Why is College and Career Readiness Important in Texas?

College and career readiness is hard to define—and that’s part of the reason it’s hard to help students achieve it. Using a common model—like this one created by education policy expert Dr. David Conley—can help educators have more productive conversations about improving college and career readiness in Texas. Dr. Conley identified four keys to college and career readiness and provides some language to help us remember them. They are:

1. Think
2. Know
3. Act, and
4. Go

“Think” refers to the cognitive strategies necessary to solve problems, gather and analyze data, and communicate ideas accurately. “Know” refers to important subject-area content knowledge in each of the core academic disciplines. “Act” refers to students’ self-monitoring abilities and study and organization habits. And “go” refers to specialized knowledge and skills necessary to navigate postsecondary life—from applications and financial aid to relating to instructors.

In Texas, we know it’s a critical time to focus on college and career readiness because we want our students and our state to be globally competitive. See this graph?

The purple squares represent young people entering the international workforce and the green triangles represent older adults retiring. In almost every country, you can see that the entering workforce has achieved higher educational attainment than the people retiring. But look at
Texas—in our state these numbers are almost equal, which means the education level of our workforce isn’t growing like it is in other countries.

But don’t panic! Texas is already taking steps to better prepare our young people for post-secondary learning so we can grow a more educated workforce. One way this is already happening is by partnering with business and industry leaders through the Governor’s Career Clusters Initiative, a job-creation plan focused on six areas:

- advanced technologies and manufacturing;
- aerospace and defense;
- biotechnology and life sciences;
- information and computer technology;
- petroleum refining and chemical products; and
- energy.

These clusters are important for educators to know about so we can prepare our students with the skills they need to compete in markets that are predicted to grow in Texas. By helping all students prepare to learn after high school, we are keeping the doors open for our future workers and for the Texas economy.

So, how do we do that? That brings us to the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards—and back to the four keys. You see Texas has a set of college and career readiness standards that identify not only the key content knowledge students need to master by the time they graduate, but also many of the key cognitive strategies and study skills as well. Combine these standards with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, which break key content knowledge down by grade level, and you’ve got a pretty good blueprint for how to help students graduate ready for next steps.

But we know we also need resources to help our kids gain “college knowledge” and prepare for the contextual challenges of post-secondary life. That’s where resources like this can help—by reminding us to partner with other educators and employers and to understand that college and career readiness isn’t just about test scores and grades.
Preparing Students to Work in a Global Economy

Imagine you are a time traveller from the 50s. What would you notice about the modern U.S. if you arrived here today? Well, first of all you might wonder about these little rectangular pieces of plastic people walk around looking at and talking into. And once you found out what they did? You’d know you were in a science fiction movie!

Today’s students will work in a world that would be almost unrecognizable to workers 50 or 60 years ago. Technology is such a large part of our world, and — as a result — our labor markets have become more globalized. It’s an exciting time, but it also means the knowledge and skills these markets demand have changed. Jobs that used to require only a high school education — like being a mechanic or a landscaper, for example, now rely on the ability to analyze technical manuals at Reading Level. They also increasingly require testing and certification.

Take a look at this graph:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percentage of Entry-level or Low-skill Jobs Requiring a College Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Business Services</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the number of options for individuals who do not pursue post-secondary education is shrinking.

Today’s students will also work in more fluid, less predictable environments: Twenty-first century workers not only need more specialized knowledge to work in more specialized and

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technical fields, they must also be able to apply their knowledge in a more complex, interconnected and swiftly changing world. To be successful, they need to be: problem solvers, action takers, collaborative workers, and effective communicators.

Knowing how to help students develop these global workforce skills is important information for educators, particularly because teachers are under pressure to focus on content knowledge due to testing requirements. To successfully cover both, consider ways to incorporate key content knowledge with skills like:

- investigating the world
- recognizing multiple perspectives
- communicating ideas and
- taking action.

Not only has the growth of technology and globalization led to a highly competitive job market that demands more of workers, it has also opened more possibilities for individuals from diverse regions of the world to work collaboratively. A truly modern education must, then, equip young people with cultural competency. Exposing students to a variety of cultures through literature, news stories, case studies and guest speakers can help increase awareness of the wider world and encourage students to see differences as valuable and important.

The bottom line? Making classrooms and schools more global helps students become ready to take on the world!
How does House Bill 5 Support College and Career Readiness?

This is a challenging and exciting time for education in Texas. With the passage of House Bill 5, Texas schools are working to implement changes to high school graduation plans and course requirements. Although there are many challenges, the good news is that the end result will provide students with greater flexibility and assurances that they leave our high schools “world ready.” Let’s take a look at some of the changes.

The Minimum High School Program has been replaced by the Foundation Program which requires four credits for English language arts, three credits for math, science, and social studies, two credits for languages other than English, five elective credits, one credit for P.E., and one credit for fine arts.

Next, there’s the Foundation Program with a Distinguished Level of Achievement, which is a 26 credit program designed to qualify the student to meet eligibility requirements for automatic admission to Texas institutions of higher education. In this option, students must complete at least one endorsement and successfully complete Algebra II. The Foundation Program with the Distinguished Level of Achievement requires four credits for English language arts, four credits for math, which include that Algebra II, four credits for science, and three credits for social studies, two credits for languages other than English, seven elective credits, one credit for P.E., and one credit for fine arts. Remember the endorsements we talked about? Those endorsements reflect successful completion of coursework focused on a particular career readiness area. The endorsement option is designed to encourage students to explore career options at an appropriate level of academic depth and rigor. Students may complete more than one endorsement if desired, and they may change endorsements any time prior to graduation.

Let’s take a look at some of those endorsements, there are five. The first is STEM; next, is Business and Industry; third, is Public Service; fourth is Arts and Humanities; and lastly, Multidisciplinary Studies. If a district offers only one, it must be the last, Multidisciplinary Studies. To further support students’ work in high school, their academic record may reflect performance acknowledgements. These performance acknowledgements recognize outstanding student performance in one or more of the following categories: performance in a dual credit course, bilingualism or biliteracy, AP or IB exam performance, PSAT, ACT-Plan, SAT, or ACT performance, or for earning a nationally or internationally recognized business or industry certification or licensure.

Although this approach to graduation will require adjustments and planning to phase in effectively, the outcome is greater course taking flexibility, more consistency in levels of student preparedness, and a greater emphasis on ensuring that students are world ready. And that’s good news for all levels of the P16 system, for the business community, for our community at large, and most importantly, our Texas high school graduates.
Programs of Study for all Students

Programs of study have been around for a long time but House Bill 5 now requires counselors to advise students through a program of study that leads to an endorsement. All districts must have programs of study.

What’s different today, is that programs of study serve as comprehensive education plan used as a tool for college and career readiness. They also provide students exposure to careers they may not have been aware of.

For example, a district may develop an Engineering program of study that identifies 4 CTE courses as the concentration. They also might develop a Performing Arts program of study, concentrating on music. This could include 4 courses of a particular instrument such as piano, clarinet or even band. Remember, programs of study may or may not include CTE courses.

A program of study identifies an occupational objective and advises a student through high school. It’s as an advisement tool, not something etched in stone. Programs of study advise the counselor, student, and parent.

The Personal Graduation Plan (PGP) works, in conjunction with, a students’ program of study. The PGP assists the counselor to individualize the program of study to meet the needs of all students.

The Texas Education Agency has provided many resources through AchieveTexas. A template for programs of study can be found there. Many Education Service Centers also have templates districts can use to develop quality programs of study.

Districts create their own programs of study and have the flexibility to align curriculum to best serve the needs of their students and community, as identified in House Bill 5.

It’s important for districts to consider developing programs of study first, and then align them to endorsements. In this way, students can see real world connections and value for themselves.

Think about programs of study as “road maps” helping students navigate the goals, they, themselves have identified. This is how we develop a strong college and career culture, by teaching students to be their own self advocates.
Partnering to Support College and Career Readiness

Have you ever heard a comment like one of these?

**College CTE instructor:** I don’t know what they are teaching these kids at that high school. They come to me and they have no sense of responsibility. They can’t even begin to read a manual.

**Secondary teacher:** I am so sick of hearing college professors complain about how incoming freshman aren’t prepared. We work so hard to get them to pass those exams. If they’re passing end-of-course exams and graduating, what else can we be doing?

**High school counselor:** These colleges admit our kids, but then fail them or make most of them take developmental education courses. If these students aren’t ready, why are they letting them in?

**Developmental education college instructor:** Most of my students don’t even place into credit bearing courses. I don’t get it. How did they leave high school without these basic writing skills?

These people are all observing different pieces of the same college and career readiness problem. The K-12 system and higher ed may need to communicate more.

One way to improve college and career readiness is to build strong partnerships between institutions at different levels, and to reach out to business and industry as well.

Let’s look at a couple of examples of partnerships that can help clarify and align college readiness goals and expectations.

If you are a K-12 educator, consider inviting speakers from local higher ed institutions and businesses to talk with students about the skills—and skill levels—that are necessary in their fields. Inviting alumni to speak about their college and career experiences is also highly informative—and motivational—for K-12 students.

Another suggestion is to ask for samples of college syllabi and model high school syllabi after them so the syllabus becomes a familiar tool for helping students understand expectations. Take it a step further and invite faculty from local high schools and colleges to participate in a collaborative grading session, and compare the way student work is assessed at different levels.

**College Instructor:** This student used a lot of strong evidence from the text in her argument, but I would score this paper low because it is improperly cited and the bibliography is incomplete.

**High School Teacher:** That’s interesting. I don’t use citation quality in my rubric. Our grades would have been very different.

Speaking of grading, when your students do long-term projects or portfolio work, consider inviting experts from outside the school to provide input about how this work would stack up to the demands of college and the workforce.

**Jury Member:** This is an impressive project, but I would like to have seen more original research. When my employees propose solutions like you do here, I ask them for the latest research and
also for evidence that they’ve gathered and analyzed from our own community. Can you tell me what idea you have about how research could be incorporated into your project?

K-12 educators traditionally haven’t had good data to illustrate whether their students succeed in higher ed settings. It may not always be possible to get data on specific students, but websites like Texas Higher Education Data [show this website front page: http://www.txhigherereddata.org/] can provide aggregate performance data to help schools target interventions and improve student achievement.

Secondary-post-secondary partnerships come in all sizes depending on the resources available. Don’t be afraid to start small. You can help your students find internships, shadow college courses and connect with mentors [show students working with businesses or higher ed instructors] just by taking the time to reach out and ask.

And the most important thing to remember? Planning and building partnerships should start with the goals you want to accomplish. That’s what we tell our students, right? Knowing where you want to end up makes it a heck of a lot of a lot easier to get there!

HS Teacher 1: I’d really like to see more of my students to place into general education courses.

College Instructor 1: I want to see more students from our local community successfully graduate from the university.

HS Counselor: I’d like my students to have the opportunity to practice workplace readiness skills while they’re still in high school.
How can Pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 Counselors Prepare Students for College and Career?

Preparing students for college and careers means not only preparing their minds, but supporting all areas of their growth and development. So how do we do this? By implementing a comprehensive PreK through 12 guidance & counseling program. A comprehensive program ensures all areas of the school are intentionally designed and coordinated to help young people develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed after graduation.

In Texas, guidance counseling refers to multiple types of services: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support. All four of these components are highly relevant to college and career planning. Even in the early grades, counseling programs that deliberately focus on post-secondary success can help contribute to a college-going school culture.

That’s why high-quality guidance & counseling programs aren’t just comprehensive, they’re developmental. Students need different types of information and support at different stages of cognitive and emotional maturity. Their developmental needs will also vary depending on their individual and community circumstances, and the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support should all reflect that.

Let’s look at a developmental approach for college and career readiness. We know that, as early as elementary school, kids begin to develop their awareness of careers and the connection between an individual’s skills, talents and interests and choosing a career. At the PreK through fifth grade, a comprehensive guidance & counseling program should focus on college and career awareness.

Counselor introducing a veterinarian to a 2nd grade class: “Hello class, we have a very special guest today. You know how your families take you to the doctor when you’re sick? Well, Dr. Kwan is a doctor who takes care of farm animals when they get sick or hurt. She’s here today and excited to talk to you. So, let’s meet her!”

Dr. Kwan: “Thanks for having me here today. Being a veterinarian is very fun and interesting. I get to help animals, travel to different farms, and work outside a lot. I went to school for many years and studied a lot of science to become a veterinarian.”

Another recommendation is to try to bring speakers to your school that students feel a connection. Maybe the speaker attended the same school, live in the neighborhood, or may possess other characteristics that connect with the students.

By middle school, students’ identities are more developed and they are ready to explore and think concretely about a variety of possible career interests. During grades 6-8, a comprehensive guidance & counseling program should focus on college and career investigation.

Counselor talking to an 8th-grade student: “Let’s take a look at your interest inventory. It will help you make decisions about what classes to take when you begin high school next year. It looks here like you really like writing and I know you get very good grades in English. You may
want to think about programs of study of that will allow you to try lots of different types of writing and begin thinking about possible careers that require that skill. Can you think of any right now?"

By the time a student enters high school, he or she should have already been exposed to a variety of possible programs of study and coached about how each can help move the student toward a desired occupational path. In high school, a comprehensive guidance & counseling program should focus on college and career concentration.

**Counselor talking to a 10th-grade student:** "Hi Marie, and thanks for coming in. You’ve done very well in the courses specific to your finance program of study. I’d like to talk to you about a couple of internship possibilities, one at a local credit union and one with a stockbroker here in town. I think it would help you see how people working in this field apply the material you’ve been learning, and it will help you make a good choice about what type of program you want to pursue after graduation."

So, let’s hear it for our counselors! It’s a big job, but the more students hear consistent, developmentally appropriate messaging about college and careers from caring adults in every area of the school, the better equipped they will be to make future choices and create success after graduation.
Taking Charge of College and Career Planning

How do we know we are doing a good job developing a college and career-ready culture in our schools? One indicator is that students are able to be their own advocates when it comes to college and career planning. That doesn’t mean they know everything, but they’ve thought enough about post-secondary planning that they know what questions to ask, how to monitor their progress and how to assess their readiness for post-secondary life.

So what can we do to help our students be the “take charge” type, not the “oops, I missed the boat!” type? It might seem crazy, but taking charge means to talk seriously about college while students are in middle school.

Think about it—middle school is when students in Texas will start to take career interest inventories, the perfect opportunity to begin making connections to possible career pathways and the courses they require.

Let’s listen in on a conversation between an educator and a student who needs a little help getting focused on the future.

Tyrus: Mr. Myers, did you see that gaming winning shot I hit?

Mr. Myers: I did see that game winning shot! I mean, you guys looked smooth! How many points did you have last night?

Tyrus: I had, like, sixteen points.

Mr. Myers: Sixteen points? How long have you been playing ball, Tyrus?

Tyrus: I’ve been playing basketball for about four years.

Mr. Myers: “Man, y’all were gelling out there; you were phenomenal. I saw that “three” you made too, with two minutes left. That was clutch!

I’m glad I’m getting to talk to you today, Tyrus. I notice not only how well and how great you are as an athlete on the court, but I’ve seen how great you are in the math class. And so I was going to ask you, “Have you thought of anything besides, probably college basketball, that you would like to do if you go to college?”

Tyrus: “I’ve been thinking, maybe a physical trainer.”

Mr. Myers: “Well, what I want to talk to you about is not only the great things that I’ve seen you do on the basketball court, but what I think you can also do in life as far as mathematics and science when you go to college. So let’s talk about a physical trainer. Look at this figure real quick. I’m just going to use mathematics. What shape is this?”

Tyrus: “It’s a rectangle.”
Mr. Myers: “It’s a rectangle! It’s like a basketball court, right? You said “physical trainer,” and that was one of the occupations that was on my mind that I wanted to talk to you about. You’ve got physical trainers, occupational therapists; those are people that use mathematics or science every day, right? But physical trainers not only are using math or science but they’re also there because the love the game, right? And I was thinking to myself, “Has Tyrus thought of something outside of the basketball court?” Meaning, have you thought about something you can do in your college life that involves a career in mathematics or science?

I know you are a phenomenal athlete, but life throws curve balls at us sometimes, right? If that doesn’t happen, I want you to have a backup plan like that because you are great in mathematics. And I not only want to see you excel on the basketball court, it would also be great to see you excel in something in life too, when Mr. Myers is an old man and I see you 10 years, or 20 years from now, all right?”

Tyrus: “Yes, sir.”

Mr. Myers: “So, have a great day. Keep up the great work and I’ll see you later, all right?”

Middle school is also a time when study habits are becoming solidified, allowing us the opportunity to help our students become better at self-management and more self-reflective about their own abilities and goal setting around grades and test scores. It is also a time when students are taking on more complex academic projects, so why not have them assemble a portfolio of research and longer-term assignments? It is a great way for students to track and measure their growth against college-level work.

Another important way educators can help our students take charge is by avoiding the temptation to peg them as “college material” or not. Instead, we need to be creative and work closely with students to help them maximize their strengths and interests and address their challenges.

Think about the difference between the way these two teachers talk about Josiah, a student who is struggling with school engagement.

Teacher 1: “I have this student, Josiah, who is not doing very well at all. He never listens and is always doing something off task.”

Teacher 2: “Does he have any interests?”

Teacher 1: He likes cars, so I’m guessing he’ll go into auto mechanics. We have some CTE courses that are for “non-college bound” students where they learn to fix cars. I’m guessing he’ll wind up there.”

Teacher 3: “Have I told you about that student in my class, Josiah?

Teacher 4: No. What about him?”
Teacher 3: Well, he’s a little bit confused about what he wants to do after high school. But he’s interested in auto mechanics and I think he’ll need some assistance with reading. But if he could get it together, it could really lead to other areas such as engineering.

Teacher 4: True.

Teacher 3: I know a program in Lubbock that has a great pathway program where students in a high school automotive technology program can continue their education leading all the way to a master degree in mechanical engineering. I’m going to suggest it to him."

Teacher 4: That’s a great idea.

Holding our students to high expectations from the early years on can help them expect more from themselves—and have that “take charge” attitude that colleges and employers like to see! Could your middle and high schools be doing more to coordinate college and career-readiness efforts?
Earning College Credit in High School

Everyone likes getting a head start, right? Well, what if you could help your students get a head start on their college careers—and help them save money on tuition too?

There are several different options for earning college credit and high school credit simultaneously. Not all of them are available to all students, but the possibilities might be more accessible than you think. Let’s take a look at some of the options.

You’ve probably heard of Advanced Placement or “AP” classes. [website: https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/exploreap] These are college-level courses offered in high school—the College Board develops the course descriptions and the exams students take at the conclusion of the class. Depending on the subject and the institution the student wants to attend, an AP exam score of 3 or higher could translate into college credit by exempting students from entry-level courses in that subject.

International Baccalaureate or “IB” is an international curriculum grounded in the liberal arts and sciences. [website: http://www.ibo.org/] It is a diploma program that requires students to take standardized courses in six required subject areas. Texas institutions of higher ed grant at least 24 hours of credit to entering IB diploma students who received scores of at least a 4 on these standardized exams—a great option for students who live in communities where the IB diploma program is being implemented.

Are dual enrollment or dual credit courses available to students in your area? If so, these are great opportunities for students to earn college credit in high school, whether through an early college or concurrent enrollment program, taking a course at a local college campus or taking an online course. [website: http://www.txvsn.org/portal/]

Let’s listen to this student tell her grandmother about some of the advantages of her concurrent enrollment program, where she took college-level courses at her high school:

Student talking to her grandmother on the phone: Hi Grandma! Yeah everything is going great! Do you remember that concurrent enrollment option I was talking to you about? Well, I went through it and graduated high school with an associate’s degree. It helped me get a job at the hospital as a nursing assistant. Yeah, I like it and it pays pretty well. My plan is work for a year, get a ton of experience, and then when I go back to school in the fall to get my bachelor’s degree, I’ll be entering as a junior.

No, I’ll still be working – at least part time. It’s going to work out perfectly. My counselor and I have already gone over my budget and it looks like when I go back to school I’ll only need to take out loans for one year. But I might even be able to get a scholarship to cover that. Thanks, grandma. Tell grandpa not to worry. I love you too, goodbye.

Here’s another student, talking about his experience attending courses on a college campus.

Student 1: What are you thinking of doing after graduation, man?
Student 2: I don’t know, I’ll probably just keep working until something better comes up. You too, right?

Student 1: I don’t know man. Last semester I took this engineering course at that community college. You know, the one Ms. Mason was talking about?

Student 2: Aw man! You actually did that?

Student 1: I did, and it was actually a lot of fun.

Student 2: Really?

Student 1: Yeah man, it was amazing. We got to build a ton of stuff. We got to assemble and design our own building models. The professor was awesome!

Student 2: I don’t know man, it just sounds like a ton of work.

Student 1: Yes, it was a lot of math.

Student 2: And you hate math!

Student 1: It actually wasn’t that bad. I took some tutoring classes at school and I finished with a “B”.

Student 2: Nice!

Student 1: And you know what? I’m getting college credit for this! I’m almost through college and I haven’t even graduated high school yet.

Student 2: I guess it is one less class to pay for.

Student 1: Right!

Student 2: You’ve really got this all figured out, don’t you?

Student 1: Whatever! All I’m saying is, you should check it out. I mean, you don’t plan on working at that burger joint for the rest of your life, right?

Sounds pretty good, right? And what’s even better is that research has shown that students typically underrepresented in higher education who participate in dual enrollment programs earn higher grade point averages and are more likely to graduate from high school, to attend a four-year university, to test into credit bearing courses, and to persist in post-secondary education than their non-participating peers.

In other words, earning college credit in high school isn’t just about saving money and getting a jump on college. It can improve a student’s overall college and career readiness so they’ll be more likely to succeed once they get there.
Supporting First-in-Family College Attenders

Applying and transitioning to college is very complex, even for students from families in which parents or other relatives went to college. Now think about a student who will be the first in his family to navigate this process.

Even the most supportive families may not have the contextual knowledge to help students decode this process if they haven’t done it themselves. We as educators can be a tremendous resource to these first-in-family college attenders—but it takes some direct outreach and specialized information to make sure they have the support and resources they need to succeed.

Organization and action planning is very important for all students, but for youth encountering the college application process for the first time, it is critical. Share checklists like these with your students—they should implement a plan and think about this transition as early as 9th grade.

**Freshman Checklist**

- Take a personality/interest inventory to increase awareness.
- Make a list of your immediate needs. What you take is as important as the grades you make.
- Develop study skills, organization, and time management skills.
- Strive for academic growth. GPA and test results are clearly affected by the pace you have.
- Talk to your counselor about how grade point averages and college will affect your work and your college goals.
- Show your progress to your parents.

**Sophomore Checklist**

- Begin to identify career paths and possible fields of study.
- Begin to calculate your financial aid need. What you take is equally important as the grades you make.

**Junior Checklist**

- Begin to explore career options. Begin to see what interests you.
- Talk to your counselor to see what classes you should take.
- Begin to explore college options. Begin to see what classes you should take.
- Make appointments with your advisor to develop a plan.
- Begin a college application.

**Senior Checklist**

- Begin to plan for the future.
- Begin to take the ACT and SAT.
- Begin to make a decision on a college.
- Begin to explore college options.
- Make appointments with your advisor to develop a plan.
- Begin a college application.

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Texas Online College and Career Readiness Resource Center
Consider this scenario, in which Saskia, a second-semester junior who would be the first in her family to attend college, talks with one of her teacher’s about plans for the future.

**Teacher:** Saskia, we haven’t talked much about your plans for graduation. I know you’ve been in a human services program of study and volunteering at the hospital. Are you thinking of pursuing a career in the medical field?

**Saskia:** I don’t know what program I would need to take. I don’t think my family can afford much. We haven’t really talked about it.

**Teacher:** Well, there are a lot of options and some of the decisions you make this year will affect which ones you are eligible for.

**Saskia:** Like what?

**Teacher:** Here’s a checklist of things juniors should be thinking about. There are also some placement tests and scholarship deadlines specific to the medical field you’ll definitely want to be aware of to keep your options open. Tell you what. Why don’t we invite your family in and make an appointment to talk to Miss Lange in the counseling department. She can explain the different options and we’ll make an action plan for you.

You’ll notice this teacher suggested bringing Saskia’s family in to the school—again, that’s a best practice for all students, but especially for families of first-generation college attenders. They may have misgivings or misconceptions about post-secondary life, be fearful of sending their child into the unknown, or want their child to stay home to contribute to the family business or income stream. On the other hand, sometime families are so excited about sending their first-generation student to college that they fall prey to predatory lenders or for-profit institutions with poor graduation outcomes. Either way, it’s a good idea to keep those lines of communication open so everyone has access to thorough, accurate information.

Speaking of accurate information, let’s look at one more scenario that looks at a dynamic that many first-generation college attenders experience—feeling shy to connect with others.

**Professor:** “Hi, Mario, thanks for coming in.”

**Mario:** “Hi, how are you?”

**Professor:** “Good! There’s something I want to talk to you about. I noticed that you haven’t attended any of the study groups for this course. Any reason why?”

**Mario:** “I don’t know. I guess I just like to try and figure out things on my own.”

**Professor:** “That’s OK, but attending study groups is a really great way to share knowledge and reinforce the material. Also, it’s a really important part of your college experience—studying with your peers and learning from one another.”

**Mario:** “I guess so—it just makes me kind of nervous.”
Professor: “Listen, there’s a group meeting in my room after class today. I think you could really get a lot out of it if you came. They’re going to be going over questions for the upcoming test.”

Mario: “I could use the help. What time are they meeting?”

Mario might have a number of reasons for not wanting to join a study group. He may be afraid that if he doesn’t know everything, it will mean he doesn’t belong in college. Or, he might feel like studying with others means he can’t “get” the material on his own.

Either way, by exposing your students to college-level expectations and study norms in middle and high school, you can help students like Mario develop the contextual knowledge to maximize their experience, ask for the help they need, and feel like they truly belong. After all, as first generation students, they had to work even harder than most to get to college—and they should know that kind of perseverance counts for a lot once they’re there!