BUILDING A COLLEGE READINESS INDICATOR SYSTEM: PROGRESS IN THE DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

FINAL REPORT

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Acknowledgements

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Case Study Background

Attention to the importance of systemic <u>district</u> initiatives to create structures for helping increase college readiness and college access for historically underrepresented students is a relatively new development. Building on the research surrounding district use of data in decision-making[i] and research on early warning indicators,[ii] the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded a College-Ready Education initiative in Dallas in 2008 and a College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) initiative beginning in 2011 to spur on district progress in this area.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, collaborating with the Chicago Consortium on School Research, worked with a group of five districts/school networks to develop and refine systemic approaches to increasing college readiness and success for underrepresented students. Our study builds on preliminary studies of early implementer districts[iii] to investigate how one of those districts, Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD), continued to develop and sustain its college readiness indicator system after its commencement.

The CRIS framework focuses on three college readiness areas (academic preparedness, academic tenacity, and college knowledge) along three dimensions (individual student, setting/school level, and system/district level). Figure 1 below illustrates typical indicators for each area in each dimension.

Figure 1. Typical CRIS Indicators in High Schools

	Individual Level	Setting/School Level Indicator	System/District Level Indicator
Academic Preparedness	SAT score	Percent of students meeting college-ready SAT score threshold	Percent of students meeting college-ready SAT score threshold
Academic Tenacity	High School attendance rate	Percent of students with 95% attendance or higher	Percent of students with 95% attendance or higher
College Knowledge	FAFSA completion	Percent of students completing FAFSA	Percent of students completing FAFSA

District Background

In 2014-15 Dallas ISD served 160,253 students in a total of 224 schools. It is the 14th largest school district in the nation. Nearly 15,000 professional staff and more than 6,000 support staff serve the district's schools and students.

Dallas ISD was led by Superintendent of Schools Michael Hinojosa from 2005-2011, and Superintendent of Schools Mike Miles from 2012-2015. Michael Hinojosa was reappointed as Superintendent of Schools in 2015.

Figure 1.
Dallas ISD Student Characteristics

Hispanic	*70%*
African-American	*23%*
White	*5%*
Other ethnicity	*2%*
Special Education	*7%**
Free/reduced lunch	*89%**
English language learner	*31%**

Figure 1[1] summarizes the ethnic diversity of the district's students and percentages receiving special services. Nearly all the district's students are non-white and from low-income homes. Almost one in three is an English language learner.

The district four-year cohort graduation rate in 2013 was reported by the Texas Education Agency as 84.8%.

District schools are organized into five regional divisions led by Assistant Superintendents under a Chief of School Leadership. Each division includes several feeder patterns of elementary, middle and high schools, each led by an Executive Director. Key district office departments involved in College and Career Readiness work include: Office of College and Career Readiness, Counseling Services, and Evaluation and Assessment.

Dallas ISD began acquiring data on its graduates from the National Student Clearinghouse in 2006 and has produced publicly available yearly reports summarizing postsecondary outcomes for its graduates since 2009. According to the most recent (2015) report,[iv] 58% of Dallas ISD 2012 graduates had enrolled in

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[1] Data on ethnicity from 2014-15 District Fact Sheet on website. Data marked with * from Hall, 2013.

college within a year of graduation. Among the 2013 graduates, 49% had enrolled in college by the fall following graduation. On average, for graduating classes over the five-year period 2009-13, more of the college enrollees went to two-year college (53%) than four-year colleges (47%). Most enrollees (90%) went to Texas colleges.

In 2007-08 Dallas ISD created an on-track to high school graduation indicator based on research conducted by the Chicago Consortium on School Research. Ninth graders were considered to be on-track if they earned five credits and had no more than one failing semester grade in the core academic subjects. The percentage of ninth graders on-track to graduation was calculated for each high school and published in a yearly report from the Dallas ISD Evaluation and Assessment department. The on-track measure was one of the accountability measures for principals from 2009-10 to 2011-12.[v] Principals and other district leaders did not pay as much attention to the on-track indicator once it was no longer an accountability measure. The latest report on the on-track indicator (2013-14) shows a slight decline in the percentage of ninth graders on-track to graduation.

In addition, Dallas ISD created a Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) in 2008-09. The data system, which was updated about every six weeks, integrated data on such indicators as attendance, truancy, course grades, number of credits earned, and state assessment scores. It allowed staff to identify students who were failing core courses, truant, or who had failing scores on the state assessments. Lists of students could be sorted and exported to EXCEL. Due to district budget cuts, the system has not been updated to reflect the new graduation requirements (particularly end-of-course exams). Other reports for principals on the end-of-course exams have been generated separately. The College Readiness Indicator System proposed in the latest round of the Gates Foundation-funded CRIS work in Dallas was envisioned as an updated and expanded replacement for the DEWS, with a more positive title.

With previous funding from the Gates Foundation beginning in 2008, Dallas ISD developed a data dashboard that integrated a set of college readiness indicators together for use by school staff. Reorganization under new district leadership in 2012 led to the dismantling of the department that created and supported the

data dashboard.[vi] This case study summarizes the development of College Readiness Indicator System work in the aftermath of that reorganization.

Case Study Framework

CRIS Essential Elements:

1) Leadership commitment
2) Data Infrastructure
3) Building Adult Capacity Around Data Use and College Readiness
4) Connecting Indicators with Action
5) Teacher Input on the Development and Implementation of CRIS
6) Parent Outreach to Support College Readiness Efforts
7) Supports to Promote College Readiness
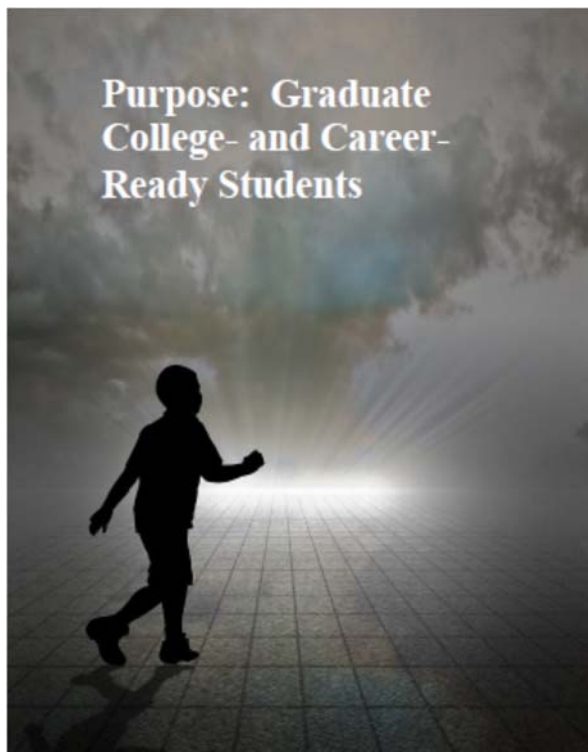8) Partnerships with Community and Higher Education Institutions

For this case study we used a qualitative methodology of analyzing data from interviews, meeting observations, and district documents. Interviews and site visits were conducted from Spring 2014 through Spring 2015. Data sources are described more fully In the Appendix.

This case study report is organized around the CRIS Essential Elements (see side-bar). These elements were identified during the foun-dational CRIS work, conducted in the original five districts, by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, in collaboration with the Chicago Consortium on School Research.[vii]

For each element, we summarize ways in which Dallas ISD reflects exemplary progress. We also note the challenges that remain for Dallas ISD and reasons that explain those challenges.

Leadership Commitment (Essential Element 1)

Strategic alignment of CRIS with the district's purpose, goals, action plans, programs, and accountability systems

The Dallas Independent School District has made college readiness its top priority (as illustrated in this graphic from a District Action Plan).

Since July 2012, Dallas ISD's official "purpose" has been to "graduate college- and career-ready students." Dallas ISD has been following and refining a district improvement action plan-- named *Destination 2020* – designed to accomplish that purpose better each year until (by September 2020):

Graphic from DALLAS ISD Action Plan

- o 90% of Dallas ISD's students graduate on time;
- o 40% attain a 21 or higher composite score on the ACT exam or a Reading/Math composite score of 990 or higher on the SAT;
- o 75% are proficient on the Year 2020 workplace readiness assessments;
- o 80% enter college, the military, or a "career-ready job."

For each of the above metrics, the district has set interim annual goals, tracks and reports progress, annually identifies key actions/initiatives needed to reach the annual and longer-term goals, and identifies strategic new expenditures needed to enable those actions and initiatives. These are summarized in yearly District Action Plans.

Examples of aligning their expenditures and actions with their goals include:

- expanding SAT and ACT prep classes;
- providing in-school PSAT for all sophomores, SAT for all juniors and ACT for all seniors;
- paying for all Advanced Placement and IB tests and re-tests.

Accountability for College Readiness

One of Dallas ISD's key strategies to champion equitable access for all students to a college-going culture and college readiness resources is to give school-level college-readiness indicators an important place in the performance evaluation and accountability systems for principals and counselors in all schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools. Interviews with two magnet high school principals indicated that the specific college-readiness metrics that they were evaluated on in the new principal evaluation system included:

- how the school's average SAT & ACT scores compared to the college readiness benchmarks the district has established;

- the school's scores on the Texas STAAR statewide achievement test (% of students scoring at satisfactory or above);

- the student attendance rate at their school (as an indicator of students' academic tenacity);

- the school's dropout and graduation rates;

- teachers' ratings of how well the school is doing in building a "College-Going Culture" based upon a six-item scale drawn from the teacher climate survey.[2]

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[2] The College-Going Culture Scale is used in principal evaluation for all Dallas ISD schools, not just high schools. All principals are evaluated based upon the percent of positive responses by teachers to these statements: "Teachers expect most students in this school to go to college," "Instruction in this school is focused on helping students get ready for college," "Teachers in this school feel that it is part of their job to prepare students to succeed," "Teachers at this school accept nothing less from students than their full effort," "Teachers at this school do not let

Cross-department teamwork in CRIS development and implementation.

Developing, refining, and sustaining a successful CRIS "requires a concerted effort that cuts across district departments and benefits from the point of view and expertise of key staff with different roles within the organization."[3] In Dallas, the Executive Director of College and Career Readiness has organized ad hoc cross-department meetings that bring together key senior-level staff from different departments to plan improvements to the district's CRIS and to discuss the programming and launch of the district's "on-track to college" (CRIS) system for monitoring student progress in academic preparedness, tenacity, and college knowledge.

Besides the Executive Director of the College and Career Readiness department (and members of that department), the team includes the Assistant Superintendent for Evaluation and Assessment, a researcher within Evaluation and Assessment who was a fellow in the Harvard University Strategic Data Partnership, and the Dallas ISD Director of Counseling Services. The team also included a project manager from the Information Technology department focused on creation of a dashboard and integrated data system.

Cross-department collaboration among key leaders that focuses on college-readiness is reportedly smoother now than in the past as a result of the college-readiness focus of the district's Destination 2020 improvement plan. In addition, a district re-organization that placed the School Leadership department in the same division as the College and Career Readiness department (along with other Teaching and Learning departments and the Evaluation and Assessment department), has also facilitated more cross-departmental collaboration.

Championing efforts to make college access and success a community-wide priority.

As documented more fully in Essential Element #8 below, Dallas ISD works closely with community partners from the greater Dallas metropolitan area to further the agenda of

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students give up when their class work becomes challenging," "Teachers at this school give students feedback to help them understand how to improve."

[3] *CRIS: Essential Elements in Implementation*, 2014.

increasing college access for area students. Its leaders participate on the leadership council of the Commit! Partnership (focused on student achievement in Dallas County), the Texas College Access Network of North Texas, and the two north Texas P-16 Councils.

Strategic communications and outreach

The district's website, official written plans, brochures, and a host of evaluation reports posted online clearly show that it has been highlighting its college- and career-readiness focus in internal and external communications. This is especially evident in communications regarding the Destination 2020 districtwide strategic improvement plan and the Imagine 2020 reform initiative (an initiative that channels district and community resources into three of its most-challenged feeder patterns). Below is a typical example of college readiness communication in a district publication:

Community Advocates for Public Education News Network   January 16, 2015

Support for rigorous AP courses continues to increase
Number of students enrolled in AP classes continues to rise

For the first time, $1 million has been allocated in the school district budget to pay for student Advanced Placement (AP) exam fees and prep sessions for the more than 21,000 Dallas ISD students enrolled in the district's AP program. The district has seen a 14 percent increase in the number of AP exams passed by students in 2014. Part of what has driven student success on AP exams is the support received through grants funded by Texas Instruments (TI) and the O'Donnell Foundation. While the current grants are set to expire at the end of this school year, both foundations are currently reviewing how it will support AP and other programs that contribute to Dallas ISD student success. *Read* how the district continues to actively work to sustain the results of the program.

CHALLENGES

Despite extraordinary leadership commitment to college readiness as the top district goal, the district has given greater priority in the past year to ensuring the on-time roll-out of their new Teacher Excellence Initiative (including a pay-for-performance component) than to ensuring the on-time roll-out of the new indicator system for reporting student progress in staying on-track to college in grades 6-12. It appears that high rates of teacher turnover, and the associated challenges for Human Capital Management and School Leadership in ensuring that classrooms are filled with teachers who are receiving the support needed to be effective, have diverted attention from helping schools to focus more particularly on college readiness indicators.

Although Dallas ISD has a cross-departmental CRIS team, team members appeared to meet more on an ad-hoc basis rather than regularly with higher-ranking district leaders to move the district forward in its college readiness work. This also reflected the district's focus on principal and teacher evaluation during 2013-14 and 2014-15.

## Data Infrastructure (Essential Element 2)

Effective data tools

Unlike many (if not most) other districts nationally, Dallas ISD aggressively pursued and gained ongoing access to objective data (through the Texas Education Agency) on two late stage measures of college knowledge: FAFSA completion and college application submission (to Texas colleges). These two measures, along with objective data on whether students have taken the SAT or ACT (generally available to most districts) and scholarships accepted are included in the accountability measure for the District Counseling Department and high school principals throughout the district. Schools receive data on individual 12th graders that can be used in school-level interventions to raise college readiness and enrollment rates.   Figure 1 (from the Dallas ISD Counseling Department 2014-15 Report) illustrates how these measures are communicated at the district level. Schools receive similar school-level reports.

Figure 1. Dallas ISD's District Goals and Attainments in 2012-2014 on Several District-Level CRIS Measures
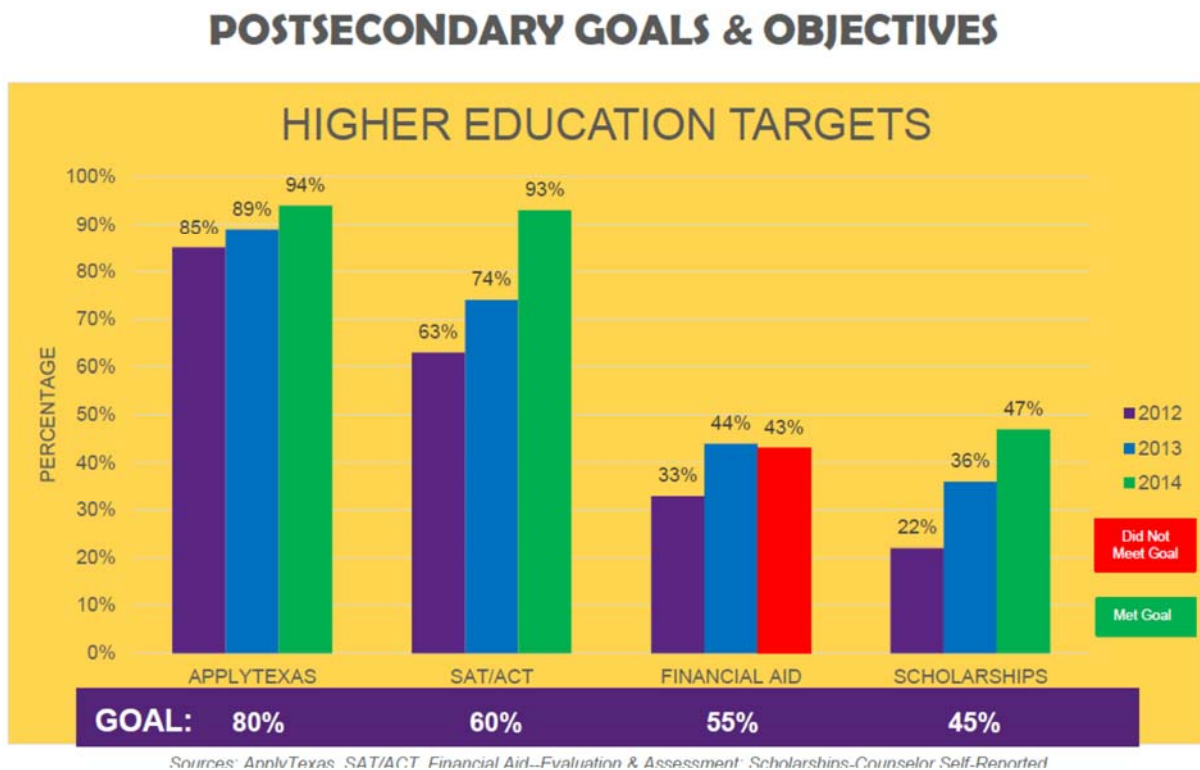
Dallas ISD high school profiles highlight key college readiness indicators such as school-level SAT/ACT results, as illustrated in Figure 2:

**Figure 2. Excerpt from the School Profile of a Dallas ISD High School**
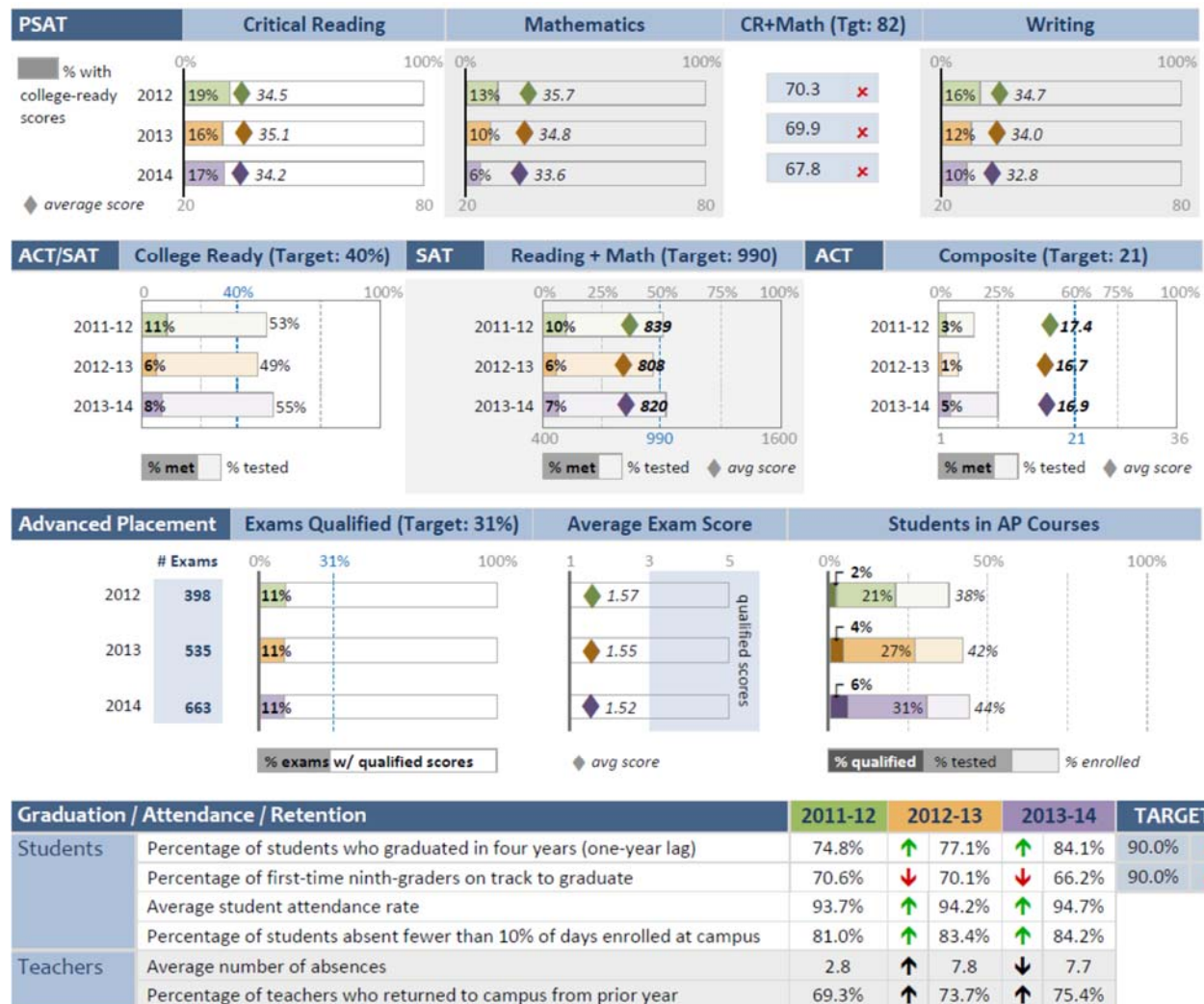
The Office of Institutional Research within Evaluation and Assessment also produces comprehensive "Data Packets" with college and career readiness measures by subgroup for each school at the beginning of the school year, which are available to school leaders on the district data portal.

Figure 3. Excerpt from a "Data Packet" of a High School

	State	District	All Students	African American	Hispanic	White	American Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Econ Disadv
SAT/ACT Results											
Tested											
Class of 2012	66.9%	77.0%	62.4%	74.1%	57.6%	66.7%	*	81.8%	*	-	62.7%
Class of 2011	68.9%	78.8%	69.7%	81.6%	62.7%	100.0%	-	100.0%	-	?	n/a
At/Above Criterion											
Class of 2012	24.9%	10.5%	5.9%	2.3%	4.7%	15.0%	*	11.1%	*	-	3.5%
Class of 2011	25.7%	10.1%	5.0%	2.5%	5.3%	6.3%	-	10.0%	-	0.0%	n/a
Average SAT Score											
Class of 2012	1422	1272	1250	1167	1240	1439	*	1317	*	-	1218
Average ACT Score											
Class of 2012	20.5	17.2	17.1	16.3	17.1	*	*	*	-	-	16.7
Class of 2011	20.5	17.1	17.6	17.2	17.0	*	-	*	-	-	n/a

In addition, Dallas ISD's Office of Evaluation and Assessment has a long history of producing high-quality evaluation reports focused on both specific programs and
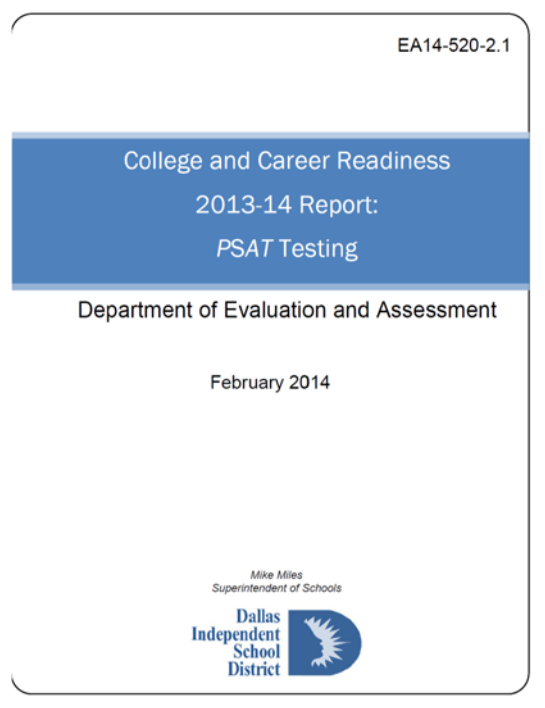
on institutional data. Dallas ISD was a national leader in analyzing data from the National Student Clearinghouse to summarize college enrollment, first-year success, and completion outcomes for its graduates in reports used by the district and its schools. The district produces publicly available College and Career Readiness reports on PSAT testing, school-day SAT testing, SAT and ACT testing, and remedial course taking in college. It also produces evaluation studies of district programs such as early college high schools and the College Access Provider initiative. These reports inform discussion and planning at the central office level. For example, the 2013 evaluation of the College Access Provider initiative for Title 1 high schools identified challenges that led the College and Career Readiness department to improve processes for 2013-14. There is now a protocol for the school principal, guidance department and college access providers to agree on where responsibility lies for each component of college readiness services to students.

Quality control. Case study findings indicate that the District has strong data quality control systems in place to ensure the production of reliable information for school and system personnel. In discussing the data available to monitor college readiness, none of the respondents suggested that they cannot trust the data that they access.

CHALLENGES

Integrated data systems. With the dismantling of the previously created CRIS dashboard (see District Background), the CRIS work in Dallas over the past couple of years has been focused on creating a new dashboard with key performance indicators of college readiness more closely aligned with current accountability measures. Although we saw evidence that the Dallas ISD Information Technology department was able to bring together some individual student-level data from separate silos into an integrated and interactive college indicator "dashboard" or data report during a professional development session with middle grades teachers during the 2014-15 school year, access to the new dashboard for district teachers was not available until the 2015-16 school year. The delay appeared to be due to other district priorities (particularly related to principal and teacher evaluations) that dominated in the competition for available information technology resources.

Our interviews indicated that different kinds of data remain, to some extent, in separate data silos and that it is still difficult for school-based staff to access all the data they need in a way that facilitates productive cycles of inquiry regarding college readiness indicators. Dallas ISD is still working on integrating individual-level data on college readiness measures (e.g., GPA, attendance, End of Course exam scores, AP course and test score data, SAT/ACT scores) in ways that can effectively guide action and specific interventions for students by school-based staff.
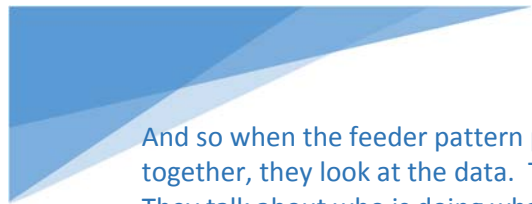
Evaluation and Assessment has produced college readiness-related reports for district and school leaders, such as a report on student performance on the End of Course (EOC) high school exams that are now a graduation requirement and accountability measure. Much of this information is available to school leaders on the district's "My Data Portal" system. But there does not yet appear to be a

systematic approach to ensuring that all district staff know how to access and use these data effectively (an issue addressed more fully in the next section).

Building Adult Capacity around Data Use and College Readiness
(Essential Element 3)

The Dallas ISD structure of "data meetings" around specific topics that Executive Directors hold monthly with principals within their feeder patterns are an existing opportunity for staff to have structured collaborative inquiry and discussions around data. These meetings are supported by central office staff who compile data for schools in structured, user-friendly ways that facilitate both the preparation process for principals and the discussion among principals at the monthly meetings. Interviews indicated that the structure and content of these data meetings are highly dependent on the direction and vision of particular Executive Directors, or their Assistant Superintendent. Our observations of two different meetings confirmed the variation in how they are conducted.

In one meeting of 4-5 middle and high school principals and their Executive Director, each principal made a short presentation of data and analysis related to a particular issue in their school,[4] discussing plans for action steps in response to findings from the data. Other principals had the opportunity to make comments or ask questions after each presentation. The Executive Director was

> And so when the feeder pattern principals get together, they look at the data. They talk about it. They talk about who is doing what. That's where there's a lot of sharing in terms of well what are you doing, what are you doing, how are we doing this together? And so it's just a way to have conversations, and also just get in the habit of monitoring data.
>
> Deputy Superintendent

particularly skilled in asking questions that helped principals to move beyond the surface to a deeper understanding of the relationships among variables in the data. In particular, the Executive Director helped principals to think through possible relationships between dimensions of instruction and student learning and achievement outcomes. Although it was not explicitly mentioned, the process that the Executive Director modeled in collaborative inquiry with principals was a way of building principal capacity to conduct the same kind of inquiry with their teachers, so as to build the capacity of their teaching staffs in

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[4] That particular month's focus was on data from formative teacher observations using the district teacher evaluation rubric.

drawing conclusions from data inquiry that could inform their practice and ultimately student outcomes.

Another data meeting we observed included almost 20 different middle and high school principals and was conducted in a different format. Groups of principals met together at different tables to present data, analysi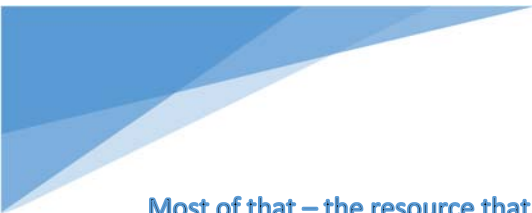s, and action plans and then receive feedback from colleagues. This format did not appear to be as carefully structured (with questioning and modeling from Executive Directors) as the previously described meeting. As a result, it did not appear to have the same potential for building principal capacity in a way that could then be transferred by principals to their teachers.

Teacher time to collaborate. In holding middle school focus groups around the proposed new on-track system, the College and Career Readiness department provided an opportunity for selected teachers from the focus group schools to engage in discussions about strategies for using student data and increasing college readiness. These focus groups yielded some fruitful discussions, although it may be beneficial to structure future discussions so that participants who are not as well-versed in more sophisticated ways of thinking about using student data and college readiness can learn from those who are. It appears that informal collaboration already occurs in some Dallas ISD schools, particularly in relatively high-performing schools, where teachers are organized into interdisciplinary pods that facilitate collaboration.

CHALLENGES

Time for professional development. It is apparent that there is not sufficient time devoted by the district for building teacher capacity around data use and college readiness indicators. Lack of training (and lack of consideration of how teachers access data) hindered the use of a previous data dashboard, and district administrators are aware of the importance of staff training for using the college

readiness indicator system. It will be important to provide not only technical training for teachers to be able to access the data tools, but also frameworks and guiding questions to help them interpret data and then know how to adjust their practices to become more effective in helping students. It is essential to provide this professional development, in the limited time available, in a way that integrates all the expectations placed on teachers into a coherent framework that will enable them to become more effective in improving student outcomes.

Connecting Indicators with Action (Essential Element 4)

Dallas ISD has several components necessary for building the regular school-level cycles of inquiry for school staff that would connect indicators with action:

- Regular collection and summarizing of individual- and school-level data on college readiness indicators;
- Useful briefs produced by Evaluation and Assessment focused on various college readiness indicators;
- Regular structured cycles of inquiry for groups of principals;
- Schoolnet software that enables teachers and school leaders to track and manage interventions for students, allowing meetings to be easily arranged and follow-up steps to be easily tracked;
- District Office Academic Facilitators who provide professional development to school-based instructional coaches, who in turn provide professional development to teachers in areas of need identified through student assessment data.

"EVERY MONTH, THE PRINCIPALS HAVE DATA MEETINGS WITH THEIR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO DISCUSS TOPICS THAT IMPACT ALL SCHOOLS IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE THAT THE PRINCIPALS HAVE A PLAN OF ACTION. THE PRINCIPALS COLLABORATE, SHARE, AND EXCHANGE IDEAS."

~EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF A FEEDER PATTERN

One example of how the inquiry led to action steps concerned Advanced Placement. An Assistant Superintendent related how analysis of the extremely low rate of Dallas ISD AP students scoring at least a 3 on the AP exam led to:

1) More focused observation of classroom instruction, which revealed the need for higher level questioning and higher quality student work production; and
2) A focus on establishing a rubric for judging student work quality.

CHALLENGES

It is not yet clear, however, that each middle and high school has a regular cycle of inquiry process focused on college readiness indicator data. Such a cycle of inquiry could help teachers understand relationships among student attendance, homework completion, course performance and GPA, and student performance on course assessments, state assessments, and PSAT/SAT/ACT/AP tests. It could also help them reflect on the level of rigor of their instruction and additional training needs they may have to increase level of rigor as well as student engagement in learning.

Teacher focus group participants expressed a desire *for more structured opportunities for collaboration with other teachers*. Similarly, the two principals interviewed said that most schools in the district have not built into their master schedule regularly scheduled common planning time for teacher teams to examine and act upon college readiness indicators. Dallas ISD was not able to identify a neighborhood high school where we could observe such a cycle of inquiry in process.

It is clear that in order to reach its goals for college readiness the district will need to build more time into the regular work week for teachers to collaborate around data use and effective ways to intervene when students are not developing the preparedness, tenacity, or knowledge needed for college. Given the constraints with time, district leadership is crucial to provide concrete, visual frameworks for principals and teachers that enable them to collectively understand the interrelationships among attendance and behavior issues, achievement, student learning, effective instructional practices, college readiness, and data driven inquiry around all these issues. Integrating collaboration around all these issues will be essential to establish organizational routines at the school level that are effective in leading to improved student outcomes. Teachers also need training and tools that will enable them to respond with appropriate individual supports, small-group interventions, or broad-based programs as indicated.

In addition to teachers' expressed need for more structured collaboration opportunities in general, an external partner identified the need for specific *teacher professional development* to increase the rigor of high school instruction, particularly in AP classes. At the same time, ensuring that high school teachers

receive this professional development presents a large challenge to the district, particularly given the high levels of teacher turnover.

Teacher Input on the Development and Implementation of CRIS
(Essential Element 5)

Recognizing that previous data systems were underutilized because they were designed with limited input from the teachers who were the intended users, the Dallas ISD College and Career Readiness department actively encouraged teacher participation in developing the new college readiness indicator system. Teachers from four middle schools were invited to participate in focus groups in Spring 2014 around the use of data. Through these focus groups, district staff who are spearheading CRIS implementation learned about how teachers use the currently available data systems, what they see as the shortcomings of those systems, and what data they would like to have centrally available in a single on-track system.

The same teachers met again in October 2014 and December 2014 to continue discussions of college readiness indicators and to give feedback on the interactive data dashboard that allowed them to identify students who were struggling on key indicators of college readiness. The teachers also gave feedback on an electronic tool that facilitates collaboration in identifying, implementing, and evaluating the impact of interventions for particular students.

CHALLENGES

Constraints on teacher time and available resources meant that input was received from only a handful of middle school teachers in the development and implementation of CRIS. It is not clear that there is any broader systematic attempt to include teacher leadership in providing feedback regarding college readiness indicators and how to improve the system.

It is crucial for districts to find ways to garner input from a much larger group of middle and high school teachers in order to ensure the teacher buy-in needed for the system to have its intended effects.

Parent Outreach to Support College Readiness Efforts (Essential Element 6)

Increasing parents' "college knowledge" and involvement in the college selection and financial aid process

Increasing parents' "college knowledge" is a process that begins in elementary school, as one Dallas ISD Assistant Superintendent pointed out.

> So we do have to make sure that kids … [as early as] in pre-K … start to … believe in themselves, that they can be college-bound and career ready… A lot of that has to do with increased parent engagement, which we're working on as well, because the parents have to see it and believe it and realize that there is life after high school and beyond…. We've got a whole department of parent engagement … because we have to work in partnership with them.
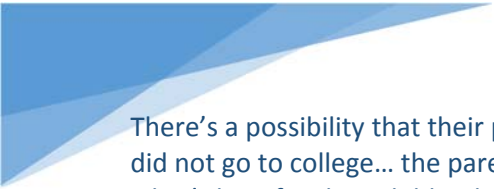>
> Dallas ISD Assistant Superintendent

Dallas ISD has been working to increase parent engagement and understanding that the goal is not simply high school graduation, but preparation for postsecondary education after high school.

In addition to the efforts of the district's Counseling Services division and school-based counseling staff to reach parents with information about college readiness and the college application process, Dallas ISD has also created the College Access Program (CAP)[5] to:

- increase the College Knowledge of students and parents;
- help students successfully complete college applications, scholarship applications, and entrance exams;
- increase parental involvement in the college admissions and financial aid process.

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[5] See broader description in Section 7 below.

> There's a possibility that their parent probably did not go to college… the parent might want … what's best for their child to be able to go to college, but they might not know how to get there either. So this is also about having that discussion of filling out the appropriate paperwork for the financial aid; make sure that we have trained people so that they know how to access this thing called college or the workplace when they get out, because those steps can be pretty intimidating as well. And so have parent meetings at night to say, "This is how you access this and here's how you can narrow down what your college search is."
>
> Dallas ISD Assistant Superintendent

College Access Program (CAP) staff (from external organizations hired as vendors by Dallas ISD) collaborate with high school counselors in addressing these needs in each school.

Providing parents with real-time information about their child's progress toward college readiness. Dallas ISD's Parent Portal provides parents/guardians with:

1. Secure online access to their children's grades, assignments, and attendance;
2. Email or text alerts of absences and grade average changes;
3. A two-way communication tool for parents and teachers.

The portal is available in both English and Spanish. It provides a very valuable tool for assisting parents in monitoring key indicators of students' academic progress and tenacity and partnering with teachers to respond quickly to early warning signs that a student is slipping off track.

According to the district's 2013-2014 evaluation of the Office of Family and Community Engagement (Lucas & Wang, 2014) the district has shown great strides in increasing parental registration for the portal (increasing from having just 20% of the district's households registered in May 2013 to 52% of the households registered in May 2014).

Meanwhile, Dallas ISD's Office of Family and Community Engagement has successfully raised parent participation in its "PREP University" family workshop series (Lucas & Wang, 2014). A total 3,213 of the district's parents attended in 2013-2014 (a 54 percent increase over the prior year). The series covers a variety of topics in over 40 sessions a year in various schools across the district (though most of these workshops are only indirectly related to college readiness or college access).

CHALLENGES

A close reading of the 2013-2014 CAP end-of-year report (Douglas, 2014, Table 14) suggests that just 400 to 450 parents (of the more than 10,000 students served by CAP) attended student-parent or parent-only workshops on topics such as college and financial aid information and applications. Counselors and CAP vendors acknowledged difficulties in getting parents to attend college access information sessions and in effectively surmounting language barriers that complicate the process of fully involving some parents. Similarly, the district's latest Comprehensive Needs Assessment recognizes the need to increase "parent awareness of higher education opportunities" and "to increase communication with parents about college readiness."
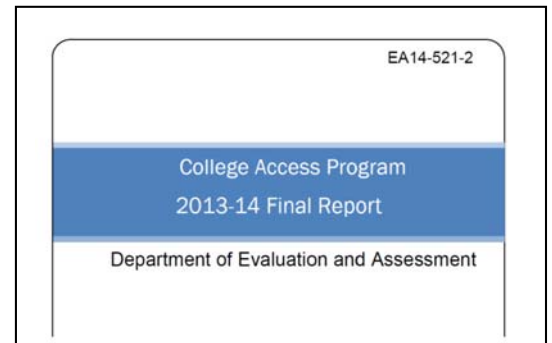
Supports to Promote College Readiness (Essential Element 7)

College Knowledge Supports

The Dallas ISD Counseling Services Department has several district-wide initiatives focused on college and career readiness, including:

- providing classroom guidance lessons on higher education/career awareness to high school counselors for delivery to classrooms of students;
- organizing district-wide college fairs.

In addition, Dallas ISD has contracted with external organizations for the past several years to provide a full-time "College Access Program" vendor at each of 34 comprehensive Title 1 high schools. This process is supervised by a College Access Coordinator (under the Director of Postsecondary Success, a department within College and Career Readiness). Principals are able to select from among several (currently 4) different approved vendors. The principal, school counselors and CAP vendor at each school agree on a set of annual goals, and how these will be divided between the counseling staff and the CAP provider, within the following college knowledge and readiness activities:

- Assisting with Career Cruising/Naviance
- Completing college applications
- Completing financial aid applications (including FAFSA, TASFA, and scholarships)
- Registering students for SAT, ACT and/or TSIA
- Test preparation for SAT, ACT and/or TSIA
- College and scholarship essay assistance
- College Fair(s) participation (with school counseling staff management)

Yearly program evaluations have been conducted by the Evaluation and Assessment Department to ascertain how well the program is working and provide formative recommendations. These have been useful in fine-tuning the program so that it works more smoothly in conjunction with the school-based counseling staff members.

As noted earlier, Counseling Services is held accountable for several "college knowledge" measures, including FAFSA completion, college application submission, percentage taking the SAT or ACT and scholarships accepted. As also noted earlier, one of the CRIS goals still to be realized within Dallas ISD is to better integrate these individual level data with other college readiness measures (e.g., GPA, attendance, AP completions, SAT/ACT scores) for intervention with students at the school level.

Academic Supports. Evaluation and Assessment produces reports on the End of Course Assessments, including data organized by teacher. Teachers receive data on individual students who are failing in order to help guide and target interventions. According to one interview respondent, "the principals use them a lot, and they look at the data by teacher. They will give teachers their data so that they can identify students, and it's very useful because it helps with interventions."

Non-Cognitive Supports. Dallas ISD is in the process of a districtwide roll-out of the Naviance college and career readiness computer platform, and it is expected that usage of the various tools within Naviance will help to build non-cognitive skills, behaviors, and mindsets needed for college readiness.

Partnerships with Community and Higher Education Institutions
(Essential Element 8)

Formal Partnerships with Flexible Approaches

It is evident that Dallas ISD leaders regularly interact with representatives of higher education institutions and community organizations through the P-16 Councils (University Crossroads and the North Texas Regional P-16 Council), meetings of Commit, and other venues. The Dallas ISD Office of College and Career Readiness manages the Interlocal Agreements for both the 6 Early College High Schools (where students can earn a high school diploma and potentially an Associate's degree) and the Dual Credit program where qualified students on every high school campus can earn dual credit with Texas colleges.

Some of the work of community organizations is focused on providing financial aid workshops and a targeted intervention to reduce summer melt (failure of admitted students to actually enroll in college in the fall following high school graduation). These organizations have also provided SAT prep classes for Dallas students.

CHALLENGES

Clear Definition of College Readiness

One issue that emerged from interviews is that the policy of many Texas universities of granting admission to all Texas students in the top 10% of their high school graduating class does not reflect an adequate assessment of their college readiness in the current environment. The anecdotal evidence of students failing to succeed in college suggests the need for more systematic study.

Summary and Conclusions

The Dallas Independent School District is clearly a national leader in its implementation of key elements of a college readiness indicator system. Leadership commitment to college readiness as the primary district goal is evidenced not just in mission statements, but also in budgetary priorities for ensuring that students have access to the testing opportunities required for college admission. Dallas ISD not only produces regular school-level reports summarizing longitudinal progress on key college readiness indicators (attendance, test scores, etc.), but also stands out nationally for its yearly evaluation reports that synthesize findings in useful ways that can inform district planning. Few other districts in the U.S. can match the Dallas ISD data reporting on such objective college access measures as FAFSA completion and college application completion. The district's focus on family engagement and on building partnerships with postsecondary institutions and related community partners is also worthy of emulation.

The districtwide organizational routine of monthly data meetings for principals within feeder patterns is also a promising structure for districts throughout the country to emulate. This structure holds great promise for helping districts to engage in continuous improvement cycles aimed at increasing the college readiness of their students.

At the same time, our case study found that other district priorities, such as the focus on teacher and principal evaluation systems, tend to compete with the goal of building a college readiness indicator system that integrates real-time student level data on various metrics and can be used at the school level. Even when effective data systems have been built in the past, turnovers in district leadership and priorities may undermine previous progress and can lead to the need for systems to be rebuilt.

Even once a user-friendly data system integrating different college readiness indicators together at the student level is fully functional, it will need to be integrated into the organizational routines at both the district and school levels for it to have its intended effect. As we noted earlier, in order to reach its goals for college readiness Dallas ISD will need to build more time into the regular work week for teachers to learn about and collaborate around data use and effective

ways to intervene when students are not developing the preparedness, tenacity, or knowledge needed for college. Given time-related constraints, district leadership is crucial to provide concrete, visual frameworks for principals and teachers that enable them to collectively understand the interrelationships among attendance and behavior issues, student learning and achievement, effective instructional practices, and college readiness. Integrating data-informed collaborative inquiry around all these issues will be essential to establish organizational routines at the school level that are effective in leading to improved student college readiness outcomes.

Dallas ISD has laid a solid foundation for ongoing work in increasing the college readiness of its students. Continuing its efforts in the type of continuous improvement process advocated by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching will be crucial for its ongoing success.

Methodological Appendix

For this case study we used a qualitative methodology of analyzing data from interviews, meeting observations, and district documents. Data sources are described more fully below. We used a constant comparative method to analyze these qualitative data to explore recurring themes and patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

 Data Sources

Table 1 summarizes data sources for the study, which included interviews, focus groups, meeting observations, and review of documents. Over the course of a year, the research team conducted interviews with a total of 24 Dallas Independent School District staff members and external partners (including multiple discussions with several of these leaders). In addition, we observed three meetings with middle school teachers designed to spur discussion about preparing students for college and the indicators needed to monitor student readiness. These meetings included focus group discussions moderated by a district leader with 20 teachers from five schools. We also observed two regular monthly "Data Inquiry Cycle" meetings of middle and high school principals, and a regular meeting of external partners working with the district to increase college access. All interviews were transcribed for use in analyses of recurring themes. In addition, we reviewed related research reports produced by Dallas ISD as well as district strategic plans and documents shared in observed meetings.

Table 1. Case Study Data Sources*

Interviews/Focus Groups	
Date	**Participants**
May 2014	Executive Director of a school feeder pattern
May 2014	Assistant Superintendent , Evaluation and Assessment
May 2014	Director of Postsecondary Success
May 2014	Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership, Division 4
May 2014	Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership, Division 3
October 2014	High School Principal, School of Science and Engineering Magnet
October 2014	High School Principal, School for the Talented and Gifted Magnet
October 2014	High School Counselor, School for the Talented and Gifted Magnet
October 2014	Director of Postsecondary Success
October 2014	AVID District Manager, formerly AVID coordinator at Hillcrest HS
October 2014	Assistant Superintendent , Evaluation and Assessment
October 2014	Evaluation Specialist, Program Evaluation, Evaluation and Assessment
October 2014	Evaluator, Evaluation and Assessment
October 2014	Assistant Superintendent, Teaching and Learning
October 2014	Deputy Superintendent
October 2014	Director of Advanced Academic Services
October 2014	Evaluator, Evaluation and Assessment
December 2014	Coordinator, College Access
December 2014	Senior Associate VP for Outreach Services & Community Engagement for University Crossroads
December 2014	Director of Counseling Services
December 2014	College and Career Readiness Department -- Imagine 2020 CCR Coordinator
March 2015	Executive Director of the school feeder pattern
March 2015	CRIS Project Manager
March 2015	Management Information Systems Consultant
March 2015	Deputy Director for College Access and Success, COMMIT!
Monthly in 2014-15	Executive Director, College and Career Readiness
Observations	
May 2014	Middle School teacher meetings
Oct 2014, Dec 2014	Middle School Teacher meetings
December 2014	Meeting of the Higher Education/Work Force Support Council for Commit!
March 2015	Cycle of Inquiry Data meeting with principals and Executive Director
April 2015	Cycle of Inquiry Data meeting with additional principals and Executive Directors

*Excluding documents list

ENDNOTES

[i] Snipes et al., 2002; Supovitz et al., 2012

[ii] Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007

[iii] Hall, 2013; Mishook, 2013

[iv] Johnson & Hall, 2015.

[v] Weir, 2014

[vi] Hall, 2013.

[vii] John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities, 2014

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