

What High Schools Can Do to Help Narrow the College-Access Gap

While college attendance overall is improving, enrollment rates among low-income students and those who would be the first in their family to receive higher education lag behind. By 12th grade, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, these students are less likely than peers to expect to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. This is often because they are not academically prepared, lack awareness of the many steps required to enter college, or don't receive guidance and support to complete the steps.

Even students who believe they are on track for college enrollment often discover too late that they aren't adequately prepared. They may have earned the credits required to graduate and passed the state exit exam, but their academic skills don't meet college demands. In fact, nearly 60 percent of students who actually enter college must take remedial courses as a condition of enrollment.

Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do, a recently published practice guide from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education, offers educators and community stakeholders evidence-based approaches for improving college access rates among their students. Authored by a panel of national experts that included WestEd Senior Research Scientist Neal Finkelstein, the guide identifies the following high-priority recommendations for high schools:

1. Offer college-preparatory courses and make students aware of which courses are required for college, starting in ninth grade.
2. Assess and assist students continuously to achieve college-preparatory academic standards, starting in ninth grade.

3. Surround students with adults and peers who build and support their college aspirations.
4. Using a hands-on approach, engage and assist students in completing critical steps for applying to and selecting a college.
5. Increase families' college-related financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid.

Panel members derived these recommendations by analyzing characteristics of college access programs, school reforms, and policy interventions that showed promise in increasing college access, particularly for low-income and first-generation students. Although the existing research on college-access services and programs does not permit conclusive evidence about best practices, the panel is confident that such services are important, and that schools should make it a priority to implement the five recommended steps.

Using the IES practice guide to frame the issues, REL West has convened several events in recent months at which key stakeholders learn about the research related to improving college access and discuss strategies for applying it to policy,

REL West Research Digest keeps educators and others abreast of the research carried out by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West at WestEd. In addition to providing abstracts of selected REL West research reports, this twice-yearly digest may include descriptions of upcoming REL West work, services, and events, and, as relevant to the Western region, of publications developed by other researchers.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Updated multi-state teaching standards

California's need for school administrators

regulation, and practice, to improve students' preparation for college and employment.

At one such event held in Las Vegas last fall, nearly 100 Nevada K–12 public school, higher education, and business leaders met to learn about the research and generate recommendations for a state task force charged with developing the state's college and work readiness standards. William Tierny, professor of higher education and Director of the Center for Higher Education Policy at the University of Southern California, and chair of the panel that authored the practice guide, detailed the guide's five recommendations for attendees and discussed possible barriers to and strategies for achieving them.

Positive lessons, as well as challenges, from other states' experiences creating college/workforce readiness standards were offered by a panel of out-of-state experts. Noting that Nevada had the opportunity to avoid a key mistake other states have made, the expert panel advised that all stakeholder groups – K–12 education, higher education, business, parents, and policymakers – be involved in the earliest stages of developing and implementing readiness standards.

Jane A. Nichols, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education, summed up the impact of the event on state efforts to improve college access: "The Pathways to College event set the stage for Nevada stakeholders to move forward quickly on college readiness standards, an issue that is critical to the state."

As Nevada progresses toward its long-term goal of creating a "college-going culture" in the state's K–12 schools, REL West will continue to provide technical assistance for the development of college readiness standards that will serve as the foundation for their efforts.

Read the full report, [Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do](#), on the What Works Clearinghouse website.

[View complete proceedings](#) of REL West events on the topic of helping students navigate the path to college, on the REL West website.

[Read a synthesis and brief summary of stakeholder recommendations](#) to the state task force in Nevada on the REL West website.

Regional Events for Policymakers and Practitioners

To ensure that key stakeholders have access to research that can help them shape education policy and practice, REL West convenes local, state, and regional events to address a variety of issues identified as high-priority by the states it serves. Events may serve as technical assistance to address pressing issues, or may deliver in-depth presentations on research by experts, with group discussions on strategies for applying the research to policy and practice. Over the past six months REL West has convened or co-convened six such events for more than 500 participants, including:

Pathways to College: Increasing Access to Postsecondary Education for All Canyons School District Students

May 5, 2010 • Sandy, Utah

Participants: District and school leaders, school/community site council leaders, and key community leaders

Improving Graduation Rates and College Access in the Southwestern Region

April 8 and 9, 2010 • Phoenix, Arizona

Participants: State education agency teams from Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah

Education Reform: Building Coherence across ARRA Funds

December 18, 2009 • Phoenix, Arizona

Participants: Teams of education leaders from 17 Western and Southwestern states and top officials from the U.S. Department of Education

Adolescent Literacy Research: Implications for California's Policy and Practice

December 3, 2009 • Costa Mesa, CA

Participants: Secondary Literacy Summit attendees

December 4, 2009 • Sacramento, California

Participants: About 30 California Department of Education staff who work on literacy and school improvement issues

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: Bridging Research, Policy, and Practice

December 2, 2009 Sacramento, CA

Participants: 50 members of California's Race to the Top California Work Group, key legislative staff, and representatives of key state organizations

To read all available event proceedings, go to the [REL West website](#).

Selected Fast-Response and Technical Assistance Project Reports

In carrying out fast-response projects intended to inform quick action and policy decisions, and in providing technical assistance on regional evaluation and research activities, REL West researchers analyze or otherwise utilize existing data, studies, and research reviews. Results undergo external peer review to ensure that they meet the Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research. The reports described below have been published since the previous issue of the Research Digest, January 2010.

Published REL West reports are available at the [REL West website](#); reports from all 10 RELs are available at the [national REL website](#).

School-site administrators: A California county and regional perspective on labor market trends

This study explores the differences among California's counties and regions in their needs for new school-site administrators in the coming decade, as driven by a combination of projected administrator retirements and projected student enrollment changes. The projected need for new school-site administrators, based solely on these combined factors, ranges from 9 percent to 71 percent of individual counties' 2007/08 administrator workforce.

Updated multistate review of professional teaching standards

States review and revise their teaching standards on an ongoing basis and can learn from other states' efforts. This updated review of teaching standards in six of the nation's most populous states – California, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas – focuses on the structure, target audience, and selected content of the standards. Originally developed in 2009, the report's updated version also addresses topics of special populations and use of technology.

The enrollment of young children in foster care in early intervention services and licensed preschools

Data from a number of sources suggest a need to improve the rate of enrollment in early intervention services and licensed preschools of young children in foster care. Yet, efforts to construct a California baseline from which to measure improvement have proven unfeasible due to data limitations. This analysis, performed to support the statewide Ready to Succeed Initiative, includes a detailed summary of referral, eligibility, and enrollment rates for children ages 0–2 and 3–5 who were in foster care in Fresno County as of January 2009.

UPCOMING FAST-RESPONSE REPORTS (working titles)

Where do English learners go to school? Distribution by language proficiency in Arizona

As requested by the Arizona Department of Education, this report shows how the number and percentage of English learner (EL) students vary by school in the state, as well as by four school characteristics: school level, school type, school location, and percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Data will be used, in part, to inform development of Arizona's English language development program.

Resource utilization in rural school districts: An analysis of spending and staffing patterns in rural and non-rural school districts in the West Region states

This descriptive and comparative study examines patterns of spending, staffing, and resources available to rural school districts in the West Region from 2000–2006, compared to their urban/suburban counterparts. The study considers factors that may differentiate rural and suburban/urban communities, such as per-pupil expenditures, staff–pupil ratios, and overhead ratios (ratios of district- to school-level spending).

An examination of English learner student mobility in Arizona

While previous research has examined student mobility among all students, little is known about the mobility rates of English learner (EL) students. Given the large population of EL students in Arizona, this study seeks to understand the extent of EL student mobility in the state. The study uses a five-year longitudinal student-level dataset to track student enrollment and transfers into and out of all public schools throughout Arizona.

ASK • A • REL

Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories. Functioning much like a technical reference library, it answers education-related questions by providing referrals to IES research projects, publications, and reports; references for and bibliographies of existing education research; referrals to federally funded education organizations and websites; and regionally specific educational information. To **Ask A REL**, go to the [national REL website](#) and select your state..

Publications from Other Organizations

Center on Innovation & Improvement

[Handbook on Effective Implementation of School Improvement Grants](#)

This handbook provides practical and useful guidance on the models and strategies required and recommended for use in applying for School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds, and includes references to the underlying research and connections to useful resources. (January 2010)

National High School Center

[Using the Right Data to Determine if High School Interventions Are Working to Prepare Students for College and Careers](#)

This report is designed to guide educators in collecting and analyzing valuable student achievement data that can help them determine if and how high school interventions for underprepared students are working to effectively prepare them for college and careers. (January 2010)

Center on Instruction

[RTI CTRL: Response to Intervention Classification Tool and Resource Locator \(K-12\)](#)

This resource contains both a web-based self-assessment and resource filtering tool that state education agencies can use to determine their level of RtI implementation, and find resources that are relevant to their needs. The

self-assessment allows users to indicate their current implementation activities within several elements of RtI, which results in a unique set of resources relevant to the user's current implementation level. (January 2010)

REL Southwest

[A Systematic Comparison of the American Diploma Project College Readiness Standards with Those of the ACT, College Board, and Standards for Success](#)

This study of four national English language arts standards compares the content of three sets of standards with a benchmark set, the American Diploma Project (ADP), to see how closely the sets agree on what students should know in English language arts to prepare for college. (February 2010)

REL Northeast & Islands

[Processes and Challenges in Identifying Learning Disabilities among English Language Learner Students in Three New York State Districts](#)

To help districts accurately identify students who are English language learners and also have learning disabilities, this study examines practices and challenges in the processes applied in three New York State districts in identifying learning disabilities among students who are English language learners. (February 2010)

CONTACT INFORMATION

REL West at WestEd
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
866.853.1831
relwest@WestEd.org
WestEd.org

This digest was prepared under Contract ED-06-CO-0014, from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, by the Regional Educational Laboratory West, administered by WestEd. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.