



Counseling and College Completion: The Road Ahead

a summary report from the *strengthening school
counseling and college advising* convening

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HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

October 24, 2014

I want to thank you for participating in the White House College Opportunity Agenda convening on Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

One of my top priorities as First Lady is encouraging young people to reach higher and take charge of their future by completing their education past high school. I believe each of us has a role to play in making sure our young people know that education is the key to success, not just for themselves, but for the entire country.

As you know all too well, the lack of counselors and high-quality college and career advising in schools across our country is impacting our youth. The average school counselor has a caseload nearly double the amount recommended by the American School Counselor Association, and in some states, these rates are as high as four times the recommended number of students per counselor. At one in five American high schools, students don't even have a counselor available to them. And many counselors feel unprepared to do the kind of college and career advising necessary to help students and families thrive. All of this is simply unacceptable.

That is why the work you are doing is so essential, and I am so grateful that you have come together to tackle these crucial challenges. I know that if we are going to reach my husband's North Star goal to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020, quality school counseling cannot just be a luxury afforded to certain school systems. We need to raise the spotlight on this important issue and ensure students have the support and encouragement they need to achieve their dreams.

I appreciate all you have done, and will continue to do, to build a brighter future for our next generation. I wish you all the best, and I look forward to seeing and hearing about your work at the November and December summits!

Michelle Obama

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Introduction and Background

Designed as a convening to follow up on the January 2014 summit in Washington, D.C., College Opportunity Agenda: Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising was held on July 28, 2014, on the campus of the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge. The convening brought together 140 school counseling and college counseling leaders and advocates from across the country, representing a wide range of sectors, including higher education (27.5%), K–12 education (28.5%), nonprofits (22%), public policy (12%), and philanthropy (10%). The event was planned in order to provide opportunities for expert leaders to:

- network and exchange ideas about successful pre-service and in-service training strategies and research related to school and college counseling that can be immediately implemented more broadly to impact students' college and career readiness;
- become aware of scalable district, higher education, and community-level initiatives that utilize clear metrics and accountability structures and hold promise for promoting equity and opportunity for students' postsecondary planning;
- consider new tools that could be used to expand the impact of school counselors and the partners that support them through training or direct service in the area of college and career-readiness across the P–20 continuum; and
- learn about new levers for reform in school counseling and college advising in order to apply these strategies in local contexts.

The breakout group sessions charged event participants to:

- reflect on the presentations in the panel sessions;
- identify strategies from the presentations that could be adapted to and implemented in participants' communities;
- consider barriers, opportunities, and needed resources to advance current work;
- learn from each other's experiences in the field; and
- develop ideas for collaboration and partnership among allies in the room and at home.

This report aims to capture the main ideas from this event and inform future convenings and work in the field. Information presented here was taken from notes, transcripts, and presentation materials from the plenary sessions and notes from the breakout sessions.

Setting the Stage

James Ryan – Dean, Harvard Graduate School of Education

The convening commenced with a welcome and introduction by James Ryan, the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. As a first-generation college-goer himself, Ryan spoke to the urgency of college access as a moral imperative and the enormous power and potential of school counselors to effect positive change.

Beyond the economic imperative, Ryan described the opportunity to attend college as a basic civil right, making the failure to expand higher education to all Americans a moral failure. He highlighted the counselor shortages that disproportionately affect historically underrepresented student populations:

- One in five high schools in the country has no counselor.
(<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-teacher-equity-snapshot.pdf>)
- The national average student-to-counselor ratio is 478:1, nearly double the American School Counselor Association's recommended ratio of 250:1.
(<http://www.nacacnet.org/research/research-data/Research%20Member%20Only/McDonough.pdf>)
- Only one in 10 students in the lowest income quartile completes a four-year college degree compared to seven in 10 students in the highest income quartile.
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/13/education/a-sharp-rise-in-americans-with-college-degrees.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>)

In addition to the economic imperative, Ryan stressed that counselors are not receiving the necessary training in college and career readiness. He described college advising as “one of the most difficult and important jobs in the country” and school counselors as “uniquely positioned to assist low-income and first-generation students.” Furthermore, He envisions training counselors in college and career readiness a vital component of the equity agenda at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

“Conversations about higher education have traditionally revolved around teachers, students, and parents, but that needs to change. The intentionally diverse audience present today reflects different sectors but a shared belief that school counseling is critical to college access and success, and that we are not doing nearly enough to support school counselors. We are excited to host this conference, not just to talk about problems, but to use our expertise and experience to generate solutions.”

– JAMES RYAN, DEAN, HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

James Kvaal – Deputy Director, White House Domestic Policy Council

Following the dean's welcome, James Kvaal framed the event in the context of the federal government's ongoing investments in legislation and policy focused on higher education attainment, while also emphasizing the value and importance of community-based efforts. Kvaal shared examples of President Obama's commitments to improving college access and completion, including:

- investing in Pell Grants,
- expanding funding for community colleges,
- extending the American Opportunity tax credit, and
- capping student loan repayments at 10 percent of income to make loans a more affordable and viable source of funding for higher education.

Kvaal explained that the administration's commitment to higher education reflects the clear link between investing in education and creating sustainable economic growth that will grow the American middle class, an issue that President Obama views as the defining challenge of his second term. Among those aged 55 and older, the U.S. continues to be the most educated country in the world, but its educational attainment is stagnating while other countries are gaining ground; among workers under the age of 35, the U.S. is now just 12th in the world in four-year degrees. The President's North Star goal embodies his commitment to regain the international lead in postsecondary degrees, including two-year degrees and occupational training certificates that hold great value in the workplace.

In setting the stage for the convening, Kvaal identified college counseling as the key leverage point to support the North Star goal due to the power of counseling to address the three major types of barriers to college enrollment for low-income students: academic, financial, and informational. Low-income students have limited access to counseling services compared to middle-class youth, due to high student-counselor ratios in many low-income schools and families' inability to afford supplemental tools and coaching. However, research has shown that a little information has large potential impacts. For example, as Kvaal noted, Michael Hurwitz found that one additional counselor in a school predicted a 10 percentage-point increase in college attendance. (<http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/advocacy/policycenter/research-brief-measuring-impact-high-school-counselors-college-enrollment.pdf>) With encouraging findings like this in mind, Kvaal expressed his hope that the event would be an opportunity to identify shared goals and challenges in three key areas of college counseling: training and professional development, innovation and research, and counseling tools.

"There's a lot that we can do as a country and as a community to move forward that doesn't depend on policy changes out of Washington. In fact, that's the most important part. It is really inspiring to be here with this group; I know many of you came in January for a day of action that the President and the First Lady hosted, and to be here to talk about some of the progress that people have made is really inspiring to me because it shows how seriously people take this effort, how committed they are. There really is a lot of inspiring work going on and I think we're doing quite a bit to reach our goal of helping more low-income students enroll in college and graduate from college."

– JAMES KVAAL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, WHITE HOUSE DOMESTIC POLICY COUNCIL

Key Question: What successful strategies for pre-service and in-service training for school and college counselors can be immediately implemented to impact students' College and career readiness?

“Spark” speaker

Mandy Savitz-Romer – Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Mandy Savitz-Romer framed the importance and urgency of the conversation around counselor training by speaking from personal experience as a school counselor. She explained that her own training did not adequately prepare her for the complex work of counseling in a large urban school, and that her experience is representative of that of many counselors. She argued that many well-intentioned people who are passionate about social justice and equity enter college counseling, but these good intentions are not enough to tackle the challenges that stand in the way of closing the opportunity gap.

Savitz-Romer described three current gaps in counseling preparation and training that present opportunities for action. The pre-service gap is exemplified by the lack of college and career readiness courses in most graduate programs in school counseling and an overemphasis on clinical training and outdated modalities that fail to integrate social/emotional development with academic and college/career development and outcomes. Once counselors are certified and working in schools, they also experience a professional development gap, as school-based professional development is usually focused on classroom teachers and rarely relevant to counselors, while professional development sponsored by national counselor organizations is highly relevant but often too costly for school counselors, both in terms of actual cost and opportunity cost of missing work without the support of school leaders. Finally, the content gap speaks to the need for counselors to acquire instrumental knowledge — such as understanding the required forms for admission and financial aid — as well as knowledge in human development and cross-cultural awareness that is crucial to supporting students' college and career aspirations and self-perceptions in order to foster not only college access, but college persistence and success.

To address these gaps, Savitz-Romer suggested that anchoring counselor training in scientific and developmental theories would move the field away from personal beliefs and good intentions toward empirically grounded core competencies that professionalize the role of counselors and increase their efficacy by building a concrete skill and knowledge base. There is enormous opportunity in training school counselors as professionals who care deeply about equity and are skilled and knowledgeable about student achievement and college and career readiness.

Panelists

- **Rachelle Perusse** – Associate Professor, University of Connecticut–Storrs (UConn)
- **Brandy Johnson** – Executive Director, Michigan College Access Network (MCAN)
- **Melissa Miller Kincart** – Assistant Commissioner for Outreach and Access, Utah System of Higher Education

Rachelle Perusse presented a field-based pre-service partnership between the University of Connecticut–Storrs and the National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) at College Board to ensure counselors' training in an equity-based approach to college and career readiness for all P–12 students and a solid grounding in analyzing and presenting data using a train-the-trainers model. The program at UConn also brings training to those already in the field to address the ongoing professional development gap. Perusse acknowledged UConn's strong position in spearheading this type of counselor training due to its reputation and leverage within the state.

Brandy Johnson described MCAN's role as a hub and advocate for local college access organizations in creating an incentive grant for graduate schools of education in Michigan to offer a required college counseling course as part of their pre-service counselor training. MCAN has also partnered with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to develop a flexible hybrid in-service curriculum that used a principal nomination process and scholarships to recruit dedicated counselors and offered an MCAN certificate and continuing education credit. After positive reviews for the pilot run, the second year of the program has already seen an increase in applications.

Melissa Miller Kincart spoke about her work at the state level in Utah to drive participation initiatives to increase post-secondary credentials for working adults, increase the pool of college applicants in general, manage the state's merit aid, apply for supplemental funding to support financial aid, invest in efforts to better match students and encourage college completion, and increase access to college counseling. The Utah Board of Regents has invested in counselor training through the Step Up to Higher Education Campaign and other school- and family-based programs, a statewide conference for in-service training, a pilot summer program to train paraprofessionals in counseling, collaborations with GEAR UP and TRIO, and flexible and adaptable curriculum for pre-service training provided through partnerships between SREB and the University of Utah and Utah State University.

Together, the three panelists highlighted the following key lessons from their experiences:

- Articulate clear goals and standards for training programs and professional development.
- Leverage existing connections, such as respected institutions of higher education, regional partners and networks, committed faculty members.
- Empower and train counselors to understand, interpret, and present data.
- Employ train-the-trainer models to increase the capacity of counselors to train their colleagues.
- Adopt recruitment strategies that target prospective counselors with a social justice orientation.
- Use incentive grants to encourage graduate schools to increase their college and career readiness course offerings and requirements.
- Explore options for hybrid or online in-service curriculum for flexibility, scope, and cost effectiveness.
- Offer certificates, continuing education credit, scholarships, and/or nomination recognition for counselors participating in college and career in-service training.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing training programs.
- Broaden training to include other adults who influence young people's college and career aspirations, such as parents and teachers.
- Develop counselors as school leaders.
- Begin by partnering with the "coalition of the willing" to enable conversations about cost-sharing partnerships and innovative programming ideas.

"Reforming the training of school counselors will take a concerted effort and collaboration between multiple partners, but also a new mindset about what those on the front lines need to know and be able to do to be successful. Our students need knowledgeable professionals with concrete skills to help them in this work, and we need to invest more in our human capital of school counselors."

– MANDY SAVITZ-ROMER, PROFESSOR, HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Key Question: How can innovation in research and district initiatives promote equity and opportunity for students' postsecondary planning?

“Spark” speaker

Pat Martin – Education Consultant

Pat Martin urged collaboration, data-driven approaches, and counselor leadership in finding ways to bring effective college and career readiness programs to scale at a national level, taking advantage of the window of opportunity presented by President Obama's North Star goal for 2020 and the First Lady's Reach Higher initiative, which have placed college access on the national agenda.

Martin urged participants to consider how scalability can be achieved by focusing on existing system structures to gather and share data on underserved student populations and improve practices for those students. Scalability will also require authentic collaborations across buildings, organizations, and sectors to establish a comprehensive preK–16 pipeline to support academic readiness and aspirations. “We can't do the silo thing,” she emphasized. “It doesn't work for scale or for children. We need to make sure that everybody has a seat at the table. Yours is only as important as the collaborations and partnerships you create.”

Finally, Martin called on counselors to embrace leadership opportunities within their roles. Citing findings from NOSCA's 2011 survey that indicate that 99 percent of counselors believe it is important for school counselors to exercise leadership in college and career readiness initiatives (http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/nosca/11b_4230_NarReport_BOOKLET_WEB_111104.pdf), she urged counselors to “own this turf” and use their expertise to reframe and repurpose their crucial work in advancing college access and completion.

“If you're okay with the status quo, that will make me very unhappy, because it's not getting us where we need to go. Find a way to do what you need to do, regardless of what the barriers are. The counselor-student ratio is a reality. We can whine about what it is. We need to reduce it. But in the meantime, the kids are already in school. There are many barriers, but I'm not going to focus on them. Focus on solutions instead. Listen with an open mind and see how you fit into this puzzle with a goal to make more students prepared for college. How are you part of the solution?”

– PAT MARTIN, EDUCATION CONSULTANT

Panelists

- **Joyce Brown** – President, Center for College and Career Readiness (CCCR)
- **Judy Petersen** – Director, College and Career Readiness, Granite School District, Utah
- **Laura Owen** – Assistant Professor, San Diego State University

Joyce Brown described the Center for College and Career Readiness's collaborative model that prepares counselors and systems to deliver services through a research-based, developmental approach. After the 2004 Counselor College Engagement Initiative in Chicago moved school counselors into a new department of postsecondary education, CCR's counselors began to work as leaders in collaborating with outside providers, providing trainings for other counselors, and working with data in partnership with the Chicago Research Consortium to try to make counselor training and service more empirically grounded. CCCR's mission and programs respect and value the expertise of the counselor in the field while also giving counselors the opportunity to collaborate outside of their buildings to cultivate their leadership and increase impact.

Judy Petersen shared her experience using the urban school counseling initiative and NOSCA guidelines to redesign and re-conceptualize the place of counseling in her school district. As part of this initiative, the Granite School District introduced new terminology for counselors — “college and career readiness counselors” — and assigned them their own department. Across the board, elementary and high school counselors felt inspired and empowered by this change, and the new lens enabled them to refashion and refocus their work using a data-driven and developmental approach. The new department has also partnered with universities to aid in data collection and sharing, and with organizations like Utah's Higher Education Commission, the Utah Higher Assistance Authority, and the United Way to provide interns and volunteers to support their work.

Laura Owen discussed research-based approaches to the final three of NOSCA's eight components of college and career readiness: college affordability, the application process, and the summer transition between high school and college. As part of a research team working with the Albuquerque, New Mexico, public school district, Owen participated in the U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA Completion Project in 2011 and worked with researchers on evaluating the project's impact on FAFSA completion and college enrollment rates. The team also conducted interviews and focus groups with counselors to learn about their understanding of financial aid opportunities, situational awareness, and leadership skills that are necessary to work with students and parents on combating college access barriers, particularly the issue of “summer melt.” Owen highlighted the importance of collaborations between counselors and the offices of the mayor and school superintendent in advancing the work.

Together, the three panelists highlighted the following key lessons from their experiences:

- (Re)Position counselors as college and career leaders and researchers in partnership with school and district officials, local institutions of higher education, and existing research initiatives.
- Build counselor skills and confidence with data on student outcomes and salient topics in college and career attainment.
- Structure opportunities for genuine collaboration and communication, such as monthly meetings between counselors and higher education researchers.
- Empower leaders who respect the value that counselors add to the college process, and who will reach out to energize and engage counselors.
- Reform organizational structures to enable school counselors to focus on college and career readiness.
- Support counselors in using empirically driven standards to create their own locally and developmentally sensitive programming and interventions at the individual, family, and school levels.
- Use collaborative research partnerships to evaluate the effectiveness of current programming and to drive future programming and new policies.
- Invite counselor perspectives and involvement in research projects and proposals.
- Create and utilize data systems that foster shared responsibility and accountability between schools and community-based partners.

Key Question: How can tools and the partners that support them expand the impact of school counselors through training or direct service in P-20 college and career readiness?

“Spark” speaker

Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy – Associate Vice Provost, Johns Hopkins University

Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy's remarks reflected a shift away from the day's discussion about high-level change to the day-to-day of counseling and how tools and resources can strengthen school and college counseling. She suggested that the ideal one-on-one college counseling is currently not possible in many contexts, given the following:

- In some large school districts the student-counselor ratio is 700:1. (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/03/education/03guidance.html?_r=0)
- Fewer than 15 percent of high-needs students receive the services they need to get on a college path. (<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/files/2013/12/Get-Schooled-College-Access-Tech-Report-2013.pdf>)
- 21 percent of students in public high schools receive dedicated college counseling compared to 70 percent in private schools. (<http://i.bnet.com/blogs/nacac-report.pdf>); (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/latest-trends-in-college-admissions-15-things-you-should-know/>)

Holcomb-McCoy spoke to the potential of tools to enhance counselors' ability to reach all students, across the P–12 postsecondary planning process, and expand capacity beyond that which they can traditionally accomplish with large caseloads. She cautioned, however, that tools must be thoughtfully developed, implemented, and assessed for efficacy. She argued that effective counseling tools should:

- begin with underserved students and families first;
- be accessible and affordable for schools with large proportions of underserved students;
- keep counselors abreast of college info and student progress;
- engage students in the college-going process;
- increase students' social capital through social media;
- be engaging, accessible, and personalized for hard-to-reach students;
- reach younger students in elementary and middle school to start the process early;
- guide and support students through all the milestones along the P-12 college preparation pipeline and through college completion
- be rigorously researched for scalability and impact.

“It is critical for us to explore how digital tools can be a cost-effective way to close the counselor–student gap, provide additional training and supports, and help reach the thousands of students who most need these services. If your only tool is a hammer, then every problem is a nail. There are many outcomes and milestones in the college preparation process, but each needs different tools. We are in need of strategies and resources and tools that work.”

– CHERYL HOLCOMB-MCCOY, ASSOCIATE VICE PROVOST, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Panelists


- **Keith Frome** – Co-Founder and Executive Director, College Summit/King Center Charter Middle School
- **Sylvia Lopez** – Director of Counseling Services, Dallas Independent School District
- **Drew Scheberle** – Austin (Texas) Chamber of Commerce Senior Vice President, Federal/State Advocacy and Education/Talent Development
- **Alice Anne Bailey** – Director, Southern Regional Education Board Go Alliance

Keith Frome described his work with the Gates Foundation-sponsored College Knowledge Challenge, which offered educational technology companies \$100,000 for winning proposals of web-based and mobile college access success apps (CASA) that would help students get to and through colleges. A total of 180 companies submitted proposals and 19 apps won grants and were launched in October 2013, sequenced along a map of 24 milestones to and through college (<http://collegeappmap.org>). While expecting an explosion of interest in online counseling moving forward, Frome explained that CASA is not yet a field; it requires best practices, conferences, common definitions, an awareness of history, and the involvement of practitioners in order to fully develop. Opportunity exists, but so do tensions and obstacles, including a lack of awareness of the personal aspect of counseling. Technology can provide great tools, he acknowledged, but human leverage is needed to make sure the apps are used and shared with others.

Sylvia Lopez described the communication tools and initiatives that have supported her work with counselors in a large school district. The College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) provides a tri-level approach to guiding educators and counselors to look at early warning signs at the individual, school, and district level, thus helping impact students on an individual basis while also holding counselors more broadly accountable for all the students whom they serve. In addition, Lopez outlined Dallas' sponsorship of monthly "Own the Turf" conferences that enable counselors to come together to engage with NOSCA's eight components of college and career readiness, and highlighted the importance of school report cards and data dashboards in helping the district track counselors' day-to-day activities with students and students' college and career preparation at the individual and school level.

Drew Scheberle spoke about the incentive for local businesses to invest in college access initiatives in their communities. Opportunity Austin, the economic diversification plan for greater Austin, included funds dedicated to working with area seniors and improving direct college enrollment rates by supplying tools and resources to support students in applying to college, taking the requisite exams, receiving necessary tutoring, and completing financial aid forms. Effective tools included a common Apply Texas application to assist counselors in tracking students with real-time data, as well as web platforms, apps, and widgets to assist with timely FAFSA submission. Scheberle also described current efforts to make data collected through Chamber-sponsored initiatives and analyses available in a portal for counselors, and to link social media messaging about job opportunities with district databases and vocational course applications.

Alice Anne Bailey described her work with SREB's Go Alliance, which focuses on research and policymaking but also sponsors a college access program, provides direct support to the group alliances, and conducts outreach and marketing for the network. Bailey gave further details about the development of the flexible training program that earlier panelists described as a crucial tool in fostering counselor competencies in college and career planning. In particular, she spoke to the careful consideration that was given to designing a tool that could be used by multiple audiences (counseling professors, graduate students, current practitioners) and in multiple formats (online, hybrid, face-to-face). The adaptability of the tool to different contexts and needs is proving to be a key theme in the evaluations they have conducted thus far.



Together, the four panelists highlighted the following key lessons from their experiences:

- Incentivize educational technology companies to develop innovative and effective tools that are sensitive to the needs of low-income and first-generation students, interactive and user friendly, accessible in terms of pricing and distribution, and able to be developed and implemented realistically.
- Consider the impact of social media on young people for information, support, and social engagement with peers and near-peers.
- Give young people options and autonomy to use tools that work for them.
- Consider the relevance and appropriateness of different tools at different stages of the college- and career-planning process.
- Work toward best practices and adoption strategies, conferences, common definitions, empirical evaluation
- Remember the importance of the human component in ensuring that tools are used and shared with others.
- Develop tools and user-friendly data portals and dashboards that help counselors and educators identify early warning signs at the individual, school, and district levels in order to provide both targeted support and a broader accountability to all students.
- Use district communication initiatives to summarize school data and counseling services and provide feedback to counselors and school leaders on areas for improvement.
- Provide training to counselors in how to use tools.
- Examine web-based platforms that can standardize or simplify the application process for students and track student data for counselors.
- Expand tools for students, for counselors' in-service work, and for counselor pre-service and in-service training and professional development.

Possibilities for the Future

The discussions throughout the day in breakout sessions reflected on the key ideas from the panels and considered opportunities and directions for future work in college and career counseling. The resonant themes that emerged included:

Collaborate and communicate to overcome the “silo effect”

- Collaboration is needed at all levels: between teachers and counselors, between K–12 and higher education, between researchers and practitioners, between schools and nonprofit/community organizations, between educators and business and technology leaders, etc.
- Collaboration can support training, research, and development of tools for college counseling and the intersections between the three — for example, aligning graduate school curriculum for counselors with college and career competencies.
- Collaboration can help organizations achieve impact at a larger scale while still allowing for local control.
- Communication is a crucial component of collaboration and is necessary to expand this work beyond those “already in the room.”

Recognize counselors’ value and expand training in specific competencies

- Consider ways to professionalize college counseling by creating additional credentials and/or advanced graduate programs where counselors can demonstrate deep knowledge of this complex and difficult work.
- Examine how counselors are structurally organized in schools and districts and what messages this sends about the place of college and career advising.
- Recognize counselors’ desire for more targeted and relevant training and address barriers to such training opportunities.
- Develop training that embraces counselors’ strengths while also cultivating concrete skills, including:
 - Technical skills – i.e. how to fill out forms such as the FAFSA
 - Content skills – i.e. knowing about a wide range of postsecondary schools, academic requirements, what options a student might have, relevant data/research
 - Communication skills – i.e. having difficult conversations with students and families, being able to communicate evidence-based outcomes to school and district leaders
 - Cultural/social skills – i.e. working with the individual child, families, and within schools to generate a college-going culture and address social and systemic inequities
 - Advocacy and leadership skills – i.e. being able to interpret data, write grants, broker and manage collaborations

Use data to drive decision-making, program focus and policy

- Data must drive college counseling and advising — not only because it is best practice and necessary for accountability, but it also lends credibility to the work and gives counselors and institutions leverage in larger conversations about equity in counseling initiatives.
- Counselors should be trained in data, research, and grant-writing to overcome the common fear of accountability and to empower them as practitioner-researchers.
- Data should be used to monitor student progress and the meeting of specific benchmarks, as well as to demonstrate clear responsibility for specific milestones
- Organizations need to communicate about research/data and develop structures that can facilitate sharing empirically based knowledge, such as a repository for research, best practices, counseling tools, etc.



Capitalize on leadership and near-peers

- Current school and district leaders set the example (and the institutional structures) for prioritizing college counseling, appreciating the value-added of counselors, and broadening the responsibility for students' college and career outcomes.
- In addition to existing leaders, we need to envision and empower counselors as leaders in advocating for college and career preparation.
- Near-peer relationships are an important kind of leadership for both students and adults: with students, it can take the form of near-peer mentoring for college and career aspirations, while for adults it can take the form of training-the-trainer models to build internal capacity and competence and overcome the stigma of professional development.

Approach technology thoughtfully

- Technology holds enormous opportunities of which counselors can take advantage for their own professional development as well as student support, but it should work in service of existing training and counseling programs, not for its own sake.
- Benefits of technological training and college access tools include convenience, flexibility, cost effectiveness, access and reach, appeal to young people, and capacity for aggregating and disaggregating data.
- Technology for college access and advising should be empirically founded and evaluated, and the data collected should be funneled directly to those working with students.
- Promising technological tools include: counselor “dashboards” of data, college application portals, apps for student tracking and communication, and web platforms to support scholarships, college match, transcript services, and predictive algorithms using ACT/SAT data.

A Call to Action

TED MITCHELL, Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

BRIDGET TERRY LONG, Academic Dean and Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Under Secretary Ted Mitchell began his call to action by reiterating the deeply personal connection to college access felt by President Obama, the First Lady, Dean Ryan, and by the Under Secretary himself as the son of a high school guidance counselor. The postsecondary outcomes for students today hold crucial implications not only for their own futures, but those of their families, communities, and the nation as a whole.

Mitchell spoke to the importance of the convening as an opportunity to revisit and highlight the commitments made at the White House's January summit, and to celebrate the growing network of professionals embracing this work. In addition to the support from the federal administration, Mitchell identified the in-person and online audience for this event as evidence of the expanding national movement to expand college readiness, access, and completion. It is the passion and collaboration of this network that will drive the postsecondary equity agenda in the years to come.

“The work we’re about isn’t a year’s work. It’s not an administration’s work. It’s a life’s work. It’s a passion for equity; it’s a passion for fairness and justice and opportunity that brings us to this work every day. It’s those sets of passions that keep us alive to the work. Look around the room now at your partners in this great effort: nonprofits, universities, districts, community-based organizations. It’s a tremendous cross-cutting network of people, and together I really do believe that we can and will create new, better, alternate futures, one kid at a time, across America, and that the sum total of that work will be to change the trajectory of their lives and their families’ lives and to strengthen the threads that bind us together as a nation. It’s that part of our work that says, over and over again, that education really is the surest path to liberty and justice for all.”

– TED MITCHELL, UNDER SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Following Mitchell, Bridget Terry Long thanked participants for a productive, insightful day that provided the opportunity to share expertise and reconnect with old friends and colleagues while also meeting new partners. Long underscored two main takeaways from the event. First, she emphasized that the work on college access and success must move past focusing on problems and challenges and instead look to promising models of practice and research that can have positive impacts. Second, she built on Savitz-Romer’s remarks that college access advocates must not seek simply to do more, or even to do things differently, but rather to look for ways to do their work better. Examples from the day include:

- Better training and professional development for counselors
- Better use of counselors as leaders in college access initiatives
- Better tools to support the work of counselors
- Better collaborations between multiple stakeholders and sectors to help students in and out of the classroom and beyond the school or district level

On behalf of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Long expressed her hope that participants would leave the event feeling energized by the community of dedicated professionals and thanked the organizers of the event.

Featured Luncheon Speakers

ERIC WALDO, Executive Director Reach Higher, Office of the First Lady
TRISH HATCH, Professor, San Diego State University


Commitments

Lunch began with remarks from Eric Waldo, executive director of Reach Higher, who provided background information about the First Lady's initiative and contextualized the event as a follow-up to the January summit in Washington, D.C. He then invited several organizations to provide updates on their commitments from that convening:

- **The College Board** will provide four electronic application fee waivers to every high school senior who used a fee waiver for the SAT. Two thousand cooperating institutes of higher education will accept these waivers.
- **College Possible** expanded its virtual advising program to Philadelphia and is currently exploring a sixth city.
- **Complete College America** is working with 22 allied states plus the District of Columbia to transform remedial education and provide co-requisite remediation at scale so that students can take credit-bearing courses from the start of their college experience while meeting their remediation requirements.
- **The Council for Opportunity and Education** is partnering with Colorado State University to expand its professional development opportunities and is working to provide an online platform to help institutions and community organizations build the infrastructure for college planning and access.
- **iMentor** has expanded its mentoring program for predominantly first-generation high school students from low-income communities, adding over 4,000 new mentors in 18 cities, with plans to launch programs in Chicago next year and two other new cities by 2018. iMentor is also using their investments in a technology platform to share their program model with other partner nonprofits.
- The **National College Access Network (NCAN)** has collected data on retention and persistence rates from over 30 member organizations for an annual national benchmarking report to be released at its national conference. NCAN will also unveil their online module to teach advising skills and provide a virtual “nudge” for students, particularly during the summer after high school graduation.
- The **National College Advising Corps** is expanding its recruitment and placement of near-peer advisers alongside school counselors to support students through the college process.
- After piloting the program with Brandeis University, the **Posse Foundation** is growing its STEM initiative, with 10 new schools total committing \$70 million to support 500 new Posse scholars majoring in STEM in the next five years. In the fall of 2014, Posse will recruit the first 100 students for this initiative.

“This is a unique opportunity. We have a President and a First Lady who understand the power of education in a way we haven't seen before because it's changed their own lives. There are still big things to do with the time we have left at the White House, and we need help. I need your help; the First Lady needs your help. People from the January summit have boldly stepped up, and we encourage you to step up. We're pulling together commitments from all sectors to work toward the goal of making the U.S. number one again in percentage of college degrees earned.”

– ERIC WALDO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, REACH HIGHER



Finally, Trish Hatch closed out the lunch session by posing several new possible commitments from San Diego State University, including commitments to:

- provide a convening opportunity on the west coast for continuing the work begun at the January summit in Washington and continued here;
- develop a doctoral program in school counseling and a certificate program in school counseling leadership based on the ASCA model;
- establish a training academy for principals and school counselors, and continuing to collaborate with local schools to provide further supports for underserved populations; and
- provide programming for young men of color and continuing to participate in gathering data, looking at outcomes, and encouraging rigorous research design.

More Information

This convening was the first of several events designed to inspire educational leaders to take concrete steps to expand access to high-quality college and career counseling. Following this convening, San Diego State University and the White House's College Opportunity Agenda will bring together a second gathering of committed leaders focused on improving school counseling preparation, programs, and practice.

Event website and materials: <http://isites.harvard.edu/coa>

Event videos: <http://hvr.d.me/DoV36>

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- Center for College and Career Readiness
- The College Board
- DODEA Department of Defense Dependent Schools, Headquarters
- National Association for College Admission Counseling
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National College Access Network
- The Options Center at Goddard Riverside Community Center
- Southern Regional Educational Board
- San Diego State University

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Savitz-Romer, M. & Liu, P. (2014). Counseling and college completion: *The road ahead. A summary report from the strengthening school counseling and college advising convening*. Cambridge, MA.