adviser for Better Make Room whose research has demonstrated the effectiveness of texting interventions in the college access space, Up Next builds on a strong foundation of rigorously-evaluated, large-scale text messaging campaigns in education and public policy in alignment with cutting-edge research on the effectiveness of behavioral nudges. It also pushes the frontier of mobile campaign design by: (1) incorporating new media; (2) capitalizing on Mrs. Obama’s connection with young Americans; and (3) facilitating connections one-on-one with real-life college advisers through interactive technologies. Initial implementation data for Up Next’s pilot year has been very promising. For instance, Up Next’s engagement rate (i.e., the rate at which students respond to questions posed by texts) is more than twice that of similar texting campaigns.

### **Looking Ahead: 2017 and Beyond**

Reach Higher and the First Lady have shown themselves to be a catalyst and an inspiration for a renewed energy and focus on the importance of increasing postsecondary success. Through its discovered convening power, Reach Higher has both brought leaders from states together who are eager for information and professional development to learn about innovative and groundbreaking practices and strategies they can use to support the students they serve as they help them navigate to and through college. And as each state participates in these convenings, their wealth of knowledge on college access and completion builds, helping to positively expose them to new strategies that will continue to make a positive impact on their state commitments and progress with this work.

As discussed, Reach Higher convenings also provide a space and opportunity for a variety of stakeholders to explore collaboration across sectors. With policymakers, state and local officials, college access advocates, school counselors, business leaders and nonprofit organizations all at the table, they were

compelled to answer together the fundamental question – how can we work together to create a better future for our students, our communities, our state and our country? Just two years in and with 42 State Teams newly formed, we are only at the beginning of seeing those results. With the next Reach Higher national convening entitled “[System-wide Sustainability for College and Career Readiness: Building Strong and Lasting Supports for School Counseling and Advising](#)”<sup>34</sup> taking place in Arizona from March 6 - 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and other states expressing interest in hosting regional convenings next year, we know there is an unstoppable momentum that will carry this work far beyond 2017.

Looking ahead, we see Reach Higher State Teams’ commitments to college opportunity already pointing to key advancements towards student success. As Reach Higher continues to support states in making clear, measurable, realistic and ambitious commitments to increase college opportunity and success, states across the country will be better able to continue to build out their data systems in robust and innovative ways to better evaluate and implement policy that produces the most effective results. Some of this work includes utilizing newly robust federal data available, such as the Civil Rights Data Collection and the FAFSA Completion Initiative, to better understand critical national equity gaps such as access to school counselors and to better support students in the journey to and through college. School counselors are often on the frontlines of ensuring that all students have access to a safe, supportive, and high-quality education. Under President and Mrs. Obama’s leadership over the last eight years, this nation has made remarkable progress in closing gaps of opportunity in education – but also, with more data available than ever before, we have also seen how far we still have to go. While we have made considerable strides in supporting low-income students, students of color, LGBTQ students, homeless students, students in foster care, rural students, and other underrepresented students, as we look to the future, the Reach Higher State Teams and so many other college opportunity advocates are working to make gains in closing achievement gaps and to create inclusive learning environments for students of every socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

In addition to these federal data sources, data systems are also advancing at the state level. The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#),<sup>35</sup> which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, includes new data, transparency, and accountability requirements for states, including the requirement to

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<sup>34</sup> Arizona Reach Higher Convening, March 6 – 8, 2017: <https://students.asu.edu/reachhigher>

<sup>35</sup> The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, P.L. No. 114-95. <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>

include postsecondary enrollment rates for every high school in the state on their state report cards.<sup>36</sup> It also includes new provisions, which allow states and school districts to expand their school counseling programs.<sup>37</sup> And with more and more states aligning K-12 education with higher education and industry, a much-needed and rare bridge between sectors is beginning to evolve. Following the development of academic standards aligned to college and career readiness in states across the nation in recent years, Reach Higher State Teams are now exploring how to best equip school counselors through pre-service and in-service training to support students' college and career readiness. Furthermore, as demonstrated in this paper, school counselors across the country are introducing innovations to better prepare their students for college and careers, including exposure to college and career experiences through campus visits and partnerships with local businesses. Exposing students to more robust career and technical education offerings for 21st century industry and integrating internships into student learning experiences have become more common; and with the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act due for reauthorization, there is likely to be renewed attention drawn to improving career education – particularly in high-demand industries – to better equip students to succeed in today's economy. Other trends include the development of dual enrollment programs, which allow students to gain college credit (or industry credentials) while still in high school, creating a more cost-effective and seamless transition to higher education post-graduation. Finally, as school counselors strive to prepare students for college and career, educators and advocates are doing more to support students from kindergarten to college graduation, fostering a college-going culture early on and seeing students through all the way to the finish line and beyond.

What's more, as a result of Reach Higher's work the Department of Education has answered a call to give school counselors a bigger seat at the table. Through its [School Ambassador Fellows Program](#), school counselors will join the community of teacher and principal leaders involved in policymaking at the Department of Education, a huge victory for the school counselor community and our nation's students. As Secretary of Education John King has said, this will help students “enlarge their vision of what is possible and take advantage of educational opportunities. School counselors fill many roles by helping students work through serious social, emotional, academic, and personal challenges, while also guiding

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<sup>36</sup> Note that the text requires this data where “available and to the extent practicable.” Sec. 1111(h)(1)(C)(xiii).

<sup>37</sup> “American School Counselor Association Endorses Every Student Succeeds Act.” American School Counselor Association. December 3, 2015. Accessed January 5, 2017. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Press%20releases/ESSA.pdf>

them along a path to college and career readiness.”<sup>38</sup> This increased focus on supporting school counselors is taking place at the state level as well. As awareness of the importance of school counselors has spread across the nation in recent years, states are investing more of their resources in the development and support of school counselors. For example, the state of Minnesota recently chose to invest \$12 million on equipping 77 schools with necessary school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and nurses.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Colorado is building upon its recent \$16 million investment in school counselors after finding that the additional school counselor support decreased dropout rates.<sup>40</sup>

As the momentum of this work carries beyond the Administration, the Reach Higher movement will continue to grow through its partnership its [Better Make Room](#), which seeks to reach students where they are while elevating student’s voices, working to support school counselors, and increasing college enrollment and attainment nationwide in pursuit of the broader North Star goal. An example of this partnership can be seen through Reach Higher and the First Lady’s final education event at the White House on January 6, 2017, celebrating the School Counselor of the Year. Reach Higher and Better Make Room created a [toolkit](#) for stakeholder involvement across the nation to demonstrate the synergy between organizations and offer a glimpse of how the work will continue into 2017 and beyond.

The First Lady has made a commitment to continue to support this work beyond her time at the White House. Building on her own experience as a first-generation college student, over the years she has demonstrated her steadfast commitment to inspiring youth to reach high and grab hold of what inspires them as they explore who they are and what they want to become. Mrs. Obama looks forward to continuing this partnership with school counselors and higher education leaders across the country who are critical to guiding students on the path to improve their lives and pursue their wildest dreams.

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<sup>38</sup> Ujifusa, Andrew. “Education Dept. Expands Ambassador Program to School Counselors.” October 28, 2016. Accessed January 5, 2017. [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/10/education\\_dept\\_expands\\_ambassador\\_school\\_counselors.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/10/education_dept_expands_ambassador_school_counselors.html)

<sup>39</sup> Gewertz, Catherine. “States Beef Up School Counseling Corps - Education Week.” *Education Week*, December 14, 2016. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2016/12/14/states-beef-up-school-counseling-corps.html>.

<sup>40</sup> “How Adding High School Counselors Saved Colorado More than \$300 Million.” *Chalkbeat*, July 19, 2016. <http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2016/07/19/how-more-high-school-counselors-saved-colorado-more-than-300-million/>.

**APPENDIX**

## **APPENDIX A: 2016 REACH HIGHER CONVENING REPORTS**

### **CONVENING: National Reach Higher Convening at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs**

#### *UCCS Reach Higher Convening: Preparing Students with Work-ready Skills*

As the momentum for the Reach Higher initiatives continues, the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS) carried the torch for the fourth convening in June 2016. For the first time, this convening brought together state teams integrating the business communities with school counselors, other educational leaders, as well as state agency leaders from 27 states across the United States. The vision of this convening was to accelerate the integration of industry into educational systems through internships, apprenticeship, and other innovative strategies to effectively prepare students for life beyond high school.

Because work-based learning has become a prominent method of preparing students for postsecondary options, this convening highlighted the important intersections between business and education communities from across the United States. These intersections strengthen the commission of helping all students to develop career readiness skills and have access to postsecondary options. This convening explored the recommended practices for work-based learning opportunities and highlighted various models across the United States. A primary impetus for this convening was to change the trajectory for underserved students from our communities and ensure that they are afforded educational opportunities.

This two and a half-day convening was hosted in the lovely setting of Pike's Peak at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. Researchers state that in 1973, 72% of jobs in America required, at most, a high school diploma. Today, we are only four years away from a time when more than 70% of jobs will require at least some form of postsecondary education. These facts compel collaborative actions in assisting students with work readiness skills. As a result of this workforce information, the College of Education, the Department of Counseling and Human Services from UCCS and the Colorado Department of Education collaborated with businesses throughout the state to focus this convening on promoting more access to work-based learning opportunities for students.

Using a similar structure of the past convenings, this event included keynote speakers and breakout sessions. However, some unique components were integrated in this convening such as adding school counseling practitioners as Ambassadors to serve each of the attending state teams.

Over 46 school counselors throughout the state applied for these positions, and 23 Ambassadors were selected. These practicing school counselors took notes during the planning sessions, led discussions and served as hosts for the state teams. The efforts of the School Counseling Ambassadors were greatly appreciated by all of the team members. 11

Another unique component of this convening was the site visits offered on the second day. Site visits were coordinated for attendees to experience Springs Fabrication where attendees had the opportunity to learn how Pikes Peak Manufacturing Partnership has brought together leaders in business, education and workforce to address the talent shortage in manufacturing and other key industries throughout the region. The tour included a demonstration of the RealWeld Trainer.

Visitors also learned how Southern Colorado is utilizing sector partnerships to:

- establish public-private partnerships
- work across silos
- expose educators to industry opportunities & provide training in rural areas

Another site visit involved the Colorado Springs School District-11 specifically the Roy J. Wasson Academic Campus (hereafter the campus). The Campus, designed to meet the varying educational needs of all students, is open fourteen hours a day, offers an Early College High School, alternative education schools, Career Pathways, online education, credit recovery, night school, adult education and two Early Learning Centers.

While on site, participants had the opportunity to speak with Principals, School Counselors and students about

- the impact of the Colorado School Counselor Corps Grant
- how Individualized Career and Academic Plans (ICAPs) support postsecondary advising
- Summer Melt programming
- Career Pathways, winner of the 2014 Pike's Peak Work Force Center's Champion of Prosperity Award.

For more information about the successes of the Colorado School Counselor Corps Grant please see the white paper regarding this grant.

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/schoolcounselorcorps>

### *Convening Agenda*

#### Day 1 Agenda

Introductions:

*Eric Waldo: Executive Director of First Ladies Reach Higher Initiative:*

This is part of the Obama's administration efforts to reinforce how post-secondary education is a prerequisite for success. It is Mrs. Obama's mission to encourage young people to complete some kinds of education past high school. The First Lady is the "School Counselor in Chief for the country."

Three key themes for this convening include:

1. School Counselors are imperative to the success of preparing students' for life beyond high school. School Counselors are often the first caring adult who teach students about the world of work.
2. College is a pathway to careers and students must be college and career ready.
3. Corporate, and philanthropic partnerships and partnerships between business and education must lead conversations that are essential to helping students develop work ready skills. School Counselors are the difference makers.

*John Hickenlooper, Governor of Colorado highlighted the following in his Welcome:*

It is a privilege to welcome you to Colorado for the fourth convening of the First Lady's Reach Higher initiative: Preparing Students with Work-Ready Skills.

This is a unique convening in the series focused on the intersection of workforce and education and how to accelerate the integration of industry into educational systems through hands-on approaches such as internships, apprenticeships, and other innovative strategies that prepare students for life beyond high school. Here in Colorado, 74 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary credential by 2020. The call to action could not be any clearer.

It is critical that as a nation and in our individual states we work to provide a world-class education and training to help people connect with careers, improve their quality of life, and support the growth of the middle class. That is why we have brought together state teams that include business, workforce, school and state agency leaders to explore new work-based learning strategies, and to learn from each other. Over the course of the next few days, I encourage you to partake in vigorous discussion and exchange of ideas with your colleagues in education, business and policy from across the nation. This convening is focused on learning and action. Learn all that you can about models of excellence in other states, and then explore how these new ideas could come to life in your own states.

We hope you will leave with some clear, actionable ideas for how to integrate business and education in a meaningful way in your own state, thus changing the trajectory for underserved student across the country.

#### Day 1 Panel Discussions

*Jeremy Anderson: President Education Commission of the States (ECS) highlighted the following in his remarks: (based on video, powerpoints)*

The Education Commission of the States provides essential, indispensable services that education policy leaders need to make a difference. Reach Higher Initiative is about ensuring every student has access to important tools and people to help support their academic planning.

Policy trends in education show that the last two years we have seen the most changes in education policy than in the past 50. The average tenure of a chief state school officers has changed from an average eight years and is now 2.4 years. There has been a drop in the number of college students choosing to be teachers by a third in the past five years.

Most successful programs in states tackle all of these: Student readiness, access, quality, and alignment. These are the differentiating issues from the states that are seeing dramatic changes and those who are having some impediments getting there.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) have some of the biggest policies in the states. Well-paying, high demand jobs will continue to go unfilled when we consider the data. Local, state and national economic growth and competitiveness will not be achieved until those advising students on postsecondary career options.

Dual enrollment is the #1 issue searched for on our website. Creating more seamless transitions from high school to college and the workforce for students is necessary. Two states to look at for dual enrollment: Iowa: 30% are taking dual enrollment courses. Colorado: despite its discrepancies with alignment issues,



students can now transfer the dual enrollment courses to post-secondary colleges. Alignment is key to transferability.

A report on dual enrollment is available on the ECS website.

*Early College High Schools* across the country are supported largely by philanthropic funds. Close to 12 states have policies that provide dedicated state funding for these programs, including North Carolina and Texas.

*Career Pathways:* Colorado has done a lot on career pathways to develop an alignment. Many career pathway programs across the U.S. are not aligned with post-secondary programs which are not aligned with workforce needs.

*Work-based learning opportunities:* Tennessee, Utah, and Indiana offer good reports on how to develop this process.

*Better Counseling & Career Exploration:* is a difficult area due to counselor-to-student ratio. Students cannot available options if that insight is not offered. Texas and Utah have developed incentives for school counselors to become highly skilled at providing college and career counseling.

*Counseling and Business Engagement:* It is difficult to build engagement between education and business. Indiana pushed this through state legislation.

We need to learn from each of these.

#### Day 1 Afternoon Breakouts

<http://www.uccs.edu/reachhigher/event-presentations.html>

- Illinois State: *P-TECH-Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools*

Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) is an innovative 9-14 school model created to address our nation's skills gap. This session highlights one P-TECH school in Chicago, Sarah E Goode STEM Academy, as it connects high school, college and the world of work to prepare students for STEM-related jobs of the future. The P-TECH model enables students to earn a high school diploma, associate degree, and workplace skills within six years.

Together, Chicago Public Schools, City Colleges of Chicago, and IBM are pioneering a new vision for college and career readiness.

- National Partners, School Counseling and Career Advising:

*The Foundational Intersection of Education and Business*

-The national economy is dependent on successful businesses

-Successful businesses depend on a well prepared workforce

-Education is the major vehicle for building a prepared workforce

The current educational landscape necessitates that all stakeholders (business, community, non-profit, school counselors and PreK-14 education leaders) collaboratively work to advance educational outcomes for all students. This session highlighted the core mission of school counselors and the importance of integrating their student centered roles into workforce planning tables, as a foundational strategy for implementing system wide and/or state wide measurable career readiness outcomes that are inextricable to the economic welfare of the nation.

• Colorado, Bridging Education, Business, and Workforce:

*The Key to Colorado's Industry Driven Talent Development System*

Colorado businesses face a persistent shortage of skilled workers. Meanwhile hundreds of students and job seekers remain unemployed or underemployed posing a threat to the economy, businesses and job seekers alike. This session highlighted Colorado's nationally recognized sectors approach and the emerging work of the Business Experiential Learning Commission as core strategies to transform the state's talent development system and ensure students have the skills needed to close the growing talent gap.

• *Massachusetts, Career and Technical Education Model*

We all want the same thing: increased student opportunities and career success.

To do this: 1. Rigorous STEM classes are essential. 2. Information on post-graduation pathways for those interested in math-science related careers is critical. This session reviewed current STEM data to demonstrate the mid-level STEM skills gap. We can do more to make students aware of significant, lucrative career pathways available after high school. We will emphasize the importance of business/industry partnerships in building academic-career relevance in the classroom and offer implementable suggestions for those interested in generating STEM careers discussion. Finally, with NASCAR race footage and a problem-solving activity we'll demonstrate how easy it is to insert relevant career information into your lessons. Current STEM resources shared.

Live Link for Tuesday's Speakers: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_yBLbAb1hRw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yBLbAb1hRw)

## Day 2 Agenda

*Stephanie Sprow:*

*Deputy Director of the First Lady's Reach Higher Initiative with U.S Department of Education*

### Metrics States Are Tracking

- % of Students Participating In College Visits
- % of Schools Offering Dual Enrollment Courses
- % of Students Demonstrating AP Potential
- % of Students Earning College Credit In High School
- % of Students Participating In Employment, Internship and Job Shadowing
- 4th Grade Reading and Math Scores
- 6th Graders Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks
- 9th Graders Passing Algebra
- ACT/SAT Completion
- Attendance Rates
- College Applications Completed
- College Enrollment Following High School
- College Persistence
- College Remediation
- Enrollment Rates
- Counselors Earning Advanced Degrees
- FAFSA Completion Rates
- High School Graduation Rates
- On -Track To Graduation Indicators (Middle and High School)
- Postsecondary Completion Rates (2 year, 4 Year, Industry Certificate)

- Rigorous Course Enrollment (Honors, AP, IB, Cambridge)
- Industry Credentials
- Dual Enrollment
- Work-Based Learning

#### Lever List

- Intersection of Business & Education
- School Counselor Professional Development
- School Counselor Leadership Training
- College and Career Readiness Policy
- Higher Ed – Pre-Service & In-Service Training
- K-12 and Higher Ed CCR Partnerships
- School Counselor and College Advising Research
- College and Career Readiness Standards & Credentialing
- Strategic Partnership Strategies

*Tanya Clay House: Deputy Assistant Secretary, P-12 Office of Planning Evaluation and Policy Development in the U S Department of Education*

#### Access and Equity to Educational Opportunities

"Our mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access."

We must broaden the definition of what it is to get an excellent education. It is a chance to get the balance right and to expand civil rights and not dilute them. Every student in this country needs and deserves access to subjects that go into being a well-rounded person.

These are necessary to be ready for today's education.

The way forward is by focusing on equity through opportunity which is a core American value that helps form our national identity, solidify our democracy and strengthen our economy.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed into law this year by President Obama is a bipartisan bill intended to fix No Child Left Behind.

ESSA ensures opportunity for all of America's students by

- Holding all students to high academic standards
- Preparing all students for success in college and career
- Providing more kids access to high-quality preschool
- Guaranteeing steps are taken to help students, and their schools to improve, reduces the burden of testing
- Maintaining annual information for parents and students
- Promoting local innovation and investing in what works

Principles of Every Student Succeeds Act:

- Upholds critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students
- Ensures that low-income and minority students are not being taught at disproportionate rates by ineffective teachers.

- Maintains dedicated funding and protections for groups of vulnerable students and for low-performing schools.
- Increases transparency for critical equity data
- Maintains 21st Century Community Learning Centers focused on students in high poverty and low-performing schools
- Gives more kids access to high-quality preschool through the authorization of Preschool Development Grants
- Includes a comprehensive literacy program for children from birth to grade 12, targeted to low-income students
- Includes competitive grants similar to many of ED's signature programs to promote local innovation and invest in what works

These include grants to provide continued support for:

- High-performing charter schools for high-need students and magnet schools comprehensive, place-based wraparound interventions, similar to the Promise Neighborhoods program
- Identification, replication and scaling of local innovation and evidence-based strategies to improve outcomes for high-need students, similar to the Investing In Innovation (i3) program

College Scoreboard allows for better choices among colleges. This is a website that was both robust and accessible. It can serve as a tool for those looking to make a more informed college decisions.

*Brandon Busted: Executive Director of Education*

Talent development pipeline- would follow students from middle to high school.

How do we build an "educonomy?"

If we were doing a better job of this, we wouldn't have the many broken linkages between education and workforce outcomes. Most people think Early childhood learning is even more important to someone's long-term success than even college.

What is our definition of success?

If we don't get this right, we focus myopically on things that may not matter as much as we think they do. 75% of students enrolled in higher education are adults who are re-skilling. The ultimate outcome of a diploma is to have a great job and a great life. We have the highest graduation rates than any time in the history of the United States. No one seems to be celebrating that! However, many who are highly educated are underemployed. Wellbeing is measured by what it is to have a great job. Teachers, out of all professions are dead last on workplace engagement, in feeling if their opinions at work count.

Are we measuring the right things?

How are we measuring care in schools today since it is the most important indicator of students' engagement. Hope is stronger predictor of college success than SAT and GPA. We need to continue to chart classic economic measures in education and behavioral economic measures. We also need to continue to chart grades, test scores, and graduation. But we must measure wellbeing, grit, and hope.

Are graduates work ready?

Gallup measured 18-35-year-olds, measuring 21st-century skills on whether what they were exposed to in their education had a relationship of to their success. Of all the items listed the two things that rose to the surface were having a Long-Term project and could they apply what they learned to solve a real problem. Most education is about context. A survey asking if High school students are getting any work experience at all. Results indicate that less than 5% of high school students who say they are interning at a

local organization of any type, and 17% report working an hour or more in a paid job. They are not getting real world experiences.

How are we doing on student engagement?

The trend is that it drops from 76% to 44% as they go through each year of school. A teacher who makes you excited about the future and being in a school that builds on their innate strengths and talents will increase student engagement 30 times.

Teachers' average engagement level drops significantly in their first few years on the job, a likely factor in low retention rates among new teachers.

Survey work readiness of college students:

- Provosts in Higher Ed are 98% confident they are doing a good job in preparing students for work readiness.
- General Population only 13% agree that colleges are preparing students who are work ready.
- Business executives only 11% agree that college students have the skills they are looking for to fill the jobs that are open.
- Most employers are not communicating with education.

What works for college graduates?

Answering ONE of these will double odds of being engaged in your work and overall wellbeing in your life.

- I had at least one professor who made me excited about learning: 64% of all college graduates strongly agreed
- The professors at my alma mater cared about me as a person: 27% strongly agreed
- I had a mentor who encouraged my goals and dreams: 20% strongly agreed.

Deep experiential learning opportunities that double your odds of being engaged in your future work

- Worked on a long-term project: less than 32%
- Had an internship that I was able to apply what I was learning: 30%

Panel Representatives:

Jared Billings, National Governor's Association

Jill Cook, American School Counselor Association

Maria Vasquez, ACT

### *Site Visits for Reach Higher Convening*

Spring Fabrication: Renise Walker, Education Liaison with the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Workforce Development Council hosted a trip for participants to visit an industry-led partnership site to learn more about the collaborative nature of industry and education which has combined forces to introduce students to work-based internships. Because Colorado Manufacturers are experiencing a skills gap and face persistent challenges finding adequate workers to fill available jobs, Pikes Peak Manufacturing Partnerships strategized to bring leaders from different sectors to provide training in rural areas of the region. Leaders from business, education and workforce addressed the talent shortage in manufacturing through a collaborative enterprise to address the workforce needs. While business had a shortage of skilled workers, the community colleges had a shortage of space to train the students.

Thus a creative connection was established meeting the needs of all of these groups.

Tom Neopl, President and CEO of Springs Fabrication, Dr. Lance Bolton, President of Pikes Peak Community College, Amanda Corum, Pueblo Corporate College-Mobile Learning Lab, John Wilson, Regional Business Alliance, David Jeffrey and Randy Scott from Pikes Peak Manufacturing Partnership discussed the partnership process and how this valuable collaboration evolved to help business, colleges and fill manufacturing positions through internships.

Colorado Springs School District 11: Cory Notestine, District 11 School Counseling Coordinator effected a presentation for the Convening participants to visit the Roy J. Wasson Academic Campus. The Superintendent, faculty and community members introduced this innovative facility.

The Roy J. Wasson Academic Campus was designed to meet the varying educational needs of all students. The Campus, open fourteen hours a day, offers an Early College High School, alternative education schools, Career Pathways, online education, credit recovery, night school, adult education and two Early Learning Centers. Principals, School Counselors and students discussed the impact of the Colorado School Counselor Corps Grant; a \$10 million state legislated grant to increase school counselor positions, lower drop-out rates and increase college going culture.

This group also discussed the state legislated Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP) which supports postsecondary advising. The newly implemented Summer Melt program for District 11 was introduced and a tour of Career Pathways, winner of the 2014 Pike's Peak Work Force Center's Champion of Prosperity Award was offered to participants.

### Day 3 Agenda

#### Introductions

*Julie Heinz: Senior Advisor for Reach Higher Initiative*

*Don Yu: Director of Better Make Room*

Better Make Room: Founded Oct 2015 was developed from need to have a student interfacing components of the Reach Higher Initiative. Better Make Room is housed in a Non-profit organization called Civic Nation. Anyone can follow this on Twitter at Better Make Room.

Together with the White House and the Office of the First Lady, we created Better Make Room to give Gen-Z the space and the tools they needed to create their own movement toward higher education and the results have been staggering. In just 5 months of launch there have been almost 600 million hits on the social media impressions. It has opened up a whole new conversation.

*Colorado Lieutenant Governor Donna Lynne*

Live Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czbd9F0aik4>

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This report from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs-Reach Higher Convening: Preparing Students with Work-ready Skills, is intended to describe the activities, keynote speakers' information and the unique agenda for this convening. The information shared in this report was taken from video recordings and powerpoint presentation materials from this two and a half day convening.

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## **CONVENING: Washington State Reach Higher Convening**

### **Team Leads:**

Danise Ackelson

Becky BallBach

State metrics

% of Schools Offering Dual Enrollment Courses

% of Students Demonstrating AP Potential

% of Students Earning College Credit in High School

% of Students Participating in Employment, Internships, and Job Shadowing

4th Grade Reading and Math Scores

9th Graders Passing Algebra

ACT/SAT Completion

Attendance Rates

College Enrollment Following High School

College Persistence

College Remediation Rates

FAFSA Completion Rates

On-Track to Graduation Indicators (Middle & High School)

Postsecondary Completion Rates (2-year, 4-year, Industry Certificate)

Rigorous Course Enrollment (Honors, AP, IB, Cambridge)

Industry Credential

Dual Enrollment

Work-based Learning

Team members

Becky Ballbach- Everett Public Schools

Danise Ackelson- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Kim Reykdal- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Melissa Pettey- Spokane Public Schools

Michelle Alejano- Washington College Access Network

Nova Gattman- Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

Weiya Liang- Washington Student Achievement Council

What has been your goal progress since 11/15 & List Evidence/Interventions?

11/15- to date

Financial Aid Interventions:

- Increase number of FAFSA completion sites in the state:
  - 80 sites to 120 sites

- Brought FAFSA Completion portal tool to the state to assist with tracking student-level FAFSA submission
  - Over 90% of districts have returned the required data usage agreement to be able to access the portal.
- As of early June 2016, the number of Washington high school seniors who have submitted a FAFSA has increased over 2015 by over 400.

#### Early engagement Interventions:

- Continued to leverage state's early promise financial aid as an early intervention tool
  - Over 91% of eligible students and parent/guardians completed a pledge for the program
  - Removed barriers and improved use of the High School and Beyond Plan
    - Added personalized pathways requirement
    - Added free statewide electronic tool
    - Added credit bearing component to incentivize early and on-going use of plan

#### Counselor training metrics:

- Purchased Go Alliance CCR module for the state of Washington
  - Launched at 4 sites across the state
  - Adding two more CCR sites for 2016-2017 academic year
  - Over 100 counselor and college access providers participate in the training

#### Victories-

As a whole we have provided greater clarity to the initiative:

- The state team aligned to stronger, more audacious goals and outcomes  
Our new goal that we increase the number of students committing to post secondary options.  
Within this, we have:
  - Strengthened the postsecondary definition to include: Apprenticeship, technical, 2-year, 4 year
  - Increased visibility to two major drivers:
    - Defining the role of the counselor as the foundation to CCR delivery is KEY
    - For Counselors to be successful they need both school teams and partnerships with workforce, post-secondary and community based organizations

As a result of our stronger, clearer initiative we:

- Increased the number of counselors attending the Reach Higher convening and galvanized around Dr. Joyce Brown's keynote
- Added key workforce agencies to both the state team and included workforce content in the event- demonstrating the need for aligned partnership
- Integrated key state government officials by
  - Presenting on statewide and local level efforts to gain ESSA adoption
  - Presenting on state's 2023 attainment goals
  - Asking for commitments on a local level.

#### Challenges-

- Local adoption by all the stakeholders
- Leveraging the recent event to strengthen high-level leadership buy-in



- The need to follow-up with individual stakeholders to ensure commitment to initiative and concrete next steps

Unexpected outcomes-

- It's important to raise awareness about important state and federal policies that can increase the number of students committing to post-secondary options
- We were able to take what we learned at the Colorado Reach Higher Convening, and quickly translate into a statewide convening that aligns national platform to state level opportunities

Next steps-

- Leverage successful event to seek resources to increase local collective impact efforts that train counselors and galvanize school/community partners to close achievement gap (IF we can get local funding to operate the model, we will make gains in closing the gap).
  - Building a stronger structure to add a state RH advisory group to make greater gains in policy and advocacy.
  - Repurpose the current RH steering committee into an implementation work group that would advance the advisory group recommendations.
-

## CONVENING: Regional Midwest Reach Higher Convening at Michigan State University

August 1-2, 2016

Michigan State University

Purpose:

The purpose of this convening is to maintain and build the momentum made at the national Reach Higher convenings in San Diego and Jacksonville. The convening will gather stakeholders from Midwestern states to share strategies on topics related to improving college and career readiness by strengthening school counseling and college advising. The overarching goal of the convening will be to energize the “Reach Higher” state teams and mobilize their membership to execute strategies related to college and career readiness.

Goals:

1. Discover promising strategies from each of the participating states on topics such as training, research, policy, partnerships, standards, and practice
2. Dialogue with school counseling and college advising professionals and stakeholders on issues related to implementation of promising strategies
3. Network with role-alike professionals
4. Mobilize state teams to plan action around priority areas

### AGENDA

Day 1 – Monday, August 1: State-Facilitated Rapid Fire Strategy Sessions

8:00-9:00 AM	Registration, Breakfast, and State Team Check-In – <i>Lincoln Room</i>
9:00-9:30 AM	Welcome from Reach Higher Michigan & Overview of Convening Agenda <i>Brandy Johnson, Executive Director, Michigan College Access Network</i>
9:30-10:15 AM	Illinois      Topic: <i>In-Service Training</i>
10:15-11:00 AM	Indiana      Topic: <i>Strategic Partnerships: Business-Education</i>
11:00 AM-11:45 PM	Iowa      Topic: <i>Research &amp; Metrics</i>
12:00-1:00PM	Lunch
1:00-1:45 PM	Michigan      Topic: <i>Pre-Service Training</i>
1:45-2:30 PM	Minnesota      Topic: <i>Strategic Partnerships: K12-Higher Ed</i>
2:30-3:15 PM	Ohio      Topic: <i>Standards and Credentialing</i>
3:15-4:00 PM	Wisconsin      Topic: <i>Practice</i>
4:00-4:15 PM	Day 1 Closing Remarks from the Kresge Foundation <i>Rebecca Villareal, Program Officer, The Kresge Foundation</i>
4:15-4:30 PM	Closing of Day 1, Look Ahead to Day 2
4:30-5:00 PM	Break

5:00PM-6:30PM           Cocktail Reception – *Corniche Room*

6:30-8:00PM            East Lansing Dine-Around hosted by MCAN – *Meet in Kellogg Center Lobby*  
                                   Day 2 – Tuesday, August 2: Small-Group Deep Dive Sessions

8:00-8:30 AM            Breakfast and Team Time – *Lincoln Room*

8:30-9:30 AM            Plenary Session: Updates and Opportunities from Reach Higher/Better Make  
 Room Campaigns  
                                   *Don Yu, Director, Better Make Room Campaign, Civic Nation*  
                                   *Eric Waldo, Executive Director, Reach Higher, Office of the First Lady*

9:30-11:00 AM Deep-Dive Breakout Discussion Sessions on Strategies

- In-Service Training – *Heritage Room*
- Standards and Credentialing – *Room 103B*
- Partnerships – *Room 103A*
- Pre-Service Training & School Counseling Leadership – *Room 102*
- Research & Metrics – *Lincoln Room*
- Practice – *Lincoln Room*

11:00 AM-12:30 PM    Role-Alike Networking Sessions

- State Agencies – *Heritage Room*
- School Counselors/ASCA Affiliates/NACAC Affiliates – *Room 103B*
- College Access Professionals/Nonprofit Organizations/Funders – *Room 103A*
- Counselor Educators – *Room 102*
- School Administrators/Non-Counseling School Staff – *Lincoln Room*

12:30-1:00 PM           Lunch, Team Planning, and Next Steps

                                  Planning Partners:

Eddie Brambila and Jacqueline Moreno, Illinois Student Assistance Commission  
 Stacy Eslick, Wisconsin School Counselor Association  
 David Ford, Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency  
 Darren Ginther, St. Paul Public Schools  
 Brandy Johnson, Michigan College Access Network  
 Brandie Oliver, Butler University  
 Rebecca Watts, Ohio Department of Higher Education

Sponsor:

The Reach Higher Midwest Convening was supported by The Kresge Foundation. We are grateful for their generosity.

REPORT

*Improving College and Career Readiness by Strengthening School Counseling  
 and College Advising --Midwest Convening*

Convening Leads: Brandy Johnson, Executive Director  
Jamie Jacobs, Director of Capacity Building  
Michigan College Access Network

Location: East Lansing, MI

Convening Type: Regional

Participating States:

- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Ohio
- Wisconsin

The Reach Higher Midwest Convening took place on August 1-2, 2016 on the campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. The convening drew 52 participants from 7 Midwestern States.

Background & Purpose:

The purpose of this convening was to maintain and build the momentum made at the national Reach Higher convenings in San Diego and Jacksonville. The convening gathered stakeholders from Midwestern states to share strategies and learn from one another.

Before the convening, five of the seven states took steps to formalize its “Reach Higher” Team. Each team determined its membership and adopted, minimally, a shared mission, values statements, and chosen priority areas. The overarching goal of the convening was to energize the state teams and mobilize their membership to execute strategies related to their priority areas.

The Michigan College Access Network staff managed the convening. A committee representing team leaders from each state met monthly via conference call to plan all aspects of the convening including goals/outcomes, agenda, speakers, content, funding, convening materials, evaluation, and follow up. Each committee member was charged with inviting their team members and ensuring they register.

Planning & Participants:

Planning Committee:

- Illinois: Eddie Brambila and Jacqui Moreno, Illinois Student Assistance Commission
- Indiana: Brandie Oliver, Butler University
- Iowa: Dave Ford, Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency; Rachel Scott, Iowa College Student Aid Commission
- Michigan: Brandy Johnson and Jamie Jacobs, Michigan College Access Network

- Minnesota: Darren Ginther, St. Paul Public Schools; Terry Henry, Minneapolis Public Schools
- Ohio: Rebecca Watts, Ohio Department of Higher Education
- Wisconsin: Stacie Eslick, Wisconsin School Counselor Association

Each state brought a team of leaders to the convening. Ideally, teams included individuals who attended the convenings in San Diego and Jacksonville or who represented the following stakeholder groups at the state level:

- School Counselor Association
- University Counselor Educator Programs
- Departments/Boards of Education, especially units such as:
  - Career and Technical Education
  - Improvement, Innovation, and School Reform
  - Professional Preparation Services/Credentialing
- Departments/Boards of Higher Education
- College Access and Advising Programs
- Association for College Admission Counseling
- Funders

Before the convening, each state was challenged to take additional steps to formalize their “Reach Higher” team. The team should consist of cross-sector leaders from organizations that represent or support school counselors or advisers. Each team should have adopted a “common agenda” of sorts – a document that summarizes the team’s mission, vision, values, goals, and priorities. These agendas should highlight each state’s commitment to serve low-income students, students who are first in their family to go to college, and students of color. Most teams brought this agenda to the convening to share with other states. The convening explored various strategies that teams can implement to make progress on their selected priority areas.

**Convening Content:** The convening workshops highlighted successful state strategies that have been implemented to improve school counseling and college advising. The sessions inspired and informed the action plans that states will create to address priority areas.

- Pre-Service School Counselor Training
- In-Service School Counselor Professional Development
- K-12 and Higher Education College and Career Readiness Partnerships
- Research and Metrics related to School Counseling and College Advising
- School Counseling and College Advising Standards and Credentialing
- Strategic Business-Education Partnerships
- Improving School Counselor Practice in Career Planning

**Funding and Sponsorship:**

The Kresge Foundation generously covered all costs related to the convening, allowing all attendees to participate without a registration fee. States did provide travel-related expenses for attendees.

**Conference Management:**

MCAN staff provided all aspects of conference management and did so as an in-kind contribution to the convening. MCAN served as the fiscal manager of the project. MCAN organized logistics, negotiated the contract with the venue, printed and organized materials, managed registration, provided staffing support during the event, and organized an off-site dinner for all attendees.

Relevant MCAN staff include:

- Sarah Anthony, Deputy Director for Advocacy and Partnerships
- Jamie Jacobs, Director of Capacity Building
- Brandy Johnson, Executive Director

Sustaining Efforts/Follow Up:

After the Midwest convening, event participants were surveyed to gauge interest for follow up collaboration and events. The states are exploring the possibility of continuing to host an annual event to bring together state teams.

Additional Documents:

- [Convening Program](#)
- [Attendee List](#)
- [Attendee Feedback](#)

## CONVENING: Regional New England Reach Higher Convening at Assumption College

### Convening Summary

The first ever Reach Higher New England Convening took place at Assumption College in Worcester, MA on Tuesday, August 16, 2016. The Convening, *Reaching Higher in New England: Increasing Postsecondary Opportunities for All Students*, drew 249 leaders and practitioners from all six New England states, New York and Pennsylvania.

Over the course of the day participants engaged in conversations with members of the national Reach Higher initiative, panel discussions and breakout sessions that explored what Reach Higher is and ways to implement Reach Higher programs and activities in their schools, organizations or states. The 249 participants included 65 school counselors, 41 college admission officers, 45 college access professionals and the other participants were K-12 school district leaders, school counselor educators, financial aid administrators, higher education leaders, policy makers and graduate students. In addition to general sessions, participants took part in work alike groups focusing on their job duties and state level discussions about Reach Higher initiatives and activities in each of the six New England states.

The keynote speaker for the convening was Joshua Steckel, author of *Hold Fast to Dreams: A College Counselor, His Students, and the Vision of a Life Beyond Poverty*. Josh is the Senior College and Career Planning Manager for New York City's College Access for All Initiative, and a leading writer, speaker and practitioner in the field of college access and success. *Hold Fast to Dreams* chronicles the experiences of ten of his former students, all of whom are first in their families to go to college. The students have the academic ability to be successful in college, but lack the supports necessary to navigate the often complex and overwhelming college and financial aid application processes. Steckel's talk clearly articulated the importance of the Reach Higher Initiative in ensuring opportunity in higher education for all students.

Feedback from the event was overall very supportive of the event including this comment "THANK YOU! Tuesday was the best professional development I have attended in a long time."

Participants were encouraged to take part in their state level team efforts moving forward. For more information about the convening, the resources shared and final report of the event, please go to <https://sites.google.com/site/rhne16/>.

The Planning Committee will soon determine how this initiative will continue at the regional level and whether regional Convenings will continue.

### Expanding Opportunity

- ❖ The Reach Higher initiative will help make sure all students understand what they need to complete their education, including:
- ❖ Exposing students to college and career opportunities
- ❖ Understanding financial aid eligibility that can make college affordability a reality
- ❖ Encouraging academic planning and summer learning opportunities
- ❖ Supporting high school counselors who can help more kids get into college

In many states and school districts talented and visionary leaders including school counselors, school district leaders, institutions of higher education, community based organizations, state educational associations, members of the business community, policy makers, funders, and researchers have already begun to meet and work on providing programs and initiatives to help attain the Reach Higher goal. Currently each New England state has a Reach Higher team in place.

For more information about the national and state level Reach Higher initiative, please visit:

National – [www.whitehouse.gov/reach-higher](http://www.whitehouse.gov/reach-higher)

Maine – [www.mainecollegeaccess.org/reach-higher-maine](http://www.mainecollegeaccess.org/reach-higher-maine)

Massachusetts – [www.reachhigherma.org](http://www.reachhigherma.org)

New Hampshire – [www.nhheaf.org/index.asp?page=events\\_collegeboundinfo](http://www.nhheaf.org/index.asp?page=events_collegeboundinfo)

Rhode Island – @ReachHigherRI



## WHO ATTENDED

While there were 249 participants who attended the program, there were 62 no shows and 52 cancellations for a total of 363 people who had some contact and interest in the Reach Higher New England program. Each state team lead was provided with this contact information and encouraged to follow up with folks in their state to connect with the state Reach Higher initiatives.

The final breakdown of attendees is as follows:

### FINAL ATTENDANCE

State (number registered)	Job title/responsibility (number registered)
CT= 37 (50)	Admission = 41 (52)
MA = 121 (162)	Business =2 (2)
ME =11 (18)	College Access = 45 (55)
NH = 21 (29)	Financial aid = 6 (7)
RI = 31 (37)	Higher Ed Other = 24 (27)
VT = 22 (24)	K-12 school districts = 9 (11)
NY = 3 (5)	Other = 44 (57)
PA = 1 (1)	School Counselor Educator = 13 (18)
DC = 2 (2)	School Counselor = 65 (96)
Total Attendees =	249

### Sponsors:

- ❖ Assumption College
- ❖ The College Board
- ❖ National Association for College Admission Counseling
- ❖ New England Association for College Admission Counseling
- ❖ Universal Technical Institute

### The Program

Organizers early on determined to create a program that was free and easily accessible for a one-day program. Assumption College in Worcester agreed to be the host for up to 300 participants. The Planning Committee then sought out to invite school counselors, college admission counselors, financial

aid administrators, college access partners, higher education and K-12 leaders, school counselor educators and graduate students from each of the New England states.

The planners agreed to invite Josh Steckel, Senior College and Career Planning Manager for New York City's College Access for All Initiative, to be the keynote speaker. He is also author of *Hold Fast to Dreams: A College Guidance Counselor, His Students, and the Vision of a Life Beyond Poverty*. As part of the keynote Steckel shared details about the lives of the ten students highlighted in the book – low income and marginalized students from under- represented populations but those who had the intelligence to succeed in college. Steckel reminded participants why the Reach Higher work is so critical – too many capable students are leaving behind who because of life's situations, which are totally out of their control, take them off the path to higher education and training. Due to generous sponsorships, all participants received copies of Steckel's book which he signed during lunch.

Morning speakers also included a welcome from Assumption College President, Francesco Cesareo and remarks from Mitchell Chester, Commissioner, of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Carlos Santiago, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. Both Commissioners discussed ways to improve career and college readiness opportunities across the state and assist more students earn a high school diploma and seek education and training beyond high school.

To learn about the Reach Higher initiative, both at the national and state levels, participants had the choice between a novice or an advanced Reach Higher breakout. Panelists provide insights into the history of the initiative nationally and the work that is being done at the state and local levels. Julie Heinz and Don Yu, representatives from the national Reach Higher and Better Make Room initiatives provided rich history and knowledge about the initiative and how to best get involved at the local or state levels.

The next morning general session was a panel consisting of a school counselor, school counselor educator, college access partner and higher education admissions representative. They provided context to their roles and how they fit into the Reach Higher efforts.

After lunch participants were invited to participate in state team level time. This gave each state team time to discuss efforts that were happening in each state and encourage folks to step up and join the state teams. For some states this was the very first meeting of their statewide network of interested participants.

The final breakout of the day included work-alike groups facilitated by career and college readiness practitioners engaged in this work. The idea was to attendees the opportunity to discuss ways that each group (school counselors, school counselor educators, financial aid professionals, college access partners, policy makers, college admissions and K-12 school districts and higher education leaders) can create Reach Higher activities within their schools programs or organizations.

The final component of the day was an opportunity to discuss and debrief. Information which was collected from the various breakouts was shared with participants in order to help others understand the numerous opportunities which exist under the Reach Higher umbrella. There was rich discussion and the sharing of questions before the program concluded with participants making any final Reach Higher pledges.

The Planning Committee consisted of the following individuals:

\*Bob Bardwell, Monson High School (MA)  
\*Tori Berube, New Hampshire Higher Education Assistance Foundation Network (NH)  
Stacy Crooks, College Planning Center (RI)  
Julie Heinz, Reach Higher (DC)  
\*Patrick Leduc, Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VT)  
Kate Leveille, Maine College Access Network (ME)  
Christine Luzi, Bridgewater State University (MA)  
\*Rachelle Perusse, University of Connecticut, Storrs (CT)  
Tim Poynton, University of Massachusetts, Boston (MA)  
Mandy Savitz-Romer, Harvard University (MA)  
Brian Tracey, University of Saint Joseph (CT)  
Kim Traverso, Connecticut Department of Education (CT)  
\*Nikki Vachon, Finance Authority of Maine (ME)  
\*Gail Walker, Rhode Island Student Loan Authority (RI)  
Don Yu, Better Make Room (DC)

\* Indicates state Reach Higher team lead

The Committee held its first conference call in January of 2016 and conducted monthly conference calls until July at which time they were weekly conference calls leading up to the Convening event. Committee members used a free conference all service for this purpose. A few Planning Committee members met in early July at Assumption for a site visit to determine appropriate breakout spaces and to finalize the agenda for the day. Otherwise the entire planning of the program was done via email and conference calls.

#### Pledges Made

Participants of the Reach Higher New England Convening were asked to complete a pledge sheet that outlined commitments that they were willing to make upon return to their school, organization or office. The idea behind these action steps was to capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm generated from the excitement of the program so participants would take some action to obtain the Reach Higher goals and not be forgotten upon return to the hectic pace of everyday life. Pledge forms also included contact information for participants who wanted to join state level teams efforts.

Over 75 pledges were made that day and returned to organizers. Sample pledges include

- *Ask my new college students to post photos/selfies in their dorm room w/the #MakeRoom - share these w/my current HS students. They are so much more inspired by their peers.*
- *I plan to work with my two guidance counselors to better prioritize their job responsibilities/tasking so that we can then either 1) better use their time & expertise on Reach Higher types of tasks or 2) produce evidence that clearly indicates a need to hire new staff positions to accomplish this important work*
- *I will work w/out community service student groups to talk to them about how we can talk more about college readiness in local schools (elementary, middle & high). I also really want to try to get funding to charter buses for BPS & CBO kids to come to our fall visit days.*

- *Visit more CBOs during travel - volunteer at FAFSA days or local college access organizations*
- *I plan to help raise awareness of Reach Higher in my own office of admissions professional. I will promote Reach Higher tools & excitement among the first gen students I recruit. I will work with organizations like NEACAC or NECBAC to support college signing day programs.*
- *Exposing more high school students to what our campus (and college in general) has to offer through campus visit days, workshops @ high schools, on-site interviews and info sessions - creating closer relationships w/school counselors*
- *Post-secondary signing day - Developing stronger middle school and initiating elementary school connections - Sharing resources/websites w/district colleagues*
- *Experience and resources will be shared with other school counselors and administrative staff - counseling curriculum will include opportunities/resources shared today - started a partnership with one university today and will continue to create partnerships w/others*
- *Training/hiring staff of color - harnessing grants/support to pilot and expand - communication streams to reach particular populations - collect data and have it drive initiatives in office*
- *I will incorporate more vocations & career planning into conversations with my students - not just focusing on college planning only.*
- *Dedicate more time and effort to connect students with career information. I will do this through continuing my "Career Meet Up" speaker series with a wider, more student focused range of careers*
- *Working more closely with RI high schools to share knowledge and my time about the college process. I want to help and support and "believe" in the students.*
- *An idea I will take back to my school is to partner with high schools to help bring students of all ages to campus to help them see themselves as college bound*
- *As a middle school counselor, I will continue to create exposure opportunities for my students w/higher ed and CTE - I will also have a conversations w/my superintendent about the Reach Higher initiative to make sure he's aware and on board*
- *Using data to track efforts/programs (get my hands on our college grad rate) - share info with counselors in district & SCA governing board (start thinking about PD to offer)*
- *The actions that can be taken at my school will be to publicize the Up Next Initiative in the school counselor newsletter with the text number 44044 and sign up word "college" - also to keep up the individual learning pages - bring back Reach Higher pledge, we also did Reach Higher day signing - Khan Academy SAT/PSAT*
- *Talk w/parents and students about our Reach Higher initiatives - during transition mtgs and open houses so that they can start getting excited about planning for their futures*
- *Bring back info about the Commonwealth Compact to our school counseling team & looking at how to get info out about that through social media & advisory - try the Up Next 44044 to our students - current & recent grads in college - think about advising AP/Dual Enrollment*

- *Hosting FA ID night & kick off - hosting FAFSA nights (in our town & w/CPC center) - assisting students in attending college fairs - attend RI school counselor breakfast*
- *Starting the college planning process earlier and connecting w/middle and elementary school students - Up Next texting service - meeting students where they are*
- *Even though I've been advising for 17yrs, I don't feel qualified when working w/students that might be 1st gen or lower income. I would love to expand my skill set w/these populations*
- *More coordination between our office and community partners (CBOs & counselors) on the best way to support students*
- *Training and support of local school counselors about our transitional year program - a great resource to 1st gen students*
- *Incorporate more training & support for new staff or outreach & relationship building with CBOs & school counselors - create better/more programming for group visits from CBOs & K-12 schools & have more outreach to encourage visits & college-going culture*
- *I am at a middle school; I am going to try to have a career/college workshop with the College Board of RI in my English grade 8 classes.*
- *Application event - senior signing day - look into incorporating Reach Higher goals/data into data team/PLC work in school counseling dept.*
- *Let's make this a workshop at VEOP! Get our state legislators @ the table - we must get them to make college affordable in VT.*
- *Connecting all our "local", regional partners to help with the future goal of successful working productive citizens*
- *Sharing links and hashtags during on-campus events -creating new visit and event plans on & off site to expose students to the initiative*
- *Consider ongoing participation on one of Reach Higher MA workgroups AND bring along other school counselors from my department*
- *Outreach to local CBOs/entities - open campus more readily to local groups - get involved in CT education collaborations*
- *I will join the googledoc & one of the working groups to continue the conversation & my commitment to #reachhigher*
- *I will incorporate these into my grade 4,5 & 6 career unit*
- *Helping at RI FAFSA Completion workshops or hosting one at my institution to help them meet their goal of increasing the number of these offered.*
- *I am committed to furthering the conversation about professional development for school counselors - including incentives, school support & funding*

- *I'd love to discuss or research how to help this specific population (e.g.: ELL 's) and set high & realistic goals for a wide variety of situations*
- *Build K-12 programming that meet Reach Higher goals at the elementary, middle and high school levels - national job shadow day initiative getting 65% of students a shadow experience in the 2016-2017 academic year*
- *Sign up for membership to get information and support goals and initiatives that I can in my district - participate in a working group in support of access, persistence & completion*

### Next Steps

The Planning Committee met after the Convening to debrief and discuss next steps. The Committee reviewed the feedback from online surveys distributed to all participants.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. A sample of responses included:

*“This was a motivating and productive day. Very well done. Appreciated getting a copy of Josh’s book!”*

*“Blown away by the organization and collaboration between state teams, leaders and organizers. “*

*“This was my first but certainly won’t be my last!”*

*“I knew very little about Reach Higher before this event. I learned a great deal and thought the trip down was definitely worth it.”*

*“This was one of the best planned conferences I have ever attended. Kudos to the planners!”*

Constructive feedback included the following comments:

*“I would have liked a little more time with Counselors from the other states.”*

*“This conference was mostly focused on the school counselor experience, which is wonderful for school counselors, but I would like if in future meetings there could be more directed towards college admissions. Our breakout group was far and away the most productive item of the day for my and my colleagues. I would also like to see, in general, more tangible action items to come out of this conference. I left it feeling a bit overwhelmed without a clear idea of next steps. I know this is one of the first convenings, so growing pains are to be expected and overall I still thought it was a good place to start. “*

*“Would have liked a more diverse group of speakers.”*

*“The convening logistics were a wee bit problematic given the agenda and tight timetable.”*

Moving forward, members of the Committee felt that they would like to see what progress was made with their state level initiatives before determining whether to host another regional convening or not in 2017. The consensus was that initially more progress would be made at each state level then by coordinating something at the regional level. Several of the planning team members would be traveling to Washington DC for the October 28-30 national convening at American University and would touch base at that point to determine a timeline for determining the future of the regional Reach Higher efforts. Organizers also

recognize that more effort must be made to create metrics by which to measure the impact that Reach Higher events have on students. This will be a continual goal moving forward in all six states.

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## CONVENING: National Reach Higher Convening at American University

In support of First Lady Michelle Obama's Reach Higher Initiative, which strives to inspire every student in America to take charge of their future by completing their education past high school, American University's School of Education hosted a National Reach Higher convening on Oct. 28-30, 2016. The theme, Connecting the Dots: Cultural Competence, Counseling, and College and Career Readiness of Underserved Youth, was selected in order for participants to focus on the skills and knowledge needed to successfully address the unique challenges of historically underserved student populations.

At American University's new location for the Washington College of Law, the convening brought together 26 state teams made up of school counselors, university faculty, state education leaders, business personnel, and workforce developers to explore intersections of cultural competence, counseling and college and career readiness. The participants exchanged ideas, shared experiences, participated in "courageous conversations" and heard a variety of speakers, including students.

The convening was made possible thanks to generous support from the **American Counseling Association (ACA), Lumina Foundation, Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, and ACT**. We also thank AU President Neil Kerwin, Provost Scott Bass, Dean Camille Nelson, and Dean Peter Starr for their gracious support and hospitality. We are grateful to the Washington College of Law Events Office staff and the School of Education and College of Arts and Sciences students, faculty and staff who assisted with technical and logistical support throughout the planning and implementation of the convening.

### The Planning Group

Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy, Dean School of Education, American University, Co-Lead

Dr. Vivian Lee, Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins University, Co-Lead

Dr. Laura Owen, Research Professor, American University

Ms. Jasmine McLeod, Department of Defense

### The Invitation

State team leaders, identified by the National Consortium of School Counseling and Post-Secondary Success (NCSCPS) and the Reach Higher National Team, were asked to send four to five members of their teams to the Convening. Attendees were to have one of the following characteristics:

1. State education and/or school counseling leader with ability to make decisions regarding educator/counselor training and/or professional development
2. Interest and/or training in factors related to education, college, and career disparities
3. Business, organization or community leader interested in diversifying workforce and workforce development programming
4. School-based counselor and/or college access professional currently working in high minority and/or high poverty schools



## Convening Purpose:

Building on previous convenings, this convening intends to initiate and deepen conversations on how best to promote equitable college and career readiness outcomes of students who historically are underrepresented on college campuses, in the workforce, and in STEM fields.

## Convening Key Questions:

How does the cultural responsiveness and competence of school counselors and college access professionals drive successful CCR outcomes of underserved youth?

What CCR strategies are successful and effective when counseling/advising underserved youth?

How can greater cultural competence assist in creating more effective systems to better serve the CCR needs of underserved youth?

What metrics should districts, states, schools utilize to ensure equity across diverse groups of students, particularly underserved youth?

## Convening Objectives:

State teams will

- build upon past convening knowledge and determine how their teams can set a path forward for addressing the unique needs of specific populations of students, particularly students that have been historically underserved.
- explore and practice how to implement “courageous conversations” about equity and cultural differences to drive successful CCR outcomes for underserved youth.
- develop systemic action plans including metrics and culturally responsive strategies, for districts, states, businesses, and training programs.
- determine policy implications when focused on the CCR needs of underserved youth.

## Attendees

Though originally planned for no more than 200 attendees, the move to the Washington College of Law facility enabled the planning committee to expand the number to 250 attendees. There was no registration fee; however, attendees were responsible for funding their own transportation and hotel accommodations. The planning committee provided information for a block of rooms reserved for the attendees at the Omni Shoreham Hotel.

At final count, 227 individuals from 26 states attended the 2016 National Convening at American University (see below). In addition, representatives from ACT, Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, the American Counseling Association (ACA), The Southern Regional Education Board, CACREP, The College Board, Gear Up, The College Bound Foundation and NACAC attended the convening

### *List of Participating State Teams*

1. Arizona

2. California
3. Colorado
4. Connecticut
5. DC
6. Georgia
7. Illinois
8. Indiana
9. Iowa
10. Louisiana
11. Maine
12. Maryland
13. Massachusetts
14. Michigan
15. New Mexico
16. New York
17. North Carolina
18. Oklahoma
19. Oregon
20. Pennsylvania
21. Rhode Island
22. Tennessee
23. Texas
24. Utah
25. Virginia
26. Washington

## AGENDA

### **Day I**

Breakfast

Welcome Remarks

**President Neil Kerwin, American University**

**Provost Scott Bass, American University**

**Eric Waldo, Executive Director, Reach Higher Initiative**

**Tina Tchen, Assistant to the President and First Lady's Chief of Staff**

Reach Higher Videos

Overview of the Convening and Convening Goals and Objectives: Drs. Holcomb-McCoy and Lee)

Morning Speaker:

## **Secretary of Education, Dr. John King**

### Q & A

#### Courageous Conversations Part I (Dr. Vivian Lee)

Attendees were divided into small groups to explore the process of having courageous conversations about “difference” and “cultural competence” within the helping/counseling/advising process. Facilitators of small groups were experts in cross-cultural counseling, particularly career counseling

#### Lunch

#### Courageous Conversation Part II

#### Connecting the Dots (Dr. Vivian Lee)

#### Evening Reception at the **Decatur House**

### **Day 2**

#### Breakfast

#### Welcome Back and Overview of the Day

#### Morning Speaker

#### **William (Bill) Mendoza, Executive Director White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education and Q & A**

Breakout Sessions (see <https://www.conferize.com/white-house-convening-2016/schedule> for short descriptions and presenter info)

Readiness Through Resilience

Broaching Cultural Issues in College Readiness Counseling

Systemic Change for Student Success

Minding the Gap

Funding Opportunities at IES

Scholars House: Academic Support and Success

College Access Counseling with LGBTQ Youth

Removing Barriers to College Access for Undocumented Students

The Brother’s Key: Empowering the Invisible Male to Be Heard

#### Lunch

Welcome Remarks: Dean Camille Nelson (Washington College of Law)

Music: Charles Omoregbee (Prince Georges County Student)

Report: Tyler Kimbel, National Council Report

Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Update

Panel Discussion, Moderator: Jasmine McLeod

1. **Jaye Espy** - Chief of Staff for the White House Initiative on Historically Black College and Universities
2. **Jim Larimore**— Director of Center on Equity, ACT
3. **Curtis Richard**, Director of Center for Workforce Development
4. **Jose Rico**- Senior Vice President of Community Impact, United Way of Metropolitan Chicago
5. **Rich Yep**-CEO, American Counseling Association

Afternoon Speaker

**Wes Moore, “All the Difference” and Founder of BridgeEdU**

State Action Planning Overview, Dr. Vivian Lee

State Planning Groups

### **Day 3**

Breakfast

Overview of Day

Morning Speaker

**Mohammed Abdel-Kader, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the International and Foreign Language Education (IFLE) and Q & A**

Student Panel: *“Students’ Hopes and Dreams”*

**Verlando Brown, Moderator**

**Andonny Garcia**

**Amir Gerald**

**Britney Rivera-Martinez**

Recommendations to the Field: The National Consortium for School Counseling and Post-Secondary Success

**Patricia Martin and Joyce Brown**

Next Steps: Better Make Room

**Don Yu**

**Eric Waldo**

**Convening Summary and Wrap Up: Vivian Lee and Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy**

## BIOGRAPHIES

**John B. King, Jr.** is the secretary of education, a position he assumed upon Senate confirmation on March 14, 2016. In tapping him to lead the U.S. Department of Education, President Obama called Dr. King "an exceptionally talented educator," citing his commitment to "preparing every child for success" and his lifelong dedication to education as a teacher, principal, and leader of schools and school systems. As secretary, Dr. King brings a continued commitment to advancing excellence and equity for every student, supporting educators and elevating the teaching profession, and improving college affordability and completion rates.

Before becoming secretary, Dr. King served since January 2015 at the Department as principal senior advisor. In that role, he carried out the duties of the deputy secretary, overseeing all preschool-through-12th-grade education policies, programs, and strategic initiatives, as well as the operations of the Department. Dr. King carried out this work with a focus on increasing equity, improving educational outcomes for all students, and closing achievement gaps through implementation of key administration priorities in areas including early learning, elementary and secondary education, special education, English language acquisition, and innovation.

In performing the duties of the deputy secretary, Dr. King also oversaw the Department's work leading cross-agency collaboration for President Obama's My Brother's Keeper task force, which seeks to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color, and to ensure that all young people are able to reach their full potential.

As Executive Director of First Lady Michelle Obama's Reach Higher initiative, **Eric Waldo** is working to inspire every student in the U.S. to take charge of their future by completing their post-secondary education, whether at a professional training program, a community college, or a 2-year or 4-year college or university. His role cuts across policy, advocacy, and community engagement to further the President's North Star goal—that by 2020, the U.S. once again leads the world in terms of college graduates. Previously Waldo was Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS) at the Department of Education (ED), where he helped lead and manage ED through President Obama's historic investment of \$100B in education funding via the Recovery Act. This work created important investments around system-level, cradle-to-career changes for states, districts, schools, and communities. Waldo also helped manage the Department of Defense (DOD) global K-12 school system as the Co-Chair for the Advisory Council for Dependents' Education, which advises and oversees the DOD schools. Waldo earned a J.D. from the University of Chicago Law School, an M.Ed. from Harvard University, and an A.B. from Brown University. He currently resides in Washington, D.C.

**Bill William (Bill) Mendoza** was appointed as Executive Director of the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education in December 2011. Bill, Oglala-Sicangu Lakota, grew up on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Sioux reservations in South Dakota. Bill has experienced, firsthand, through his professional and life experiences, the multitude of challenges facing American Indian students, educators, and tribes. In addition to being a teacher and principal, Bill has worked at the school, professional and community level to help foster leadership development and civic engagement among American Indians. Integral to his professional and academic capacity has been his experiences as a tribal college student at Haskell Indian Nations University, Sinte Gleska University, and Oglala Lakota College.

Bill previously served as the Deputy Director and Executive Director for the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges. Since his appointment in January 2011, he has provided leadership to key administration initiatives including: Executive Order 13592, Tribal Leaders Speak – The State of Indian Education 2010

Report; State-Tribal Education Partnership Pilot; and 2012 ED-DOI Memorandum of Understanding. Before coming to Washington, DC, Bill was working towards a Doctorate in Education Leadership at Montana State University (MSU). He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Humanities from Fort Lewis College in 2005 and a Master of Education from MSU in 2010.

**Mohamed Abdel-Kader is the Deputy Assistant Secretary** in the International and Foreign Language Education (IFLE) Office at the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE). As Deputy Assistant Secretary of IFLE, Mohamed is responsible for encouraging and promoting the study of foreign languages and the study of the cultures of other countries at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels in the United States; and coordinates with related international and foreign language education programs of other Federal agencies, as established in the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act. He leads the work of IFLE in administering the domestic programs authorized under Title VI of the Higher Education Act and those overseas programs under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange (Fulbright-Hays) Act administered by ED. Prior to joining ED, Mohamed served as the Director of Development for the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and also managed the university's advancement strategy in the Middle East region, where he focused on major gifts and strategic engagement.

## **APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF REACH HIGHER COMMITMENTS**

### **STATE: Louisiana**

*Commitment:* To Increase FAFSA completion in Louisiana.

*Strategies:*

- 1) Provide professional development to counselors, teacher, and college access professionals on the FAFSA;
- 2) Publicize the FAFSA Completion Project to schools districts, so they can enroll to know which students have completed the FAFSA;
- 3) Provide FAFSA and financial aid training to students and families in Louisiana; and
- 4) Provide and support FAFSA Completion Workshops for students and families where they receive one-on-one assistance.

*Metrics:*

- 1) Number of counselors, teachers, and/or college access professional receiving training;
- 2) Number of school districts that are a part of the FAFSA Completion Project;
- 3) Number of students and families attending FAFSA and financial aid training;
- 4) Number of students and families receiving one-on-one assistance completing their FAFSA; and
- 5) FAFSA completion rate.

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### **STATE: Maryland**

*While Maryland has not yet developed Reach Higher commitments, it is in the early stages of gathering stakeholders to build the movement:*

Currently the Maryland Reach Higher state team is conducting research to garner the voices of practicing school counselors. Once we analyze the data we will meet as a larger team, share the data, and work to rewrite a White Paper that was an initial effort when the MD state team began. From there we will hold a state meeting and have concrete data to use as we move forward. We will build relationships with MSDE to ensure a stronger coalition.

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### **STATE: Michigan**

*Commitment:* Increase the number of school counseling graduate programs with a dedicated course in college and career readiness.

*Strategies:*

1. Three graduate programs have new required dedicated courses in college and career readiness (CMU, WMU, WSU). Two additional other programs worked to make changes to their existing curriculum or added an elective (UD-Mercy, GVSU).
2. We are very proud of our university partners/team members who worked diligently to improve their graduation program curriculum to respond to the training gaps. Michigan does have 9 school counseling programs; however, the vast majority of students trained via these 9 programs are trained by one of the five programs that made changes.

*Metric:* Pre-service school counselors with access to dedicated training in college and career readiness.

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## **STATE: Tennessee**

*Commitment:* Position School Counselors to do work that is aligned to their training and expertise, removing unrelated roles and responsibilities and reducing counselor student ratios so that counselors have more time to spend advising and supporting students in meeting their postsecondary goals.

*Strategies:*

- 1) Revision of state model of comprehensive school counseling;
- 2) Revision of state counseling standards;
- 3) Discussing revisions to licensure policies to ensure that candidates have the appropriate training when they enter the profession;
- 4) Convened a state level Advisory Council of counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, postsecondary, and workforce development to develop a strategic plan for transformation of school counseling in the state;
- 5) Working with pre-service programs to include more college and career advising as well as opportunities for pre-service counselors and administrators to work together to develop a stronger understanding of both roles and reducing confusion about the role of the school counselor; and
- 6) Providing comprehensive professional development to increase counselor capacity to effectively meet the standards and expectations of the model.

*Metrics:*

- 1) We have collected survey data from school counselors, administrators, and district level leaders regarding the work of school counselors and there will be follow up surveys to assess the impact of our strategies;
  - 2) Counselor student ratios; and
  - 3) We also expect to see an impact in the data of our other commitments (promotion rates, graduation rates, FAFSA completion rates, postsecondary going rates, etc.).
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## **STATE: Utah**

*Strategies:*

- 1) Passed state legislation to provide funding for a counseling professional development certificate in career and college readiness;
- 2) Changed professional evaluation metrics to include college readiness programs aimed at students;
- 3) Created an annual training conference for high school counselors.

*Metrics:*

- 1) Number of counselors receiving the professional development training and certificate;
- 2) Individual counselor's ratings on the evaluation forms; and
- 3) Number of attendees at annual conference.

## **STATE: New York**

*Commitment:* Identify and develop a common data set.

*Strategies/Metrics:* We identified four metrics that are currently collected at the state level which are critical indicators of the success of school leaders, school counselors and college advisors working collaboratively with a joint college and career vision for students:

1. Attendance: Chronic Absenteeism;
2. High School Graduation Rates;
3. Postsecondary Intentions (PGP);<sup>41</sup> and
4. FAFSA Completion.

For all these metrics, we are planning to identify the baseline and set statewide goals - both in terms of overall improvement and in terms of closing gaps (achievement, opportunity, attainment) between groups of students by various demographic variables including race, gender, Free/Reduced Lunch, disability, language

In addition to these four metrics, we identified three aspirational metrics to work towards. These data are currently not collected and/or reported for the state as a whole:

1. Algebra 2 Mastery;
2. Postsecondary Enrollment, Remediation, Persistence and Retention Rates; and
3. Individual Student Portfolio & Annual Plan<sup>42</sup> (overall plan, career and academic success plan).

The Data Committee of CCCCNY will begin work on these metrics immediately. The work will include:

For our four current student outcome metrics:

- Establish a baseline for each metric both for overall attainment and for understanding gaps between student groups;
- Propose statewide goals based on the baseline;
- Explore a system of statewide reporting on progress; and
- Develop a system for participants in CCCCNY to measure their own progress toward goals.

For our three aspirational measures:

- Propose strategies for how to move forward on each aspirational metric

We will fit our chosen metrics in the context of all college and career indicators so that when we talk to schools and programs there is a sense of how these metrics fit overall and that there are other critical metrics.

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<sup>41</sup> Every student in New York State reports their postsecondary intentions upon graduation.

<sup>42</sup> The proposed regulation changes currently before the Board of Regents include the requirement that every student have an individual student plan. Once these regulations are passed, we need to work on the following questions: What data do they contain (or do they need to contain) that we can collect statewide? What system will be created to aggregate and report out this data?

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## **ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF HOW STATES ARE MEASURING SUCCESS**

- **Arizona** is working to increase the number of Arizona students with a post-secondary educational degree by 8% by 2020.
- **Iowa**'s Governor's Office set a 70% college attainment goal by 2025 and is convening a commission to oversee the process.

**Texas** is working to attain an increase in college applications of 4% per year in each of its 20 regional Education Service Centers.

## **EXAMPLES FROM STATES WHO ARE THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX**

- **Louisiana**'s Reach Higher state team is aiming to promote programs like "Future-Building Fridays" to raise counselor and teacher awareness of careers in high-demand
- **Virginia** has created an Affordable Pathways Grant opportunity designed to stimulate the collaboration between public school divisions, community colleges and universities to create and expand affordable student pathway programs. Grants awarded in the first round will target the expansion and creation of sustainable affordable pathways programs that focus primarily on high school to college-age students; strengthen PK-12 partnerships with higher education; implement or expand pathways that support cost savings to students such as opportunities for early college credit, improve time-to-degree/credential or completion rates, particularly for underrepresented populations; and lead to a degree, certificate or workforce credential.

## **APPENDIX C: BEST PRACTICES FROM COLORADO'S SCHOOL COUNSELOR CORPS GRANT PROGRAM**

*“Colorado School Counselor Corps Grant Program: Early Experiences and Lessons Learned”  
by Sheila Arredondo, WestEd, and Dan Jesse, Shelley H. Billig, & Jennifer Weston-Sementelli, RMC  
Research Corporation*

*Colorado established a School Counselor Corps Grant Program (SCCGP) in 2008 to provide competitive grants to school districts in order to increase the availability and effectiveness of school-based counseling services for secondary school students. State leaders created the program to improve graduation rates and increase percentages of students preparing for, applying to, and continuing on to postsecondary education. This report provides information about the SCCGP and its initial successes, including participants' experiences, in order to inform and assist other state education agencies and policymakers who might be interested in developing similar initiatives in their states.*

### ***The Role of School Counselors in Cultivating Postsecondary Readiness***

Colorado's grant program was founded on the idea that school-based counselors can play pivotal roles in helping students plan their futures and can provide guidance for students' academic achievement, career development, and personal and social growth. An American School Counselor Association (n.d.b) review of research articles in peer-reviewed journals found evidence that appropriate access to school counselors helps students complete high school on time (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012; Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012) and helps them prepare for postsecondary studies (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Hurwitz & Howell, 2014; Pham & Keenan, 2011). Colorado's SCCGP addresses the need to prepare students for postsecondary success by attempting to increase the number of licensed school counselors serving secondary school students in the state.

Since the SCCGP's inception, the program has funded more than 200 licensed school counselors to work with Colorado students in 233 secondary schools, in 75 districts, and through a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). A 2016 legislative report found that in districts receiving SCCGP funding, graduation rates increased steadily from 65 percent for the class of 2010 to 74 percent for the class of 2015, whereas graduation rates in comparison districts that had not received SCCGP funding increased from 65 percent for the class of 2010 to only 70 percent for the class of 2015. Dropout rates also improved for SCCGP sites. According to the 2016 report, dropout rates in comparison districts without SCCGP funding fluctuated between 5.5 percent and 3.9 percent over the years from 2010 to 2015, while dropout rates for districts that had received SCCGP funding stabilized at 3.7 percent, close to the state average (Engelman, 2016).

In districts receiving SCCGP funding, concurrent enrollment rates (the rates at which secondary school students enrolled concurrently in college-level courses) went up as well. According to the 2016 report, between 2012 and 2015, student participation rates in concurrent enrollment increased 74 percent in SCCGP-funded districts, while rates for students in comparison-group sites increased 48 percent. The state average increase during this same time period was 71 percent (Engelman, 2016).

Postsecondary matriculation is another major objective of the SCCGP. According to the 2016 report, the matriculation rate in SCCGP-funded districts increased from 31 percent for the class of 2011 to 44 percent for the class of 2014. This rate has remained stable over the last three years. The state average was approximately 56 percent across the same time span (Engleman, 2016).

In 2015, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) contracted with the Center for Research Strategies to collect information regarding the number of SCCGP positions sustained beyond the grant, as well as on programs and services that were implemented using SCCGP funds and then sustained beyond the grant. Survey results revealed that approximately 90 percent of the school counseling positions were sustained and nearly 100 percent of the programming was continued.

### ***Documenting the SCCGP Experience***

In 2016, to document the state's experiences and capture lessons that could be informative to other states, the CDE asked WestEd and subcontractor RMC Research Corporation to develop this report about the SCCGP and participants' perspectives.

RMC researchers collected information for this report primarily through focus groups in February 2016: one conducted during an SCCGP training at Aurora Community College, and another with counselors from a BOCES. RMC researchers also interviewed program participants in March and April 2016. Participants in the focus groups and interviews represented 19 school districts and 2 BOCES, and included 18 school counselors, 10 grant coordinators, 3 administrators, and 2 individuals serving in a consulting role for grantees or for the grant program in general. Participants responded to questions about their experiences with the SCCGP, training and technical assistance, and tasks completed during their first year of having an SCCGP grant.

RMC gathered additional information during two SCCGP training sessions held in February, and from materials that included the program's training webinars and resources, *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (American School Counselor Association, 2012), pertinent legislative documents, SCCGP annual reports, and application materials for SCCGP funding.

### ***The Creation of Colorado's School Counselor Corps Grant Program***

In April 2007, Colorado Governor Bill Ritter established the P-20 Education Coordinating Council (Lopez, 2011), consisting of representatives from early childhood education, K-12 and higher education, business and industry, and the state legislature. The council was charged with making recommendations for developing a seamless education system, from preschool through graduate school, that prepares youth for the 21st century. The council's subcommittee on postsecondary preparation found that even though counseling was consistently associated with strong postsecondary preparation, the student-to-counselor ratio in Colorado was about 500 to 1, which greatly exceeded the ratio of 250 to 1 recommended by the ASCA for effective programming (ASCA, 2012).

The subcommittee also determined that simply increasing access to school counselors would be insufficient for improving student outcomes. Counselors needed to adhere to standards set forth by the ASCA (ASCA, 2012) and be part of comprehensive postsecondary preparation efforts involving schools, districts, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education. The subcommittee also decided that counselors needed to work with individual students to discuss and systematically develop plans for the future. The subcommittee thus recommended that postsecondary preparation be part of the

accreditation process for K–12 schools and that every student develop an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP).

To assist schools and districts in meeting these goals, the group worked with the legislature to create the SCCGP, which provides competitive four-year grants and professional development for Colorado districts in need of funds and guidance (see next section for eligibility criteria). Program development and implementation are guided by an advisory board. Members include representatives from the CDE, the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, community colleges, school districts, and school counselors. Initially, the advisory board conceptualized the program components, held annual retreats to reflect on the program’s effectiveness, advised CDE staff, communicated with stakeholders, publicized outcomes, and reported to policymakers. Today the board continues to provide strong support for the program, particularly through communication with legislators.

### ***Program Elements***

#### *Eligibility and selection criteria*

School districts, BOCES, and charter schools are eligible to seek SCCGP four-year grants by filling out an extensive application. Priority is given to applicants that serve schools where the dropout rate and/or the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch is higher than the state average, and/or where postsecondary remediation rates exceed the state average.

CDE provides an annual training webinar detailing how to complete the SCCGP application process, and CDE staff members are available to provide additional information and support. The selection process is competitive. Applications are reviewed using a rubric-based point system to rate the quality of each applicant’s program development, internal and external partnerships, postsecondary plans, and budget. Bonus points are allocated for providing a clear picture of indicators that students are at risk of not succeeding in postsecondary education, and for operational sustainability plans.

To be awarded a grant, an applicant must show previous support for school counseling programs, provide information on current student-to-counselor ratios, and commit to sustaining grant-funded counseling positions. Applicants must also describe ways in which district- and school-level administrators are engaged in the grant-writing process, and must commit to ongoing administrative involvement throughout the four-year grant period.

#### *Funding and requirements*

Applicants that receive an SCCGP grant may use the funds to supplement, but not supplant, resources that they currently use for secondary school counseling activities. Funding may be used for licensed secondary school counselor salaries and benefits, postsecondary preparatory services, professional development, and/or program development. Funds can also be used for the school counseling team to attend three required professional development sessions per year, provided by CDE. The trainings are for counselors funded under the grant, counseling teams, and key leadership staff most closely related to the success of the grant. At a minimum, counselors funded under the grant and principals or assistant principals must attend these trainings. A series of seven webinars is also required for first-year grantees.

Receipt of first-year funding is not a guarantee of funding for subsequent years. To be eligible for funding in years two through four, the grant recipient must meet several conditions. The grant recipient must: (1)

conduct and report a thorough needs assessment and environmental scan in year one; (2) submit evaluation materials to CDE by July 1 of each year after year one; (3) demonstrate adequate progress toward annual objectives, as determined by CDE's review of submitted online reporting protocols; (4) complete a program development report that demonstrates the ability to continue services in years two through four; and (5) provide properly completed budgets each year.

#### *Needs assessment*

The needs assessment that grantees are required to complete in year one is compiled through surveys of students, parents, teachers, staff, and community members. CDE's guidance specifies that the needs assessment must be short, be easy to complete, measure the current state of the school, and depict the desired state. CDE provides sample needs assessments during trainings and on the SCCGP website. The samples include questions for stakeholder groups, allowing grantees to adapt surveys to fit their needs. Training and technical assistance address how to develop survey items (e.g., avoiding jargon and being aware of sensitive topics), distribute surveys (e.g., available languages, distribution format), and analyze completed surveys (e.g., meaningful disaggregation). Sites use findings from their needs assessment to identify priorities for each stakeholder group.

#### *Environmental scan*

The environmental scan that grantees are required to complete in year one focuses on identifying school and community factors that may impact student outcomes. Environmental scans are completed by examining four types of factors: (1) internal, micro-systemic/school-counselor factors; (2) internal, macro-systemic/school-counseling program factors; (3) external, micro-systemic/school factors; and (4) external, macro-systemic/community factors. CDE created worksheets that provide guidance to grantees regarding which data sources to use for the environmental scan and how to use the resulting information for further planning. Data sources include school counselor résumés, the ASCA Use-of-Time Assessment (American School Counselor Association, n.d.a), the school counseling core curriculum and program assessment (American School Counselor Association, 2012), the school data profile, local and regional press coverage, and online databases maintained by the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics. Analyzing the environmental scan includes entering pertinent information into a factor-analysis summary sheet that helps grantees interpret the data. The data from the environmental scan are used in conjunction with needs assessment data to help determine root causes of problems.

#### *SMART goals*

The SCCGP requires grantees to create SMART goals — Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound — for what they intend to accomplish with their SCCGP funding. Creating a SMART goal involves identifying a specific goal, along with how and when to assess progress toward achieving that goal. During year one, each grantee is expected to develop no more than four SMART goals related to student counseling; the grantee must then report annual progress on those goals. CDE reviews and approves the SMART goals set by grantees, providing assistance on developing the goals, as necessary.

#### *Interventions*

To address the goals that they have set, grantees select interventions, which can include delivery of direct and indirect services (as described in the ASCA model; ASCA, 2012) and/or professional development for school personnel. Interventions are based upon contextual fit and available resources and are expected to clearly align with the needs, root causes, and SMART goals that grantees have identified. In selecting

interventions, grantees are encouraged to consider the research base, feasibility, effectiveness, and delivery method of the interventions. Grantees may also choose to implement a comprehensive guidance curriculum that aligns with ASCA standards. Grantees must continually assess the impact of interventions that they choose to implement, and may change interventions if the initially selected interventions are not having the desired impact.

### *Sustainability*

From the first training and throughout involvement with the SCCGP, participants are advised to build a schoolwide culture that promotes postsecondary preparation and that includes all staff members understanding how to help students envision their postsecondary aspirations and knowing how best to support students toward reaching those aspirations. When initially awarded an SCCGP grant, schools and districts are asked to indicate how they will sustain the activities and services that they create with the grant funds, and to commit to keeping school counselors in place when the grant ends. Funding can be reduced by 10 percent each year to help sites adjust and learn to reallocate resources to sustain the improvements they make.

### ***Supporting Grantees: Role of the State Education Agency***

CDE has developed and refined a multiyear, multiphase approach for supporting grantees. The grant application and planning process, implementation, technical assistance and professional development, and monitoring are integrated and carried out with the intention of developing grantee capacity to deliver high-quality programming.

### *Planning*

In the initial years of the SCCGP, CDE observed that the inclusion of a planning year along with various forms of support led to the most effective implementation and sustainability of projects in later years. Now all grantees participate in a planning year. Depending upon local context and resources, some sites elect to hire a counselor to participate in the planning process. During this time, school teams refine their preliminary needs assessments and environmental scans, solidify SMART goals, and develop counseling program strategies that align with ASCA standards. Administrators and staff attend professional development sessions three times a year and regularly communicate with CDE staff about grant administration, implementation, reporting, and other issues.

### *Implementation*

Schools implement their grant plans during years two, three, and four. Counselors are expected to be in place, participate in professional development sessions, provide a comprehensive school counseling program, and communicate regularly with CDE staff. Participating districts complete detailed online reports each year, which require information about staffing and the number of licensed school counselors, progress toward meeting goals, counseling program strategies and services, professional development, continuation plans, and requests for follow-up years. During year four, grantees are expected to have plans in place for sustaining their efforts beyond the SCCGP funding.

### *Technical assistance and professional development*

CDE communicates general information about the SCCGP through webinars and email. CDE staff provide most SCCGP training and technical assistance in face-to-face settings, with the focus and activities customized to the grantees' needs. A kickoff meeting for new grantees covers grant expectations and management, ASCA model basics, and end-of-year reporting, as well as providing an overview of the



SCCGP website, current legislative report, and upcoming webinars. Fall meetings address the competencies needed to complete a needs assessment, conduct an environmental scan, identify SMART goals, and select and implement evidence-based interventions. During subsequent years, grantees learn expectations for interim reports, explore strategies for encouraging students and their parents to apply for federal student aid, and analyze data for decision-making.

Technical assistance also includes providing information on fostering a college-going culture, as well as helping grantees to address challenges facing underserved populations, support program effectiveness, and comply with reporting requirements. At least one member of the school leadership team is required to attend all CDE-led sessions. CDE personnel have reported that requiring school administrators to attend grant trainings reinforces the principal/counselor relationship and the value of sustainability of positions and programs made possible through the grant funding. The first training for grantees focuses on the knowledge of grant specifics to guide administrators in the planning process. Technical assistance and support resources continue to evolve and are posted on the CDE website.

### *Monitoring*

First-year grantees submit electronic reports to CDE, with narrative and budget sections. The narrative includes the needs assessment, environmental scan, root-cause analysis, SMART goals, interventions, and documentation of licensed school counselor participation rates. Grantees provide three prioritized budget options to cover contingencies, as a way to develop the capacity to effectively revise budgets in future years.

During years two through four, district-level grantees complete a different monitoring process from the process for school-level grantees. District-level staff members (typically grant managers or project directors) respond to detailed electronic surveys that collect information about progress toward SMART goals, areas impacted by pursuit of the goals, program strategies and services, implementation, program data, professional development, counselors hired, and ICAP implementation and goals for the coming year. Plans for sustainability and strategies for addressing unmet needs in the future are also addressed.

School-level grant personnel (typically lead district counselors or grant managers) report on items related to staffing, performance goals and evaluation, and intended outcomes. They also report on the presence and/or creation of a mission statement, access to services for all students, plans for closing achievement gaps, characteristics of student learning objectives and goals, needs assessment activity, use of data, and whether counselors spend their time in ways that directly benefit students. Grantees provide information on annual reviews, resources for professional development, representation on curriculum and education committees, communications with parents, and use of pre-collegiate programming.

Reporting requirements are meant to be aligned, to present a coherent picture of grantee activity that not only meets compliance requirements but informs future project improvements. CDE staff review grantee reports to identify issues worthy of further exploration during site visits, which serve primarily to provide support, professional development, and technical assistance. CDE intends these visits to enhance capacity building at the local level to implement projects with high fidelity and ensure sustainability over time.

### *Lessons Learned*

Program designers, state leaders, grantees, and participants have addressed challenges throughout implementation, learning many lessons over the years. The intent of documenting these lessons is to inform the work of other states considering similar initiatives.

### *Outcome-driven vision*

Although the SCCGP is a grant program and is funded by the legislature, state leaders and program designers have envisioned the program as a systemic change strategy designed to enhance the way schools operate, while improving practice and policy along the way. They consider successful sites to be those that envision a future in which every student pursues some avenue of postsecondary studies, and where a schoolwide culture provides counselors and other educators with the time and space required to foster postsecondary readiness and success. The program is intended to infuse the entire school culture, including students' daily interactions.

### *State leadership and support*

Stakeholders in Colorado have indicated that clear, consistent, and meaningful guidance and assistance are essential if sites are to reach their annual objectives. Grantees who provided information for this report agree that the leadership provided by CDE and the SCCGP advisory board members has been reliable, noteworthy, and exceptional, and that CDE's support to sites across the state has been indispensable. Interviewees and focus-group participants indicated that CDE's frequent, face-to-face training and technical assistance have helped grantees reach their goals in a timely manner. Respondents also appreciated the mix of training — which included in-person sessions as well as webinars and email communications — noting that complex technical issues that vary from site to site are best handled during face-to-face conversations.

### *Champions, advocates, and partners*

According to interview and focus-group respondents, the Colorado School Counselor Association played a strong role in promoting the program to districts and schools, catalyzing effective practices, and communicating to the legislature about program effectiveness. Respondents also indicated that members of the SCCGP advisory board are key advocates who employ a range of strategies to publicize the program and communicate with policymakers about results. Legislators regularly hear program stories told through data from students, parents, and educators. Interviewees and focus-group participants indicated that representation of different stakeholder groups on the advisory board has ensured continuity and maintained forward momentum. Respondents also pointed to other key partners, including site-based administrators who are involved during the planning year, as well as community-based organizations, colleges, and universities.

### *Readiness and commitment*

CDE staff indicated that they identify and assist highly motivated applicants for SCCGP grants, even though the initial applications may not be well conceived. CDE respondents said they had learned that rather than deny a prospective grantee, they could work with the applicant during the planning year to prepare a meaningful and actionable application. Interviewees and focus-group respondents indicated that moving from a three-year grant cycle to a four-year grant cycle that included a full 12 months for planning and preparation had increased commitment to the program, resulted in better outcomes for students, and increased sustainability of counseling positions. The program documents and communications convey the expectations that applicants must devote time and energy to effective planning, engage fully in the process, and carefully consider results from the needs assessment and the environmental scan. Applicants are consistently prompted to leverage the program for schoolwide change, and CDE uses the initial application to measure applicants' readiness for this change in systems and culture. Additionally, school districts along with their high schools and middle school feeders are

encouraged to apply together, to establish cohesive, consistent links among schools. Some grantees have commented that going through the application process was the first time they had met with their counterparts at feeder schools.

#### *Accountability and sustainability*

Both CDE staff and grantees indicated that they continuously monitor the use of SCCGP funds, and that monitoring provides essential status checks to help sites stay on track, fulfill obligations, use funds appropriately, and make timely adjustments. Respondents also indicated that effective monitoring assists with progress documentation and accountability. A comparative approach is used to document progress. CDE staff indicated that they compare grantees' outcomes to those of peer districts with similar student characteristics, and that this comparison provides compelling evidence of program effectiveness. District-level respondents indicated, in interviews and focus groups, that programming and staffing added value to the school sites, and that evidence of this value helped grow the SCCGP and ensure sustainability. CDE staff have indicated that school counseling positions can have a positive return on investment by keeping students engaged in school and preventing dropouts, which can maintain enough per-pupil revenue to match the funding needed for the school counselor.

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