

The Network
for College Success

Freshman On-Track Toolkit





ABOUT THE NETWORK FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

The Network for College Success (NCS) envisions high schools that continuously cultivate collaboration, powerful learning, and a culture of high achievement to prepare all students for college and career success.

NCS uses research to design and facilitate professional learning that builds the capacity of school leaders to greatly improve student outcomes. Through cross-school learning communities and job-embedded coaching, we support district leaders, principals, teachers, and counselors to:

- Strengthen school leadership
- Improve teaching and learning
- Support freshmen transitioning into high school
- Prepare students for quality postsecondary options
- Support culture and climate
- Integrate research and data into daily practice

For more information about NCS, please go to ncs.uchicago.edu.

NCS Core Values and Beliefs

- Educators have the capacity to solve their own problems when there is actionable data, research-based strategies, collaborative teams, and professional trust.
- School-based leaders drive change in schools. Increasing their capacity as leaders is the essential lever for improvement.
- Students' intellectual capacity is not static. It grows when challenged and develops when teachers explicitly build academic mindsets and non-cognitive skills.
- School improvement happens when adults make their practice public and critically examine their work collaboratively. Trust is essential to adults' willingness to engage in this process.
- Data are a powerful tool for school improvement when used to trace causes, seek solutions, and guide change. Data can be destructive when only used to judge and punish.
- Challenging leaders to interrupt inequities in schools and districts is vital to improving schools. All students from all backgrounds deserve equitable educational outcomes.

About the Toolkit

The NCS Freshman On-Track Toolkit is a collection of protocols, reports, resources, and artifacts used by our experienced Coaches in their daily work to help schools better support students through the critical first year of high school.

The Toolkit is organized around four key components:



APPLYING
RESEARCH & DATA



DEVELOPING
CAPACITY & LEADERSHIP



CULTIVATING
TRUST & RESPECT



BUILDING
SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS

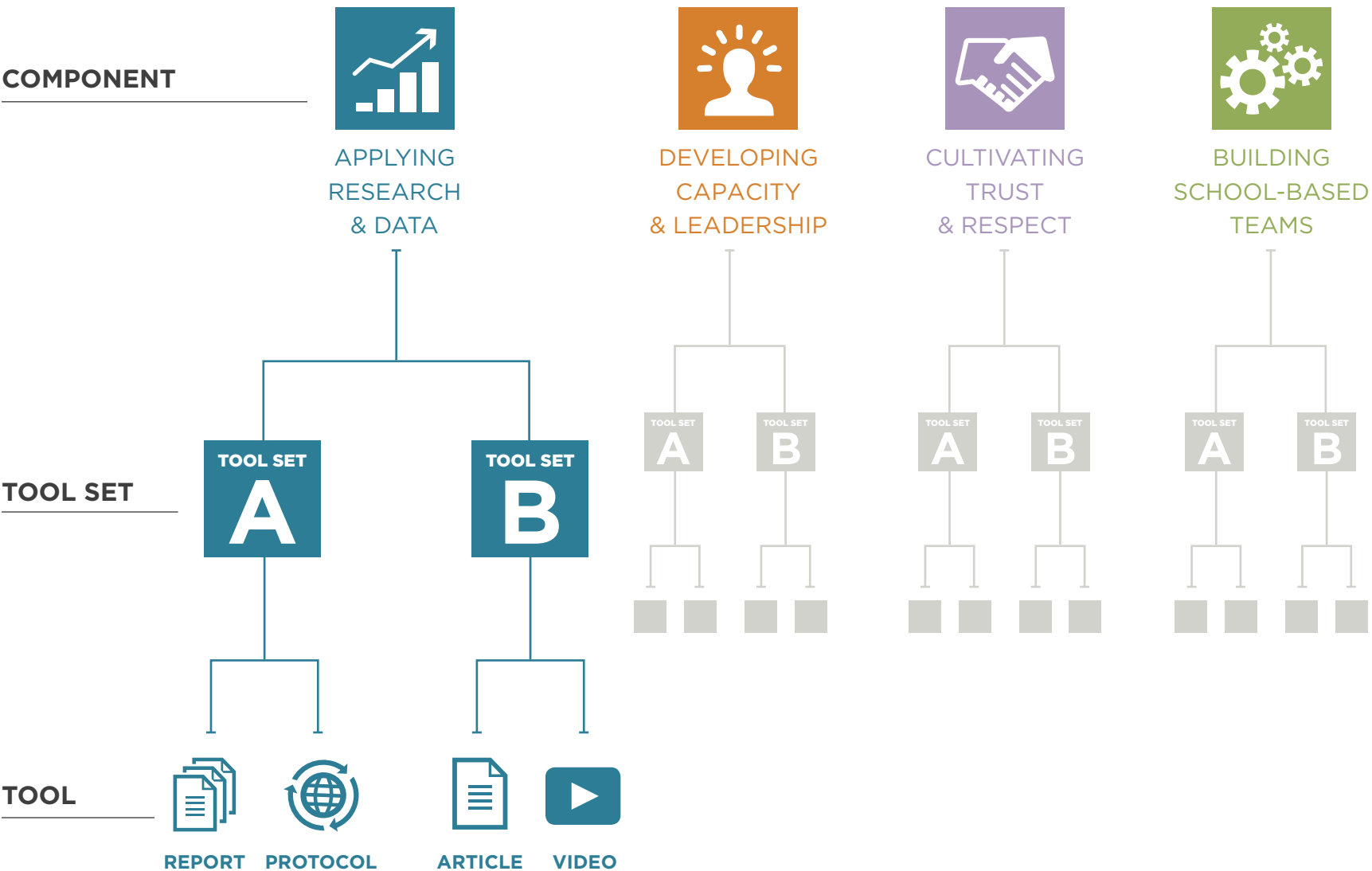
For each of the components, you will find a collection of Tool Sets, or bundles of tools (including videos), organized to help you achieve your Freshman On-Track goals.

What is On Track?

In Chicago, a student is considered On Track if he or she has accumulated five full credits (ten semester credits) and has no more than one semester F in a core subject (English, math, science, or social science) by the end of freshman year. These represent the criteria to become a sophomore in Chicago Public Schools. Students who are On Track are far more likely to graduate from high school than their off track peers.

On Track may be defined differently in your school or district. For more information about the origins of On Track in Chicago, please refer to the Applying Research & Data component in this Toolkit.

Toolkit Organization



Acknowledgements

The Network for College Success acknowledges the dedicated professionals at each of our partner high schools who have made their practice public and shared their expertise, tools, and insights. Without them, this Toolkit would not be possible.

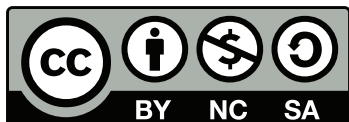
We would like to thank the Chicago Public Schools for their ongoing commitment to the Freshman On-Track work and improving students' academic attainment.

We would also like to thank our partners at the Urban Education Institute, including the UChicago Consortium for School Research, UChicago Impact, and The To&Through Project.

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their thought partnership and providing the Network for College Success with the resources to reflect on our work with schools and produce this Toolkit.

A Note about Creative Commons

Many of the tools in the Network for College Success Freshman On-Track Toolkit are original works or adaptations with the permission of the original creator. Because all of the tools have been compiled and presented here in the interest of sharing best practices, original works have been marked with a [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) copyright license.



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Getting Started: The NCS Freshman Success Framework Overview

In 2009, the Network for College Success developed the Freshman Success Framework to provide our partner schools with guidance on how to establish a high-functioning system of support for students entering high school. The three dimensions of the system – the actions of the team, its leader, and the principal – are vital for helping freshmen successfully transition into high school.

Framework Overview

Dimension 1: Principal (or Assistant Principal)

- Foundational Planning
- Implementation Accountability
- Student-Focused Culture
- Classroom-Level Teacher Support Structures

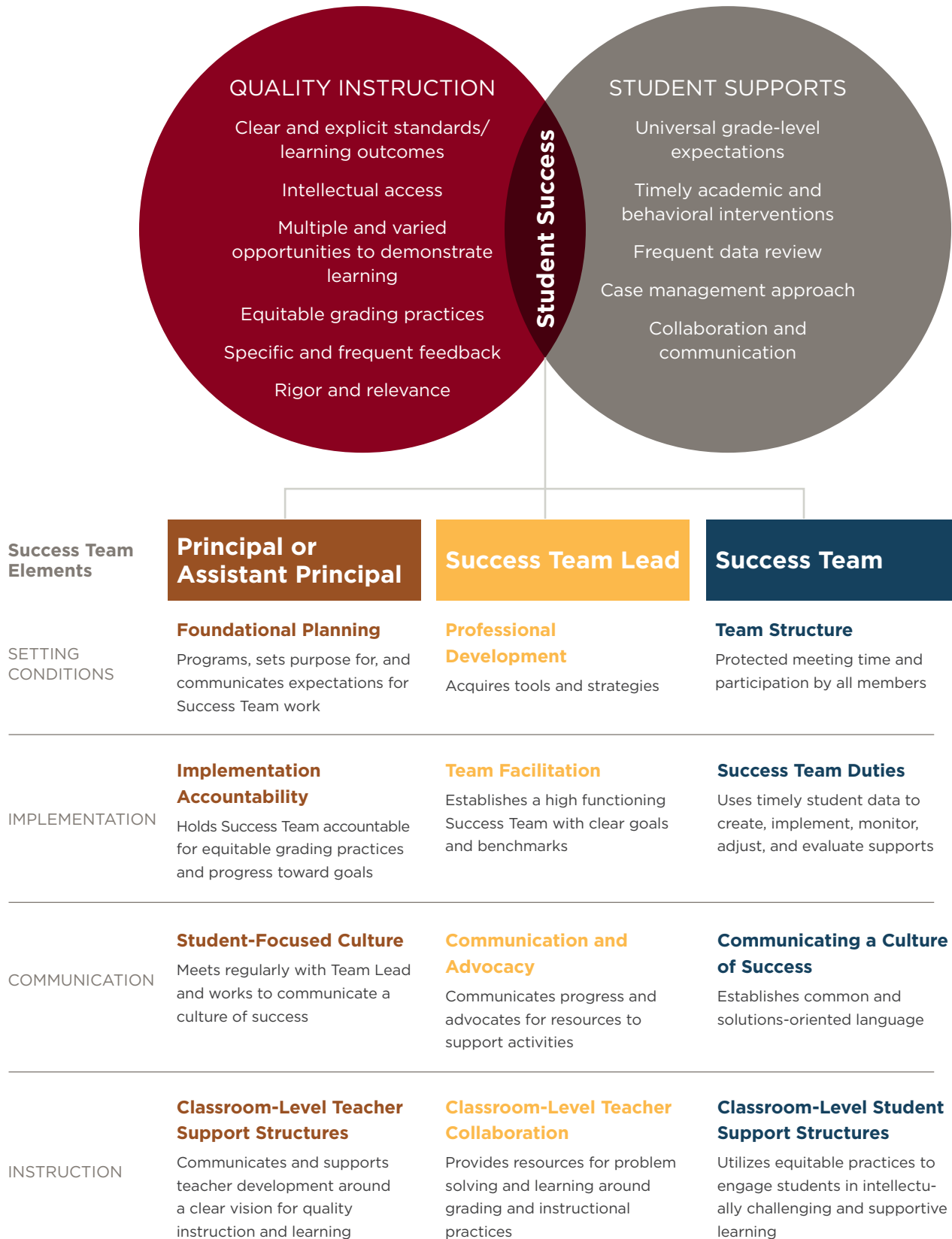
Dimension 2: Success Team Lead

- Professional Development
- Team Facilitation
- Communication and Advocacy
- Classroom-Level Teacher Collaboration

Dimension 3: Success Team

- Team Structure
- Success Team Duties
- Communicating a Culture of Success
- Classroom-Level Student Support Structures

Freshman Success Framework: Satellite View





APPLYING RESEARCH & DATA

TOOL SET

A

Calculating Freshman On-Track

TOOL SET

B

**Exploring Ideas to Support the Transition
to High School**

TOOL SET

C

Developing and Tracking Interventions

TOOL SET

D

**Communicating On-Track Research to Staff,
Students, and Families**



Calculating Freshman On-Track

Contents

What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools

Technical Notes for Freshman On-Track

Purpose

The Freshman On-Track indicator provides a clear metric for predicting high school graduation in Chicago and targeting students for intervention. Schools can set goals around this metric and monitor them on an ongoing basis.

Collectively, these tools provide school districts and/or high schools with a fundamental understanding of the research that informs Freshman On-Track initiatives.

How & When to Use

The comprehensive “What Matters” report from the UChicago Consortium provides the foundational research that sparked the On-Track movement in Chicago that resulted in the dramatic increase in graduation rates. The Technical Notes tool illustrates how Freshman On-Track is calculated in the Chicago Public Schools. We recognize this is a Chicago-specific example. However, it can be used as a guide for establishing and communicating On-Track metrics in your district.



Calculating Freshman On-Track

What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools

Too many students in Chicago Public Schools fail to graduate from high school. It is a problem that can sometimes feel overwhelming to address because the causes of dropout are myriad and complex. What is often lost in discussions about dropping out is the one factor that is most directly related to graduation—students' performance in their courses. In this research report, UChicago Consortium authors Elaine Allensworth and John Q. Easton look into the elements of course performance that predict whether students will graduate and suggest what schools and families can do to keep more teens in school.

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CONSORTIUM ON
CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools

A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures, and Attendance in the Freshman Year

Elaine M. Allensworth
John Q. Easton



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Introduction

Improving graduation rates and reducing dropout rates are high-priority items on the national agenda for high school reform. There is increasing recognition that a high school diploma is a minimum requirement for success in the workplace and that too few students obtain this minimum standard.¹ Yet, it is a problem that can sometimes feel overwhelming to try to manage. In part, this is because of the magnitude of the problem: nationally, nearly one-third of students do not graduate from high school.² Almost half the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students fail to graduate from high school, and in some CPS high schools more students drop out than graduate.³ These numbers underscore the urgency of addressing this issue immediately.

The dropout problem is also difficult to manage because its causes are many and complex. Research on dropping out has shown that the decision to persist in or leave school is affected by multiple contextual factors—family, school, neighborhood, peers—interacting in a cumulative way over the life course of a student.⁴ This suggests a daunting task for dealing with the problem of dropout—if so many factors are involved in the decision to drop out of school, including experiences outside of school and in early grades, how can any high school effort substantially address the problem?

What is often lost in discussions about dropping out is the one factor that is most directly related to graduation—students’ performance in their courses. In Chicago, we have shown that inadequate credit accumulation in the freshman year, which usually results from course failures, is highly predictive of failing to graduate four years later. Research in New York City has shown very similar connections between inadequate credit accumulation and eventual dropping out, and national data confirms this; almost all students who drop out leave school far behind in course credits.⁵ As we

document here in more detail, success in high school coursework is directly tied to eventual graduation. Knowing that graduation is directly tied with course grades suggests two potential strategies for addressing dropout problems. At the very least, we can use freshman course performance to identify students at high risk of dropping out to target with support and intervention. At the most, if schools and teachers can influence the quality of students' performance in their coursework, then they have a direct lever to affect graduation rates—a lever that should simultaneously improve student achievement.

In this report, we look closely at students' performance in their coursework during their freshman year, how it is related to eventual graduation, and how personal and school factors contribute to success or failure in freshman-year courses. We show that data on course performance can be used to identify future dropouts and graduates with precision, and we compare performance indicators to discern how they might be used for nuanced targeting of students at-risk of dropping out. We examine the factors that contribute to course performance in the freshman year, showing that success in coursework is affected more by what students do while they are in high school than by their preparation for high school and backgrounds. Finally, we provide evidence that teachers and schools matter for how students perform in their courses, and that efforts to reduce dropout rates are consistent with initiatives to address low achievement.

We focus on the freshman year because our prior work, and work by others, has shown that course

performance in the freshman year sets the stage for eventual graduation. This report builds on a report we released June 2005 that described and defined the “freshman on-track indicator.” In that report, we showed the relationship between being on-track at the end of the freshman year and graduating from high school four and five years later. On-track students had at least ten semester credits (five full-year course credits) and no more than one semester F in a core course by the end of their first year in high school. Students who were on-track at the end of their freshman year were nearly four times more likely to graduate from high school than their classmates who were not on-track.⁶

The original on-track report provided initial evidence that we could use freshman-year course performance to precisely identify future dropouts. While it was a key validation of the on-track indicator, it left a number of unanswered questions: Why is the indicator predictive? Why are students off-track? And what might high schools themselves contribute to students' course performance? Furthermore, that report only examined whether students were making minimal progress in their freshman year, which meant whether they were earning sufficient credits to be on-track for promotion to the tenth grade. But we want students to graduate from high school ready for college and work, which means we should aim for students doing A and B quality work.⁷ In this report, we pull apart a variety of indicators of freshman course performance—including students' failures, absences, and overall grades—to learn what matters for a successful freshman year.

Introduction Endnotes

1 E.g., Orfield (2004); Barton (2005); National Association of Secondary School Principals (2005).

2 Swanson (2004).

3 Allensworth (2005).

4 Rumberger (2004); Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2001).

5 Cahill, Hamilton, and Lynch (2006); National Center for Education Statistics (2007).

6 Research in Philadelphia has also shown that course performance in the eighth and ninth grades can be used to identify dropouts years before they leave school (see work by Robert Balfanz, Ruth Curran Neild, and Lisa Herzog). For example, using detailed records on students, Neild and Balfanz (2005) used attendance and failure in the eighth and ninth grades to identify dropouts in Philadelphia. As in Chicago, they found that test scores were not as predictive of graduation as students' performance in their coursework.

7 As documented in the CCSR report, *From high school to the future: A first look at CPS graduates' college enrollment, college preparation, and graduation from four-year colleges*, students with a GPA lower than a 2.0 are unlikely to enroll in college, and those with a GPA lower than 3.0 are unlikely to obtain a four-year degree. Grades are also very predictive of future earnings (Miller, 1998).

Chapter 1

A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures, and Absences in the Freshman Year

As a measure of minimally adequate performance, the on-track indicator groups together marginally successful students and very successful ones. Knowing that the on- and off-track groups both contain students with widely differing course performances, we decided to explore what aspects of being off-track made students less likely to graduate, and if more nuanced indicators of course performance—such as number of course failures, GPA, or absences—might be better predictors of eventual graduation. We begin this chapter by examining these other indicators of course performance as predictors of graduation. We then use the other indicators to look more closely at what it means to be off-track.

A Number of Freshman-Year Indicators Can Be Used to Predict High School Graduation

The on-track indicator is highly predictive of graduation, but it is a blunt indicator; and the requisite data to construct the indicator are not available until the end of a student's first year in high school. Schools and districts often ask if there are other indicators that could be used to forecast graduation. In fact, there are several related measures of how well students do during their freshman year that are equally predictive and more readily available, including freshman-year GPA, the number of semester course failures, and freshman-year absences.

Freshman Course Performance Among CPS Students

This report analyzes several different, but related, indicators of freshman-year performance. Each is defined below, along with summary figures that show the performance of first-time ninth-graders in the 2004–05 school year (24,894 students). We include only students who remained in school through spring of their freshman year.

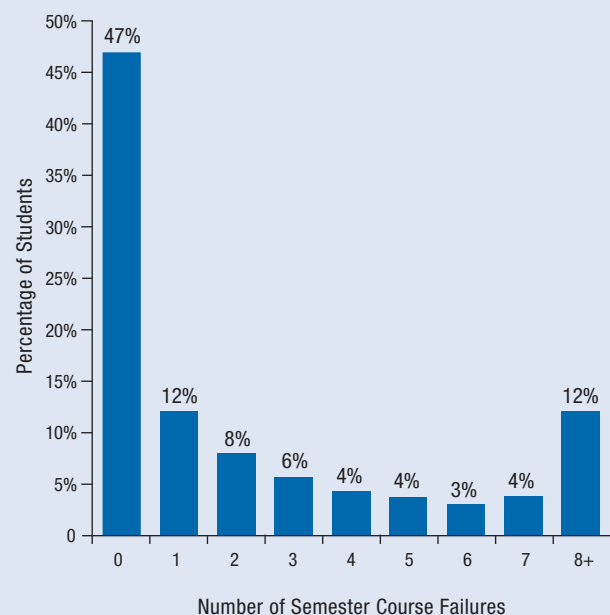
The 2005 report on the on-track indicator showed that freshman-year course performance has improved over the last decade in CPS; on-track rates improved from 50 percent with the 1994–95 freshman class to 60 percent with the 2003–04 class (excluding first-year dropouts), while freshman-course pass rates improved from 76 to 81 percent over the same period.^A However, as detailed below, one cannot escape the conclusion that, in general, freshmen in CPS still do very poorly; more than half of freshmen fail a course, the average GPA is below a C, and absence rates are very high—40 percent of freshmen miss more than four weeks of school (including class cutting). The statistics would sound even worse if we included freshmen dropouts in the calculations. For many students, freshman year is like a bottleneck—their performance is so poor that they are unable to recover. These negative experiences in freshman year put students at high risk of not graduating, which later prevents them from participating in the mainstream economy and larger society. We cannot hope to substantially improve graduation rates unless we substantially improve students' course performance in their freshman year.

On-Track: A student is considered on-track if he or she has accumulated five full credits (ten semester credits) and has no more than one semester F in a core subject (English, math, science, or social science) by the end of the first year in high school. This is an indicator of the minimal expected level of performance. Students in CPS need 24 credits to graduate from high school, so a student with only 5 credits at the end of freshman year will need to pass courses at a faster rate in later years. The definition

is aligned with the CPS promotion policy for moving from freshman to sophomore year, which only requires five full credits. In the 2004–05 freshman class, 59 percent of first-time high school students were on-track while 41 percent were off-track (excluding students who dropped out before the end of their first year in high school).

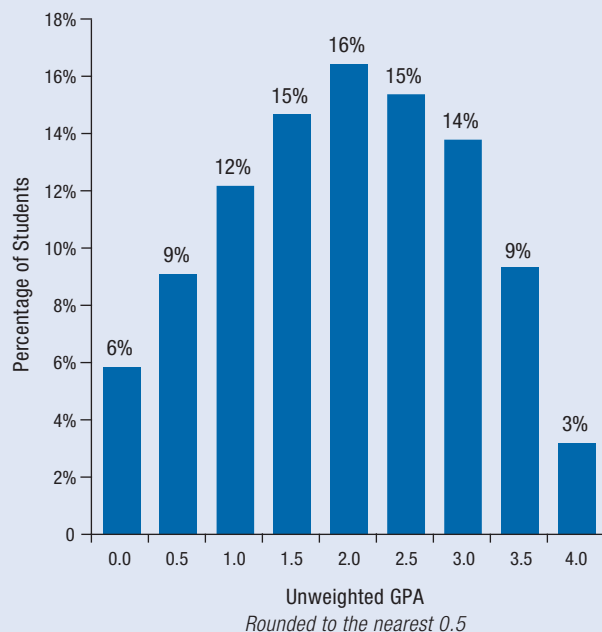
Number of Semester Course Failures: In this report, we measure failures across all courses by semester. This differs from the on-track indicator, which only incorporates failures in core subjects (reading, math, science, and social science); this report examines overall course performance, not just performance in core courses. A typical student takes 7 courses each semester; thus, a typical student could fail as many as 14 courses in a year. Figure 1 graphs the number of semester courses failed by first-time freshmen in the 2004–05 school year, excluding students who dropped out before the end of their first year in high school. The modal category of failures is 0; however, more than half the CPS freshmen (53 percent) fail at least one course.

FIGURE 1
Number of Course Failures Among Freshmen in 2004-05



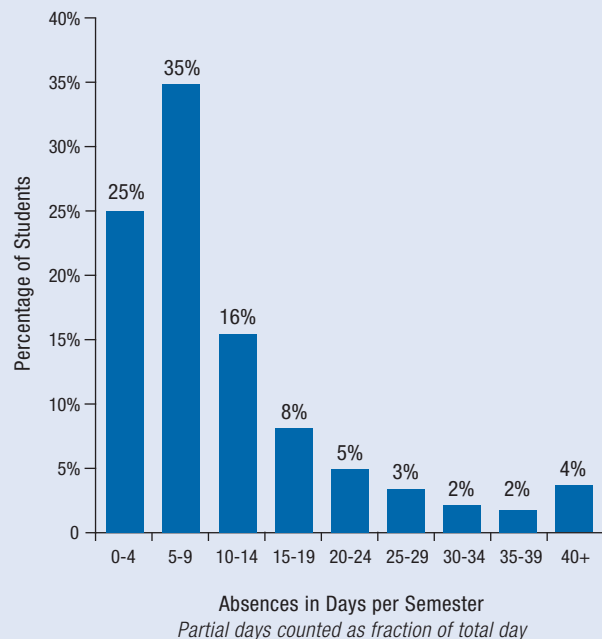
Grade Point Average (GPA): CPS students receive a weighted GPA on their report card, which gives extra points for grades in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. In this report, we analyze unweighted GPAs (which use values of 4 points for an A, 3 for a B, 2 for a C, 1 for a D, and 0 for an F) for all credit-bearing classes. We analyze unweighted GPAs rather than weighted GPAs because all students do not have equal access to honors, International Baccalaureate (IB), and AP courses. Figure 2 shows the distribution of GPAs among first-time freshmen in 2004–05, for students who remained in school through spring term. A 2.0 GPA (C average) is typical for CPS freshmen. Very few students—only 3 percent—have A averages their freshman year, while more than 40 percent of freshmen finish the year with a GPA lower than 2.0 (a D+ average or lower). About a quarter of students have a B or higher average at the end of their freshman year.

FIGURE 2
Distribution of Freshmen GPAs in 2004-05



Course Absences: Absences are counted on a course-by-course basis and then aggregated into total number of days absent. If a student misses one out of seven courses in a day, it counts as one-seventh of a day of absence for that student. Figure 3 shows absence rates for students entering CPS high schools in the 2004–05 school year, excluding students who dropped out before the end of their first year in high school. One-quarter of students missed less than one week of school per semester. Forty percent of students missed more than two weeks of school per semester, which is a month or more of class time per year. There are 90 days in each semester, so these students missed more than 10 percent of the annual instructional time. Students can be counted as truant with 20 unexcused full-day absences.

FIGURE 3
Absences Among Freshmen in 2004-05



Sidebar Endnotes

A Allensworth and Easton (2005).

Table 1 shows how well each of the four indicators of freshman-year course performance predicts whether students will graduate from high school within four years. Whether a student is on-track, GPA, and the number of semester course failures all correctly identify graduates and nongraduates 80 percent of the time. GPA is the most accurate for identifying nongraduates. Freshman-year absences are slightly less predictive than the other three indicators because they do not distinguish students who are attending school but performing poorly in their classes from those who are attending and performing well. Although the four indicators of course performance may seem somewhat interchangeable, they each provide somewhat different information, as described below.

TABLE 1
Predictive Ability of Indicators of Freshman-Year Performance

Freshman Performance Indicator	Overall Correct Prediction	Specificity <i>Predicting Nongraduates</i>	Sensitivity <i>Predicting Graduates</i>
GPA	80%	73%	85%
On-Track vs. Off-Track	80%	72%	85%
Semester Course Failures	80%	66%	89%
<i>Fall-semester failures</i>	76%	55%	91%
Absences	77%	59%	90%
<i>Fall-semester absences</i>	74%	53%	89%

In the earlier report, we showed that students on-track at the end of their freshman year are about four times more likely to graduate than off-track students (see Figure 4). The on-track indicator has advantages over the other indicators in terms of ease of reporting and being easily understood by a broad public. Because it is a categorical variable with only two values—either on- or off-track—it is easy to report trends over time. However, the on-track indicator does not provide information that is precise enough to allow specific students to be targeted for specific interventions. In addition, the indicator does not provide timely information to schools: it cannot be calculated until the summer after students' first year of high school.

Several researchers have found that high absence rates are strong predictors of dropping out.¹ In CPS, about 15 percent of first-time freshmen have extremely

high absence rates, missing one month or more of classes each semester (see Figure 3). These students have largely disengaged from school—they remain enrolled, but have marginal attendance—and they have less than a 10 percent chance of graduating (see Figure 5). However, it is not just extremely low attendance that is problematic. *Even moderate levels of absences are a cause for concern.* Just one to two weeks of absence per semester, which are typical for CPS freshmen, are associated with a substantially reduced probability of graduating. In the 2000–01 cohort, only 63 percent of students who missed about one week (five to nine days) graduated in four years, compared to 87 percent of those who missed less than one week. This is of great concern, considering that only one-quarter of CPS freshmen miss less than one week of school per semester. Attendance is clearly a vital part of graduating from high school, but beyond this we show evidence later in this report that attendance is the most essential requirement for avoiding course failure.

Information on absences is available early in the school year and might be the most practical indicator for identifying students for early interventions. More than half the nongraduates can be identified by the end of the first semester using either absence or failure rates. By the end of the first term, course grades and failure rates are slightly better predictors of graduation than attendance because they directly indicate whether students are making progress in their courses. These rates also provide more specific information to target programs for struggling students than the on-track indicator. GPA, in particular, provides information about who is likely to struggle in later years and is the best indicator for predicting nongraduates.² As shown in Figure 6, students with a 2.5 GPA (C+ average) in their freshman year have a very high likelihood of graduating within four years—86 percent did so in the 2000–01 freshman cohort. As grades fall between 2.0 (C average) and 0.5 (D- average), graduation rates fall dramatically. Just under three-fourths of students with a 2.0 (C average) graduated by 2004 in the 2000–01 cohort, compared to about one-quarter of students with a 1.0 (D average). Virtually no student with an average lower than a D in the freshman year earned a CPS diploma; this is a cause for concern, given that 15

FIGURE 4

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman On-Track Status

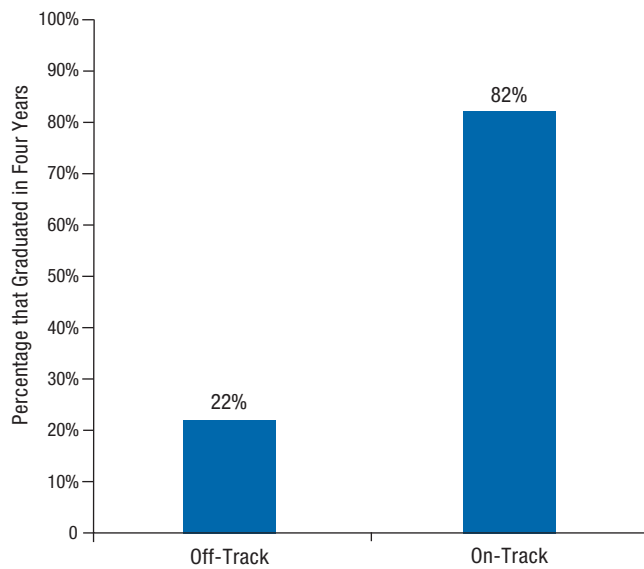


FIGURE 5

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman Absence Rates

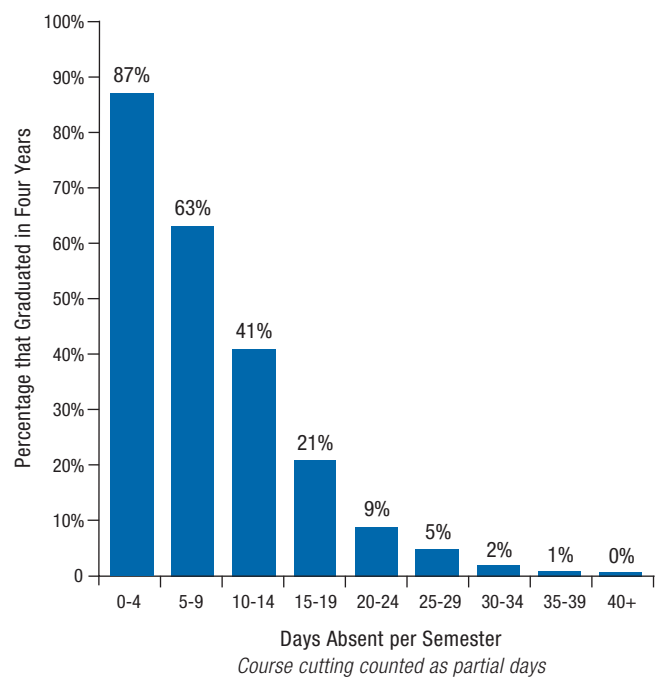


FIGURE 6

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman GPA

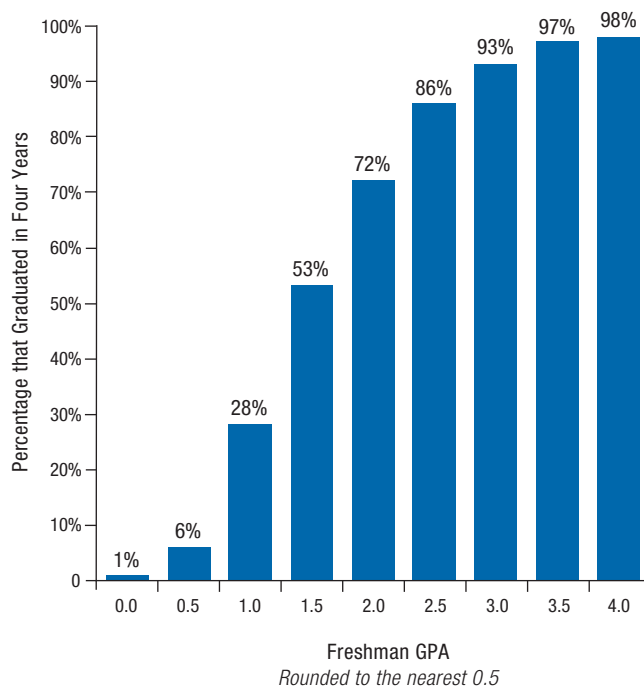
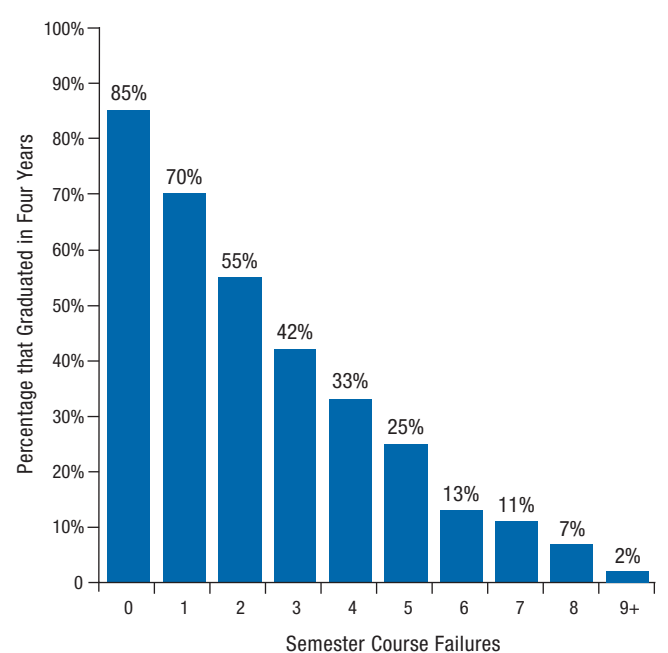


FIGURE 7

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman Course Failures



Graduation rates are based on students entering high school in September 2001, followed until September 2005 for Figures 4-7.

percent of CPS students finished their freshman year with lower than a D average (see Figure 2).

On the other hand, students with good grades in their first year are very likely to be successful in their remaining years of high school. In the 2000–01 entering class, *almost all students with a B average or higher at the end of their freshman year graduated within four years*. Furthermore, almost 80 percent of these students graduated with a final GPA of 3.0 or higher. We know from research that the decision to drop out is affected by myriad factors in students' lives, many of which exist outside of the school.³ It is probable that first-year students who earned high grades experienced fewer outside stressors than other students, and fewer personal and home problems undoubtedly made graduating from high school easier for them. However, it is also likely that many of the students who received good grades

their freshman year also struggled with problems outside of school sometime during their four years of high school. Remember from Figure 2 that almost a quarter of CPS freshmen have B or higher averages in a district that is about 90 percent low income—thus, most students with B or higher averages are low-income students. Still, 95 percent of the students with B or higher averages graduated within four years.⁴ Success in the freshman year may make it easier for students to continue, despite personal and family problems that might develop during the course of high school.

Clearly, GPAs are related to course failures because failures are part of the calculation of students' GPAs. Course failures are more directly tied to graduation, however, because students need to accumulate a specific number of course credits to receive a diploma, and they must pass their classes to obtain credits. This is

Students' Freshman-Year Course Performance Is Much More Important for Graduation Than Their Background Characteristics and Prior Achievement

Students' likelihood of graduation is affected by their educational experiences prior to high school, and is related to their economic and demographic backgrounds.^A Research on graduation has shown particularly strong relationships of graduation with students' test scores and age on entry into high school—which is a proxy for grade retention. Graduation is also related to students' gender, race, and economic status. However, all of these factors together explain only about 12 percent of the variation in graduation rates in the cohort of students entering CPS high schools in the 2000–01 school year.^B In

contrast, students' freshman-year GPA and number of Fs explain 39 percent of the variation in graduation rates.^C Once we know how students performed in their classes in their freshman year, additional information about their backgrounds does little to improve our prediction of whether they will graduate.^D As we showed in Table 1, ninth-grade Fs or GPA each can be used to predict about 80 percent of graduates; if we include information about students' background characteristics and prior achievement, we only improve the prediction by about half a percentage point.^E

Sidebar Endnotes

A E.g., Rumberger (2004); and Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2001).

B This is the reduction in log-likelihood (pseudo- R^2) that is achieved by predicting graduation with students' eighth-grade test scores, age, race, gender, poverty, and economic status with a logistic regression model.

C The variance explained increases from 12 to 40 percent if indicators of freshman course performance are included in the models described in the previous footnote.

D Background characteristics explain only an additional 1 percent more variation in graduation rates than do freshmen Fs and GPA alone.

E These statistics on variance explained in dropout are similar, albeit slightly smaller, to those reported by Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2001) in their comprehensive study of factors across the life-course that contribute to graduation/dropout. They reported that ninth-grade performance, behaviors, and attitudes (GPA, grade retention, parent attitudes, pupil behaviors, and pupil attitudes) together explained 44.1 percent of the variation in dropout rates; when they added in background factors, the variation explained increased by just under 6 percent (to 49.8 percent).

reflected in the consistent relationship between the number of courses a student fails and whether that student eventually graduates, as shown in Figure 7. Each additional course failure makes it more difficult to graduate.⁵ Once students have failed six semester courses (i.e., three full-year courses), they are so unlikely to graduate that additional failures only modestly decrease the probability of graduating; these students have failed half their courses or more.⁶

Because each indicator has different advantages, an effective monitoring system could be created to take advantage of each indicator at different points in the school year. For example, because absence rates are known early in the school year, schools could address poor course attendance within the first quarter. After students' first-quarter grades are known, students with failure warnings should receive immediate supports. When semester grades are posted, those students with failures will need a strategy for making up missing credits. At the end of the school year, students' grades could be used to identify students at high risk of future failure and to identify students performing below their potential (e.g., students with high test scores but low grades). On-track rates for the cohort could be determined in the summer after the school year as a simple indicator to evaluate school programs and policies, and to identify particular groups of students with nonpromotion rates that are especially high.

Course Failure Is a Sign that Students Are Generally Struggling in School

Students can be off-track just by failing one yearlong course (two semester courses). After writing the last report, we wondered about the extent to which students were thrown off-track by an aberrant course failure. We also wondered if course failure was as detrimental to graduation among students who were generally doing well in their other courses as it was for students who were struggling across all of their courses. To gain a better understanding of the variability in the course performance of on- and off-track students, and what that variability means for graduation, we examine on- and off-track performance by students' failures and their grades in the courses they passed.

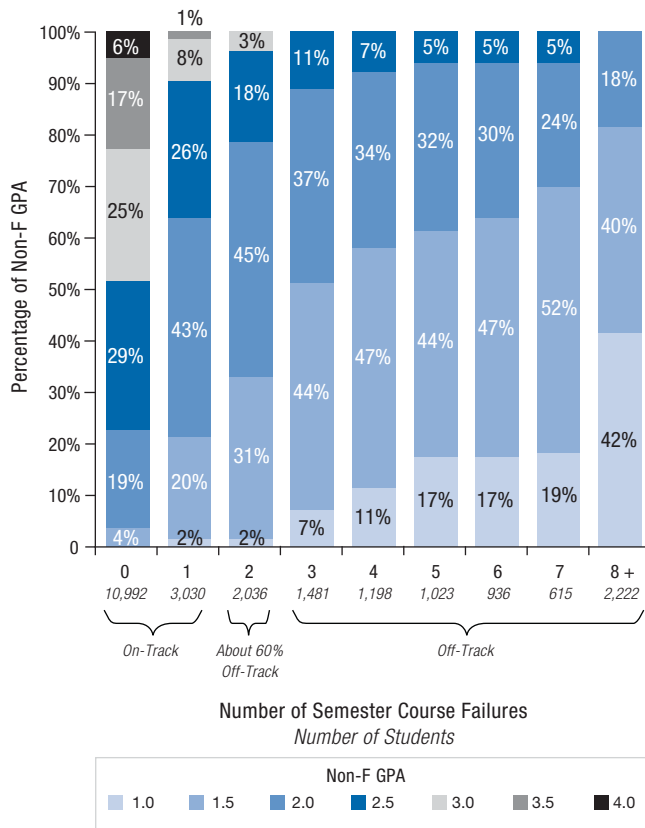
In general, off-track students are struggling in all of their courses. Figure 8 shows the distribution of GPAs in passed courses by the number of semester course failures. Even on-track students have relatively low GPAs. Among students with no failures, the typical GPA is about 2.5 (C+). Only half (48 percent) has a GPA of a B or higher; 23 percent are C or D+. Among students with only one semester F, who are also on-track by our definition, over 90 percent have a GPA lower than 3.0 (B average) in the courses that they pass. More than three-fourths of students who fail just one full-year course have grades averaging 2.0 or lower (C or lower) in the classes they pass. Almost all off-track students who fail two or more semester courses have GPAs of 2.0 or lower in the classes they pass. It is most typical for off-track students to have a GPA of 1.5 (D+ average) in the courses they pass.

Few students experience isolated problems and perform well in other coursework. Failure in even one semester course is generally a sign of trouble in other courses. This suggests that problems or successes in one class may generalize to other classes. For example, a student who skips one class may fail to show up to subsequent classes that day. Likewise, success in one class may lead a student to put forth more effort in other classes. Of course, performance in all courses will be affected by factors such as students' background and preparation, and by the overall instructional climate of the school.

The strong connection between grades overall and failures in a few classes has implications for how we think about high school reform strategies. *Instead of being isolated, problems with course failure tend to indicate broader problems of academic performance.* This suggests that strategies that address particular courses (e.g., math remediation or tutoring) might be limited in their ability to affect broader outcomes, compared to more comprehensive strategies (e.g., instructional coordination across classes or schoolwide attendance initiatives). This also suggests problems of course failures, dropping out, and low achievement should be addressed by coordinated strategies. These issues are discussed further as we explore the school factors associated with freshman-year course performance.

FIGURE 8

Grades in Passed Courses by Number of Course Failures



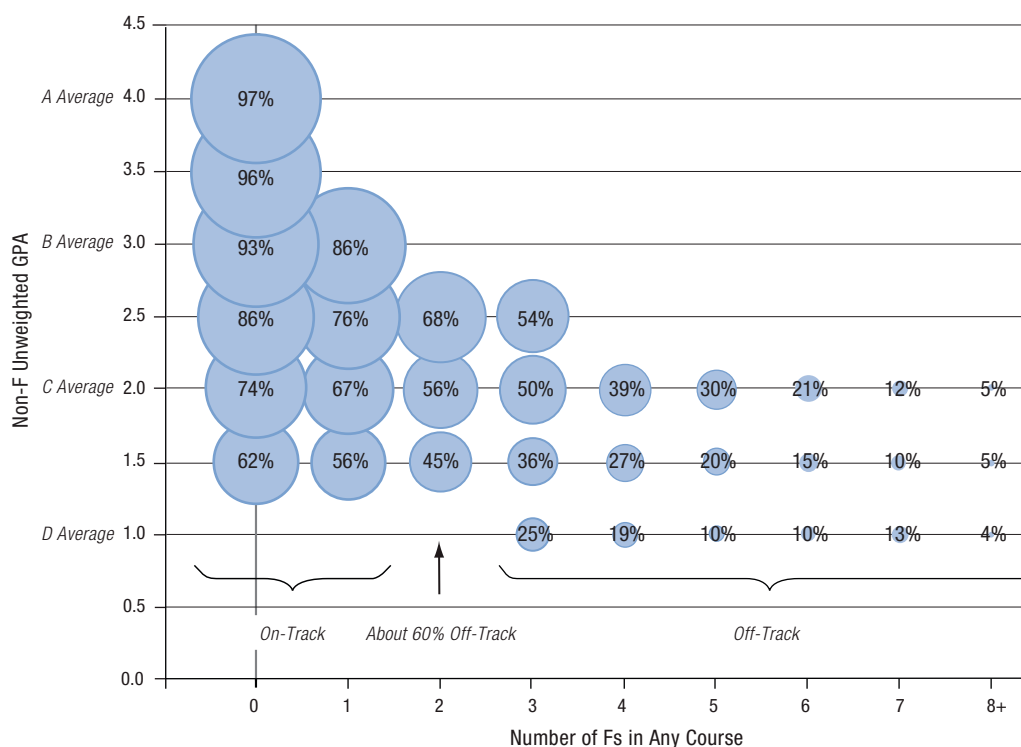
Overall Grades, as Well as Failures, Matter for Graduation

Course failures and overall GPA are strongly related. However, among students with the same number of Fs, higher grades in other courses increase the likelihood of graduation. Figure 9 shows graduation rates classified by the number of Fs and GPA in the courses that students passed. Each column represents students with the same number of freshman-year failures. Among students with the same number of failures, those who had higher grades in the courses they passed were much more likely to graduate. Even students with no failures in their first year of high school were at some risk of not graduating if they had a C average or lower. It is likely that poor grades in the freshman year foreshadow problems with course failure in later years. Students who just barely pass their freshman classes are likely to struggle as they move into their sophomore year.

Course grades predict the likelihood of graduating, but course failures have a direct effect on graduation beyond their relationship with students' overall grades. Ultimately, students need course credits to

FIGURE 9

Graduation Rates by number of Fs and GPA in Passed Courses



How to Read this Chart:

The size of the bubbles indicates the four-year graduation rate of students entering high school in the 2000-01 school year by their freshman year course failures and grades in the classes they passed. Students who passed all of their courses in their first year of high school are in the first column. Their graduation rates ranged from 62 percent among students with a 1.5 GPA to 97 percent for students with a 4.0. Among students who failed two semester classes their freshman year, graduation rates ranged from 45 percent among students who received a mix of Cs and Ds in the classes they passed (averaging 1.5 points) to 68 percent for students with all Cs in the classes they passed (2.0 average), up to 68 percent for students with a mix of Cs and Bs (2.5 average) in the courses they passed.

graduate; and failures have a direct effect on the probability of graduating. As shown in Figure 9, the probability of graduating declines quickly with each additional course failure.⁷ This can be seen more clearly in Figure 10, which shows graduation rates by freshman GPA for both on- and off-track students. All students with very low freshman GPAs are off-track (see far left of graph), and nearly all students with high GPAs are on-track (see far right of graph). But in the middle range, GPAs from 1.0 to 2.5 (D to C+), students can be either on- or off-track depending on how many Fs they have. For students in this middle range, about 60 percent of students, having failed more than one semester course has a strong impact on the likelihood of graduating. Among students with the same overall GPA, on-track students are about 9 percentage points more likely to graduate than off-track students with the same GPA. This occurs even though off-track students must have had higher grades in their passed courses than students with the same overall GPA who are on-track.

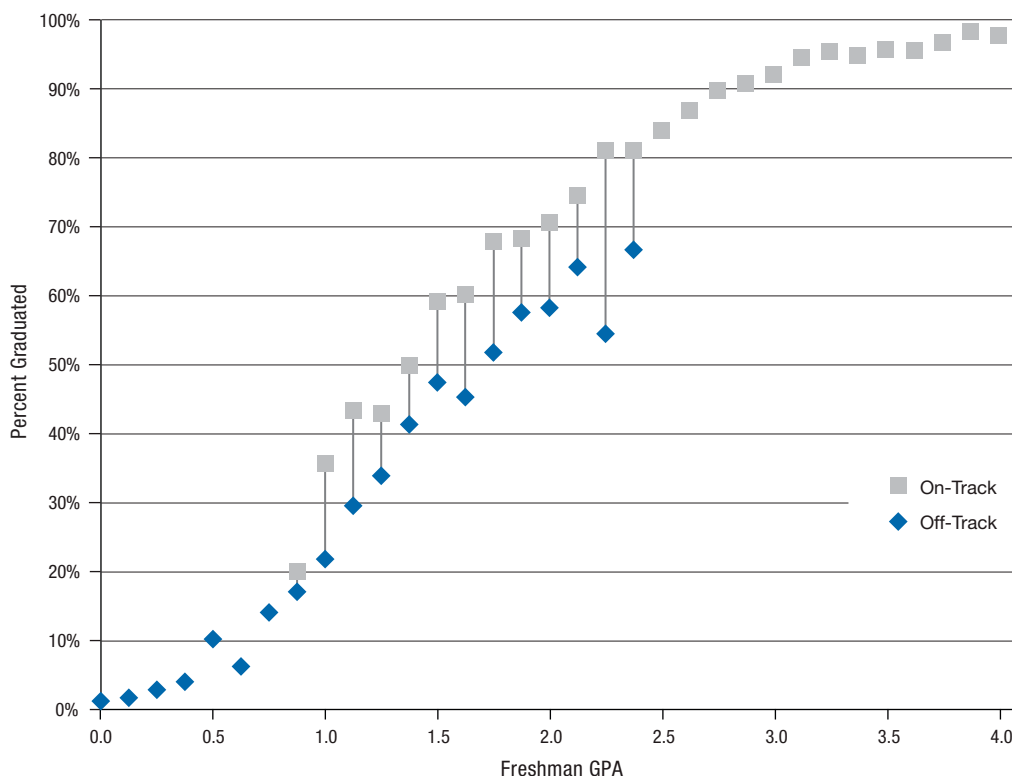
Intervention Efforts Are Needed for More Than Just the Lowest-Performing Students

Students with high rates of course failure are extremely unlikely to graduate. Those who fail four or more semester courses (i.e., two courses in each semester), or who hold lower than a D average, probably need very intensive assistance in order to graduate; and schools may be disappointed with the effects of programs that are not sufficiently comprehensive. On the other hand, students with GPAs in the D+ or C- range, or just one failure in the first semester (two semester failures for the year), are about as likely to graduate as not to graduate. Because students in this GPA range constitute a large percentage of students and they have a reasonable chance of graduating, efforts to support these students could have a substantial payoff for school graduation rates. However, because such students are not the lowest performers, these students may not be seen as in great need of support.

To gauge the degree to which graduation rates might be affected by a targeted effort to increase passing

FIGURE 10

Percentage of Students Who Graduated in Four Years by Freshman GPA and On-Track Status



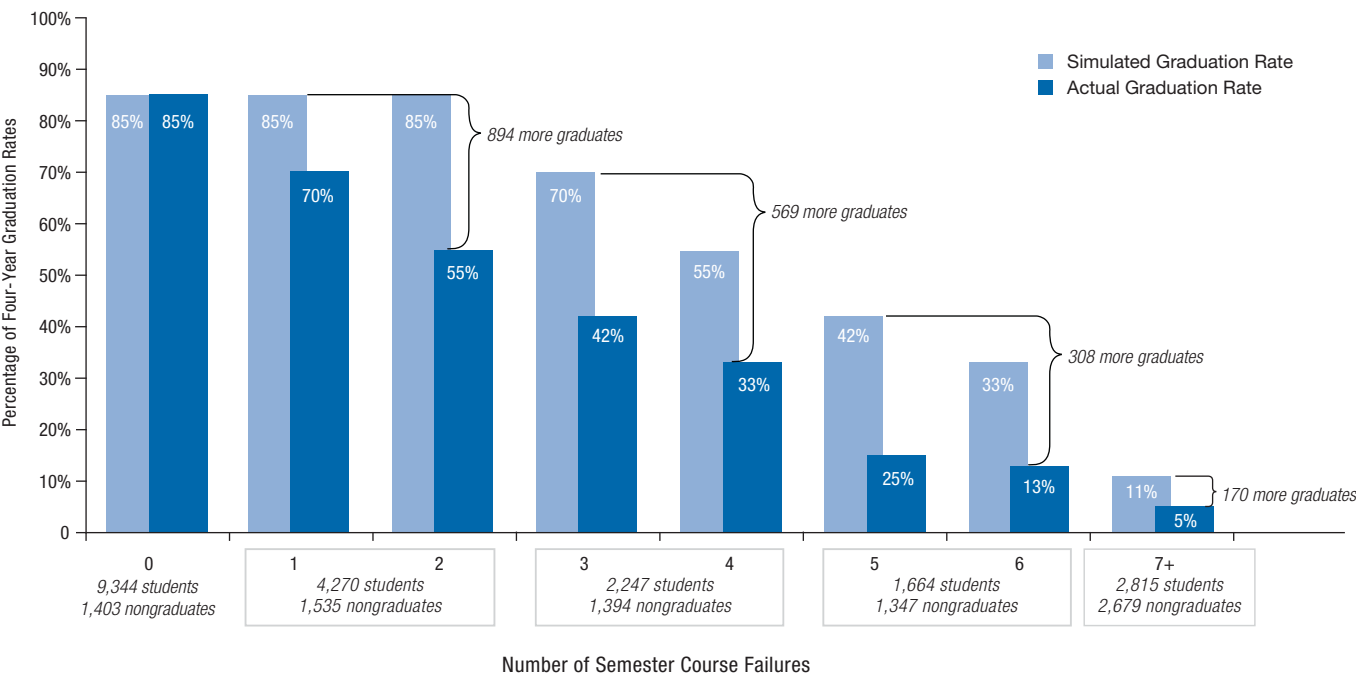
Almost all students with GPAs below 1.0 are off-track, while almost all students with GPAs above 2.5 are on-track. Students with GPAs of 1.0 to 2.5 may be either on- or off-track. The gray lines show the difference in graduation rates for students with the same GPAs by on-track status. Students who are off-track must have had higher grades in the courses they passed than on-track students with the same GPA, yet they are about 9 percentage points less likely to graduate.

rates, Figure 11 simulates the maximum improvements in graduation rates that could be expected if schools could find a way to get each student to pass two additional semester courses (one full-year course) in their freshman year. This could be considered a summer school recovery effect, since students can take a full-year course over the summer, or a potential effect of increasing academic supports in the school year. To estimate the effect, we simply assign each student the graduation rate observed among students who had two fewer failures than that student. This is an overestimation of potential graduation rates, because we do not consider other factors that are associated with failure that influence graduation. However, it allows us to gauge the relative effects of improvements in pass rates on different groups of students.

The bottom of Figure 11 shows that about half the students who entered CPS high schools in 2000–01 and failed to graduate four years later received multiple

Fs in their freshman year: 2,679 students who failed to graduate had seven or more semester Fs in their freshman year, and an additional 1,347 students who failed to graduate had five or six semester Fs. Thus, this may seem like a reasonable group to target for recovery efforts or tutoring. However, improving pass rates among these students by two semester courses would do little to affect overall graduation rates—their probability of graduating is so small that they would still be unlikely to graduate with an additional two course credits. We might expect as many as 170 additional graduates among students with seven or more semester failures (a 1 percentage point increase in the total graduation rate), and as many as 308 more graduates among students with five or six semester failures (a 2 percentage point increase in the total graduation rate). Students with many course failures will need more support than tutoring or summer school to have a reasonable chance of graduating—all of these students

FIGURE 11
Estimated Improvements in Systemwide Graduation Rates if Each Student Passed Two Additional Semester Courses*



*Graduation rates for students failing fewer than two courses are estimated as if they failed no courses. This simulation suggests the maximum degree to which graduation rates could be expected to improve if each student failed two fewer courses or recovered two courses immediately after failure. It is an overestimation because it does not take into account factors other than Fs that affect graduation (e.g., grades in passed courses tend to be lower among students with more Fs). However, it can be used to gauge the relative effects

of recovery or improvements in pass rates for students with different rates of failure. While students with multiple Fs comprise the majority of nongraduates, small improvements in pass rates or recovery among these students would have a much smaller effect on graduation rates than similar efforts among students who have failed only one or two courses. These figures are based on students in the 2000–01 freshman cohort.

How We Obtained Information on Students and Schools

The analyses in this report are based on two cohorts of students. The statistics that show freshman course performance without any reference to graduation rates or survey data are based on all freshmen who entered CPS high schools in fall 2004 who did not attend charter schools (24,894 students). Statistics that tie freshman course performance to graduation rates are based on all students who entered CPS high schools in fall 2000 who did not transfer out of CPS before September 2004 and who did not attend a charter school (20,803 students).^A Statistics that use survey data only include those students from the 2004–05 cohort who participated in the spring 2005 surveys (14,045 students) described below.

Data on students' course absences and grades come from semester-by-semester grade files provided by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Data on grades and absences are provided separately for each course taken by each student each semester. All CPS schools, except charter schools, provide this information. For this reason, charter school students cannot be included in any of the analyses in this report.

Data on students' background characteristics and school demographics come from student administrative records and test score files provided by CPS. Gender, race, and age are part of the administrative record files. Mobility, which is calculated from longitudinal administrative records on individual students, is measured as the number of times a student changed schools in the three years prior to high school. Eighth-grade achievement is measured with students' scores in the reading and math sections of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS).

Students' socioeconomic status is measured through two variables, which were constructed from the 2000 U.S. census data, regarding the economic conditions in students' residential block groups. The first, concentration of poverty, is constructed from information on the male unemployment rate and the percentage of families living below the poverty line. The second, social status, is constructed from

information about average income and education levels. These indicators allow for much more discrimination in socioeconomic background than the simple indicator of free/reduced lunch, for which about 90 percent of CPS students are eligible.

Measures of school climate come from surveys conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) in spring 2005. Nearly 130,000 students, teachers, and principals across the system participated. Our surveys ask about learning climate, teacher-student relationships, leadership, and quality of the school's instructional program. They also ask about the school's professional environment, and the nature of the school's relationships with parents and the community. From these surveys we create measures about features of each school.^B Students' perceptions of climate are constructed from responses of ninth- and tenth-grade students. Teachers' perceptions are constructed from responses of teachers at all grade levels.

Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to discern individual students' specific experiences on a class-by-class basis. For each measure, students either reported on just one of their courses (English or math) or on the school as a whole. We can aggregate the data from all students to create measures of climate across the school, and classroom climate across English and math classes in the school, but we cannot distinguish different patterns of experience within the school among different students. Still, these measures of the average climate in schools provide some evidence about what matters for course performance, although we would expect to find stronger relationships if we could map out different experiences within schools.

Sidebar Endnotes

A Students who left for involuntary reasons (incarceration, institutionalization, death) are excluded from analyses, along with those who transferred out of CPS.

B For more information on our surveys and on the psychometric properties of our measures, visit the CCSR Web site at ccsr.uchicago.edu.

need to pass *at least* four additional semester courses to be on-track, and many need much more. Modest efforts to support these students will not be sufficient to have a sizable impact on graduation rates.

On the other hand, summer school and tutoring that is targeted at students with small numbers of course failures could potentially have a sizable effect on graduation rates. If students who failed just one or two semester classes were to pass those classes instead

of failing them, we might expect as many as 894 additional graduates. If students who failed just three to four semester classes (up to two full-year classes) were to pass an additional two semester classes (one full-year class), we might expect an additional 569 more graduates. Together, this is a 7 percentage point increase in the overall graduation rate. It is also likely easier to improve pass rates among students with few Fs than among students with multiple failures.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

1 E.g., Balfanz and Neild (2006); Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey (1997).

2 In fact, 86 percent of nongraduates can be identified with freshman GPA by sacrificing specificity to 68 percent.

3 Rumberger (2004a); and Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2001).

4 Ninety-five percent of these students graduated within four years, and only 3 percent dropped out. The remaining 2 percent remained for a fifth year of high school.

5 Besides preventing credit accumulation, failure may also impede graduation through indirect mechanisms. For example, failure may demoralize students and lower their expectations. Failure may also

disrupt students' schedules when they need to repeat a failed class.

Often students progress to classes that build on knowledge that should have been learned previously, thus a failure can indicate that a student is unlikely to succeed in a future class. For example, most CPS students who fail algebra in their freshman year take geometry in their sophomore year before passing algebra.

6 Most students take seven courses in their first year of high school.

7 Each additional course failure decreases the probability of graduating by about the same amount as a decrease of half of a grade point across all classes.

Chapter 2

What Matters for Grades and Failure in the Freshman Year: Student Backgrounds and Behaviors

Why do some students make a successful transition to high school while others fail? Is freshman course performance mostly a result of students' backgrounds and preparation in elementary school? Is performance influenced by where students go to school or by factors that are in the control of teachers and school professionals? In this chapter, we begin to address these questions by examining the student factors associated with course absences, failures, and grades. In a subsequent chapter, we bring in the characteristics of schools.

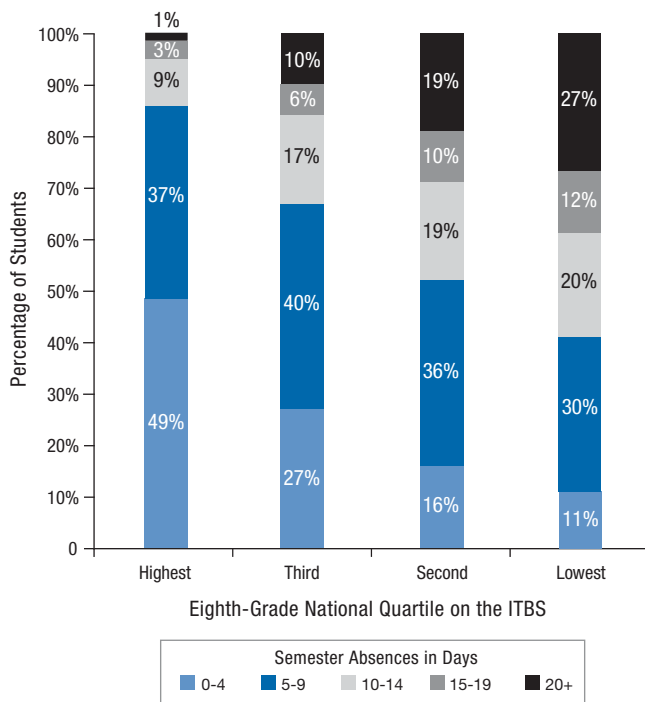
Attendance Is Crucial for Passing Classes; Prior Academic Preparation Is Also Important for High Grades

There are two obvious and interrelated reasons why students may not do well in their courses—either they are not prepared for the academic work required by their high school courses or they are not coming to class and expending sufficient effort to do the requisite work. If the first is the main reason for course failures, it indicates that we need greater focus on preparing students in elementary schools for the academic demands of high school. If the second is the larger contributor to failure, then the problem results from students' behavior in high school and may be influenced by high school conditions. Some behavioral issues also may be addressed with more attention to attendance in elementary schools and better development of extra-academic skills, such as

abilities to communicate well, work with others, develop leadership, improve group behaviors, and resolve conflicts. But behavioral issues suggest a need for critically examining high school culture and organization to identify ways that will encourage student participation and engagement. For simplicity, we begin by comparing academic preparation as measured by test scores with student effort as measured by attendance. In subsequent analyses, we also include students' reports of studying behavior as a measure of effort.

Before comparing their relationships with course failure, it is important to note that elementary test scores and high school attendance rates are strongly related to each other. Students with high achievement in elementary school are less likely to have high rates of course absence than those entering with low achievement, as shown in Figure 12. While almost half the students with the highest elementary achievement miss less than one week of high school classes per semester, only 11 percent of students entering with low achievement miss less than one week. More than a quarter of students with very low achievement in elementary school miss one month or more of classes per semester.

FIGURE 12
Absences by Incoming Achievement



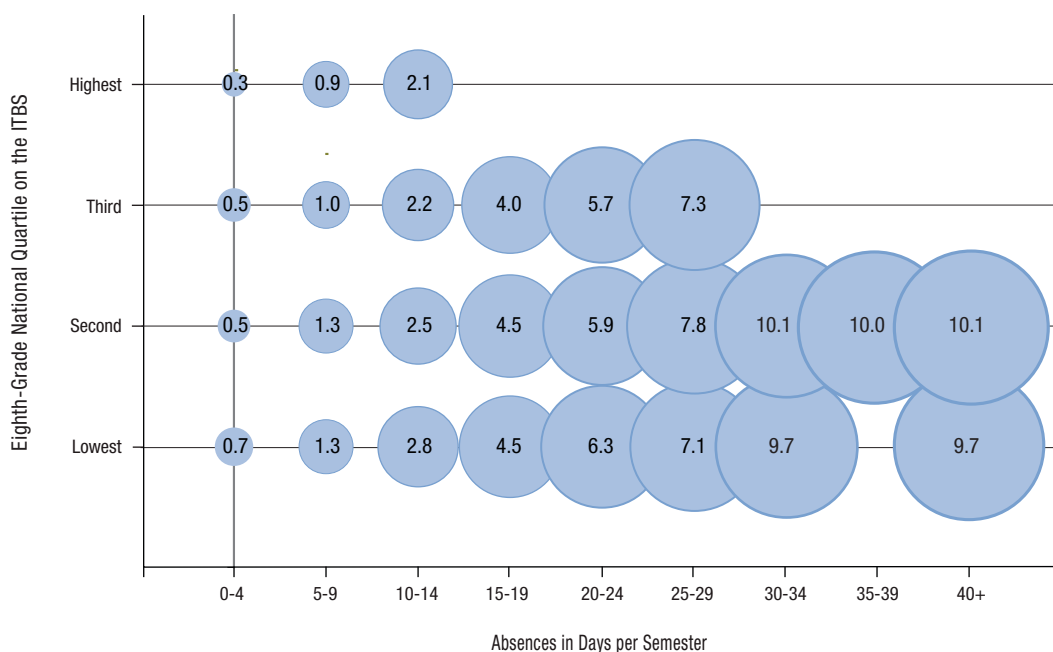
This relationship is not surprising; for some of these students, low achievement in elementary school probably resulted from high absence rates in elementary school. Also, there is likely a reciprocal relationship between achievement and absences, so that students who do not feel successful in their classes have less motivation to come to school. Still, given their low achievement, these are the students who most need to come to school, and they tend to attend the least often.

But it is not just students who enter high school with low achievement who are frequently absent. Attendance is a problem even among many high-achieving students. About half of the highest-achieving students—those entering high school with test scores in the top quartile nationally—missed more than one week of classes per semester, and almost three-fourths of students scoring in the third quartile (i.e., above national norms) missed more than one week per semester. Just one week of absence per semester indicates problems with students' grades.

Most people consider eighth-grade test scores to be good predictors of students' likelihood to do well in high school courses, and they are. However, course attendance is *eight times* more predictive of course failure in the freshman year than eighth-grade test scores; freshman absences can be used to predict 63 percent of the variation in course failures among freshmen in the 2004–05 entering class, while together math and reading eighth-grade ITBS scores predict only 8 percent of the variation in course failures. As shown in Figure 13, students who entered high school with very low eighth-grade achievement (with test scores that placed them in the bottom national quartile) who missed less than one week of classes per semester had fewer Fs, on average, than students entering high school with very high achievement (test scores in the top national quartile) who missed *one additional week* of classes (0.7 semester course failures, compared to 0.9). Likewise, students with the lowest eighth-grade test scores who missed just one week of classes averaged fewer Fs than students with the highest test scores who missed two weeks (1.3, compared to 2.1). As shown in Figure 13, students' failure rates increase dramatically with more course absences (across the horizontal axis), but rise only modestly as eighth-grade achievement

FIGURE 13

Average Number of Fs by Absences and Eighth-Grade Test Scores



This figure only includes students still enrolled in school at the end of their freshman year. Only cells with at least 5 percent of students are included.

How to read this chart: The size of the circles indicates the extent of course failures. Students in the top row of the figure entered high school with the highest level of achievement, with test scores in the top national quartile. Very few of these students missed more than three weeks of school per semester, so there are no circles in columns that represent more than three weeks of course absences. However, students with high test scores who missed two weeks of classes in a semester averaged about two semester

course failures in a year. High-achieving students who missed one week of classes per semester averaged one semester failure. Note that failure rates increase dramatically with greater absence (moving to the right along the horizontal axis). For example, failure rates are lower among students entering high school with the lowest test scores (in the bottom quartile) who missed less than a week of school than among students with the highest test scores (in the top quartile) who missed one week of school.

decreases (across the vertical axis). Among students with very high absence rates, incoming achievement is not at all predictive of failures. Just one week of absence is associated with a much greater likelihood of failure, regardless of incoming achievement.

There are likely a number of reasons that absences and failures are so strongly related. Obviously, attending class is a requirement for obtaining course credit and necessary for learning course material. In addition teachers' grading practices may incorporate absences or be affected by them. For example, teachers may reward good attendance through more lenient grading, while being especially strict in the grading of students who seem to be making less of an effort and are missing class. In addition, students who are performing poorly may least want to attend class. In many cases, there may be a downward spiral; missing class leads

to poor performance, and poor performance leads students to avoid class. Research on dropping out has characterized the process as a gradual disengagement, where students miss more and more school, making it increasingly difficult to return.¹ Absences and failures may also be related for spurious reasons; for example, a poorly organized class may provide little motivation for student attendance and may also provide little support for learning. We are not saying that the relationship is completely causal, with absences determining course failures. But it does make sense that grades suffer if students are not in class to learn. The overwhelming strength of this relationship does suggest that failures are largely determined by course absence.

Among students with low absence rates, incoming achievement also predicts course failure. Students who entered high school with eighth-grade achievement

How We Measured Students' Studying Behaviors

We created a measure of students' studying behaviors from four items on the CCSR survey of ninth- and tenth-graders, listed below. Together, the items formed a scale with a reliability of $\alpha=0.76$. On average, 71 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they set aside time to do homework

and study; 85 percent said they tried to do well on schoolwork even when it isn't interesting; 51 percent said they don't go out with friends if they need to study; while 44 percent said that they always study for tests.^A

How Much Do You Agree with the Following:

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
• I set aside time to do my homework and study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I try to do well on my schoolwork even when it isn't interesting to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• If I need to study, I don't go out with my friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I always study for tests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sidebar Endnotes

A Another item that asked about the number of hours spent studying was initially included in the measure. However, it did not fit with the other items and lowered the reliability. We were concerned about including it in the measure because the number of hours that students studied was confounded with the degree

to which they needed to study. While more time studying was associated with better outcomes when examined on its own, it was associated with worse outcomes once we controlled for other study habits. Thus, we chose not to include it as a control variable because it might be affected by the outcomes being studied.

in the bottom national quartile but missed less than one week of high school per semester were more than twice as likely to fail a course as students with similar absence rates but elementary achievement in the top national quartile (averaging 0.7 failures compared to 0.3 failures). Thus, academic preparation does matter, but students' behaviors in high school are more important.

Course attendance is also highly predictive of getting higher grades, not just avoiding failures. As with course failures, attendance is the strongest predictor of overall grades and of grades other than failures.² In fact, more than half of the students who miss less than one week of school per semester have a GPA of 3.0 (B average) or higher at the end of their first year, three-fourths have at least a 2.5 GPA, and 90 percent have at least a 2.0 GPA.³ In other words, almost all students who have good attendance also have average or higher grades. However, while course failure is overwhelmingly associated with course attendance,

academic preparation remains very important for getting higher grades. Without controlling for other student characteristics or behaviors, 17 percent of the student-to-student variability in GPAs can be explained by incoming test scores, while incoming test scores are associated with just 8 percent of the variability in course failures.

Looking beyond attendance, another measure of effort—students' self-reported study behaviors—is also predictive of freshman-year failures, and is particularly predictive of overall grades. Students who report high rates of studying earn GPAs that are 0.24 points higher, on average, than students who report low rates of studying, controlling for other background characteristics, including eighth-grade achievement and high school attendance.⁴ Students who report high rates of studying also fail about 0.4 fewer courses than students with similar test scores and attendance who study little.⁵

Course Grades Are Lower Among Boys and Nonwhite Students Than We Would Expect, Based on Their Behaviors and Academic Backgrounds

A number of student demographic characteristics are associated with course failure rates and GPA, such as race, gender, number of school moves prior to high school, economic status, and age at entry into high school. For example, boys, highly mobile students, and students entering older than age 14 are more likely to fail courses than other students. However, many of these relationships exist because students with these characteristics are more likely to have low elementary achievement, high absence rates, or both. Once we account for incoming achievement and course absences, the relationships of economic status, mobility, and age with GPA and failure largely disappear. (Tables 8 and 10 in Appendix D provide details on the relationships of these background variables using statistical models.

Gender and race, however, are still related to course failure and GPA, after controlling for incoming achievement and attendance. Gender is particularly predictive of failures and grades, with relationships that are similar in magnitude to those of incoming test scores. Without considering absence rates, boys receive one semester course failure more, on average, than girls in the same high school who have similar backgrounds and eighth-grade achievement. Boys' GPAs are also 0.4 points lower.⁶ These differences are only partially explained by gender differences in attendance or studying. Boys and girls differ only slightly in their attendance and study rates, so when we control for these factors the gender difference in GPA declines by only 21 percent, and the difference in failure rates declines by only one-third. Given what we know about students' backgrounds and behaviors in high school, we still cannot explain the large gender gaps in GPAs and failure rates. The sidebar "Gender Differences in Course Performance" at the end of this chapter provides further details.

There are few differences in grades by race/ethnicity among students with similar academic and economic backgrounds unless we control for attendance and studying behaviors. Among students with similar academic and socioeconomic backgrounds, African-American

students' GPAs are 0.2 points lower than the GPAs of white students, Latino students' GPAs are 0.1 points lower than whites, and Asian students' GPAs are 0.35 points higher than whites, on average. The only significant racial/ethnic difference in failure rates is that Asian students have 0.6 fewer semester course failures than other students, on average. Once we adjust for differences in absences and studying behaviors, however, racial/ethnic differences in grades and failure *increase*. When we compare students with similar absence and studying rates, nonwhite students, including Asian students, average about 0.4 more course failures than similar white students. Likewise, differences in GPAs between white students and both African-American and Latino students grow larger once we take attendance and studying into account. Only the difference in grades between Asian and other students is mostly explained—this difference shrinks by over two-thirds once we take into account attendance and studying. Academic behaviors explain the better performance of Asian students, but the lower GPAs of African-American and Latino students cannot be attributed to worse attendance and less studying. African-American and Latino ninth-grade students are getting lower grades than white students who have the same eighth-grade test scores, high school attendance, and study behaviors.

Students' Background Characteristics Prior to High School Are Much Less Important in Explaining Failures Than Are Their Behaviors in High School

While a number of background characteristics predict freshman-year failure, the relationships are minute compared to those of attendance with failure. Students' background characteristics explain 7 percent of the differences in failure rates among students, and test scores explain an additional 5 percent (12 percent total), but absences and studying explain an additional 61 percent beyond test scores and demographic characteristics (73 percent total). See Appendix D for details.⁷ Students' experiences and behavior while in high school are of utmost importance for passing courses; the focus of efforts to address failure should be on students' behaviors while in high school.⁸

Students' demographic characteristics and their previous test scores explain more of the variation in students' grades than in failure rates—31 percent. Absences and self-reported study behaviors are slightly more important, explaining an additional 34 percent of the variation in grades beyond test scores and demographic characteristics (64 percent total).⁹ There seems to be a hierarchy: attendance is the most crucial factor for passing classes; however, to get high grades students need good attendance, effort, and good preparation. The extremely strong relationship that attendance holds with grades and failures suggests that we need to understand the factors behind course absences if we are going to improve students' grades and pass rates.

Student Background Characteristics Largely Do Not Explain Differences in Absence Rates Among Students

Course absences are a serious problem in CPS, and these high absence rates underlie many of the problems with course failure and low GPAs. Attendance is affected by many factors that exist outside the high school, such as health, family stability, and students' experiences in elementary school. CPS predominantly serves low-income students who often experience more health problems than higher-income students, which interferes with attendance.¹⁰ Yet, we can explain only a small amount of the differences across students' freshman year absence rates by their personal demographic and economic characteristics.

Background characteristics that have some association with absences include students' race, gender, poverty level, mobility in elementary school, eighth-grade test scores, and age at entry to high school. The strongest relationships are with eighth-grade test scores, elementary school mobility, and age at entry to high school.¹¹ As shown in the earlier chapter, students entering with high achievement are least likely to be absent more than two weeks per semester, while almost half the students entering high school with very low achievement are absent this often. Keeping constant other background characteristics (e.g., age, race, and gender), students with very low achievement before high school average five more days of absence per

semester in their freshman year than students with very high achievement.¹² This suggests that we should incorporate attendance strategies as part of ninth-grade transition programs for low-achieving students.

Not surprisingly, highly mobile elementary school students also are likely to have more absences in high school, as are students who entered high school after age 14. For example, students who changed schools three or more times in their last three years of elementary school average six more days of absence per semester in high school than students with stable enrollment. These students are likely experiencing family and residential instability that affects their attendance. Students who began high school older than age 14 are absent 5 days more, on average, than students who entered at age 14 or younger, controlling for their test scores. Most students entering high school older than age 14 have been held back in grade at some point. Students entering high school who are old for their grade may be more likely to have a history of absence.¹³ In addition, there is evidence that grade retention makes students more likely to withdraw from school, and so retention itself may bring on higher absence rates.¹⁴

Once elementary test scores, elementary mobility, and age on entering high school are taken into account, there are only very modest differences in absence rates by gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Controlling for other background characteristics, boys average just one more day of absence than girls. Asian students are absent three fewer days, on average, than African-American and white students with similar elementary test scores, mobility, and age. Latino students are absent about one fewer day than similar African-American and white students. Likewise, poverty shows only a small relationship with absence (once test scores, mobility, and age are controlled), with students from high-poverty neighborhoods absent 1.5 days more, on average, than students from low-poverty neighborhoods.¹⁵ Even though they are significantly related to absence, all these individual student characteristics together explain less than one-fifth of the total variation in absence rates.¹⁶ For the most part, demographic and academic background characteristics do not explain the large differences in absence rates among students.

Gender Differences in Course Performance

The gender gap is one of the most pressing and least understood problems in high school reform today. It is a relatively new phenomenon, as graduation rates of girls nationwide did not surpass those of males until the early 1980s (CPS, 2000). Nationally, 65 percent of male students graduate, compared to 72 percent of female students.^A In CPS, only 39 percent of African-American boys and 51 percent of Latino boys graduate,^B and those boys who graduate tend to have very low GPAs.^C Among CPS freshmen, boys are more likely than girls to have very low GPAs, and they are much less likely to have high GPAs (see Figure 14). Only 5 percent of first-time freshman boys in CPS had GPAs of 3.5 or higher in the 2005–06 school year, while almost 30 percent had GPAs of 1.0 or lower.

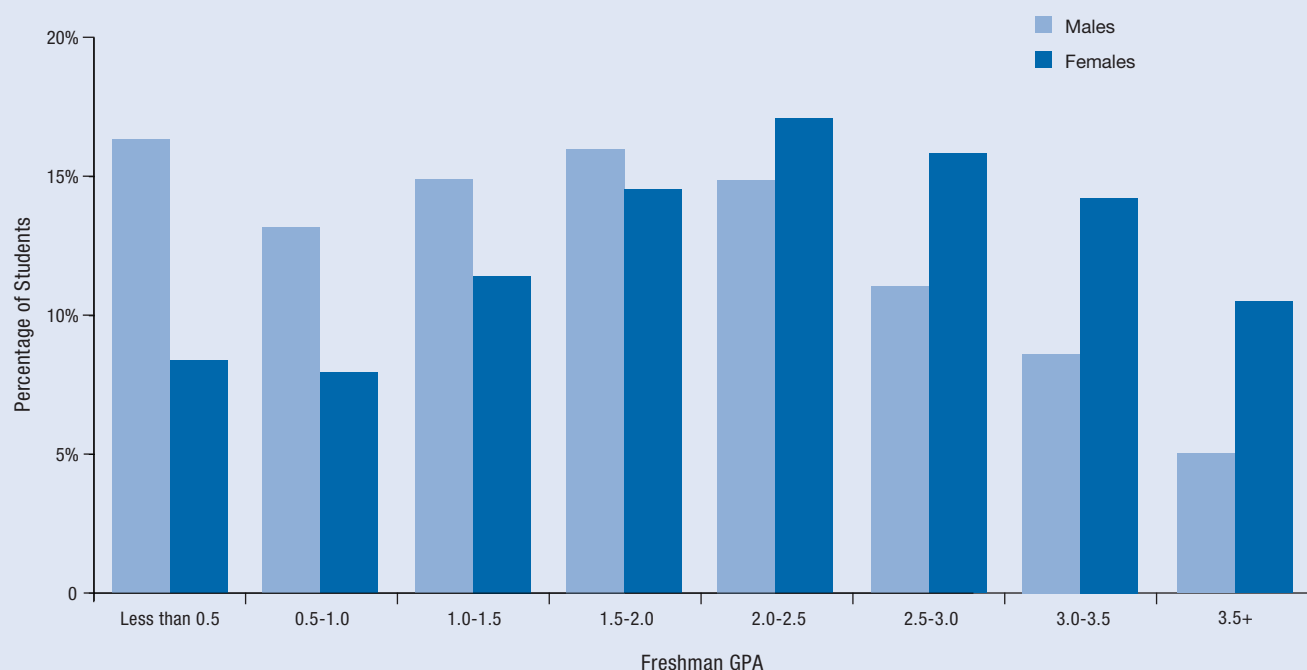
While there is growing research identifying the gender gap, there is little that helps to explain it. There is some research suggesting that behaviors such as self-discipline may underlie part of the gender gap.^D In Chicago, it is true that boys have somewhat

higher absence rates than girls and report slightly lower rates of studying.^E However, these differences explain only one-third of the differences in grades between girls and boys in CPS. Among students who attend the same high school and have the same attendance, study habits, and eighth-grade test scores, boys' GPAs are 0.3 points lower on average than girls', and their failure rates are higher by 0.6 Fs.^F Other research has shown that students tend to perform better when their teachers are the same gender, suggesting that the over-representation of female teachers may underlie some of the differences.^G However, the performance differences that can be attributed to teacher-student match are quite modest. These teacher-gender effects do very little to explain the sizable gaps in performance, although they do lead us to wonder what it is about same-gender teachers that may facilitate learning (e.g., better understanding of behavioral cues).

In the popular press, a number of potential explanations have been posed for the gender gap,

FIGURE 14

Distribution of Freshman GPAs by Gender for Students Entering CPS High Schools in 2005-06



including biological differences, inappropriate behavioral expectations for boys, and curricula that are too focused on topics of interest to girls.^H In addition, cultural expectations have been proposed to explain the particularly low graduation rates of minority males.^I However, there is little data to support these explanations, and several do not hold up when we examine Chicago data. Concerns about the curricula tend to point to English classes as less appealing to boys; yet in Chicago, the gender gap is not markedly different across subjects (see Figure 15). Cultural explanations seem unlikely, given that the gender gap is not confined to specific racial/ethnic groups but exists across all racial/ethnic breakdowns.^J

To try to better understand what might underlie the gender gap in CPS, we looked to see whether there were differences in the size of the gender gap across high schools and whether these differences were related to the climate in the school. In all CPS high schools, boys perform more poorly in their classes, on average, than girls; but there are differences across schools in the size of the gender

gap.^K Schools that attract high-achieving students have smaller gender gaps in course failures, but this is because course failures are less common in these schools. There are equally large gender gaps in GPAs, regardless of the academic or economic composition of the school. *However, differences in failure rates by gender are smaller in schools where more students report strong student-teacher trust, personal support from teachers, schoolwide press to prepare for the future, and peer support for academic achievement.*^L Each of these factors is also related to lower schoolwide failure rates, but they may be particularly crucial for boys at risk of failure. Only one measure of school climate is associated with a smaller gender gap in overall GPA: the degree to which teachers report individualizing instruction.^M Boys' GPAs are not as far behind girls' GPAs in schools in which more teachers reported adjusting their pacing and strategies in response to students' understanding.

These relationships are highly suggestive that classroom conditions play a role in the gender gap. They suggest to us that boys at risk of failure may be particularly sensitive to the degree to which teachers reach out to provide academic support and tailor instruction. In addition, there are systematic ways in which boys view the climate in their school differently than girls. Boys tend to report much lower levels of teacher personal support than girls, as well as peer support, for academics (see Figure 16). The difference in boys' perceptions of their peers' support for academics may indicate different norms of academic behavior for boys—differences that may be read by teachers as lower levels of engagement or interest. While purely speculative at this point, we could imagine that boys might have greater difficulty approaching teachers when they are having problems, particularly if they feel that their peers would not be supportive of help-seeking behavior. The substantial difference in boys' and girls' reports of personal support from teachers likewise suggests that boys are receiving less academic support from teachers than they feel that they need.

FIGURE 15

Gender Differences in Course Performance by Subject

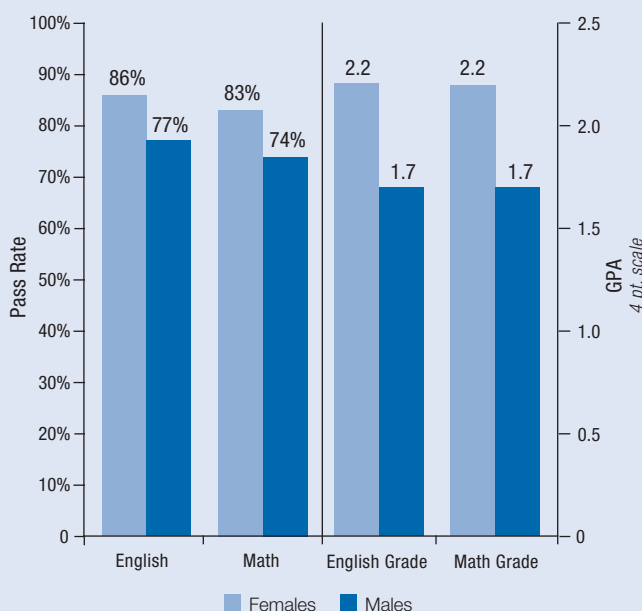
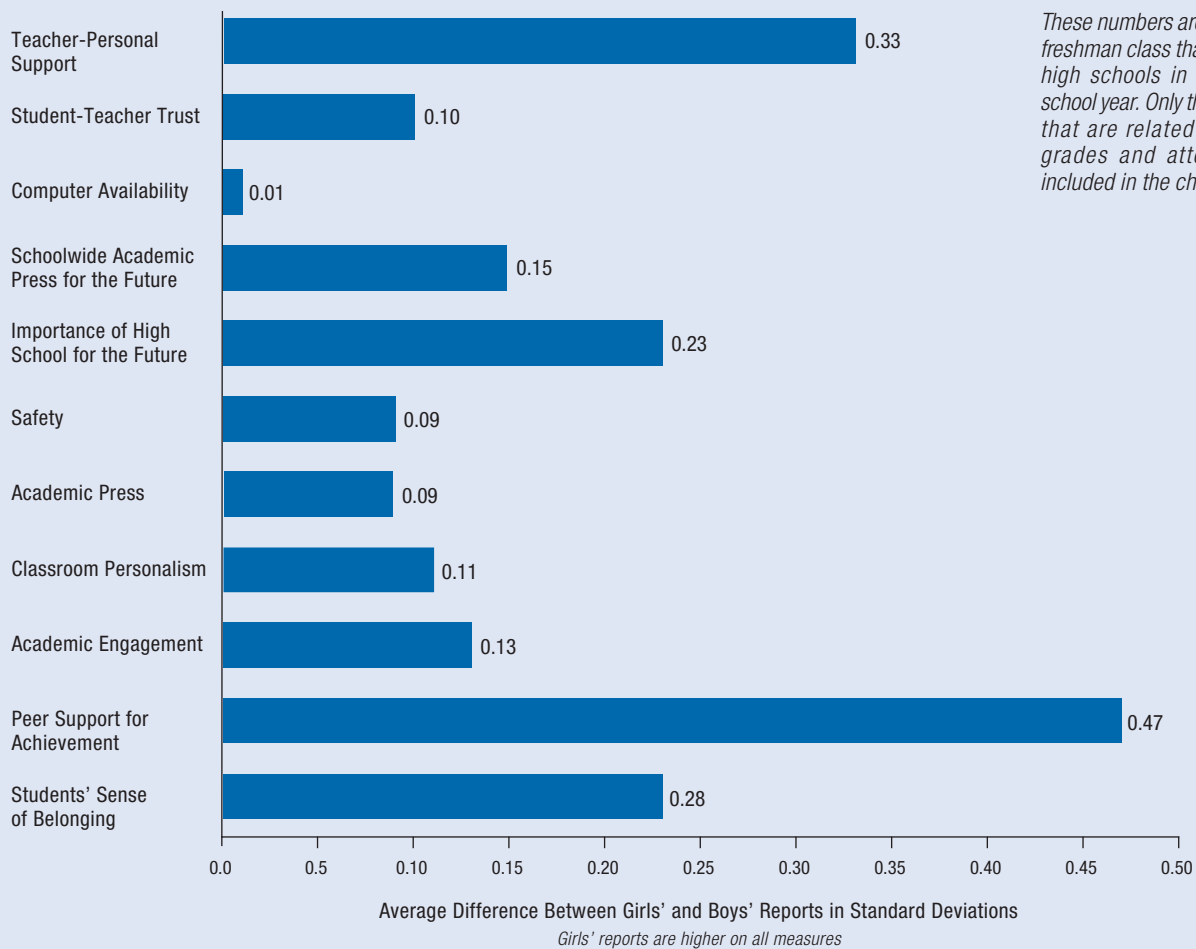


FIGURE 16

Differences Between Girls' and Boys' Reports of School Climate



Sidebar Endnotes

A Greene and Winters (2006).

B Allensworth (2005).

C Roderick, Nagaoka, and Allensworth (2006).

D Duckworth and Seligman (2006).

E Boys are absent 1.3 more days than girls, on average, in their first year of high school. Forty-eight percent of first-year freshman boys report studying or doing homework for less than two hours per week, compared to 44 percent of girls; 7 percent of boys report spending ten or more hours per week on studying/homework, compared to 9 percent of girls.

F These differences can be seen in Table 8 (Fs) and Table 10 (GPA) in Appendix D.

G Dee (2005).

H Brooks (2006); Leving and Sacks (2006); and Tyre (2006).

I Patterson (2006).

J National data reported by Greene and Winters (2006) show that the gender gap in graduation rates is largest among minority students. However, these comparisons are based on percentage point differences rather than ratios. If comparisons are made in terms of the ratio of male to female nongraduates, the differences between racial/ethnic

groups in the gender gap become minimal. Using Greene and Winters' figures, across all ethnic groups but Asians, the percentage of nongraduates is about 25 percent higher among males than among females (among Asians the male rate is 11 percent higher). In CPS, the percentage of nongraduates is about 30 percent higher among males than among females across all racial/ethnic groups but Asians (where the rate is 64 percent higher).

K Gender gaps were studied through two-level hierarchical linear models with variables for student backgrounds and elementary achievement entered at level 1, similar to those shown in Appendix C. However, these models allowed the gender coefficient to vary by school.

L Residuals of the gender gap coefficient from the models predicting course failures were correlated with measures of school climate at the following levels: school-level academic press for the future (-0.35), student-teacher trust (-0.35), teacher concrete support (-0.28), and peer academic support (-0.27).

M Teacher individualization of instruction was correlated with the GPA gender gap coefficient at $r=0.22$.

Chapter 2 Endnotes

- 1 Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2001); Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006).
- 2 The analyses presented here use students' overall GPA. The same analyses were performed using students' GPA in their passed courses, but the results were similar and so overall GPA is presented here for simplicity.
- 3 These statistics remain constant across different cohorts of first-time freshman, including those who started high school in fall 2000 and those who started fall 2004.
- 4 This is a difference of two standard deviations (see Table 10 in Appendix D).
- 5 This is a difference of two standard deviations (see Table 8 in Appendix D).
- 6 These numbers control for eighth-grade test scores, poverty in students' neighborhoods, socioeconomic status of students' neighborhoods, mobility in elementary school, age at entry to high school, and two school characteristics: academic and socioeconomic composition of the student body.
- 7 These figures are out of the total variance (at both the individual and school levels).
- 8 There are likely unmeasured factors that affect students' course attendance in high school, unrelated to their school experiences, such as family instability. However, it is also likely that these factors would be highly correlated with students' background characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, mobility, age, and elementary school test scores, and thus also controlled to some extent in the models.
- 9 The strong relationship between grades and absence is not simply an artifact of the very lowest-achieving students having extremely high absence rates. The relationship remains about as strong as if we predict nonfailing grades, or if we use a transformed version of absence that reduces the influence of extreme cases.
- 10 Newacheck et al. (1998); and Starfield (1982).
- 11 See Table 6 in Appendix D for details.
- 12 High and low achievement is defined as one standard deviation above and below the mean.
- 13 Students who are held back in grade tend to have higher rates of absence pre-retention than students not held back (Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber, 2003). This could be due to the relationship between absence and achievement, and also because teachers may use attendance as one criterion for promotion, along with achievement.
- 14 E.g., Grissom, and Shepard (1989); Roderick (1994); Allensworth (2005).
- 15 This is the difference in average absence rates between students whose neighborhood poverty level is one standard deviation below average, and those one standard deviation above average. These figures are calculated from a nested model that accounts for differences across schools—see Table 6 in Appendix D.
- 16 See Table 6 and Table 7 in Appendix D for details on the statistical models relating background characteristics to course attendance.

Chapter 3

What Matters for Grades, Failure, and Attendance: School Practices

Grades and course failures are strongly tied to student behaviors in high school, particularly course attendance. Only a small portion of students' attendance patterns can be explained by their background characteristics prior to high school. Given this, what other factors are related to attendance? One answer is in students' experiences in high school.

In this chapter, we look for differences among schools in students' attendance, grades, and course failures that cannot be explained by the characteristics that students bring with them prior to high school. We begin by looking simply at the degree to which there is variation in attendance and grades among students with similar backgrounds at different schools. Following this, we show that particular school practices and climates are related to better outcomes among schools that serve similar types of students. This analysis is limited to looking at effects averaged across classrooms and students within each school. We know that individual students' experiences vary widely within schools, and there is substantially more variation in attendance rates and course grades among students within the same school than there is across schools. However, our measurement system does not allow us to look more closely than the school level.¹ This work provides initial evidence that school climate and practices matter.

Course Attendance Varies Substantially Across Schools That Serve Similar Types of Students

There is substantial variation from one school to another in attendance rates, even when we compare students with similar eighth-grade achievement and background characteristics. After removing differences in absence rates that can be explained by students' backgrounds and prior achievement, absence rates vary across schools by about 6.5 days per semester. When we confine the comparison to schools serving similar types of students, absence rates vary by about 4.4 days per semester.² This is about a week of absence per semester (almost two weeks per year) that cannot be accounted for by students' backgrounds or the composition of students in their school.

Of course, student absence is caused by illness, doctor appointments, personal or family problems, extended vacations, weather, transportation difficulties, or the need to work. Our evidence, however, suggests that the need to work is not a primary cause of absence, and that schools can influence the degree to which students miss class. Only 10 percent of first-year CPS freshmen work more than ten hours per week, and work may indeed interfere with the attendance of these students.³ But for the 69 percent of students who do not work at all and the 21 percent who work less than ten hours per week, work is not contributing to absence. Likewise, if sickness, personal/family issues, or transportation problems were alone responsible for student absence, we would expect absence rates to be similar across the school year. However, our data show that freshman attendance, which is bad enough in fall semester, is even worse in spring semester. In some schools freshmen miss an additional week or more of classes in spring semester than they do in fall semester, while in other schools absence rates are similar in both terms; this suggests that school effects are driving absence, along with personal reasons. There are also substantial differences in absence rates across schools, suggesting school effects on attendance.

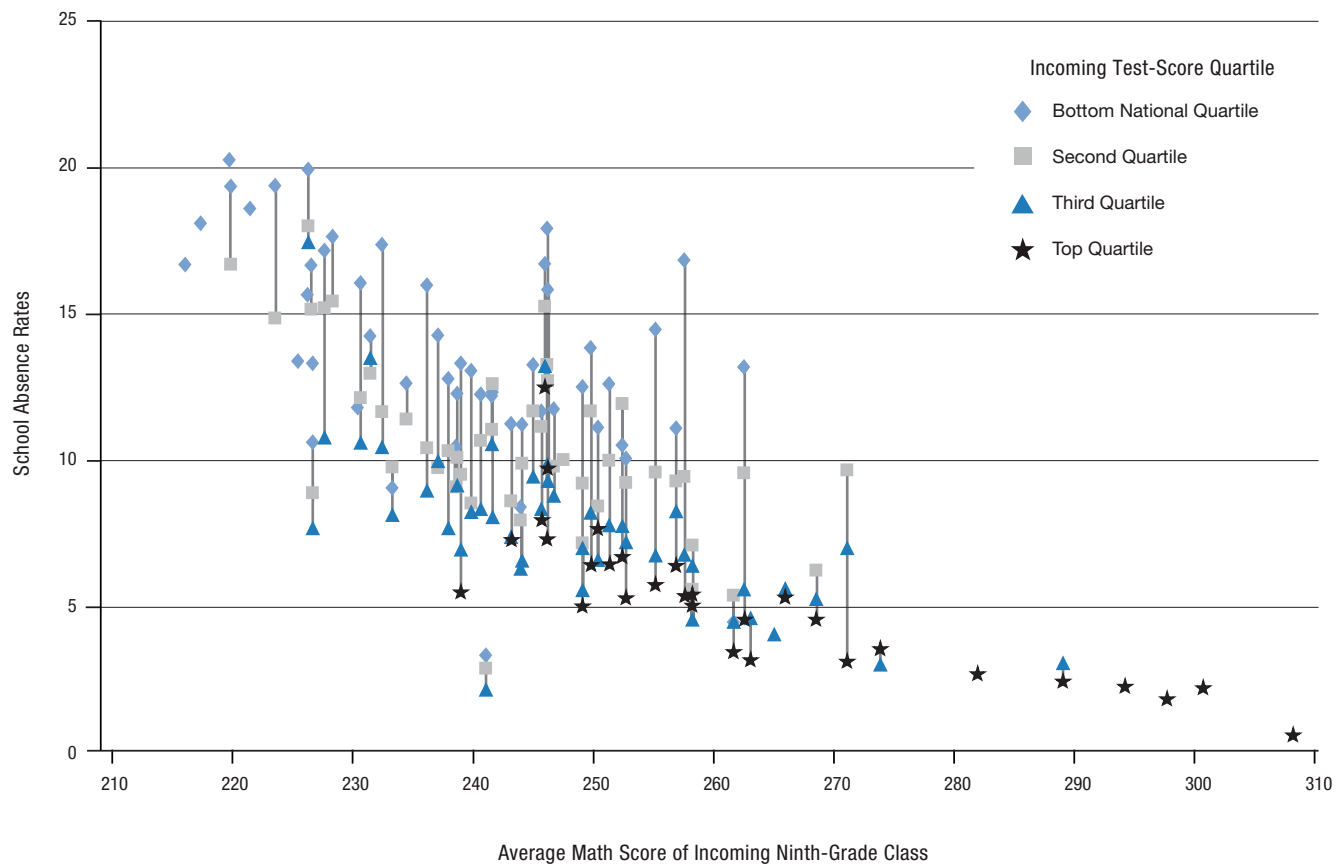
Figure 17 shows the wide variation in absence rates across schools for students with similar incoming achievement, with details provided in Table 2 (see

Appendix A). One trend that is striking in Figure 17 is the strong relationship between school absence rates and the degree to which the school enrolls high- or low-achieving students. Two students with similar incoming achievement are likely to have very different absence rates based on the average incoming achievement of other students at their school. Students who attend schools with high average achievement tend to have better attendance rates than similar students attending schools with low average achievement. This is partly because students who attend schools with higher average achievement than their own probably have other characteristics that are also associated with better absence rates (e.g., highly educated parents and fewer disciplinary problems).⁴ However, the effects of academic composition seem to be more than the sum of individual characteristics of students. Student composition affects the climate of the school (see the sidebar “Many Aspects of School Climate Are Closely Tied to Student Body Composition”). One can imagine that it is easier to develop intervention plans for individual students when only a few students are doing poorly, while it may be difficult to convince students that they need to attend more often when frequent absence is common.

The strong relationship between academic composition and absence rates highlights the difficulty of improving a school with a large percentage of low-achieving students. Letgers and Balfanz (2004) have shown that a large percentage of dropouts in this country are enrolled in “dropout factories.” In these schools, which serve predominantly low-income students, freshmen vastly outnumber seniors due to low rates of promotion, and school staff members are overwhelmed by the concentration of student needs. They found poverty to be the main correlate of weak promotion rates.⁵ While we found academic composition to be more predictive of absences than school poverty, the tight relationship between poverty and academic composition may make the root cause immaterial in terms of policy. Schools serving large proportions of students who have not been successful in elementary school face substantially more challenges than schools receiving mostly high-achieving students.

FIGURE 17

Freshman-Year Absence Rates by School by Students' Eighth-Grade Achievement



How to read this figure: Each dot shows absence rates for students in a specific school entering high school with a specific achievement level. A school could be represented by as many as four symbols, each representing students with different incoming test scores. Symbols representing the same school are connected by a line. The different symbols allow for a comparison of students with similar eighth-grade achievement. Diamonds show absence rates for students entering high school with elementary test scores that put them in the bottom national quartile. Squares represent absence rates for students entering high school with test scores in the second-to-lowest national quartile. Many of the lowest-achieving schools in the system only enroll students with achievement that is below norms, and for this reason the far left side of the figure mostly has diamonds and squares. Triangles represent absence rates among students in the third national quartile, while stars represent students in the top national quartile. On the far right side of the chart are the selective enrollment schools. These schools only enroll students with test scores above national norms, and so they are only represented with triangles (for those students in the third quartile) and stars (for those students in the top quartile). By comparing similar symbols, the chart shows that students with similar incoming achievement have very different absence rates at different schools.

Consider an exceptional school — North-Grand. The average incoming math ITBS score for students entering North-Grand in 2004 was 241 standard score points, and you can easily identify the symbols representing North-Grand by looking for the lowest set of symbols at 241 on the horizontal axis. These symbols are far below the cluster of symbols representing other schools because absent rates are much lower than typical at this school. Average absence rates for North-Grand students are under a week per semester, even among those with eighth-grade test scores place them in the bottom national quartile (the diamond). In comparison, at other schools serving similar students, students entering high school with test scores in the bottom quartile (the diamonds) tend to have absence rates between 8 and 18 days per semester. North-Grand is also different from a number of other schools in the degree to which the symbols are close together. At North-Grand, absence rates are similar across students with very different incoming test scores (represented by different symbols). At many schools, students with high eighth-grade test scores have much lower absence rates than students with low eighth-grade test scores; in these other schools the symbols are spread apart.

Still, while academic composition is strongly related to absence, schools with the same academic composition often have very different absence rates. This can be seen in Figure 17 by comparing similar symbols (representing students with similar academic backgrounds) that have a similar location on the horizontal axis. For example, at schools with typical incoming achievement (between 240 and 250 standard score points), absence rates among students in the second achievement quartile (represented by square symbols) vary from less than 5 days per semester at one school to 15 days at another.

There are also substantial differences across schools in the degree to which students' incoming achievement is related to course absences. Some schools show large differences in absence rates by students' elementary achievement, while others show only small differences across students with varying levels of incoming achievement. The relationship between academic preparation and attendance depends on the school that a student attends—at some schools incoming achievement matters substantially, but at other schools it does not.⁶ Policies and practices of schools likely moderate the relationship between academic background and course performance.

Grades and Failure Rates Also Vary Across Schools, But School Differences in Grades Are Small Compared to the Effects of Academic Preparation

Among students with similar background characteristics and eighth-grade test scores, average failure rates differ by about 1.4 Fs across schools.⁷ In other words, two students who look alike in terms of their race, gender, socioeconomic background, elementary school mobility, age, and eighth-grade test scores coming into high school may have failure rates that are different by 1.4 Fs, based solely on which school they attend. These differences are modestly related to the composition of students in the school. Controlling for the average achievement level of students entering the school and average poverty level, failure rates among students with similar backgrounds vary across schools by about 1.4 Fs.

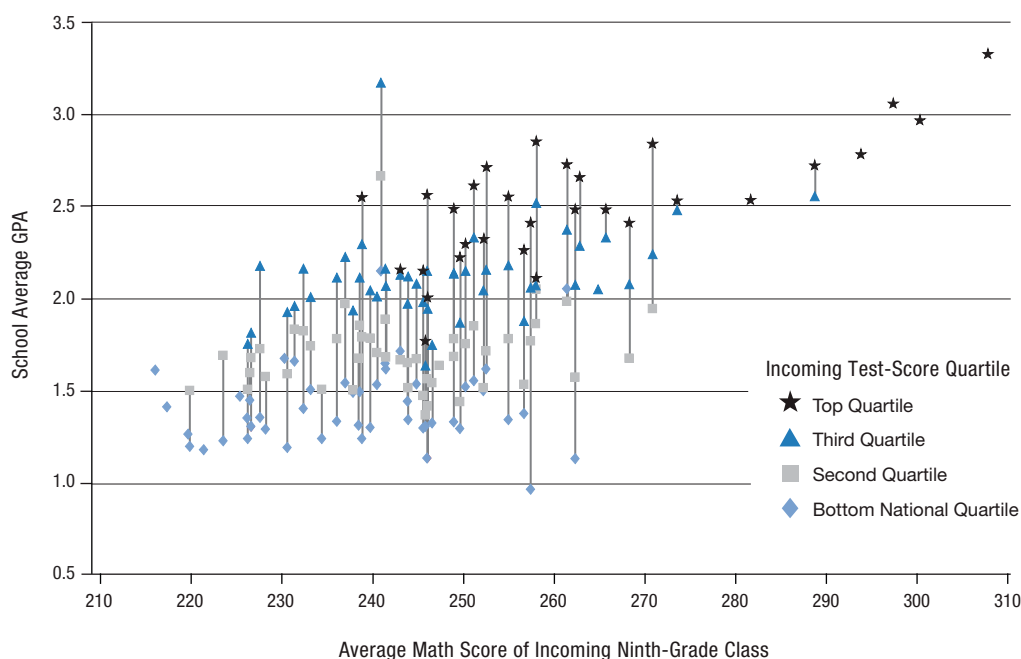
GPA's vary by about 0.3 points across schools, after controlling for students' incoming achievement and background, and for the composition of students in the school.⁸ A difference of 0.3 grade points sounds small, but it is not trivial—such a difference could have a sizable effect on a student's eligibility for college. To achieve an increase of 0.3 points in GPA would require a student with straight Cs to receive Bs in 5 out of 14 semester classes—not a small feat. Furthermore, a few schools have particularly high or low GPAs, given the students they serve. We should better understand why these differences exist and how they may be affected by different practices or standards. However, it is important to note that the differences between schools in average grades are modest. This occurs, in part, because academic preparation is an important factor behind getting high grades at all schools.

The between-school variation in grades looks different than the variation in attendance because grades are more dependent on students' incoming academic skills. Figure 18 graphs average GPAs by school for students with different levels of eighth-grade achievement (see Table 2 in Appendix A for details). This chart is similar to Figure 17, which graphed absences; however, the picture is quite different. Unlike Figure 17, there are fairly distinct ranges of GPAs across all schools among students with similar pre-high school achievement. For example, students entering high school with achievement in the third national quartile tend to have GPAs between 1.8 and 2.5 at almost all schools, while those entering with scores in the second quartile tend to have GPAs between 1.5 and 2.0—note that there is variation within each achievement quartile in average grades, but only a slight overlap across achievement quartiles. While there are differences across schools in average grades, and at a few schools these differences are sizable, in general, school effects are small compared to the effects of academic preparation.

There is a common perception that students receive high grades in low-performing schools because of low academic standards. Because grades are seen as subjective, they are often considered unreliable as indicators of academic achievement. The patterns shown in Figure 18 contradict this perception—poorly prepared students are unlikely to get good grades just

FIGURE 18

Freshman Year GPA by School by Students' Eighth-Grade Achievement



How to read this figure: Each dot shows the average GPA for students in a specific school entering high school with a specific achievement level. A school could be represented by as many as four symbols, each representing students with different incoming test scores; symbols representing the same school are connected by a line. The different symbols allow for a comparison of students with similar eighth-grade achievement.

Many Aspects of School Climate Are Closely Tied to the Student Body Composition

The analyses presented in this report look at the relationships of school climate with student outcomes after taking out any effects that might be attributable to the types of students served by the school. Many aspects of climate are related to schools' academic and socioeconomic composition, and many of these same features are related to student outcomes. It can be difficult to disentangle these relationships. Table 5 (see Appendix C) shows the strength of some of these relationships, in particular for schools that enroll higher-achieving students. Those students are more likely to report a safer school environment, fewer disciplinary problems, and better peer behavior in class; those students are more likely to report that they feel like they belong; and those teachers are more likely to expect students to go to college, and to report productive relationships with parents and high levels of commitment to the school.

It becomes difficult to disentangle the extent to which these features of school climate themselves

affect student outcomes. Student outcomes are better than expected in schools with high-achieving students and positive school climates. It might just be that having many high-achieving students together in the same school improves each individual student's achievement and also simultaneously improves the climate. Alternatively, student body composition might affect the climate of the school, which in turn affects student outcomes.

Because we cannot tell the extent to which each is true, we only show the relationships with climate that remain after we have removed the effects of student body composition on student outcomes. This may be overly conservative, in that some features of schools may not be found significant because they are so strongly related to student body composition that their effects cannot be disentangled. However, this analysis provides comparisons among similar schools, showing why schools that serve similar types of students have different student outcomes.

because they attend a low-performing school. One might think that a school that only enrolls poorly prepared students (e.g., only students with test scores below national norms) would give As and Bs to the best of those students. Yet, that is not the case—few students who enroll in these schools receive As and Bs. Undoubtedly, there are somewhat different standards for grades across teachers and schools. In fact, statistical models show that students with the same number of absences tend to have slightly higher GPAs at schools where absence is common.⁹ However, standards are not so much lower that they compensate for the very different levels of preparation and attendance at the different types of schools.

While concern is often voiced that standards are set too low in CPS, Figure 18 suggests the opposite—few students in CPS receive high grades at any school. At only a few selective-enrollment schools are average GPAs higher than 2.5 (C+). Even students who enter high school with elementary achievement in the top national quartile are unlikely to achieve a B average at all but the top few high schools in the city. Why students receive such poor grades is a topic that needs further exploration—are there too many competing demands or stressors on students, are standards set too high, is instruction weak or poorly organized, or are expectations for performance set too low? We begin to explore these questions by looking at the characteristics of schools with GPAs, failures, and absence rates that are higher or lower than expected, given the students that they serve.

Course Performance Is Better in Schools with Strong Teacher-Student Relationships and Where Students See High School as Relevant for Their Future

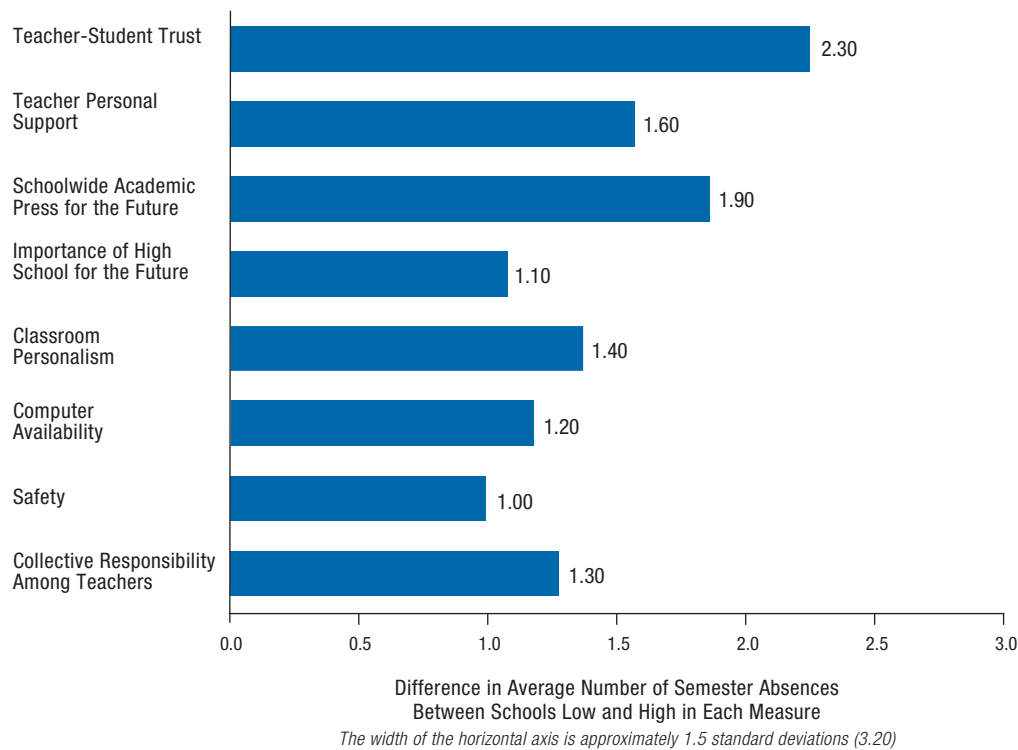
There are significant differences among schools in average grades, failure rates, and attendance, even after we take into account the backgrounds and incoming academic skills of students they serve. To better understand what school factors may affect student course performance, we look at a number of aspects of the learning climate in schools, measured with surveys of students and teachers in CPS conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR).

Table 3 in Appendix B lists some of the specific concepts of climate and practices that we measured with a survey administered in spring 2005. These include a wide range of topics related to how students interact with each other, their parents, and their teachers; how strongly the school supports students and their plans for the future; and various aspects of interactions among teachers around instruction. These measures of school climate were compared to average school absences, failure rates, and GPA, after adjusting them for differences that would be expected simply based on the characteristics of students entering the high school, including individual background, entering achievement, and composition of the student body.¹⁰ Table 4 in Appendix C provides the details, which we summarize here. In general, grades, failure, and absence rates were significantly better than expected, given the students served by the school, in schools characterized by two features—supportive relationships between teachers and students, and a perception among students that the work they were doing in high school was preparing them for the future.

In particular, student performance is better where students report high levels of trust for their teachers and where they report that teachers provide personal support to them. As shown in Figure 19, students at schools with high levels of trust between teachers and students averaged 2.3 fewer days of absence per semester (5 days per year) than similar students at similar schools where there was little trust between students and teachers. Students averaged 0.8 fewer Fs in schools with high levels of trust, compared to similar students in schools with low levels of trust (see Figure 20), while GPAs were 0.2 points higher (see Figure 21). This is consistent with other research that found that schools with strong teacher-student relationships are more likely to have greater student engagement, reduced absences, and better graduation rates.¹¹ Weak teacher-student relationships can make it difficult for teachers to adequately monitor and support students.¹² The importance of teacher-student personal relationships in affecting grades and attendance also shows up in the degree to which students report personalization in the classroom and personal

FIGURE 19

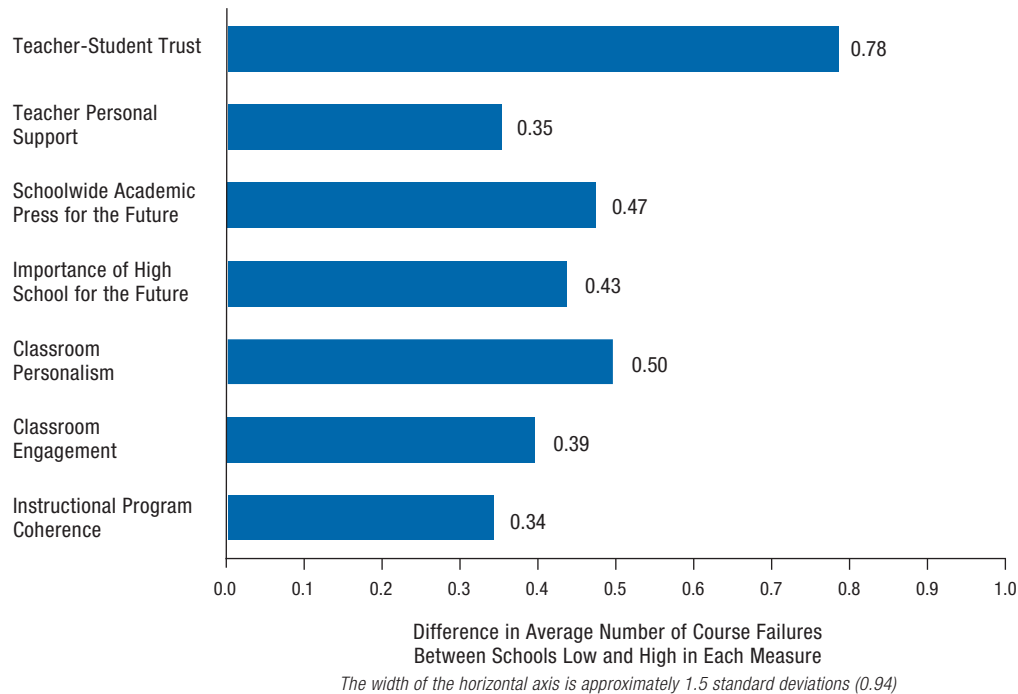
Relationships of School Climate Measures with Course Absences



These are relationships that remain after controlling for individual students' background characteristics (SES, gender, race, age at beginning high school, mobility in elementary school) and eighth-grade achievement test scores, as well as the composition of students in the school (average poverty level, and average incoming eighth-grade achievement). Schools that are high in measure are one standard deviation above average, those that are low are one standard deviation below average. See Table 3 in Appendix B for a list of all measures that were examined.

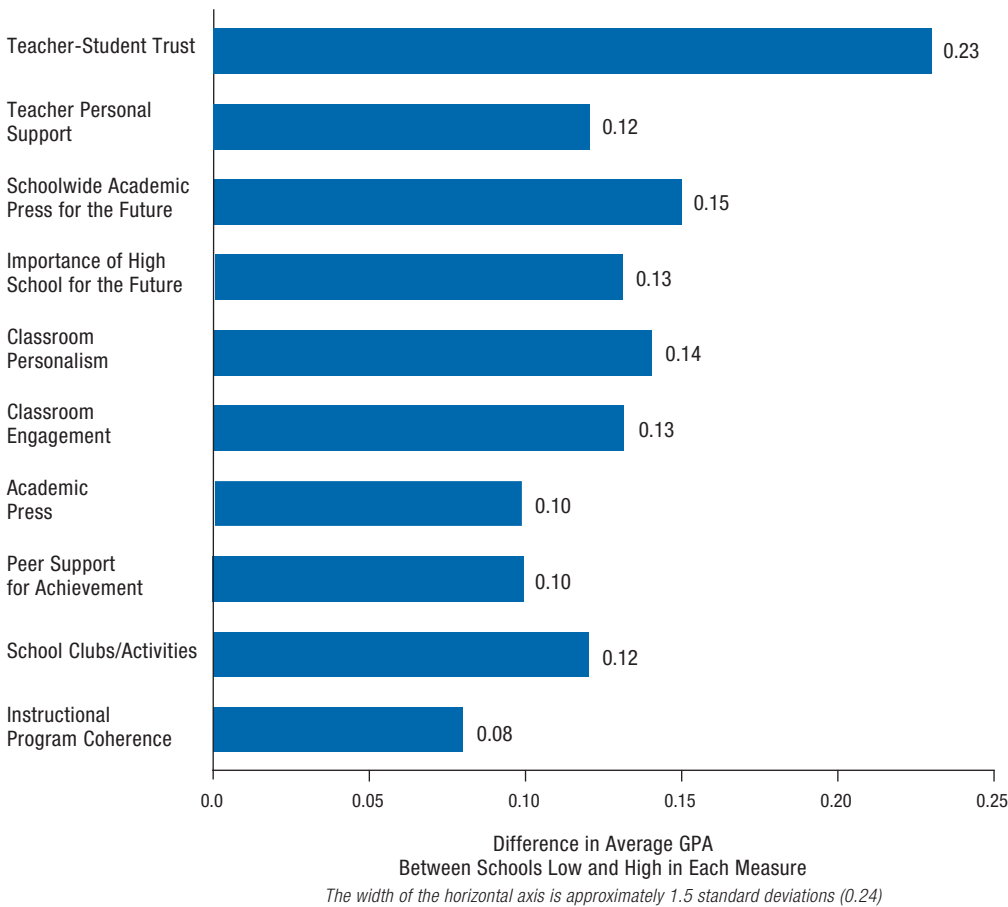
FIGURE 20

Relationships of School Climate Measures with Course Failures



These are relationships that remain after controlling for individual students' background characteristics (SES, gender, race, age at beginning high school, mobility in elementary school) and eighth-grade achievement test scores, as well as the composition of students in the school (average poverty level, and average incoming eighth-grade achievement). Schools that are high in measure are one standard deviation above average, those that are low are one standard deviation below average. See Table 3 in Appendix B for a list of all measures that were examined.

FIGURE 21
Relationships of School Climate Measures with Average School GPA



These are relationships that remain after controlling for individual students' background characteristics (SES, gender, race, age at beginning high school, mobility in elementary school) and eighth-grade achievement test scores, as well as the composition of students in the school (average poverty level, and average incoming eighth-grade achievement). Schools that are high in measure are one standard deviation above average, those that are low are one standard deviation below average. See Table 3 in Appendix B for a list of all measures that were examined.

support from teachers. Failure and absence rates were lower, and GPAs were higher, in schools where more students felt that their classroom teachers gave them individual attention and showed personal concern for them. Failure and absence rates were also better in schools with substantial personalization in classes compared to those with little personalization.

The strength of the relationship with classroom personalism is particularly noteworthy, given that it is measured at the school level with each student reporting on only one English or math class, rather than across all their classes. There are substantial differences across classrooms within the same school in the degree to which students report personalism. Therefore, we would expect the relationship of classroom personalism and engagement with attendance, grades, and failure to be even more pronounced across classrooms within a school than across schools.

Schools also differ in the general climate for learning that exists across classrooms towards the purpose of learning. Those schools that are able to make the connection between high school and students' futures tend to have lower absence and failure rates and higher average grades. These are schools in which more students report that what they do in high school matters for college and the workforce. Schools where many students felt that high school grades matter for success in college and the workforce and that classes give useful preparation for life averaged fewer absences and failures, and higher grades, than schools where few students felt high school was relevant for their future. Likewise, schools where students report that there is a schoolwide press for all students—not just the top students—to have high aspirations, work hard, and plan for the future tend to have lower failure rates than expected, given the types of students served

by the school. In other words, failure rates are lower and grades are higher when school is seen as relevant and important for the future, and all students are pressed to prepare for life after high school. While relevance is measured at the school level in this work, it seems likely that perceptions of the relevance of school are tied to students' perceptions of their individual courses and the extent to which the work they do in those courses is meaningful. Researchers have shown that students produce higher-quality work when assignments have meaning to them.¹³

The two constructs that come out as most distinguishing schools in terms of students' course performance—the degree to which school is seen as relevant for the future and strong teacher-student relationships—are consistent with many of the current recommendations heard nationally on high school reform.¹⁴ These recommendations have sometimes been conceptualized with a third component, rigor, as the three Rs—rigor, relevance, and relationships. We have only two measures of academic rigor available in this analysis—students' perceptions of academic press and teachers' reports of assignment demands. Neither shows a strong relationship with grades or failures, but we should not expect that rigorous coursework would necessarily translate into higher grades. Slow-paced work that is not challenging might lead to disengagement, but fast-paced and challenging work requires more effort from students.¹⁵ Thus, rigorous work might have contradictory effects on grades, even if it leads to better academic skills. Still, it is notable that neither academic press nor rigorous academic demands is associated with higher rates of failure. In fact, grades are slightly higher than expected at schools where students report higher levels of academic press. These are schools where students report that teachers expect all students to participate and to achieve at high levels. In other words, students have higher grades in schools where more students report that their teachers challenge them with difficult work and questions.¹⁶

Relationships between teachers and students matter, as does the relevance of school. In addition, some resources at the school seem to matter for attendance, grades, and failure rates. Attendance was better than expected at schools where students reported access to

computing technology at school. Schools in which many students participate in extracurricular activities have lower-than-expected failure rates and higher-than-expected grades.¹⁷ It could be that schools with greater club and team participation attract students who are generally more motivated, and this is why there is a relationship between club participation and school grades. However, another indicator of involvement that is not shown here—participation in out-of-school clubs—is not associated with higher grades. Instead, grades are higher in schools that are able to get more students involved in clubs and activities at the school. High involvement in tutoring, however, was not associated with higher grades, better attendance, or lower rates of failures than would be expected, given the students served by the school.

Finally, course performance was better than expected in schools with more cooperation among teachers—where teachers feel responsible for all students, and they trust and respect other teachers in the school—and where there is more coherence in programming in the school. These final relationships suggest that it is not just what happens in individual classrooms that matters, but how teachers work together in the school. *Coherence in instructional programming, in particular, is associated with higher grades and lower rates of failure.* This suggests caution if attempting to address problems of failure with programming that is disconnected from the core instructional work of the school. Schools in which teachers report less coherence among programs in the school have higher rates of course failure and lower grades. Attendance is also better where more teachers take collective responsibility for the academic success of students in the whole school—not just their own students.

In general, the factors that seem to matter the most for student success are those that are most in the control of the school. Only one climate measure associated with student characteristics is significantly associated with grades—the extent to which students support each other academically. None of the measures of parent support or parent interaction with teachers was significantly associated with grades or failures, once we control for student body composition. *Teachers working together in a coordinated way—taking responsibility for*

the whole school; providing relevant, coherent instruction; and developing strong relationships with students—most strongly distinguishes schools with above-expected student performance in their courses.

All of these concepts are analyzed at the school level. Because students' experiences may vary widely within the same school, we expect that many of the school-related factors that affect student failure are difficult to discern if we only look at school averages. Students' absence rates and performance will depend on their

cumulative experiences with specific teachers, peers, and school professionals. Still, these measures of the average climate in schools provide general evidence about what matters for course performance in the first year of high school. Other work being conducted at CCSR is examining the factors that affect students' grades in one class—eleventh-grade English. This work provides a more direct test of individual classroom climate on students' grades, and shows similar positive effects of classroom personalization on students' grades.¹⁸

Chapter 3 Endnotes

1 Our reports of schools come from two sources, either students' reports about just one of their courses (English or math), or students' general reports about the school as a whole.

2 These are differences of two standard deviations across schools, taken from the square root of the level 2 variance shown in Table 7 in Appendix D.

3 Statistics on work are derived from the 2005 CCSR survey of CPS students. Even students who work more than ten hours per week miss just two more days of school per semester than students who do not work at all.

4 Analyses of surveys of eighth-graders show that students tend to attend higher-achieving high schools if they: attend an elementary school that tends to send students to high-achieving high schools, have more highly educated parents, report fewer disciplinary problems in elementary school, report some participation in religious organizations, and report more trust of their teachers in elementary school. These characteristics are also related to high school attendance rates.

5 In their description of schools with weak promoting power in New York, Balfanz and Legters (2004) show generally very low levels of entering achievement.

6 Models that allow the achievement coefficient to vary across schools show significant variation in the achievement-absence relationship across schools.

7 This is a difference of two standard deviations across schools, taken from the square root of the level 2 variance from Model 3. Absences were not controlled, since this is a behavior that occurs during high school, rather than a pre-high school characteristic. See Table 9 in Appendix D.

8 This is a difference of two standard deviations across schools, taken from the square root of the level 2 variance from Model 4.

9 In general, schools' average GPAs decrease as absence rates increase. However, if we compare students who have the same number of days absent, those who are at schools with poor attendance rates average higher GPAs than students with similar absences who are at schools with better average attendance. The relationship between absences and GPA decreases as school absence rates increase, so that more days of absence are associated with a smaller deficit at low-attendance schools compared to high-attendance schools. Students attending schools with high absence rates (one standard deviation above average) have GPAs that are 0.23 points higher, on average, than students with the same number of days absent who attend schools with low absence rates (one standard deviation below average).

10 We did not control for students' absences or study behaviors in the analysis of grades and failures because these are behaviors that occur after students have entered high school and are likely affected by their experiences in school. Therefore, many of the same factors that were associated with absences are also associated with grades and failures.

11 Pittman and Haughwout (1987); Wasley et al. (2000); Lee and Smith (1999); Lee and Burkam (2003); and Kahne, Sporte, and de la Torre (2006). In addition, two recent studies of dropout consisting of interviews with students (Boston Youth Transitions Task Force, 2006) and with dropouts (Bridgeland, Morison, and Dilulio; 2006) both concluded that relationships with teachers were one of the most important factors affecting students' school experiences.

12 This can be seen, for example, in qualitative work on freshman failure rates by Roderick (2005). She found that without knowing students personally, teachers were prone to attribute poor performance to lack of motivation, and so failed to help when students were experiencing particular stressors. Yet, students that high school teachers saw as unmotivated were sometimes rated as very motivated by their elementary teachers who knew them better. In contrast, students who formed a close relationship with an adult at the school were able to recover from failure in high school.

13 Marks et al. (1996); and Mitchell et al. (2005).

14 E.g., Letgers, Balfanz, and McPartland (2002); Shear et al. (2005); and Darling-Hammond, Aneess, and Wichterle Ort (2002).

15 Discussion of these issues is available in McDill, Natriello, and Pallas (1986) and McPartland and Schneider (1996).

16 Teachers' support of standards and testing is associated with lower grades, more failures, and higher absence rates. This might seem contradictory, but this measure is more of an indicator of teachers' feelings about testing and standards than a direct indicator of the demands placed on students. In fact, teachers may be more supportive of external guides in schools where they view demands to generally be weak.

17 We are not just saying that individual students who participate more in activities and tutoring have lower failure rates because we are measuring these relationships at the school level. Instead, attending a school where there is more overall participation in extracurricular activities and tutoring is associated with lower rates of course failure for all students.

18 Nagaoka and Deutsch (2006).

Do Some Elementary Schools Do a Better Job Than Others at Preparing Their Students for the Transition to High School?

Elementary schools may prepare their students for high school in a number of ways. At the very least, elementary schools provide their students with the academic skills that they will need in high school. Students also develop other important skills in elementary school, such as attendance and studying habits, which they will need when they go to high school. At some elementary schools, staff members put effort into enrolling their students in high schools that they think will best serve them. Other elementary schools simply “feed” into specific high schools. Thus, the elementary school that students attend affects their enrollment at a specific high school. Finally, some elementary schools develop partnerships with the high schools to which they send many of their graduates; they may create transition programs for students or they may establish communication between elementary and high school teachers about the students they both serve. These different means of preparing students for high school are visible in students’ freshman outcomes.

We can see differences across elementary schools in the degree to which their graduates perform well in their freshman-year courses. If we compare elementary schools by the average ninth-grade GPAs of their eighth-grade graduates, for example, they vary by about 0.67 points. This is about 10 percent of the total variation in students’ GPAs.^A Some of the differences among elementary schools can be attributed to which high schools students attend, either because of feeder patterns between elementary and high schools or because school staff members work to send their students to particular high schools. Once we account for students’ high school enrollment, the differences across elementary schools

in their graduates’ ninth-grade performance shrink by half.^B There are also differences in the background characteristics of students attending different elementary schools; after accounting for these differences in background characteristics (gender, race, and economic status), only about 2.3 percent of the total variation in freshman-year grades can be attributed to their elementary schools.

While 2.3 percent of the variation in grades is a small amount of the total variation, it is equivalent to a difference of about 0.32 GPA points. Some of these differences in students’ high school grades result from different levels of academic preparation in elementary schools. Academic skills, as measured by students’ test scores in eighth grade, explain an additional 0.4 percent of the variation in freshman GPAs across elementary schools (leaving 1.9 percent unexplained). Absence rates in the freshman year explain all but 0.07 percent of the remaining variation. There are only very small differences across elementary schools in their graduates’ high school outcomes, once we account for high school enrollment, academic skills, and attendance patterns in high school. These remaining differences across elementary schools that are not explained by students’ backgrounds, academic preparation, attendance, or high school enrollment are equivalent to about 0.16 GPA points. Thus, most of the effects of elementary schools on students’ grades seem to work through traditional mechanisms: the high schools into which they send their graduates, the degree to which students leave with academic skills, and the degree to which their students have developed good habits with attendance and studying.

Sidebar Endnotes

A This decomposition of variance comes from a two-level hierarchical linear model with students nested within elementary schools.

B These statistics come from cross-nested hierarchical models with students nested simultaneously within elementary and high schools.



Chapter 4

Interpretive Summary

There is a growing consensus that we need to be concerned about students who fail to pass ninth grade because they are at high risk of not graduating.¹ Efforts to improve ninth-grade promotion rates tend to focus on students with few credits at the end of their first year in high school. But, as shown in Figure 7, even one failure in a full-year course (two semester courses) puts students at high risk of not graduating. In fact, students who receive only a few Fs, or who have very low grades with no Fs, may be the students most amenable to intervention because they are struggling but still making some progress in school. *We should pay attention to more than just the lowest-achieving students when working to address issues of graduation and dropping out.* In a school system where about half the students drop out, it is not just aberrant students who are at high risk of not graduating but average students as well.

Problems of Failure and Dropping Out Are Embedded Within Issues of Improving Overall Achievement

Some educators may be concerned that efforts to improve dropout rates are contradictory to improving achievement. From this point of view, improving dropout rates means paying attention to the lowest-performing students—and these are the students who may be perceived as dragging down the achievement level of the school.² However, working to reduce dropouts does not just mean preventing failure among the lowest-achieving students. Students with few failures but poor grades in their classes are also at high risk of not graduating. Also, course failures are closely tied to overall performance—students who are failing any course also tend to do poorly in the

classes they pass. Furthermore, the same school factors that are related to failures—student relationships with teachers and the degree to which school seems relevant to students—are also associated with higher grades.³ Reducing dropout rates means improving course performance among all students—not just those with multiple course failures.

Addressing Freshman Failures, Dropouts, and Achievement Requires a Critical Look at Core Practices That Affect Students' Grades in Their Courses

Current discussion about improving student achievement focuses on two broad areas: course rigor and accountability through high school testing. Efforts to address the dropout problem often entail special programs for failing students, flexible standards, or separate schools. None of these approaches requires a close examination of why students are performing poorly in their courses. For this reason, the effectiveness of these approaches may be limited.

It seems doubtful that increasing enrollment in rigorous courses, or emphasizing standardized testing, will greatly improve students' readiness for college or the workforce if students' course performance continues to be weak. For many years, CPS has had rigorous graduation requirements. Yet, of the students who graduate, over one-third leave school with no more than a D+

average.⁴ Although these students participated in college preparatory coursework, they probably learned little with such poor performance. Likewise, standardized testing in the high schools has shown little academic benefit for students. The state of Illinois requires all CPS students to take the ACT examination at the end of eleventh grade. Despite substantial emphasis on preparation for this examination, 65 percent of CPS graduates receive a 17 or below, which is below all college-readiness benchmarks.⁵ Research conducted by CCSR shows that these low scores are tied to poor performance in students' coursework. Students who receive higher marks in their courses show higher gains on corresponding standardized tests. *The strategies that are being proposed most strongly for high school reform must be accompanied with efforts to improve course performance (i.e., grades).* By themselves, rigorous requirements and standardized tests are unlikely to substantially raise student achievement.

Strategies for addressing dropout issues often entail special programs for at-risk students and multiple routes to graduation, splitting off students from the regular academic track.⁶ The assumption behind such approaches is that off-track students are in need of a different type of education than regular students. This makes sense if there are a few students at risk of failure, but it is a questionable solution in typical schools where half the students eventually go off-track and fail to graduate. Addressing the educational needs of many

We Are Not Suggesting That Students Be Given Passing Grades if They Have Not Shown Adequate Mastery of Course Material

The relationship between course Fs and graduation is strong, and knowledge of this relationship may tempt a sympathetic teacher to give a student credit even when standards for the class have not been met. We are not advocating this practice. To the contrary, such an action may demonstrate to the student that little effort is necessary for passing, thus making the student more likely to fail subsequent courses. We are also not suggesting that course requirements be “dumbed down” to make it easier for

students to pass. If a class is too easy, students may lose motivation to attend; they may be more likely to fail not only that class but also subsequent classes that require the knowledge and skills they should have learned. Students may also be unprepared for subsequent demands in college or the labor market. Instead, we are advocating that teachers and schools identify students who are failing, find out why they are failing, and then try to give them the support they need to recover from this failure.

students at risk of not graduating requires systemic change to core practices in the school.⁷

Programmatic approaches to addressing dropping out are popular because they are easier to implement than systemic reforms,⁸ and they target students who clearly need support. But besides being impractical in schools where most students go off-track, they are rarely found to be effective.⁹ A “second chance” or “skimming off” strategy does little for students at risk for future failure, and it does not address problems of average and high-achieving students performing below their potential. Furthermore, too many options and programs may lead to confusion and poor choices among students who most need guidance and have the fewest supports.¹⁰ Too many disconnected programs can also decrease coherence in the instructional program of the school.¹¹ This is not to say that programs and interventions for struggling students are not worthwhile; we certainly should be identifying students in need of support. But programs and interventions that are disconnected from the core instructional program of the school may not be the best use of resources. Flexibility and tailored programs for a few students should not substitute for critical evaluation of schools’ instructional programming, and all programs should be developed to align coherently with the general instructional plan of the school.

At the beginning of this report, we noted that trying to address the myriad factors that affect students’ decisions to leave school was an overwhelming task. If we add to this list separate efforts to address low achievement, the competing demands on schools can be enormous. But reducing dropout and increasing achievement both come down to the same thing: improving students’ performance in their courses. *Figuring out how to help students do better in their courses and receive higher grades will simultaneously push students to higher levels of achievement (including student test scores) and keep more students in school.* Unfortunately, this is not a common theme in current discussions about high school reform.

Lack of attention to students’ grades may exist because grades are viewed as subjective and unreliable. Standards may be somewhat lower in schools that primarily enroll low-achieving students; however, these differences

seem to be modest. As shown in Figure 18, schools that enroll poorly prepared students do not have students graduating with high GPAs. Recall that grades strongly predict future outcomes, including college graduation and earnings in the workforce;¹² clearly they are valid as indicators of students’ skills. Test scores are generally seen as objective measures across teachers, schools, and districts, but course grades are more predictive of future outcomes than test scores; they capture a broader range of skills measured over a longer period of time.

Students Do Better in Their Coursework When They Have More Reasons to Come to Class and Work Hard

Students’ academic preparation for high school is far less important for simply passing courses than is their behavior in high school, particularly their course attendance. *Course passing rates are primarily determined by attendance.* Almost all students who have good attendance finish their freshman year on-track. Schools know almost immediately which students are missing school or class, allowing them to determine why and develop strategies to improve attendance. This means working with students and parents, and it means thinking about attendance policies and instructional practices at the school.

Students attend class more often when they have strong relationships with their teachers, and when they see school and their coursework as relevant and important for their future. The relationships that students have with teachers and other adults at school provide encouragement to attend and support for academic learning and persistence. School itself could be seen as relevant and important for the future, providing students with motivation to attend. Individual coursework can also be perceived as relevant—helping students to grow and understand their world better or providing preparation for college and the workplace. The more students see their schoolwork as relevant for the future, the greater the likelihood that school as a whole will feel worthwhile. Other researchers who investigate high school reform have identified these same aspects of school climate—teacher-student relationships and the relevance of school for the future—as key in

addressing issues of failure and dropout.¹³ This study adds to that literature by providing quantitative evidence from a large sample of schools to support conclusions that have been drawn from case studies, focus groups, informal observations, and program evaluations. Taken together, there are consistent themes from many sources that freshman-year engagement and performance in school is higher in places with strong teacher-student relationships and where students see the relevance of what they are doing in school for their future.

But what does it mean to work on relationships and relevance in high schools? Does building relationships simply mean that teachers should be nice to students? Does increasing relevance mean introducing occasional units that are tied to work skills? Neither of those solutions seems adequate. Good relationships between teachers and students are not sufficient by themselves for high levels of student achievement or even for addressing high rates of failure. While successful programs often incorporate elements of personal relationships between teachers and students, programs that solely address relationships do not necessarily improve dropout rates or student achievement.¹⁴ Likewise, it seems doubtful that student achievement or course performance would improve simply by introducing work-skill units or programs that are unconnected to the main academic content of students' classes. Instead, school-based relationships develop as teachers and students work together to meet academic goals. Relevance comes from making academic content meaningful to students.

A focus on students' course performance keeps attention on the factor that most directly affects graduation, and that simultaneously directly affects academic skills and postsecondary readiness. We can use course performance as a guide in two ways: identifying students who need support and identifying weaknesses in schools' instructional programming. In our previous report, we suggested that schools should be looking for patterns in student performance—by time of day, type of student, type of subject—to develop strategies to help schools identify particular groups of students, teachers, or structures that need attention. In

this report, we have shown that there are a number of indicators of academic performance that can be used to identify students' risk of not graduating. Given what we know about what matters, schools may then ask: Is our instructional program set up to foster relationship building between school professionals and students? Are programs in the school organized coherently around students' academic performance? Are students being monitored and provided supports as needed? Are teachers receiving feedback and support for relationship building with students and instructional relevance?

Grades and attendance in CPS are alarmingly low, even among students testing above national norms in the eighth grade. Boys are doing particularly poorly, and not because they are studying or attending school much less than girls. In addition, nonwhite students, who make up the majority of the CPS student population, receive lower grades than white students after adjustments are made for elementary test scores, economic background, attendance, and study behavior. Poor course performance is a critical issue for CPS, and we need a better understanding of why some subgroups of students show particularly low grades. Traditional explanations—such as low motivation, attendance, or work effort—do not explain the discrepancies.

Efforts to Improve High School Course Performance Do Not Rest Solely With High Schools

Very good grades in high school are unlikely unless students have shown strong academic performance in elementary school; this suggests that high schools cannot address this issue alone. *Elementary and middle schools should work with high schools to prepare students for the ninth-grade transition.* Academic preparation in elementary school is also related to attendance in high school—students entering high school with high achievement are less likely to have serious absence problems in high school than moderate or low-achieving students. Neild and Balfanz (2006) have shown that attendance and failure in eighth grade can be used to predict eventual dropout. Currently, CPS puts students in high school preparatory programs by their test scores, but why not use criteria, such as attendance and grades,

that are more predictive of success? Elementary teachers tend to know their students better than high school teachers. CPS might consider building communication between middle school and high school teachers regarding expectations and supports for students in the transition to high school.¹⁵

We also need to actively spread the message to students and parents that grades and attendance matter a great deal. Attendance is the most important determinant of passing classes and graduating. Even a week of absence per semester substantially increases the likelihood of

failing a class. More importantly, grades are the most important determinant of graduating from high school, going to college, and graduating from college. Students who want to graduate from college—78 percent of CPS seniors—should be aiming for B or higher averages in high school. The vast majority of CPS students want to go to college, and their parents support this goal. They should know that achieving this goal requires strong performance in high school coursework. All students should be working for regular attendance and high grades.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

- 1 See discussion of the ninth-grade graduation link in reports by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2005), the *American School Board Journal* (Black, 2004) and Achieve, Inc. (Jerald, 2006), and research by Neild and Balfanz (2006), and Cahill, Hamilton, and Lynch (2006).
- 2 See Roderick, Nagaoka, and Allensworth (2006) for a more detailed discussion of perceptions of the trade-off between high standards and diploma attainment.
- 3 To be certain that the analyses of grades were not being overly influenced by the factors that affect course failure, identical analyses were performed predicting grades in the courses that students passed. The results were almost identical to those that incorporated failures.
- 4 Roderick, Nagaoka, and Allensworth (2006).
- 5 Ibid. Scores below 17 place students in the bottom quartile of students taking the ACT examination. According to ACT guidelines, students should score an 18 on the English portion of the test to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher in college English and a 22 on the math portion to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher in college algebra.
- 6 For example, one of the main recommendations in a recent report of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2005) was that routes toward graduation be flexible; for example, that there be loose standards for grade promotion. These suggestions echo plans here in Chicago. Likewise, several programs place struggling students into special classes and schools; for example, this is the strategy that New York is taking for students at risk of dropping out. See Cahill, Hamilton, and Lynch (2006).
- 7 The suggestion that we pay attention to core practices of the school, rather than just seeing dropout behavior as embedded within students, echoes a recommendation made by Lee and Burkam (2003) after their research showed that dropping out was related to high school organization and structure.
- 8 In his essay on how to address dropout, Rumberger (2006) describes evidence for programmatic and systemic approaches for addressing dropouts. He notes that there is little evidence that programmatic solutions are generally effective, but that systematic approaches may often be too difficult to implement.
- 9 Dynarski (2004).
- 10 In Chicago, for example, graduation rates improved when all students were required to take a college-preparatory sequence and enroll in seven credits their freshman year. Prior to the new requirements, many students took too few courses to graduate on time.
- 11 Grades and failure rates are better in schools with strong coherence in instructional programming. In addition to evidence presented in this report, the importance of coherence in instructional programming is echoed in work we have done in elementary schools. See Newmann,

Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk (2002).

12 Roderick, Nagaoka, and Allensworth (2006); Noble and Sawyer (2002); and Miller (1998).

13 A number of high school reform models that incorporate elements of personal relationships between teachers and students, as well as connections between school and the future, have been shown to be successful for addressing issues of dropout and freshman failure. For example, evaluations of AVID and Talent Development—programs that emphasize strong social support among students and teachers—have shown improvements in attendance, achievement, and dropout rates. See Watt, Powell, and Mendiola (2004); and McParland, Balfanz, Jordan, and Letgers (1998). From evaluations of four high school reform models (including Talent Development), researchers at MDRC concluded that improvements in graduation rates can occur with instructional improvement that includes increased personalization and supports for struggling students. See Herlihy and Quint (2006). In their review of six effective dropout prevention and college attendance programs for at-risk students, Fashola and Slavin (1998) found that the successful programs had several elements in common, including personalization between students and teachers, connections to an attainable future, and academic assistance to help students succeed in rigorous (not remedial) classes. In a large quantitative study of schools in Maryland, Kerr and Letgers (2004) found that those with small learning communities have lower dropout rates than expected, and attribute this to improved personalization. Based on their observations of schools that “beat the odds” in terms of freshman promotion rates, Balfanz and Letgers (2006) suggested that instruction should be connected to higher education and the workplace, as well as tied to support. Case studies of the freshman transition by Roderick (2005), as well as interviews with dropouts (Bridgeland, Morison, and Dilulio, 2006), and interviews with students, parents, and teachers (Boston Youth Transitions Task Force, 2006), all emphasize the importance of teacher-student relationships for addressing issues of failure and/or dropout. Using a large quantitative national database, Lee and Burkam (2003) likewise found teacher-student relationships to significantly affect dropout rates.

14 See Dynarski’s (2004) review of dropout prevention programs. In Chicago, the initiative to break down large schools into smaller schools succeeded in improving personalization and relationships between teachers and students, but student achievement remained very low. See Kahne, Sporte, and de la Torre (2006). The small school initiative in Chicago has recognized the need to focus on instructional improvement in the schools.

15 There is evidence that middle school transition programs can help students in their freshman year. See Mizelle and Irvin (2000); and Hertzog and Morgan (1999).

A Summary Model of High School Effects on Student Outcomes

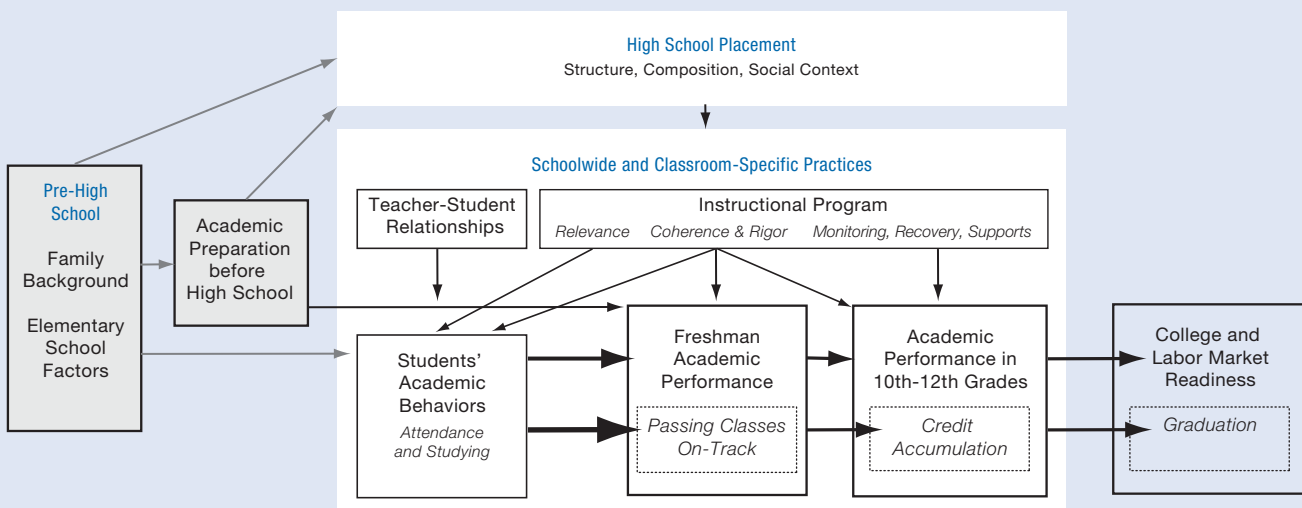
Preparing high school students for college and labor market success is the key concern of high school reform, and graduating from high school is the minimum requirement that students need to achieve post-secondary success. We began this report by suggesting that we could address low graduation rates by focusing on students' performance in their classes. Here, we summarize our findings with the aid of a diagram (Figure 22). Our key outcome is high school graduation, which is shown on the far right of the chart. It is embedded within college and labor market readiness as the most basic indicator of preparation that students obtain from high school.

To get to graduation, students need to accumulate sufficient credits over at least four years. Passing classes is essential for accumulating credits, and students' performance in their freshman year affects their likelihood of success in the subsequent years of high school. Figure 22 shows this sequence; passing classes and credit accumulation are shown as *embedded within* general academic performance. Reducing failure and increasing credit accumulation are both about improving achievement.

Often we think of graduation as an outcome that results from many different influences—family, peers, community, schools—and it can seem like an overwhelming problem to try to manage. Yet, while all of these background factors are related to a student's likelihood of graduating, their influence works primarily through class performance; thus, the arrows in the diagram that show the influence of pre-high school characteristics do not point directly to graduation but to the boxes that precede graduation. This suggests two potential mechanisms for improving graduation rates. At the very least, by looking at students' course performance as early as freshman year we can identify students at risk of not graduating who need the most support. We can tell which students are likely not to graduate from observable data that are readily available to schools. At the most, the effect that schools and teachers can have on course performance, beyond the influence of background factors and preparation, provides a direct lever to work on graduation rates—a lever that is more accessible to school professionals than personal or family factors, and that is more strongly tied to graduation than nonacademic factors.

FIGURE 22

A Summary of High School Effects on Student Outcomes



Students' academic preparation for high school and their background characteristics affect students' likelihood of graduating in several ways. First, they affect the development of academic skills and behaviors that students will need in high school. The development of appropriate behaviors is particularly important because passing courses depends primarily on students' behaviors in high school. Failure is overwhelmingly tied to attendance, and this is represented by a thick arrow from attendance to passing classes and on-track in Figure 22. Higher achievement is also strongly determined by students' behaviors in high school, but high grades are unlikely if students do not also have good academic preparation prior to high school.

Students' backgrounds and academic performance in elementary school also affect high school outcomes by leading students to enroll in specific high schools. Some schools are only accessible to high-achieving students, while enrollment in other schools depends on students' residential location or on student and parental efforts to enroll in non-neighborhood schools. High school climate and practices, in turn, affect students' performance in their coursework. Many aspects of high school climate are affected by the composition of students who enroll in the school. However, even among schools serving similar student populations, there are differences in practices that affect students' performance in their coursework.

Inside the school, relationships with teachers and peers provide students with reasons for coming to class and putting forth effort, while relationships in the larger school can provide motivation for attending school. Students are more likely to put forth effort if they view the work they are doing in their classes as relevant for their future, and if they are being pushed by the school to have high aspirations and make plans for the future. When schools can make the connection of high school work to students' futures, students are most likely to put forth effort to succeed.

Relevance is just one feature of the instructional program of a school, which includes the rigor and coherence of classroom instruction, and the rigor and coherence of the broader instructional plan of the school. Rigor and coherence affect the extent to which students' effort and preparation translate into learning through challenging, coherent content and tasks.

An additional component of instructional programming that we did not measure in our surveys is the extent to which schools monitor student progress and provide supports that allow students to recover from failure. We include these elements in Figure 22 because work by other scholars has suggested that schools can help students improve their academic performance through careful monitoring and support.^A At the classroom level, monitoring student achievement and developing methods for recovery, which is part of individualization and personalization of instruction, is facilitated by close relationships between teachers and students. Monitoring can also occur at the school level, with principals and counselors using data on course performance to identify students performing below expectations and developing plans for summer school, tutoring, and course scheduling.

Improving students' course performance is a key mechanism for improving both graduation rates and academic achievement. This requires critical examination of core practices across the school and in individual classrooms—the extent to which instruction is relevant, coherent, and rigorous—along with attempts to ensure monitoring and support for struggling students, as well as to build good relationships between teachers and students.

Sidebar Endnotes

A In their observations of schools that “beat the odds” in terms of ninth-grade promotion, Balfanz and Letgers (2006) found not only that they had strong instructional programs and a personalized structure but also that they had monitoring systems to get students back on-track.



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Appendix A: Individual School Data

TABLE 2

Data for Figure 17 and Figure 18

School Name	Average Incoming Math Achievement in the School	Eighth-Grade Math Test Scores, National Quartile	Average Number of Days Absent	Average GPA
Amundsen	251	Bottom	12.6	1.6
Amundsen	251	Second	10.0	1.9
Amundsen	251	Third	7.8	2.3
Amundsen	251	Top	6.5	2.6
Bogan	246	Bottom	15.8	1.1
Bogan	246	Second	12.8	1.4
Bogan	246	Third	9.3	1.9
Bogan	246	Top	9.8	2.0
Brooks	282	Top	2.7	2.5
Carver	239	Bottom	10.5	1.3
Carver	239	Second	9.1	1.7
Chicago Agricultural	265	Third	4.1	2.1
Clark	249	Second	7.2	1.8
Clark	249	Third	5.6	2.1
Clemente	243	Bottom	11.3	1.7
Clemente	243	Second	8.7	1.7
Clemente	243	Third	7.4	2.1
Clemente	243	Top	7.3	2.2
Collins	228	Bottom	17.7	1.3
Collins	228	Second	15.5	1.6
Corliss	236	Bottom	16.0	1.3
Corliss	236	Second	10.5	1.8
Corliss	236	Third	9.0	2.1
Crane	232	Bottom	17.4	1.4
Crane	232	Second	11.7	1.8
Crane	232	Third	10.5	2.2
Crane Achievement Academy	220	Bottom	20.3	1.3

Continued on next page

TABLE 2—CONTINUED

Data for Figure 17 and Figure 18

School Name	Average Incoming Math Achievement in the School	Eighth-Grade Math Test Scores, National Quartile	Average Number of Days Absent	Average GPA
Curie	262	Bottom	4.5	2.1
Curie	262	Second	5.4	2.0
Curie	262	Third	4.5	2.4
Curie	262	Top	3.5	2.7
CVS	246	Bottom	16.7	1.3
CVS	246	Second	15.3	1.4
CVS	246	Third	13.2	1.6
CVS	246	Top	12.5	1.8
CVS Achievement Academy	220	Bottom	19.4	1.2
CVS Achievement Academy	220	Second	16.7	1.5
Douglass Middle	226	Bottom	15.7	1.4
Dunbar	245	Bottom	13.3	1.5
Dunbar	245	Second	11.7	1.7
Dunbar	245	Third	9.4	2.1
Englewood	228	Bottom	17.2	1.4
Englewood	228	Second	15.3	1.7
Englewood	228	Third	10.8	2.2
Farragut	239	Bottom	13.3	1.2
Farragut	239	Second	9.5	1.8
Farragut	239	Third	7.0	2.3
Farragut	239	Top	5.5	2.6
Fenger	231	Bottom	14.3	1.7
Fenger	231	Second	13.0	1.8
Fenger	231	Third	13.5	2.0
Foreman	238	Bottom	12.8	1.5
Foreman	238	Second	10.4	1.5
Foreman	238	Third	7.7	1.9
Gage Park	242	Bottom	12.4	1.6
Gage Park	242	Second	12.6	1.7
Gage Park	242	Third	8.1	2.1
Hancock	248	Second	10.1	1.6
Harlan	237	Bottom	14.3	1.5
Harlan	237	Second	9.8	2.0
Harlan	237	Third	10.0	2.2
Harper	227	Bottom	10.6	1.3
Harper	227	Second	8.9	1.7
Harper	227	Third	7.7	1.8
Hirsch	234	Bottom	12.7	1.2
Hirsch	234	Second	11.4	1.5

Continued on next page

TABLE 2—CONTINUED

Data for Figure 17 and Figure 18

School Name	Average Incoming Math Achievement in the School	Eighth-Grade Math Test Scores, National Quartile	Average Number of Days Absent	Average GPA
Hope	263	Third	4.6	2.3
Hope	263	Top	3.2	2.7
Hubbard	255	Bottom	14.5	1.3
Hubbard	255	Second	9.6	1.8
Hubbard	255	Third	6.8	2.2
Hubbard	255	Top	5.8	2.6
Hyde Park	246	Bottom	18.0	1.1
Hyde Park	246	Second	13.3	1.6
Hyde Park	246	Third	9.9	2.2
Hyde Park	246	Top	7.3	2.6
Jones	294	Top	2.3	2.8
Juarez	244	Bottom	8.4	1.4
Juarez	244	Second	8.0	1.7
Juarez	244	Third	6.3	2.0
Julian	247	Bottom	11.8	1.3
Julian	247	Second	9.8	1.5
Julian	247	Third	8.8	1.7
Kelly	249	Bottom	12.5	1.3
Kelly	249	Second	9.2	1.7
Kelly	249	Third	7.0	2.1
Kelly	249	Top	5.0	2.5
Kelvyn Park	242	Bottom	12.2	1.6
Kelvyn Park	242	Second	11.1	1.9
Kelvyn Park	242	Third	10.6	2.2
Kennedy	253	Bottom	10.1	1.6
Kennedy	253	Second	9.3	1.7
Kennedy	253	Third	7.2	2.2
Kennedy	253	Top	5.3	2.7
Kenwood	258	Bottom	16.9	1.0
Kenwood	258	Second	9.5	1.8
Kenwood	258	Third	6.8	2.1
Kenwood	258	Top	5.4	2.4
Martin Luther King	274	Third	3.0	2.5
Martin Luther King	274	Top	3.6	2.5
Lake View	258	Second	7.1	2.1
Lake View	258	Third	6.4	2.5
Lake View	258	Top	5.1	2.9
Lane Tech	289	Third	3.1	2.6
Lane Tech	289	Top	2.5	2.7

Continued on next page

TABLE 2—CONTINUED

Data for Figure 17 and Figure 18

School Name	Average Incoming Math Achievement in the School	Eighth-Grade Math Test Scores, National Quartile	Average Number of Days Absent	Average GPA
Lincoln Park	271	Second	9.7	1.9
Lincoln Park	271	Third	7.0	2.2
Lincoln Park	271	Top	3.1	2.8
Manley	233	Bottom	9.1	1.5
Manley	233	Second	9.8	1.7
Manley	233	Third	8.2	2.0
Marshall	231	Bottom	16.1	1.2
Marshall	231	Second	12.2	1.6
Marshall	231	Third	10.6	1.9
Mather	250	Bottom	11.1	1.5
Mather	250	Second	8.5	1.8
Mather	250	Third	6.6	2.2
Mather	250	Top	7.7	2.3
Morgan Park	263	Bottom	13.2	1.1
Morgan Park	263	Second	9.6	1.6
Morgan Park	263	Third	5.6	2.1
Morgan Park	263	Top	4.6	2.5
Moses Vines	230	Bottom	11.8	1.7
North-Grand	241	Bottom	3.4	2.2
North-Grand	241	Second	2.9	2.7
North-Grand	241	Third	2.2	3.2
Northside Prep	308	Top	0.6	3.3
Payton	298	Top	1.9	3.1
Phillips	227	Bottom	16.7	1.5
Phillips	227	Second	15.2	1.6
Prosser	266	Third	5.6	2.3
Prosser	266	Top	5.3	2.5
Robeson	224	Bottom	19.4	1.2
Robeson	224	Second	14.9	1.7
Robeson Achievement Academy	216	Bottom	16.7	1.6
Roosevelt	241	Bottom	12.3	1.5
Roosevelt	241	Second	10.7	1.7
Roosevelt	241	Third	8.4	2.0
School of Arts	225	Bottom	13.4	1.5
Schurz	246	Bottom	11.7	1.3
Schurz	246	Second	11.2	1.5
Schurz	246	Third	8.3	2.0
Schurz	246	Top	8.0	2.2

Continued on next page

TABLE 2—CONTINUED

Data for Figure 17 and Figure 18

School Name	Average Incoming Math Achievement in the School	Eighth-Grade Math Test Scores, National Quartile	Average Number of Days Absent	Average GPA
Senn	240	Bottom	13.1	1.3
Senn	240	Second	8.6	1.8
Senn	240	Third	8.2	2.0
Simeon	258	Second	5.6	1.9
Simeon	258	Third	4.6	2.1
Simeon	258	Top	5.4	2.1
Steinmetz	250	Bottom	13.9	1.3
Steinmetz	250	Second	11.7	1.4
Steinmetz	250	Third	8.2	1.9
Steinmetz	250	Top	6.4	2.2
Sullivan	244	Bottom	11.3	1.3
Sullivan	244	Second	9.9	1.5
Sullivan	244	Third	6.6	2.1
Taft	257	Bottom	11.1	1.4
Taft	257	Second	9.3	1.5
Taft	257	Third	8.3	1.9
Taft	257	Top	6.4	2.3
Technology	227	Bottom	13.3	1.3
Tilden	226	Bottom	20.0	1.2
Tilden	226	Second	18.0	1.5
Tilden	226	Third	17.5	1.8
Tilden Achievement Academy	221	Bottom	18.6	1.2
Von Steuben	269	Second	6.3	1.7
Von Steuben	269	Third	5.3	2.1
Von Steuben	269	Top	4.6	2.4
Washington	252	Bottom	10.5	1.5
Washington	252	Second	12.0	1.5
Washington	252	Third	7.8	2.0
Washington	252	Top	6.7	2.3
Wells	239	Bottom	12.3	1.5
Wells	239	Second	10.1	1.9
Wells	239	Third	9.2	2.1
Westinghouse Achievement Academy	217	Bottom	18.1	1.4
Young	301	Top	2.3	3.0

Appendix B: Description of Survey Measures

TABLE 3

CCSR Measures on School Climate and Instruction

Measures from Surveys of Students	
Academic Support Among Peers	Peer Classroom Behavior measures the degree to which students' classmates treat each other with respect, work together well, and help each other learn, and if other students disrupt class, like to put others down, and don't care about each other. Students' reports refer to a specific class.
	Students' Sense of Belonging measures students' reports of how personally connected they feel to the school. Students rate the degree to which the people at school feel like family, whether people at school care if they come to school, and whether they participate in activities at the school.
	Peer Support for Academic Achievement asks students if their friends try hard in school, talk about classwork, help each other prepare for tests, and think it is important to attend classes.
Classroom Climate	Academic Engagement examines student interest and engagement in learning. Students responded to items regarding whether they are interested in their class and the topics studied and work hard to do their best. Students' reports refer to a specific class.
	Classroom Personalism gauges whether students perceive that their classroom teachers give them individual attention and show personal concern for them. Students were asked if their teachers know and care about them, notice if they are having trouble in class, and are willing to help with academic and personal problems. Students' reports refer to a specific class.
	Academic Press measures whether teachers press all students toward academic achievement. Students were asked if their teacher expects them to do their best, expects everyone to work hard, if the work is difficult and challenging, if you have to work hard to do well, and if the teacher asks difficult questions. Students' reports refer to a specific class.
Parent-Student Relationships	Parent Support for student learning gauges student views of their parents' support for their schoolwork. Students were asked about how often their parents (or other adults) encourage them to work hard, do their homework, and take responsibility.
	Parental Press for academic achievement asks students about the frequency with which their parents or guardians talked to them about and encouraged them in their schoolwork.
Safety and Discipline	Incidence of Disciplinary Action measures how often students get into trouble and are disciplined. Students were asked how many times they were sent to the office, how often their parents were contacted about discipline problems, and how often they had been suspended from school.
	Safety reflects students' sense of personal safety inside and outside the school and traveling to and from school.

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TABLE 3—CONTINUED

CCSR Measures on School Climate and Instruction

Measures from Surveys of Students	
Schoolwide Orientation	Importance of High School for the Future includes questions about students' attitudes regarding the importance of high school, such as whether grades in high school matter for success in college, classes give useful preparation for what students' plan to do in life, if high school teaches valuable skills, whether what they learn in class is necessary for success in the future, and whether working hard in school matters for success in the workforce.
	Schoolwide Academic Press for the future measures students' views of school norms of academic expectations. Students report on the degree to which all students are expected to work hard, stay in school, plan for their futures, and have high personal aspirations for their lives after graduation.
School Resources	Tech Hardware Availability measures the extent to which students report computer hardware is available to them.
	School Clubs , after-school activities measures the extent to which students at the school report participating in school clubs or after-school activities.
	Sports Teams measures the extent to which students at the school participate in sports teams.
	Tutoring measures the extent to which students at the school participate in after-school programs for help with schoolwork.
Teacher-Student Relationships	Student-Teacher Trust focuses on the quality of relationships between students and teachers. Students were asked whether they believe teachers can be trusted, care about them, keep their promises, and listen to students' ideas, and if they feel safe and comfortable with their teachers. In high-scoring schools, there is a high level of care and communication between students and teachers.
	Teacher Personal Support measures students' reports of teachers being there to help with personal matters. Students were asked whether there is a teacher who they can talk to about personal problems, who gives extra help with schoolwork, and who cares about how the student is doing.
Measures from Surveys of Teachers	
Coherence and Cooperation Among Teachers	Instructional Program Coherence assesses the degree to which teachers feel the programs at their school are coordinated with each other and with the school's mission. Teachers were asked if the materials in their schools are consistent both within and across grades, if there is sustained attention to quality program implementation, and if changes at the school have helped promote the school's goals for student learning.
	Collective Responsibility focuses on the extent of shared commitment among the faculty to improve the school so that all students learn. Teachers were asked how many colleagues feel responsible for students' academic and social development, set high standards of professional practice, and take responsibility for school improvement.
	Reflective Dialogue about practice reveals how much teachers talk with one another about instruction and student learning. Teachers reported how often they discuss curriculum and instruction as well as school goals, and how best to help students learn and how to manage their behavior.
	Teacher-Teacher Trust measures the extent to which teachers in school have open communication with and respect for each other. We asked, for example, whether teachers in the school trust and respect each other feel like they can discuss feelings and frustrations.

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TABLE 3—CONTINUED

CCSR Measures on School Climate and Instruction

Measures from Surveys of Teachers	
Classroom Practice	Assignment Demand asks teachers how often they require students to complete different types of assignments (e.g., short writing assignments of 1 or 2 pages, out-of-class readings, revisions of assignments). Teachers report about a specific class.
	Individualization of Instruction asks teachers how often they adjust instructional strategies to respond to students' understanding, adjust pacing of a lesson, and modify their lessons to meet students' needs. Teachers report about a specific class.
	Personal Relationships with Students asks teachers how often students talk to them about their friends, families, personal problems, their progress in class, academic achievements, and how they are doing in other classes. Teachers report about a specific class.
	Support of Testing and Learning Standards asks teachers to what extent they align their teaching emphases with state learning standards, whether they believe the standards are appropriate guidelines, and whether test-score accountability has helped the school focus on what's best for students.
Parent Interaction	Teacher-Parent Interaction measures teachers' reports of positive interactions with parents—whether parents support their teaching, do their best to help their children learn, and have confidence in teacher expertise; whether teachers and parents consider each other partners in educating children, and staff work to build trusting relationships with parents
	Teacher-Parent Trust asks teachers whether they feel good about parents' support for their work, the extent to which they feel respected by their students' parents, whether teachers and parents think of each other as partners, whether staff work to build trusting relationships with parents, and whether parents have confidence in the expertise of teachers.
Teachers' Feelings About the School	Teacher Commitment to the School gauges the extent to which teachers feel loyal and committed to the school. Teachers reported whether they look forward to working in the school, would rather work somewhere else, and would recommend the school to parents.
	Teacher Self-Efficacy asks students how much they believe they can control disruptive behavior in the classroom, motivate students who show low interest, get students to believe they can do well in school work, and help students value learning.
	Teacher-Principal Trust measures the extent to which teachers feel their principal respects them. Teachers were asked if their principal looks out for the welfare of teachers and has confidence in their expertise, and if they respect the principal as an educator.
	Expectations for Students Going to College gauges whether teachers expect most students at the school to go to college, and help students plan for college, and if the curriculum is focused on getting students ready for college

All measures come from the CCSR surveys conducted in Spring 2005. The survey items that were used to construct the measures, and the psychometric properties of the measures, are available at ccsr.uchicago.edu.

Appendix C: Correlations Involving Survey Measures

TABLE 4

Significant School Correlations of Climate and Instruction with Student Outcomes
Controlling for Student Backgrounds, Pre-High School Achievement, and School Composition

Measures of Climate From Student Surveys		Absences	Failures	GPA	Code*
Academic Support Among Peers	Peer Classroom Behavior				PEER
	Students' Sense of Belonging			.23^	BELS
	Peer Support for Academic Achievement		-.20^	.29*	PSAA
Classroom Climate	Academic Engagement		-.24*	.24*	ENGG
	Classroom Personalism	-.28*	-.35**	.35**	PERC
	Academic Press			.22^	PRES
Parent-Student Relationships	Parent Support for Student Learning				PARS
	Parental Press for Academic Achievement				PPAA
Safety and Discipline	Incidence of Disciplinary Action				DISO
	Safety	-.22^		.22^	SAFE
Schoolwide Orientation	Importance of High School for the Future	-.45***	-.31*	.35**	FUTR
	Schoolwide Academic Press for the Future	-.43***	-.36**	.47***	SLAP
School Resources	Computer Availability	-.27*		.22^	SXAV
	School Clubs, After-School Activities	-.21^	-.23^	.35**	
	Sports Teams	-.22^	-.24*	.27*	
	Tutoring				
Teacher-Student Relationships	Student-Teacher Trust	-.40***	-.40***	.47***	TRTS
	Teacher Personal Support	-.36**	-.27*	.37**	TSUP

***Code:** These measure codes are provided for readers who would like to reference further information on measure construction by visiting the CCSR Web site at ccsr.uchicago.edu.

Continued on next page

TABLE 4—CONTINUED

Significant School Correlations of Climate and Instruction with Student Outcomes
Controlling for Student Backgrounds, Pre-High School Achievement, and School Composition

Measures of Climate From Teacher Surveys		Absences	Failures	GPA	Code*
Coherence and Cooperation	Instructional Program Coherence	-0.23 [^]	-0.26*	0.25*	PGMC
	Collective Responsibility Among Teachers	-0.31*		0.25 [^]	COLR
	Reflective Dialogue About Practice				REFD
	Teacher-Teacher Trust			0.23 [^]	TRTE
Classroom Practice	Assignment Demand				ADMD
	Individualization of Instruction			0.24 [^]	INDV
	Personal Relationships with Students				PERT
	Support of Testing and Learning Standards	0.28*	0.28*	-0.22 [^]	STND
Parent Interaction	Teacher-Parent Interaction				TPIN
	Teacher-Parent Trust				TRPA
Teachers' General Feelings	Teacher Commitment to the School				SCMT
	Teacher Self-Efficacy				TEFF
	Teacher-Principal Trust				TRPR
	Expectations of Students Going to College				UEXP

[^] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Correlations were calculated using residuals from two-level HLMs that predicted failures, absences, or grades with student-level demographic characteristics (gender, race, poverty, social status, school mobility in the three years before high school, age when began high school, days absent) and eighth-grade reading and math achievement, and two measures of student composition at the school level—average eighth-grade ITBS achievement of the freshman cohort, and average residential poverty level of the freshman cohort.

***Code:** These measure codes are provided for readers who would like to reference further information on measure construction by visiting the CCSR Web site at ccsr.uchicago.edu.

TABLE 5

Correlations of School Climate and Instruction with Student Composition

Measures of Climate From Student Surveys		Average Incoming Achievement ¹	Poverty Level of Students ²	Code*
Academic Support Among Peers	Peer Classroom Behavior	0.61 ***	-0.69 ***	PEER
	Students' Sense of Belonging	0.52 ***	-0.23 *	BELS
	Peer Support for Academic Achievement	0.23 *	0.17	PSAA
Classroom Climate	Academic Engagement	-0.32 **	0.37 ***	ENG
	Classroom Personalism	-0.23 *	0.30 **	PERC
	Academic Press	0.09	0.19	PRES
Parent-Student Relationships	Parent Support for Student Learning	-0.18	0.60 *	PARS
	Parental Press for Academic Achievement	0.22 ^	0.04	PPAA
Safety and Discipline	Incidence of Disciplinary Action	-0.73 ***	0.63 ***	DISO
	Safety	0.51 ***	-0.28 *	SAFE
Schoolwide Orientation	Importance of High School for the Future	0.07	0.21 ^	FUTR
	Schoolwide Academic Press for the Future	0.31 **	-0.16	SLAP
School Resources	Computer Availability	0.38 ***	-0.21 ^	SXAV
	School Clubs, After-School Activities	0.30 *	0.14	
	Sports Teams	0.57 ***	-0.25 ^	
	Tutoring	0.05	0.08	
Teacher-Student Relationships	Student-Teacher Trust	-0.05	0.00	TRTS
	Teacher Personal Support	0.22 ^	0.14	TSUP
Measures of Climate From Teacher Surveys		Average Incoming Achievement ¹	Poverty Level of Students ²	Code*
Coherence and Cooperation	Instructional Program Coherence	0.08	-0.02	PGMC
	Collective Responsibility Among Teachers	0.19	-0.19	COLR
	Reflective Dialogue About Practice	0.12	0.01	REFD
	Teacher-Teacher Trust	0.01	0.04	TRTE
Classroom Practice	Assignment Demand	-0.36	0.48 ***	ADMD
	Individualization of Instruction	-0.06	0.12	INDV
	Personal Relationships with Students	-0.05	0.12	PERT
	Support of Testing and Learning Standards	-0.44	0.49 ***	STND
Parent Interaction	Teacher-Parent Interaction	-0.29 *	0.24 ^	TPIN
	Teacher-Parent Trust	0.57 ***	-0.40 ***	TRPA
Teachers' General Feelings	Teacher Commitment to the School	0.51 ***	-0.44 ***	SCMT
	Teacher Self-Efficacy	0.23 ^	0.03	TEFF
	Teacher-Principal Trust	0.25 *	0.00	TRPR
	Expectations of Students Going to College	0.52***	-0.35 **	UEXP

These are correlations without any adjustments for students' background characteristics.

^ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

¹Defined as the average incoming eighth-grade math score on the ITBS

²Defined as the aggregate poverty of students' residential census block groups, where poverty was measured as the percent of families below the poverty line and the male unemployment rate

*Code: These measure codes are provided for readers who would like to reference further information on measure construction by visiting the CCSR Web site at ccsr.uchicago.edu.

Appendix D: Summaries of Models

TABLE 6

Coefficients from Full Model Predicting Course Absences

Level 2	Coefficient	T-ratio
Intercept	8.925	33.886 ***
Average Incoming Achievement in School	-2.034	-4.850 ***
Average Poverty Level in School	-0.142	-0.425
Level 1	Coefficient	T-ratio
Male	0.806	7.137 ***
African-American	-0.966	-3.654 ***
American Indian	-0.032	-0.022
Asian	-2.774	-7.597 ***
Latino	-1.397	-5.872 ***
Poverty	0.758	7.172 ***
Social Status	0.091	0.916
Moved Once in 3 Years Before High School	0.944	7.430 ***
Moved Twice in 3 Years Before High School	2.632	13.557 ***
Moved 3+ Times in 3 Years Before High School	5.424	16.703 ***
Eighth-Grade Math ITBS Score	-0.048	-16.820 ***
Eighth-Grade Reading ITBS Score	-0.008	-3.087 **
Began School Early	-1.852	-4.445 ***
Slightly Old-for-Grade When Began High School	0.275	2.070 *
Months Old-for-Grade When Began High School	0.268	17.199 ***

[^] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The variable representing absences is slightly skewed ($skew = 1.6$). Models were also run on the log of absences, which has a normal distribution. However, the results were very similar so models using the untransformed outcome are displayed here for ease of interpretability.

TABLE 7

Variance Components from Models Predicting Course Absences (in Days)

Model	Unexplained Level 1 Variance (Individual Level)	Unexplained Level 2 Variance (School Level)
1. Unconditional	86.0	18.8
2. With background characteristics plus student achievement at level 1	79.2	10.7
3. With background characteristics plus student achievement and school composition at level 2	71.5	4.9

TABLE 8

Coefficients From Full Models Predicting Course Failure Rates

	Model without Freshman Attendance		Model with Freshman Attendance	
Level 2	Coefficient	T-ratio	Coefficient	T-ratio
Intercept	2.530	30.839 ***	1.775	27.506 ***
Average Incoming Achievement in School	-0.416	-3.166 **	0.196	1.921
Average Poverty Level in School	-0.276	-2.627 *	-0.240	-2.924 **
Level 1	Coefficient	T-ratio	Coefficient	T-ratio
Male	1.006	22.440 ***	0.644	20.096 ***
African-American	0.128	1.222	0.387	5.365 ***
American Indian	0.055	0.096	0.370	1.022
Asian	-0.567	-3.903 ***	0.354	3.726 ***
Latino	0.091	0.960	0.421	6.537 ***
Poverty	0.220	5.246 ***	-0.030	-1.001
Social Status	0.008	0.212	-0.050	-1.825
Moved Once in 3 Years Before High School	0.293	5.801 ***	-0.004	-0.102
Moved Twice in 3 Years Before High School	0.787	10.231 ***	-0.005	-0.080
Moved 3+ Times in 3 Years Before High School	1.443	11.237 ***	-0.233	-2.275 *
Eighth-Grade Math ITBS Score	-0.022	-19.467 ***	-0.007	-8.825 ***
Eighth-Grade Reading ITBS Score	-0.001	-0.994	0.001	1.077
Began School Early	-0.555	-3.350 **	0.075	0.670
Slightly Old-for-Grade When Began High School	0.036	0.679	-0.031	-0.839
Months Old-for-Grade When Began High School	0.073	11.798 ***	0.004	0.759
Study Behaviors			-0.324	-15.186 ***
Days Absent			0.319	124.151 ***

[^] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

TABLE 9

Variance Components from Models Predicting Course Failure Rates

Model	Unexplained Level 1 Variance (Individual Level)	Unexplained Level 2 Variance (School Level)
1. Unconditional	12.43	1.16
2. With student background characteristics at level 1	11.80	0.78
3. With background characteristics plus student achievement at level 1	11.46	0.52
4. With background characteristics plus student achievement and school composition at level 2	11.45	0.46
5. With student background characteristics, achievement, school composition and freshman absence rates and studying	3.44	0.26

TABLE 10

Coefficients From Full Models Predicting GPA

	Model without Freshman Attendance and Studying		Model with Freshman Attendance and Studying	
Level 2	Coefficient	T-ratio	Coefficient	T-ratio
Intercept	1.973	88.396 ***	2.221	104.223 ***
Average Incoming Achievement in School	0.138	3.860 ***	-0.063	-1.886
Average Poverty Level in School	0.081	2.823 **	0.068	2.493 *
Level 1	Coefficient	T-ratio	Coefficient	T-ratio
Male	-0.408	-34.452 ***	-0.323	-30.487 ***
African-American	-0.196	-7.088 ***	-0.309	-12.950 ***
American Indian	-0.062	-0.411	-0.130	-1.087
Asian	0.375	9.79 ***	0.100	3.186 **
Latino	-0.109	-4.373 **	-0.208	-9.756 ***
Poverty	-0.061	-5.474 ***	-0.009	-0.928
Social Status	-0.002	-0.191	0.000	-0.009
Moved Once in 3 Years Before High School	-0.079	-5.929 ***	-0.003	-0.275
Moved Twice in 3 Years Before High School	-0.207	-10.187 ***	-0.023	-1.189
Moved 3+ Times in 3 Years Before High School	-0.356	-10.448 ***	0.045	1.320
Eighth-Grade Math ITBS Score	0.009	30.691 ***	0.006	22.980 ***
Eighth-Grade Reading ITBS Score	0.001	2.587	0.001	2.770 **
Began School Early	0.225	5.148 ***	0.048	1.313
Months Old-for-Grade When Began High School	-0.021	-12.955 ***	-0.003	-2.385 *
Study Behaviors			0.203	28.819 ***
Days Absent ¹			-0.083	-97.154 ***

¹ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

¹ For simplicity, days absent was entered in this model without transformation (although extreme values of greater than 40 were trimmed to 40). Because it is somewhat positively skewed, the models were re-run with the square root of absence, which has only a slight positive skew. The square root of absences showed a slightly stronger relationship with grades, and similar patterns were observed.

TABLE 11

Variance Components from Models Predicting GPA

Model	Unexplained Level 1 Variance (Individual Level)	Unexplained Level 2 Variance (School Level)
1. Unconditional	1.01	0.18
2. With background characteristics plus student achievement at level 1	0.83	0.06
3. With background characteristics plus student achievement, absences, and study behaviors at level 1	0.38	0.04
4. With background characteristics plus student achievement and school composition at level 2 (not controlling for absences and study behaviors)	0.79	0.03
5. With student background characteristics, achievement, school composition, freshman absence rates and study behaviors	0.38	0.03

About the Authors

Elaine M. Allensworth

Elaine M. Allensworth is the Co-Director for Statistical Analysis at the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago (CCSR). She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology, and an M.A. in Sociology and Urban Studies from Michigan State University. Allensworth is an expert in statistical methodology, but believes that knowledge develops best by combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Her work focuses on the structural factors that affect high school students' educational attainment, particularly the factors that affect graduation and dropout rates. She was the lead author on a number of studies on graduation rates in the Chicago Public Schools, including *The On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation* (2005), *Graduation and Dropout Trends in Chicago: A look at cohorts of students from 1991 through 2004* (2005), and *Ending Social Promotion: Dropout Rates in Chicago after Implementation of the Eighth-Grade Promotion Gate* (2004). She recently began a three-year mixed-methods study of the transition to high school, which will follow a cohort of students from eighth grade into their second year in high school. This study looks at the ways in which students perceive the challenges of high school, the school practices that can foster successful freshman-year performance, and those that can hinder students. Allensworth is also a member of the CCSR postsecondary project, which is following students' transition from high school to college. As part of this work, she has been examining the factors affecting students' performance on the ACT. She is also leading several studies on the effects of rigorous curricula on students' experiences in their classes, grades, test scores, high school graduation, and college attendance. Allensworth was once a high school teacher.

John Q. Easton

John Q. Easton is Executive Director of the Consortium. He has been affiliated with CCSR since its inception in 1990 and led its first research study. Much of Easton's research at CCSR examines trends in achievement test scores and the use of test scores in school improvement and school accountability efforts. He is coauthor of a recent study on the relationship between freshman-year academic performance and high school graduation. Easton holds a PhD in Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistical Analysis from the University of Chicago.

This report reflects the interpretation of the authors. Although the Consortium's Steering Committee provided technical advice and reviewed earlier versions, no formal endorsement by these individuals, organizations, or the full Consortium should be assumed.

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Our Mission

The Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago aims to conduct research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. By broadly engaging local leadership in our work, and presenting our findings to diverse audiences, we seek to expand communication among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. CCSR encourages the use of research in policy action, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we believe that good policy is most likely to result from a genuine competition of ideas, informed by the best evidence that can be obtained.



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Calculating Freshman On-Track

Technical Notes for Freshman On-Track

This document was created by Chicago Public Schools to define how Freshman On-Track is calculated and provides considerations for appropriate use of the metric.

Freshman On-Track

What is Freshman On-Track?

Freshman On-Track % is a measure of how many first-time freshmen are, by the end of their first year, “on track” to graduate from high school within four years. The measure is based on two freshman year data points: (i) credit accumulation; (ii) course failures. An eligible first-year freshman is on-track by the end of the year if s/he has: (i) earned at least five course credits; (ii) failed *no more than* one semester of a *core* course—otherwise, s/he is off track. CCSR research shows that freshmen who finish their first year of high school on-track are more than three times as likely as those off-track to graduate from high school within four years.

There are a few technical points regarding FOT calculation that anyone using this data should be aware of:

- Eligible freshmen count towards the FOT rate of the school they attend *on the 20th day of school*, regardless of where they finish, or spend the majority of, the school year.
- Freshman year dropouts *are* included in the metric, and they are counted as off-track.
- Freshmen attending the following types of schools (as of the 20th day) are *not* included in the metric:
 - Charter schools
 - Jail schools
 - Alternative schools
 - Special Ed schools
- Students repeating ninth grade are not included in the metric.

While attendance may impact whether a student earns the necessary amount of credits and/or passes courses, attendance *does not* directly factor in to the calculation of this metric.

Components of Freshman On Track

- Credits accumulated during first year of HS (≥ 5)
- Number of semester core course failures during first year of HS (≤ 1)

How are results reported?

Annual

- **School-level** Freshman On-Track data for the years 1997-2009 is currently available on the REA website. To obtain it, visit the REA homepage, then navigate to School and Citywide Reports->All Schools, then look for the Excel file called “Freshman On Track Rates” under the heading **On Track Rates, 1997-2009**.
- **Student-level** Freshman On-Track data—which is aggregated up to the school, area and district levels for reporting and accountability purposes—is not available directly via website. However, it can be obtained on an as-needed basis by contacting Daisy Garcia (x32367) or Melva Ryan (x32536) of Central Office PM.

Point-in-time

A “point in time” Freshman On-Track rate—a rough approximation of end-of-year Freshman On-Track rate—is also available, on a dynamically updated basis, via the Freshman Success Report located on Dashboard. This point-in-time rate may be useful to monitor and manage school and area performance within the school year: be advised, however, that the value of this rate jumps around quite a bit during the school year, is always lower at the end than the beginning of the year, and is based on an approximation of the end-of-year FOT criteria. Any questions regarding Dashboard data should be directed to John DiCello, Dashboard Manager, at x31669.

What questions can Freshman On-Track data answer?

Freshman On-Track data can be used at the aggregate level—whether district, area or school—to gauge what percentage of students are “on track” to graduate in four years—in turn, we know that students who are on-track after freshman year are over three times as likely as those off-track to graduate in four years. In short, it helps us answer the broad question: “How good of a job is this part of the district doing making sure its freshmen have attained the education they need to graduate on time?”

Freshman On-Track data can also be cut in numerous ways to indicate how successful schools, areas, or the district as a whole have been at intervening with “at risk” students to ensure they are on pace to graduate on time. Interesting analytical questions and possible deep dives include:

- What % of students who were flagged on the beginning-of-year Freshman Watchlist (or any of the quarterly Freshman Success Reports) finished the year “On Track”?
- What kinds of “at risk” students are we most (and least) successful at getting on track—kids with attendance problems? Academic problems? Both?
- How do different racial/demographic groups break down in terms of Freshman On-Track %, and how (if at all) should this information inform school- and/or classroom-level FOT strategies?
- Did tailored, school-level interventions “work”?—How much more likely were “at risk” students who received particular types of intervention (e.g. tutoring, parent conferences, etc.) during their first year of high school to be “on track” than those who did not?
- Among our off-track students, what particular classes or subject areas are causing the most semester failures? Do we have a plan to ensure that proper supports are in place to help reduce failure rates in these areas going forward?
- Among a high school’s freshman student body, are there substantial variations/patterns depending on what elementary feeder school a student attended, and how should this impact our feeder school outreach strategy?
- What percentage of our *off-track* freshmen graduate within four years?—and do we have effective credit recovery programs in place to get these kids back on track during sophomore/junior/senior year?
- What percentage of our *on-track* freshmen graduate within four years?—and do we have effective sophomore/junior/senior year transition programs in place to ensure that on-track kids *stay* on track?

What questions can Freshman On-Track data NOT answer?

- Freshman On-Track was designed to be predictive of high school graduation—NOT of either college enrollment or college success. Standardized test scores and GPAs are much better indicators of the latter.
- Freshman On-Track will tell us how many of a given school’s freshmen were on track, but not how close a given student or given student was to the FOT “cutoffs”—i.e. it will NOT tell us:
 - How many more credits/fewer failures off-track students needed to be on-track
 - How far beyond “On Track” baseline cutoffs on-track students were, in terms of credit accumulation
- Without deeper analysis, FOT will not indicate *why* a student was off-track, i.e. whether it was because s/he did not *attempt* enough credits, or because s/he did not *pass* enough credits.
- FOT cannot directly answer any questions about student attendance, nor does it incorporate such data.
- FOT will not tell you anything about what happens to students who have been retained, i.e. are second-time freshmen.
- Also, keep in mind that FOT rates are highly dependent on:
 - Ability level and work habits of incoming students
 - Grading policies at individual high schools

How is Freshman On-Track data used within CPS?

Freshman On-Track data is a key self-monitoring tool for schools, which can be used to help gauge the effectiveness of school-specific intervention and transition strategies for 9th graders.

It is also a key district accountability metric, in two ways:

1. First, the metric **% of Freshmen On-Track** appears on the districtwide annual high school scorecard, which is used to gauge CAO effectiveness and progress towards district and area goals.
2. Second, FOT is a crucial component of the district's Performance Policy, which dictates whether or not a given school is on probation. Specifically, a high school can earn up to three (3) points for its current FOT level, and up to (3) points for its FOT trend—six (6) points, total. For more specific information on how FOT counts towards probation status, please visit <http://policy.cps.k12.il.us/documents/302.6.pdf>.

Where can I find more information?

- Several online resources from the REA website explain the methodology behind Freshman On Track and the ways in which CPS uses this data centrally.
- A Freshman On-Track Handbook, which details the experiences of six Freshman On-Track “lab” schools while developing and implementing, is available from Paige Ponder of Graduation Pathways (paponder@cps.k12.il.us; x32078).
- A report from CCSR (Chicago Consortium on School Research) describing the development and predictive validity of this metric is available online at <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf>.
- Peter Godard (prgodard@cps.k12.il.us; x32735) and Michael Deuser (xmkdeuser@cps.k12.il.us; x31278) can help explain what the metric measures and how it is calculated.
- Daisy Garcia (dagarcia@cps.k12.il.us; x32367) and Melva Ryan (mryan1@cps.k12.il.us; x32536) can help you with any data requests related to FOT.



Exploring Ideas to Support the Transition to High School

Contents

Easing the Transition to High School

Relationships Matter

The Magic of Mentoring

Mentoring Minority Students

Purpose

Building relationships with students is a critical lever for supporting them in the transition to high school. Structures such as mentoring and Freshman Advisory programs allow students to receive on-time targeted support through one-on-one, small group, and/or whole group activities. During the initial phases, Success Teams may struggle with deciding what interventions will be the most impactful for their students. Tool Set B provides you with a collection of practical, research-based articles to increase your knowledge of meaningful and targeted student interventions.

How & When to Use

Professional readings provide a common learning experience for your Success Team. Using a text-based protocol with the professional reading allows participants to process new information as well as discuss implications for practice. We find protocols to be very helpful in structuring an efficient and productive conversation when in teams. Some possible protocols for use are [the Four A's Text Protocol](#), [The Final Word](#) and [Text-Based Seminar](#).



Exploring Ideas to Support the Transition to High School

Easing the Transition to High School

A chronicle of one suburban high school's journey to shift the culture of support for freshmen through the creation of a Freshman Advisory program focused on connecting students to the high school and providing them with academic and social survival skills.

[Click here to read >>](#)



Exploring Ideas to Support the Transition to High School

Relationships Matter

A review of the research on the importance of student-teacher relationships as a lever for student academic achievement. Practical suggestions are also provided.

[Click here to read >>](#)



APPLYING
RESEARCH & DATA

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT





Exploring Ideas to Support the Transition to High School

The Magic of Mentoring

The basics of establishing a school-based mentoring program, including how to structure a program, the role of a mentor, and supporting ongoing mentoring relationships.

[Click here to read >>](#)



Exploring Ideas to Support the Transition to High School

Mentoring Minority Students

An article describing one urban high school's approach to creating special classes for high-achieving minority students in an effort to increase minority enrollment in honors courses.

[Click here to read >>](#)



Developing and Tracking Interventions

Contents

Considerations for Planning Tier 2 Interventions

Quick Guide to Tracking Interventions

Intervention Evaluation Flowchart

Intervention Success Monthly Action Plan (IS-MAP)

Student Success Intervention Plan

Purpose

One responsibility of the Success Team is to develop and track interventions. Team members should give thoughtful consideration to intervention design that ensures interventions are meeting the needs of all students, including those who are underperforming and those who are high achieving. The team must also determine the effectiveness of selected interventions and their impact on student achievement.

How & When to Use

Planning effective student interventions can be a challenging task for both new and established Success Teams. This set of tools provides support for teams that are creating and/or fine tuning their student intervention systems by encouraging teams to describe, analyze, and reflect on their current practices. Furthermore, these tools provide team members with opportunities to adjust interventions to better serve students.



Developing and Tracking Interventions

Considerations for Planning Tier 2 Interventions

A set of guiding questions to use during the development of an intervention system. Questions are focused on looking at student data, targeting students, and intervention selection, implementation, and effectiveness.

Considerations When Planning Tier 2 Interventions

For more information on the tiered systems of student support, please refer to the [Response to Intervention \(RtI\)](#) or [Multiple Tiered Student Supports \(MTSS\)](#) websites.

Data Questions

- To what degree is attendance playing a role in student performance? To whom do you refer Tier 3 students who have serious attendance issues (inside and outside of the school) so that the team can really concentrate on supporting Tier 2 students?
- How does the grade distribution look by teacher? Are there teachers who are failing a disproportionate number of students?
- Do your assessment policies create opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery, or do they cause students to feel overwhelmed and fall off track?

Targeting Students

- How many students have you identified for Success Team intervention? Does this number fall in the 15 – 25% range for Tier 2 supports? Are there students who are really Tier 3 being included into Tier 2 supports?

Intervention Selection

- What issue is the intervention addressing? (academic/social-emotional/behavioral)
- What programs/resources already exist in the building that could possibly address the issue? How closely do these programs/resources align with the identified needs of students? For example, if tutoring is being offered already, is it designed to help students with real-time issues they face in their classes or is it specifically designed for remediation of basic skills?

Intervention Implementation

- Who will implement the intervention?
- Who will coordinate the intervention (logistics)?
- Who will own the tracking of the intervention's effectiveness?
- What does successful implementation look like?

Considerations When Planning Tier 2 Interventions (cont.)

Tracking Effectiveness

- Does tracking your intervention include the following information: targeted students' names, participation (such as the number of times the student participates within a specified period), grade check dates, and grades in targeted courses?
- Does your tracking tool allow you to aggregate point-in-time data in different ways so that you can accurately monitor targeted student progress?
- What is your timeline for course correction?



Developing and Tracking Interventions

Quick Guide to Tracking Interventions

Guidelines for designing an intervention tracking tool.

Quick Guide to Tracking Interventions

Tracking is necessary to determine the efficacy of an intervention so that adjustments can be made in a timely manner. A tracking tool is more effective when it is in a teacher-friendly format that can be disaggregated to pull data for specific subgroups. For example, if your team is using tutoring as an intervention, and the targeted student group requires tutoring in more than one core class, your tracking tool should be able to disaggregate data to ascertain intervention impact by course. Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets can support tracking interventions by disaggregating data and creating graphs.

Features of Good Intervention Tracking Tools

- Name of the intervention and what key performance indicator it addresses (attendance, point-in-time On-Track rates, GPA, behavior metric, etc.)
- Names of the targeted students
 - If tracking grades, include each core course's average expressed as a percentage
- Intervention contacts/implementation evidence
 - Tutoring attendance
 - Mentorship contact dates
 - "Office hours" visits
- Point-in-time progress on the key performance indicator impacted by the intervention
 - Should include at least 2 checkpoints within a 10-week period
 - If tracking grades, provide an average expressed as a percentage for each core course
 - If tracking attendance, provide number of cumulative absences and/or tardies

Quick Guide to Tracking Interventions (cont.)

Example: Henderson College Prep, Quarter 3 Mentorship Program, KPI Addressed: Point-in-Time On-Track

		Meeting 1 Dates: 02/01 - 02/04/2016					
Student	Mentor	Abs	Tardies	ENG	MATH	SCI	SOC
A	Isom	1	1	75	83	56	80
B	Shields	1	0	90	57	83	32
C	Wells	0	3	48	67	77	93
D	Wells	0	5	79	78	76	57
E	Pitcher	0	1	82	84	88	32
F	Muldrow	1	1	44	78	88	57
G	Pitcher	2	6	75	81	87	71
H	Martinez	1	1	61	55	62	71
I	Pitcher	1	1	68	90	83	83
J	Isom	0	3	59	65	83	93
K	Isom	0	2	88	82	88	32
L	Martinez	0	1	88	92	51	85
M	Shields	0	0	75	78	88	76
N	Shields	1	0	83	83	88	57



Developing and Tracking Interventions

Intervention Evaluation Flowchart

A pathway to determine if individual interventions are working for schools and to improve the use of data to successfully implement interventions.

Is our student success intervention working for our students?

YES

OR

NO: Is there a true opportunity for recovery if students participate with fidelity?


- What are you doing that works for students? (What is your evidence?)
- What are you doing that works for the adults implementing the intervention? (What is your evidence?)
- What parts of your implementation plan can you tweak for even greater success?

YES

Is it an implementation fidelity issue?

- Are there other school programs/initiatives competing with effective implementation?
- Are teachers/owners aware of implementation procedures?
- Are teachers compensated when appropriate?
- Is there sufficient and reasonable time to implement the intervention?
- Is the intervention publicized effectively to appropriate stakeholders?
- Have you implemented the intervention long enough?

Is it a student participation issue?

- How are students held accountable for not participating? By whom?
- Do they see the results of their participation?
- Are students encouraged by multiple adults to participate?
- Does the intervention respect student time and effort?
- Is the intervention viewed as punitive?

NO

Is the issue a mismatch between the intervention and student needs?

- Does the intervention provide supports for students struggling academically?
- Is the intervention frequent enough to be effective?
- How was the intervention selected? Based on identified student need? Adult preference? Feasibility?

Is the issue one that cannot be addressed by a Success Team intervention?

Examples:

- Teacher philosophy
- Grading policies
- Chronic truancy
- Chronic suspensions
- Curriculum pacing

Is our student success intervention working for our students?

Data Components Key To Successful Implementation

What data structures and practices, if addressed, will increase your team's efficacy in improving student achievement?

Access to timely Gradebook data

- Are grades updated in a timely manner according to the grade pull schedule?
- Who can provide the grade-level, course, and student-level data you need?
- Can you manipulate data into a teacher-friendly format?
- Do you have or make time to manipulate the data into a teacher-friendly format?

Student participation data

- How are you tracking participation? (intentionally or randomly)
- Is your tracking tool useful for highlighting trends in participation and its effect on achievement?

Intervention implementation data

TUTORING

- Are teachers actually tutoring students/ providing academic support?
- How are students provided with work to complete during tutoring?
- If tutoring is administered by external partners, how is communication of student needs and course expectations shared with them?

MENTORING

- Do mentoring conversations push students to action around their grades?
- What information are mentors provided with to drive their mentoring sessions?
- Are mentors able to advocate professionally with their colleagues?

Data analysis

- Is sufficient time allocated for analyzing data specific to your intervention?
- Does your team's analysis of intervention data lead to action toward increasing student achievement?

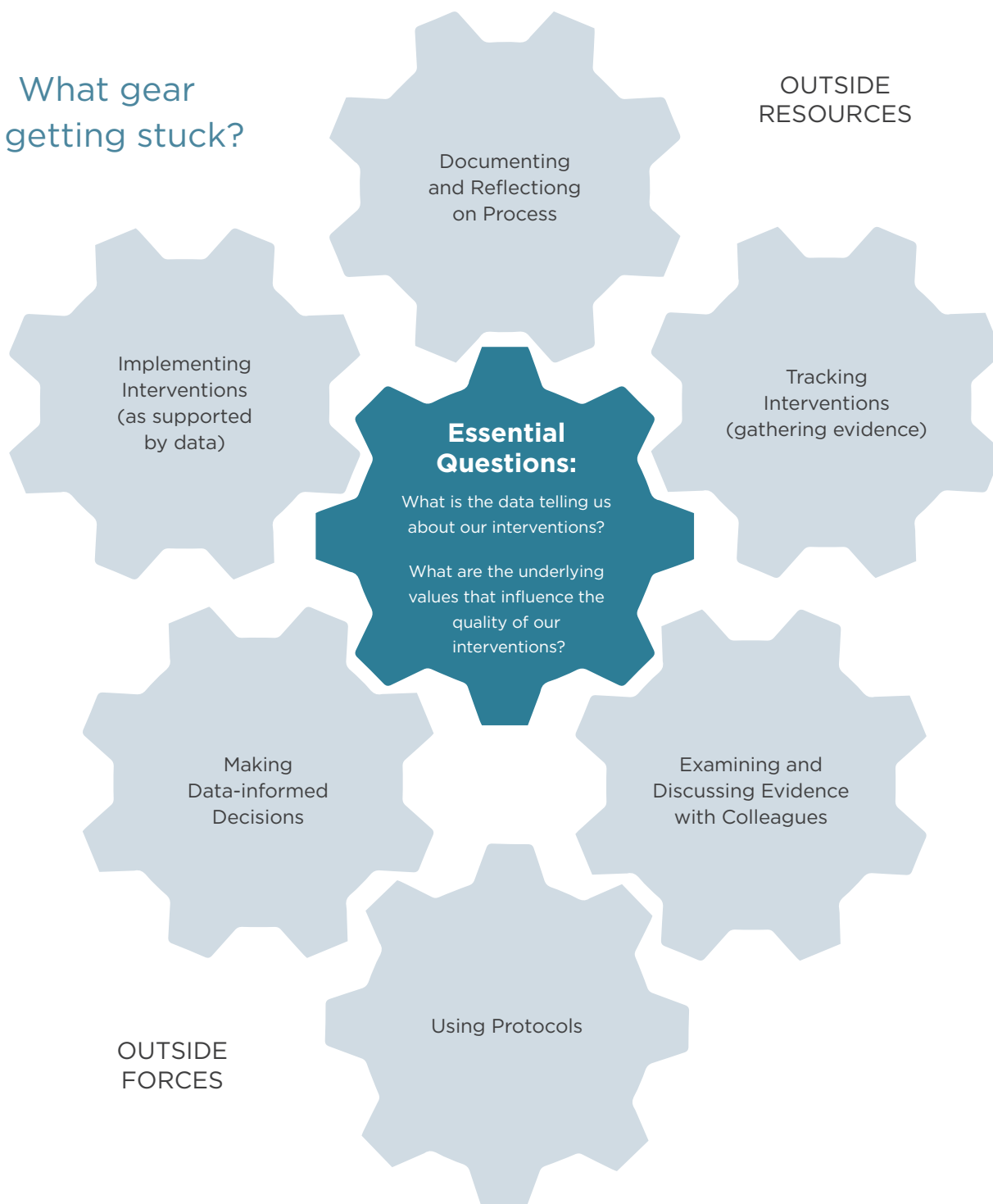
Intervention Evaluation Flowchart (cont.)

Some Considerations for Intervention Planning

- Identifying what students need
- Programming/scheduling interventions
- Matching adult expertise with student needs
- Strategizing around how to get targeted students to the intervention
- Connecting what's happening in the intervention to what's happening in the classroom (relational/academic)

The Evidence Process

What gear
is getting stuck?





Developing and Tracking Interventions

Intervention Success Monthly Action Plan (IS-MAP)

Supports action planning using results from the Intervention Evaluation Flowchart.

Intervention Success Monthly Action Plan (IS-MAP)

Based on quarterly student achievement data and your reflection using the Intervention Evaluation Flowchart, what area needs refinement and what is the change you will make? (refer to bolded categories on the Flowchart)

Area of Refinement: _____

Planned Change: _____

Why am I planning to do this? What's at stake? What do I hope will happen as a result of this change in our team's practice?	How will I initiate this change? What action do I need to take to bring this change to fruition?		What supports do I need to be successful? Who can help me and what do I need from them?	How will I know if my team has made progress? What evidence will tell our team we're on the right track with the intervention?
	Action Item	Due Date	What I Need	Resource Person



Developing and Tracking Interventions

Student Success Intervention Plan

A planning tool for student interventions that includes the identification of baseline data, criteria for success, status checkpoints, and plans for reflection.



Student Success Intervention Plan: Quarter ____

Date:	School:				Grade:	
Focus	<input type="checkbox"/> Attendance <input type="checkbox"/> Ds/Fs <input type="checkbox"/> GPA <input type="checkbox"/> On-Track Rate <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____					
Target group				Number of Students		
Baseline data used to select target group						
Intervention description	What it is: When it takes place (dates/times): Where it takes place: Description of activities involved:					
Goal of intervention						
Criteria for success						
Owner(s) of intervention						
Participants in intervention						
Timeline of intervention	Planning and preparation	Introduction to staff	Introduction to targeted students	Introduction to parents and stakeholders	Intervention start date	Intervention end date
Status checkpoints	Checkpoint 1	Checkpoint 2		Checkpoint 3		Checkpoint 4
Summary of action taken after each checkpoint						
Reflection at end of intervention						



Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families

Contents

**UChicago Consortium
Guides to On-Track for
Students and Parents**

**What Does “On-Track”
Mean?**

“Am I On Track?”

Purpose

Effective communication of On-Track research and school-wide goals is important to create the necessary buy-in to improve outcomes for freshmen. Each member of the school community – students, families, faculty, and staff – plays a key role in successfully transitioning students to high school.

How & When to Use

Tool Set D contains examples that can be used as part of your communication strategy. While developing your plan, consider the following:

- What do you want to communicate to the school community and why?
- Who are your audiences?
- What are the key messages for each audience?
- How will messages about On-Track be shared with each group and who is the best person to deliver them?
- What is the most effective way for sharing information with each group?
- Where can student voice play a role?



Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families

UChicago Consortium Guides to On-Track for Students and Parents

Created by the UChicago Consortium, these documents provide a research-based, user-friendly explanation of the Freshman On-Track metric and how the metric relates to high school graduation and postsecondary outcomes.



Freshman Year: The Make-it or Break-it Year

Your student is about to start the most important year of high school—perhaps the most important year of school so far. This is the year that will set the stage for whether they will graduate and whether they will be ready for college.

How do we know this? Because researchers at the University of Chicago--the Consortium for Chicago School Research--have spent years trying to understand what really matters when it comes to graduating from Chicago Public Schools. Working in cooperation with the district, the Consortium researchers have analyzed years of data—surveys, standardized tests, student grades, attendance records—and uncovered some connections that might surprise you.

It's not about their 8th grade test scores, or even the ACT test they will face in the 11th grade, although these tests do matter. It's not about where you live and how much money your family earns, although those facts get a lot of attention when educators talk about drop-out statistics.

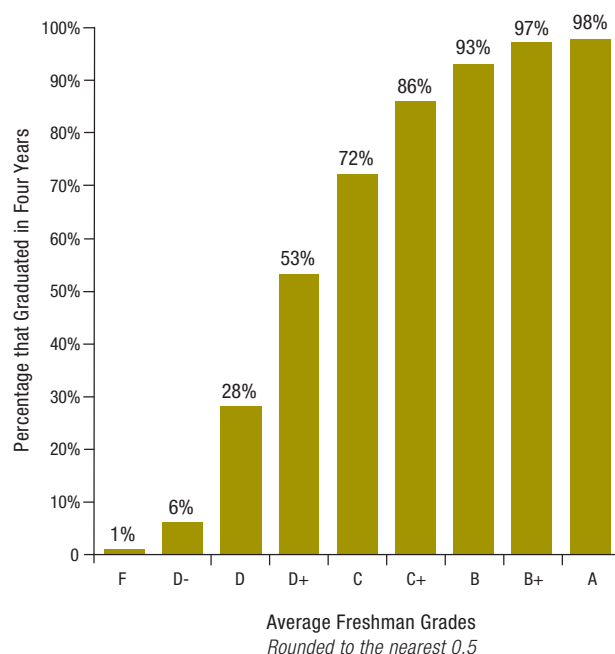
□ Here's what really matters far more than anything: **GRADES AND ATTENDANCE.**

No one wants to be a drop-out statistic. So as you guide your teenager through this crucial year, consider what research tells us about Chicago freshmen and the factors that influence whether or not students will graduate four years later.

GRADES

- More than 95 percent of students with a B average or better in their freshman year graduate.
- Freshmen who earn a B average or better have an 80-percent chance of finishing high school with at least a 3.0 GPA.
- Freshmen with less than a C average are more likely to drop out than graduate.

Freshman Grades Predict Graduation

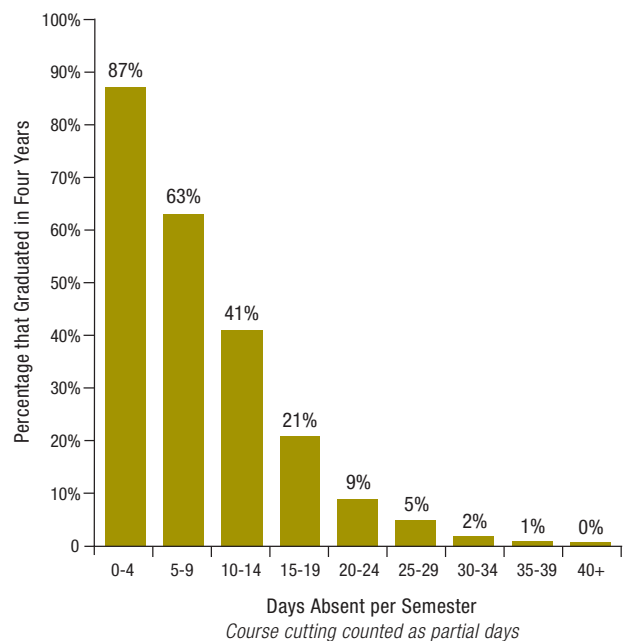


Grades and Attendance

ABSENCES

- Nearly 90 percent of freshmen who miss less than a week of school per semester graduate, regardless of their 8th grade test scores.
- Freshmen who miss more than two weeks of school flunk, on average, at least two classes—no matter whether they arrive at high school with top test scores or below-average scores. In fact, freshmen who arrive with high test scores but miss two weeks of school per semester are more likely to fail a course than freshmen with low test scores who miss just one week.

Missing Classes Puts Graduation at Risk



What does all this research mean for you and your student?

Essentially, that the freshman year is an important chance for a fresh start. Strong students can quickly fall off course if they start cutting classes and blowing off homework. And students who struggled in elementary school can turn things around if they come to school every day and aim for a B average. For Chicago students who want to graduate from college—and 78 percent of seniors say they do—that B average in high school is what it's going to take to succeed in college.

It sounds simple, but there is a lot of room for improvement in these two areas. That's because:

- More than half of Chicago freshmen fail a course.
- About 40 percent miss more than a month of school in that first year (which includes class cutting).
- The average GPA is lower than a “C.”



So...what can you do?

- ✓ **Reinforce the importance of getting to school on time and not cutting classes.** Your teenager may think it doesn't matter to blow off the first or last class of the day, but it does. Even occasional skipping leads to dramatically lower grades. And it sends the wrong message to teachers about the desire to succeed.
- ✓ **Talk with your student's teachers** about how you can help your teen succeed, especially if you see his or her grades start to fall. Teachers should be helping struggling students, but sometimes it falls on freshmen (and their parents) to ask for that help. We know from our research that students do

better in their courses when they trust their teachers and count on them for support. Communication with teachers is important, especially if there are personal issues affecting performance in class.

- ✓ **Make academics your top priority for your freshman.** This means trying hard on assignments even when they aren't interesting and choosing to study instead of socializing when there is a big test. Students with good study habits have higher GPAs and fail fewer courses than classmates who don't make homework a priority.



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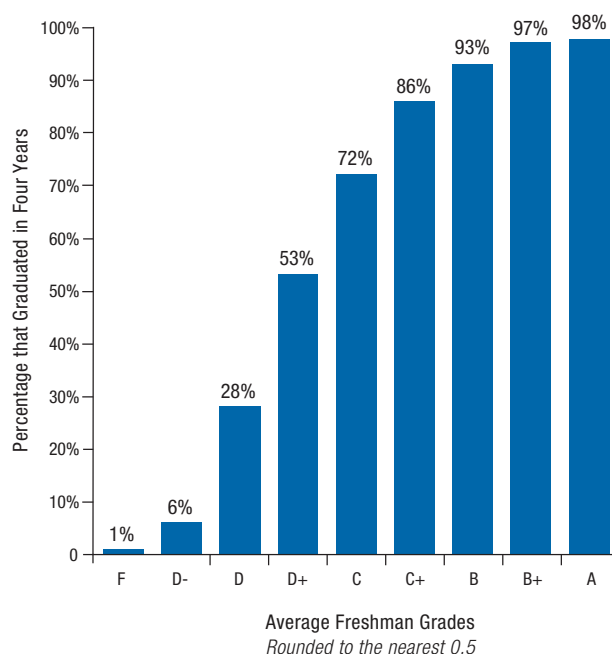
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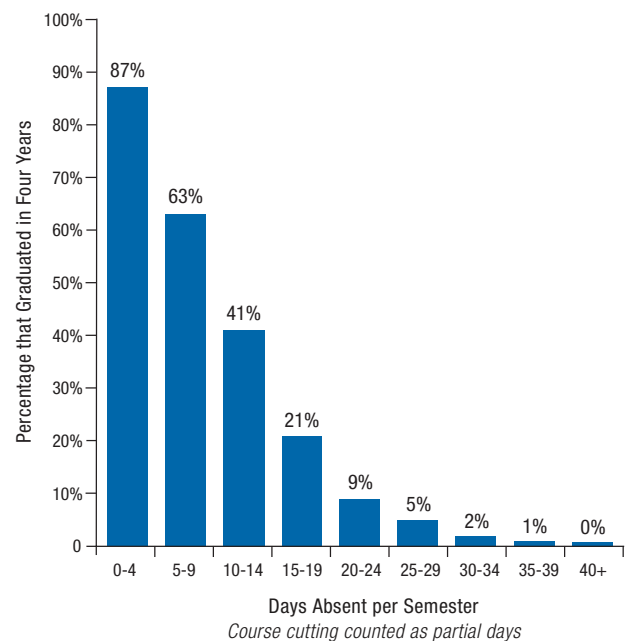


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But you don't have to be one of these statistics.

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Primer Año: El Año de Pasar o Fracasar

Su estudiante está por comenzar el año más importante de escuela secundaria—quizás el año más importante de toda su vida escolar hasta el día de hoy. Este es el año que va a determinar si se gradúan de la escuela secundaria y si estarán listos para asistir a la universidad o no.

¿Cómo es que sabemos esto? Porque investigadores en la Universidad de Chicago—del Consortium on Chicago School Research—han pasado años tratando de entender lo que realmente importa sobre la graduación de la escuela secundaria de las Escuelas Públicas de Chicago (Chicago Public Schools). Trabajando en cooperación con el distrito educativo, los investigadores del Consorcio han analizado años de datos informativos—encuestas, exámenes estandarizados, calificaciones estudiantiles, listas de asistencia—y han descubierto ciertas conexiones que le sorprenderán.

No se relaciona totalmente con sus puntajes en los exámenes de 8^{vo} grado, ni tan siquiera con el examen de ACT, al que se enfrentarán en el 11^{mo} grado, aunque estos exámenes si son importantes. No se relaciona con dónde Usted vive y cuánto dinero su familia gana, aunque esos hechos atraen mucho la atención cuando los educadores hablan acerca de las estadísticas de deserción escolar.



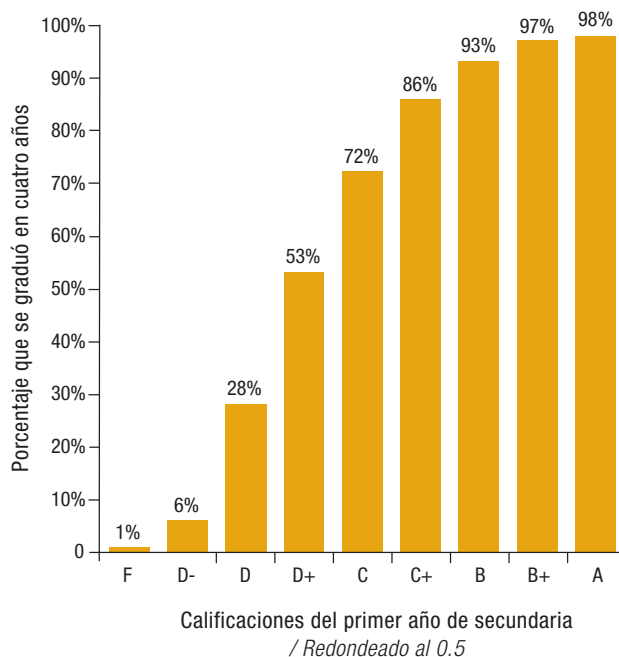
Esto es lo que realmente cuenta mucho más que cualquier otra cosa: **NOTAS Y ASISTENCIA ESCOLAR.**

Nadie quiere ser parte de una estadística de deserción escolar. Así que a medida que Usted guía a su adolescente a través de este año crucial, considere lo que las investigaciones nos dicen acerca de los estudiantes de primer año de la escuela secundaria y de los factores que influyen si se graduarán o no cuatro años más tarde.

NOTAS O CALIFICACIONES

- Aproximadamente el 95 por ciento de los estudiantes con un promedio de B o más en su primer año se gradúan.
- Los estudiantes del primer año de la secundaria que logran un promedio de B o más tienen una posibilidad de 80 por ciento de terminar la escuela superior con por lo menos un 3.0 de Promedio General de calificaciones (GPA).
- Los estudiantes con menos de una C de promedio tienen más posibilidades de darse de baja de la secundaria que de graduarse.

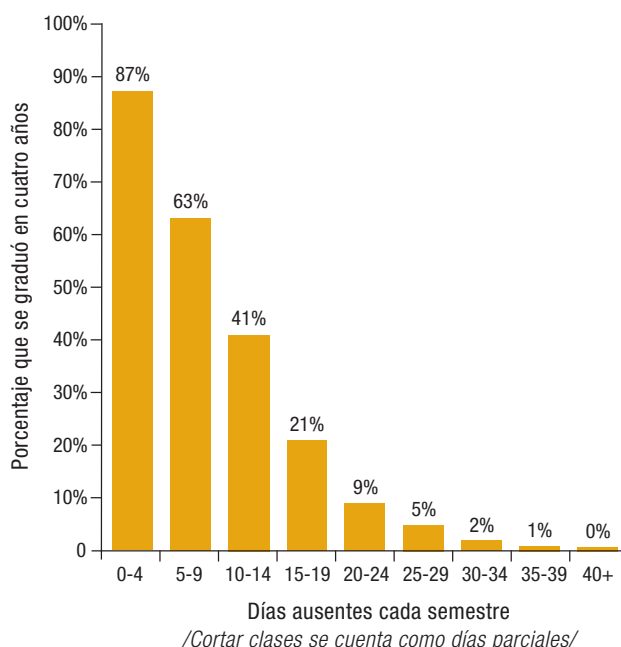
Calificaciones del primer año pronostican la graduación



AUSENCIAS

- Cerca del 90 por ciento de los estudiantes de primer año que pierden menos de una semana de clases por semestre se graduarán de la secundaria sin importar el puntaje obtenido en los exámenes de 8^{vo} grado.
- Los estudiantes de primer año que pierden más de dos semanas de clases fracasarán, en promedio, en por lo menos dos clases—sin importar si llegan a la secundaria con puntajes sobresalientes o por debajo del promedio en los exámenes. De hecho, los estudiantes de primer año que llegan con puntajes sobresalientes en los exámenes pero que pierden más de una semana de clase por semestre tienen más posibilidades de fracasar un curso que los estudiantes de primer año que obtienen puntajes bajos y que pierden menos de una semana.

La falta de asistencia pone la graduación a riesgo



¿Qué significan todas estas investigaciones para los estudiantes?

Esencialmente significan que el primer año de la escuela secundaria es una oportunidad importante para un buen comienzo. Los buenos estudiantes pueden desviarse de curso rápidamente si comienzan a cortar clases y si no cumplen con sus tareas. Y los estudiantes que han tenido dificultades en la escuela primaria pueden cambiar las cosas positivamente si asisten a la secundaria diariamente y tratan de obtener un promedio de B. Para los estudiantes de Chicago que desean graduarse de la secundaria—y el 78 por ciento de los estudiantes de cuarto año dicen que así lo desean—ese promedio de B en la escuela

superior es lo que necesitarán para tener éxito a nivel de universidad.

Suena sencillo, pero hay mucho que mejorar en estas dos áreas. Eso es así porque:

- Más de la mitad de los estudiantes de primer año de Chicago fallan un curso.
- Cerca del 40 por ciento pierden más de un mes de escuela durante el primer año de secundaria (lo que incluye cortes de clases).
- El Promedio General de calificaciones es menos de una “C.”



Entonces... ¿qué puede hacer Usted?

- ✓ Haga hincapié en la importancia de llegar a la escuela a tiempo y no cortar clases. Su adolescente puede pensar que no tiene importancia alguna “volarse” o estar ausente de la primera o última clase del día, pero esas faltas sí importan. Aún la omisión ocasional de clases puede resultar en notas dramáticamente más bajas. Además de que eso da la impresión equivocada a los maestros sobre el deseo de tener éxito de su hijo/a.
- ✓ Hable con los maestros de su hijo/a sobre cómo Ud. pueda ayudarle a tener éxito en sus clases. Los maestros deben de ayudar a los estudiantes cuando tienen problemas, pero algunas veces los

estudiantes o sus padres tienen que pedir ayuda. Sabemos por medio de nuestras investigaciones que los estudiantes hacen mejor trabajo en sus cursos cuando confían en sus maestros.

- ✓ Haga que los estudios sean la prioridad más alta de su hijo/a. Esto significa poner más esfuerzo en las tareas aunque no sean interesantes y escoger estudiar en vez de socializar cuando hay algún examen importante. Los estudiantes con buenos hábitos de estudio tienen un Promedio General de calificaciones más alto y fracasan en menos cursos que sus compañeros que no dan prioridad a la tarea escolar.



Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families

What Does “On-Track” Mean?

A presentation that introduces the On-Track metric to students as well as emphasizing the importance of attendance and grades in freshman year.

What Does “On-Track” Mean?

“On-Track” Series Guidance Curriculum – Academic Domain

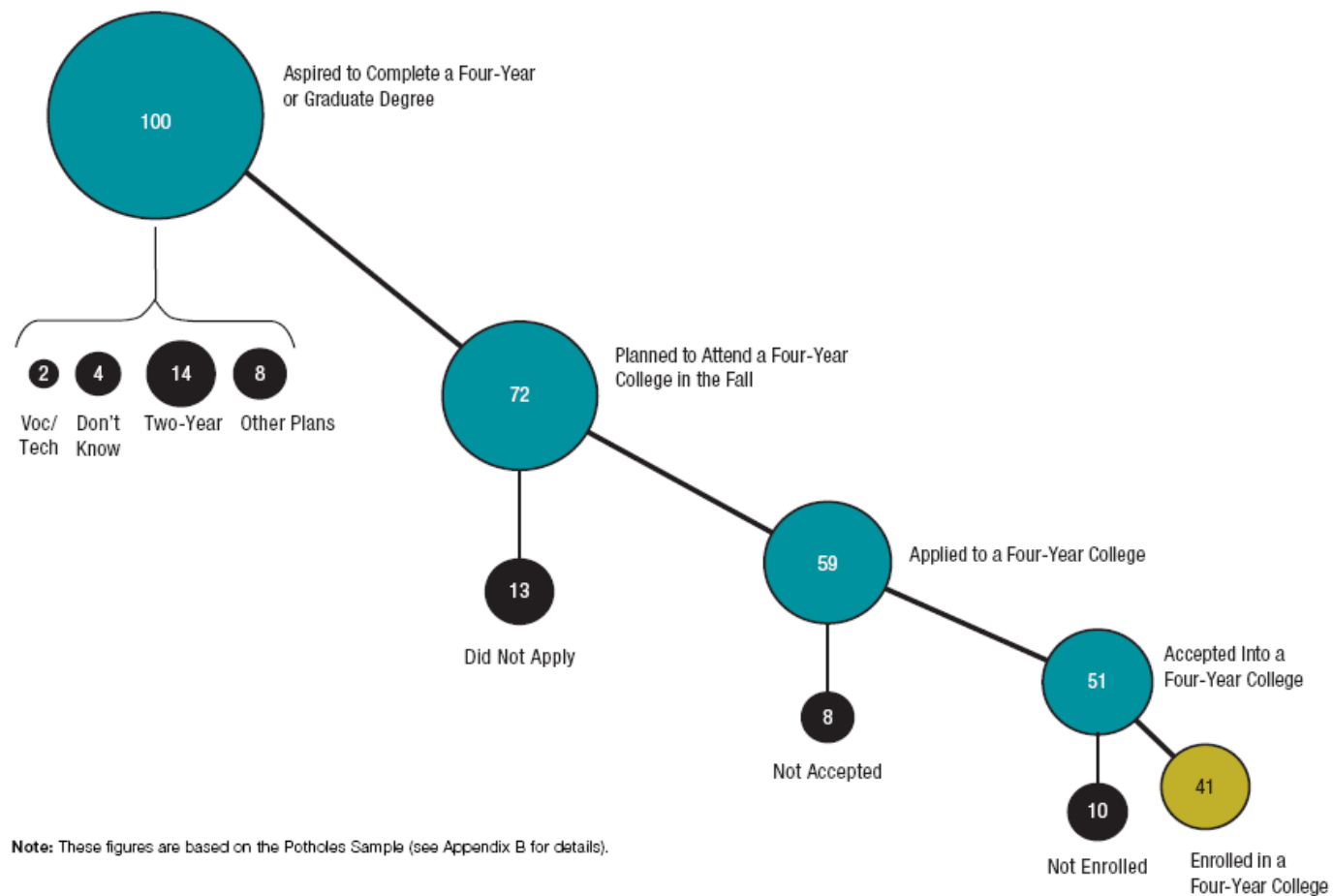
Al Raby High School 2009-2010

Who wants to go to college?

- Why?
- What difference does going to college make?

Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families

Tracking students through the steps to college enrollment:



So how do I make sure I graduate?

- Know your destination (college) and keep it in sight
- Have a roadmap (a plan for how to get there)
- Ask for directions when needed
- Stay ON TRACK!

What does “On-Track” mean?

On-Track means you are performing in a manner that will allow you to graduate in four years

- Must earn at least 5 credits by June of freshman year
- Fail no more than .5 of a core course credit (one semester of a core class)

(Core Courses = Survey Literature, World Studies, Environmental Science, Algebra)

Did you know...

An “On-Track” freshman is

3.5 X
MORE LIKELY
TO GRADUATE IN 4 YEARS

than an off track freshman.



How do I stay On Track?

- Pass all classes
- Attend school every day
- Know the requirements for graduation

Graduation Requirements at Al Raby High School

- 24 credits (minimum)
- 4 service learning projects, to be completed through your academic classes each year
- 4 years of student advisory
- Driver's Education (PE II)
- PSAE (Prairie State Achievement Exam)
- Public Law Exam
- Consumer Education exam

Al Raby's Graduation Requirements

English	4 credits	1. Survey of Literature* 2. World Literature*	3. American Lit. * 4. British Lit. *
Math	3 credits	1. Algebra I* 2. Geometry*	3. Algebra II/Trig.*
Science	3 credits	1. Environmental Sci. 2. Biology*	3. Chemistry 4. Physics/Topics
Social Science	3 credits	1. World Studies* 2. US History*	3. (see electives)
World Language	2 credits	1. Spanish I* 2. Spanish II*	
Fine Arts	2 credits	1. Art* 2. General Music*	



Al Raby's Graduation Requirements (cont.)

Physical Education	2 credits	1. PE I/Health* 2. PE II/Driver's Ed*	
Career Education	3 credits	AVID I, II, III, IV OR any course above and beyond the minimum req.	English Senior Project (required course)
Electives	2 credits (choose from the following)	Beg. Mixed Chorus Collins Writing AP Psychology AP US Government AP Studio Art AP Environmental Sci.	Statistics Pre-Calculus AP Calculus AP Statistics AP Lang. & Comp. AP Literature
Total = 24 Credits			
*Required course			



Speaking of credits, what are they?

- 1 semester class passed = $\frac{1}{2}$ credit
- So, if you pass every class during the semester, you can earn how many credits?
 - 6 classes x $\frac{1}{2}$ credit each =
 - 3 credits at the semester
 - 6 credits per school year

Speaking of credits, what are they?



Is this student On Track?

	1 st Semester	2 nd Semester
Survey Lit.	B	B
Algebra	C	A
Env. Science	D	D
World Studies	B	C
PE/Health	A	A
Art I	B	B
Reading	B	C

YES



Is this student On Track?

	1 st Semester	2 nd Semester
Survey Lit.	C	C
Algebra	B	C
Env. Science	D	C
World Studies	F	F
PE/Health	A	A
Art I	A	B
Reading	C	D

NO



Is this student On Track?

	1 st Semester	2 nd Semester
Survey Lit.	C	C
Algebra	F	D
Env. Science	C	C
World Studies	C	B
PE/Health	A	A
Art I	A	A
Reading	D	C

YES



Attendance Matters!!!



Applying
Research & Data

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



Attendance Matters!!!

Research shows that students who attend school each day:

- Get better grades
- Learn more
- Are more likely to get high school diplomas
- Are less likely to go to prison

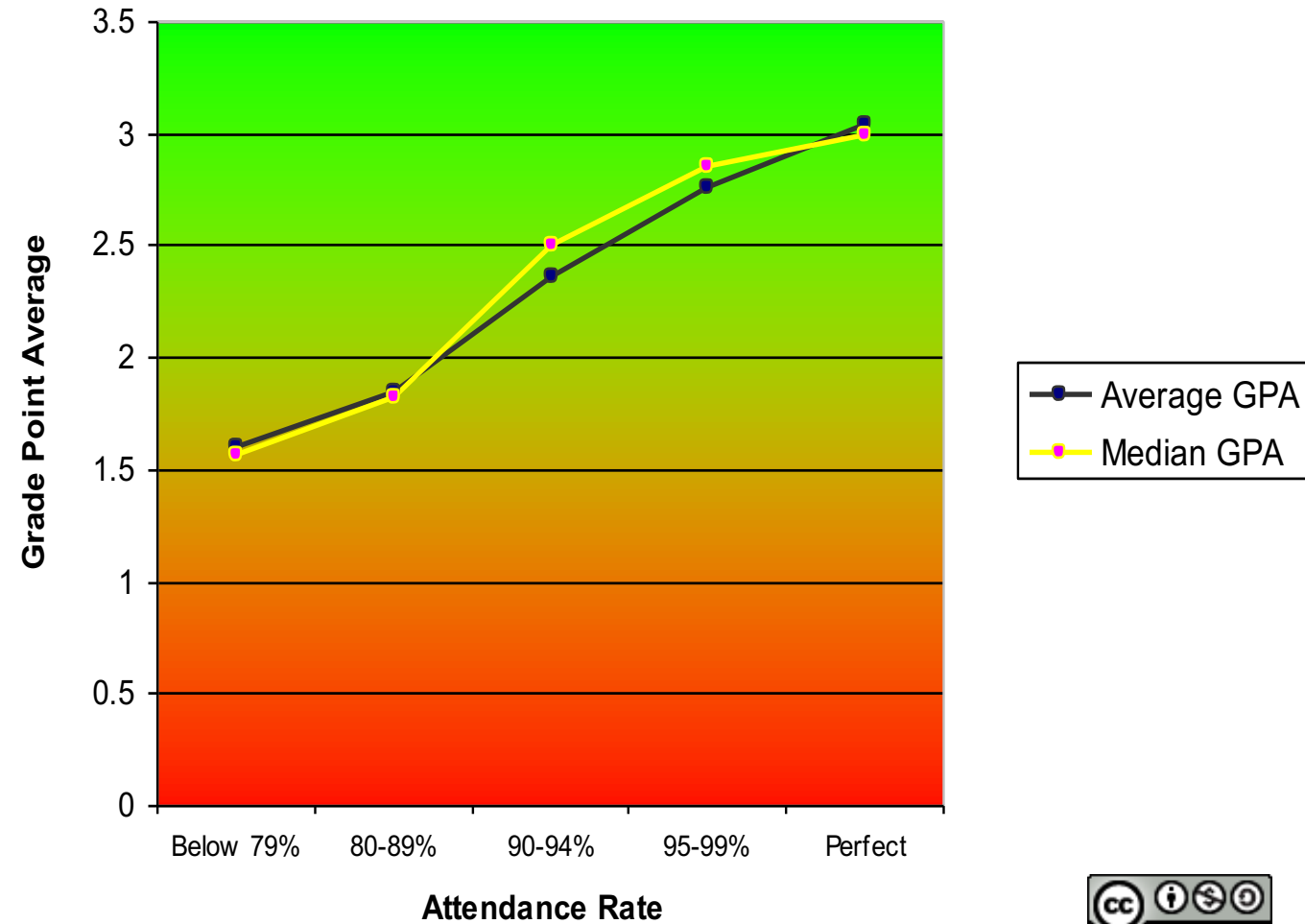
Fact:

Nearly **90%** of freshmen
who miss **less than 1 week** of school per semester
GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL
regardless of their 8th grade test scores.

Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families

Attendance vs. GPA

Quarter 1 - Raby's Freshman Class



Applying
Research & Data

Attendance Matters!

- List 3 reasons why students are absent and tardy to school
- List solutions for each reason

Attendance Matters!

- What time are students expected to be at school?
- Where is the attendance office located?
- What is an excused absence?
- What is an unexcused absence?
- What are the consequences?

Check Points

October 14	Progress Report 1
November 19	Report Card 1 (Pick-up)
December 16	Progress Report 2
February 3	Report Card 2
END OF 1 ST SEMESTER	
March 10	Progress Report 3
April 22	Report Card 3 (Pick-up)
May 19	Progress Report 4
June 18	Report Card 4
END OF 2 ND SEMESTER	



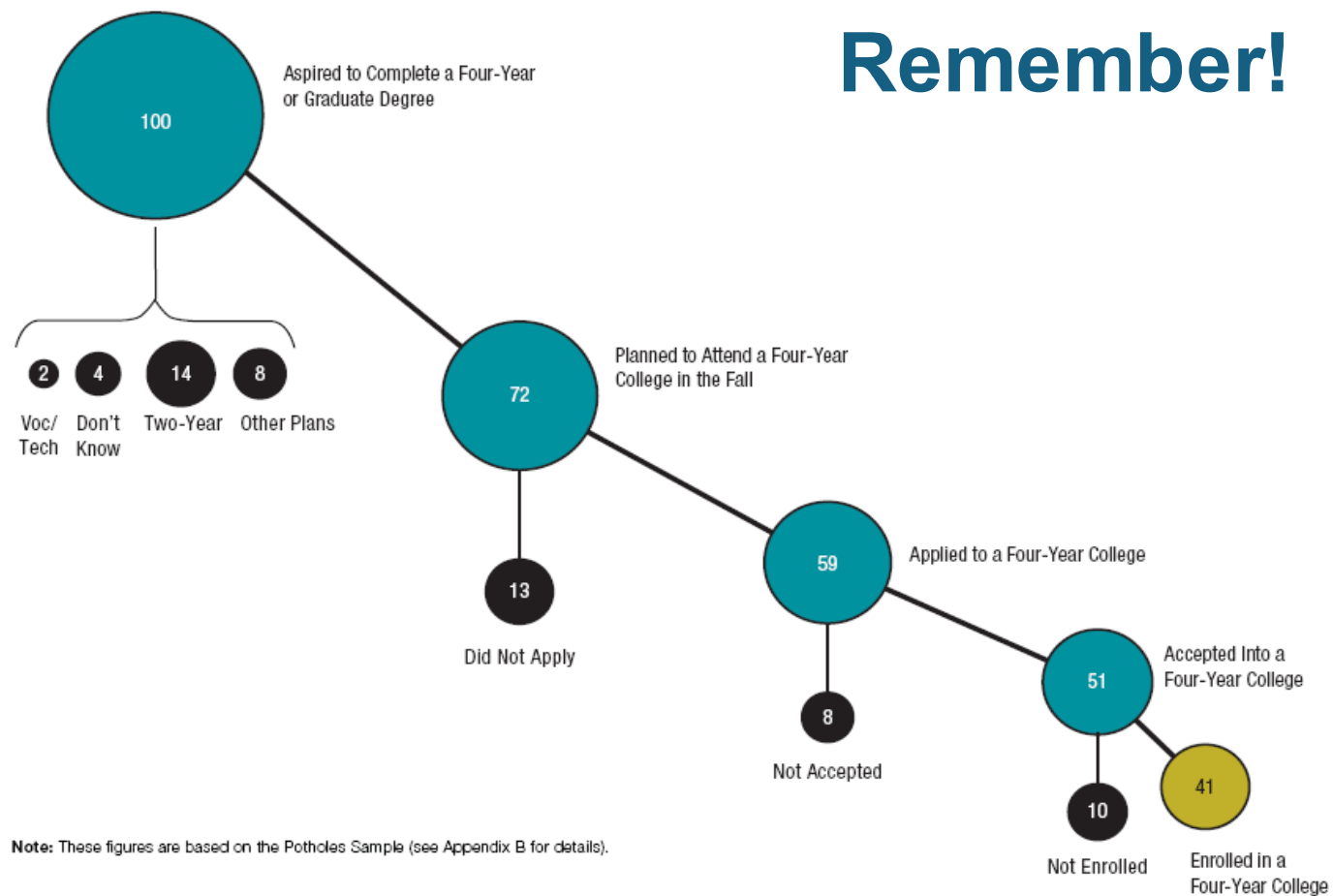
How do I stay On Track?

- Pass all classes
- Attend school every day
- Know the requirements for graduation

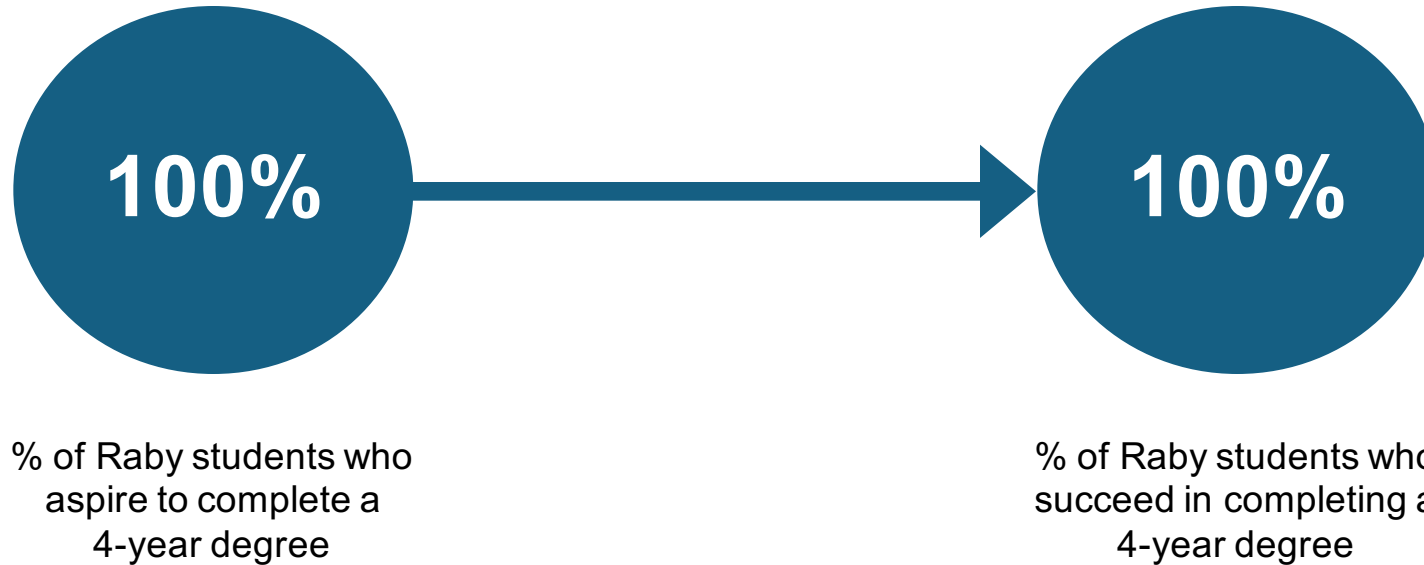
What are some possible consequences of falling off track in freshman year?

Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families

Tracking students through the steps to college enrollment:



Al Raby's Goal!



Stay On Track!



Applying
Research & Data

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT





Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families

“Am I On Track?”

A student-friendly poster that describes the On-Track metric and provides students with clear criteria for evaluating their own On-Track status.

AM I ON TRACK?

**“On Track” means you are performing
in a manner that will allow you to graduate
within four years**

AFTER 1st semester

You are On Track if:

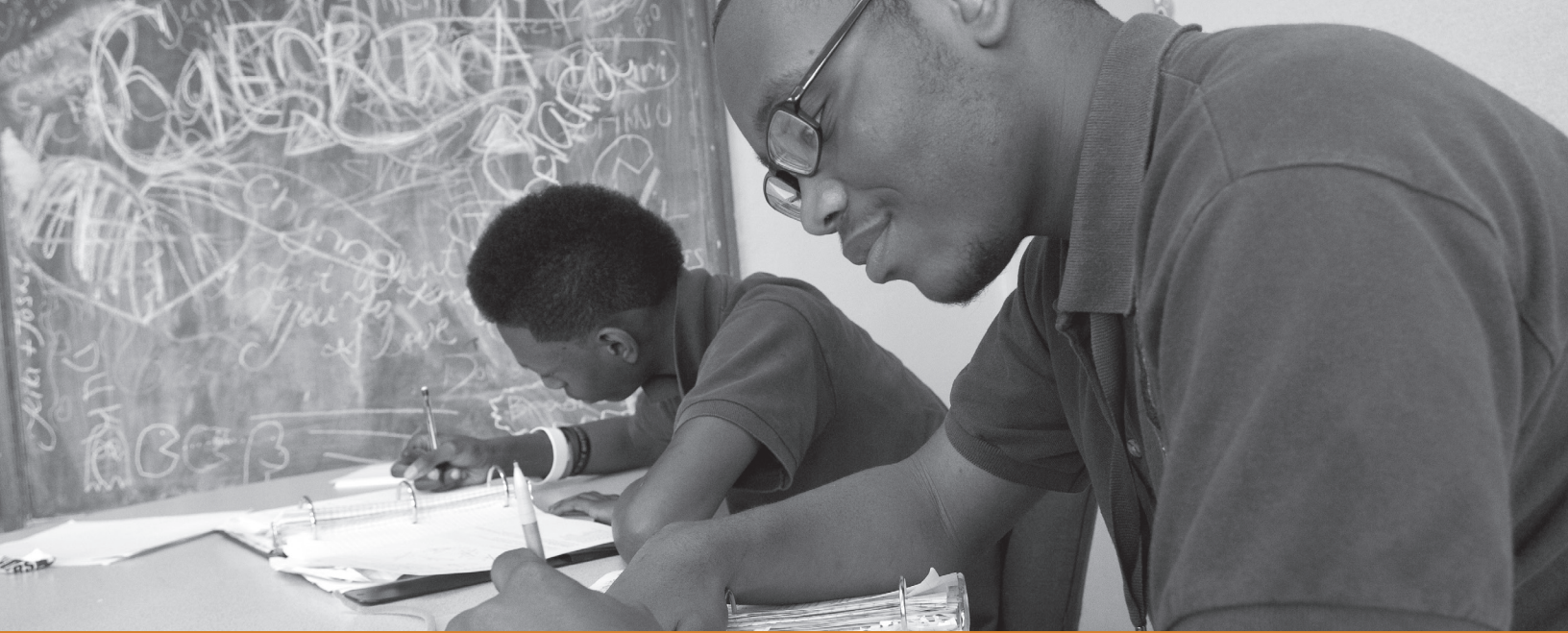
- You failed no more than one core course
- AND
- you earned at least 3 credits

AFTER Freshman year

You are On Track if:

- You failed no more than 0.5 credits total in your core courses
- AND
- you earned at least 5.0 credits

Core courses: Survey Literature, Algebra/Geometry, World Studies, Environmental Science, and Reading in Language Arts.



DEVELOPING CAPACITY & LEADERSHIP

TOOL SET

A

Planning for Your Success Team

TOOL SET

B

Supporting Your Success Team Lead

TOOL SET

C

Planning for a Success Team Meeting



Planning for Your Success Team

Contents

**Sample Job Descriptions
for Success Team Leads
& Members**

**Freshman Academy
Team Calendar Planning
Considerations**

Purpose

Careful planning is vital for a strong Success Team. Administrators must deliberately select team members that not only understand the importance of the transition to high school, but also genuinely care about the achievement of their students. Strong Team Leads can build relationships with students and adults as well as facilitate data-driven conversations that lead to sound decision-making.

How & When to Use

Administrators should refer to Tool Set A during the initial phases of team planning and development. These tools provide ideas and considerations as you develop the systems and structures for this work in your school. Additionally, the job descriptions support your process for selecting Team Leads and members.

Once formed, your team can use these tools to support the clear communication of meeting expectations as well as a guide for providing feedback to Team Leads.



Planning for Your Success Team

Sample Job Descriptions for Success Team Leads & Members

This set of sample job descriptions clarifies the roles and responsibilities of Team Leads and members.

Success Team Lead Job Description

Collaborates With: On-Track Coordinator

Position Overview

The Success Team Lead works with the On-Track Coordinator to engage grade-level faculty and staff in the design and implementation of interventions that will increase the grade level's On-Track rate. These strategies include, but are not limited to:

- utilizing student course performance, attendance, and misconduct data to develop and implement interventions (Tier 2),
- creating a system for tracking the effectiveness of interventions,
- celebrating successes toward On-Track and student connection goals, and
- communicating with the counseling department around academic recovery options for students

Special Note: The Success Team Lead is often a teacher. This person should be capable of balancing this role with their teaching responsibilities.

- Communicate strategies and progress toward success goals to Success Team
- Support the On-Track Coordinator to execute community activities around On-Track, including assemblies, parent info sessions, and celebrations
- Participate in ongoing professional development around team leadership and On-Track best practices

Preferred Characteristics

- Service-oriented, especially around student advocacy
- Possess strong instructional skills and knowledge
- Experience in building and facilitating effective teams or willingness to learn this skill set
- Proficient use of Microsoft Office Suite, including Word and PowerPoint
- Experience with an early warning system
- Strong organization, communication, and leadership skills

Success Team Lead Duties and Responsibilities

- Collaborate with the On-Track Coordinator to facilitate development of highly functional grade-level Success Teams that focus on creating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions
- Set freshman success goals for On-Track and develop structures for students to connect with the administration and Success Team

Success Team Teacher Job Description (9th and 10th Grade)

Collaborates with: On-Track Coordinator and/or Team Lead

Position Overview

Success Team teachers are student advocates who participate fully with their grade-level teammates to design and implement On-Track strategies that will increase student achievement. These strategies include, but are not limited to:

- utilizing student course performance, attendance, and misconduct data to develop and implement interventions (Tier 2 supports),
- collectively evaluating the effectiveness of interventions,
- participating in the celebration of successes toward On-Track and student connection goals,
- communicating with parents/guardians around academic recovery options for students, and
- applying the tenants of student support – multiple opportunities for success, recognition of and willingness to provide non-traditional supports, understand and consider the cognitive development of students – in the classroom on a daily basis.

- Set student success goals for On-Track and student connection with the administration, On-Track coordinator (where applicable), and Team Lead(s)
- Utilize resources which support student success
- Reflect on one's own philosophies and practices in an effort to meet the diverse needs of students
- Demonstrate transparency with students and parents on how to achieve success in the course

Preferred Teacher Characteristics

- Teach three or more classes in one grade level or works with students in that grade for a significant amount of time in another way (e.g. grade-level counselor)
- Strong communication and critical thinking skills
- Strong service and support orientation
- Ability to bring projects to closure with minimal supervision
- Willingness to extend work beyond traditional classroom hours
- Maintain a high level of personal responsibility in one's work

Success Team Member Duties and Responsibilities

- Participate as an active member of a highly functional grade-level Success Team that regularly uses course performance, attendance, and misconduct data to create, implement, monitor, and evaluate interventions



On-Track Coordinator Job Description

Reports to: Principal

Position Overview

The On-Track Coordinator engages grade-level faculty and staff – i.e. the Success Team – in the design and implementation of strategies that will increase the school's On-Track rate. These strategies include, but are not limited to:

- utilizing student course performance, attendance, and misconduct data to develop and implement interventions (Tier 2 supports),
- creating a system for tracking the effectiveness of interventions,
- celebrating successes toward On-Track, attendance, and student connection goals, and
- communicating with the counseling department on academic recovery options for students

On-Track Coordinator Duties and Responsibilities

- Provide timely course performance, attendance, and misconduct data in a teacher-friendly form for analysis
- Facilitate development of highly functional grade-level Success Team(s) that focus on creating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions
- Set student success goals for On-Track and student connection with the administration and Success Team(s)
- Communicate strategies and progress toward goals to Success Team(s), administration, parents, and students

- Advocate for resources to support student success
- Coordinate community activities around On-Track, including assemblies, parent info sessions, and celebrations
- Collaborate with the counseling department on high school transition activities, including, but not limited to: high school fairs and orientation
- Participate in ongoing professional development around team leadership and On-Track best practices

Selection Criteria

- Demonstrated ability to use data to guide planning and evaluation
- Proficient use of Microsoft Office Suite, including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint
- Experience with an early warning system preferred
- High school teaching experience preferred
- Proven experience in building and facilitating effective teams
- Strong communication skills and critical thinking skills
- Experience developing systems and managing change
- Strong service and support orientation
- Ability to bring projects to closure with minimal supervision





Planning for Your Success Team

Freshman Academy Team Calendar Planning Considerations

Illustrates team structures and routines focused on freshman success, including data sources and meeting times.

Freshman Academy Team Calendar Planning Considerations

Regular team meeting time

Possible data sources (including availability and time for team analysis)

- Freshman Success reports
- Attendance
- Grades
- Internal data sources, like Google Docs
- Interim assessment data
- Social-emotional data
- Student work

Meeting topics

- Structure and support
 - Roles and responsibilities of the team
 - Setting agreements for team meeting time
 - Supports needed from administration to do the work
- Interventions
 - On-Track/off-track students
 - Social-emotional
 - Attendance incentives/initiatives
- Problem-solving issues, such as interventions
- Student focus groups to inform the team's practice

- Parent communication/involvement
 - Parent conferences
 - Progress reports
 - Open Houses
 - Shadow days
- Student “town hall” meetings
 - Informing students of progress toward goals
 - Attendance, academic, and community-building celebrations



Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Contents

Team Lead Orientation

Stages of Team Development

Developing Your Upward Management Plan

Thirteen Tips to Effective Upward Management

Upward Management Plan Checklist

Communication Styles

Dealing with Difficult People in Meetings

Reframing Organizations

Intervention Interview Protocol

Purpose

Individuals responsible for supporting Success Team leadership should refer to this collection of tools. Regular, job-embedded support of the Success Team Lead is a key component of the freshman success work. Most often, Team Leads are classroom teachers new to leadership and the responsibilities of leading a team of adults. In the Network for College Success model, ongoing support is provided by an external coach or facilitator. However, school-based support is another option, such as from an administrator or veteran teacher-leader.

How & When to Use

Tool Set B provides practical activities for supporting new Team Leads. External support organizations, similar to the Network for College Success, can also refer to the readings, activities, and presentations when planning.



Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Team Lead Orientation

A sample orientation presentation that establishes expectations for Team Leads and can be used as a guide for establishing a district and/or school-based program for Team Leads.

Team Lead Orientation

NCS Freshman Success Collaborative Conference

August 30, 2010



Developing Capacity
and Leadership

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



Outcomes for This Orientation

- Increase understanding of expectations around freshman success work
- Distinguish overall and one-on-one supports Success Team Leads will receive
- Partner with a cohort member for personal support

Introductions

- Name and School
- One hope and one concern about your role in the upcoming year



Agenda

- Why focus on transition?
- The charge for Freshman Success Teams
- The mantle of freshman team leadership
- Your professional support system



Focusing on Transition



Developing Capacity
and Leadership

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



Freshman On-Track Indicator

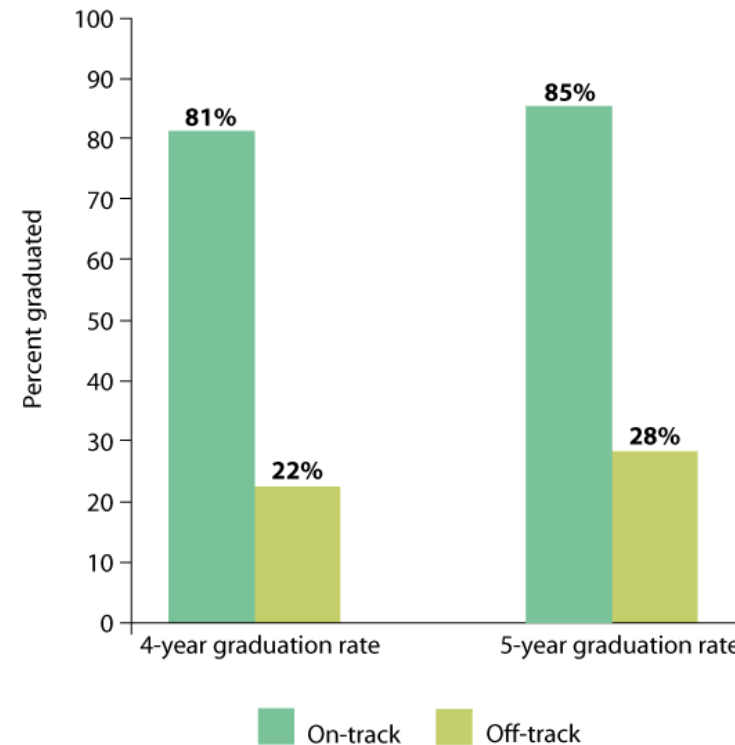
- A measure of progress during the first year of high school
- An On-Track student has no more than one semester F in a core subject
 - English, reading, math, science, or social studies
- An On-Track student has accumulated five full course credits (in any subject)
 - The number required to move to 10th grade in Chicago Public Schools



How is the On-Track Indicator Related to Graduation?

Four- and Five-Year Graduation Rates by Whether On-Track at the End of the Freshman Year

Students entering high school in September 1999

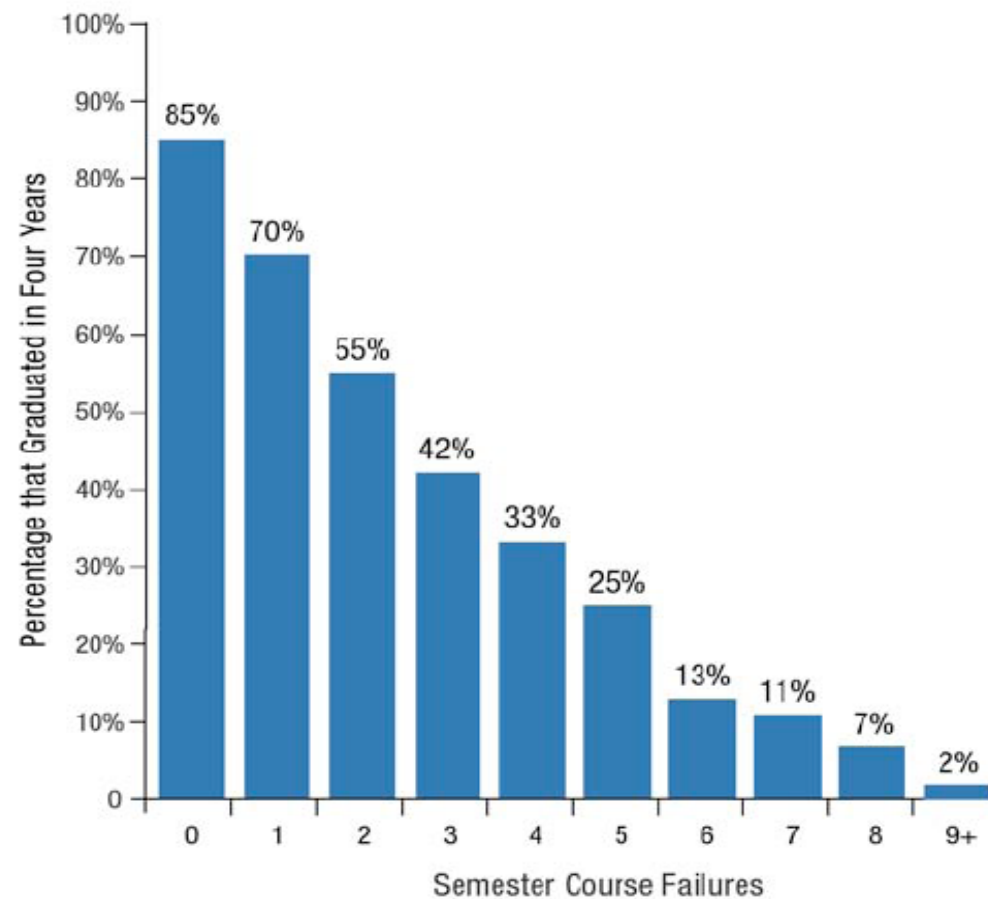


Note: Students who dropped or transferred out of CPS before the end of the school year are not included in these calculations. If students who dropped out during their first year were included, the off-track graduation rates would be 20 percent (4-year) and 25 percent (5-year). The on-track rates would remain the same.



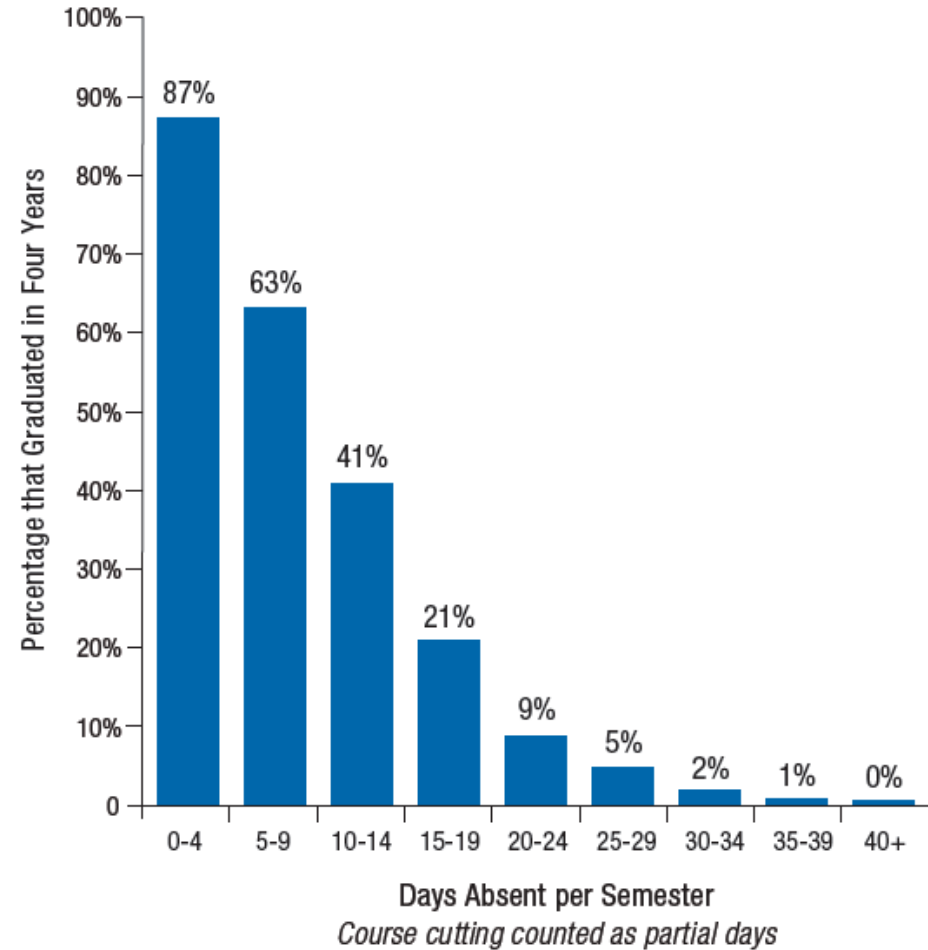
How is the On-Track Indicator Related to Graduation?

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman Course Failures



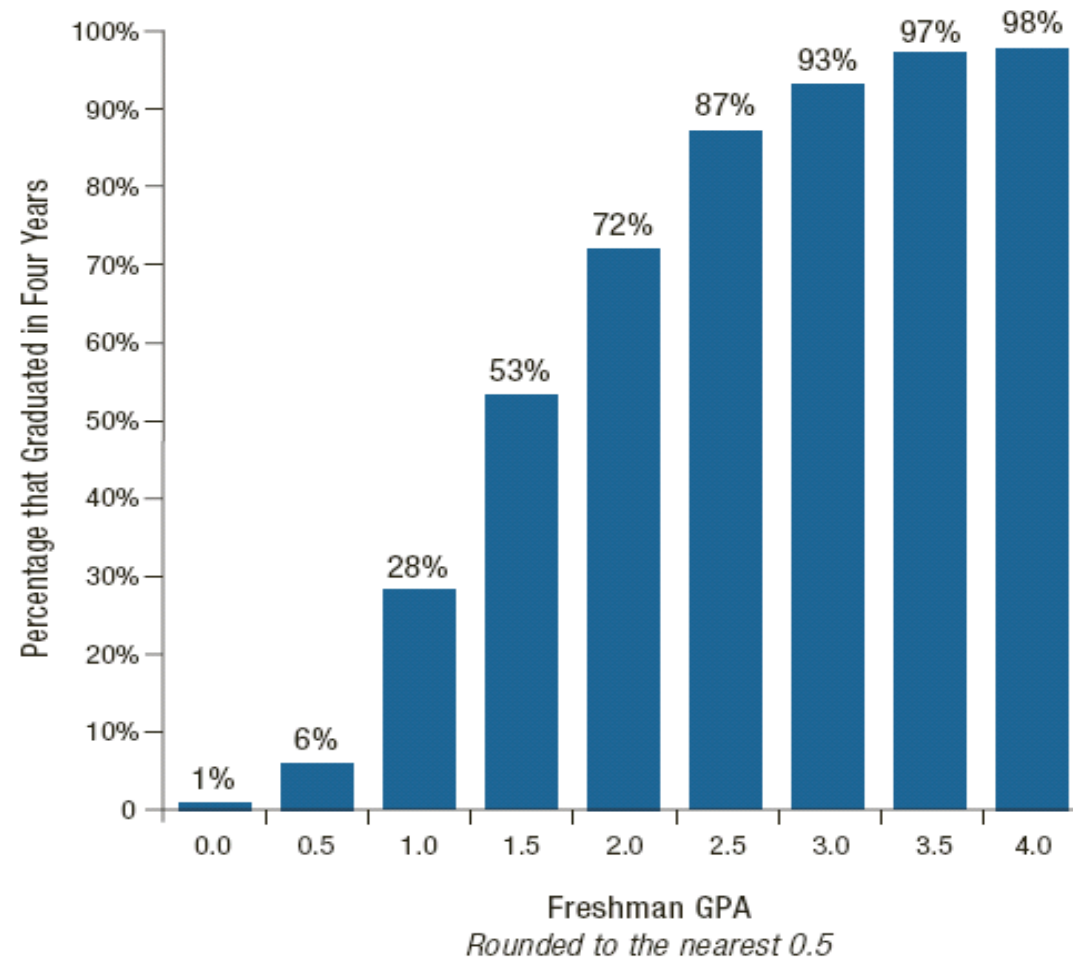
How is the On-Track Indicator Related to Graduation?

Missing Classes Puts Graduation at Risk



How is the On-Track Indicator Related to Graduation?

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman GPA



Student-Teacher Relationships Matter!

- Teacher-student trust
- Teacher personal support
- Schoolwide “academic press” for the future
- Importance of high school for the future



The Work of Freshman Success Teams



Developing Capacity
and Leadership

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



The Transition Strategy

Freshman Connection:

- Early acclimation to high school
- Pre-identification of and early support for struggling incoming freshmen

Freshman Success Team:

- Yearlong personal and professional support system for students



What is the work for Freshman Success Teams?

- Provide eighth to ninth grade transition support so that increasing numbers of freshmen are on track to graduate from Chicago Public Schools



The Freshman Success Team

- General Education teachers
- Special Education teachers
- Administration
- Student advocate/dean
- Counselor



Freshman Success Team Duties

- Meet regularly with time sufficient for the work
- Contribute toward attaining the team's freshman On-Track, attendance, and behavior/student connection goals
- Develop, implement, and track interventions for targeted students



Data Is Our Guide

- Own the data
 - Course performance (Grades, D's and F's)
 - Point-in-time On-Track rates
 - Attendance
 - Discipline reports
- Use data to develop, implement, and track progress of targeted interventions to improve student performance



Community Development

- Communicate universal expectations for students
- Provide multiple and varied opportunities for students to succeed
- Employ solutions-oriented communication
- Conduct timely joint student/parent conferences
- Celebrate successes



The Mantle of Team Leadership



Developing Capacity
and Leadership

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



Foci for Team Leadership

- Team development
- Containing the work
- Upward management
- Community development
- Personal professional resilience



Team Development

- Establish agreements
- Coordinate and utilize team members' talents toward freshman success goals (Freshman On-Track, attendance, course performance, behavior)
- Coordinate resources and training
- Motivate the team



Containing the Work

- Facilitate development of and progress on goals
- Develop meeting agendas focused on freshman success
- Utilize appropriate protocols in facilitating meetings, including those for data analysis

Upward Management

- Regularly communicate team progress
- Advocate for resources



Community Development

- Advocate for students
- Coordinate assemblies and celebrations



Personal Professional Resilience

- Develop capacity to utilize freshman-specific tools from Chicago Public Schools
- Acquire tools and strategies that increase team effectiveness



Your Professional Support System



Developing Capacity
and Leadership

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



Provided by the District and Network for College Success

Freshman Success Collaborative:

- Monthly meetings
- Sharing promising practices
- Problem solving
- Data examination
- Practicing protocols

On-Site Coaching:

- Provided by District or Network for College Success coach
- Support around moving key performance indicators
- Personal professional goal
- Problem solving





Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Stages of Team Development

An article that discusses the developmental stages of team formation using the authors' personal experiences and research. The article can support new Team Leads to understand each stage as a required and necessary part of the team formation process.

Stages of Team Development

Lessons from the Struggles of Site-Based Management

Nancy Mohr and Alan Dichter



Annenberg
Institute for
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

One major focus of the work of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform is developing and supporting educational leadership with the vision and expertise needed to transform schooling. The Institute's Leadership initiative seeks to influence, support, and sustain models of shared leadership (teacher, principal, superintendent, community) that help to improve student achievement.

As part of its work in promoting effective leadership practices, the Leadership initiative staff convened a group of practitioners affiliated with the Institute's programs to reflect on and write about innovative and effective leadership. Ten of the resulting essays were published in a two-part series on Leadership for Learning in the September 2000 and June 2001 issues of *Phi Delta Kappan*. A shorter version of "Stages of Team Development" appeared in the June 2001 segment.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform was established at Brown University in 1993. Its mission is to develop, share, and act on knowledge that improves the conditions and outcome of schooling in America, especially in urban communities and in schools serving disadvantaged children. The Institute pursues its mission in four initiative areas: Leadership, Opportunity and Accountability, District Redesign, and Community-Centered Education Reform.

For more information on the work of the Annenberg Institute, visit our Web site at www.annenberginstitute.org.

Nancy Mohr was the founding principal of University Heights High School in the Bronx, where she served for ten years. She currently works as an educational consultant with reform projects and groups of educators throughout the United States and in Australia. She also directs the New York Regional Center of the National School Reform Faculty, affiliated with the Horowitz Teacher Development Center at New York University, and is a consultant to the National School Reform Faculty at the Center for Reinventing Education at the University of Washington. She is the author of "Small Schools Are Not Miniature Large Schools," in William Ayers's *A Simple Justice: The Challenge of Small Schools* (Teachers College Press, 2000).

Alan Dichter was principal of Satellite Academy High School, an alternative high school in New York City, for ten years and also Director of the Lower Manhattan Outreach Center, a program for overage students returning to school. He served as Assistant Superintendent for Charter and New School Development at the New York City Board of Education before assuming his current position as Assistant Superintendent for Executive Leadership Development, conducting programs for aspiring principals and for future superintendents and deputy superintendents. Also at the Board of Education, he helped to create and oversees the Executive Facilitators Academy, which helps leaders develop and practice facilitation skills. He is the author of several articles on leadership and professional development and has consulted widely on issues related to urban school reform.

Nancy Mohr and Alan Dichter live in New York City.

Stages of Team Development

Lessons from the Struggles of Site-Based Management

Nancy Mohr and Alan Dichter

Organization wants to happen. Human organizations emerge from processes that can be comprehended but never controlled.

— Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers
A Simpler Way

We had sensed for some time that something was wrong – site-based management had not been delivering the goods. We formed leadership teams; they met; we shared decision making – but teaching and learning didn’t change. “Perhaps too much had been expected from simply the transfer of power,” suggest Priscilla Wohlstetter and Susan Albers Mohrman, who have written an extensive study looking at the outcomes of sharing decision making in schools. The idea always was to improve education for kids; but instead what seemed to have happened in many places was that there was another meeting to attend and nothing much else was new. “Is the theory flawed? Is the current wave of decentralization just another swing of the pendulum?” ask these authors, whose study of practice looked at thirty schools in nine school districts, each of which had at least four years’ experience with school-based management.

We were asking ourselves the same questions. As principals of alternative high schools in New York City, we each had been deeply involved in

school reform for over fifteen years. Each of our schools struggled incessantly with “group management” at Satellite Academy High School and consensus-based decision making at University Heights High School. During this time, our own experiences and observations, combined with those shared in professional development opportunities with colleagues in other New York schools and around the country, helped us learn a number of valuable lessons.

We saw for ourselves the tremendous power that can be generated within a school when the professional staff genuinely experiences a sense of ownership. But we learned that adult empowerment, for its own sake, is too limited a goal. We found that adult ownership, while necessary, does not in and of itself make learning more powerful for students. We learned how to get beyond ownership as a goal and how to develop professional communities of learners, focused on teaching and learning, that are able to take advantage of the multiple perspectives a community can offer.

Our conclusions, based on hands-on experience, are supported and illuminated by research findings in recent literature. Michael Fullan (1993) cites several studies of site-based-management projects, none of which found evidence of a strong connection between shared decision making per se and student learning. “The point is not that participation in decision making is a bad thing,” Fullan cautions, but “that it is not focusing on the right things – the cultural core of curriculum and instruction.”

Participation may be necessary in order to build the habits of collaboration, which are essential, but it is not sufficient for improving student outcomes.

Robert Evans (1996) explores the *kinds* of shared decision making that do create a link between adult empowerment, student learning, and leader behavior. “Teachers who are empowered to make decisions about their school will structure their classrooms to empower students in the learning process, encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their own education,” he asserts. “A key point ... is that empowerment’s true target is not teachers or any other constituency, but the school. ... To achieve it requires an authentic leader to take the primary role in both shaping the framework and nurturing the capacity of others to help shape it.”

Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage (1995) show that higher student achievement has been directly linked to the building of professional communities – groups of educators who regularly meet to discuss each other’s work and to learn from each other about ways to improve teaching and learning. Newmann’s work on authentic learning (1996) points out why some schools in his study had higher student achievement than others. In addition to focusing on student learning, the achieving schools nurtured professional community inside the school and understood that “the promotion of intellectual quality and professional community depended on a complex interaction of cultural and structural conditions.”

The most fundamental conclusion we have drawn is that learning to share decision making in a professional community that focuses on student learning is a developmental process, and each stage of that process offers discrete challenges and opportunities. When teachers form teams in their classrooms, the student groups will go through these

stages. When superintendents work with principals, or their own staff, the same lessons apply. Just as it is useful to remember that our children will and must go through the terrible twos, it’s comforting to remember that even our adult communities will and must go through stages in their development and will have to work through some fairly predictable problems in order to emerge in a more mature state.

We now fully appreciate that the driving question underlying this journey is not “When does shared decision making work and when does it not work?” but rather “What do you have to do to develop a professional community to the point where it is promoting rigor in teaching and learning throughout a school?” We also know that leadership is essential to the successful negotiating of this journey. And we don’t mean only principal leadership; teachers, parents, students, and district administrators must all play essential leadership roles.

The observations that follow illustrate the developmental stages that faculties go through en route to becoming learning organizations. Are these stages as clear-cut and neat as we make them sound? Of course not. We’ve lived through these steps, and, like anyone who has worked with groups, we know that little can be predicted and much can go wrong. But these observations represent years of reflection, and we strongly believe that a thorough understanding of such a complex conceptual framework – one which requires endless work and struggle to implement truly and honestly, but which has the potential to genuinely transform what happens in classrooms for kids – is an indispensable tool on this journey. In that spirit, we would like to share our experiences – some joyous, some not – about how that process plays out, what each stage involves, and what is needed to work through each stage and move on to the next.

The Honeymoon Stage

Emerging Community

This is terrific! Before, I was powerless; nobody even asked my opinion. Finally, I'm part of a group that meets with the leader. At last, I feel valued; I am so happy that my voice is going to be heard.

I'm not always comfortable disagreeing with the group, so far, especially when I have to do it publicly, but it is exciting to feel that we will be able to make real change; soon we'll be making a lot of important decisions.

The eager group may begin by thinking that this is going to be easy. It may forget to build, earlier rather than later, some common goals. Is the intent to give everyone a voice, or is it to improve the intellectual quality of the school? Making decisions without a clear sense of mission or shared vision can create a battleground for personal interests. Now is the time to clarify the method of making decisions: why to make them, how to make them, and which ones are appropriately made by the group. The leader must unapologetically set limits to the scope of the group's initial work. These limits can be open to discussion, but to pretend that everything is up for grabs creates a lack of security inappropriate for group health.

The leader must also be prepared to share and move toward a vision of greater group involvement based on capacity and on priorities. Problems can be averted if consensus is introduced early as the mode. Voting leads to factions, polarization, and a history of resentment, since there are always losers along with the winners. Consensus means having to look for the win-win solution, which is not the same as seeking a 100 percent vote and being held hostage by the hold-outs.

The leader's role in this stage is that of designer. Groups are powerful, not in spite of, but because of having multiple points of view. A variety of viewpoints, however, does not necessarily produce the most creative outcomes. When a group is in the early stages of working together, it does not yet have a lot of collective knowledge. It is sometimes useful for the leader to solicit input, envision a design, and then present a plan to the group. The group can digest it, modify it, and then look for agreement. Another strategy is for the group to brainstorm possibilities, with a small group or a leader putting it together into a design or plan.

What does not work is for a leader to come to the group and say, "How do you want to schedule classes? This is your school, so it's up to you to tell me what you want to do." There is something a bit hostile in this last approach. A leader had better be self-reflective and should be clear if sharing leadership is, in fact, what she/he wants.

.....

Nancy bought bagels for her staff every Friday. It was to thank them for their hard work, a personal way of appreciating them. When students came into her office early in the morning and asked for bagels, she gave them to them as a reward for being early to school. One Friday a teacher expressed her sense that the bagels should be for the teachers only and "proposed" to the staff, for agreement, that there be no bagels for students. What Nancy had to point out was that these were her bagels, purchased with her money, and she was going to give them to whomever she wanted. The teacher in the glow of the Honeymoon Stage thought that teachers would now make decisions about everything that happened in the school. It was disappointing to her to find out that the Friday bagels were not in her purview.

.....

The Conflict Stage

The Honeymoon Is Over

Who made *that* decision? I can't buy in unless I'm a part of what's going on.

I can't work with that group.

We are supposed to be talking about instruction, but we keep arguing about career day, the new schedule, the budget for art supplies, and who's going to teach that split program. When are we going to work on something of substance?

Sometimes I feel like going back to my classroom and closing the door; working with kids is easy compared to this!

This is a natural (and valuable) stage for groups – the stage of emerging controversy. And group development theory tells us that not only is this inevitable, but it is essential to developing a healthy group. “In fact, a group without conflict may be in serious difficulty; points of view are being masked and inhibited, and good solutions cannot be worked out” (Miles 1971). Whether it's a group of two (a marriage) or one hundred (the U.S. Senate), where there are different people, there are different points of view. What really matters is how you learn to deal with those differences. So the very same conflict resolution principles we use for students apply to adults as well: an absolute insistence upon resolving (not hiding) conflicts – combined with a few ground rules for civil discourse – should do nicely for starters.

It is helpful to warn the group that this stage will come – before it happens. Knowing that conflict is inevitable will lessen anxiety. The group would do

well to avoid being overly nice – trying to smooth things over, ignoring problems. Dealing with petty dilemmas skillfully will allow the group to venture into the important (and difficult) issues – ones about teaching and learning. Everyone has to learn how to be a negotiator and/or mediator.

The leader's role in this stage is to help the group manage conflict. First, the leader must make sure that all are committed to working on conflict management. The temptation to avoid dealing with conflict leads to resentment-collection and to the mediocrity that comes of too much compromise. There is also the temptation on the part of the group to revert to being top-down because it's “easier” or “clearer,” and this must be acknowledged and stopped. The leader should resist the urge to say, with pride, “See, they *want* me to make all the decisions.”

The leader in this stage is both a mediator and a teacher of mediation and negotiation. “In the schools in which faculty members were direct with one another and had developed processes for airing controversy, the faculty made changes that endured and grew stronger over time. Where faculty members had no capacity to deal with controversy they were unable to move beyond existing practices” (Wasley et al. 1997). Effective leaders have the courage to confront difficult issues of race, gender, class, etc. But they also “move from being the ones who manage conflicts among group members to being the ones who teach group members how to manage their own conflicts” (Schwarz 1994).

However, effective leaders do not allow the group to be used to settle issues that belong in face-to-face, private conversations: “People around here

are late a lot; I think we should do something about it” could be a legitimate topic for a group to take on if it really is about a slippage in group norms. It could also be a cover-up for the speaker’s unwillingness or inability to assertively confront one person who is chronically late.

Leaders must also help groups set norms. Good leaders do this publicly, taking every opportunity to reinforce them with the group. This might take the form of reviewing a written document or of routinely reminding people how certain events were consistent with shared agreements. This reinforcement comes from regularly reflecting on how the group is doing and on whether or not the norms are still the ones we believe are important. Leaders continually remind the group about “how we do things around here,” especially when it has been tough to do the right thing. Norms are different from rules – we know we will sometimes fall back, but there are no recriminations when this happens.

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In the early days of building a new school, Nancy found that each semester teachers were changing their teaching teams. At first she felt it was good to let people choose the teachers they wanted to work with and encouraged the staff to make adjustments in order to come up with the best configurations. The problem was that eventually there were some people who couldn’t or wouldn’t work with anyone else. Once she realized what was happening, she knew that it had to stop. The building of community in a school has to be more like marriage than dating. Problems have to be worked out. Issues have to be addressed. And you can’t continually change partners rather than work things through. It became clear that the same thing had been happening in classrooms. Students (and teachers) looked forward to the next semester when they could change groupings, hoping that things would be better next time. The school realized that students and teachers became much stronger and wiser when they learned how to work out their differences and learned to stay together over time – leading

to relationships where members had deeper knowledge of one another. When this happened, the teaching and learning could take place on a new level because teachers knew how individual students learned best and students knew that they could work out problems with adults. Adults and students could appreciate each other because of, not in spite of, all their complexity.

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Alan’s school, which had four sites, each with its own teacher-director, had had a history of competition among the sites. Resources were either strictly divided or they were allocated through a convoluted reliving of the history: “You got extra funding two years ago.” “Remember that time we let you buy books? Now it’s our turn.” It took an enormous amount of work to redesign the culture of the school to become one in which the greater good could be the deciding factor in how allocations were made. Sites began to see themselves as part of a whole instead of as rival factions. How was this done? The only way changes to a culture take place: over time and through constant reinforcement. Alan had to not only voice the new set of norms and beliefs, but also ensure that they were always being practiced. And he had to do this not as an authoritarian, but as someone whose responsibility it was to regularly remind the group of what it stood for and why it was there. And he had to do it over and over. It took several years; there just was no fast way. They all knew they had “arrived” when the management teams from all four sites readily agreed to a proposal from Alan that one site which was going through a particularly difficult transition be funded for an extra teacher for the entire year simply because they needed it. And rather than resent it, the members of the group spoke about feeling good about their collective ability to get beyond their individual interests.

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The Confusion-about-Democracy Stage

What's the Leader Supposed to Do?

Sure, you say I'm empowered, but as long as we have a leader, he/she still holds all of the chips.

Sometimes decisions are made without me – why should I feel buy-in? Furthermore, who decides who gets to make which decisions? We need specific processes and procedures.

If we're a democratic group, why does the leader have more influence than I have? If we're all leaders, why do we need someone in charge? There's always a hidden agenda.

I may be ready for empowerment, but I'm not so sure about the others. I don't know if they're as committed/talented/trustworthy as I am. Maybe it's better to just forget about it and let the leader do it all – then at least we know who to blame.

“The role of school management – principals and superintendents – has not received much attention in SBM [school-based management] plans,” Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996) note. “Private sector experience has found that such roles are pivotal in successful decentralization.” Groups come to learn that the roles that leaders play are essential – after all, who is going to push us when we get stuck, do that work we'd rather not do, and remind us of our agreements? In fact, without a strong leader making sure these things happen, our “democratic” process sometimes stalls because one or two people dominate the conversation and we all get disgusted. Evans (1996) calls this kind of leadership “authentic”:

Authentic leaders ... want to optimize collective involvement and professional com-

munity, but ... they will not sacrifice substance for process, clarity and focus for a management modality. They do not abandon traditional authority; they use it judiciously, building involvement as they can in a variety of informal as well as formal ways, but asserting themselves as they must. They provide a binary leadership that is both top-down and bottom-up. In this way they avoid the pitfalls that can turn empowerment and collaboration into quagmires and they help school communities deepen the commitment on which improvement depends.

Leadership can vary and move around, but when it comes down to it, no matter how much decision making is shared, there does have to be someone who is in charge – and we have to know who that is. Otherwise, we all can spend an inordinate amount of time either duplicating each other's efforts or waiting for someone to be decisive.

This stage can be confusing to everyone. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996) state that “studies of effective public schools agree that a strong central leader, like the principal, is key to successful management. An effective leader can set the school's vision, serve as an instructional leader, coordinate reform efforts and rally support for the school.” Yet, in the same document, under “Why School-Based Management Fails,” the authors caution that

principals who work from their own agenda, not helping to develop a common one ... are perceived as too autocratic by their staffs. ... [T]his often led to a power struggle between teachers and the princi-

pal over who controlled the school. ... Teachers frequently referred to “the principal’s vision” in schools where the leadership was autocratic.

Making sense of all of this is not impossible, but reconciling concepts which seem to be in opposition to each other is what makes the job of the leader so complex and so far above the more clear-cut management hierarchies of the past.

Leaders at this stage must strive to prevent the group from falling into “process worship,” where following the procedures and processes, designed to make sure that voices are heard, becomes the goal rather than the means to an end. Allowing processes to become a substitute for using judgment can lead to well-executed but terrible decisions. Or even worse, it can lead to stagnation and frustration. It’s the leader’s job to regularly prioritize and reprioritize and help the group to keep straight what’s important.

The leader needs to make sure that the changes that are taking place are systemic, not cosmetic. “Schools struggled with SBM when they simply layered SBM on top of what they were already doing” (Wohlstetter and Mohrman, 1996). The leader must not be seen as playing favorites and must keep the process honest. The leader must teach all of the players to develop the habit of consulting one another regularly and must facilitate that consultation, making sure that it happens. And then the leader has to help the group see that it has a responsibility to not only trust each other but to trust the leader as well, just as the leader has trusted them. The leader both models and teaches inclusion. It is not good enough to say, “You had the opportunity to object, participate, etc.” Opportunities not only have to be presented, but promoted. Involvement and involving others are not options. And the leader has to be comfortable being a leader.

One responsibility that must be assumed by everyone involved in an organization where shared decision making is taking place is to avoid the “in-crowd/out-crowd syndrome.” Groups that work effectively within larger organizations understand that they must spend a lot of time communicating with those outside the group – and those outside the group have an equal responsibility for being willing to believe that the group’s purpose is to help the whole and that being a good group member means not wasting one another’s time. This means not whining, not forgetting the real reason you are all there.

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Alan’s school was confronted with a problem at one of the sites. There was a staff member who was not an effective teacher, and the staff wanted the teacher-director to deal with the problem. So he did ... and asked the teacher to leave the school. Then the staff was upset, saying it was their right to make decisions and that they had wanted the director to deal with the problem, but not make a decision on his own. They were told that the decision would stand, but that there would have to be an immediate plan for an intervention process so that in the future whenever there was a personnel issue, it would be clear how it would be handled and the process would be known to everyone. There was resistance to making this plan. The crisis was over and they wanted to “move on.” The leader had to insist. This is one example of a changing leadership role. While it was no longer appropriate for the leader to make unilateral decisions, it was essential to take the lead in making sure that there were procedures in place, ones which ensured democratic outcomes and which did not rely on peer pressure alone for accountability.

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The Messy Stage

Now Things Are Even Less Clear

This team's work is sloppy; I need more clarity and control.

If this is supposed to make me feel "bought-in," it's not working. I'm working harder now and getting less done.

It's fun to be collegial, but where is it getting us?

I'm still not always comfortable with all of our decisions. Sometimes I don't even remember why I agreed to something. And when we have to include different perspectives – kids, parents, etc. – that really slows us down.

There's no time to do anything right, let alone get to the important issues.

Learning to love risk-taking and ambiguity is a tall order, but it has to happen. It's hard to celebrate mistakes and avoid the safe route. To help it happen, there must be systems in place to maximize communications among all of the members of the group. Instead of a clear line of authority that is very neat but not very effective, there can and should be multiple forms of communicating – a sort of circulatory system for the organism, one which keeps the blood moving.

The organization needs multiple groups with varied tasks and foci. This way the power is truly dispersed throughout the school and is not simply vested in one group instead of the principal. So the next time someone says, "What, another meeting?" there has to be a reminder that meetings, when well run, are truly valuable. The alternative would be to

go back to a clear line of authority with meetings that are used only to transmit information, top-down. Meetings can themselves be learning experiences if run effectively, but that means planning and organization. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996) "found that school-based management required a redesign of the whole school organization that goes far beyond a change in school governance."

Another source of messiness is the need to include all stakeholders.

Involving stakeholders ... isn't enough to ensure all voices are heard. ... Decisions that emerge from integrating multiple perspectives are bound to be better than decisions made by a single person or from a single perspective. Yet it takes time and skill to integrate multiple perspectives, especially when there are power differences among the diverse groups. This is a challenge worth meeting if school teams are to think creatively and in new ways to better serve all their students. (Hergert 1997)

The leader's role in this stage is to help the group be comfortable with messiness, pointing out that it's OK and is part of real life. "Comfortable" doesn't always mean relaxed and happy. When members of the group say, "I'm not comfortable with that," they can be gently encouraged to understand that their comfort is not the major goal of the school and that maybe their discomfort is a sign that there is learning taking place. The goal is to feel safe enough to indulge in risk-taking. The leader resists being "Father/Mother Knows Best" and continues to help the group appreciate that it can find a good

route, and that there is no one right answer. The leader cannot and should not try to prevent mistakes from happening. Mistakes should be welcomed, examined, and understood as natural phenomena – a necessary part of learning.

On the other hand, leaders must strive to develop those systems and communications that will eventually bring order out of chaos and follow up, follow up, follow up. Solutions have to be real. Miles (1990) distinguishes between traditional coping (e.g., using normal routines or working harder as the way to solve the problem) and “deep coping,” which is doing whatever has to be done to solve the problem (e.g., change the schedule, provide time, make sure it happens). “Serious reform ... is changing the culture and structure of the school,” says Michael Fullan (1991). “As long as we have schools and principals, if the principal does not lead changes in the culture of the school, or if he or she leaves it to others, it normally will not get done.”

The leader must also lead professional development. Leaders foster professional practice by putting in place processes and structures that promote teacher collaboration and collective responsibility (Lieberman et al. 1988, McLaughlin and Yee 1988). The leader plays a key role in fostering a sense of collective responsibility among the faculty such that problems of teachers’ performance are viewed not as individual failure but as the concern of the whole faculty (McLaughlin and Yee 1988).

It is important for both the leader and the group to begin to see their work as engaging in problem solving and learning, rather than “problem hiding” (McLaughlin and Yee 1988). When the group focuses on learning, it finds that it is making better decisions and that its process becomes more and more seamless (and more efficient). As the group sees itself learning together through professional dialogue, through seeking out information

and evidence, through self-reflection and a feedback process, then they are moving to becoming a professional community. The group and the leader are able to now use the skills they were developing in earlier stages. “Learning and improvement of performance will occur only from serious peer and group assessments of how well their own judgments are working” (Louis and Miles 1990).

There is a particular problem of messiness for the leader, who is expected to simultaneously strengthen cross-fertilization and collaboration; maintain calm, order, and the sense that someone is in control; promote strong cultural norms, values, and beliefs; and include everyone’s voice in setting the agenda. Making sense of these seemingly disparate goals is the hard but critical work of the leader in this stage.

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Nancy came to understand that her role as the professional development leader of the school meant that she not only had the responsibility to design and run professional development activities at staff meetings (where announcements were banned), but she also spent her entire day in a variety of meetings – leadership team, curriculum planners, office staff, long-term planners, etc. Each of these meetings was a part of the professional development web in the school. But the realization grew that it was simple enough to spend meeting time perseverating about details. So, the rule became that every meeting would have as half of its agenda a professional topic, and that the topic would come first, not after the business (when it frequently didn’t happen at all). This became a school community habit and each team that met understood that its purpose, first and foremost, was to learn together, and this included reading articles and building on prior knowledge. For Nancy, as the principal, it meant doing all of those other principal’s chores early in the morning and late in the day. She felt it was worth it to keep these multiple conversations going.

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The Scary Stage

Where's the Authority and Accountability?

I know I said I wanted to be a part of a professional community, but maybe “they” do know better than we. Actually, I sometimes hope so, because I feel less and less sure about what should happen.

Whose fault is it if something goes wrong? Suddenly I don't feel so powerful, I just feel more of a heavy responsibility.

Where's the validation; what are the rules?

I'm just not sure I want to be responsible for talking about what's going on in other people's classrooms, about what standards should be, about what we should teach. After all, if we open that up, then I have to be willing to hear stuff about my own work, and that is truly scary.

Participation in making decisions does not in any way ensure that the group automatically takes on real responsibility for what happens; in fact, it can sometimes get the urge to back off and look around for someone or something to blame. Evans (1996) remarks that “few teachers, it seems, want to be fully empowered and collegial.”

It is important that the group build an accountability system that ensures its work is based on substantive information and data and not solely on the opinions and preferences of its members. Accountability is built on the lateral flow of information sharing and on the group's ability to critique itself. It is in this stage that the group begins to see itself as a professional learning community rather than merely a decision-making group. It really is

moving into genuinely shared leadership. Once this happens, the group sees that what makes a true professional community is a systemic approach to a “collective rather than individual accounting for school outcomes” (McLaughlin and Yee 1988). Now the group is shifting to an instructional focus and aligning its teaching practice with those values and beliefs by using reflective practice and dialogue.

What can be really scary is when there is no improvement in student performance after the group has been working so hard. Remember the findings: higher student achievement has been directly linked to the building of professional community (Newmann and Wehlage 1995). So the group has to make sure it is not only working hard, but working together in productive ways. Wasley, Hampel, and Clark (1997) describe some of the key conditions that foster teacher learning (see sidebar).

By now, the group will have a history of successfully dealing with challenges. The leader's role at this stage is to move the group from its initial successes toward the next stage: public accountability. The leader reminds the group of what has been learned and cites specific examples of the group exceeding its own expectations. The leader reminds the group that it has already been accountable in many ways and that institutionalizing a collective accountability is the last challenge. Having built in the habit of reflection, the leader will now find the group ready to be more publicly accountable. This will not, however, be an instinctive next step. The courageous leader starts by being self-reflective and then helps the group to hold a mirror up to itself.

KEYS TO FOSTERING TEACHER LEARNING

- Time: “Few faculty or central office staff or state departments have yet created adequate conditions for adult learning in their schools.”
- Collegiality: “Despite the fact that we have understood the importance of collegiality for a number of years, most schools maintain a strong culture of individuality and isolation.”
- Analytical capacity: “Reflective activity needs to be more critically analytical. ... [Teachers] need to ask themselves why they are attempting new techniques; ... then they need to examine whether the changes they are attempting are getting what they hoped for. ... To be more critically analytical, teachers need to develop the skills of giving and receiving regular feedback on their work in classrooms.”
- Expertise: “Teachers need a readily available support system of experts who are knowledgeable. ... A common practice is to suggest that a teacher who has been out to a workshop function as the resident expert for the school. Unfortunately, sophisticated understanding takes a great deal more time and effort.”

(from Wasley et al. 1997)

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Peer assessment and accountability in Alan’s school had, over the years, come to exist more in theory than in practice. People met in “peer groups,” having found many reasons not to visit one another’s classes; or, if they did visit, by all accounts they gave each other very superficial and very positive feedback. There was a growing concern that a number of teachers who were in need of substantial support and help were, in fact, not getting the kind of “critical friendship” they needed. In order to revitalize this theoretically existing procedure, Alan kept bringing the question to the table: What are we doing about this? Let’s share examples. Let’s be a problem-solving group. Why are we resisting? What is so difficult about giving and getting critical feedback? How can we stop letting ourselves off the hook? He would hear from staff members privately that they were concerned, but they were reluctant to say it out loud. His goal was to make that voice public. His job was not “enforcer” but “relentless advocate” for the group to grow and collectively look at the problem, to make sure that the environment was safe, that there was respect, and that there was a reduced tolerance for collective denial.

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The Mature-Group Stage

A Professional Learning Community

Finally, we're proactive and make our own agendas rather than reacting to those of others. We also have learned to be inclusive and are avoiding "us" and "them" scenarios.

We have learned to focus on learning as a group rather than making decisions before we have enough knowledge. In fact, we have realized that the point is to make high-quality decisions – ones that are better because they include more points of view.

We realize that we have to give up some of our own preferences in order to see the bigger picture and to work on the common good. We can agree to delegate more often, and while we seek critical feedback, we don't waste each other's time in micro-management.

Our meetings are themselves now professional development opportunities instead of battlegrounds for issues.

Now, finally, we're talking about teaching and learning and about raising standards, not merely "setting" them. And we're all taking responsibility for making sure that happens; we've stopped pointing the mental finger at one another.

The leader's role in this stage is to keep the group from becoming complacent, making it clear that "we'll probably never be 'there,'" and that there is always a next step in the cycle of assessment and reforming. But, at the same time, the leader helps the group appreciate the habits they have institu-

tionalized and the cultural norms that support the progress that has been made.

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In Alan's school, annual reports, a synthesis of teacher reflections, were written by each of the four sites. In order to maintain this valued but burdensome expectation, he instituted a process that improved its chances of being valued by the school community. Not only were copies shared with everyone (an accountability strategy) but the leaders of the sites spent two hours critiquing the overall report. Routinely, these reports were introduced by a reminder of the number of years the school had done this, and a ten-year timeline was developed tracing the critical growth of the school directly through these documents. And while everyone still found the process burdensome, no one would consider finishing out the year without an annual report. And everyone made sure their reflections were included.

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The concept of the "church year" helped Nancy understand what she had to do in her school. Having grown up a minister's daughter, she was very familiar with the cycle but never quite understood its value. Every October there was an appreciation of the harvest. There were the same lessons, the same hymns, even the same colors used. In her school, it became clear that October had a different meaning – it was the "conflict month." After the "honeymoon" of September, there were inevitably squabbles among students and even among staff. It helped enormously to anticipate this and say, "October is coming." This reminded the school community to have conversations in family groups about handling conflict and to have staff meetings where there were reviews of the procedures needed and the ways to prevent conflict from becoming combat. Not only were new members of the community introduced to the habits and the culture of the school, but older members were honored for their roles in the school's history and at the same time had their memories jogged.

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A Transforming Experience

In our years of evolving understanding about leadership, empowerment, and professional community, we learned, as principals, to be better learners and teachers ourselves. It was simply not good enough to hope learning would happen because we set up structures, brought in outside experts, and/or sent teachers to workshops. Authentic learning required an authentic learning community, one that learned from research, from its own experience, and from its own analysis of that experience. And all of that required that we do the same thing.

Forming a learning community was like planning for a class – and we learned that just as a good teacher would not dream of teaching in a rigid, arbitrary manner, neither would she/he initially turn it over to the students. Good teachers know it is their job to teach the students how to be good learners, how to take on responsibility, and how to value one another's voices. And good teachers do not leave it to chance. It's no different for good leaders.

We found that developing and participating in a genuine learning community, with shared decision making focused on student learning, is more than a task; it is a changed way of being. For a group to learn to see professional development as a collective rather than as an individual responsibility, it must challenge deeply ingrained ways of doing things. John Goodlad (1994) comments on this same realization in a broader forum:

It is difficult for many and impossible for some groups and enterprises to align their self-interests with the public good, and that is what an educative role in the positive sense invariably requires. It is equally difficult for a public which was educated much more for individual devel-

opment and competition than for personal responsibility and community welfare to sort out the degree to which adversaries are indeed locked in struggles that affect us all when one side claims to be for the common good. ... Such matters are not part of the human conversation for most of us.

We also learned that a genuine learning community must never forget that building consensus and focusing on adult learning are not ends in themselves but only a starting place, a structure that works no miracles unless it is used wisely and well. These efforts are only really useful if student achievement is the overarching goal. Focusing on adult learning requires, paradoxically, that we not focus on ourselves, our needs, and our comfort level. Rather, our learning has to be about what works for kids, whatever it takes. Whenever we lose sight of that, we squander precious time and energy.

None of this happens overnight. By being prepared for the problems that adult groups will encounter as they struggle with how to work together effectively to increase student learning, educators can mindfully evolve, stage by stage, into true learning communities. They will learn to view power differently, to make learning more meaningful for kids, and maybe even to model a just and democratic mini-society.

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Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Developing Your Upward Management Plan

A presentation that provides a sample plan to support Team Leads to understand upward management as a key lever for leadership. The presentation describes upward management and provides strategies for supporting leads to establish regular communication with their principals.

Developing Your Upward Management Plan

Freshman Success Collaborative
Summer Conference

August 30, 2010



Developing Capacity
and Leadership

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



Three Realms Of Upward Management

- Communication protocols
- Scheduled encounters
- Professional credibility



Communication Protocols

What is your principal/administrator liaison's:

- Communication style? (Communication Styles Matrix in Tool Set B)
- Communication preference? (email, face-to-face interaction, phone, hard copy memo)

Who is CC'd on meeting agendas, minutes, memos, etc.?

Communication Protocols

Some Rules of Thumb:

- Agendas sent to principal/administrator liaison 48 hours prior to team meetings
- Other items requiring approval are delivered to principal/administrator in a timely manner
- Turn around meeting minutes within 48 hours



Scheduled Encounters

- Sacred, regular meeting time
- Identify standing agenda items
 - Examples: share team successes and obstacles toward goals; action items; and specific needs impacting the work
- Archive of documented dialogue
 - Examples: meeting minutes; and formal/informal conversations with team members

Professional Credibility

- Objectivity
- Preparedness
- Quick admission of mistakes
- Documenting and archiving dialogue



Next Steps

- Take a moment to digest what you've heard
- What are your immediate next steps?





Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Thirteen Tips to Effective Upward Management

An article that provides practical strategies for Team Leads to support upward management, tips for common personality types for upward managers, and how to avoid missteps.



DEVELOPING
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PM WORLD TODAY – PM TIPS & TECHNIQUES – SEPTEMBER 2008

Thirteen Tips to Effective Upward Management

By Lonnie Pacelli

So let's get right into this....

Have you ever known a manager who held great respect of his or her team but was not respected by his or her management? Or maybe you've had a manager that just couldn't get things done effectively because he or she just didn't know how to "work the system"? Or even still, are you are a manager who is continually frustrated because you can't get your manager to do what you need him or her to do? If any of these sound familiar to you, welcome to the world of ineffective upward management.

Upward management is one of those skills that some do very well, many never seem to master, and virtually all learn only through on-the-job lessons-learned. When done well, both the manager and employee work as a team to ensure each other is informed, address problems before they spin out of control, and be more effective at managing. When done poorly, both manager and employee are not only ineffective at getting the job done but are chronically frustrated due to mis-steps and surprises.

Through the years I've come to categorize most poor upward managers into four personality types:

- **The Brown-Noser** - This is the employee who treats his boss as some kind of rock star and constantly searches for what his boss wants to hear. Rather than upwardly managing, the brown-noser upwardly affirms whatever it is the boss is thinking.
- **The Rebellious Teenager** - This is the employee who consciously conceals information from her boss because she wants to demonstrate that she can get things done without help from her boss. Rather than upwardly managing, the rebellious teenager keeps her manager in the dark by withholding information.
- **The Cowardly Lion** - This is the employee who simply is afraid to share information with his boss because he fears his boss' reactions. Rather than upwardly managing, the cowardly lion avoids sharing information unless completely painted into a corner.

- **The Erupting Volcano** - This is the employee who subscribes to the "more is better" school of information management and will tell her manager every gory detail of every single event every single day. Rather than upwardly managing, the erupting volcano spews data like hot lava and forces her manager to pick out the important facts.

So how do you avoid miss-steps in managing upward? Give this baker's dozen a look and see if one or two of these nuggets can help you be a better upward manager:

- **#1 - Understand your boss** - Think about how your boss likes to communicate; does she prefer written emails or verbal discussion? Does she like structured one-on-one meetings or informal chats? Get a clear understanding of how your boss likes to engage and adapt your style to her style.
- **#2 - Stick to objective facts** - When presenting information avoid emotionally-biased assessments. Sure, you may have put your heart and soul into a project but if the project no longer makes business sense to do then it's your responsibility to put personal feelings aside and do the right business thing.
- **#3 - Don't dump problems on his or her doorstep that you should be solving yourself** - Yes, your manager has greater responsibility than you, probably gets paid more than you, and most likely has more organizational influence than you. That doesn't mean you get to delegate things you should be solving yourself. Handle the problems that you're paid to handle and enlist your boss for the stuff that requires his influence in the organization.
- **#4 - Be specific about what you need** - Whether it be money, resources, or some other form of assistance, be very specific about what you need, why you need it, and what will happen if you don't get what you need. Credible objectivity is crucial here: if it looks as if you are "stacking the deck" by exaggerating consequences or embellishing benefits you're likely to not get what you need. Also, subsequent asks are going to be viewed with greater skepticism.
- **#5 - Don't ever give reason for your boss to question your credibility** - Simply put, if you get caught stretching the truth on even the smallest of facts, you've now given your boss reason to question not only the little things but

also the big things. You've got to stay pure with your boss and protect your integrity by never allowing your credibility to be put to question.

- **#6 - Don't manage upward at the expense of managing downward** - I've known one too many managers who did a great job of keeping his boss happy but had a team that wanted to string him up by his thumbs. Look, at some point in time those that manage up at the expense of managing down will get found out and will have to pay the piper. Don't play Russian roulette with your career by keeping your boss comfy while ticking off your team.
- **#7 - Respect your boss' time** - Got a meeting with your boss? Show up on time, come prepared to discuss whatever topics need discussing, and end the meeting on time. Your boss is busy and her time should be utilized as effectively as possible. Don't let your boss see your meetings with her as a waste of time.
- **#8 - Diligently follow through on commitments** - So your boss asks you to complete an assignment by tomorrow. You agree to meet the commitment. The deadline passes and you haven't met the commitment and all you can offer up is some lame excuse. Sheesh. Even if you think an assignment given to you is the dumbest assignment on earth, if you've made a commitment to do it then meet the commitment. Not following through shows a lack of respect for your boss and breeds distrust.
- **#9 - Present options** - In decision making managers like to see alternatives and the consequences associated with each alternative. Some of the best decision making meetings I've been in with my bosses have been where we had meaningful dialogue around two or three viable options to resolving a tough problem. My job in the process was to frame up the options, provide facts to support each option, and provide a recommendation. Sometimes the recommendation was taken, sometimes not; the most important thing was that a good decision was made because there was good informed discussion.
- **#10 - Make your boss look good** - Let's say that your boss is due to make a presentation to his boss and is relying upon you to provide some critical information. You give your boss the information he needs and he presents it to his boss. He then gets fricasseed because the information is wrong. Guess whose office he stops at first on his way back from getting barbecued? Simply put, don't put your boss in a situation where he looks bad in front of his management; you've not only hurt your credibility, you've hurt his credibility.

- **#11 - Don't suck up** - Telling your boss what she wants to hear can label you as a spineless know-nothing who doesn't have the intestinal fortitude to manage effectively on your own. You'll not only quickly lose the respect of your team, your boss will ultimately see through you and not respect your leadership abilities. Sure, you may get the occasional self-absorbed manager that craves shameless idolatry; but by and large bosses view sucking up as incompetence.
- **#12 - No surprises** - Ever tell your boss that your project is on schedule and on budget then at the last minute spring a huge schedule or budget slip on her? Particularly early in my career I've had this happen more than once. For it to happen more than once is shameful to say the least. Bosses don't like surprises where they are forced to accept a problem without having the option to try to fix it before it got out of control. When you see problems make sure you inform your boss; just make sure you're working diligently to resolve the problem and not just to cover your @\$\$.
- **#13 - Admit mistakes...quickly** - Look, screw-ups happen. Heaven knows that I've got more screw-ups to my name than many managers will ever see. The important thing is to own up to your mistakes quickly and outline what you are going to do to rectify the mistake. Being the last one to recognize you've made a mistake just diminishes your credibility, so own up to those gaffes and get to work fixing them.

Upward management: sometimes a real pain, many times a diversion, but always a necessity. Take stock of your upward management skills and see where you might need to tie up some loose ends using some of these nuggets.

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Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Upward Management Plan Checklist

A checklist that guides Team Leads to develop an upward management plan focused on communication through the use of protocols and regular meetings between Team Leads and administrators.

Upward Management Plan Checklist

Communication Protocols

- ☐ Preferred method of communication for the liaison to the principal/administrator:

- ☐ Does principal /administrator get CC'd on communications with liaison? _____
- ☐ I make sure the meeting agenda is sent to my principal/administrator liaison for approval at least 48 hours prior to the team meeting
- ☐ I make sure items requiring approval are brought before the principal/administrator liaison in a timely manner

Scheduled Encounters

- ☐ I am scheduled to meet with my principal/administrator liaison weekly/semi-monthly on matters related to freshman success
- ☐ Our agreed upon standing agenda items include:
 - ☐ _____
 - ☐ _____
 - ☐ _____
 - ☐ _____
- ☐ I make sure my principal/administrator liaison receives the meeting minutes within 48 hours, including:
 - ☐ Summary of discussion
 - ☐ Action items, including owner and due date
- ☐ I keep an electronic/hard copy archive of the meeting minutes



Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Communication Styles Matrix

An overview of four common communication styles that can be found on any team and ways to support Team Leads to make appropriate responses to each communication style.

Communication Styles Matrix

FACTORS	EXPRESSIONER	DRIVER	RELATER	ANALYTICAL
How to Recognize	They get excited.	They like their own way: decisive & strong viewpoints.	They like positive attention, to be helpful, & to be regarded warmly.	They seek a lot of data, ask many questions, behave methodically & systematically.
Tends to Ask	Who? (the personal dominant question)	What? (the results-oriented question)	Why? (the personal non-goal question)	How? (the technical analytical question)
What They Dislike	Boring explanations, wasting time with too many facts.	Someone wasting their time trying to decide for them.	Rejection, treated impersonally, uncaring & unfeeling attitudes.	Making an error, being unprepared, spontaneity.
Reacts to Pressure and Tension by	"Selling" their ideas or being argumentative.	Taking charge or taking more control.	Becoming silent, withdraws, introspective.	Seeking more data & information.
Best Way to Deal With	Get excited with them. Show emotion.	Let them be in charge.	Be supportive; show you care.	Provide lots of data & information.
Likes to Be Measured by	Applause, feedback, recognition.	Results and goals.	Friends, close relationships.	Activity & business that leads to results.
Must Be Allowed to	Get ahead quickly. Likes challenges.	Get into a competitive situation. Likes to win.	Relax, feel, care, & know you care.	Make decisions at own pace, not cornered or pressured.
Will Improve with	Recognition & some structure with which to reach the goal.	A position that requires cooperation with others.	A structure for goals & methods for achieving each goal.	Interpersonal & communication skills.
Likes to Save	Effort. They rely heavily on hunches, intuition, feelings.	Time. They like to be efficient, get things done now.	Relationships. Friendship means a lot to them.	Face. They hate to make an error, be wrong, or get caught without enough info.
For Best Results	Inspire them to bigger & better accomplishments.	Allow them freedom to do things their own way.	Care & provide detail, specific plans & activities to be accomplished.	Structure a framework or "track" to follow.





Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Dealing with Difficult People in Meetings

An article that explores challenging personality types and provides tips to create collaborative meetings.

[Click here to read >>](#)



Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership

An article that summarizes Bolman and Deal's Four Frames organizational theory (structural, political, human resources, and symbolic) by which leaders can view their work.

Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership

BOOK REVIEW

Christian T. K.-H. Stadtländer

Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership

Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal

(Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California, U.S.A.; 2003; ISBN 0-7879-6427-1) U.S. \$38.00

Organizations are complex entities, often difficult to understand. Many factors make organizational life complicated, ambiguous, and unpredictable. The biggest challenge for managers and leaders is to find the right way to frame our organizations in a world that has become more global, competitive, and turbulent. The book by Bolman and Deal is a marvelous work on understanding how organizations function. It also provides practical suggestions for reframing organizations in order to adapt them better to current business realities.

Bolman and Deal focus on both management and leadership. The authors believe that organizations face several dangers. If, for example, an organization is overmanaged but underled, it will eventually lose any kind of sense of purpose and spirit. On the other hand, a poorly managed organization with a strong and charismatic leader may soar briefly only to experience a significant downfall shortly thereafter. Bolman and Deal suggest that we need today more people in managerial roles who can deal with organizational confusion and chaos by establishing order and finding simplicity; we need managers who love their work and organizations, and respect the people whose lives they affect. Leaders should be both artists and analysts, who are flexible and versatile enough to reframe their experience, as well as constantly seek new issues and discover possibilities. The authors also suggest that leaders and managers should view management more as a moral and ethical undertaking and should attempt to combine business realism with a passionate commitment to larger values and purposes.

In *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal concentrate mainly on organization theory's implications for practice. This makes their book not only extremely valuable for managers and future leaders of organizations but also for management consultants who advise managers and leaders on a variety of organizational issues. The authors use a four-frame model (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic), indicating that the same situation can be viewed in at least four different ways. Each of these frames is distinctive, coherent, and powerful, yet

when taken together, they help capture a comprehensive picture of an organization's situation. These frames can be used to identify what is wrong in organizations and what can be done to correct it.

The four frames have their own image of reality. Each frame can be characterized as follows: (1) The Structural Frame (metaphors: Factory or machine) emphasizes goals, specialized roles, and formal relationships; this frame can be used to organize and structure groups and teams to get results and fit an organization's environment and technology. (2) The Human Resource Frame (metaphor: Family) sees the organization through the lens of human needs, emotions, skills, and relationships; the goal is to align organizational and human needs to build positive interpersonal and group dynamics. (3) The Political Frame (metaphor: Jungle) has to do with power, conflict, competition, and organizational politics; this frame can be used to cope with power and conflict, build suitable coalitions and hone political connections, and deal with both internal and external politics. (4) The Symbolic Frame (metaphors: Carnival, temple, or theater) sees organizations as cultures, propelled more by rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroes, and myths than by rules, policies, and managerial authorities; the goal of this frame is to shape a culture that gives a purpose and meaning to workers, provides organizational drama for internal and external audiences, and build team spirit through ceremony and story.

The theories presented in this book were derived from research conducted with a variety of organizations from different sectors around the globe. Bolman and Deal analyzed organizations such as McDonald's in India, Citibank, Enron, Kodak, Harley-Davidson, Volvo France, NASA, the U.S. Air Force, Nordstrom, Harvard University, and the U.S. Congress in regard to individual aspects of the organizational frames. This approach makes the four-frame model relevant and applicable to any type of domestic and international organization.

Bolman and Deal believe that multi-frame thinking requires elastic movement that lies beyond narrow and mechanical approaches for understanding

organizations. When managers and leaders apply the holistic model, they view organizations through all four frames (people, power, structure, and symbols); this gives them an array of options and development opportunities. For example, people in organizations will improve on bargaining, become more open to training, learn how to celebrate success, and lose fear of reorganizing and reframing; they suddenly see the need to develop creativity, risk-taking, and playfulness; they will find the right questions and answers, and search for a deeper meaning and faith despite chaos and confusion; this eventually leads to the development of passionate, committed, flexible, and ethical, as well as understanding and responding managers and leaders who move the organization forward in a constantly changing business environment.

The book also provides the reader with information about important articles and books published in this field. A series called "Greatest Hits from Organization Studies" is displayed as sidebars throughout the book and represent valuable summaries of key ideas from the most influential works in the scholarly literature as well as summaries of management best-sellers. For this, the authors developed two lists: (1) The "greatest hits" as rated by scholars and (2) Best-sellers as represented in the list of Business Week. A summary of these lists is provided in the Appendix.

The book concludes with a section on improving leadership

practice by applying the four-frame model. More specifically, various issues related to the challenges of leadership are discussed, including integration issues, opportunities and perils, the distinct image of leaders and leadership, creating change, as well as ethics and spirit. Bolman and Deal then illustrate the process, art, and choice of reframing an organization by following a new principal through his first week in an urban high school. This high school is used as an example for an organization in trouble, similar to a corporation in crisis, a struggling hospital, or an embattled public agency. This case study essentially demonstrates how Bolman and Deal's theories would play out in practice by applying the four-frame model to a real world problem.

All in all, I found this book to be superbly written and well illustrated. It provides the reader with a 19-page list of cited references useful for further in-depth study of management topics related to organizational issues. This book is a useful text for managers and leaders who want to learn more about the functioning of organizations. It is also a superb guide for consultants who advise in organizations junior and senior managers, section leaders, and executives. Finally, this book is an excellent text for graduate students and scholars in business and education schools who are interested in learning how organizations function by studying the basics, cases, and applications of organizational theory and behavior.

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Supporting Your Success Team Lead

Intervention Interview Protocol

A protocol that focuses on intervention design and implementation through the lens of Boleman & Deal's Four Frames. Intended to be completed as a small group activity, the protocol helps Team Leads arrive at concrete next steps for revamping an intervention plan.

Intervention Interview Protocol

Overview

This protocol is designed to help Success Team Leads consider the team's interventions by exploring questions written through the lens of Bolman and Deal's four leadership "frames" or "orientations." Participants should take the self-assessment on the following two pages to identify their leadership frame/orientation prior to engaging in the protocol. Doing so will help the leader consider implications for practice and possible next steps.

Time

65–75 minutes if the leadership orientations assessment is not already completed; 55 minutes if already completed

Materials

Copies of each page of the protocol
Watch/timer

Rotating Roles

Interviewer (who also serves as timekeeper), Interviewee, Scribe

Process

1. Make sure participants complete the leadership orientations assessment. (10-15 minutes)
2. Once leadership orientations are identified, participants read through each of the roles, noting that all participants will serve in each of the three roles during the protocol (interviewer, interviewee, and scribe). State that the purpose of this protocol is to deepen and broaden the perspective of the interviewee and that the interviewee reserves the right to decline answering questions for which s/he currently holds no answer. (8 minutes)
3. Divide participants into triads and select initial roles. The interviewer begins with contextual openers (on the interviewer's sheet) and interviews the interviewee for 8 minutes. The scribe follows along and takes notes in the appropriate boxes of the scribe sheet. Within the time allotted, the interviewer may not ask all the questions on the sheet. This is okay. (8 minutes)
4. At the conclusion of the interview round, the scribe reads the notes s/he wrote to the interviewee. The notes are given to the interviewee. (5 minutes)
5. Members of the triad then rotate roles and repeat steps 3 and 4, completing two more rounds of interviews so that every member of the triad has been interviewed, has served as scribe, and has served as interviewer. (13 minutes per round x 2 rounds = 26 minutes)

Intervention Interview Protocol (cont.)

Overview

Debrief Questions (5 minutes)

- Content: What insights arose for you? What next steps are you considering as a result?
- Process: What worked? How might you use this process in your work with the team?

Intervention Interview Protocol

Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment

This questionnaire asks you to describe yourself as a manager and leader. For each item, give the number “4” to the phrase that best describes you, “3” to the item that is next best, and on down to “1” to the item that is least like you.

1. My strongest skills are:

- _____ a. Analytic skills (ST)
- _____ b. Interpersonal skills (HR)
- _____ c. Political skills (PL)
- _____ d. Flair for drama (SY)

2. The best way to describe me is:

- _____ a. Technical expert (ST)
- _____ b. Good listener (HR)
- _____ c. Skilled negotiator (PL)
- _____ d. Inspirational leader (SY)

3. What has helped me the most to be successful is my ability to:

- _____ a. Make good decisions (ST)
- _____ b. Coach and develop people (HR)
- _____ c. Build strong alliances and a power base (PL)
- _____ d. Inspire and excite others (SY)

4. What people are most likely to notice about me is my:

- _____ a. Attention to detail (ST)
- _____ b. Concern for people (HR)
- _____ c. Ability to succeed, in the face of conflict and opposition (PL)
- _____ d. Charisma (SY)

5. My most important leadership trait is:

- _____ a. Clear, logical thinking (ST)
- _____ b. Caring and support for others (HR)
- _____ c. Toughness and aggressiveness (PL)
- _____ d. Imagination and creativity (SY)

6. I am best described as:

- _____ a. An analyst (ST)
- _____ b. A humanist (HR)
- _____ c. A politician (PL)
- _____ d. A visionary (SY)

COMPUTING SCORES

Compute your scores as follows:

- _____ ST = 1a + 2a + 3a + 4a + 5a + 6a
- _____ HR = 1b + 2b + 3b + 4b + 5b + 6b
- _____ PL = 1c + 2c + 3c + 4c + 5c + 6c
- _____ SY = 1d + 2d + 3d + 4d + 5d + 6d

Intervention Interview Protocol

Leadership Orientations Self-Assessment (cont.)

Interpreting Scores

1. **Structural** leaders emphasize rationality, analysis, logic, facts, and data. They are likely to believe strongly in the importance of clear structure and well-developed management systems. A good leader is someone who thinks clearly, makes the right decisions, has good analytic skills, and can design structures and systems that get the job done.
2. **Human resource** leaders emphasize the importance of people. They endorse the view point that the central task of management is to develop a good fit between people and organizations. They believe in the importance of coaching, participation, motivation, teamwork, and good interpersonal relations. A good leader is a facilitator and participative manager who supports and empowers others.
3. **Political** leaders believe that managers and leaders live in a world of conflict and scarce resources. The central task of management is to mobilize the resources needed to advocate and fight for the unit's or the organization's goals and objectives. Political leaders emphasize the importance of building a power base: allies, networks, coalitions. A good leader is an advocate and negotiator who understands politics and is comfortable with conflict.
4. **Symbolic** leaders believe that the essential task of management is to provide vision and inspiration. They rely on personal charisma and a flair for drama to get people excited and committed to the organizational mission. A good leader is a prophet and visionary, who uses symbols, tells stories, and frames experience in ways that give people hope and meaning.

COMPUTING SCORES

Compute your scores as follows:

$$\text{ST} = 1a + 2a + 3a + 4a + 5a + 6a$$

$$\text{HR} = 1b + 2b + 3b + 4b + 5b + 6b$$

$$\text{PL} = 1c + 2c + 3c + 4c + 5c + 6c$$

$$\text{SY} = 1d + 2d + 3d + 4d + 5d + 6d$$

Intervention Interview Protocol

Interviewer Instructions

Lead/Coordinator: _____ Interviewer: _____

Date: _____ Scribe: _____

Begin with the contextual openers. Responses to the contextual openers may prompt you to ask clarifying questions, and that is fine. After gaining an understanding of the intervention plan, pose questions from each of the four frames below. The goal is to help the lead or coordinator think critically about the content, process, and goals of the intervention by engaging in all four frames. Provide sufficient wait time, and respect the respondent's right to not answer a question.

Contextual Openers

What story from the data led your team to develop an intervention?
Summarize your intervention plan.

Structural Questions

- What systems do you have in place to facilitate productive implementation of your intervention? For example, how does the scheduling of your intervention limit calendar conflicts?
- How will you know if this intervention is effective for the targeted group? Describe your intervention effectiveness tracking system.
- What type of adjustments may you have to make to your intervention if the data indicates it is not effective for your targeted group of students?

Human Resource Questions

- Why this particular intervention for the targeted group of students?
- Thinking of the targeted students, what staff members do you think will elicit participation and best effort from students?
- What were the criteria for selecting those who will implement the intervention?
- What is the capacity of the implementers to execute the intervention successfully?
- What training will those implementing the intervention need?

Political Questions

- Who appears most willing to implement the intervention?
- How are you addressing implementers who are showing signs of not being on board with the plan?
- To whom can you go to advocate for the tools and resources you need to successfully implement your intervention?
- What political barriers do you need to address to give your intervention a chance for success?

Symbolic Questions

- How does your intervention align with your team's mission or purpose statement?
- How is your team messaging the intervention to students? Is it presented as punitive or supportive?
- What celebrations do you have planned for students who are making progress toward your On-Track and student connection goals?
- What tangible appreciation will those implementing the intervention receive for engaging in it?

Intervention Interview Protocol

Scribe Instructions

Lead/Coordinator: _____ Interviewer: _____

Date: _____ Scribe: _____

Record responses to the questions raised. Your goal is to capture the key responses shared by the lead or coordinator. Recording significant quotes and ideas will be instrumental in helping the lead or coordinator plan next steps. You will read your notes aloud at the end of the interview and give them to the lead or coordinator interviewed.

Key Responses to Structural Questions	Key Responses to Human Resource Questions
Key Responses to Political Questions	Key Responses to Symbolic Questions



Intervention Interview Protocol

Lead or Coordinator Instructions

Lead/Coordinator: _____ Interviewer: _____

Date: _____ Scribe: _____

You will be asked several questions to help you consider your intervention plan through all four frames (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic). This protocol will be most helpful to you if you respond honestly to the questions posed. It is okay to not have an answer for a question. The goal is to broaden your perspective about the forces at work within your school context that can help or hinder the success of your intervention. A description of the types of questions you will be asked are outlined below.

Structural

These questions ask you to think about your intervention in terms of the structures and systems necessary to achieve your defined goals.

Human Resource

These questions ask you to think about the people participating in your intervention, from recipients to implementers.

Political

These questions ask you to think about how you advocate and acquire what you need to implement your intervention.

Symbolic

These questions ask you to connect the intervention plan to the vision, mission, and/or purpose of your team's work.



Planning for a Success Team Meeting

Contents

**Success Team Meeting
Planning Checklist**

**Success Team Meeting
Agenda Template**

Purpose

Strong meeting facilitation is integral to achieving the goals of any team. This collection of tools is intended to help Freshman Success Team Leads and/or administrators hold effective and productive meetings.

How & When to Use

Success Team Meeting Planning Checklist: This tool provides school-based Team Leads with a sample checklist of activities to be completed before and after a team meeting. It can be used as a checklist and modified to include school-specific items.

Success Team Meeting Agenda Template: A strong agenda is the foundation of a productive meeting. This tool should be used to collaboratively plan each school-based team meeting. Collaboration can occur with an administrator and/or another team member. While planning, it is important to keep in mind:

- Assign team members to the following roles: recorder, process observer, and timekeeper.
- Provide time for revising action items and creating new action items.



Planning for a Success Team Meeting

Success Team Meeting Planning Checklist

This checklist guides the careful and intentional planning of team meetings.

Planning for a Success Team Meeting

Success Team Meeting Planning Checklist

Before Event

- ☐ Identify/confirm meeting date, time, and location
- ☐ Develop agenda (best to plan at least 5 days in advance)
- ☐ Secure teammates to serve in meeting roles, including:
 - ☐ Recorder (make sure the recorder has an electronic copy of agenda to type minutes directly into the agenda during the meeting)
 - ☐ Timekeeper
 - ☐ Parking lot attendant (someone who records issues that are important but not directly applicable to the meeting agenda)
 - ☐ Process observer
- ☐ Email meeting reminder, including: date, time, location, and materials to bring (if appropriate)
- ☐ Create and compile all necessary materials including:
 - ☐ Attendance sheet
 - ☐ Payroll sign-in sheet (when applicable)
 - ☐ Agenda
 - ☐ Handouts, including but not limited to:
 - ☐ Point-in-time academic and attendance data
 - ☐ Point-in-time intervention tracking data
 - ☐ Materials for intervention implementation
 - ☐ Materials for celebratory activities
- ☐ Gather supplies and equipment needed for facilitation, including:
 - ☐ Chart paper, markers, highlighters, extra pens
 - ☐ Post-its and tape
 - ☐ Audio-visual equipment (as appropriate)
- ☐ Email agenda at least 24 hours prior to the meeting, including reminder to bring necessary materials
- ☐ Arrive early to set up meeting space
 - ☐ Seating so that all members can see each other
 - ☐ Chart paper posted where all members can see it
 - ☐ Attendance, agenda, and payroll sign-in sheets at room entrance (to prevent distraction by latecomers)
 - ☐ Extra pens around the seating area

After Event

- ☐ Collect your supplies for safekeeping for the next meeting!
- ☐ Submit sign-in sheets to main office
- ☐ Archive a copy of the agenda and minutes
- ☐ Email the meeting minutes to teammates within 48 hours or sooner if there are action items with immediate due dates



Planning for a Success Team Meeting

Success Team Meeting Agenda Template

A tool that can serve as a thoughtful road map for accomplishing the goals of the team meeting.



DEVELOPING
CAPACITY & LEADERSHIP

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT





Success Team Meeting Agenda Template

Date:		Time:		School:	Grade:
Previous Meeting:				Next Meeting:	
FACILITATOR:	RECORDER:	PARKING LOT:	PROCESS OBSERVER:	TIME-KEEPER:	
PREVIOUS ACTION ITEMS		PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	DEADLINE	UPDATE/NOTES	
TOPIC		TIME	DISCUSSION		
Revisit previous action items (see above)		5 min			
Data Analysis Protocol: _____		20 min			
Intervention development, monitoring, or tracking of student progress		10 min			
Student centered-speak		10 min			
CURRENT ACTION ITEMS		PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	DEADLINE	UPDATE/NOTES	





CULTIVATING TRUST & RESPECT

TOOL SET

A

Building Community

TOOL SET

B

Clarifying Success Team Purpose



Building Community

Contents

Forming Ground Rules

Compass Points

**Community Call:
Icebreaks and Warm-Ups**

Purpose

Success Teams are learning communities organized around the shared purpose of supporting students to successfully transition to high school. Despite this shared purpose, team members have individual philosophies and ideas about how to approach this work. Regular community building provides opportunities for team members to connect to a shared purpose as well as each other.

Tool Set A provides Team Leads with ideas for community building within Success Teams.

How & When to Use

Community building is a part of Success Team work and related activities should connect to the goals for the meeting. When creating a team meeting agenda, Team Leads should preserve space and time for these activities. You may be tempted to eliminate community building when short on time or when you feel there are other important things to do. Resist the urge and make sure community building is a regular segment of your team's meeting.

The protocols and activities in Tool Set A set the stage for this work. For instance, the Compass Points activity is ideal for a new Success Team. The information learned can help the Success Team determine the strengths and areas for growth of each team member. After completing the activity, it is not uncommon to hear members reference the findings. You might hear a team member say, "Well, I'm an East, I need to know the big picture," or "I know she's a South, so she's concerned with our comfort right now."



Building Community

Forming Ground Rules

A protocol to support Success Teams to develop norms that will shape how they work together. Ground rules help teams to establish trust and clarify expectations.



Forming Ground Rules

Developed by Marylyn Wentworth.

Ground Rules, or Norms, are important for a group that intends to work together on difficult issues, or who will be working together over time. They may be added to, or condensed, as the group progresses. Starting with basic Ground Rules builds trust, clarifies group expectations of one another, and establishes points of “reflection” to see how the group is doing regarding process.

Time

Approximately 30 minutes

1. Ask everyone to **write down what each person needs in order to work productively in a group**, giving an example of one thing the facilitator needs, i.e. “to have all voices heard,” or “to start and end our meetings when we say we will.” (This is to help people focus on process rather than product)
2. **Each participant names one thing from his/her written list**, going around in a circle, with no repeats, and as many circuits as necessary to have all the ground rules listed.
3. **Ask for any clarifications** needed. One person may not understand what another person has listed, or may interpret the language differently.
4. **If the list is VERY long – more than 10 Ground Rules — ask the group if some of them can be combined to make the list more manageable.** Sometimes the subtle differences are important to people, so it is more important that everyone feel their needs have been honored than it is to have a short list.
5. **Ask if everyone can abide by the listed Ground Rules.** If anyone dislikes or doesn’t want to comply with one of them, that Ground Rule should be discussed and a decision should be made to keep it on the list with a notation of objection, to remove it, or to try it for a specified amount of time and check it again.
6. **Ask if any one of the Ground Rules might be hard for the group to follow.** If there is one or more, those Ground Rules should be highlighted and given attention. With time it will become clear if it should be dropped, or needs significant work. Sometimes what might appear to be a difficult rule turns out not to be hard at all. “Everyone has a turn to speak,” is sometimes debated for example, with the argument that not everyone likes to talk every time an issue is raised, and others think aloud and only process well if they have the space to do that. Frequently, a system of checking in with everyone, without requiring everyone to speak, becomes a more effective ground rule.
7. **While work is in progress, refer to the Ground Rules whenever they would help group process.** If one person is dominating, for example, it is easier to refer to a Ground Rule that says, “take care with how often and how long you speak,” than to ask someone directly to stop dominating the group.
8. **Check in on the Ground Rules when reflection is done on the group work.** Note any that were not followed particularly well for attention in the next work session. Being sure they are followed, refining them, and adding or subtracting Ground Rules is important, as it makes for smoother work and more trust within the group.



Building Community

Compass Points

This protocol allows team members to consider their own working styles as well as the working styles of others.



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North, South, East and West:


Compass Points

An Exercise in Understanding Preferences in Group Work

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF

Similar to the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, this exercise uses a set of preferences which relate not to individual but to group behaviors, helping us to understand how preferences affect our group work.

1. The room is set up with four signs on each wall — North, South, East and West.
2. Participants are invited to go to the “direction” of their choice. No one is only one “direction,” but everyone can choose one as their pre-dominant one.
3. Each “direction” answers the five questions on a sheet of newsprint. When complete, they report back to the whole group.
4. Processing can include:
 - Note the distribution among the “directions”: what might it mean?
 - What is the best combination for a group to have? Does it matter?
 - How can you avoid being driven crazy by another “direction”?
 - How might you use this exercise with others? Students?

	North <i>Acting – “Let’s do it;” Likes to act, try things, plunge in.</i>	
West <i>Paying attention to detail —likes to know the who, what, when, where and why before acting.</i>		East <i>Speculating – likes to look at the big picture and the possibilities before acting.</i>
	South <i>Caring – likes to know that everyone’s feelings have been taken into consideration and that their voices have been heard before acting.</i>	

North, South, East and West

Decide which of the four “directions” most closely describes your personal style. Then spend 15 minutes answering the following questions as a group.

1. What are the strengths of your style? (4 adjectives)
2. What are the limitations of your style? (4 adjectives)
3. What style do you find most difficult to work with and why?
4. What do people from the other “directions” or styles need to know about you so you can work together effectively?
5. What do you value about the other three styles?



Building Community

Community Call: Icebreakers and Warm-Ups

Community Calls are brief activities that take place at the beginning of the meeting. They enable team members to share what makes them stay committed to each other and the work.



Ice Breakers and Warm-Ups

Shared at the June 2000 NSRF National Facilitators Meeting

The following exercises designed to help people get to know one another.

1. If you were to write your **Autobiography**, what would the title be and why.
2. Write on the inside of your tent card (table name card) a **fact about yourself** that no one would be likely to guess. Read them out loud. Gives people a hook. (i.e., "Faith, who raises sheep.")
3. **Draw a picture that describes who you are** -- can be symbols, colors, you doing something...
4. **Create a flower**. Each person puts one petal on the flower, on which is written something important about them. If we can find something we all have in common we put it in the center.
5. **Human Scavenger Hunt**, where you find things interesting about each person from a list that might be work related or not. Items like, find someone who has coached a CFG already, someone who has taught in another country, someone who has created a portfolio that works... People share who they found in the whole group.
6. People at each table find **four things they have in common and share with the large group as an introduction**. Can't be anything about education. (At one table, all had an Uncle Harry they didn't like).
7. People post one **clue about themselves** (with no name) on a bulletin board. Later in the day, add another clue beside the first clue (more if there is time) and people guess identities from the clues at the end of the day. People make assumptions and then they find that it's very revealing and fun.
8. **Post cards from the edge**. Bring a collection of wild postcards and hand them out. Each person finds something in the post card that relates to their experience as a teacher or principal and shares that with the group.
9. **Give out pennies and look at the dates**. Go around the room and share something that occurred for you in the year of the penny. It can be something about your education (as a child, a teachers etc.) or it can be just about life. You'll need a good collection of pennies with varied dates.
10. **Skittles**. People grab one, there is a guide by color: Yellow, something you're doing this summer; green, something about work; red, an adventure you've had in education, etc. Whatever you want for categories.

11. **North, South, East, West.** It establishes strengths: North: do it now (action); West: organizational (structure); East: vision (meaning); South: feelings (caring). See directions in almost any CFG handout collection.
12. **Gingerbread people.** Hand out Gingerbread people, who have a question on each of their body parts: what gives you indigestion (stomach), what drives you crazy (head), what you love (heart), what you bring (one leg), what you want to let go of, (hand) what you want to take away. Each person takes a turn introducing themselves and answering the questions. They can write them in and post them all, with their names on the Gingerbread people.
13. **Draw your school** - either a picture or a floor plan, show challenges, strengths - personalize school by what you think makes it special. Share pictures.
14. Write down **powerful learning experiences** from when you were age 10 to 13. Share them.
15. **Line up in birth order and share schooling** in small groups that break up roughly by generations or clusters of years and share out.
16. **Movie titles that describe your school experience** and why.
17. **Change style indicator** and score yourself, validate Conservators, Validators, and Initiators of Change, Pragmatist. (You'll need the directions to do this)
18. Read *Alexander's Horrible Rotten Day* (children's book) aloud, then ask people to share their **Bad morning experiences**.
19. **Two truths and a lie:** you share two things that are true and one lie about yourself (as an educator or a person - decide on one) and the group tries to guess which one is the lie. "What you would like to be true?" is the follow up question.



Clarifying Success Team Purpose

Contents

**Modified Hopes and
Fears Protocol**

**Cleaning the Lens
Protocol**

Purpose

All teams experience difficult situations that result in conflict and decreased productivity. During these times, it is important to process new information and clarify team purpose.

Tool Set B can support Team Leads to facilitate difficult conversations that clarify team purpose.

How & When to Use

When a Success Team Lead becomes aware of major conflicts and /or a lack of progress due to team dynamics (i.e. conflicting priorities, philosophical differences), there is a need to refocus efforts. We recommend the use of a protocol from Tool Set B to create a safe space for honest and productive conversations.



Clarifying Success Team Purpose

Modified Hopes and Fears Protocol

An activity that acknowledges significant events and related fears to move a team forward while allowing space for individual processing.

Modified Hopes and Fears Protocol

Purpose

To acknowledge the impact of a significant event and to create space for members to anchor themselves in the hopes they hold for their work together moving forward.

Timing & Grouping

This protocol can vary from 20 to 60 minutes, depending on the size of the group and the range of members' concerns. If the group is particularly large, the facilitator can ask table groups to work together and then report out.

Supplies

Newsprint/chart paper, sticky notes, writing utensils, markers

Agreements

- **Confidentiality** - Our personal stories stay in. Our shared commitments are socialized.
- **No judgment zone** - Different events impact people in different ways. We agree to listen to one another with a compassionate ear.
- **Solutions-oriented discourse** - While we are sharing our fears, we acknowledge that they can cause stagnation. Therefore, we commit to stepping into our hopes.

Steps

1. **Introduction.** The facilitator names the impactful event and asks members to silently write on a sticky note their greatest fear or concern about it. Then, the facilitator asks them to think about their greatest hope for the work moving forward and to write it on a separate sticky note.
2. **Pair Share.** The facilitator asks members to share their fears and hopes with a partner.
3. **Listing.** Members create a "Fears" column and a "Hopes" column on a sheet of newsprint/chart paper using their sticky notes. All fears and hopes are posted without comment or judgment.
Note: if the group is particularly large, create smaller groups for this step and assign a scribe.
4. **Processing.** The facilitator provides time for members to silently read the lists.
5. **Discussion Questions.** What trends or themes do you see in the fears? In the hopes? Based on the trends in our hopes, what 2 or 3 commitments can we focus on to propel our work together?

Modified Hopes and Fears Protocol (cont.)

For groups that have been divided into smaller groups -

6. Each group will discuss the questions in step 5 and report out one core theme around fears, one core theme around hopes, and one commitment. Facilitator scribes the commitments on newsprint/chart paper.
7. The facilitator asks, "Of the commitments listed, which 2 or 3 will we collectively agree to move forward?" Remind the team that the commitments anchor how we interact with one another to realize the hopes we hold for our work.
8. **Debrief the process.** How was this process helpful? In what ways did it challenge or push you? How might you use this protocol in your practice?

A Few Facilitation Tips

- The facilitator can participate by listing his or her fears and hopes as well.
- Do not skip steps! For some, just writing their fears and hopes is personally cathartic. For others, it is the collective consideration of the impact which will be powerful in setting commitments moving forward.
- Remember, the commitments made serve as an anchor for your work moving forward. In debriefing with the lead(s) of the team or group, explicitly ask how these commitments are embedded in the work.
- Thank members for sharing!



Clarifying Success Team Purpose

Cleaning the Lens Protocol

This protocol re-establishes individual commitments by reconnecting team members with the work on a personal level.

Cleaning the Lens Protocol

This protocol provides participants with the opportunity to (1) reconnect on a personal level with the foundational beliefs that drew them into the work that is currently presenting a challenge and (2) prioritize time and energy toward activities that are vital and important to fulfilling the purpose of the work.

Time

30 minutes

Role(s)

Facilitator and scribe

Materials

chart paper, markers, "Cleaning the Lens Protocol Worksheet" for participants

Revisit Your Personal Foundation (3 minutes)

1. In a sentence or two, articulate the purpose for your work.
2. Why is this work significant to you? What has kept you resilient in the work up to this point?

Assessing Responsibilities (5 minutes)

3. List the current work responsibilities vying for your time and energy.
4. What responsibilities do you view as vital to fulfilling the purpose of your work?
These responsibilities address the essence of the work. Without them, the entire work crumbles.
5. What responsibilities are important to fulfilling the purpose of your work?
These responsibilities enhance the product of your work.

Assessing Time Commitment (3 minutes)

6. To fulfill each vital responsibility you noted, how much time per week is required for you to do each one well?
7. To fulfill each important responsibility you noted, how much additional time per week is required for you to do each one well?

Cleaning the Lens Protocol (cont.)

Refocusing Efforts (5 minutes)

8. What are you currently doing that is misaligned with the purpose for your work?
9. What is at stake, to gain or lose, by continuing to perform these duties in conjunction with the work that you have identified as vital and/or important?
10. How have you contributed to this misalignment?

Moving From Thoughts To Action (3 minutes)

11. What are your next steps to bring your efforts in closer alignment to the purpose of your work? By when?
12. Who can you enlist to hold you accountable for taking your next steps?

Enlisting Help For Follow-Through (10 minutes)

13. In dyads, share your responses and enlist your partner to hold you accountable for having the next steps completed by your target date.





BUILDING SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS

TOOL SET

A

**Facilitating Effective Adult Collaboration
and Conversation**

TOOL SET

B

Assessing Success Team Progress

TOOL SET

C

Facilitating Data-Driven Conversations

TOOL SET

D

Engaging Students in On-Track Conversations



Facilitating Effective Adult Collaboration and Conversation

Contents

**Success Team in Action:
Hancock High School
Video**

**How Adults Can Work
Together Presentation**

**Communities that
Undermine Learning**

**Conversations in Schools
that Improve Student
Achievement**

Purpose

A focus on effective adult collaboration moves teams toward becoming accountable communities that are able to address issues with a problem-solving approach rather than trying to ignore or minimize them. Accountable communities also self-monitor group and individual functioning and share both urgency and hope (The Skillful Leader by Platt and Tripp, 2000).

How & When to Use

Tool Set A supports Team Leads and members to acquire the necessary background knowledge to become an accountable and professional learning community focused on student achievement and results. The video on Hancock High School showcases one NCS partner school engaging in a solutions-oriented conversation about their students. Along with a professional reading, and/or the presentation in this Tool Set, your Success Team can assess the ingredients for effective adult collaboration and conversation.



Facilitating Effective Adult Collaboration and Conversation

Success Team in Action: Hancock High School Video

A video that provides a snapshot of a Success Team facilitating an accountable conversation about student outcomes.

[Click here to view >>](#)



Facilitating Effective Adult Collaboration and Conversation

How Adults Can Work Together Presentation

A sample presentation to share with Success Team members
focused on working together to improve On-Track rates.

How Adults Can Work Together Presentation

Created by the NCS Freshman Success Collaborative

November 2009



Building School-Based
Teams

NCS FRESHMAN ON-TRACK TOOLKIT



Adult Attitudes

- Be present
- Be committed
- Be responsible



System of Communication

- How can we set up a system of communication that will foster the collaboration necessary to meet student needs in a timely manner?
- How do we communicate with students to nurture ownership of their progress?



Make Data Our Friend

- Make the time to analyze data
- Collaboratively develop action plans
- Monitor progress on action plans
- Evaluate action plans with data-based evidence



Solutions Orientated

- Bulk of conversations are focused on strategies for improvement
- Creating a culture of support for struggling teachers



Setting Students Up for Success

- Universal expectations for all ninth grade classes
- Student-friendly objectives
- Relevance to students' lives/work
- Keep up with grading
- Provide timely and frequent feedback to students on their progress
- Provide multiple opportunities to succeed
- Common assessments



More on Common Assessments

- Developed collaboratively
- Aligned to standards
- Fine tuned to assess what students are expected to know/be able to do
- Have length appropriate for the time allotted for testing
- Have an agreed-upon rubric



Facilitating Effective Adult Collaboration and Conversation

Communities that Undermine Learning

An article that describes how three community prototypes – Toxic, Laissez-Faire, and Congenial – serve as obstacles to team functioning and, as a result, limit improvement efforts.

communities **that** **undermine** learning

School leaders must distinguish between PLCs that genuinely serve greater student learning and groups that protect mediocre performance by both students and adults.

Period 2 common planning time at River High School: Five minutes after the last bell, Team 9B teachers are amiably catching up on one another's weekends while waiting for the perpetual stragglers to arrive.

Maria, the team leader, seems to be the only one with a sense of urgency. "People, remember our norm of getting started promptly," she implores. "Let's go. We need to spend a few minutes planning April's field trip. Then we have to talk about how we're doing with the interdisciplinary writing prompts."

Before Maria has finished distributing a short agenda, Principal Knox arrives. He's on his daily walkthrough this period and cannot stay, but he wants to encourage the group with a "little pat on the back."

Al Knox is proud of his Professional Learning Community initiative at River High School. He has provided his PLCs with common meeting time, stipends for team leader(s), and summer training in norm development and agenda setting. Compared to the fractious group of ninth-grade teachers he saw two years ago, 9B is collaborating pretty well, Al thinks. He is pleased by the congenial tone of the gathering and the

team's shared goal to improve student writing—a school priority. After a quick thanks for their efforts, Al continues his walk and leaves 9B to get on with its business.

If Al had stayed longer, the unfolding interaction might have made him reconsider his assessment. Instead of a few minutes, the field trip discussion took more than half the meeting. A tangent into a student discipline issue chewed up another 15 minutes.

Team 9B got to the main agenda item with 10 minutes left. At that point, two teachers admitted that they were not getting to the writing prompts despite previous promises. John "never could find the time" and Tina complained about "doing English in science." Colleagues' comments were dismayingly solicitous:

"That's OK, John. Get to it when you can."

"Listen, your low group isn't going to be able to write much anyway. Maybe you could just experiment with one of your good sections."

No one expressed dismay over how time had been used or the failure to address the

By Alexander D. Platt and Caroline E. Tripp

one agenda item that would have a direct impact on student performance. No one made a passionate plea about the serious gap in writing achievement. No one took a colleague to task for violating the team agreement, thereby granting tacit permission to the notion that individual autonomy takes precedence over responsibility to the group.

If we measure collaboration in terms of impact on teaching and learning, the meeting was a failure, and the group's performance inadequate.

False hope

Team 9B is one of many learning communities with the worthwhile mission of improving student learning springing up all over California. Some do indeed fulfill the promise of professional learning set forth by DuFour and others. But as Michael Fullan warns us from his research, "[We] have found that professional learning communities are being implemented superficially. They give the educators involved a false hope of progress."

To fulfill the promise of professional learning communities, skillful leaders need to do more than simply marshal resources and cheer faculty on from the sidelines. We must distinguish between groups that genuinely pool their mental effort to develop organizational intelligence in the service of greater student learning — what we call Accountable Communities — and groups whose interactions block improvement and protect mediocre performance by both students and adults.

Three different prototypes fall into the latter category: the Toxic Community, the *Laissez-Faire* Community and the Congenial Community. Although they may look different, each group:

- accepts or tolerates low performance, inertia or lack of contribution from its own members;
- expects and accepts low performance from groups of students who have somehow been labeled as less worthy or less capable;
- attributes poor student achievement to external factors like family background, lack of financial support for schools or community conditions;
- derives benefit from, and therefore ex-

erts effort to sustain, conditions that favor adult comfort or convenience over student needs;

- has little or no collective experience with, or models for, effective problem-solving skills and strategies.

Real schools are full of such underperforming groups, many of which parade



To fulfill the promise of PLCs, skillful leaders need to do more than simply marshal resources and cheer faculty on from the sidelines.

as "effective teams." As you examine the profile descriptions that follow, and the suggested approaches for taking on such groups, consider how you would use them to diagnose and help Team 9B. Consider whether any of the groups in your school display similar characteristics and what you and your leadership team might do.

The Toxic Community

As their name implies, toxic groups are distinguished by their "negative take" on almost all aspects of schooling and by their real or perceived ability to stifle initiative, punish heretics (anyone who takes a leader's side on an issue), derail emerging solutions to problems, and blame everyone but themselves for mediocre student or adult learning.

Sarcastic humor and weary cynicism

bind vocal members together in an "us versus them" or "this too shall pass" stance that serves to protect members from external demands and to drive non-subscribers to silence or to the safety of other spaces.

Toxicity may result from patterns of district bungling, including lack of supervision and feedback or lingering resentments over past injuries, such as strikes or destructive bargaining sessions. Toxicity is also fueled by emotional exhaustion from years of "initiative overload" and unsupported effort and continual stirring of a few "ringleaders" who derive gratification and a sense of purpose from being aggrieved.

By nature guarded and suspicious, toxic groups do pay attention to what the organization wants from them and to the ways in which organizational goals or changes in practice might affect their traditional rights and privileges. They often use the union contract to defend the status quo.

Rather than embracing promising ideas on their merits or supporting leaders who want to find ways of trying out new practices within the framework of the contract, Toxic Communities vote for and encourage union leaders who take a tough, protective stance.

Finally, Toxic Communities focus on why things should not be done, cannot work or are a problem for something that already exists. Thus, members most often present themselves as blockers to improvement efforts and as individuals whose job is to sort, select and label both children and other adults.

New teacher induction programs are no match for these lethal culture builders! Challenging these communities requires a balance of listening, acknowledging and direct intervention. These highly negative cultures almost always require some changes in personnel.

Approaches for tackling Toxic Communities

- Identify the past or present causes for the toxicity (previous authoritarian leadership, residue from strikes and contract impasses, a track record of broken promises from the district).
- Build bridges before lighting fires (Lencioni, 2002). Listen to and acknowledge previous conditions and past contributions

to the current situation before asking for changes.

- Give feedback to individuals when expectations for effective collaboration are not met, but avoid attacking or labeling statements. Instead, focus on the importance of pooling knowledge to better help students and name the consequences for students when adults are unable to collaborate.

- Adopt and consistently use structures that equalize participation in discussion and minimize opportunities for haranguing and bullying.

- Use transparent, data-based processes for identifying student learning problems and setting priorities for action, rather than unstructured decisions by acclaim or assertion.

- Honor contract provisions consistently, but persist with clear non-negotiables and expectations. Do not let grievances distract from your focus.

- Remove the most negative individual or a destructive ringleader from the group.

The *Laissez-Faire* Community

While Toxic Communities are often bonded by their sense of injury or by a common vision of “the other” as enemy, groups we have designated *Laissez-Faire* share little beyond a desire or belief in their right to be left alone to “do their own thing.”

In *Laissez-Faire* Communities, teachers or administrators co-exist pleasantly but are disconnected from institutional goals and from each other’s work and work concerns. Members are largely motivated by personal needs either for comfort and convenience or for instructional autonomy; no shared purpose or vision drives their interaction.

If Toxic Communities snarl and snort in response to requests for collaborative problem solving, *Laissez-Faire* Communities sniff and sigh with martyred resignation. The school’s designated goals do not appear to have immediate relevance or utility. Rather than adversarial, as in Toxic Communities, relationships with leaders are often collusive: “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.”

Laissez-Faire Communities frequently evolve in heavily decentralized districts or schools in the absence of strong leadership. They also develop when leadership defines its role as protection of cooperative members and motivation through favors and deals. These communities tend to support mediocre learning because they see it as an inevitable result of student limitations and because examining and subsequently changing one’s core practice would violate the fundamental value of autonomy.

Approaches for intervening with *Laissez-Faire* Communities

- Identify the practices and forces that are supporting autonomous actions, deal-making, secrecy or low expectations.

- Determine when and how the group interacts well to solve a problem (even if it is low-level) and build on established structures or norms.

- Establish clear problem-solving structures and make problem solving a central part of meeting agendas. Use time efficiently.

- Assess how much time is wasted on unimportant topics; be judicious in identifying the most important problems for the focus of collaborative action.

- Monitor how time is spent during group meetings; collect agendas and minutes.

- Help teams use standards and feedback to define a common learning problem, identify a change goal for itself, and establish how it will monitor its own performance.

- Offer options for initial structuring of joint work. Looking at student work, developing common assessments and examining student test results could all be productive starting points.

- Have much of the work done in course-alike pairs or trios where there is compelling rationale for working together.

The key to improving the collaboration of these autonomous units is to help them see that joint work will help them be more effective in their own classrooms.

The Congenial Community

Congenial Communities are “happy” or “nurturing” places to work. These groups send off the false aura of smoothly func-

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tioning teams. Considerable effort goes into building and maintaining adult relationships and comfort, but unlike Toxic or *Laissez-Faire* Communities, they have no difficulty with requests to collaborate.

Members usually enjoy one another's company and have positive or neutral relationships with the leaders. Mediocrity is sustained because members do not challenge one another's ideas and practices in service of better student learning, because getting along comes first.

Problems are quickly reduced to simplistic statements and solutions, and no real effort is made to examine data to get at the core practices that are no longer serving children's needs. Congenial Communities especially can be by-products of leader shortcomings.

Recognizing that good relationships and trust create effective teams, administrators often overstress the role of congeniality and inadvertently send signals that getting along is paramount. Such leaders see themselves as being responsible for keeping peace and harmony, and worry that any attempt to press for genuine changes in practice will "undermine school morale" without producing results.

Thus, everyone understands that naming an ineffective practice goes against established cultural norms, and difficult questions about poor student or adult performance are swept under the rug.

Approaches for intervening with Congenial Communities

- Lead with relationship building and the need for acceptance and affiliation, but use data to reframe focus from adult comfort to students' losing out.

- Help congenial groups be more accepting of conflict by adopting protocols that assist members in managing conflict (see National School Reform Faculty Web site, www.nsrffharmony.org).

- Invest in training that helps members to identify their own preferential styles and conflict-averse behavior, and analyze the consequence of "burying" difficult information or important disagreements.

- Invite community members to examine their own performance against criteria for a

Books Worth Reading

Six Secrets of Change; How Leaders Learn

Reviewed by George Manthey, assistant executive director, ACSA Educational Services

"Give me a good theory over a strategic plan any day of the week," is the opening sentence of Michael Fullan's latest book. It is a guide for both business and education leaders who want to make their organizations "survive and thrive." Six "secrets" are offered as a theory of action, with the caution that leaders be open to "surprises or new data that direct further action."

The secrets are not likely to surprise you as they deal with the way leaders treat employees, define purpose, build capacity, learn, share information, and create organizations that learn. Fullan cautions that for the secrets to work they must all be nurtured, as none are sufficient in isolation of the others. For me, the six secrets provide a useful filter for examining the efficacy of decisions and actions.

"The Six Secrets of Change" (2008), by Michael Fullan. Published by Jossey-Bass.

Gordon Donaldson credits Joanne Iskin, a principal in California's Lennox Unified School District, for insisting that this book get written. In it Donaldson provides a model (Interpersonal-Cognitive-Intrapersonal or I-C-I) that he has found useful for understanding performance and learning. The book provides real examples of how teacher leaders and principals have used the I-C-I model to provide a framework for their own leadership of learning. Donaldson asserts, "Persistent hurdles to leader effectiveness are the result, in part, of gaps of leaders' interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive knowledge sets."

One aim of the book is to help leaders understand that their focus can not be their own skill set, but must include increasing their understanding of how what they do affects the "knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practice" of those they are leading. Donaldson also reminds us that the highest purpose of leadership of schools is to lead in ways that increase student learning.

"How Leaders Learn" (2008), by Gordon A. Donaldson. Published by Teachers College Press.

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collaborative and accountable community and identify goals for growth.

Team 9B is certainly not a Toxic group. It is probably more a hybrid. It has qualities that mark it as *Laissez-Faire*: spending time on topics not focused on teaching and learning and embracing individual autonomy as a primary value. The aversion to conflict and the cultural norm of guarding the friendly climate marks it more as a Congenial team.

The exact classification, however, is less important for leaders than being clear about how to monitor, supervise and coach Team 9B to work in ways that are more likely to impact student learning. This requires that leaders recognize malfunctioning teams and adopt a toolkit of intervention strategies listed above. They also need a clear vision of what a high-performing team looks like.

The Accountable Community: The vision of excellence

Accountable Communities are the much desired but rarely achieved ideal for team functioning. They are demanding and sometimes uncomfortable places to work. Labeling a community as “accountable” means its members have moved beyond merely working together well in service of students in general. The team takes direct responsibility for monitoring its own actions and for calling others on behaviors and stances that are not helpful to the mission.

Accountable Communities impact the consistency and quality of members’ classroom instruction more than teams functioning at other levels. Accountable Communities live a “no quarter, no excuses” existence, where every choice a teacher makes is open to examination and revision when there are students who have not yet learned what they need to learn.

Could you describe any of your teams as accountable? Do you have some good teams who could stretch to this level of performance?

These communities are bonded and motivated by the glue of common goals, common agreements, common assessment and/or common students. They do not depend on external authorities to police them; they are able to connect their classroom work to larger organizational goals.

Becoming accountable

We can’t expect all teams to become accountable overnight, but we do expect leaders to actively confront Fullan’s worry that “professional learning communities are being implemented superficially,” by taking four actions.

1 Be committed to strong measures of accountability and intervention in cases of malfunctioning teams. There will be no spontaneous outbreak of improvement without intervention, feedback and coaching.

2 Give “life and clout” to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession Standard No. 6: Developing as a Professional Educator, especially 6.3 — Working with Communities to Improve Professional Practice (“Inspect what you expect”). Use existing evaluation standards to reward contribution and recommend growth where needed.

3 Develop clear definitions and images for what constitutes a high functioning, “accountable” PLC that impacts student learning. Share these descriptions with teams so they can self assess their performance.

4 Collect data on what is actually happening. If the principal had really observed Team 9B, he would have been able to give growth feedback to the team leader or the entire team.

Accountable Communities are the much desired but rarely achieved ideal for team functioning. They are demanding and sometimes uncomfortable places to work.

Because of the emphasis on problem solving and the constant fine-tuning that goes on in Accountable Communities, the impact of their teaching on student learning is less random. Through their skilled problem solving, they relentlessly address learning gaps (concepts not yet understood and skills not yet mastered) for both adults and students.

There is a willingness to move beyond the most obvious solutions and responses to problems and seek other explanations and opportunities. They let go of treasured but non-working approaches when faced with data indicating their lack of success. When the knowledge of the group falls short, they seek external expertise.

Accountable Communities do not collaborate on everything. They are very selective and are known to push back against

principals who have gone overboard on collaboration. Ironically, these groups are marked as much by what they don’t collaborate about! Some have described this as “relentless focus” on matters of instruction and learning (see box above).

If school leaders want to maximize the power of PLCs, they need to not just support, but monitor and coach. Otherwise, we will have a few great teams, fewer great schools and many students performing below our hopes. ■

References

Lencioni, Patrick. (2002). *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This article was adapted from “The Skillful Leader II: Confronting Conditions That Undermine Learning” (2008).

Alexander D. Platt and Caroline Tripp are authors of the best-selling book, “The Skillful Leader: Confronting Mediocre Teaching” (2000) and the new book, “The Skillful Leader II: Confronting Conditions that Undermine Learning” (www.ready-about.com). Platt is also a seminar speaker at ACSA’s upcoming Leadership Summit, Nov. 6-8 in San Diego.

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Facilitating Effective Adult Collaboration and Conversation

Conversations in Schools that Improve Student Achievement

A quick guide that provides criteria and specific language for collegial conversations focused on student outcomes.

Conversations in Schools that Improve Student Achievement

Schools that make the most learning gains for students have leaders who ensure the frequency and quality of professional conversations. *Conversations among adults about teaching and learning permeate the building. That means they happen at all times of day, in formal and informal settings, and all the adults involve themselves.*

The conversations:

- are substantive
- use recent information about student performance
- spring from questions that assume responsibility and capacity to improve student learning
- are non-defensive
- enable people to know things about each other as people
- reach out to Professional Knowledge
- lead to action

Listen in as you walk around the building....meetings, teachers' lounge, hallways. If you hear conversations like this, you can be sure the school is improving student results.

“Substantive” means they are talking concretely about teaching and learning itself, and the issues, decisions and actions teachers are taking in daily practice with specific students.

“Based on recent information” means teachers bring specific and timely evidence about how students are doing to the table. It could be from yesterday's work as well as quarterly assessments, writing samples, test scores: whatever will illuminate where students are and what they need next.

“Spring from questions” means the conversations are asking questions about the connection between teacher action and student results with an assumption that it is our job to improve student results, and that we are able to do so.

“Non-defensive” means that when students don't learn, teachers face the evidence squarely and accept responsibility for their part. They don't get hung-up in guilt or blame of themselves or of the students. Thus they are always working on how to adjust their actions to improve student results.

“Each other as people” means that staff members come to know one another as individuals who have life histories and interests and commitments.

“Reaching out to Professional Knowledge” means that these conversations do not happen in a vacuum. The teachers are aware that there is a vast reservoir of Professional Knowledge created by peers over the past century; and they need to bring this Professional Knowledge into their planning and their problem solving in order to maximize student success.

“Lead to action” means the conversations go beyond being interesting and satisfying for the participants. They lead to changes in instruction that benefit students. These changes can be seen, heard, and measured in their positive results.





Assessing Success Team Progress

Contents

**Freshman Success
Inventory**

Success Analysis Protocol

Purpose

Success Teams should regularly assess their progress to determine strengths and areas in need of growth. This assessment is not limited to the performance of the entire team. It also includes the performance of the Team Lead and administrators responsible for supporting the team.

How & When to Use

Success Teams should build time into their regular routines for assessment, reflection, and action planning. The Network for College Success encourages quarterly informal assessments. This allows the team to pause and celebrate successes. Regular team assessment can also reveal areas of concern that may require the team to set additional goals or take a new approach to the work.

Success Teams should approach assessment as a collaborative process grounded in a clear set of criteria or expectations for team performance. The Freshman Success Inventory is based on the NCS Freshman Success Framework adopted by our partner schools (see the Framework Overview in the About section of this Toolkit). The Inventory allows each team member to reflect and respond to the criteria, after which the results are compiled so the entire team can determine a final performance level. Based on the data, teams are encouraged to set quarterly goals and action plans.



Assessing Success Team Progress

Freshman Success Inventory

A tool to collaboratively assess the current practices across three main areas – the Success Team, the Team Lead, and the Administration – using four performance levels (Embedded, Practicing, Emerging, and Not Yet Practicing).

Freshman Success Inventory

Rating descriptions

- **Embedded-** This practice is so ingrained in our work that it is a distinguishing feature of the culture of freshman success in our school (way of being)
- **Practicing-** This is a regular practice in our school (way of doing)
- **Emerging-** This practice is in its beginning stages in our school
- **Not Yet Practicing-** We have not begun this practice/we are planning to implement this practice in our school

Rate your team's current implementation level for each of the indicators below.

Administration (Principal or Assistant Principal)	Embedded	Practicing	Emerging	Not Yet Practicing
SETTING CONDITIONS: Administration programs and sets purpose around student success work for a core set of grade-level teachers				
Administration identifies and clearly communicates Team Lead expectations as well as monitors progress of Success Team development				
With the Success Team, the administration sets student success goals with benchmarks to monitor progress				
Administration provides and protects regular meeting time				
Administration provides time for General Education and Special Education teachers, counselors, student advocates/deans, and members of administration to attend regularly scheduled meetings				



Freshman Success Inventory

Administration (Principal or Assistant Principal) (cont.)	Embedded	Practicing	Emerging	Not Yet Practicing
IMPLEMENTATION: Administration provides timely access to data specific to freshman success, such as point-in-time On-Track data				
Administration provides professional development and training opportunities specific to high school transition				
Administration reviews and interrogates interim freshman success data in light of Success Team goals, and strategizes with Team Lead around next steps				
Administration holds teachers accountable for implementing equitable grading practices				
COMMUNICATION: Administration provides space for freshman success-related communication on a regular basis				
Administration communicates and supports Success Team efforts to communicate a culture of success for all				
INSTRUCTION: Administration communicates a clear vision for instruction				
Administration supports teacher development through proactive observation and constructive feedback around instructional practice				
Administration provides learning opportunities on classroom practices that support students' successful transition to high school				



Freshman Success Inventory

Success Team Lead	Embedded	Practicing	Emerging	Not Yet Practicing
SETTING CONDITIONS: I acquire tools and strategies to lead the Success Team				
With principal, I establish the Success Team meeting calendar with sufficient time for data analysis as well as intervention development, monitoring, and adjusting				
With my principal and Success Team, I set freshman success goals with benchmarks to monitor progress for the school year				
IMPLEMENTATION: I develop action-oriented meeting agendas, which consistently address freshman success goals generally and intervention development, tracking, and evaluation specifically				
I establish the conditions necessary to facilitate the freshman success work with my team				
I work to bring actionable student-level data at regular intervals				
COMMUNICATION: I regularly communicate strategies and progress toward our goals to the Success Team, administration, parents, and students				
I advocate for resources to support our freshman success efforts				
I coordinate student and adult celebrations and assemblies around freshman success goals. Examples: student award ceremonies and parent nights				



Freshman Success Inventory

Success Team Lead (cont.)	Embedded	Practicing	Emerging	Not Yet Practicing
INSTRUCTION: I seek out instructional and intervention resources, readings, and tools to improve teacher and Success Team practice				
I design and facilitate the Success Team discussion, problem-solving and sharing around grading and instructional strategies				

Success Team	Embedded	Practicing	Emerging	Not Yet Practicing
SETTING CONDITIONS: We develop effective meeting strategies, such as building norms and creating action-oriented agendas				
We share roles and responsibilities on our Success Team that are conducive to freshman success work				
We meet regularly with sufficient time for data analysis as well as intervention planning and monitoring				
With our principal, we set freshman success goals (On-Track rates, student connection, etc.)				
We engage in regular, calendared team meetings where we analyze data as well as develop, monitor, and adjust interventions				
Our Success Team includes General Education and Special Education teachers, counselors, student advocates/deans, and members of the administration				



Freshman Success Inventory

Success Team (cont.)	Embedded	Practicing	Emerging	Not Yet Practicing
IMPLEMENTATION: We review incoming class performance data to develop early goals and targeted supports for students				
We develop, implement, track, and evaluate level 2 interventions, making adjustments when appropriate				
We refer students to the appropriate level of intervention				
We review actionable student-level data in order to provide appropriate support(s)				
COMMUNICATING A CULTURE OF SUCCESS: We use strengths-based and action-oriented communication to support students				
We conduct joint parent/student conferences				
We celebrate student and adult successes toward our freshman success goals				
We engage faculty in frequent communication on student progress and successful strategies				

Freshman Success Inventory

Success Team (cont.)	Embedded	Practicing	Emerging	Not Yet Practicing
CLASSROOM-LEVEL STUDENT SUPPORT STRUCTURES: We create, implement, and evaluate instructional strategies around student engagement				
We provide multiple and varied opportunities for students to exhibit mastery or be assessed				
We utilize transparent and equitable grading practices that communicate grade-level expectations and student achievement				





Assessing Success Team Progress

Success Analysis Protocol

A protocol to analyze the development of a best practice so lessons can be applied to future work.

The Success Analysis Protocol

Purpose of this protocol

To analyze how a new successful practice has developed so that we can apply the lessons learned to future work.

Roles

A timekeeper/facilitator to help the pair stay focused on how the practice described by the presenter is different from typical or routine practices. The goal is to analyze what makes this practice so successful. The facilitator is a full participant in this protocol.

“Best Practice” is defined as a process that proved to be highly effective in achieving the intended outcome.

1. Identifying a success: reflect on and then write a short description of a professional practice that you have developed over the first quarter. (5 minutes)
2. Presenter describes the success. The listening partner takes notes. (3 minutes)
3. Listening partner asks clarifying questions about the professional practice. (3 minutes)
4. Listening partner reflects on the success story, describing what was heard from the presenter. What helped make this professional practice successful? (5 minutes)
Note: Presenter does not participate in this part of the discussion but does take notes.
5. Presenter responds to the listening partner’s comments concerning what made this learning experience so successful and how might it be applied to future work. (3 minutes)
Note: Presenter does not have to respond to questions raised in Step 4.
6. Appreciate! Take a moment to appreciate the good work of the colleague. (1 minute)
7. Debrief the protocol as a pair. Possible questions: What worked well? How might we apply what we learned to other work? (5 minutes)





Facilitating Data-Driven Conversations

Contents

ATLAS-Looking at Data Protocol

Wagon Wheel Tool for Data Analysis

Success Team in Action: North-Grand High School Video

Purpose

Data-driven conversations require careful facilitation to ensure a safe and supportive environment wherein educators take ownership of their outcomes. NCS believes multiple forms of data can be powerful tools for school improvement when they are used to trace causes, seek solutions, and guide change. It is important for Success Team members to be open to honest reflection about successes and struggles.

How & When to Use

All Success Team conversations should be rooted in data, so Team Leads must select protocols that support the effective facilitation of these conversations. The protocols in Tool Set C are frequently used in NCS partner schools. Your team should establish a regular routine for using protocols as part of your data conversations to improve student outcomes.

Using protocols might feel forced at first try, but trust the process. The protocol is structured to create a safe environment for all.



Facilitating Data-Driven Conversations

ATLAS-Looking at Data Protocol

A protocol designed for use when data is a focal point for discussion. The structured approach of a protocol, with clear norms and expectations for conversation, creates a safe space for all participants. The protocol supports equity of voice and allows all members to describe the data, make inferences, and share implications for future work.



ATLAS Looking at Data

Learning from Data is a tool to guide groups of teachers discovering what students, educators, and the public understands and how they are thinking. The tool, developed by Eric Buchovecky, is based in part on the work of the Leadership for Urban Mathematics Project and of the Assessment Communities of Teachers Project. The tool also draws on the work of Steve Seidel and Evangeline Harris-Stefanakis of Project Zero at Harvard University. Revised November 2000 by Gene Thompson-Grove for NSRF. Revised August 2004 for Looking at Data by Dianne Leahy.

Selecting Data to Share

Data is the centerpiece of the group discussion. The following guidelines can help in selecting data or artifacts that will promote the most interesting and productive group discussions. Data or artifacts that do not lead to a single conclusion generally lead to rich conversations.

Sharing and Discussion of Data

Discussions of some forms of data sometimes make people feel “on the spot” or exposed, either for themselves, for their students or for their profession. The use of a structured dialogue format provides an effective technique for managing the discussion and maintaining its focus.

A structured dialogue format is a way of organizing a group conversation by clearly defining who should be talking when and about what. While at first it may seem rigid and artificial, a clearly defined structure frees the group to focus its attention on what is most important. In general, structured dialogue formats allot specified times for the group to discuss various aspects of the work.

1. Getting Started

- The facilitator reminds the group of the norms.
Note: Each of the next four steps should be about 10 minutes in length. It is sometimes helpful for the facilitator to take notes.
- The educator providing the data set gives a very brief statement of the data and avoids explaining what s/he concludes about the data if the data belongs to the group rather than the presenter.

2. Describing the Data (10 Minutes)

- The facilitator asks: “What do you see?”
- During this period the group gathers as much information as possible from the data.
- Group members describe what they see in data, avoiding judgments about quality or interpretations. It is helpful to identify where the observation is being made—e.g., “On page one in the second column, third row . . .”
- If judgments or interpretations do arise, the facilitator should ask the person to describe the evidence on which they are based.
- It may be useful to list the group’s observations on chart paper. If interpretations come up, they can be listed in another column for later discussion during Step 3.

3. Interpreting the Data (10 Minutes)

- The facilitator asks: “What does the data suggest?” Second question: “What are the assumptions we make about students and their learning?”
- During this period, the group tries to make sense of what the data says and why. The group should try to find as many different interpretations as possible and evaluate them against the kind and quality of evidence.
- From the evidence gathered in the preceding section, try to infer: what is being worked on and why?
- Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the data, no matter how confusing, makes sense to some people; your job is to see what they may see.
- As you listen to each other’s interpretations, ask questions that help you better understand each other’s perspectives.

4. Implications for Classroom Practice (10 Minutes)

- The facilitator asks: “What are the implications of this work for teaching and assessment?” This question may be modified, depending on the data.
- Based on the group’s observations and interpretations, discuss any implications this work might have for teaching and assessment in the classroom. In particular, consider the following questions:
 - What steps could be taken next?
 - What strategies might be most effective?
 - What else would you like to see happen? What kinds of assignments or assessments could provide this information?
 - What does this conversation make you think about in terms of your own practice? About teaching and learning in general?
 - What are the implications for equity?

5. Reflecting on the ATLAS-Looking at Data (10 Minutes)

Presenter Reflection:

- What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
- What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?
- How can you make use of your colleagues’ perspectives?

Group Reflection:

- What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at the data raise for you?
- Did questions of equity arise?
- How can you pursue these questions further?
- Are there things you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at this data?

6. Debrief the Process

- How well did the process work?
- What about the process helped you to see and learn interesting or surprising things?
- What could be improved?

ATLAS - Looking At Data Protocol

Instructions

For each of the four phases of the ATLAS protocol, jot down additional questions that can be raised to elicit deeper analysis and reflection from participants.

FACTS <i>(What do we see?)</i>	INTERPRETATIONS & WONDERINGS <i>(What does the data suggest?)</i>	IMPLICATIONS <i>(What does this mean for our work?)</i>	NEXT STEPS <i>(So what are we going to do?)</i>
<p>What do we see in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance in core courses vs electives? • Historical performance over time in courses? (if provided in graph) • Entire grade level vs special populations? (if student lists are provided) • Boys' performance? Girls' performance? • The proportion of students with B's or better vs those with D's and F's? • Proximity to our annual/quarterly On-Track benchmark? (if point-in-time On-Track percentage is shared) • Change in performance of students targeted for intervention? • Number of off track students who have averages within the 40 – 59% range? 	<p>What does the data suggest about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic rigor of the courses? • Student attendance patterns? • The effectiveness of our Tier 2 intervention on targeted students? • Execution of the modifications and accommodations in student IEPs? • Execution of learning plans for our ELLs? • Our tenacity in regularly updating grades? Are these grades a true reflection of where students are academically? • The quantity and types of opportunities given for students to succeed? 	<p>What does this mean for our work in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who are nearly off track? • Students who are off track? • Students who are failing more than 3 classes? • Our needs as teachers to successfully meet the directives in student IEPs and/or ELL learning plans? • Improving student access to the concepts and skills in our courses? • Adjusting our Tier 2 intervention? • Ensuring grades are as current as possible so that our actions are addressing real-time need? 	<p>From all the implications, what would be the high leverage next steps we can take toward improvement?</p> <p>(Limit the next steps to no more than 3, especially if the whole team is owning them)</p>





Facilitating Data-Driven Conversations

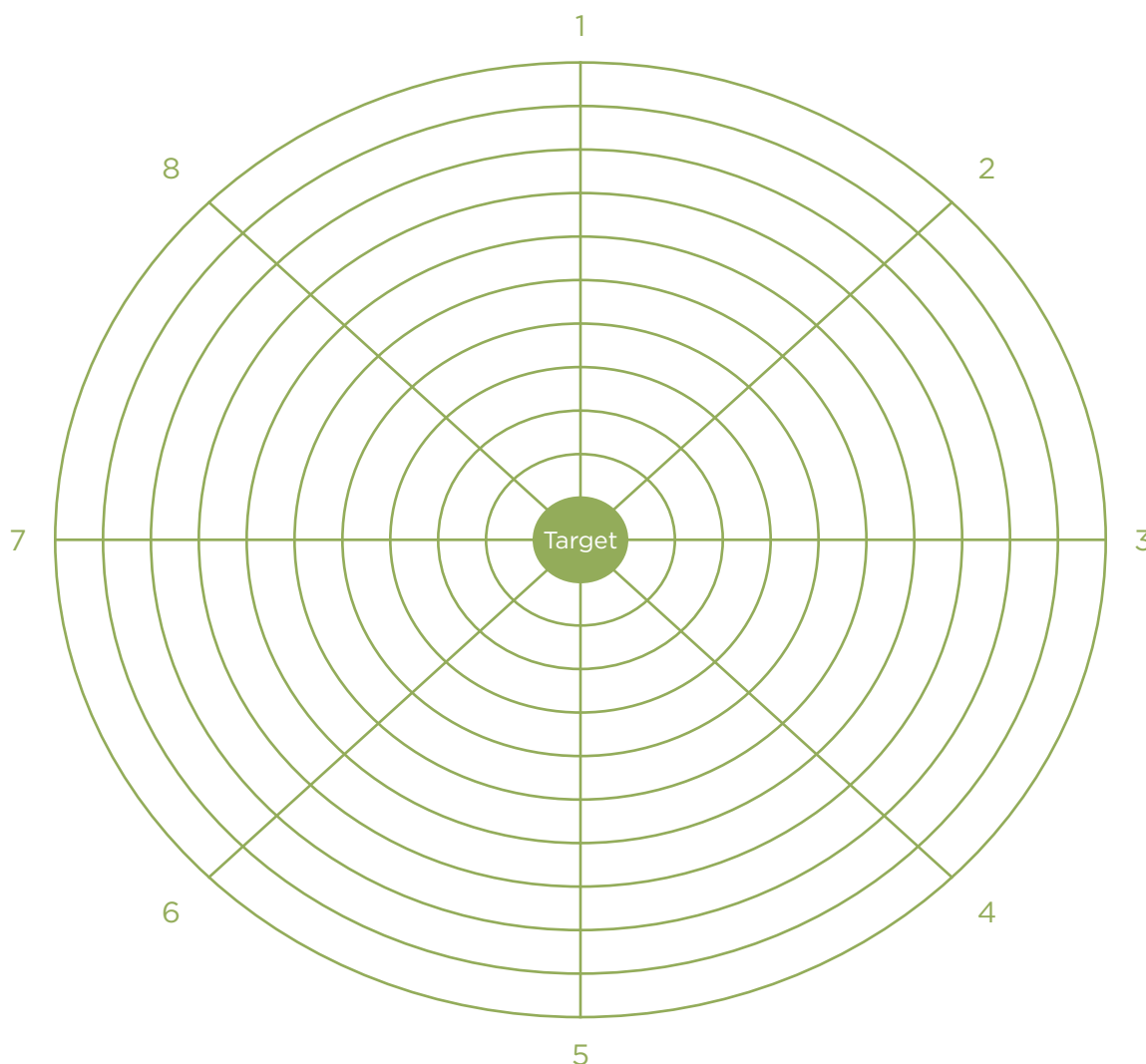
Wagon Wheel Tool for Data Analysis

A tool that allows for the triangulation and assessment of multiple variables and data points.

Wagon Wheel Tool for Data Analysis

Steps in using the wagon wheel:

- Assign key variables to each spoke on the wheel.
- Establish a scale for each spoke, with the highest performance on the inner rim of the circle. Label individual spokes with their own scale.
- Plot performance data along spokes, color coding to distinguish units being compared (classrooms, schools, departments, grade levels, budgets, or even certification areas).
- Connect the lines for each unit if comparisons are made between units.
- Identify the pattern of performance against selected performance standards.



Variables:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.



Wagon Wheel Tool for Data Analysis

Analyze to Prioritize

Performance	Inference
Strengths/Celebrations	
Obstacles	
Prioritizing List your most urgent needs and/or largest obstacles: 1. 2. 3.	

List Your Obstacles:

Using the template below, list your largest obstacle in the rectangle. Brainstorm all possible causes and list on the lines. Review your causes and circle only the ones which you can impact.





Facilitating Data-Driven Conversations

Success Team in Action: North-Grand High School Video

A video that provides a snapshot of a Success Team holding an accountable conversation using a structured protocol.

[Click here to view >>](#)



Engaging Students in On-Track Conversations

Contents

**Ideas for Engaging
Students to Stay
On Track**

On-Track Unit Plan

Purpose

Success Teams are responsible for creating multiple opportunities to engage students in On-Track conversations. These opportunities can include school-wide events and Freshman Seminar and/or Advisory programs. Tool Set D provides examples on how one NCS partner school approached student engagement around On-Track goals.

How & When to Use

Success Teams can use Tool Set D to generate their own ideas for the work. It is important for teams to distribute activities and responsibilities among team members to avoid burnout.

Success Team conversations focused on supporting incoming freshmen should happen in the spring so the team is ready to maximize opportunities, such as freshman orientation, later in the summer to engage students.



Engaging Students in On-Track Conversations

Ideas for Engaging Students to Stay On Track

A menu of engagement activities aligned with the school calendar to support timely and relevant student engagement in On-Track efforts.

Ideas for Engaging Students to Stay On Track

Summer Prior to Entering Ninth Grade

Begin exposing incoming freshmen to the concept of On-Track through transition activities. Use current students to deliver this information whenever possible! Possible activities include:

- Pre-Orientation/High School Investigation Day
- Freshman Connection
- Department teacher phone calls and/or individual meetings
- Back-to-School Orientation in August

Quarter 1

Get into the specifics about what freshmen must do to be considered on track. Example activities:

- Grade-level assembly during 1st week of school. Market as “On-Track pep rally.”
- Classroom guidance lessons (On-Track Unit)
- Have students evaluate their first 5-week progress report. Using On-Track criteria, students evaluate whether they are on or off track. Can be done through any class, advisory period, or during a guidance lesson.
- Post pictures of On-Track students in lunchroom or high-traffic area.
- Tie 1st quarter awards to On-Track status
- All freshman teachers should use On-Track language in their classes and relate students’ performance in their class to being on or off track
- Small group meetings with off track students, led by upperclassmen

Ideas for Engaging Students to Stay On Track

Quarters 2-3

Don't let the fire burn out from 1st quarter! Students will pick up on it and begin to think that it's not important anymore. Continue the On-Track talk throughout the second and third quarters. Example activities:

- On-Track breakfast club
- Field trip incentives only for On-Track students
- Facilitate healthy department competition, such as a pizza party for the department with the most On-Track students
- Small group meetings for marginally off track students, led by upperclassmen
- One-on-one meetings for severely off track students, led by counselors, teachers, or administrators
- Grade-level meetings that center around On-Track trends for the entire grade level
- Department/advisory activities that help students to track their own data, such as attendance rate, number of D's/F's, detentions, etc.
- Gradebook checks that occur once weekly during a class (rotate which class throughout school year, so time is not taken from the same class each time)
- Pass out FAQ's or myths/facts that clear up any misconceptions about being off track

Ideas for Engaging Students to Stay On Track

Quarter 4

During the final quarter, help each student understand clearly what he/she must do in order to get back on track. This is often very time-consuming because it is so highly individualized and may vary from student to student. Dividing students among the Success Team and using adult mentors can help alleviate the burden.

- Small group or one-on-one meetings with off track students. At the end of the meeting, students should be able to articulate exactly what they need to do to get back on track.
- It is important to communicate to students that they can ALWAYS get back on track, no matter how off track they may currently be. It may take more work for some students, but it is always possible.
- Culminating On-Track field trip or reward that students can work toward
- Final On-Track awards given at end-of-year ceremony
- Expose students to their sophomore year On-Track “to-do” list



Engaging Students in On-Track Conversations

On-Track Unit Plan

An instructional unit created and implemented by the guidance department. Teachers can modify the unit for use during seminar and/or advisory classes.

On-Track Unit Plan

Overview

Purpose	To familiarize freshmen with the concept of “On-Track” status
Grade Level	First-semester freshmen
ASCA* Standards Addressed	A:A1.5 – Identify attitudes and behaviors which lead to successful learning A:B2.3 – Develop and implement an annual plan of study to maximize academic ability and achievement
# of Sessions	Three Total Session #1: What Does “On-Track” Mean? Session #2: What is my 4-Year Plan? Session #3: Am I on track to graduate?
Time Required	45 minutes each
Evaluation Tools	Pre- and post-tests

On-Track Unit Plan

Session #1: What Does “On-Track” Mean?

Goals & Objectives	<p>Goal 1: Introduce students to the concept of On-Track</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Students will learn the definition of “On-Track” • Objective 2: Students will explore the credit requirements for graduation • Objective 3: Students will identify the “checkpoints” that occur throughout the year <p>Goal 2: Develop an awareness of the importance of staying On-Track throughout high school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Students will explore the relationship between freshman On-Track status and graduating from high school • Objective 2: Students will brainstorm and discuss possible consequences of falling off track in freshman year • Objective 3: Students will explore the relationship between attendance and On-Track status
ASCA* Standards Addressed	A:A1.5 – Identify attitudes and behaviors which lead to successful learning
Time Required	45 minutes
Materials Needed	What Does “On-Track” Mean? PowerPoint
Evaluation Tools	Pre- and post-tests

On-Track Unit Plan

Session #1: What Does “On-Track” Mean? (cont.)

Lesson Plan

1. Complete pre-test with students (5 min.)
2. Begin PowerPoint
 - a. Making It to College activity and time for processing (8-9 min.)
 - b. On-Track lesson (5 min.)
 - c. Is This Student On Track? group activity (5 min.)
 - d. Attendance lesson (5 min.)
 - e. Activity & share-out (5-6 min.)
 - f. Check points and wrap-up (5 min.)
3. Complete post-test with students (5 min.)

On-Track Unit Plan

Session #2: What is my 4-Year Plan?

Goals & Objectives	<p>Goal 1: To develop a 4-year individual plan of study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Students will use the transcript evaluation form to review the course requirements for graduation • Objective 2: Students will explore the relationship between creating a 4-year plan and staying on track • Objective 3: Students will apply their knowledge of the graduation requirements to map out courses for the entire four years of high school
ASCA* Standards Addressed	A:B2.3 – Develop and implement an annual plan of study to maximize academic ability and achievement
Time Required	45 minutes
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of the transcript evaluation/4-year plan of study form • Small bag of candy
Evaluation Tools	Pre- and post-tests

On-Track Unit Plan

Session #2: What is my 4-Year Plan?

Lesson Plan

1. Complete pre-test with students (5 min.)
2. Pop-quiz for candy (5 min.)
 - a. What does the concept of On-Track mean? (On-Track means you are performing in a manner that will allow you to graduate in four years. Must earn at least 5 credits by June of freshman year and can fail no more than one semester of one core course)
 - b. An On-Track freshman is how many times more likely to graduate in four years than an off track freshman? (3.5 times)
 - c. How many credits do you need to graduate from high school? (24 credits)
 - d. If you pass all of your classes freshman year, how many credits can you earn by the end of the year? (6 credits)
3. Pass out a transcript evaluation form to each student. Explain how it illustrates the graduation requirements, elective courses, and non-credit requirements. Discuss courses open to freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. (5 min.)
4. Instruct students to fill out their tentative 4-year plans on the transcript evaluation form. Explain that these plans are not set in stone and may change from year to year. Ask students why having a plan can help them stay on track to graduate. (25 min)
5. Complete post-test with students (5 min.)

On-Track Unit Plan

Session #3: Am I On-Track?

(To be completed after 1st-semester transcripts are available)

Goals & Objectives	<p>Goal 1: To assist students in identifying and evaluating their On-Track status after the first semester</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1: Students will use the transcript evaluation form to evaluate their first transcripts • Objective 2: Each student will determine his/her On-Track status and develop a plan to get on track or remain on track for the second semester
ASCA* Standards Addressed	<p>A:A1.5 – Identify attitudes and behaviors which lead to successful learning</p> <p>A:B2.3 – Develop and implement an annual plan of study to maximize academic ability and achievement</p>
Time Required	45 minutes
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' completed 4-year plans/transcript evaluation forms • Each student's transcript • Am I On-Track? worksheet • "On Track" guide poster • A few pieces of candy
Evaluation Tools	Pre- and post-tests

On-Track Unit Plan

Session #3: Am I On-Track?

(To be completed after 1st-semester transcripts are available)

Lesson Plan

1. Complete pre-test with students (5 min.)
2. Pop-quiz for candy (1 min.)
 - a. What does the concept of On-Track mean? (On-Track means you are performing in a manner that will allow you to graduate in four years. Must earn at least 5 credits by June of freshman year and can fail no more than one semester of one core course)
 - b. If you pass all of your classes, how many credits can you earn by the end of 1st semester? (3 credits)
3. Define “transcript” (a document that shows all the classes you passed in high school, your grades, GPA, and any special awards, activities, or honors that you received - many colleges use it to make admissions decisions). Pass out each student's transcript. Discuss how to read a transcript – point out the following: identifying information, class rank, courses passed/failed, credits, service learning hours, and GPA. (10 min.)
4. Pass out each student's transcript evaluation form/4-year plan that he/she completed during the last lesson. Instruct students to fill out the transcript evaluation form, checking off each first semester class that they passed. Pointing out the “Am I On-Track?” poster, have students write on the form whether they are on track and why. (10 min.)
5. Complete post-test with students (5 min.)