
Issue Editors' Notes

INCREASING ACCESS TO and persistence in college is one of the critical issues in education today and presents multiple challenges for secondary schools for how to prepare and support their students to navigate this increasingly complex process. There are a growing number of interventions designed to improve college access and matriculation for high school students; this is particularly the case for low-income families and first-generation college-goers as many are at risk for not attending college. Gaining an understanding about the barriers facing the transition from high school to college is a crucial step. These obstacles include a multitude of factors—lack of access to resources at home or school, not having a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum or not taking advantage of these courses when available, and misperceptions or faulty information about the college-going process.

In putting together this issue, we contacted scholars who not only conduct rigorous evaluations of interventions to improve the college-going process but also are at the forefront of developing innovative and effective ways to ease the transition process. One essential question raised by the contributors is the role of the high school. There is considerable attention regarding whether high schools should take a more active role than they currently do in preparing students for college. In response to this question, various experiments have been implemented in high schools that are designed to assist adolescents in forming their future plans after high school and complete the necessary steps to continue their education after graduation. Some of these experiments include large institutional initiatives that involve restructuring schools to become more college focused; others are smaller interventions that provide

information, strengthen ties with parents, assist in the application process to college including financial aid, and promote strategic planning. While some of the interventions in this issue are designed for school-wide implementation, others are more targeted interventions that focus on one aspect of the college process, such as financial aid, but all recognize the role of high schools in shaping students' college-going aspirations and behavior.

Research demonstrates that increasing the college-going culture within a school through behavior, such as having high educational expectations for students, creating aligned ambitions, and enrolling in rigorous academic courses that are prerequisites for college admission, can make a difference in postsecondary enrollment. Schneider, Broda, Judy, and Burkander discuss specific ways high schools can develop and sustain a college-going culture. Horng, Evans, Antonio, Foster, Kalamkarian, Hurd, and Bettinger describe how college advisers can work within schools to improve the college-going culture, focusing on the role of both qualitative and quantitative research in understanding the impact of the college-going culture on aspirations and college-going rates. Johnson, Moeller, and Holsapple reflect on how institutions, such as the Consortium on Chicago School Research, can create and maintain effective structures that support a college-going culture through networks of adult relationships in schools and connections between educators and young people. Interventions focusing more narrowly on one aspect of the college-going process, as discussed by Harris, still acknowledge the importance of creating a strong college-going culture in high schools.

Establishing and maintaining partnerships across institutions and among community stakeholders can provide a wealth of resources and information to support students through the college-going process. Johnson, Moeller, and Holsapple provide ways to develop and strengthen ongoing relationships between researchers and practitioners that support a strong network that facilitates the sharing of resources. In their evaluation of The National College Advising Corps, Horng, Evans, Antonio, Foster, Kalamkarian, Hurd, and Bettinger explain how the intervention itself relies on

institutional partnerships between universities and local districts. The need for these institutional partnerships that can bridge secondary and postsecondary institutions is perhaps critically evident when addressing how to support students in the summer between completing high school and enrolling in college. As Castleman and Page describe in their work examining the obstacles of college enrollment and interventions to help mitigate attrition that occurs over the summer. Using college-going resources already available in the community and strengthening relationships between these resources is also a low-cost and sustainable strategy to improve access as discussed by Schneider, Broda, Judy, and Burkander.

One essential consideration in the evaluation of interventions mentioned by Hornig and colleagues as well as Johnson, Moeller, and Holsapple is a discussion of how to handle negative findings, particularly when interventions are the result of university–community partnerships. It is vital, as a community of scholars, to be transparent with our data and results—whether positive or negative—since there are opportunities to learn from both outcomes.

This volume includes some of the most cutting-edge and rigorous research on improving college access and it is our goal that this issue helps to delineate the obstacles adolescents face in their transition from high school to college, increase our understanding of the mechanisms contributing to gaps in college enrollment, and highlight how interventions can help to ease these challenges.

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Barbara Schneider
Justina Judy
Editors

BARBARA SCHNEIDER *is the John A. Hannab Chair and University Distinguished Professor at Michigan State University.*

JUSTINA JUDY *is a doctoral candidate in Educational Policy and Economics of Education Fellow at Michigan State University.*