



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Increasing Postsecondary Access: Key Recommendations from the IES Practice Guide

William G. Tierney, Ph.D. • February 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College

Highlights

- Chair of the IES Practice Guide, Helping Students Navigate the Path to College, Dr. William G. Tierney describes the rationale for the guide and the need to increase postsecondary access
- Dr. Tierney gives an overview of four recommended practices: Prepare Students Academically, Assess and Intervene, Foster College Aspirations, Assist with College Entry
- Several concrete examples of how to implement these practices are offered

About the Interviewee

William G. Tierney is University Professor and Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education and director of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California (USC). Former president of the USC Academic Senate, he chaired the Ph.D. program for the USC Rossier School of Education and chaired the University Committee on Academic Review. Having spent over two decades conducting research on college access for underrepresented youth, Dr. Tierney is committed to informing policies

and practices related to educational equity. He is currently involved in a project to develop, evaluate, and disseminate a highly interactive, entertaining, web-enhanced computer game for low-income youth that will boost high school students' college aspirations and equip players with knowledge about preparing for and succeeding in college. He is also involved in projects pertaining to the problems of remediation to ensure that high school students are college-ready, and a project investigating how to improve strategic decision making in higher education.

Full Transcript

My name is William Tierney. I am University Professor and director of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California.

The IES Practice Guide for increasing access to college is important for two reasons. One is simple fairness, equal opportunity. When I went to college, I never decided that I was going to college; it was just a given. Everyone in my high school went to college. We all didn't talk about where we were going to college; we talked about where we were going to college. I want that opportunity for every first-generation, low-income person in America.

The second point has to do with the opportunity for the country. We know that for the United States to remain economically competitive, we need more individuals with certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees. Over the course of a lifetime, an individual will earn a substantial amount more money if he or she has a bachelor's degree than simply a high school degree.

We are recommending that every high school provide college-level curricula so that when students graduate from high school, they have had the opportunity to take classes that prepare them for college.

So the first point is that every school provides students as soon as they walk into high school with a template for courses that they need to take that will prepare them for college. Another recommendation has to do with assessment, and there are two parts to this. One part is that we need students to be assessed continually throughout their high school career. We need to know if they are on track to do college-level work when they graduate from high school.

If I simply give you a test and I find out that you are not performing adequately, but I don't do anything and I don't tell you or I don't tell your family, then the test is for naught; it's a waste of time. So what we are recommending is a linkage between assessment and action—whenever there is a deficiency, improve it.

One of the challenges in low-income schools today is that college counseling is few and far between. There may be one counselor for 800 students. The opportunity for students to talk about college with an adult is few and far between. Again, think of this: They have parents who may never have set foot in a college, much less have gotten a college degree. They may know no one in their community who has gone to college.

So the potential of creating a mentoring program that enables students to focus specifically on college has multiple payoffs and benefits.

The next point has to deal with enabling students to figure out how to complete the path to college. This is particularly important in eleventh and twelfth grade. Many students who are going to go to a four-year institution need to take an exam like the SAT and the ACT.

We know that an awful lot of students are eligible for financial aid, but they don't access it. Why is that? The answer is because they don't know how to access it. Students that I work with don't think in terms of *grants* and *loans*. Those are adult terms. What they think of is *free money*, and that's the way we need to talk to students: "Look, you need to fill in this form and you need to fill it in by March 1st because if you do, you will get free money."

So those are the kinds of issues that we need to deal with when we think of involving students with adults and peers and also walking students through systematically from ninth grade through graduation, but really starting in eleventh grade in terms of applying and where do I want to go to college, what kind of college do I want to go to.

Perhaps the most important point is to recognize that a school is not an island. Schools have to be working in concert with middle schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions as well as community-based agencies.

We also know that one of the most significant aspects of dropping out happens between eighth and ninth grade. That's because students arrive in the ninth grade and realize that they are not academically prepared and that it's much harder than junior high school. If we create closer relationships between junior high and high school, we will have a more synthetic transition that will enable students to be better prepared. Really what we are asking for is relationships across organizations and to help high schools recognize that they are not on their own.