HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE TRANSITION WORKING GROUP

Updated July 24, 2020

National estimates are that post-secondary enrollment for Fall, 2020 could be down as much as 15% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Left unaddressed, such a significant drop in enrollment could have devastating consequences for students, especially those who are already at-risk of not enrolling or completing college: low-income students, students of color, first-generation students, and rural students. Students who delay enrollment may have lower lifetime earnings[1].

While the rate of Illinois HS seniors completing a FAFSA is the same as it was last year as of July 6 at 61%, overall, the number of students completing a FAFSA to attend a MAP-eligible school is down 5% compared to last year. This is an early predictor that enrollment by low-income students could be down this fall.

To address this challenge, IBHE, ICCB, ISAC, and ISBE convened a Working Group to identify best practices to support high school students planning for and transitioning to college, especially those students already most at-risk of not enrolling or completing.

Drawn from this preliminary work of the group of school district superintendents, community college and public university leaders, ICCB, ISAC, ISBE, and IBHE staff, these strategies for immediate action by state agencies, school districts, colleges and universities can help students successfully transition to college and "stay the course" toward their degrees.

To add your institution's best practices to the list, please email info@ibhe.org.

Selected Best Practices for High Schools

- **Stay in touch with your seniors/graduates** to make sure they stay on track. This may fall to administrators if staff are not available over the summer.
    - Be prepared to provide multiple levels of support. Some of the college-bound students need help with every step, even rides to their college to set things up, while others need minimal help.
    - Since normally much of this handoff work is done during the 4th quarter of the year, this year requires special adaptations.
    - ISAC offers a range of helpful resources and tools through its student portal.

- **Consider a program like Chicago Public Schools' Summer Transition Coordinator positions (STC)** to support students as they complete activities that lead to college enrollment.
    - STC work 10–20 hours per week for a period of 7-8 weeks.
    - These positions are typically filled by school counselors or senior seminar teachers who receive supplemental pay/stipend.

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[1] https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2020/07/delaying-college-during-the-pandemic-can-be-costly.html

- Activities include concrete steps relevant to completion of financial aid verification, payment/billing, placement tests, orientation, course selection, college paperwork, etc.
- **Build a Summer Transition Survey to ensure all pre-college steps are completed.**
    - CPS' STC (see above) uses this tool to document interactions and meetings throughout the summer months, and "closes out" students once all relevant activities have been completed. Weekly close-out reports are sent to staff, tracking progress toward department- and group-level KPIs.
    - [Sample Summer Transition Survey](#).

- **Create your own Summer Youth Ambassadors** (SYA).
    - CPS has its own program of near peer mentors that support school efforts and strategies to engage recent HS graduates. College students and recent HS graduates are hired for these summer positions.
    - SYA work under the general supervision of a designated Summer Transition Coordinator (STC) who is responsible for leading summer outreach and support efforts.

- **Encourage connections to local ISACorps member.**
    - High schools and colleges/universities should know who their local ISACorps members are. The ISACorps are recent college graduates, many who are the first in their families to go to college, who serve as near-peer mentors and help provide essential information to students planning for college. [Find a Corps member in your area](#).
    - ISACorps members are available to meet with students and families over the summer, when high school counselors may be less available
    - ISACorps members also host activities and work with students and families throughout the year, so that connections can and should be made early!
- **Make person-to-person connections at the campus**—ensure each student has a personal connection to someone on the campus they want to attend
    - High school counselors should connect each student to an admissions counselor at the student's college choice.
    - Create individual virtual appointments to connect students for advising, placement, etc.
    - As part of the hand-off to the admissions counselor, ask them to connect the prospective/incoming students to current student

Selected Best Practices for Higher Education
- **Communicate broadly** whether fall will be in-person, a combination of online and face-to-face, or fully online as soon as this is known to decrease uncertainty.
    - Identify which courses or types of courses will be online v. face-to-face
- **Provide online "test drive" courses** to help students understand what online college learning looks like
    - Include orientation to your online learning tool. [Test Drive course from Sauk Valley Community College](#).
    - Consider "sample" course by a faculty member especially skilled at online instruction

- o Work with faculty to create video "tips" on how to be a successful online learner. [“Student Passport to Online Learning” from Kankakee Community College](#).
  - o Work with students to create similar video "tips"
  - o Share the video tips through social media and your website
- **Connect students to campus** with virtual tours if in-person tours are not available. [UIUC Virtual Visits](#).
  - o Have students shoot video vignettes so prospective students can visualize themselves on campus. [Touring Time](#) and [Day in the Life](#) (both UIUC).
- **Change deadlines and administrative policies** to address students' uncertainty
  - o Extend deadlines for deposits
  - o Use tools for document sharing so that materials can be submitted electronically without wet signature
  - o Consider moving to test optional policies if standardized testing is required for admission
  - o Make it known that the institution will offer to review financial aid awards if students' circumstances have changed since they completed the FAFSA. Read ISAC's [recent OpEd](#) about this in the Southern Illinoisan.
  - o Waive fees
  - o Allow unofficial transcripts until school districts are able to provide official transcripts. High schools can send official transcripts electronically at no cost through ISAC Transcript Exchange, through Parchment Exchange. To sign up contact Heidi Dodge at hdodge@parchment.com or 480-719-1646, x1021.
- **Provide flexibility in placement**
  - o [Use GPA as a tool for placement](#)[2].
- **Be creative in overcoming technology gaps**
  - o Allow students who may not have access to technology elsewhere into buildings to use technology for online orientations, advising appointments, etc. Follow all CDC and IDPH safety guidelines, including maintaining small groups, with appropriate social distancing, masks, hand hygiene, and following other safety practices
  - o Allow students to visit campus by appointment for advising, etc.
- [**Reinforce dual credit**](#) as connection between high school and college
  - o Ensure students have an opportunity to complete Spring 2020 dual credit courses this summer
  - o Provide face-to-face dual credit coursework in Fall 2020 so students have access to campus technology and continue to make progress

Statewide Actions

- **Launch statewide public education campaign** to counter the narrative to take time away from college; address the value of college; encourage students to stay on track by taking fewer classes if necessary, to work with their school, and to connect to ISACorps.
- **Dedicate GEER funds to strategies for successful high school to college transition** and closing technology gaps (along with college retention)
  - o Consider making laptops/technology available to every student as they enter college.

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[2] Research on GPA as a placement tool available from the [Community College Resource Center, Columbia University](#) and [Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis](#).