
A Review of the Literature

The Link Between Academic Resiliency and College and Career Readiness

Steve Weigler

Abstract: Policy makers and educators across the United States have committed to achieving student college and career readiness. Recent research shows a strong link between academic resiliency and students' ability to succeed in college or in the workplace. Schools across the country are thus implementing programs to build academic resilience to ensure their students are prepared for postsecondary studies and attaining career aspirations.

National Focus on College and Career Readiness

In 2005, a historic bi-partisan gathering of governors and business leaders from nearly all fifty states committed to preparing all students to be college and career-ready by high school graduation.¹ The mission was clearly stated: to align high school standards, assessments, graduation requirements, and accountability₂ systems with college and workplace requirements.

A commonly accepted definition of "college- and career-ready" refers to students who are prepared to succeed in a university or community college, or are career-ready for a job that could support a family.

In order to achieve university, community college, or career readiness many K-12 institutions have adopted the common core standards in English/Language Arts and Math, (currently adopted by 35 states). Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education proposed rewriting "No Child Left Behind" to include a mandate to ensure all students are college and career ready by the time they graduate from high school.³

The United States is committed to preparing all students to be college and career ready by the time they graduate high school.

Resiliency and College and Career Readiness

While most students express college aspirations early in high school, many fail to graduate, let alone attend a post-secondary institution.⁴ Moreover, of those students who are eligible to attend college, nearly 60% are not adequately prepared for post-secondary studies.⁵ Factors associated with not becoming college and career-ready include a lack of academic or career role models, discrimination, racism, lack of positive feedback, and/or low K-12 educator expectations. These factors especially affect teens from minority and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.⁶

Recent research shows college and career-readiness is strongly associated with the development of a number of resiliency skills, including academic self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation.⁷ Research further shows that building academic resilience can positively impact the likelihood of students overcoming perceived barriers to entering college.⁸

Resilience, a key component of social emotional learning, refers to the ability to succeed despite adverse conditions such as poverty or abuse. Researchers have determined that the key components of academic resiliency are: students' perception of the importance of high school and college, academic confidence, connections to educators and positive role models, the ability to handle academic stress, a sense of well/being, and intrinsic motivation.⁹

College and career readiness is strongly associated with the development of resiliency skills.

Academic resiliency skills can be learned, measured, and can have a long-term impact on students' academic performance, which lays the groundwork for post-secondary access and success. Resilient students become responsible for their own success, which is a major factor in enhancing their motivation to overcome extrinsic academic barriers.¹⁰ Accordingly, a resiliency-focused educational paradigm can improve student persistence toward college readiness, especially for students who are faced with great adversity.

Key to developing successful interventions that promote student resiliency and persistence toward college readiness is the identification of malleable and protective factors, which are shown to empirically mitigate or buffer risky circumstances, such as attending a high-risk school. High school staff can then directly target these malleable

and task completion for college readiness.¹¹

How Schools can Achieve College and Career-Readiness by Building Students' Resiliency

The Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guide, "Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do," outlines effective practices, or protective factors, that prepare students academically for college, assists them in completing the steps to college entry, and improves their likelihood of entering college. There are three recommended practices, which may serve as protective factors and promote resilience and persistence toward college-readiness, despite students attending at-risk schools. These protective factors are:

- Surround students with adults and peers who build and support their college-going aspirations.
- Engage and assist students in completing critical steps for college entry.
- Increase families' financial awareness, and help students apply for financial aid.

The Practice Guide points out that "building and supporting" involves much more than simply providing students with the information necessary to enter college. Instead, it is important to implement interactive practices that support students' own academic self-efficacy and, in turn, allow students to master task completion and persistence toward college readiness.

In an educational context, an effective role model — someone who demonstrates the behaviors that are needed to be college-ready — is key to students exhibiting the same behavior. Having a role model who helps students identify and work toward personal goals can further help promote student self-efficacy.

Finally, there needs to be a curricular component to improve academic self-efficacy. The curriculum should include an assessment to show that students have mastered important concepts, adequate demonstrations from role models, and encouraging mentors and educators to learn to manage the anxiety associated with challenging activities.¹²

ScholarCentric's *Success Highways* resiliency assessments and curriculum meet the goals outlined in the Practice Guide and have proven to be very effective in building resiliency and academic self-efficacy in students.

The *Success Highways* methodology was developed over a 15-year period from university and school-based research conducted by a group of scientists at the University of Wisconsin, led by Dr. V. Scott Solberg. Models were adapted from researchers in the field of human development and change, including Ann Masten, Paul Baltes, Albert Bandura, Sheldon Cohen, Stevan Hobfoll, Edward Deci, and Richard Ryan. These interrelated skills include:

- Understanding the relevance of education in achieving life goals
- Academic confidence
- Connectedness to others
- Stress management skills
- Balanced sense of well-being
- Intrinsic motivation

Success Highways helps students increase their college and career readiness and development of academic self-efficacy.

Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that students exposed to *Success Highways* improved academically and were more likely to graduate high school. Additionally, participation in the program helped students increase their college and career-readiness and development of academic self-efficacy.¹³

Conclusion

Research shows that although students may have the academic skills necessary to enter college, it is unlikely that they will be resilient and persist toward college without specific socio-emotional resiliency skills. Effective college and career-readiness initiatives recognize the correlation between resiliency and student preparedness for attending college and meeting career aspirations. Schools need to focus on building key resiliency skills by surrounding students with adults who build and support their college-going aspirations, engaging and assisting students in completing steps to enter college, and increasing families' financial awareness. This, in turn, promotes socio-emotional skills that enhance resilience and persistence toward college readiness.¹⁴

Footnotes

1. Wills, Joan. (2008). Preparing ALL youth for academic and career readiness: Implications for high school policy and practice. Washington, D.C. : National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership.
2. Achieve. (2010). *Closing the expectations gap, 2010: Fifth annual 50-state progress report on the alignment of high school policies with the demands of college and careers*. Washington, D.C.: Achieve. Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/files/AchieveClosingtheExpectationsGap2010.pdf>
3. Paulson, A. (2010) No Child Left Behind embraces ‘college and career readiness.’ *The Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved from <http://www.csmonitor.com>.
4. The Center for Student Success, The Research Planning Group for Californian Community Colleges, & The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. (2009). *Effective practices for promoting the transition of high school students to college*. Center for Student Success. Retrieved from <http://asccc.org/sites/default/files/Transition-changes.pdf>
5. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education & Southern Regional Education Board. (2010). *Beyond the rhetoric: Improving college readiness through coherent state policy*. Retrieved from http://www.highereducation.org/reports/college_readiness/focus.shtml
6. Howard, B. and Madison-Harris, R. (2011). Increasing high school graduation rates and improving college enrollment for high-need students. *Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL*, 5, 2.
7. Close, W. and Solberg, V.S.H. (2008). Predicting achievement, distress, and retention among lower-income Latino youth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72, (2008), 31-42. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2007.08.007
8. Bryan, J. (2005). Fostering educational resilience and achievement in urban schools through school-family-community partnerships. *ASCA*, 8, 3. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>.
9. Solberg, V.S.H. (n.d.). Empirical research and underlying research framework for *Success Highways*. Denver, CO: ScholarCentric.
10. Solberg, V.S.H., Close, W., & Metz, A.J. (2002). Promoting success pathways for middle and high school students: introducing the Adaptive Success Identity Plan for school counselors. In C. L. Juntunen & D. R. Atkinson (Eds.), *Counseling across the lifespan* (pp. 135-157). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
11. Dobbs, D. (2009). The science of success. *Atlantic Magazine*, (December 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/12/the-science-of-success/7761>
12. Tierney, W.G., Bailey, T., Constantine, J. Finkelstein, N., & Hurd, N.F. (2009). Helping students navigate the path to college: What high schools can do: A practice guide (NCEE #2009-4066). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncss/wwc/publications/practiceguides>
13. Close, W. and Solberg, V.S.H. (2008). Predicting achievement, distress, and retention among lower-income Latino youth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72, 31-42. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2007.08.007
14. Denver Public Schools. (2010). [Ninth grade academy evaluation summary from 2007 to 2010]. Unpublished raw data.
16. Hooker, S. and Brand, B. (2009). Success at every step: How 23 programs support youth on the path to college and beyond. Washington, D.C.: American Youth Policy Reform. Retrieved from <http://www.aypf.org>

ScholarCentric
2406 W. 32nd Ave., Suite C
Denver, CO 80211