



## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) represents more than 15,000 school counseling and college admission professionals nationwide. NACAC recommends the following policy priorities as essential to improving college and career attainment and student achievement beyond high school.

### Improve Access to School Counselors for All Students

**Rationale** Research conducted by NACAC and in collaboration with our colleagues in the Pathways to College Network shows that access to quality school counseling has a significant impact on the academic achievement and postsecondary planning of all students, particularly those students who are low-income, first-generation, and other underserved populations. Many students, however, do not have access to a school counselor during the critical high school years. Additionally, many school counselors are overburdened with large caseloads and non-counselor duties, both of which hinder their abilities to provide quality postsecondary advising. The current student to counselor ratio national average is 471:1, and counselors in public schools reported spending only 23.4 percent of their time on postsecondary admission counseling, compared to 52.1 percent for private school counselors. Counselors at higher income schools and those at schools with smaller enrollments also spent more time on postsecondary counseling compared to their counterparts at lower-income and larger schools.

#### Recommendations

- \* The Department of Education should provide guidance to state and local education agencies on how to identify and access funding sources, including but not limited to the ESEA Title IV block grant, which can be used to expand counseling services.
- \* Congress should amend ESEA to include provisions of the Pathways to College Act, which would provide federal support to increase access to school counseling services for the highest-need school districts.

### Promote Professional Development for School Counselors

**Rationale** School counselors assist students to plan for and pursue college and career pathways. For many low-income, first-generation, and other underserved students, a school counselor is the first—and sometimes only—person to whom a student can turn for professional advice on charting a life course beyond high school. In today's rapidly evolving economy and education marketplace, it is more important than ever for counselors to be remain up-to-date on labor market trends, university admission practices, financial aid policies, and student success research.

#### Recommendations

- \* Ensure that school counselors are able to receive professional development under Title II of ESEA.
- \* Involve school counselors in annual assessments and other school improvement efforts initiated or part of ESEA.

### Improve Access to Rigorous Curriculum, Including College Preparatory Courses, For All Students

**Rationale** Successful completion of a robust college preparatory curriculum is a better predictor of college success than test scores and is one of the strongest predictors of bachelor's degree completion (American Institutes for Research, 2013). Performance in college preparatory courses is the most important factor in admission decisions (NACAC State of College Admission, 2013). Currently, low-income and other underserved students disproportionately lack access to rigorous curricula and therefore are not as prepared for postsecondary education as their more affluent peers. Access to rigorous curricula for all students is critical to improving college going and graduation rates, and to fortifying the nation's future economic livelihood.

#### Recommendations

- \* The Department of Education should provide guidance to state and local education agencies on how to identify and access funding sources, including but not limited to the ESEA Title IV block grant, which can be used to support access to AP, IB, dual enrollment, and postsecondary credit-bearing course options.
- \* Amend allowable uses of Title I funds to support neediest high schools in developing and expanding innovative approaches to curriculum improvement, including dual enrollment or early college high school programs.
- \* Congress should incentivize states to implement more equitable K-12 finance structures.