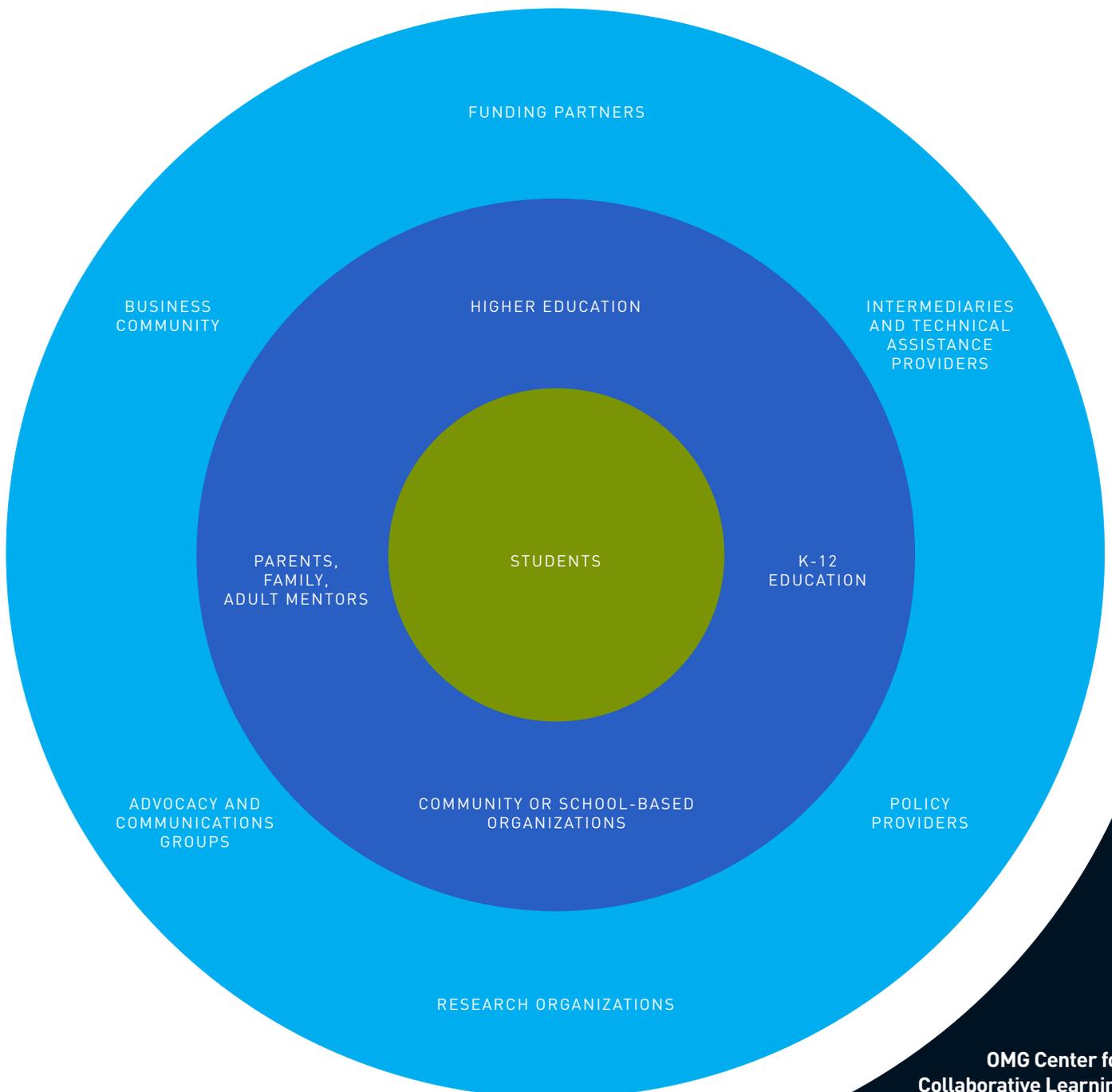


Conducting a Scan of Your College Access and Success System

**Why it matters. How to do it.
How to use it.**

By Victoria Dougherty and
Michele Lempa



About the OMG Center

The OMG Center for Collaborative Learning is a non-profit organization that provides a broad range of consulting services to national philanthropic institutions, and nonprofit and government organizations that address quality of life issues in communities.

Established in Philadelphia in 1988, OMG's diverse professional team works throughout the country to develop innovative, high impact solutions to difficult community challenges through strategy development and evaluation. The staff relies on a collaborative action research approach that builds new client capacities and also contributes knowledge to the fields in which we work.

Areas of established expertise include pre K-16 education, community development and community building, leadership development, arts and culture, and children, youth and families.

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Introduction

Increasing college attainment in the United States is widely recognized, within the public and private sectors, as a critical workforce and education goal. In recent years, many leaders in the college attainment field, including local governments, educators, community-based providers and private funders, have turned to more systemic approaches in their quest to improve college attainment, recognizing that it takes a coordinated system of players, working in localized contexts, to move students through the K-16 education pipeline.

To develop a strong local college access and success system, it is essential to understand what assets are in place, what type of college attainment results the current local system yields, and what challenges need to be addressed. For communities in the earliest stages of developing a system, the process of developing a scan can play a catalytic role in galvanizing stakeholders, laying the groundwork for necessary partnership, and developing a map that can trigger momentum, direction, and collaborative will for more coordinated action. In communities where a more emergent or developed system is already in place, an assessment scan can provide essential benchmarking, so progress over time can be calibrated, effective strategy development can unfold, and ongoing

coordination and alignment of programs can be facilitated. This guide provides an overview of how to develop and implement an assessment of your local access and success¹ system, exploring why it matters, how to do it, and how to leverage findings from this process to drive change. We illuminate the discussion with case study material from our recent assessments of the college access and success systems in two cities — Miami, FL and Philadelphia, PA — which OMG Center conducted for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Additionally, the lessons in this paper are drawn from our experience evaluating system approaches to improving college access and success for the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Citi Foundation.²

Overall, our work in Philadelphia and Miami, and in other locales across the country, underscores the powerful role of data in developing and strengthening local college access and success systems, so that numbers of students might partake in the economic and social benefits that college attainment yields.

¹ College access is defined as preparing for, earning admission to, and enrolling in college. College success is defined as persisting and graduating from college.

² OMG was the evaluation partner on the Partnerships for College Access and Success (PCAS) initiative funded by

Lumina in eight communities between 2004-2007 and is currently the evaluation partner for the Citi Post Secondary Success Program and the Gates Foundation's Communities Learning in Partnership (CLIP) initiative.

Why College Attainment Matters

College Completion is an Economic and Social Justice Issue

“By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world”

– President Barack Obama³

The President has set increasing college attainment as a goal, recognizing the necessity of a college education to America’s economic competitiveness in the current and future labor market. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than half of all new jobs through 2014 will require more than a high school diploma and 22 of the 30 fastest growing career fields will require some post-secondary education.⁴ Aware of the importance of college degrees to economic vitality, many regional and city business and government leaders have made advancing college attainment levels a goal.

Obtaining a college degree is also critical to advancing individual socio-economic mobility. According to a 2007 College Board Study, individuals with an associate’s

degree earned 29 percent more than their peers with just a high school degree and individuals with a bachelor’s degree earned 62 percent more.⁵ Yet disparities in who earns college degrees persist along racial, ethnic and income lines. For example in 2008, 12 percent of Hispanics and 20 percent of African Americans age 25-29 had a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 37 percent of whites.⁶ Similar disparities exist based on family income; a child from a family in the top income quartile is five times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree by age 24 than a child in the bottom quartile.⁷ Improving college attainment provides greater opportunity for economic advancement across racial, ethnic and income lines.

3 Remarks of President Barack Obama – As Prepared for Delivery Address to Joint Session of Congress Tuesday, February 24th, 2009

4 Heckler, D. (2004). Occupational Employment Projections to 2014. Monthly Labor Review, November 2005. DC: U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

5 Baum, S. and Ma, J. (2007). Education Pays 2007: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society. NYC: College Board.

6 National Center for Education Statistics 2008

7 Mortenson, T. (2001). Graphs Titled: BA attainment by age 24 by family income quartile. Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 114; October 1-8.

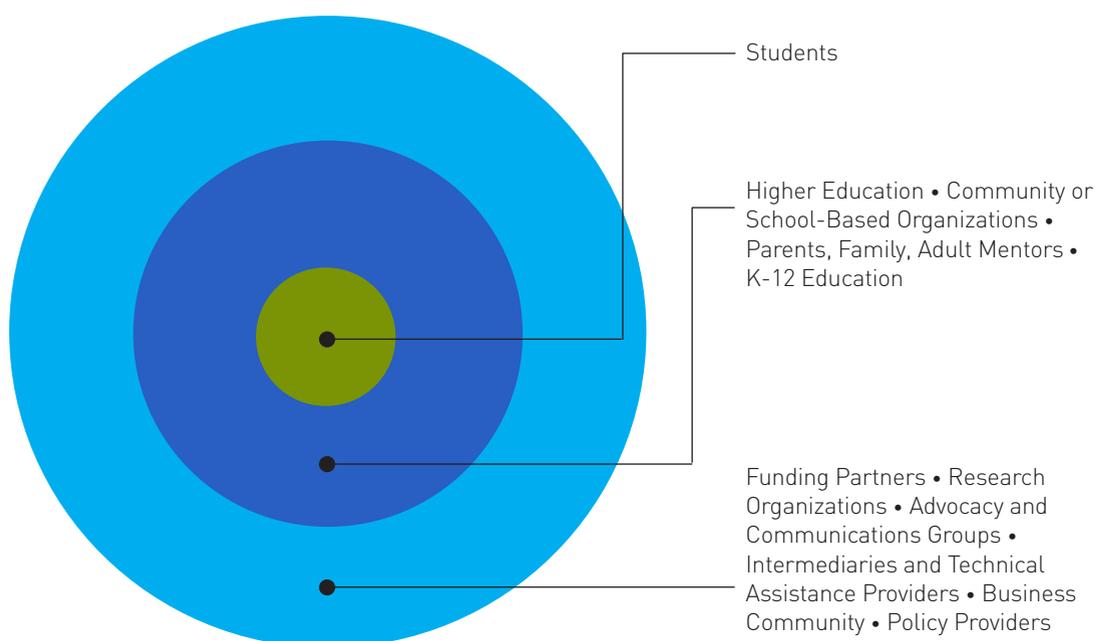
The Value of a Systems Approach

Key Players in a College Access and Success System

The greatest obstacles to college access and success for underrepresented students include poor academic preparation, lack of college awareness, insufficient understanding of the application process, limited financial aid, and inadequate supports once in college. Over the past 15 years, the majority of college access and success efforts have focused on discrete programming — academic tutoring, college fairs, financial aid information, and in-college supports — to address these challenges. While this fragmented approach has helped some students, it has failed to help many others. The research has shown that students need a continuum of supports, first building motivation and empowering students to aspire to go to college, layering in academic supports and providing the additional guidance to navigate the college application and financial aid processes, and then continuing to provide this array of supports to students once they are in college.

Leaders in the college access field recognize the need for fundamental changes that will take us from the current patchwork of discrete college programs to a coordinated system linking students to a comprehensive array of services within a supportive policy environment. Moving students successfully through this pipeline necessitates a system of organizations, government agencies, funders, businesses, and individual champions. *Figure 1* shown below highlights the various players and stakeholders in the college access and success system. As the graphic illustrates, the students are at the center of the system and its reason for being. Surrounding the students are the individuals, organizations and institutions that have the most direct contact with them: parents and family members, community or school-based organizations, K-12 education providers, and higher education providers.

This core of the college access and success system operates within a much broader network of stakeholders that includes funding partners, research



← FIGURE 1
Stakeholders
in a College
Access and
Success System

FIGURE 2 →
Education Pipeline



organizations, advocacy and communication groups, intermediaries and technical assistance providers, the business community, and policymakers. While this outer ring of the college access and success system may not directly interact with students, these stakeholders have a significant influence on the ways in which the college access and success system functions, ultimately influencing individual students.

Functions of an Effective System: Coordination, Alignment and Partnership

To help students move through the K-16 pipeline effectively, it is important for program providers to *coordinate* their services. A coordinated approach increases the likelihood that students will receive the full spectrum of services and supports needed, including those that address motivation, empowerment and aspiration; academic rigor and readiness; the logistics of college application and financial aid assistance; and psycho-social factors. For example, Philadelphia has piloted school-based Student Success Centers to assist students by creating a deep and sustainable college-going culture within individual schools, with each center functioning as a delivery gateway for outside service providers. By systemically addressing coordination, providers and educators can better support the whole student and avoid gaps and duplication of efforts.

In addition to coordinating the supports provided at *any given point in time*, it is critical to *align* these supports *over time*. Research has shown that to help a student on the college pathway, it is important to start early (elementary or middle school) and to persist with this process. As depicted in the pipeline graphic shown above (*Figure 2*), the student moves through different institutional homes across the K-16 pipeline, encountering a variety of educators and service providers over time. The transitions between these institutional homes are critical junctures

where students may stray from the college pathway. Institutions, educators, and providers need to bridge their efforts to aid students on the college pathway to provide continuous, effective support across the pipeline. For example, the math preparation a student receives in the later years of high school should align with the math requirements that students will face when they enter college.

Partnership facilitates coordination and alignment, as it helps institutions, leaders, educators, providers and family members recognize the value of working in tandem. Its effective functioning necessitates infrastructure, formal leadership with decision-making authority, clear roles and responsibilities, communication channels and data sharing agreements and processes. To advance a college access and success agenda across institutions in a given community also takes policy know-how and the ability to build public will.

Tackling system-level college access and success policies and practices through place-based partnerships is gaining currency as an effective strategy and producing compelling models of effective practice: communities such as Boston and Philadelphia, for example, and some of the most influential funders of college access and success, including the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have identified place-based partnerships as a vehicle to realign fragmented and ineffective systems. In the partnership efforts undertaken by local leaders and national funders, baseline assessments of their college access and success systems and data tracking efforts have been critical elements of their partnership building and system advancement strategies.

How to Create a Local System Scan: Landscape & Attainment Data Analyses

Why Are Data Necessary?

The first step in building or advancing a local system is to know how it currently functions — what is the overall performance level? What are the strengths and challenges? How is the system embedded within the community? Who are the active players and what are their roles? What options exist to advance the system and improve its performance?

Over time, data are necessary to track progress, assess where barriers to access and success exist, identify successes and build upon them, and clarify where new approaches are warranted to strengthen the system.

By providing an evidence base and a common understanding of the system starting point, data have been drivers of change in several local efforts to advance college access and success systems. For example, “Success Boston” is a partnership of the Mayor’s Office, the Boston Public Schools (BPS), the Boston Foundation, higher education institutions, the Boston Private Industry Council, employers, and college access and success programs. This partnership used data on the college access and success experiences of BPS students to bring the necessary partners to the table to develop and implement a three-pronged strategy for improving college attainment (getting ready, getting in, getting through), with designated entities identified to assume leadership roles for each of the initiative’s major components.

Data may confirm existing assumptions and hypotheses (thereby catalyzing action) or may counter them (pointing to the need for alternative strategies and frameworks). Either way, data provide a common evidence base and language to bring stakeholders to the table as potential partners. Because most players only engage with a discrete aspect of the system, data can provide an overarching perspective that players involved in the day-to-day work of college

attainment may not otherwise readily see. Additionally, the process of collecting and analyzing data, especially determining what questions to ask and collaboratively grappling with what the data portrait reveals, often strengthens relationships, building more sustainable partnerships over time.

What Data Should You Collect?

There are two primary components to assessing your community’s college access and success system: 1) determining its college enrollment and completion picture and 2) assessing the landscape of stakeholders and the supports that they provide. The first part provides the baseline of the system’s performance, while the second part provides the context for understanding the performance and how it may be improved. In tandem, the two parts provide a picture of the whole system.

How Do You Collect These Data?

College Enrollment and Completion Data

You will need to obtain approval for your project from a Research Review Committee or other entity in the school district that is charged with protecting students’ privacy and rights. Although school districts do not all have the same administrative structure, most have a data, research or evaluation office that will be able to provide you with information on how to obtain permission to access data. The approval process can take several months so it is wise to inquire early about what is required.

To determine the picture of college enrollment and completion in a local community, it is necessary to have access to high school graduation data and National Student Clearinghouse data on college completion.⁸ This requires a partnership with the

8 The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) is a nonprofit organization that maintains an electronic registry of secondary and postsecondary student records for verification of student enrollment, diploma, degree, and loan data. The NSC maintains records on behalf of more than 3,300 colleges and universities

that enroll 17 million students — 92% of total U.S. enrollment in higher education. Membership fees for high schools and school districts are approximately \$425 per high school. <http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/>

SYSTEM ASSESSMENT COMPONENT

1 Determining the College Enrollment and Completion Picture

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

- What are the overall rates of enrollment in college for your community's high school graduates? In two-year colleges? Four-year colleges? Public, private?
- Are there differences in college enrollment by the demographics of area high school graduates? Are there differences by the type of high school the student attended?
- What are the rates of college completion? At two-year colleges? Four-year colleges? Public, private?
- Are there differences in college completion by the demographics of area high school graduates? Are there differences by the type of high school the student attended?
- How do your city's rates compare to national numbers for similar populations?

2 Assessing the Landscape of Stakeholders and Supports

- Who are the key players in the college access and success system: leaders, community-based providers, key institutions, other influential participants?
- What partnerships and/or forums are in place to coordinate and align the college access and success work? How do they function?
- What programs and supports are in place vis-à-vis what has been shown nationally to be important for success?
- What system reform efforts are underway?
- What are the challenges to improving the system's performance?
- What are the opportunities to improve the system?

CASE STUDY PART ONE

From the Field: A Tale of Two Cities (Philadelphia and Miami)

Methods: How OMG Collected Data

On behalf of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the OMG Center conducted assessments of the college access and success systems in Miami, Florida and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 2008-2010.

Philadelphia

We assessed the landscape of players and supports in Philadelphia through analysis of over 25 interviews, a document review, and observation of multiple meetings of local college access and success forums and partnerships, including monthly convenings of community-based providers and regular meetings of work teams of the Mayor's College Ready Committee, part of the Mayor's Council for College and Career Success.

In Philadelphia, we also analyzed the college enrollment, persistence and completion results of over 73,000 students who graduated Philadelphia public high schools between 2003 and 2009. The analysis included demographics and type of high school attended by the student and the student's college enrollment, persistence and graduation experience, including types of colleges attended and completed. We obtained this data from the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) who received the college enrollment and completion data from the National Student Clearinghouse. OMG worked in partnership with the SDP to conduct this analysis and worked closely with key members of the Mayor's College Ready Committee to inform the analysis plan and to discuss preliminary results.

Miami

In Miami, we conducted nearly 25 interviews and a document review to assess the landscape of players and supports. Because Miami was in a different phase of its system's development, ongoing local meetings pertaining to access and success had not occurred; therefore the landscape data collection in Miami was limited to interviews and a document review.

We planned to conduct an analysis of college enrollment, persistence, and completion data in Miami, similar to the analysis conducted in Philadelphia. However, Miami-Dade County Public Schools was not able to provide the data before the end of our study.

Preliminary Observations

Overall, we found that the two cities are at very different stages in the development of their access and success systems. Our summary analysis described Philadelphia as "a system with a history of developing individual programs and an emergent focus on coordination and alignment" and Miami as "an emerging, but still fragmented system."

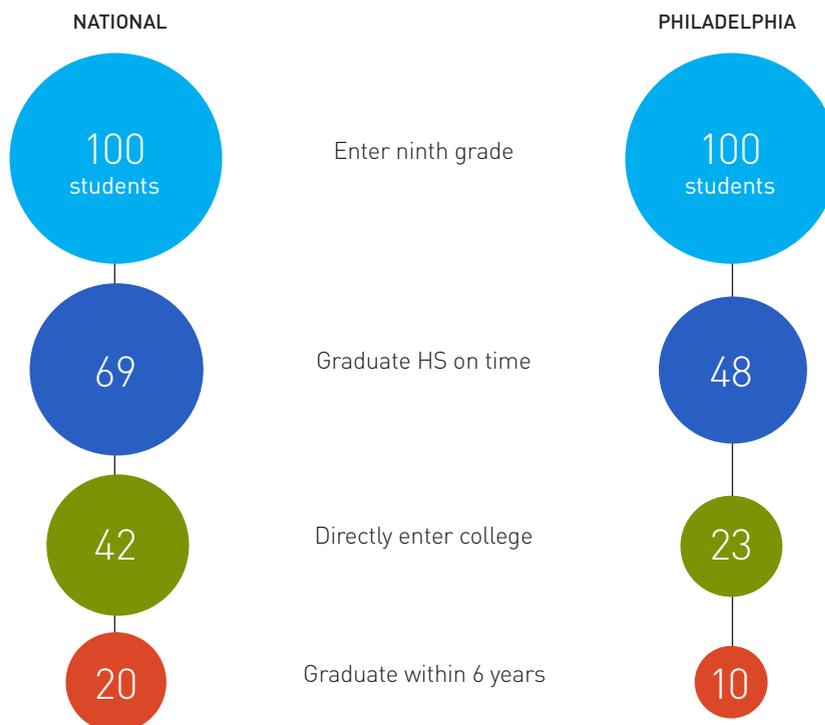
The differences in systems development in these two cities is in part explained by local contextual factors, including differences in the structure of their school districts, political leadership and geography. For example, whereas the Philadelphia school district operates within one Mayoral jurisdiction, the City of Philadelphia, the Miami Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) operates within approximately 30 different cities and towns in the Miami Dade area. Additionally, a critical contextual factor in the Philadelphia system is an articulated commitment by the Mayor to double college enrollment in Philadelphia.

FIGURE 3 →

Snapshot of data from the Philadelphia assessment: College going and completion among 2003 Philadelphia High School graduates compared to national trends

National data source: The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Student Pipeline - Transition and Completion Rates from 9th Grade to College for 2006.

Philadelphia data source: "Pipeline" to College Graduation for First-time 9th Graders, 1999-2000, School District of Philadelphia Office of Accountability, Jan 2010.



local school district and the National Student Clearinghouse. The school district submits high school graduation data to the Clearinghouse to obtain information on college enrollment and completion, matched by individual student. The Clearinghouse will then send the matched data back to the district. The Clearinghouse website has information on the process, including what data are needed to conduct the match. Many school districts are members of the Clearinghouse. If a school district is not a member, an intermediary with expertise in this area can facilitate the development of this membership and assist with data-related challenges.

It is important that you establish relationships within the school district at the beginning of your process so that you have internal champions who can help you overcome any roadblocks you may encounter. For

example, some districts may be reluctant to join the National Student Clearinghouse out of concern for student privacy. The Clearinghouse can provide you with information showing that the Federal Department of Education has determined it complies with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Your district champion can bring this information back to the appropriate people within the district and help make the case for why the analysis is important.

Prior to requesting data from the school district, review your overriding questions to make sure you request the appropriate data from the district and the Clearinghouse. For example, if you want to examine whether there are differences in enrollment by certain demographic characteristics, then the district must

CASE STUDY PART TWO

From the Field: A Tale of Two Cities (Philadelphia and Miami)

The Scan: What OMG Center Found in Philadelphia

Our summary analysis described Philadelphia as “a system with a history of developing individual programs and an emergent focus on coordination and alignment.”

Landscape Assessment

Our Philadelphia landscape assessment highlights the important role of leadership in catalyzing system development: Philadelphia’s Mayor identified doubling college attainment of Philadelphians in the next 5 to 10 years as one of three major administrative goals at the start of his term in 2008. The Mayor established a College Ready Committee, with leadership from the Chief Education Officer, with the aim of regularly convening local stakeholders in the college access and success system to achieve this goal.

Our work detailed the activities of the Mayor’s College Ready Committee to increase the City’s college attainment rates, as well as recent advancements within the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) (such as guidance mandates and curricular changes). We identified several emergent initiatives focused on coordinating and systematizing previously isolated efforts. Overall, the leadership of the Mayor’s office, recent advancements by the School District, multiple new initiatives aimed at coordination, a strong network of nonprofit providers and local program models, and recent increased prioritization of retention by local colleges provide great opportunity for advancing the college access and success system in Philadelphia. However, challenges to system advancement persist, including lack of clarity regarding who is served by the multiple programs, fragmentation of service delivery, an emphasis on reactive college access and

success supports, targeting students near the end of high school rather than earlier in their schooling, and low transfer rates from two- to four-year colleges.

Figure 6 is one example of information that a landscape assessment can provide to help advance an existing system. It is a graphical representation of local stakeholders in college access and success and how they fit into the system when our Philadelphia landscape assessment was conducted. Stakeholders can use this information in various ways, for example, to help strengthen parts of the system, reevaluate their own roles, or increase collaboration.

Enrollment, Persistence and Completion Data

Our analysis of college enrollment, persistence and completion of Philadelphia public high school students was in sync with much of what we found in the landscape analysis. For example, the analysis showed much greater college success among students graduating from the magnet high schools as compared to other high schools that offer less of a college-going culture. Additionally, transfers from two- to four-year colleges were relatively low, which reflects the landscape findings that students need better navigational tools to move effectively along the two- to four-year college pathway. Additionally, the data helped pinpoint where, in comparison with national trends, system vulnerabilities exist in terms of student attrition from the college attainment pathway (see Figure 3).

be asked to include the specific demographic variables of interest for each student.

It is important to engage relevant partners at this data-request stage to discuss collectively what is important to analyze, what larger issues you seek to explore, and for what audiences and what purposes. Additionally, in order to pursue the most informed and useful data gathering, it is critical to know information about the local community, including the structure of its K-12 and higher education systems, the political structure of the city vis-à-vis the K-12 system, geographic assets and challenges and the socio-economic diversity of the student population. Understanding this context will help determine what analyses are most important and how to understand the results. For example, is the local community college viewed as an entry point on the pathway to

four-year colleges for many local public high school students? If yes, then transfer patterns of students between two- and four-year institutions may be valuable data to request, analyze, and report.

Once a data request has been made to the school district, ongoing discussions typically follow to insure that data is received in the most appropriate and useful format. School districts differ in their data systems, so it should be anticipated that ongoing conversations will be required concerning variables in the data set. This process often takes considerable time—sometimes as long as a year, so it is important to have the district as a willing partner. Many districts have limited budgets and staffing. If possible, therefore, it is advisable to build in some funding for the district to cover their staff time during this phase of the process.

FIGURE 4 →
CAS System
Program Elements
in High School
and College



CASE STUDY PART THREE

From the Field: A Tale of Two Cities (Philadelphia and Miami)

The Scan: What OMG Center Found in Miami

Our landscape analysis characterized Miami as an “emerging but still fragmented system.”

Landscape Assessment

The landscape scan identified pockets of interest within the business community, local higher education institutions, the school district, the city of Miami and local funders. However, the education agenda is currently dominated by other significant concerns, including budget cuts, dropout rates and early childhood interests.

In our picture of the access and success system in Miami, there are many community and school-based organizations who are engaged in college access programming; however, for many of these organizations, college access is one piece of a larger youth development mission, rather than the primary focus of their program. The organizations more dominant in college access programming in Miami tend to be national organizations, including College Summit, the Posse Foundation, and Breakthrough Miami. Two local higher education institutions, Miami Dade College (MDC) and Florida International University (FIU) actively promote college access supports to Miami public school students and are leaders in efforts to promote college completion.

The city’s former mayor championed education and under his leadership, the City of Miami and the Miami Dade Public Schools (MDCPS) created an Educational Compact in 2005, formally outlining a partnership that was the first of its kind in the nation. MDCPS now has Educational Compacts with several municipalities and with Miami-Dade County; which could be leverage points for future partnership building. Miami is under the leadership of a new mayor as of January 2010. It is unclear what the new mayoral administration’s intentions are regarding the Compact.

Opportunities to strengthen the college access and success system in Miami documented in our landscape analysis include pockets of local leadership voicing interest in college access and success, multiple youth development programs offering services related to college access and success, and an existing feeder pattern education structure (i.e. established pathways that channel and funnel students from specific elementary schools, to middle schools, to high schools) that could facilitate program alignment. Challenges include the lack of coordination and communication among programs, the dominance of other education issues, including the current financial crisis, and the absence of a lead organization or institution using data to drive change and to advance college attainment as a priority.

Figure 5 is an example of how a landscape assessment can be used to identify the potential levers in a fledgling system. It is a graphical representation of potential college access and success stakeholders in Miami that were identified in our scan. These stakeholders included organizations that expressed an interest in college access and success or that were working on related educational issues such as high school dropout prevention.

Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion Data

Miami-Dade County Public Schools was not a member of the National Student Clearinghouse when our study began. We spent a considerable amount of time making the case for membership, addressing privacy concerns, and facilitating the agreement process between the district and the Clearinghouse. Although we were unable to acquire the necessary data before the end of our study, the district now has a National Student Clearinghouse membership through a state-level pilot program and can access college enrollment, persistence, and completion data to conduct its own analyses.

FIGURE 5 →

Snapshot of data from the Miami assessment: Potential players in the Miami access and success system



Once the matched college enrollment and completion data for the high school graduates have been received, relevant partners will want to discuss the preliminary results. It may be helpful to explore possible explanations for patterns in the data with higher education institution leaders, school district personnel, community-based providers and other partners with knowledge of the students' experiences. This engagement process, in addition to clarifying and informing the story revealed by the data, can also help bring partners together around shared messaging and inform next steps and action items.

Access and Success Landscape Data

To assess the landscape of the college access and success system in the community, it is necessary to conduct a document review and multiple interviews. It is also helpful to attend local meetings of system players, if the opportunity exists in the timeframe of the assessment.

Just as understanding the basic context of the education and political system in the city is an important first step in determining the local college enrollment and completion picture, it is also a critical first step in conducting the landscape assessment. You will want to first understand the structure of the K-12 and higher education systems, the relationship between city government and the K-12 system, and geographic and socio-demographic strengths and challenges in order to pursue a more informed analysis of the landscape of system players and supports. Against this backdrop, questions regarding the roles of these institutions and players in the provision of college access and success supports can be pursued.

It is also important to establish a knowledge base of the necessary parts of a college access and success system generally, as well as develop an understanding of important components of successful access and success programming. You can then compare your local community against what is known to contribute to a successful system. Drawing from literature in the field, we have established a framework of the necessary parts of a college access and success system (see *Figure 1*) and the types of supports needed at both the access and success stages. *Figure 4* provides an

overview of the critical program elements of a successful access and success system.

After establishing the local context and developing an understanding of the national framework, you can then begin to collect data to assess your local system. Interviews are the primary means we have used to collect this data, using a "snowball technique" whereby early interviewees suggest additional interviewees. We recommend first interviewing a handful of key leaders, representing various sectors in the system, and enlarging the circle of respondents based on their referrals. As you pursue this method, you will need to be cognizant of capturing the perspectives of different sectors and community segments.

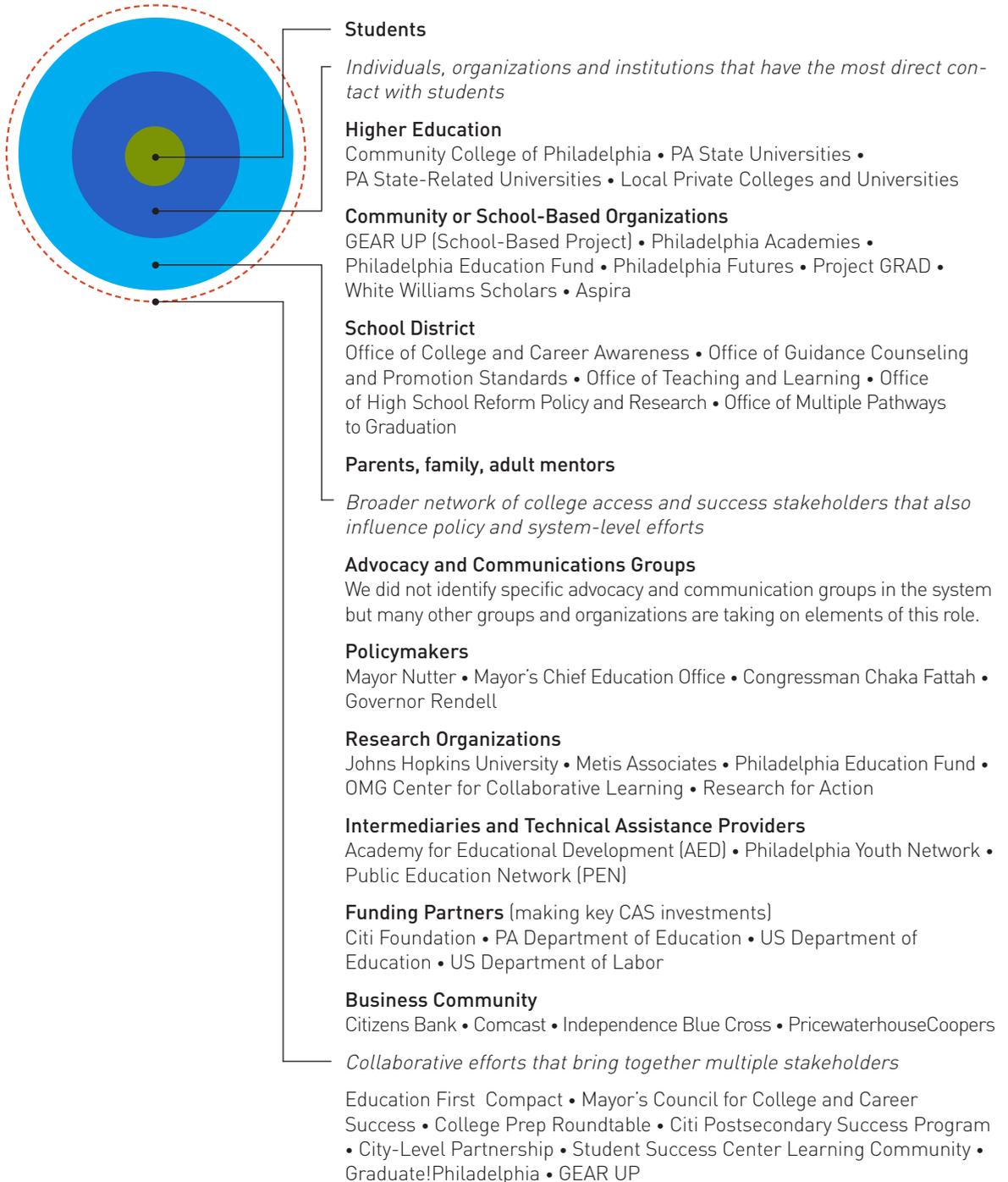
The content of the interviews should include questions regarding access and success programs and policies, coordination and alignment in this programming, challenges to access and success, progress that has occurred or is on the horizon, and the existence of partnerships, both informal and formal, within the system.

A document review should be conducted to supplement and inform the interview process. Documents of use may include school district materials on access programs, parent handbooks, district and higher education institution website pages detailing access and success programs and initiatives, and reports assessing past or current college access and success initiatives. If a formal partnership to address college attainment exists, documents describing the partnership's members, the charge of the partnership, action plans and accomplishments should be reviewed as well.

Similar to the college enrollment and completion analysis, it is important to vet preliminary results of the landscape assessment with relevant partners in the system. Engaging local school district, higher education, community organization and city government leaders in a discussion of early results can inform and clarify findings, as well as stimulate greater take-up and interest in the assessment results.

FIGURE 6 →

Snapshot of the current college access and success system in Philadelphia: A Core Group of Concerned and Engaged Stakeholders



How to Leverage Findings: Partnership, Programs and Policy

How can this type of assessment help you strengthen college access and success in your community?

“This lays the foundation and provides a common language for the College Ready Committee”

– Representative of the Philadelphia Mayor’s Office of Education

There are five primary ways in which local leaders, in government, philanthropy, and education, can support and advance a college access and success system: 1) conduct research, 2) convene partners, 3) build public will, 4) invest in programs and 5) invest in policy change efforts. An assessment of a local college access and success system is a key ingredient to all of these.

1 Conduct research: Understanding how a community is faring in college attainment and the strengths and challenges in the local access and success system, is critical to a community’s ability to act strategically to improve college attainment. Leaders in education, government and philanthropy can invest in and support local research studies to analyze college-going patterns and available supports. It is important to invest up front in baseline assessments, but also in building an infrastructure with the capacity to continue tracking patterns over time. Assessing the community’s progress over time can continually inform strategies for improvement. Additionally, investing in baseline research and the institutionalization of data collection provides the opportunity to fuel partnerships. Data sharing and dialogue can be a catalyst for building more sustainable partnerships to support students throughout the pipeline.

2 Convene partners: Leaders in government, education and philanthropy can convene local players to work together to advance a college access and success system. This can happen either by supporting the development of a lead organization to champion the access and success agenda and drive the partnership or by directly serving as the lead convener, providing the infrastructure necessary

to build and sustain the partnership. Either way, a key ingredient to developing a shared action agenda among partners is to first establish a common evidence base among the partners. A baseline assessment of college-going trends and the landscape of supports can provide the evidence base needed to build consensus and a common vision to move forward together.

3 Build public will: A key role for leaders in government, education and philanthropy, is to disseminate a message and build the interest and will of others to act on that message. Though different partners may disseminate different pieces of the message, building public will is easier if the partners are using a common reference point for their messaging. Again, a baseline assessment of college-going trends and supports is a necessary ingredient to illustrate the urgency of a call to action, and to shape this common message and build the will to act on it.

4 Invest in programs: Education, government and philanthropic leaders can advance a college access and success system by incentivizing coordination and alignment of programs. For example, private or public dollars can be used to create funding opportunities that support a more fluid pipeline for students — providing transition supports from high school graduation through the first semester of college or creating service connections between K-12 providers and on-campus college support services. Public or private dollars can be used to invest in pilot or demonstration projects that emphasize coordination and alignment across programs and/or institutions. Baseline assessments

CASE STUDY PART FOUR

From the Field: A Tale of Two Cities (Philadelphia and Miami)

Leveraging Findings: How Philadelphia is Using its College Access and Success Scan

In Philadelphia, where the Mayor has a strong commitment to increasing college attainment, his Office of Education is using data to build a shared understanding of local conditions and to begin to drive policy decision making. The Office of Education convened a College Ready Committee comprised of representatives from education non-profits, community colleges and 4-year postsecondary institutions, the School District of Philadelphia, and the local business community. A data work team is charged with bringing relevant information to the larger group. The data assessment conducted by OMG, and funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, came at a pivotal time when the Committee was seeking data to understand local conditions and to use data to shape its messages. As a result, the Committee is using the OMG college access and success system assessment as baseline research from which to measure progress, to convene partners to create a shared agenda, to build public will, and to inform investment decisions.

As baseline research, the scan provided the Mayor's College Ready Committee's work teams with an understanding of where Philadelphia stands vis-à-vis the national research both on college enrollment, persistence and completion trends and on the program components considered critical to an effective access and success system. The work teams will use this research to measure their progress on several key variables. For example, our landscape assessment points to the importance of a rigorous high school curriculum, including Algebra II, in a college access strategy. The post-secondary readiness work team is discussing how to measure progress on this item. Further, our assessments have raised awareness of what is important to measure, how to define variables of interest, and how to understand

and discuss key points in the data. For example, discussions of preliminary results among key partners in the Mayor's College Ready Committee have raised awareness of how to understand and discuss politically sensitive findings related to two-year to four-year college transfer rates. Most agree that this heightened awareness of the data and its context will contribute to a more informed improvement plan.

The Mayor's Office has been the driving force behind using these data. However, School District representatives serve on the College Ready Committee and its work teams and, as such, are part of ongoing conversations using the data. The Mayor's College Ready Committee and School District of Philadelphia used OMG assessments to convene key partners, bringing stakeholders together to discuss the college enrollment and completion and landscape findings and their implications for action among the stakeholders. For example, the interim chair of the college completion work team stated that the college enrollment and completion analysis will serve as the launching pad for discussion among the higher education institutions on the work team. In a recent cabinet meeting of the School District, the Chief Accountability Officer shared the findings with the Superintendent and other cabinet members, as the district leadership is also very interested in measuring college attainment progress.

To use the assessment to spread awareness beyond the key partners, the Mayor's Office of Education and the College Ready Committee are planning to disseminate the college completion and enrollment analysis as part of a broader launch of the Mayor's strategy to increase college attainment. The data will

of college-going trends and the landscape of players and supports can inform what types of program investments are likely to have the greatest impact.

5 Invest in policy change: Education, government and philanthropic leaders can also strengthen college access and success by supporting policy changes to strengthen coordination and alignment. Such policy changes may include stronger curriculum alignment between K-12 and higher education institutions, greater opportunities for dual enrollment (high school/college), mechanisms to strengthen accountability

across the pipeline for college enrollment and completion, and measures to strengthen college-going culture in the high schools. Some ways to strengthen college-going culture through policy change include post-secondary counseling mandates, professional development training and parent involvement policies. Baseline assessments of college-going trends and the landscape of supports can inform more strategically what policy investments are likely to have the greatest impact.

CASE STUDY PART FOUR CONTINUED

be used to help make the case to a broader city constituency of political and business leaders, college access and success non-profits, the School District, and parents for the need to develop policy and resources to work together to improve college attainment.

And finally, the Mayor's College Ready Committee is using the system assessment to inform both program and policy investment decisions. Each of the Committee's three work teams (data, post-secondary readiness, and college completion) are responsible for developing recommendations to the full College Ready Committee, which will create a cohesive overarching workplan incorporating the recommendations. According to the Mayor's Office of Education, in each of the work teams, the assessment significantly informs the local system development policy recommendation process. For example, the post-secondary readiness work

team has discussed possible strategies to address gaps in curricular rigor described in the landscape analysis.

Timing and mayoral leadership for college attainment are driving forces behind Philadelphia's use and response to the system assessment, as well as the rapid adaptation of new college access and success strategies. The OMG scan coincided with the intensification of local attention to this issue, fueled by the election of Mayor Michael Nutter, a passionate advocate with a bully pulpit for college attainment.

CASE STUDY PART FIVE

From the Field: A Tale of Two Cities (Philadelphia and Miami)

Leveraging Findings: How Miami Could Use the College Access and Success Scan

In a city like Miami, where attention within the education arena is focused on pressing issues other than college attainment, and where there is not significant leadership driving interest in this goal, the adoption and use of the assessment understandably looks different than in Philadelphia. However, despite Miami's less developed and ripe environment for college attainment initiatives, there is great potential for the scan to add value to the system.

In Miami, the assessment of the landscape of access and success stakeholders and supports can be used to 1) convene funders and other local stakeholders, 2) support the development of a lead organization to champion college access and success issues and coordination, and 3) inform investments to stimulate development of the system, such as pilot or demonstration projects focused on coordination and alignment.

For example, the Chamber of Commerce in Miami has recently embarked on an effort to convene policy stakeholders to develop a pre-K through college education plan. This assessment of the local system can provide a common starting point for discussion among the stakeholders and inform strategy development.

Exemplar cities have indicated that the existence of a lead organization or institution that champions the advancement of a college access and success system is a critical ingredient in improving college attainment. Our initial scan of the landscape of players and supports can help to 1) identify potential lead entities to serve as this champion and 2) inform any emerging

lead organization or institution of the landscape that they will be working to mobilize.

It is especially relevant in a less developed system to have an informed strategy to test new efforts to stimulate system development. For example, in Miami, the landscape assessment could be used to drive investment in a pilot effort providing intensive resources to a set of schools that are already part of the same feeder pattern. A pilot could test and demonstrate effective coordination and alignment of services and supports, which we highlighted in the assessment as necessary yet lacking.

In addition to the landscape assessment, Miami can benefit from an analysis of college enrollment, persistence and graduation data for its students. This type of analysis can provide a baseline against which the district can measure its progress, serve as a catalyst to bring together the potential partners that were identified in the landscape assessment, build public will to elevate college access and success as a primary issue locally, and help inform investment decisions for local funders.

Philadelphia's use and Miami's potential use of the college access and success system assessments illustrate the value of this type of assessment in advancing access and success in communities at very different stages of development and operating in very different environments.

Final Thoughts

As government, education, business and community leaders continue to underscore the dire need to increase college attainment, especially among under-represented populations, the press for systemic approaches to increasing attainment will likely continue to grow. Research to date has shown that access and success in college requires a coordinated, holistic approach, involving multiple individuals and institutions. Fragmented program approaches will not deliver the large-scale impact on attainment that is necessary.

A critical first step in developing a systemic approach is to understand the local system; who is a part of the system, what the system provides, how it operates, and how it performs. An assessment of the college enrollment and completion picture and the landscape of players and supports can provide this understanding. The results can then be used to fuel partnership development, build public will, inform investments, measure progress over time, and, ultimately, celebrate success.



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