

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.

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 To&Through Project

The To&Through Project is a partnership between the University of Chicago’s Urban Education Institute and the Network for College Success. The Project’s mission is to move more students to and through high school and college with a combination of research, data, and professional learning:

- **Research** illuminating what matters most for students’ high school and college success
- **Data** guiding efforts to improve students’ attainment of key milestones
- **Professional Learning** translating research and data into improved practice

In collaboration with educators, communities, and policymakers, the Project aims to significantly increase the percentage of freshmen who go on to earn a college degree and to share the learning from Chicago with education stakeholders across the country.

A college education has grown more critical to success in the workforce. Of the 11.6 million jobs that have been added in the post-Great Recession economy, 99 percent have gone to workers with at least some college education. Research also shows that people who finish college tend to be healthier, wealthier, and happier—they earn at least 51 percent more and live an average of seven years longer; they are also less likely to get involved in crime and more likely to volunteer and vote.

Still, a sizable gap between students’ college aspirations and attainment remains. Currently, 71 percent of freshmen in Chicago Public Schools aspire to earn a bachelor’s degree, yet projections show only 18 percent of them will go on to earn a four-year degree by their mid-20s. Nationally, the vast majority of high school students aspire to earn a bachelor’s degree, yet less than one in three succeed. To help close this gap in Chicago and nationwide, the To&Through Project is committed to supporting education stakeholders in their efforts to move more students to and through high school and college with a combination of research, data, and professional learning.

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The To&Through Communications Toolkit

The To&Through Communications Toolkit is a collection of briefs, posters, student videos, lesson plans, and other resources created to support school leaders in their efforts to share the research that matters most for high school and college success. The Toolkit was developed with input from high school principals across Chicago and the resources are designed to heighten awareness of and spark meaningful dialogue among school leaders and families about what fosters high school and college attainment. The To&Through Communications Toolkit provides messaging resources that can be used to complement or supplement the NCS Postsecondary Success Toolkit resources.

To learn more about the To&Through Project, including the Communications Toolkit, go to toandthrough.uchicago.edu.

About the Toolkit

The NCS Postsecondary Success 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 to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college. The Toolkit is organized into four Components, each with their own collection of Tool Sets (or bundles of tools), organized to help you achieve your school or district's postsecondary goals.



Understanding Research & Applying Data



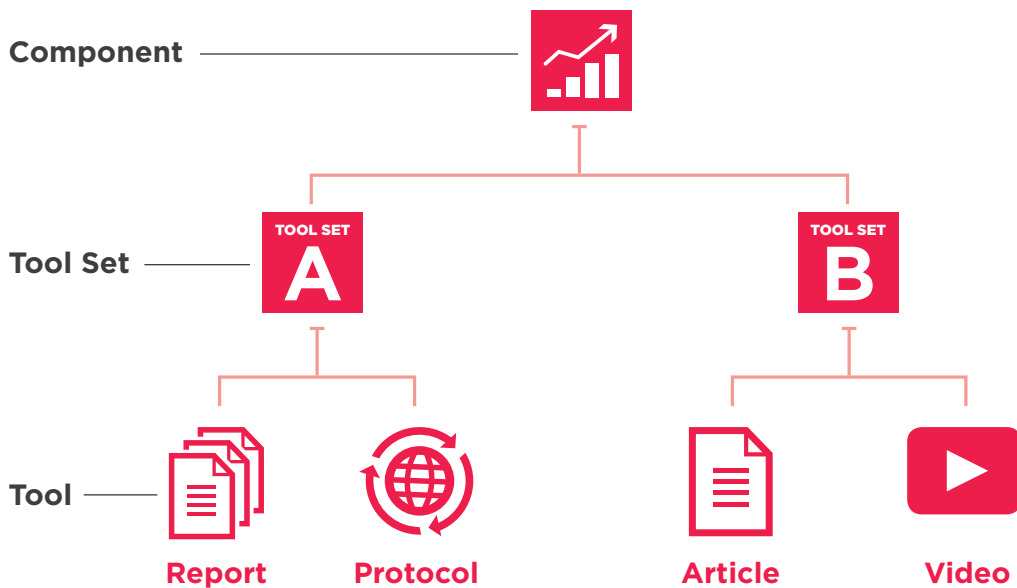
Developing Postsecondary Leaders



Building School Teams



Engaging Students & Families



Acknowledgements

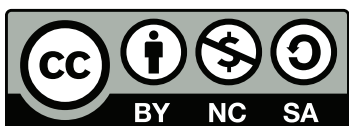
The Network for College Success and the To&Through Project would like to acknowledge the dedicated professionals at each of our partner high schools who make their practice public and share their expertise, tools, and insights. Without them, this Toolkit would not be possible.

We would like to thank the leaders at Chicago Public Schools for their collaboration, and their ongoing commitment to improving students' academic attainment and postsecondary success.

We would also like to thank our partners at the Urban Education Institute, including the UChicago Consortium on School Research. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation for their thought partnership and for providing us with the resources to produce the Postsecondary Success Toolkit.

A Note about Creative Commons

Many of the tools in the NCS Postsecondary Success 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 Approach to Postsecondary Success

Our Beginning

In 2009, the Network for College Success developed an approach to postsecondary success grounded in the landmark *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College* report coming out of the UChicago Consortium on School Research. The report provided our experienced Coaches and partner schools with the key indicators critical to college enrollment and success, including:

- Successfully navigating the complex application process;
- The concept of *match* (ensuring students apply to colleges based on their academic qualifications);
- Increased knowledge on the financial aid application process and award letters; and
- The role of social capital as *networks of support* for students in schools.

The notion of *networks of support* in schools to increase college enrollment and success challenges educators to reflect on and adjust how they supported students' postsecondary plans. *Potholes* confirmed that educators, not just family members, have a large influence on when and how students apply to and enroll in college. This pushed the Network for College Success and our partner schools to engage in a deeper conversation on the systems and structures needed in high schools to better serve students. While families play a critical role in supporting their children's aspirations, educators should provide the technical knowledge to help students throughout the postsecondary process. This is especially true for first-generation students.

The Network for College Success organized cross-school professional learning communities as well as provided on-site coaching to Counselors and other educators to help them think creatively about how to translate this research into practice in their school buildings. Early on, it became clear that administrators—not just Counselors and College & Career Coaches—were necessary to create schoolwide postsecondary initiatives. In addition, teachers' actions, beliefs, and participation in these initiatives mattered a great deal. Finally, schools needed strong data systems, such as Naviance, to set clear goals and objectives. The Network for College Success Postsecondary Coaches helped schools develop strong postsecondary teams to organize around this work—all in an effort to create schoolwide college-going cultures that greatly impact student outcomes.

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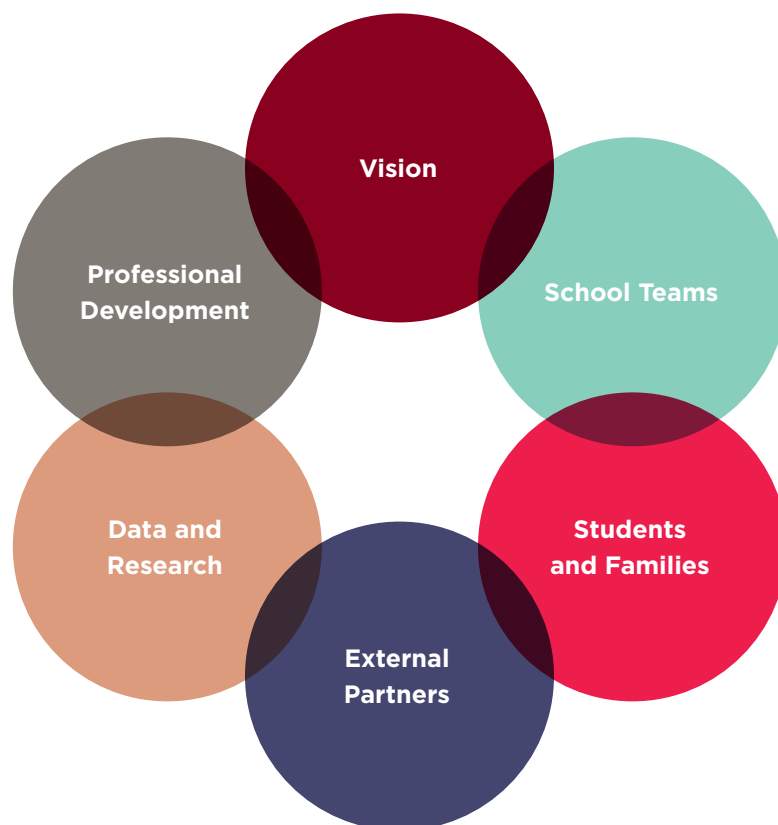
Today

The Network for College Success currently designs and facilitates year-round professional learning for over 60 Counselors, College & Career Coaches, and other educators focused on postsecondary success. We partner with 15 to 20 schools each year and provide quarterly trainings to all non-charter high schools in Chicago. We continue to focus on the key indicators for success stemming from the *Potholes* report and subsequent UChicago Consortium research.

In addition, the Network for College Success is now exploring the latest research on adolescent development and integrated identity to support students' college aspirations. School systems and structures alone cannot sustain successful college-going cultures or improved student outcomes. Students need to make meaning of their experiences—whether it is developing the capacity to bounce back from challenging incidents or recognizing and celebrating successes—in order to see themselves as achievers and college-goers.

The resources in this Toolkit have been key to our work with educators and schools in Chicago. In fact, many tools were developed with and by our partner schools as they explored different ways to provide effective student supports. We hope they will further your thinking and planning as you develop a comprehensive postsecondary initiative in your school or district.

An Overview: Effective School Systems and Structures to Support a College-Going Culture and Student Success



Vision

Create schoolwide conditions that support student-centered postsecondary efforts that are espoused by the Principal (administration) and implemented by staff.

School Teams

Teams are organized to implement programming that supports a college-going culture, equitable outcomes, and student success. Clear and consistent messaging is conveyed school wide.

- Postsecondary Leadership Teams (including College & Career Coaches)
- Counseling Departments
- Grade-level Teams and Teacher Content Teams

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Students and Families

- Students and families learn about the technical aspects of applying to, enrolling in, and transitioning to college. This includes support on college choice, various postsecondary options, the FAFSA, award letters, and the different types of financial aid.
- Students have multiple opportunities to reflect on their future and engage in meaningful experiences regarding their postsecondary choices.
- Families feel welcome and supported to engage in conversations that foster their children's success.

External Partners

External partners are supportive of a school's vision and are mutually accountable for postsecondary success efforts.

Data and Research

School teams consistently review data that impacts postsecondary efforts and outcomes, using tools such as Naviance. Data and research inform postsecondary planning as well as universal and targeted student supports.

Professional Development

Counselors, College & Career Coaches, and other educators are exposed to the most relevant thinking, tools, and research on college access and success. Counseling Departments and Postsecondary Leadership Teams support schoolwide engagement and learning.