

The Network
for College Success

Freshman On-Track Toolkit

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Table of Contents

About the Network for College Success	1
NCS Core Values and Beliefs	2
About the Toolkit	3
Toolkit Organization	4
Acknowledgements	5
A Note about Creative Commons	6
Getting Started: The NCS Freshman Success Framework	7
Freshman Success Framework: Conceptual View	8
Freshman Success Framework	9



UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH & APPLYING DATA 10

TOOL SET A: Calculating Freshman On-Track 11

TOOL SET B: Building Relationships to Support the Transition to High School 35

TOOL SET C: Developing and Tracking Interventions 43

TOOL SET D: Communicating On-Track Research to Staff, Students, and Families 62

TOOL SET E: Ongoing Research from the UChicago Consortium 87

Continued on Next Page

Table of Contents



PREPARING TO LEAD 102

TOOL SET A: Planning for Your Success Team 103

TOOL SET B: Strengthening Success Team Lead Capacity 111

TOOL SET C: Planning for a Success Team Meeting 173



SETTING CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS 179

TOOL SET A: Building Community 180

TOOL SET B: Strengthening Success Team Purpose 191



IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS 199

**TOOL SET A: Facilitating Effective Adult
Collaboration and Conversation 200**

TOOL SET B: Facilitating Data-Driven Conversations 216

**TOOL SET C: Engaging Students in On-Track
Conversations 226**

TOOL SET D: Assessing Success Team Progress 240



ABOUT THE NETWORK FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

The Network for College Success (NCS) envisions high schools that continuously cultivate collaboration, powerful learning, and a culture of high achievement to prepare all students for college and career success.

NCS uses research to design and facilitate professional learning that builds the capacity of school leaders to greatly improve student outcomes. Through cross-school learning communities and job-embedded coaching, we support district leaders, principals, teachers, and counselors to:

- Strengthen school leadership
- Improve teaching and learning
- Support freshmen transitioning into high school
- Prepare students for quality postsecondary options
- Support culture and climate
- Integrate research and data into daily practice

For more information about NCS, please go to ncs.uchicago.edu.

NCS Core Values and Beliefs

- Educators have the capacity to solve their own problems when there is actionable data, research-based strategies, collaborative teams, and professional trust.
- School-based leaders drive change in schools. Increasing their capacity as leaders is the essential lever for improvement.
- Students' intellectual capacity is not static. It grows when challenged and develops when teachers explicitly build academic mindsets and [non-cognitive skills](#).
- Schools improve when educators make their practice public and critically examine their work collaboratively. Trust is essential to people's willingness to engage in this process.
- Data analysis is a powerful tool for school improvement when used to trace causes, seek solutions, and guide change. Data can be destructive when only used to judge and punish.
- Challenging educators to interrupt inequities in schools and districts is vital to improving schools. All students from all backgrounds deserve equitable educational outcomes.

About the Toolkit

The NCS Freshman On-Track Toolkit is a collection of protocols, reports, resources, and artifacts used by our experienced Coaches in their daily work to help schools better support students through the critical first year of high school.

[A Capacity-Building Model for School Improvement](#) paper accompanies the Toolkit, capturing the NCS model and history, and situates our work within current research. The Toolkit is organized around four key Components:



UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH
& APPLYING DATA



PREPARING
TO LEAD



SETTING CONDITIONS
FOR SUCCESS



IMPLEMENTING
SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS

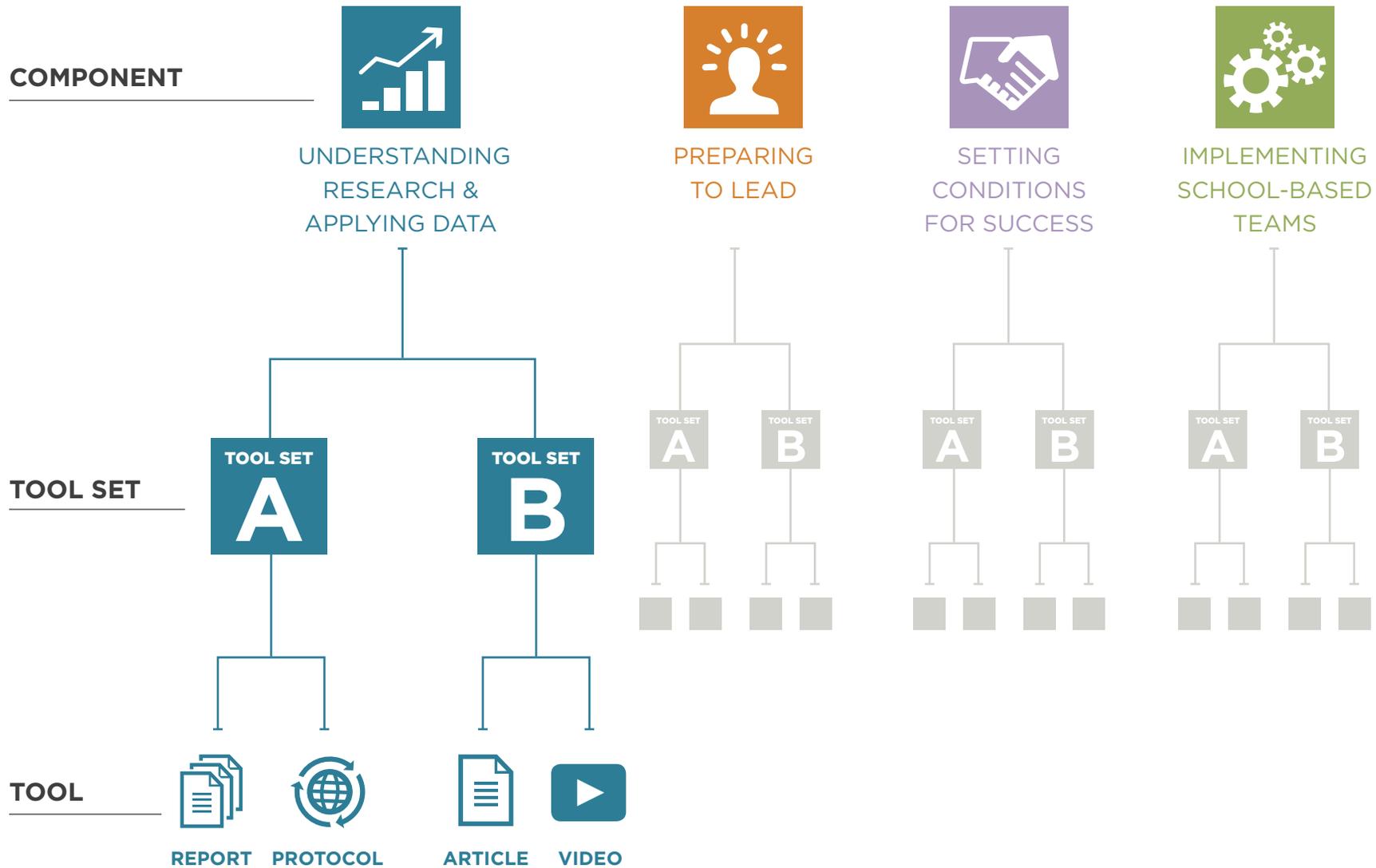
For each of the Components, you will find a collection of Tool Sets, or bundles of tools (including videos), organized to help you achieve your Freshman On-Track goals.

What is On Track?

In Chicago, a student is considered On Track if he or she has accumulated five full credits (ten semester credits) and has no more than one semester F in a core subject (English, math, science, or social science) by the end of freshman year. These represent the criteria to become a sophomore in Chicago Public Schools. Students who are On Track are far more likely to graduate from high school than their off-track peers.

On Track may be defined differently in your school or district. For more information about the origins of On Track in Chicago, please refer to the Understanding Research & Applying Data Component in this Toolkit.

Toolkit Organization



Acknowledgements

The Network for College Success would like to acknowledge the dedicated professionals at each of our partner high schools who make their practice public and share their expertise, tools, and insights. Without them, this Toolkit would not be possible.

We would like to thank the leaders at Chicago Public Schools for their collaboration, and their ongoing commitment to the Freshman On-Track work and improving students' academic attainment.

We would also like to thank our partners at the Urban Education Institute, including the UChicago Consortium for School Research, UChicago Impact, and The To&Through Project.

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their thought partnership and for providing the Network for College Success with the resources to reflect on our work with schools and produce this Toolkit and the accompanying *A Capacity-Building Model for School Improvement* paper.

A Note about Creative Commons

Many of the tools in the NCS Freshman On-Track Toolkit are original works or adaptations with the permission of the original creator. Because all of the tools have been compiled and presented here in the interest of sharing best practices, original works have been marked with a [Creative Commons](#) copyright license.



In contrast to a traditional copyright, where all rights are reserved to the creator, our purpose in using a Creative Commons license is to make it easier for others to share and use the material. We encourage you to openly use and share the original works found in this Toolkit. You may also adapt the tools marked with a Creative Commons license, provided you share those adaptations in the same open, non-commercial manner.

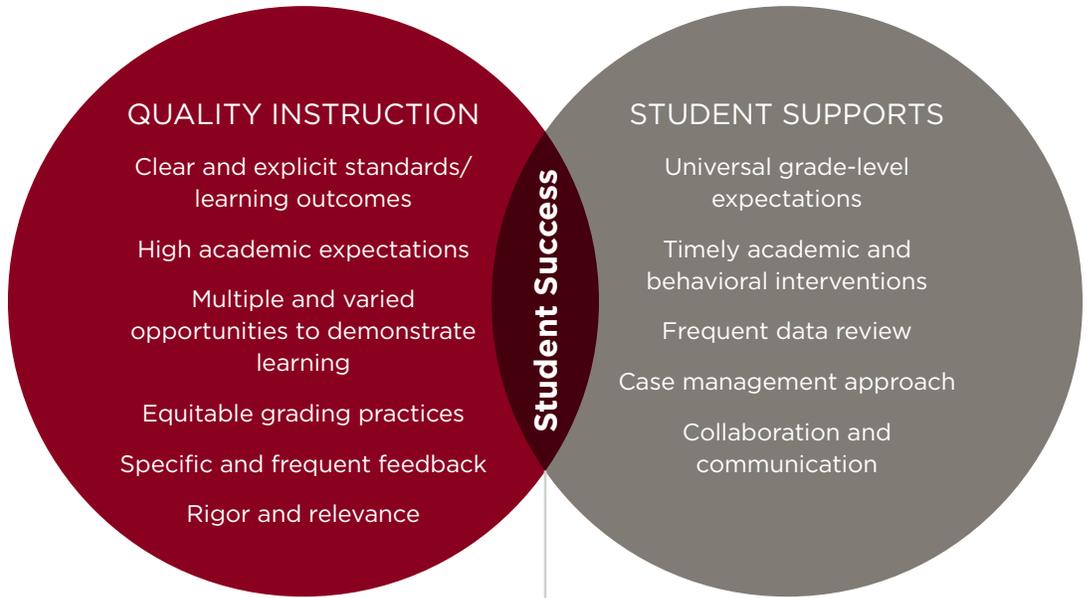
Getting Started: The NCS Freshman Success Framework

In 2009, the Network for College Success developed the Freshman Success Framework to provide our partner schools with guidance on how to establish a high-functioning system of support for students entering high school. The three dimensions of the system – the actions of the team, its leader, and the principal – are vital for helping freshmen successfully transition into high school.

First, take a look at the Conceptual View of the Freshman Success Framework on the next page. It provides a high-level overview of the content, conditions, roles, and functions of freshman success work.

Next, dig into the the actual Freshman Success Framework, which is the comprehensive roadmap for leading this work in your school. The Framework details the necessary elements to create and implement a high-functioning freshman success program. Done effectively, this will result in high freshman course performance and ultimately high graduation rates.

Freshman Success Framework: Conceptual View



Elements	Principal or Assistant Principal	Success Team Lead	Success Team
SETTING CONDITIONS	<p>Foundational Planning</p> <p>Programs, sets purpose for, and communicates expectations for Success Team work</p>	<p>Professional Development</p> <p>Acquires tools and strategies</p>	<p>Team Structure</p> <p>Protects meeting time and participation by all members</p>
IMPLEMENTATION	<p>Implementation Accountability</p> <p>Holds Success Team accountable for equitable grading practices and progress toward goals</p>	<p>Team Facilitation</p> <p>Establishes a high-functioning Success Team with clear goals and benchmarks</p>	<p>Success Team Duties</p> <p>Uses timely student data to create, implement, monitor, adjust, and evaluate supports</p>
COMMUNICATION	<p>Student-Focused Culture</p> <p>Meets regularly with Team Lead and works to communicate a culture of success</p>	<p>Communication and Advocacy</p> <p>Communicates progress and advocates for resources to support activities</p>	<p>Communicating a Culture of Success</p> <p>Establishes common and solutions-oriented language</p>
INSTRUCTION	<p>Classroom-Level Teacher Support Structures</p> <p>Communicates and supports teacher development around a clear vision for quality instruction and learning</p>	<p>Classroom-Level Teacher Collaboration</p> <p>Provides resources for problem solving and learning around grading and instructional practices</p>	<p>Classroom-Level Student Support Structures</p> <p>Utilizes equitable practices to engage students in intellectually challenging and supportive learning</p>

Freshman Success Framework



Freshman Success Team Outcomes: Ways of Being		
Goals of Success Model	Guiding Beliefs for Student Success	Resulting School Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve grade-level On-Track rates • Improve student course performance as reflected in GPA • Increase college readiness and access indicators for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and adults can learn and achieve • Relationships are essential to student success • High and future-minded expectations must be held for all students • Transition plans assist student acclimation to school culture • Opportunities for students to demonstrate success are varied and plentiful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data-informed decision making • Goals and solution-based orientation • Capacity development at all levels • Shared leadership • Accountability for results while supporting the work • Positive working relationships amongst staff, students, and families • Increased responsible behavior by students and adults

Freshman Success Team in Action: Ways of Doing			
Elements	Principal	Team Lead	Success Team
<p>Setting Conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selects, programs, sets purpose, and provides foundational knowledge on freshman success work for core set of grade-level teachers • Identifies team leadership (Team Lead, data technician, social-emotional learning specialist, etc.) and communicates expectations for their engagement with Success Team • Sets goals for On-Track and student connection with the Success Team and team leadership • Provides and protects team meeting calendar, with regular and sufficient time for 1) data analysis and 2) intervention development, monitoring, and adjustment • Provides time for General Education and Special Education teachers, counselor(s), data technician, student advocate or dean, and/or administration to attend regularly scheduled meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquires foundational knowledge on the importance of freshman course performance as well as tools and strategies to lead the Success Team • With principal and data technician, establishes Success Team meeting calendar that includes regular and sufficient time for 1) data analysis and 2) intervention development, monitoring, and adjustment • With principal and Success Team, sets freshman success goals for On-Track and student connection, and develops benchmarks to monitor progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops effective meeting strategies, such as establishing a mission statement and clear purpose, building norms and action-oriented agendas, and data-driven decisions • Shares Success Team roles and responsibilities conducive to freshman success work • With principal and Team Lead, establishes foundational knowledge, sets purpose, and creates freshman success goals for On-Track and student connection • Engages in regular, calendared Success Team meetings to 1) analyze data; 2) develop, monitor, and adjust interventions; and 3) discuss and implement instructional strategies that promote student success • Includes General Education and Special Education teachers, counselor(s), data technician, student advocate or dean, and/or administration
<p>Implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides timely access to freshman success-related data, such as point-in-time On-Track data • Provides professional development and training opportunities on the transition to high school, data strategy, and social-emotional learning • Reviews and interrogates interim freshman success-related data in light of Success Team goals, and strategizes with team leadership around next steps • Holds teachers accountable for implementing equitable grading practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops action-oriented meeting agendas that consistently address freshman success goals generally and intervention development, tracking, and evaluation specifically • Establishes team meeting conditions conducive to the successful execution of Success Team duties • Works with data technician to bring actionable student-level data at regular intervals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews incoming class performance data to develop early and targeted supports for students • Develops, implements, tracks, and evaluates Tier 2 interventions, making adjustments when appropriate • Based on available data, refers students to appropriate level of intervention • Reviews actionable student-level data (Tiers 1-3) in order to provide appropriate support
<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides space for freshman success-related communication on a regular basis • Explicitly supports Success Team efforts to communicate a culture of success for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly communicates strategies and progress toward freshman success goals to Success Team, administration, parents, and students • Advocates for resources to support freshman success efforts • Coordinates freshman success assemblies, parent nights, and celebrations toward On-Track and student connection goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains strengths-based and action-oriented communication to support students • Conducts joint parent/student conferences • Celebrates student and adult successes around On-Track and student connection goals • Engages faculty in frequent communication on student progress and successful strategies
<p>Instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates a clear vision for instruction • Supports teacher development through proactive observation and constructive feedback around instructional practice • Provides learning opportunities on classroom practices that support students' successful transition to high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks out instructional and intervention resources, readings, and tools to improve teacher and Success Team practice • Designs and facilitates data-driven discussion, problem solving, and sharing around grading and instructional strategies for the Success Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using data and research, creates implements, and evaluates instructional strategies around student engagement • Provides multiple and varied opportunities for students to exhibit mastery or be assessed • Utilizes transparent and equitable grading practices that communicate grade-level expectations and student achievement