Ready to Move Forward Together:

Report from a Convening of AASA,
The School Superintendents Association and
American Association of Community Colleges

American Association of Community Colleges

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

Report prepared by: ACT

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Introduction

On November 7, 2016, superintendents and community college presidents from AASA, The School Superintendents Association (AASA) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), respectively, gathered for the fourth time to advance an ongoing dialogue about high-impact collaborative strategies between secondary and postsecondary education. The group, representing some of the most innovative leaders in the secondary and community college sectors (see Appendix A), offered real-world examples of how to create a seamless K–14 system that benefits students, parents, employers, and the community at large. Participants also discussed ways to scale up such efforts, including an honest assessment of the challenges that may hinder or prevent further collaboration from occurring.

The overarching theme of the meeting was: *Ready to Move Forward Together*. This was reflected in the wide-ranging set of promising K–12 and community college collaborations that were discussed over the course of the meeting (see Appendix B). They included:

- **Expanding dual and concurrent enrollment programs**
- **Creating meaningful college and career pathways**
- **Encouraging teachers, faculty, and employers to visit each other's environments**
- **Recognizing the importance of counseling, especially on career options**

In addition to these topics, the day's conversation was broadened to include the sharing of collaborations with local businesses and community leaders.

Motivating the day-long conversation was a shared desire among attendees to close the gap in alignment between secondary and postsecondary education systems in the U.S. The recently passed reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),[1] connects more formally with the Higher Education Act[2] and Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act[3] than did previous ESEA reauthorizations. ESSA has also changed the manner in which school performance is assessed, including the ability to include soft skills in the accountability framework for states and schools.

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[1] Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). S. 1177; Pub.L. 114–95.

[2] Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008). H.R. 4137; Pub.L. 110–315.

[3] Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act (2006). 20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.

> "One success story that's really amazed me, is we have a student down at the high school, dual enrollment student in cybersecurity, just finished a two-year degree at Snead, [and] was accepted to the University of Alabama [in] Huntsville. They have a [National Science Foundation] grant that funds the completion of a Bachelor's and a Master's. This student is now going to [the] University of Alabama [in] Huntsville [with] full tuition and fees [and] full housing covered, plus $24,000 a year as a stipend."
>
> *Robert Exley, President, Snead State Community College*

This greater need for alignment between systems and the increased flexibility allowed in accountability metrics presents both an opportunity and a challenge for stakeholders in both secondary and postsecondary education systems. At issue is the need to ensure that transitions from one system to the other are seamless, without need for remediation. In addition, the historical segmentation of students into programs preparing them to be either college ready or career ready has prevented many stakeholders from understanding the benefits to be gained from preparing individuals for both.

This report highlights the key takeaways from the meeting. The first three sections summarize promising inter-sectoral practices, the fourth section identifies some remaining challenges, and the concluding section poses a number of guiding principles to move this collective work forward.

Collaboration between K–12 and Postsecondary Education

Dual enrollment is an increasingly popular model of collaboration between K–12 and postsecondary education. An example of such a collaboration is that between Marshall County Schools and Snead State Community College in Alabama. Their dual enrollment program is part of the Lumina Foundation's *Right Signals* program for cybersecurity.[4] The program focuses on cultivating college navigation skills and brokering accelerated career pathways by focusing on academic skills, student skills, college knowledge, and self-knowledge for each student. Also, the participants benefit from a statewide articulation agreement for transfer of some core program community college credits to public universities.

Beyond the dual enrollment component, a unique aspect of their collaboration is the combination of public and private funding that turns high school partnerships into college enrollments. This approach to funding was developed to address decreases in high school graduates' enrollment in local community colleges and the increased need for remediation for those entering postsecondary education. In the program, participating high schools teach dual enrollment courses during the day and provide college courses for working adults and displaced workers at night via a local workforce development grant.

In order for collaborative K–12 and postsecondary partnerships to succeed, the partners must answer three questions:

1. ***Are the community college credits earned in the dual enrollment program accepted by all four-year institutions?*** In Alabama, only those courses that are in the state course catalog are accepted, which has led to competition and inconsistency among four-year institutions.

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[4] http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/Pages/right_signals.aspx.

2. *How does dual enrollment contribute to college readiness?* The joint program in Alabama happened organically, but its growth has caused concern at Snead Community College. The conversation about readiness is one way to start planning for early interventions to reduce the need for developmental education in postsecondary education.

3. *What are the programmatic barriers for joint secondary and postsecondary education initiatives?* One barrier against the success of such programs is insufficient coordination: program administrators need to have more advance notice in order to have adequate course offerings. Another barrier is teacher quality. Snead Community College sent "good" instructors to Marshall County Schools to teach the dual enrollment courses, which ultimately sent the right signal to students, especially in career-technical fields. A third barrier is a seeming lack of coherent state policy on dual enrollment coupled with a culture of resistance toward looking at out-of-state best practices, and a fourth barrier occurs when a state does not use funding as a policy development opportunity.

Collaboration with Local Industry

Dual enrollment is also an effective way for high schools and colleges to both respond to rapidly-changing workforce needs and augment course offerings with opportunities such as paid internships, job shadowing, and career coaching. The Wallace State Community College Early College dual enrollment program, started 10 years ago, provides 75 students per year with college and high school course instruction. This fast-track program, implemented in partnership with Cullman County schools, allows students to complete 30 hours of general education college credit at their own pace online. The program emphasizes readiness for college, work, and life, and its specific priorities include increasing college going, emphasizing workforce development, and accelerating completion.

The goal of the program is for all high school students to earn an industry certification or Associate's degree. Simply put, dropping out of high school is not an option, with multiple pathways to graduation provided for each student. More than 96 percent of students in the program graduated from high school, with a college success rate of 63 percent.

The program integrates several "Fast Track to Industry" pathways, which include paid internships with courses provided two days a week on campus alongside intensive local industry engagement. The program also includes partnerships with several large local manufacturing employers (e.g., automobile, aerospace, and nautical manufacturing). Scholarships are provided for teachers to spend time with local businesses, and schools partner with the local Chamber of Commerce to sponsor a local career fair and financial literacy program.

"[W]e established a public-private partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce . . . [called] CAWS, Culinary and Workforce Solutions. They sponsor an annual career fair with all area high schools; in addition to that, they teach a Keeping It Real financial literacy program with business and industry partners. And we also provide paid summer internships for academic teachers in high schools to spend time in local industry [to gain an] understanding [of] the kinds of jobs that are available to students in our community."

Vicki Karolewics, President, Wallace State Community College

"I saw a girl get off the bus and literally this girl was jumping up and down saying, 'I'm on a college campus! This is a college campus!' So many families . . . live in poverty, whose parents never went to college and are not ever going to take [their children] to show them one. It's really important for us to have a student visit a college and see a place where they might be able to see themselves someday."

Ladarla Haws, Superintendent, Racine Unified School District

Understanding that success includes more than academic skills, the program also involves leadership academies that emphasize the importance of soft skills. All participating students are assigned a career coach, a career-prep class, and job shadowing. Since the program was implemented, the local community college system has now adopted a new format for college placement that includes non-cognitive measures.

In order for industry partnerships to succeed, partners must answer two questions:

1. *How are similar programs funded?* Funding was discussed as the biggest challenge that is impeding success. Shrinking secondary and postsecondary education budgets cannot solely absorb costs. Furthermore, for students who have to pay their own way, money is a barrier. While the program currently has a lot of first-generation college-going students, it has already seen dual enrollment increase the local college going rate. In Alabama, state funds ($10 million) are currently available only for Tier 1 dual enrollment programs.

2. *How can we reshape K–12 incentives created by state accountability systems?* Relationship building is key for reshaping accountability metrics, but that alone cannot change the weights placed on each measure. Especially problematic is alignment of state accountability measures that would allow schools to offer both Advanced Placement and dual enrollment.

Collaboration with the Local Community

The final type of promising collaboration shared during the meeting was between a high school and local community leaders. The Racine Unified School District (USD) in Wisconsin has faced an interesting paradox over the years: despite having the most job openings in the state, the district also has one of the state's highest unemployment rates. To help address the local workforce development problem, the Academies of Racine program was created in partnership with local community leaders to clearly document indicators of readiness for college, career, and life.

The program requires each high school graduate to fulfill District graduation requirements, participate in a career pathway course sequence, and complete an academic and career plan. To be considered ready for college and/or career, graduates must complete a list of college- and career-ready indicators as well as a list of life-ready indicators such as financial literacy, self-awareness, and goal setting courses. As part of the program, college coaches are provided in each high school, with the District adding additional coaches in middle school.

The District feels that it is important for students to be on a college campus to fully realize their potential as college students. Students in the program are required to participate in a yearlong "Freshman Academic Experience" in ninth grade that includes visiting a college campus.

In order for community partnerships to succeed, partners must answer two questions:

1. ***What role do high school teachers play in this collaboration?*** As part of the program, all high school teachers in the Racine USD have visited local businesses to see how they operate and how academics apply to work. Since the program began, the District has seen an increase in high school students graduating with college credits, from 60 percent to 80 percent.

2. ***What role do postsecondary institutions play in this collaboration?*** Even with the information gleaned from the various indicators, certain students still may be not able to enroll in college. This is particularly true for students from low-income households who may feel that a college education is beyond their means. To address this, Racine USD and their postsecondary neighbor, Gateway Technical College, have developed the Gateway Promise, which ensures that all low-income high school students in the District have the opportunity to graduate with a college degree from Gateway Technical College. All tuition and fees for the Gateway Promise program are covered for three years (6 semesters) by the Gateway Technical College Foundation. The program also includes a required summer success bridge component, academic planning support, job readiness and career planning workshops, international and/or service learning projects, and case management.

Remaining Challenges

The meeting highlighted a number of promising practices currently underway among the AASA and AACC memberships to close the alignment gap. Although all of the participants already engage in at least one of the promising practices discussed in this report, several challenges still remain that may hinder further adoption and further innovation. These challenges need to be addressed in order to replicate and scale up the aforementioned promising practices.

Of utmost importance is finding colleagues, especially those in other educational sectors and in the local labor market. Reticence to engage in similar programs with the local employment community can be addressed by focusing on how similar collaborations have leveraged such support for funding, career fairs, and communication of the importance of college and career readiness over a lifetime.

It is important to note that regulatory barriers of the past are no longer at issue. At a federal level, ESSA is enabling these conversations to happen, providing support for local schools and communities to engage in similar cross-sector collaborations. Despite this movement nationally, there is additional work to be done at the state policy level in ensuring that existing regulations and accountability systems do not hinder multi-readiness initiatives and dual enrollment availability for all students.

For cross-sector collaboration to be successful, buy-in from practitioners in both secondary and postsecondary organizations is critical. Professional development practices for both secondary and postsecondary instructors could benefit from a joint or team-based approach, especially for dual enrollment programs. Cross-pollination of promising practices is essential for instructors to fully understand the importance of preparing students to be ready for both college and career.

The ultimate challenge of any best practice is being able to "share and scale" outside of individual communities. While reports such as this one are useful in communicating promising policies and practices, such papers cannot supplant the importance of continuing the conversation at state and local convenings. For example, what are you hearing as an effective strategy to improve college and career readiness in your state or local community? Are such strategies being documented and shared outside of their respective geographies? What other stakeholders (outside of secondary education) are being formally included in such collaborations? For example, regional accreditors should be added to the conversation of cross-sector collaboration. Challenges with alignment of accountability and quality metrics can only be formally addressed by those charged with standard-setting for quality instructional programs.

Last, there needs to be agreement on common terminology to describe the components of successful multi-sector readiness collaborations. Terms like *dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, dual credit,* and so on are very confusing to practitioners, students, and parents alike. Similarly, multiple definitions of college, career, and life readiness abound in the academic and career literature, which only causes further confusion among stakeholders about what it is that they are preparing students for.

Moving Forward

After offering a number of promising yet practical examples on how to better align the K–12 and postsecondary systems in the short term, the conversation concluded with a shift to what AASA and AACC could do to reshape future superintendents and community college presidents. Both organizations agreed that it is critical for the leadership of AASA and AACC to directly and jointly take on these challenges. So what are the levers that need to be pulled? Below are a few examples raised during the meeting:

- *Identify the right messengers for different audiences.* High school students are more likely to listen to college freshmen, while parents and teachers are more likely to listen to business leaders.

- *Revamp new-hire orientation policies to include the expectation that superintendents and local community college president meet regularly.* Also, have each new superintendent and community college president make a commitment to sit on their state's workforce boards.

- ***Come with a plan instead of asking others to shape the problem.*** The time to drive the change is now.
- ***Recognize that success takes trust and willingness.*** It might be difficult to tackle these issues—and undertake any of the promising practices described in this report—right out of the gate without the collective commitment of each of the organizations and external stakeholders.

Appendix A: Attendee List

Attendee	Title	Institution	State
Bryan Albrecht	President	Gateway Technical College	WI
Shane Barnette	Superintendent	Cullman County Schools	AL
Dana Bedden	Superintendent	Richmond Public Schools	VA
Joseph Dragone	Superintendent	Ballston Spa Central School District	NY
Joseph Erardi, Jr.	Superintendent	Newtown Public Schools	CT
Robert Exley	President	Snead State Community College	AL
Christopher Gaines	Superintendent	Mehlville School District R9	MO
Allen Goben	President	Tarrant County College-NE Campus	TX
Ladarla Haws	Superintendent	Racine Unified School District	WI
Philip Hickman	Superintendent	Columbus Municipal School District	MS
David Hicks	Superintendent	Bremen City School District	GA
Merrill Irving	President	Hennepin Technical College	WI
Vicki Karolewics	President	Wallace State Community College	AL
Timothy Mitchell	Superintendent	Riverside Community School District	IA
David Pennington	Superintendent	Ponca City Public School District	OK
Dan Phelan	President	Jackson Community College	MI
Gail Pletnick	Superintendent	Dysart Unified School District	AZ
David Schuler	Superintendent	Township High School District 214	IL
Theron Schutte	Superintendent	Marshalltown Community School District	IA
Robin Shaffer-Lilienthal	Provost	Marshalltown Community College	IA
William Wainwright	President	Northshore Technical College	LA
Thomas Walker	President	Wayne Community College	NC
Cindy Wigley	Superintendent	Marshall County School	AL
Lisa Brady Gill	Senior Director	ACT—External Engagement	IA
Gregory Kienzl	Principal Researcher	ACT—External Engagement	IA
Cassi Barker-Carr	Principal Strategist	ACT—External Engagement	IA
Mary LeFebvre	Senior Researcher	ACT—External Engagement	IA
Walter Bumphus	President & CEO	AACC	DC
Mary Heiss	Senior Vice President	AACC	DC
Bernadette Holloway	Project Manager, VFA	AACC	DC
Jolanta Juszkiewicz (JJ)	Director of Policy Analysis	AACC	DC
Tammy Reichelt	Senior Program Associate	AACC	DC
Dan Domenech	Executive Director	AASA	VA
Jimmy Minichello	Director, Communications	AASA	VA
Mort Sherman	Associate Executive Director	AASA	VA

Appendix B: Agenda

AASA/AACC
Dialogue to Improve College Readiness
Sponsored by ACT

November 6–7, 2016
9:00 am–2:00 pm
Ritz Carlton Pentagon City ~ 1250 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA
22202

November 6

6:30 pm   Group Dinner

November 7

8:30 am   Breakfast

9:00–9:10   Welcome
             Walter G. Bumphus   Dan Domenech
             President and CEO, AACC Executive Director, AASA

9:10–9:30   Introductions

9:30–9:45   Purpose of the Meeting
             Facilitator Kris Kurtenbach, Founding Partner, Collaborative
Communications

9:45–10:15   ACT Research on College/Career Readiness Indicators
             Lisa Brady Gill, Senior Director, ACT

10:15–10:30 Break

10:30–11:45 Promising K–12/Community College Partnerships
             • *Vicki Karolewics, President, Wallace State Community College
               (AL)*
             • *Shane Barnette, Superintendent, Cullman County Schools
               (AL)*
             • *Robert Exley, President, Snead State Community College (AL)*
             • *Cindy Wigley, Superintendent, Marshall County Schools (AL)*
             • *Bryan Albrecht, President, Gateway Technical College (WI)*
             • *Ladarla Haws, Superintendent, Racine Unified School District
               (WI)*

11:45–12:30 Working Lunch
             1. What can we learn from the successes that have been
                discussed? Are they scalable and replicable?
             2. Review the previously suggested short-term and long-term
                strategies where AACC/AASA can work together to support the
                efforts of its members to improve college readiness. (Select
                one activity to advance)

12:30–1:30 Sharing Promising Practices

1:30–2:00   Summary and Next Steps
1. How do members of the two organizations ensure that their work is widely disseminated so that it may help other districts and colleges?
2. How can we use the ESSA planning opportunity to develop and strengthen our K–12/higher education partnerships?
3. How do we move the agenda forward?

About the Organizations

American Association of Community Colleges

As the voice of the nation's community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) delivers educational and economic opportunity for more than 12 million diverse students in search of the American Dream. Uniquely dedicated to access and success for all students, AACC's member colleges provide an on-ramp to degree attainment, skilled careers and family-supporting wages. Located in Washington, D.C., AACC advocates for these not-for-profit, public-serving institutions to ensure they have the resources and support they need to deliver on the mission of increasing economic mobility for all.

For more information about AACC visit: www.aacc.nche.edu.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children.

For more information about AASA, visit: www.aasa.org.

ACT

ACT is an independent, nonprofit organization that provides assessment, research, information, and program management services in the broad areas of education and workforce development. Each year, ACT serves millions of people in high schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses, and government agencies, nationally and internationally. Though designed to meet a wide array of needs, all ACT programs and services have one guiding purpose–helping people achieve education and workplace success.

For more information about ACT, visit: www.act.org