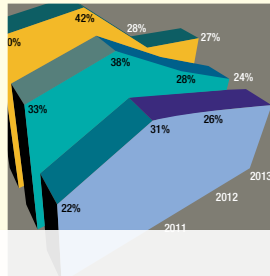
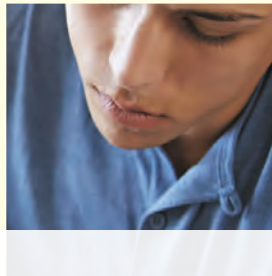
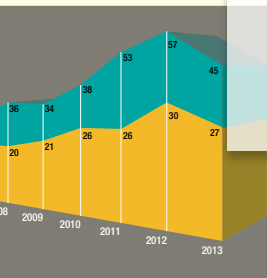


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LESSONS from the **GO College** Program



Using **Student Tracking Data** to
Improve **College Access Programs**



Using **Student Tracking Data** to Improve **College Access Programs**

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Khadish Franklin

Associate Director and Senior Researcher at the Pell
Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education

Maureen Hoyler

President of the Council for Opportunity in Education



Council for Opportunity in Education

What Does the Term **College Access Programs** Include?



The term “College Access Programs” refers to a range of governmentally and privately-funded programs that have as their purpose preparing low-income students, first-generation students and minority students for college—and assisting them in applying for and securing financial aid. Many College Access Programs begin working with students in middle school, while others begin their interventions when students are in high school.

The oldest continually-operating College Access Programs are the federally-supported TRIO Talent Search and TRIO Upward Bound programs which together serve over 370,000 students annually.¹ A second set of federal college access programs—that are hosted by states and partnerships of school districts, colleges, and community agencies—is GEAR UP.² Several states fund pre-college efforts including California, New Jersey, and New York.³ A number of locally and governmentally-funded college access programs belong to the National College Access Network and a directory of these programs can be found at <http://www.collegeaccess.org/accessprogramdirectory/search.aspx>. Additionally, several particular approaches to college access are noted here. These include: AVID, <http://www.avid.org/>; College Summit, <http://www.collegesummit.org/>; locally-funded scholarship programs, Posse, www.possefoundation.org/; Promise Scholarship programs, Say Yes to Education, <http://www.sayyestoeducation.org> and College for Every Student, [http:// http://www.collegefes.org/](http://http://www.collegefes.org/).

1 More information about these programs, hosted by more than 850 colleges and community agencies in every state, can be found at:
<http://www.2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>.

2 More information about GEAR UP is available at:
<http://www.2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>.

3 Information about these efforts is available at:
<http://www.csac.ca.gov/doc.asp?id=216>; <http://www.state.nj.us/nj/education/students/college/>; and
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/fgunding/2013-20-nys-p-tech/home.html>.



What is GO College?

GO College is an innovative model for delivering college access services to entire schools that enroll high percentages of low-income students. GO College embeds college coaches—staff of local colleges or community agencies—on-site in these schools on a full-time basis. Relying heavily on shared data and community collaboration, GO College works to align in-school and out-of-school programming to improve student achievement. Its ultimate goal is to increase college access and success for all students at each GO College high school.

GO College was chosen as one of the initial Investing in Innovation (i3) programs of the U.S. Department of Education. Additional support is provided by the GE Foundation.



What is COE?

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is a nonprofit organization, established in 1981, dedicated to furthering the expansion of college opportunities for low-income, first-generation students, and students with disabilities throughout the United States. Its membership includes more than 1,000 colleges and agencies.

Improving **Student Tracking** in **College Access Programs**

Objectives of the Practice Brief

The purpose of this Brief is to describe the current use of tracking data in college access programs, to examine how the experience of GO College can inform that practice, and to recommend changes in practice based on that GO College experience. This Brief is designed to assist College Access Programs (CAPs) across the spectrum to expand their capacity to use data to aid their efforts to help students get to and succeed in college.

Since the mid-1960's, thousands of college access programs have worked to increase educational prospects for low-income, first-generation, and minority students. They have informed students about the college experience and assisted them in preparing to attend. In recent years, as better tracking data from the National Student Clearinghouse has become available, these programs have developed greater potential to learn critical lessons about their efforts and to use data to improve those efforts.

What Do We Mean by Student Tracking Data?

Most simply, tracking data means post-high school data. In other words, "What happens to students who had been enrolled in a College Access Program after graduation from high school?" However, tracking data has limited value if it is not placed in the context of other data available to the college access programs during the time students receive services from those programs—for example, service data, demographic data, and academic data. Similarly, tracking data has limited value if it cannot be provided in a meaningful way to all the stakeholders working in college access—other College Access Programs in the community, schools and their leaders, colleges where the students enroll, teachers, parents and students.



A person with dark hair, seen from behind, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants. They are carrying a yellow backpack with brown straps. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery and a path.

National Student Clearinghouse

Brings Invaluable Assistance to **College Access Programs**

The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) is a non-profit organization founded in 1993. Today, NSC is the primary system for states, school districts, and CAPs to estimate the college participation, transfer, and completion rates of students, particularly when they cross state lines. More than 3,500 colleges and universities enrolling over 98% of all students in public and private U.S. institutions participate in the Clearinghouse. These institutions provide access to enrollment and degree information on each of their students.

In order to get information about college enrollment, subscribing institutions, such as school districts, high schools, and CAPs, send a list of students to the National Student Clearinghouse. Student information is matched with the information collected from the participating institutions. Confirmation is sent if a student's record is found in the NSC database based on information provided by participating institutions. If a student is housed in the Clearinghouse, each enrollment start date and end date, enrollment status, and degrees awarded are provided.

**“DATA! DATA!
DATA! DATA!
DATA! DATA!
DATA! DATA!”**

he cried impatiently.

“ I can’t make bricks without clay! ”

Sherlock Holmes, *The Adventure in the Copper Beeches*,
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Preparing **Tracking Data**

How Is Tracking Data Currently Used in College Access Programs?

There are very few college access programs that do not track—or attempt to track—students after they graduate from high school or leave their program. For example, TRIO's Talent Search and Upward Bound as well as GEAR UP have long been required to provide such information. The TRIO Upward Bound Annual Performance Report (APR), for example, contains 52 data fields, of which half require annual updates, including information on college enrollment for six years following high school graduation. The Talent Search APR was revised during the last grant cycle and now also requires programs to track participants who have entered college and to follow their persistence in college for six years after high school graduation.

How Did GO College's Actual Collection of Tracking Data Differ from that of Other College Access Programs?

GO College's collection of tracking data differed from that of most other college access programs in that

- 1** its funders provided resources to both track students and utilize the data that was secured;
- 2** its data collection schedule was determined not by the requirement of a performance report but rather on a cycle that assured the data was most relevant to the program staff and their stakeholders; and
- 3** it utilized measures beyond the data available in the National Student Clearinghouse (e.g. follow-up surveys to students' cell phones, interviews of coaches/counselors, information provided by school staff) to augment the data available in the National Student Clearinghouse.

GO College is organized around the idea that only those data for which there is a predetermined need should be collected. Presently, there is so much data available to schools, colleges, and College Access Programs that it is overwhelming. At the same time, inconsistencies in data—and limitations in



time available to educators working in college access—often stand as obstacles to effective use of data. While funders—both governmental and private—expect college access programs to use data, they rarely provide funding for staff time or outside resources to organize and understand that data. Additionally, though the National Student Clearinghouse is a tremendous resource to college access programs and schools, all colleges don't always report enrollment data to the Clearinghouse on a consistent schedule—which is a key barrier to drawing accurate conclusions from that data.

Compliance vs. Program Improvement

For most College Access Programs, tracking is a compliance requirement, and CAPs are not provided technical or financial resources to interpret the data collected. In surveys conducted by the Pell Institute, few CAPs are systematically utilizing this tracking data for internal or external reporting, program improvement, or professional development. Since CAPs have the data—it is not a radical leap to consider using the data for project improvement, but it is an important step. While not particularly startling, a key finding of GO College is that the metrics utilized to measure college readiness in the K-12 and postsecondary systems are completely misaligned. As a result, the accountability systems for the two systems make conversations aimed at improving college access and success for particular groups of students—particularly low-income, first-generation, and minority students—much more difficult than necessary given the wide availability of data.

For communities interested in using data to start conversations aimed at improvements in college access and success, steps must be taken to bring these two sources of data and drivers of accountability together. CAPs are often sponsored by colleges and particularly when this is the case, in any conversation about college access and success, the CAP must deliberately distance itself from the all-too-frequent narrative of college administrators that places responsibility for the lack of success for particular populations of college students on the failures of secondary school systems. Colleges, school districts, and communities must be willing to examine practices and share data which impact college success for students in question, for example adequate pre-college preparation, less-than-adequate financial aid packaging, participation in supportive services, course loads, hours students are required to work, and a less-than-welcoming campus environment.

Our key findings from the GO College Program and our partnership with a number of community partners reveal many opportunities to improve the capacity of college access programs to use and prepare tracking data. The following are GO College's initial recommendations for collecting and analyzing tracking data from districts, colleges and the NSC on an annual basis. Later we'll discuss both how to report this data—and how to use it for professional development and overall improvement in college going. It may well be that the first data your CAP—or the CAPs in your community compile—fall short of your initial expectations. Recognize from the outset the complexity of what you are attempting, line up key partners, keep the partners on board, and keep building.



Moving from Data to Action

The following range of CAP responses confirmed our belief that when college access counselors and high school administrators looked at college enrollment data together, they experienced “aha” moments that evolved into actionable change.

A College Access Program, part of the NCAN network, (collegeaccess.org) examined the report and found that many of the students who enrolled at the local community college only attended part-time, although at high school graduation their program counselor had anticipated that they would enroll full-time. After participating in the annual professional development meeting that examined the tracking report, one of the counselors suggested that in July and August of each year, the CAP counselors contact each of their senior clients to discuss their freshman course-load as well as their current work schedules to see if this would increase the number of students enrolling full-time.

An Upward Bound program combined its tracking data in rolling three year cohorts because the number of students in each senior class is relatively small. The counselors and director recognized that they were not sure the program was providing consistent guidance on the benefits of enrolling in two-year vs. four-year colleges in terms of cost for attaining the baccalaureate for students with different academic backgrounds. Accordingly, they completed a short study of that question, and identified certain circumstances, and certain categories of students, for which initial attendance at a community college certainly provided a less costly alternative and equally quick path to the baccalaureate.

A High School principal was committed to ensuring that more of her students received college access services but frustrated that although several CAPs served her school, they did not seem to be collaborating as much as would be advisable. When she learned about the GO College Program and the **empower**TM data system it had developed and was now being used by the state's GEAR UP program, she decided to adopt it for her school. **empower** allowed her to assure that no student at her school was served by more than one college access program, that all college trips and other school-wide events were planned jointly by all programs working in the school, that she and her counseling staff had immediate access to information on FASFA completion, college application completion and acceptances, college visits and scholarships, tutoring, etc. Working as a team, school administrators, counselors and all the CAPs working in the school set annual goals to increase the number and percentage of seniors meeting admissions requirements for local colleges as well as to increase the number and percentage of seniors actually enrolling in college.



Can Talking Be Action?

The experience of GO College is a resounding YES. When, in the professional development session examining tracking data, the college Access program or College Access Team at the High School finds that students at a particular college are not being retained at the level expected, the most usual thing is to pick up the phone, set up a meeting and see if together, partners can work to increase the success of students from the program(s) or school(s).

When college access
counselors and high school
administrators looked at college
enrollment data together, they
experienced “aha” moments
that evolved into actionable
change.

What is empower?

In the initial years of GO College, COE developed a data solution—**empower**—to meet the specific needs of communities working to increase college access and success for low-income students and students from under represented groups.

empower:

- Integrates student data from multiple stakeholders—schools, community partners, colleges.
- Enables cross-stakeholder collaboration and planning for student success.
- Delivers role-based access to student information via dashboards and analytics.
- Developed by COE—the thought leader on issues of college access and success.
- Powered by the secure COE cloud and supported by industry leading technologies.

empower
The College Readiness Analytics Solution

empower received the
2012 Oracle Excellence Award

Recommendations to College Access Programs on Preparing Tracking Data



1 Data sharing by its definition requires partners. Choose your specific partners wisely and with strategic goals in mind. If your partners are pre-existing, make sure that you clarify shared outcomes.

2 Make sure partners wishing to track students have an appropriate data sharing agreement in place with your school district(s). A model agreement is available on the GO College website at: <http://www.mygocollege.org/forms>.

3 Know what data elements are most important to your community and specify them in the data sharing agreement.

4 Secure the support of senior institutional or organizational leadership to reach out to local philanthropists and funders to provide both the leadership and the conditions to make sure that tracking data is reported and used.

5 Identify a college faculty member who is able to assist your project in gathering and interpreting the follow-up data. Utilize this partnership to also gain valuable training for program staff around use and collection of data.

6 If possible, secure the agreement from the school district for your institution to track and report college-going and success for all students in your partner schools or in some of your partner schools.

7 Use the same date each year to draw data from NSC.

8 Create a standardized instrument to collect data that will augment what you receive from NSC. For example, querying of other CAPs to find out if students whom they know to be enrolled are not yet showing in your data.

Reporting

How Are College Access Programs Reporting Data?

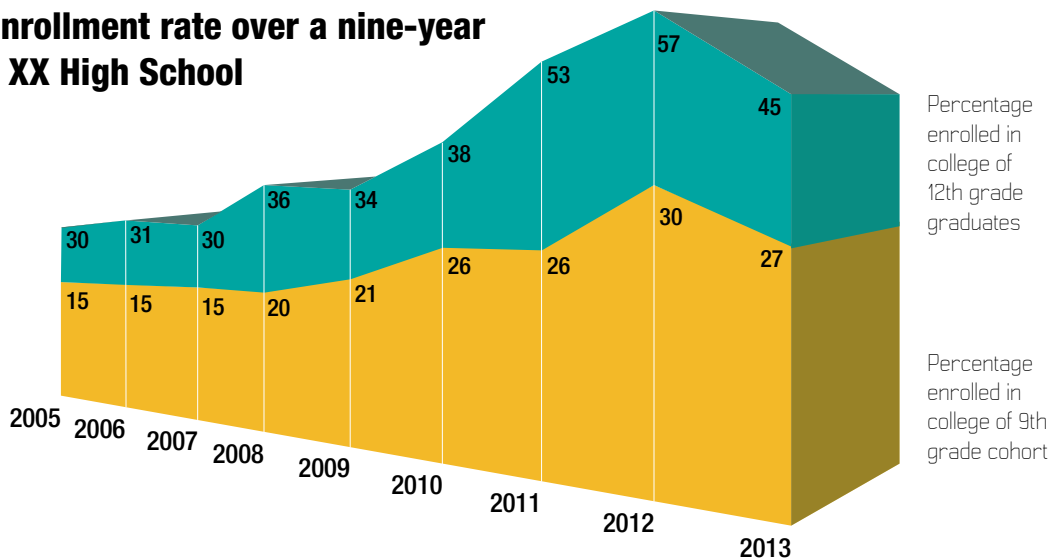
As we discussed, most College Access Programs collect data and many report data to a range of audiences. However, the quality of the reports varies. As might be expected, programs that rely on multiple funders are more sophisticated in their reporting of data because they use these materials with multiple audiences and rely on communication with these audiences for their sustainability. Programs relying on government funding often go beyond the requirements of their funding agency to communicate impact to legislators who fund college access programs. Only recently have College Access Programs, regardless of funding source, worked together to communicate impact on a local community or state.

How Did GO College Reporting Differ from Current Practice?

GO College reporting differed in four ways from current practice:

First, it provided college access information on a longitudinal basis over time. As an example, reporting of both seniors and ninth graders of each GO College school was included in the annual GO College enrollment report.

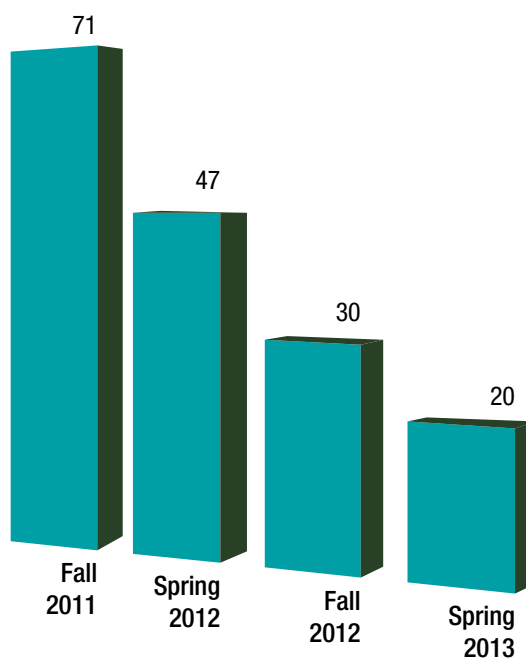
College enrollment rate over a nine-year period at XX High School



Second, GO College included two basic sets of reports that were released every year: one on college access and one on college success (retention and graduation).

Examples of both of these reports are included on the GO College website at **MyGoCollege.org**. The first set of reports discussed college enrollment for the most recent class of high school seniors.

By year three, one-quarter of Go College graduates were retained or had graduated at XX Community College



■ Number of Go College graduates of 2011 who started in Fall 2011

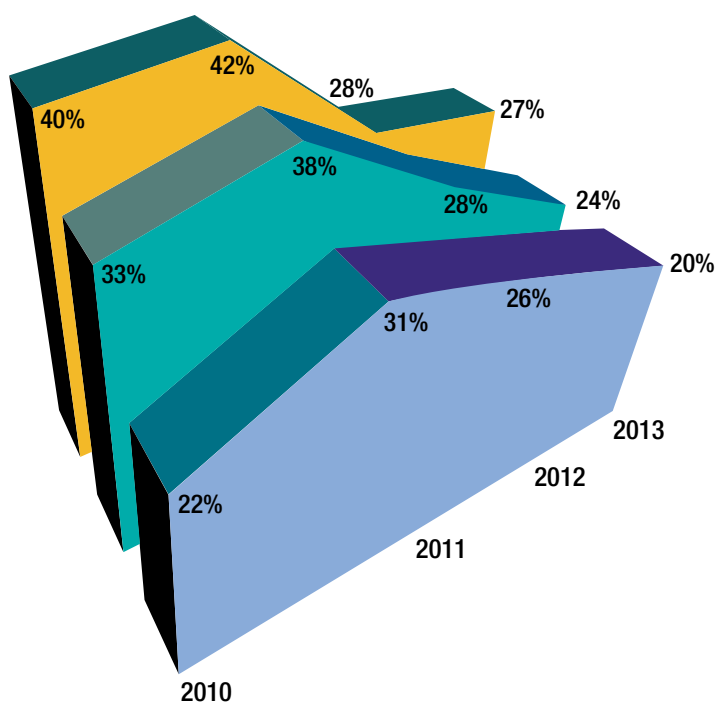
The importance of disaggregation in ensuring meaningful data can be linked to former United States Secretary of Labor Robert Reich's joke that his 5 foot height and Shaquille O'Neal's 7 foot stature averages 6 feet, but that a coach should consider more than combined average before putting Reich on a basketball team.

Third, to the extent meaningful, the reports disaggregated data by demographic information, academic performance and college access services received.

The following chart reveals college-going by racial groups at a fictitious high school.

College-going rate by race

■ Black or African American ■ White ■ Total Schools



Disaggregation was facilitated by the use of the data system developed in GO College, **empower**.

For Example, by disaggregating data in the enrollment report by academic performance, the enrollment report drew attention to the fact that many high-achieving students are not enrolling in college.

Average overall GPA among 20XX graduates at XX High School who enrolled and who did not enroll in college: (164 students)

School	College Enrollment	Number of students with GPA Data	Average overall GPA	Minimum overall GPA	Maximum overall GPA
XX High School	Enrolled (96 students)	96	2.870	1.556	3.966
	Did Not Enroll (68 students)	68	2.419	1.265	3.710

Fourth, both the enrollment and retention reports contained highlighted findings as well as recommendations in an Executive Summary. Additionally, GO College collaborated with the principals and leaders of each school to create a shared list of valued data and reporting priorities. This exercise was particularly meaningful for the CAP by placing it in the role of a shared leader in school improvement rather than an external service provider.

Recommendations on Reporting Tracking Data

1 Report on both college enrollment and college retention/graduation in separate annual reports.

2 Develop your reporting with an eye towards program improvement. Include recommendations that can be worked on by partners in a two- to three-year time-frame.

3 Recognize the sensitive nature of the material included. Assure that no privacy regulations have been breached. Even when you are confident that the reports do not include any personally identifiable information (PII), think very carefully before circulating reports that may serve to embarrass any of your partners.

4 Disaggregate data, particularly on such factors as economic background and race/ethnicity. This is what will distinguish your reporting from the more generic reports on college enrollment released by states and districts. The staff of COE's Pell Institute is available to work with you in thinking through and developing your reports.

5 Contextualize the reports to ensure that you address national, state, and local factors that drive changes in key metrics, rather than simply provide numbers.

6 Share the reports in person with interested parties in the schools, district offices, school board, colleges, and philanthropic organizations.



Using Student **Tracking Data** to **Improve College Access** and **Success**

How Are College Access Programs Using Tracking Data to Improve College Access and Success?

In the last several years, CAPs have become much more adept at improving their performance. For example, with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Education, CAPs (as well as high school counselors) are now able to track student/family progress in completing and processing their FASFA (Federal Application for Student Financial Assistance). As of July 10, 2014, GEAR UP and TRIO programs are able to track FASFA status through state grant agencies. Similarly, many CAPs are examining retention data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) to advise students on the institutions where they have the best chance of graduating. However, it remains rare that tracking data is used in a systematic or collaborative way on a school-wide basis or in the broader community. Seldom were the tracking findings of the College Access Programs shared with the “receiving” colleges in a way that seeks to improve success of students after post-secondary enrollment.

How Did GO College’s Use of Tracking Data Differ from That of Other College Access Programs?

GO College is presently in its fourth year—and is seeking to address the need for an organized plan to use data. In its third year, we implemented informal professional development activities for CAPs and for partner schools that examined the data on college enrollment and retention and served as a springboard for enhanced twice yearly professional development activities both for the school College Access Teams and for the CAP staff. Those activities needed significant improvement and the professional development/community discussion outlines included on the GO College website are being utilized in the 2014-2015 academic year.



Four sets of related professional development and shared discussion materials have been developed that are intended for use as tools in these efforts:

- for CAPs;
- for College Access Teams at Partner Schools;
- for Admissions and Diversity Offices at “receiving schools;” and
- for the broader community.

Each set of materials is designed to be used in the fall when data from previous year’s classes can be examined and again in the spring when a final push for enrollment can be made. The driver for utilizing data is to build consensus for continuous improvement. It is important to recognize that data taken alone is not a great motivator. Students and their experiences are a much better motivator. So the data exercises in these materials represent only one element of the process. Savvy college access and school leaders use data to build a narrative and share their program’s story rather than just presenting tables and facts.

It is important to recognize that data is not a great motivator—students and their experiences are a much better motivator—so the data in these materials only represents one element.



Recommendations on Using Tracking Data

1 Make a point to share the data you compile and use it for change management! In addition to your partner schools, colleges, and agencies; share it with local corporations that are interested in developing a strong local workforce. Have a communication and dissemination strategy. Include local foundations and be forthright about your commitment to using data to improve outcomes.

2 Don't expect to begin with huge changes; **small changes matter**. For example, GO College noticed that a number of high-achieving students were not enrolling in college, and in subsequent years, school teams made greater effort to reach out to seniors with GPA's over 2.5 and encourage them to apply to college. Initially, only a few students who would have fallen through the cracks may go on to college as a result of changed practice. But, those changes, in real students' lives, will translate to a great many in the years to come.

3 Deliberately mix up your data sessions with great motivational material to encourage educators and community members to act on the material presented. The data will show people the right thing to do; but you must move people to act.

4 Once is never enough. People have very busy lives with competing demands. College access and success for low-income, first-generation, and minority students is a shared responsibility. Therefore, college access and success professionals must regularly move this information onto the agendas of schools, districts, colleges, and communities.



Moving Forward – Together

From its inception, a basic struggle in the field of college access and success was to be recognized and established as a profession. Data which is fundamental to our work is a basic building block of practice in action for our profession. Too often, data are viewed as simply a means to continued funding or as a required step of general compliance. The fundamental assumptions of this practice brief are that, at its best, the use of data provides a core accountability mechanism as well as a foundation to the college access profession. In order to move into a future where college access and success are shared as vital priorities, data must be at the center of continuous improvement and employed as a key tool in professional development and partner dialogue. Then, professionals in CAPs must lead the charge.



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Council for Opportunity in Education

1025 Vermont Ave. NW Suite 900

Washington, DC 20005

202.347.7430

www.coenet.us