

September 17, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents
FROM: David L. Buhler
SUBJECT: College Opportunity Agenda

Background

On July 28, 2014 The White House and the Harvard Graduate School of Education convened more than 130 leaders from professional associations, nonprofit community organizations, school districts, higher education, and foundations in Cambridge to address the issue of strengthening school counseling. These education leaders and advocates discussed how to ramp up training, leverage technology, and rally together for administrative support to improve the quality and quantity of college advising.

Melissa Miller Kincart, Assistant Commissioner for Outreach and Access was personally invited by the U.S. Department of Education to not only attend, but to be a featured panel speaker in the Professional Development and Training session. Ted Mitchell, the U.S. Under Secretary of Education, represented the Whitehouse at the event as well as Eric Waldo, Executive Director of the administration's Reach Higher Initiative. The Reach Higher initiative is the First Lady's effort to inspire every student in America to take charge of their future by completing their education past high school, whether at a professional training program, a community college, or a four-year college or university.

Issue

In 2011, to strengthen Utah's professional development College Access Challenge Grant objective, Assistant Commissioner Kincart, decided to purchase a state license from the Southern Regional Education Board and embed the Collaborative Counselor Training Initiative (CCTI) into the University of Utah's and Utah State's University pre-service master's level school counseling programs. Prior to this, implementation of CCTI in the southern region had primarily been in the professional development arena for existing school counselors. Over the next two years, with leadership and support from Kincart and the CACG, Dr. Paul Gore and Camille Odell (program directors), and their amazing faculty integrated the CCTI online modules into the two existing programs. By 2013, the University of Utah had established an emphasis in college and career readiness, and Utah State University has added a stand-alone course dedicated to this topic. At the summit, Kincart was presented Utah's successful pre-service and in-service training strategies related to school and college counseling. The attached article gives an overview of these national issues and highlights Utah efforts as leading out in much needed area of education reform.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only, no formal action by the Board is required. However, the Board is encouraged to read and take note of the information in this memorandum and review the attached Education Week article, and note that further follow-up will be handled by the Commissioner's Office as part of the Board's Participation strategic objective.

David L. Buhler
Commissioner of Higher Education

DLB/MMK
Attachment

EDUCATION WEEK

Published Online: September 9, 2014

Published in Print: September 10, 2014, as **Guidance Counselors Push for More Students To Be College-Ready**

Counselors Work to Get More Students on College Path

Using new strategies to serve diverse needs

By Caralee J. Adams

Kristin M. Chiasson and her team of guidance counselors have been ramping up efforts to foster more of a college-going culture at Wayne Memorial High School, near Detroit, where a majority of students would be among the first in their families to pursue higher education.

After surveying students to identify their needs in the college process, the school is starting lunchtime help sessions to walk students through the onerous application process and will be rebranding a financial-aid workshop to entice more participants.

Ms. Chiasson, who says she previously had little time or training on how best to address the diverse experiences and needs of the student body, was inspired to expand her efforts after completing a new course in college access with about 80 of her peers across Michigan. The inaugural in-person and online professional-development program helped them build their college-counseling skills and knowledge of the admissions process.

"What we are all struggling with in this field is our time," said Ms. Chiasson, who is trying to make all the information about college options more manageable to students, while juggling so many other job responsibilities.

Starting the Conversation

As states implement college- and career-ready standards and try to prepare more students for postsecondary education, some are looking to better position guidance-counseling programs to do much of the additional outreach.

The eight-month training program offered by the Michigan College Access Network, or MCAN, gave Ms. Chiasson new insights and strategies for understanding students' diverse experiences and the most effective services for addressing their needs. The program has attracted so much interest among counselors across the state that it is expected to serve some 150 more participants this school year.

A few hours north, in Traverse City, Mich., veteran counselor Tom Ford is using some of the strategies from that training program to get all students at West Senior High School to, at a minimum, apply for college. To start, his school will set aside a week in November where counselors, teachers, and admission officers from nearby colleges will help students complete an online application during the school day in their advisory period.

"I'm not so naive to think that every student will end up going to college, but at least it will start

[← Back to Story](#)



the dialogue," said Mr. Ford, who hopes to remove the mystery for students and families who have never gone through the college-planning and -application process.

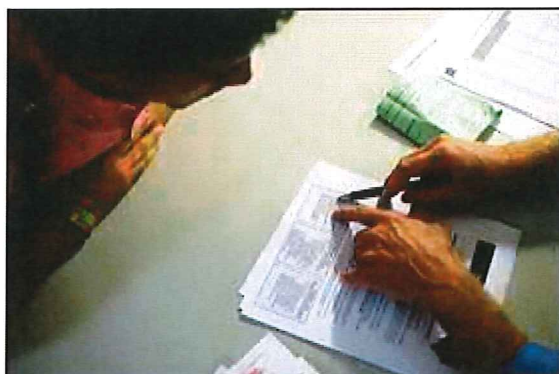
High school counselors play a big role in setting students' sights on higher educational attainment, particularly for low-income students and students of color. Yet **research has shown** that counselors have been a mostly untapped, and insufficiently trained, resource in such efforts. First lady Michelle Obama has recently put the spotlight on the critical role that school counselors play in helping students aspire to and enroll in postsecondary education through her Reach Higher Initiative.

To better equip counselors with strategies to help disadvantaged students, state-level training initiatives, like the one in Michigan, along with graduate counseling programs offering college advising are emerging.

This school year, two of Michigan's public university graduate programs in counseling began to require courses in college counseling.

"Counselors are good at working with students and families," said Brandy M. Johnson, the executive director of MCAN, the nonprofit network that promotes community collaboration to expand college-going. "What they don't

always know is how to help with financial-aid applications, Pell Grants, and the nuances of" helping students find the right college for them.



Ford explains the NCAA's academic requirements to senior Cameron Sipple.

—Sean Proctor for Education Week

Elsewhere, graduate programs in school counseling at universities in Utah and Connecticut have woven college- and career-readiness into their curricula. In January, Colorado State University will launch a new 15-credit graduate-certificate program in college access and success.

Private and public agencies are also offering training for counselors already on the job. In Houston's Spring Branch Independent district, all counselors and academic advisers are receiving training on financial aid from the nonprofit uAspire. And in North Carolina, online courses for school counselors focused on college planning are expanding, in part, thanks to a new law that requires them to spend 80 percent of their time in direct counseling with students.

In these tight fiscal times, with little likelihood of an influx of funding for school counseling, there is a hope that training will be able to help counselors be more efficient with the time they do have with students, says Mandy Savitz-Romer, a professor in the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Too often, counselors are bogged down with heavy case loads, crisis counseling, and administrative duties, such as test proctoring. In Michigan, counselors report that only about one-quarter of their time is left to advise students on postsecondary options, according to a **statewide survey** conducted last fall.

Nationwide, the typical public school counselor, on average, **works with 471 students**—nearly twice the recommended amount—and most feel unprepared for the challenges they face on the job. A recent study by researchers from the College Board found that an additional high school counselor could induce up to a 10-percentage-point increase in four-year college enrollment.

Expanding Skills

A **White House summit** in July on strengthening the role of counselors in expanding college access focused on underserved student populations. Experts emphasized that counselors need to know more about the college process than their own experiences and to have the tools to be able to reach out to high school students who traditionally may not have thought about higher education as an option.

"Good intentions and passion are not enough to tackle this challenge," said Ms. Savitz-Romer, who organized the meeting, which included more than 100 leaders from nonprofits, K-12, higher education, business, and philanthropy who were asked to commit to expanding support for counseling and college access.

Although graduate programs for school counseling have not always included advising in college and career readiness, more are starting to recognize the need.

WEBINAR



Positioning Counselors To Be Game Changers In College Access

Photo: Sean Proctor for Education Week

FREE WEBINAR: Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2014 2 to 3 p.m. ET

[Register now.](#)

"There is a critical mass of counseling educators that are thinking about reforms" to include college advising and access, said Ms. Savitz-Romer. "It's more than sporadic."

In 2012, the Utah System of Higher Education brought together university faculty members, current school counselors, district comprehensive-guidance coordinators, and representatives from various college-access programs to customize curriculum on college- and career-readiness to infuse into preservice training programs. By 2013, the University of Utah had established an emphasis in school counseling and college and career readiness in its master's in school counseling program (a designation on the transcript of all graduates), and Utah State University added a dedicated course in its program on the topic.

"We are trying to empower school counselors to be part of the conversation and be seen in schools by principals as leaders," said Melissa Miller Kincart, the assistant commissioner of outreach and access for the system. "They hold the keys to changing the game around college and career readiness."

Effective college counseling is not about treating all students the same, said Rachelle Pérusse, an associate professor in the counseling program at the University of Connecticut, in Storrs. "Some kids need more. They come with a shorter ladder," she said.

At UConn, graduate students learn that counselors in elementary school should talk early about the importance of college, visit campuses, and have school career fairs. At the secondary level, counselors are trained to analyze data to look at access to advanced courses by income level, gender, or disability, said Ms. Pérusse.

About 40 of the country's 400-plus school counseling programs have graduate courses in college counseling offered in degree, certificate, and continuing education, according to the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the American School Counselor Association. Every state has its own licensing criteria, so credentials of counselors vary.

College access was identified by counselors as the area in which they most need additional training, according to a **2012 national survey** by the National Center for School Counselor Advocacy at the College Board. The poll found counselors who report being better trained are

more likely to work in schools with higher rates of college attendance.

Setting Standards

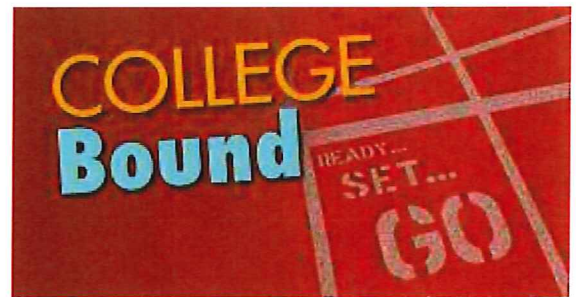
Counselors need to supplement their formal training (83 percent have a master's degree) with practical tools on college advising, said Alice Anne Bailey, who directs an initiative at the **Southern Regional Education Board**, which designed the counselor-training materials used in Michigan and 12 other states. "What students are missing is the hand-holding and right information to walk them through the process," she said.

Both information and finances are hurdles to first-generation college students.

To address that gap, there has been a growth in college-access organizations that operate outside of schools in recent years. Part of the new training emphasis is on helping counselors learn how to partner with those services and connect students with expanding resources, notes Harvard's Ms. Savitz-Romer.

The new reality is that everybody needs some kind of training after high school, so counselors can no longer wait for students to come to them, said Mr. Ford, the Traverse City counselor. "You have to be the advocate; shake the bushes and be active."

RELATED BLOG



[Visit this blog.](#)

Special coverage on the alignment between K-12 schools and postsecondary education is supported in part by a grant from the Lumina Foundation, at www.luminafoundation.org. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.