Prepared to Thrive
A Guide for Cultivating a Community Focus on College and Career Readiness

Schools, businesses, and non-profit organization partners are all key in influencing the culture of any community. This guide is designed to support community teams as they cultivate a culture of college and career readiness for their students. It should be used in conjunction with the Postsecondary and Career Expectations Framework as described in the Illinois Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act of 2016. Both documents are intended for use by both education and non-education based institutions and should be used in the development, implementation and evaluation of a local action plan to support students and families. These documents are organized around three key areas for student success.

- Career Exploration and Development
- College Exploration, Preparation and Selection
- Financial Aid and Literacy

Suggested Process

1. Form a collaborative planning team that will be responsible for action plan development and will organize and pass off plans to a community implementation team
2. Inventory current college and career readiness activities conducted by school and community-based organizations for elementary, middle and high school students
3. Utilize guiding questions to determine unmet needs and additional opportunities
4. Develop, including people who will need to implement it, an action plan for addressing unmet needs (template provided); include metrics for monitoring programs, an evaluation component and a mechanism for revising the plan as needed.
5. Implement the plan
6. Evaluate progress and make changes; develop or revise the plan as necessary.

Possible Members of the C&CR Community Team

- Elementary school representative
- Middle school representative
- High school representative
- Community college representative
- Library representative
- Chamber of commerce or other business representative
- Religious organization leader
- Local service organizations
- Community based organizations
- Afterschool programs
- YMCA or YWCA
- Local Governmental Agencies
- United Way
- Other entities essential to the future of the children in the community.
Guiding Questions – Consider these questions to identify unmet needs and additional opportunities
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<tr>
<th><strong>Elementary School Students</strong></th>
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</table>
| **Career Exploration and Development** | What opportunities do students have in school and in the community to learn about different careers? | What is needed for students to learn about the 16 career clusters in the first steps toward identifying career options?  
- Introduction to all of the career clusters  
- Mechanisms to learn more about individual careers  
- Opportunities to identify their interests  
- Career exploration events  
- Connections to career professionals  
- Integration of career activities into classroom work | How are students transitioned from thinking about career clusters to identifying careers of interest and making plans for the future in school and in the community? What opportunities are there to  
- Hear from alumni and community leaders  
- Visit businesses  
- Learn about postsecondary credentials required for various jobs  
- Align summer or other out of school time with career activities or interests  
How are students’ career interests used to create a schedule of courses throughout high school? | What supports are in place in school and in the community for students and families preparing for life after high school?  
- Resume/personal statement/goals and steps to attain those goals  
- Interviews for internships/jobs/scholarships  
- Job/internship searches and applications in their career pathway  
- Earning and receiving industry-based certifications |
| | How are student interests connected to the 16 career clusters in school and outside of school? | How are students’ plans for high school aligned with their interests and career pathways? | How is career planning a part of school coursework and extracurricular activities? | What opportunities are there in school and in the community for students to strengthen their preparation for postsecondary institutions and careers such as  
- Early college credit programs (Advanced Placement, Dual Credit, Articulated Credit)  
- Earning professional certifications or credentials  
- Team-based challenge projects related to various career pathways  
- Capstone projects |
<p>| | What supports are in place for identifying and communicating with families of ELL or first generation students about career exploration and development? | How are families of ELL or first generation students included and supported in making career exploration plans with their students? | How are families of ELL or first generation students included and supported in more in-depth career planning with their students? | How are families of ELL or first generation students fully supported in making post-secondary decisions related to careers? |
| | How are community leaders involved in connecting student interests to work skills? | How are families of ELL or first generation students included and supported in making career exploration plans with their students? | What opportunities do students have to participate in problem based learning that integrates a career focus in classes? | What opportunities are students to participate in problem based learning that integrates a career focus in classes? |</p>
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| How are students introduced to the idea of going to college in school and in the community? | How are students encouraged to build an ongoing relationship between community service, student interests, extracurricular activities and postsecondary? | How are educators and community members empowered in schools and in the community to support students in determining their postsecondary plans?  
- School counselors  
- Teachers, librarians and other school staff  
- Public librarians and other informal educators  
- Religious leaders  
- Business leaders in all 16 career clusters  
- Community leaders  
- Military | In what ways can students catch up or speed up (e.g. AP or dual credit) coursework in preparation for their postsecondary goals?  
How are local school personnel, community leaders and families supporting a rigorous 12th grade in school and in the community?  
In what ways are students assisted in school and in the community as they narrow down the pool of, apply to, chose, and enroll in postsecondary institutions aligned with their career plans?  
- Participate in college fairs  
- Visit colleges  
- Track entrance requirements  
- Choosing schools to apply to (3-5 match, one safety and one reach)  
- Applying to postsecondary institutions  
- Selecting the best fit postsecondary institution  
- Completing the admissions and enrollment process  
- Enlisting in the military |
| In what ways do the schools and the community communicate with students and families about postsecondary expectations?  
What efforts are made to ensure that all families included?  
What opportunities are there for students to go to local college campuses for Saturday events or summer camps? | How are cultural expectations respected and addressed when introducing families to the importance of a postsecondary education?  
What opportunities are there for students in school and in the community to attend classes or activities or challenges/events held on local college campuses (i.e., tours, concerts, summer camps, Saturday Faire)? | In what ways are all students, including ELL and first-generation students, prepared for their postsecondary goals through  
- Academic preparation  
  - attendance  
  - grades  
  - rigorous courses  
- Extracurricular activities  
- Community service  
- Community activities  
- Leadership opportunities  
- Mentoring programs  
- Campus visits | What supports are in place in school and in the community to help students and families, including ELL and first generation, to understand and prepare for the complete college experience including  
- Pre-college  
  - Educational requirements  
  - Cost  
  - Entrance exams  
  - Applications  
  - Financial aid applications, assessments  
- During college  
  - Paying bills  
  - Staying on top of coursework  
  - Navigating college support systems  
- After college  
  - Expected starting salary  
  - Mid-career salary |
| How are families of ELL or first generation students included and supported in making high school plans with their students? | How are students’ high school course plans aligned with their post-secondary goals? | In what ways are students assisted in school and in the community as they narrow down the pool of, apply to, chose, and enroll in postsecondary institutions aligned with the their career plans?  
- Participate in college fairs  
- Visit colleges  
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<td><strong>Financial Aid and Literacy</strong></td>
<td><strong>What opportunities do families have in the community to learn about planning for and financing a child’s postsecondary goals?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What opportunities do students have in school and in the community to develop age-appropriate financial literacy?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What opportunities do students have in school and in the community to develop adult financial literacy?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What additional supports are in place for the families of ELL or first generation students?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How can families of ELL or first generation students receive support in planning for their child’s postsecondary goals?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How are students and families, including ELL and first generation, supported to complete their financial planning for the chosen post-secondary option?</strong></td>
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</table>
| | | **Where can families go for assistance to better understand the financial “return on investment” of different post-secondary options?** | - Estimate costs of postsecondary attendance  
- Determine the financial “return on investment” of specific postsecondary options  
- Understand financial aid options  
- Apply for financial aid/scholarships/grants  
- Evaluate financial aid offers  
- Determine the role of debt in their post-secondary goal attainment. |

- How are students and families assisted in completing a financial aid assessment?  
- How are students and families informed about the general cost ranges of various postsecondary options and completing “return on investment” analyses?  
- In what ways are families who are unfamiliar with postsecondary financial aid options, expectations and outcomes supported to think through and fully understand their options?
Action Planning Template – Plan to take action on unmet needs or newfound opportunities

Community Partner(s)/Champion

Goal (What are you trying to accomplish?)

Rationale (Why are you trying to accomplish this goal?):

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<td>What are you trying to accomplish?</td>
<td>Relationships, Methods, Activities</td>
<td>Person Responsible</td>
<td>Implementation Timeline</td>
<td>Can we afford it?</td>
<td>Where are we in the process?</td>
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### Sample Calendar of Activities for Students

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<tr>
<th>Career Development and Exploration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fall (August-December)</td>
<td>Participate in career highlights days and ask questions of professionals in 8 of the 16 different career clusters. Engage with professionals who work with the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H and other student groups about activities to explore careers. Attend local museums and community center programs with business leaders to build relationships with career-professionals.</td>
<td>Complete a career cluster survey. Complete a module that explores careers connected to career clusters of interest and write a reflection about which careers are most interesting or appealing and why. Choose a career cluster of interest and develop a plan for high school that supports that area of interest. Participate in community group activities that emphasize student interests and careers.</td>
<td>Participate in a workshop series on careers in our community and hear from professionals about careers of interest; follow up with your favorite professional (phone, email, letter), explain why they inspired you and ask for advice on how you can be better prepared to embark on your own career. Participate in school - community activities that build relationships with career professionals (e.g. Rotary Youth Leadership, Kiwanis Key Club, Leo Club).</td>
<td>Create a resume and personal statement. Participate in mock job interviews. Serve as a leader in your extracurricular activities. Consider and register for appropriate dual credit, AP and/or IB courses as aligned with specific career pathway. Consult with the local community college about any articulated credit earned as part of a career tech course. Volunteer at one or more local nonprofit organizations in your interest area (e.g. Animal Shelter, Homeless Center, Food Bank, Hospital).</td>
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<td><strong>Spring (January - May)</strong></td>
<td>Participate in hosting high school seniors visit day in their caps and gowns.</td>
<td>Participate in a career exploration day with a parent or family member.</td>
<td>Participate in career pathway oriented visit days (e.g. manufacturing day).</td>
<td>Participate in workshops about finding and applying to internships.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Participate in career highlights days and listen to /ask questions of professionals in 8 of the 16 different career clusters.</td>
<td>Visit to workplaces aligned with career interests.</td>
<td>Participate in assessments for industrial credentials, if available.</td>
<td>Participate in a team challenge in a career cluster oriented topic.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Participate in career pathway oriented visit days (e.g. manufacturing day).</td>
<td>Connect with mentors for STEM career pathways projects.</td>
<td>Participate in assessments for industrial credentials, if available.</td>
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<td>Receive recognition for attainment of industry credentials as part of the school honors banquet/assembly</td>
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<td><strong>Summer (June – August)</strong></td>
<td>Participate in workshops with family members that introduce the 16 career clusters with professionals from the community.</td>
<td>Participate in career exploration activities offered by community organizations.</td>
<td>Volunteer at organizations connected to career interests and/or personal values.</td>
<td>Participate in an internship or other work based learning opportunity connected to career interests</td>
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<td>Participate in community activities that build relationships with career professionals (e.g. Rotaract, Kiwanis Kids, Leo Club).</td>
<td>Participate in community activities that build relationships with career professionals (e.g. Rotaract, Kiwanis Kids, Leo Club).</td>
<td>Job Shadow career professionals during summer months.</td>
<td>Become a regular volunteer at organizations connected to career interests and/or personal values</td>
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<td>College Exploration, Preparation and Exploration</td>
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<td>Fall (August-December)</td>
<td>Participate in discussions about why people go to college</td>
<td>Hear from community leaders about attending college and how attending may be necessary to acquire livable wage jobs</td>
<td>Participate in a college fair</td>
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</table>
|  | Hear from alumni about the college experience in different career clusters |  | Participate in school activities supporting a postsecondary mentality  
  - Favorite College T-Shirt Day as a Homecoming dress-up day;  
  - Hang pennants for destination schools in a public place  
  - Teachers placards outside their doors with their degrees and alma maters  
  - College visitors in the counseling center | Participate in school activities supporting a postsecondary mentality  
  - Favorite College T-Shirt Day as a Homecoming dress-up day;  
  - Hang pennants for destination schools in a public place  
  - Teachers placards outside their doors with their degrees and alma maters  
  - College visitors in the counseling center |
|  | Participate in school activities to promote college-going (e.g. faculty alma maters, local sports heroes) |  | Register and take the PSAT or other college entrance practice exams.  
  Increase responsibility within student activities, clubs and sports. Keep a record of your activities to use for scholarship applications.  
  Visit the campuses of postsecondary institutions.  
  Encourage family members to participate in a parent university. | Register and take the SAT or ACT and any AP exam opportunities |
|  |  |  | Participate in College Application Month activities, including workshops focused on  
  - Choosing colleges to apply to  
  - How to complete and submit college applications | Participate in College Application Month activities, including workshops focused on  
  - Choosing colleges to apply to  
  - How to complete and submit college applications |
|  |  |  | Become a leader in student activities, clubs and/or sports. Keep a record of your activities to use for scholarship applications.  
  Encourage family members to participate in a parent university. | Become a leader in student activities, clubs and/or sports. Keep a record of your activities to use for scholarship applications.  
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<td><strong>Spring (January - May)</strong></td>
<td>Participate in discussions about why people go to college</td>
<td>Attend activities in which college representatives talk about the importance of preparing for college while in high school including academic preparation, extracurricular activities, community service/activities, leadership opportunities and mentoring programs</td>
<td>Course catalogue prominently features</td>
<td>Participate in a college application completion party to kick off choosing and completing college applications</td>
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<td>Hear from community leaders and high school upperclassmen about the college experience and how to prepare for going to college.</td>
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<td>• Information about dual credit courses</td>
<td>Complete a profile in the College Scholarship Service system for access to scholarships</td>
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<td>Kindergarten graduates receive shirts with “class of” on them to grow into.</td>
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<td>• Information about AP test scores</td>
<td>Participate in National College/Signing/Decision Day</td>
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<td>• Articulated Credit options</td>
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<td>Enroll in classes for next year according to requirements for your post-secondary plans.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Enroll in classes for next year that earn early college credits (AP, Dual Credit, Articulated Credit)</td>
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<td>Graduation Activities</td>
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<td>• Graduates recognized for college acceptance/ military enlistment</td>
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<td>• Graduates wear a ribbon with the colors of their chosen college</td>
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<td>• High school graduates pair up with K graduates for Kindergarten ceremony</td>
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<td>Encourage family members to participate in a parent university</td>
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<td>Take any required assessments for enrollment into post-secondary programs (e.g. placement tests, CLEP tests, language tests)</td>
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<td>Attend a summer camp or Saturday classes at a local college</td>
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<td>Participate in group college visits to local institutions</td>
<td>Visit colleges of interest</td>
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<td>Attend summer school for remediation or enrichment activities.</td>
<td>Attend summer school for remediation or acceleration opportunities.</td>
<td>Attend a summer camp or Saturday classes at a local college</td>
<td>Encourage students to make sure they have completed the “Nine steps to making your college plans a reality!” (<a href="http://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr-sdp/files/sdp-summer-melt-sample-nine-steps.pdf?m=1431312539">http://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr-sdp/files/sdp-summer-melt-sample-nine-steps.pdf?m=1431312539</a>)</td>
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<td>Mentors meet with students and families to make sure they understand</td>
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<td>• The Academic Side</td>
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<td>o Registering for and attending orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The Other Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Receiving required immunizations</td>
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<td>o Completing housing forms</td>
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<td>o Arranging transportation</td>
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<td>o Navigating online portals</td>
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<td><strong>Fall (August-December)</strong></td>
<td>Learn about the importance of earning an income Understand how money is required to buy goods and services and practice making choices about how to spend your money Learn about why people save and some guidelines for determining how much to save for future goals</td>
<td>Participate in a parent-to-parent session on affording college with parents; college financial aid staff may be on hand as a resource Engage in activities to develop competencies in financial literacy related to earning income; buying goods and services; saving; using credit; financial investing; and protecting and insuring</td>
<td>Complete a financial aid assessment with a family member Attend a workshop about financial planning for various postsecondary options with a family member, including a section on “return on investment”</td>
<td>Participate in FAFSA Completion Month (September) activities including FAFSA Completion Workshops (stand alone or during school open house/parent-teacher conferences) Affording College/Financial Aid Workshops Receive and read communications on why completing the FAFSA is important Participate in Scholarship Application Month activities including workshops on how to find, apply for, and evaluate scholarships and other types of financial aid</td>
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<td><strong>Spring (January-May)</strong></td>
<td>Learn about using credit Participate in the Stock Market Game™ with students in middle and high school</td>
<td>Participate in the Stock Market Game™ with students in elementary and high school</td>
<td>Participate in the Stock Market Game™ with students in elementary and middle school</td>
<td>Participate in workshops for tax filing assistance for families Complete paperwork for assistance with fees for applications. Participate in Award Letter Comparison Month (March) activities Determining the cost of attendance Making sense of financial aid award letters</td>
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| Summer (June – August)   | Attend a financial literacy workshop for families | Participate in a family-based community challenge that require the demonstration of financial literacy competencies | Participate in a family-based community challenge that require the demonstration of financial literacy competencies | Meet with mentor to review the financial aspects of postsecondary choices  
  - Tuition bills and required deposits  
  - Identifying and budgeting for non-tuition expenses |
|                          | Identify one or more financial goals for your family together |  |  |  |

**Additional Possible Activities**

- Parent University for parents of ELL/first generation students to orient them to the process and experience of attending a postsecondary institution
- Host recent alumni visit days for current students to talk with alumni at each level about what the next level is like
- Distribute “class of” onesies to local hospitals to be given to babies born during the year

**Resources**

Illinois Pathways - [https://www2.illinoisworknet.com/ilpathways/Pages/default.aspx](https://www2.illinoisworknet.com/ilpathways/Pages/default.aspx)
Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) - [https://www.isac.org/](https://www.isac.org/)