From Research to Results: Practical Insights for K-12 Leaders

Beyond Graduation: What the Research Says About
Preparing Every Student for Life After K-12

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College and Career Readiness (CCR)

The set of skills, knowledge, and competencies that students need to successfully transition to postsecondary education or the workforce after high school.

From Research to Results does the heavy lifting for K-12 leaders, analyzing dense academic research to pinpoint the factors that predict or cause the things that matter most in education: teacher retention, college and career readiness, and student engagement. By bringing you actionable insights directly from rigorous studies, we help you turn data into practical solutions that can make a real difference for teachers and students. *Here's a look at the research driving CCR frameworks.*

The concept of college and career readiness (CCR) has gained prominence in education policy and practice over the past decade, as stakeholders increasingly recognize the importance of preparing students for life beyond K-12 education (Conley, 2012).

CCR frameworks are built on extensive research identifying factors that predict postsecondary readiness and success. These include not only traditional academic indicators but also experiential and non-cognitive components that collectively shape a student's ability to thrive in college, careers, or the military.

Traditionally, CCR was often measured primarily through standardized test scores. However, recent research and initiatives advocate for a more comprehensive approach. One notable example is the Redefining Ready! initiative from the AASA (The School Superintendents Association), which proposes using multiple measures to assess readiness, including GPA, advanced coursework, dual credit classes, industry credentials, and workplace learning experiences (AASA, 2021).

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State Frameworks for CCR

Several states have developed frameworks aligned with this holistic approach to CCR:

- **California's College/Career Indicator (CCI):** Includes measures such as the completion of college preparatory courses, dual enrollment, AP/IB exams, and career technical education pathway completion (California Department of Education, 2021).
- **New York's Multiple Pathways to Graduation:** Allows students to demonstrate readiness through various pathways, including STEM, the Arts, Humanities, and Career and Technical Education (New York State Education Department, 2020).
- **Illinois' Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) Framework:** Provides a structured approach from grades 8 through 12, outlining key benchmarks for each grade level (Illinois State Board of Education, 2021).
- **Texas' College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) Indicators:** Includes measures like meeting TSI criteria, completing dual-credit courses, earning industry-based certifications, and demonstrating military readiness (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

Common Elements of CCR Frameworks

Despite differences in implementation, CCR frameworks share several key data points:

1. **Academic Achievement:** All frameworks measure core academic performance, often through GPA, standardized test scores, or the completion of rigorous coursework.
2. **Advanced Coursework:** Participation in AP, IB, or dual-credit courses is widely recognized as an indicator of college readiness (An & Taylor, 2015).
3. **Career and Technical Education (CTE):** Completion of CTE pathways or earning industry credentials is increasingly seen as a valuable indicator of career readiness (Dougherty, 2016).
4. **Work-Based Learning:** Many frameworks incorporate internships, apprenticeships, or other workplace experiences as indicators of career readiness.
5. **Non-Cognitive Skills:** Emerging frameworks are beginning to measure skills like perseverance, time management, and teamwork, which research highlights as essential for postsecondary success (Nagaoka et al., 2013).

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From Research to Practice

To ensure all students are ready for life beyond K-12, educators and policymakers should:

- **Expand Access to Rigorous Opportunities:** Provide equitable access to advanced coursework, CTE pathways, and work-based learning experiences.
- **Emphasize Holistic Readiness:** Include non-cognitive skills in CCR metrics to reflect their importance in postsecondary success.
- **Monitor Equity:** Disaggregate data to identify and address gaps in readiness among student subgroups.
- **Leverage Local Partnerships:** Collaborate with higher education institutions, industry leaders, and community organizations to provide real-world learning experiences.

Conclusion

College and career readiness is about more than crossing the finish line of graduation. By adopting a comprehensive, data-informed approach, schools can ensure every student leaves high school prepared to thrive in their next steps—whether in college, career, or the military. A focus on holistic readiness equips students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences needed for lifelong success.

References

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