

# Collaborative Curriculum Alignment

## Webinar Handout 3—Interim Reading Assignment

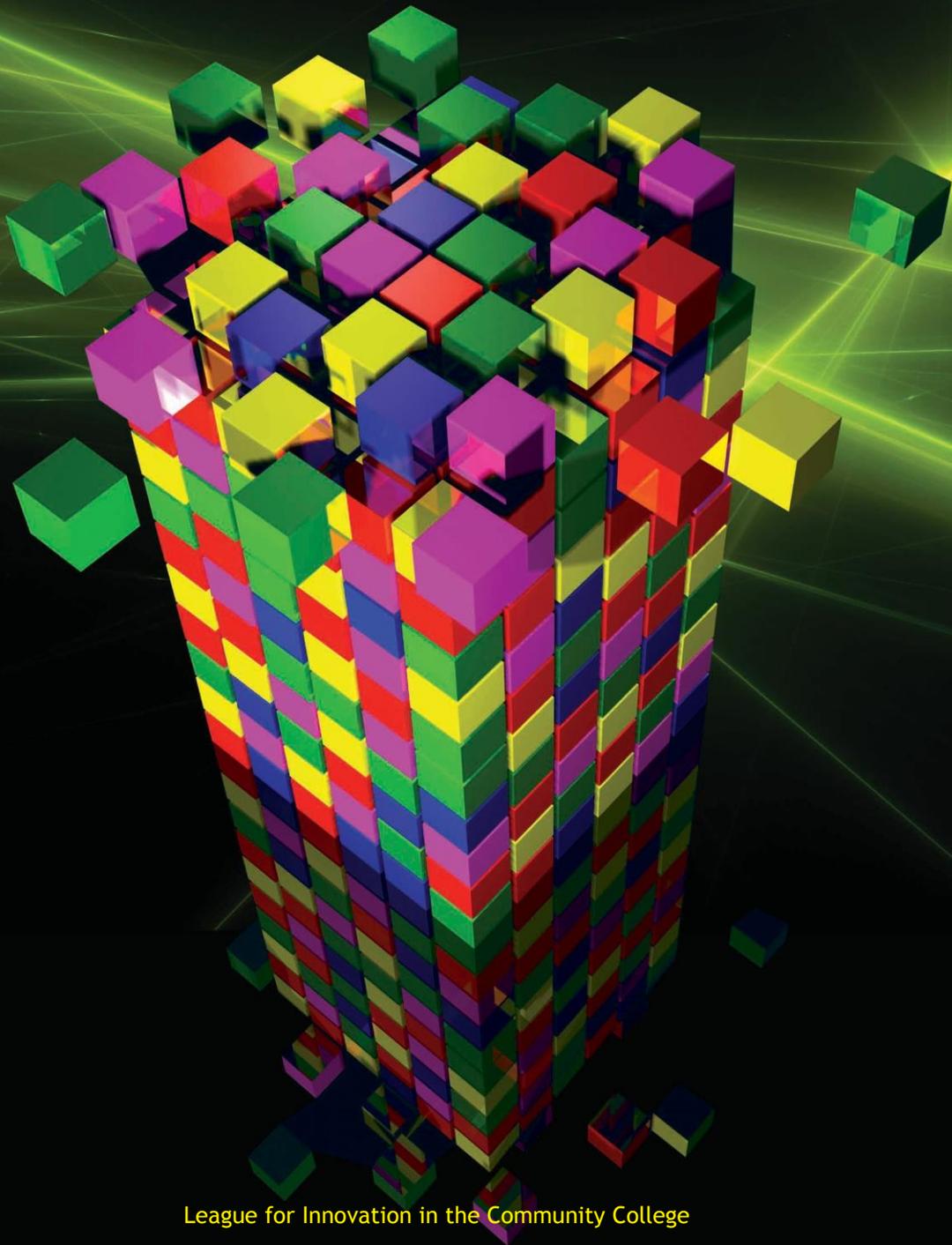
Regional training provided by the  
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# Significant Discussions

A Guide for Secondary and Postsecondary Curriculum Alignment



League for Innovation in the Community College

with support from  
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# INTRODUCTION

More than ever before, in today's competitive global economy, a well-educated population is critical to the economic vitality and stability of a nation. We depend on our education systems to efficiently move learners through compulsory school levels and prepare them to succeed in postsecondary education and careers. Educational attainment is critical to our standing in the world—so much so that President Obama established the American Graduation Initiative. This initiative calls for a 50% increase in student completion rates at community colleges over the next decade, a completion agenda that takes on significant importance for this country. When looking at the movement of students from high school to postsecondary education and on to careers, we appear to have a leaky pipeline. A high percentage of students are not completing and moving to the next level. Consider these facts compiled by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems ([www.NCHEMS.org](http://www.NCHEMS.org)):

- 19.7% of ninth graders will graduate from high school on time, go directly to college, return for their second year of college, and graduate within 150% of program time (3 years from a 2-year college; 6 years from a 4-year college);
- For every 100 ninth graders, 68.6% will graduate from high school on time (4 years).
- For those who go to 2-year colleges, 53.5% will return for their sophomore year.
- For those who go to 4-year colleges, 75% will return for their sophomore year.
- Of those who go to a 2-year college, 29.1% will graduate after 3 years (150% of program time).
- Of those who go to a 4-year college, 56.4% will graduate after 6 years (150% of program time).

(Sources: National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] Common Core Data; Integrated Postsecondary Education System [IPEDS] Residency and Migration, Fall, Enrollment, and Graduation Rate Surveys; retrieved from [www.higheredinfo.org](http://www.higheredinfo.org).)

Comparing these 2006 data to 2003 data, no significant progress has been made in the completion rates. Furthermore, comparing our educational attainment

levels with those of other developed countries tells us that we have a lot of hard work to do to make the changes necessary to improve these conditions and begin to achieve the completion goals in the American Graduation Initiative. Making the necessary changes will take time and money. Clearly, there is no quick fix that will meaningfully increase educational completion levels, but, just as clearly, this is a challenge that must be met. The components of this guide are designed to help meet that challenge. Combined with substantially improved career counseling, advising, and coaching, and with a commitment among systems of education to work together more effectively, we can help develop smooth transitions for students and improve our completion rates. Students must understand the relevance of the curriculum—“Why do I need to know this stuff?”—and they want and deserve help with a plan that takes them through high school to postsecondary education and into the workforce.

A major reason for the low completion rate is that the majority of students are not ready to succeed at the next educational level. Many recent high school graduates find themselves inadequately prepared to be successful in higher education, and require enrollment in remedial or developmental education classes immediately upon entering college. Nearly half of all college students take at least one remedial course. In *Paying Double: Inadequate High Schools and Community College Remediation*, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2006) estimates the annual cost to provide remedial education for community college students who have recently completed high school is \$1.4 billion. When the system struggles to achieve the intended outcome of seamlessly educating the population, we are compelled to search for solutions.

The Significant Discussions project was designed to develop a guide to facilitate discussions between secondary and postsecondary faculty and administrators, and business, industry, and community partners. The Significant Discussions guide will assist partnerships in their collaborative work to better align the curriculum across institutions and educational levels. The guide is based on effective practices in place at nine participating sites and promising practices identified through research.



*Methodology.* The Significant Discussions guide is the product of an action research project involving educators and business partners across the country (see pages 54-57). With support from MetLife Foundation, the project facilitated the establishment of discussion groups at nine community colleges. The community college partnerships included each college's secondary, university, business, and community partners. In addition, a national review panel of six individuals with expertise at various levels of education provided assistance on selection of the nine college partnerships, and reviewed the guide twice during the iterative process used in its development.

## Nearly half of all college students take at least one remedial course.



The 15 community college-site partnerships that participated in the College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI) were eligible to apply to become the nine college participants in the Significant Discussions project. Fourteen of the 15 site partnerships submitted proposals and, after review of applications and submission of recommendations from the national panel, nine were selected to participate.

The initial draft document for the discussion guide was created using relevant research literature. This initial draft (Draft 1) was prepared by the principal investigator and project assistant. The document evolved through an iterative process, including eight review stages and subsequent revisions as a result of input from those reviews.

The nine community college partnerships were comprised of educators at various levels and business and community representatives (see pages 54-57). Partners reviewed the guide in preparation for partnership discussions. The principal investigator attended all nine discussions.

For the purposes of review and revision of Draft 1, the nine community college partnerships were divided into three groups of three. Input from partnership discussions at the first three college sites was used to develop Draft 2 of the guide. Draft 2 was shared with the second group of three college sites. The process was repeated, resulting in Draft 3 and then Draft 4 of the document.

Data from the college partnership participants and national review panel members were gathered using an instrument that asked respondents to rank their level of agreement (strongly agree to strongly disagree) on six questions related to the various sections of the guide. In addition, general comments were solicited.

Following the formative reviews by the college sites, the national review panel members provided their initial formative review of Draft 4. The national review panel used the same review instrument as the college partners, and provided input and recommendations for revision.

Draft 5 was developed using input from the national review panel and was submitted to the project staff in the League for Innovation in the Community College for comment. Draft 6 was developed based on input from the project liaison and then distributed to the national review panel for their summative review.

Draft 7 was created using the national review panel input and was again submitted to the nine college partnerships for their review. The college project leaders forwarded the summative review input to the project staff and project liaison, who completed and edited Draft 8. The final document was completed in September 2010.

# THE SIGNIFICANT DISCUSSIONS GUIDE

The Significant Discussions guide is organized into five sections, each presenting a phase in the process leading to systemic solutions that improve student transitions and college and career success.

## Getting Started

The “Getting Started” section is designed to assist in identifying the right people to participate in a collaborative partnership. During this initial phase, “Why Significant Discussions?” (pages 7-13) serves as common reading and provides a relevant research base to inform all partners about the existing conditions that negatively impact student transitions. “Why Significant Discussions?” is intended to help garner support from diverse members of the partnership and establish a foundation for the efforts ahead. A glossary of terms is included on pages 52-53 to clarify words and phrases that, in the context of this work, may be unfamiliar to some partners.

## Gap Analysis

During the “gap analysis, partners review the relevant essential and/or career cluster knowledge and skill statements. Secondary and postsecondary faculty review the curriculum to identify when and where the knowledge, skill, or standard is delivered. The gap analysis helps to uncover whether, and which, critical elements are missing in the curriculum. Gap analysis tools are included in Appendix A.

## Curriculum Alignment

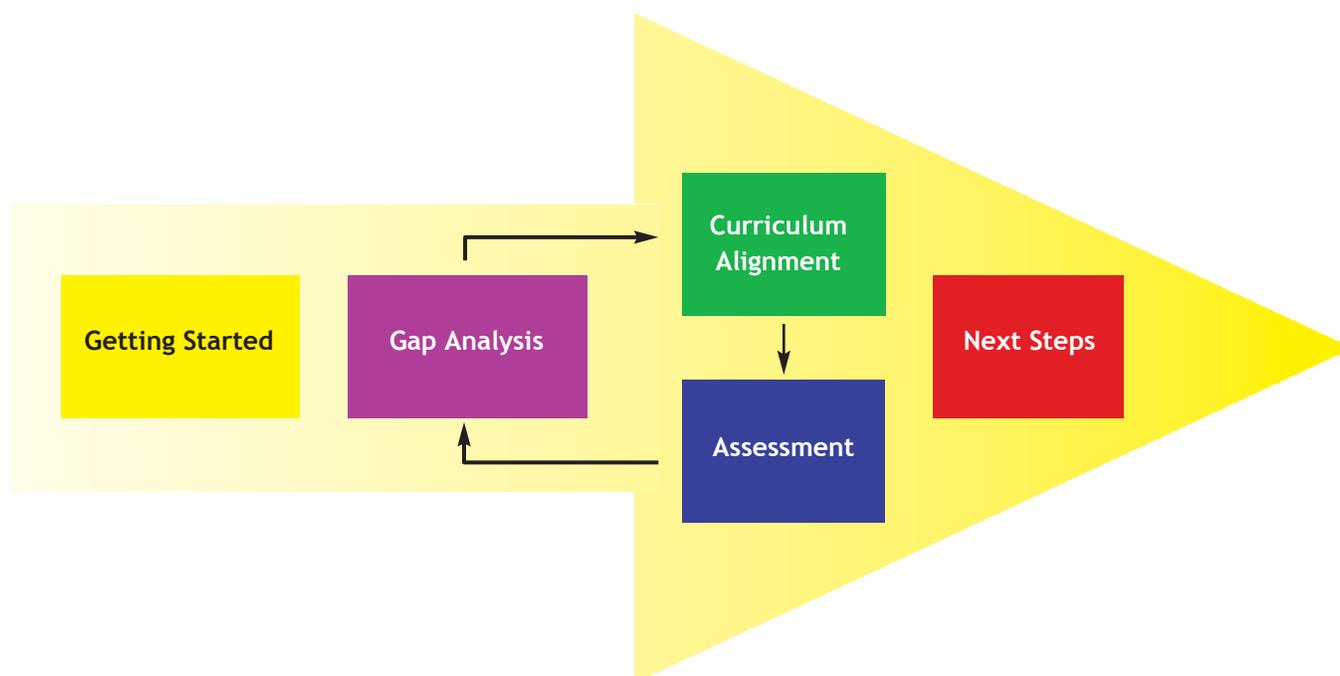
In the curriculum alignment phase, secondary and postsecondary faculty use the results of the gap analysis as they revise the curriculum. Special attention is given to closing gaps and filling in any missing knowledge, skills, or standards. Where overlaps or duplications occur, depth of knowledge should become more complex, requiring a higher order of thinking. Curriculum alignment tools are included in Appendix B.

## Assessment

The fourth section, “Assessment,” offers several strategies to determine whether curriculum alignment changes have produced the intended results. The gap analysis, curriculum alignment, and assessment phases form an ongoing continuous improvement cycle as indicated by the Significant Discussions diagram below. Assessment results inform subsequent gap analyses, which in turn guide future curriculum alignment work. The cycle repeats regularly to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, current, and effective.

## Next Steps

The “Next Steps” section provides recommendations at a system level and offers action steps that each institution and individual stakeholder can take, even as systemic changes evolve.



# WHY SIGNIFICANT DISCUSSIONS?

According to Kati Haycock (2009, paragraph 9), president of the Education Trust, "Back in the 1990s, it started being clear to us that a whole lot of kids who were following all the rules and doing fine on exams in high school were entering college and finding themselves having to take remedial courses and learning things they should have learned in high school." In the Achieve, Inc., report, *Out of Many, One: Toward Rigorous Common Core Standards*, Kramen and Eresh report a similar experience: "Too many students across the country meet K-12 state standards, pass state tests, and complete state-required courses only to be placed into remedial courses once they enroll in college or to find they are unqualified for training programs and skilled employment in the modern workplace" (Achieve, Inc., 2008a, p. 1). Why does this happen? How can there be such a misalignment between what students learn in high school and what they are expected to know and be able to do once they get to college? What steps can be taken to improve this situation?

This tragic waste of human resources will not only condemn millions of adults in the next generation to unfulfilling lives marked by low-wage jobs and unrealized potential, it will threaten the economic security and social stability of our states and nation.

Gene Bottoms and Marna Young  
*Lost in Transition*  
Southern Regional Education Board  
High Schools That Work



## K-12 School Systems

School systems generally spiral the curriculum vertically from kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12). Children learn foundational knowledge in elementary school and build upon that foundation through middle and high school. Ideally, the knowledge and skill base of every student approaching graduation from high school will adequately support that young person's future educational and career goals, whether he or she intends to go directly into the workforce or

continue his or her education. Organizations such as the National Governors Association and initiatives such as the American Diploma Project claim that the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in college or the workplace are nearly identical. In *Claiming Common Ground*, the authors note that "many of the efforts to improve secondary schools have targeted student readiness for both college and work as a single key objective: the skills and knowledge required for middle-income jobs closely mirror those required for college success" (Callan et al., 2006, p. 1).

One might conclude that such a shared vision of college and career readiness would simplify the work of K-12 schools. Yet the Education Trust's "Ticket to Nowhere" (1999) notes,

Colleges don't agree among themselves about the exact nature of needed knowledge and skills, and consequently, where high school ends and 'college level' work actually begins. The business community is not better. Business Roundtable and National Alliance of Business may urge schools to focus on high-level reading, writing, mathematics, and analytic skills. But members of the local Chamber are as likely to stress the importance of things like punctuality, courtesy, teamwork, and basic reading and math skills (p. 4).

As much as K-12 schools may want to focus their attention and resources on attempting to clarify college and career readiness standards and align instruction accordingly, they are instead held accountable for achieving standards defined by their respective state departments of education. High-stakes exams measure how well students and schools meet those established state standards, and although students are required to pass the designated exam to receive a high school diploma, the standards on these exams often are calibrated at about a 10-grade level.

*A Confounding Disconnect*. Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2004, p. 2) describe the perplexing relationship between high school and college: "The coursework between high school and college is not connected. Students graduate from high school under one set of standards and, three months later, are required to meet a different set of standards to enroll in college."

This sends a confusing message to high school students and their parents, who believe that passing an exit exam signals a successful conclusion to the high school experience and implies college readiness. Sadly, more confusion may await them as they transition to college.

### College Transition

Community colleges are generally publicly funded, open-admission institutions that offer associate and certificate degrees as well as professional and technical certifications. The phrases “open admission” and “open access” are common in the community college lexicon, but can be perplexing for those unfamiliar with the true meaning. Although some community college degree programs are selective, compared with colleges or universities with challenging admission standards or competitive selection criteria, open access implies that anyone may attend. Bottoms and Young (2008, p. 14) explain, though, that “open admission does not always mean admission to credit-bearing courses leading to a degree. For many students, it means taking remedial or developmental courses to become college-ready and acquire skills that should have been developed in high school.” Callan et al. (2006, p. 5) further explain that “since these broad-access institutions do not have stringent admission requirements, many high school students assume that they do not need rigorous academic preparation to attend a community college. They do not understand that community colleges have academic standards for taking college-level courses and completing a certificate or degree program.”

Of course, the need for remediation for returning adult learners will continue because some individuals may need to refresh knowledge and skills they have not used regularly since leaving formal education systems. For the purposes of this guide, however, the primary concern is the need for remediation among recent high school graduates.

*The Impact of Placement.* After applying for admission to a community college or university, students take a placement exam that usually measures reading comprehension, writing, and math skills. The results of the exam help determine whether students are academically prepared to handle the rigor of college-level courses. If a student’s placement score falls below a cutoff point established by the college, the student is advised or required to take one or more remedial courses before enrolling in college-level classes. Unlike college-level courses, remedial courses do not typically earn required credits for certification or graduation. In addition, tuition for remedial classes is usually equal to tuition costs for courses that apply toward certificate or graduation requirements. Participation in remedial courses adds cost, potentially escalates student loan debt, increases time to completion, and can have a demoralizing impact on student confidence and motivation.

The cost of remedial education is staggering. In *Diploma to Nowhere* (Strong American Schools, 2008), the authors estimate that entering college freshmen and their families pay \$708 to \$886 million in remedial education tuition and fees. Table 1 includes data for all entering college freshmen at public 2- and 4-year institutions.

**Table 1. Scope and Cost of Remedial Education for All Entering College Freshmen**

	Number of Students in Remediation	Tuition and Fees	Subsidies*	Cost of Remediation (assuming two remedial courses)
Public 2-year	995,077	\$513-\$642 million	\$1.37-\$1.71 billion	\$1.88-\$2.35 billion
Public 4-year	310,403	\$195-\$244 million	\$239-\$299 million	\$435-\$543 million
Total	1,305,480	\$708-\$886 million	\$1.61-\$2.01 billion	\$2.31-\$2.89 billion

\*Subsidies include revenue from state appropriations as well as revenues from other sources, including private gifts and investment returns. Compiled from information in Strong American Schools, *Diploma to Nowhere* (2008).



These figures represent the cost to all entering college freshmen, some of whom may not be recent high school graduates. Consequently, Table 1 calculations are higher than the *Paying Double* figures cited in the Introduction of this guide, which represent remediation costs for recent high school graduates attending community college.

In *Paying Double: Inadequate High Schools and Community College Remediation*, the authors explain that

In addition to the expense students and families bear, taxpayers cover the direct and indirect instructional costs of remedial courses through the subsidies community colleges receive from state and local government. These tax dollars are above and beyond the taxes allocated to support local secondary schools. Thus, taxpayers are essentially paying twice for the coursework and skill development students are expected to receive in high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006, p. 3).

Students who stop out or drop out of college often have student loans to repay. Meanwhile, these individuals still do not have a degree or certificate of value that qualifies them for more and better jobs that pay a family-supporting wage. At best, participation in remedial courses increases time to completion (see Table 2). The Strong American Schools (2008, p. 12) report, *Diploma to Nowhere*, notes that “Even more worrisome, though, is that students who participate in remedial education are much more likely to drop out before completing a degree.”

**Table 2. Degrees of Remediation**

Students who require:	Graduate within 8 years
No remedial courses	57%
One or two remedial courses	29%
Four remedial courses	19%

Compiled from information in Strong American Schools, *Diploma to Nowhere* (2008).

## Collaborative Partnerships

A major national project, the College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI), demonstrated how significant discussions among strong collaborative partnerships can help to smooth student transitions and help more learners achieve their education and career goals. Participating colleges found that discussions among schools, colleges, and business partners can help improve these conditions and strengthen linkages that align standards for high school graduation, college admission, and enrollment in credit-bearing courses.

As Bottoms and Young (2008, p. IV) assert, “Many collaborative partnerships between high schools and colleges are voluntary and efforts are often episodic and dependent on local personalities rather than on a uniform set of state policies.” Colleges, universities, and business and community organizations should, but often do not, partner to engage in reform efforts that align high school and college standards and curriculum to accurately reflect what students need to know and be able to do in college. There are few vehicles in place to encourage the two systems of education to communicate with each other, much less to collaborate to improve student achievement across institutions. Callan et al. (2006, p. 2) charge that “No one is held responsible for the students who drop between the cracks of the two systems.”

This kind of accountability is difficult to achieve. As Callan et al. (2006, p. 2) explain, “Currently, the K-12 standards movement and efforts to improve access and success in higher education are not connected.” Bottoms and Young (2008, p. 15) further explain:

In most state accountability systems, reducing the remediation rate is not a performance factor for either high schools or two-year colleges; thus, it is not often a priority for either. Most states lack a comprehensive state policy that fosters partnerships between community colleges, state departments of education, and local school districts to implement a systematic approach to reduce remediation among recent high school graduates.

In “Ticket to Nowhere” (1999), the Education Trust proposes thinking of standards in a K-16 way as a critically important foundation for reform work. The authors of *Paying Double* (Alliance for Excellent Education, p. 4) advise that “Content and coursework across the systems should align with the skills and knowledge students need in today’s increasingly competitive and demanding world.”

In *Raising Our Sights: No High School Senior Left Behind* (Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, 2001), the authors propose:

What is required is the building of new bridges between K-12 and postsecondary education, bridges that are broad, substantial, and frequently used, with traffic running both ways. It is time to move beyond separate systems, in which curriculum and assessment systems in K-12 and postsecondary education bear little relationship to each other, to a more seamless system in which standards, curriculum, and assessment efforts between the two systems are aligned and integrated. In truth, what is required is a new commitment to a single system of ‘P-16’ education, in which the sights of everyone at every level of the system are raised to take into account new requirements, challenges, and expectations (p. 20).

CCTI demonstrated how collaborative partnerships positively influenced curriculum alignment and helped to smooth student transitions. Fifteen community college partnerships in five occupational areas worked to develop career pathways that would help to achieve the following five outcomes:

- Decrease the need for remediation at the postsecondary level;
- Increase enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education;
- Increase academic and skill achievement at the secondary and postsecondary levels;
- Increase attainment of postsecondary degrees, certificates, or other recognized credentials; and
- Increase entry into employment or further education.

During the life of the project (2002-08), four practices emerged as the most promising elements to ensure success. Collaboration, communication, counseling, and curriculum alignment—the 4 Cs—are considered to be essential for creating a shared culture that supports successful student transitions (Kempner, 2008). (See Table 3.)

**Table 3. College and Career Transitions Initiative Promising Practices**

COLLABORATION	<b>Collaboration</b> among partners and across the education, business, and government sectors needs to be supported by strong leadership.
COMMUNICATION	<b>Communication</b> among all the partners, faculty, counselors, and supporting staff is critical to ensure that collaboration is effective and long term.
COUNSELING	<b>Counseling</b> functions provide information to ensure that students know what academic skills are needed to transition effectively and how to acquire those skills.
CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT	<b>Curriculum alignment</b> creates seamless pathways necessary for student success across educational levels to students’ future careers.

Source: An unpublished report prepared by K. Kempner for the League for Innovation in the Community College’s *College and Career Transition Initiative Executive Summary: General Overview of Findings*, 2008.



*Collaboration* among partners and across the education, business, and government sectors needs to be supported by strong leadership. Helping students successfully transition from secondary to postsecondary education and onto careers requires the collaboration of multiple institutions, organizations, and employers, and commitment from high-level leaders.

*Communication* among all the partners, faculty, counselors, and supporting staff is critical to ensure that collaboration is effective and long term. With the support of high-level leaders, faculty, staff, and counselors are the functional experts positioned to design and develop the processes that will enhance student success across systems.

*Counseling* functions provide the information to ensure that students know what academic skills are needed to transition effectively and how to acquire those skills. Students should have access to knowledgeable individuals to assist them in developing a realistic college and career plan based on accurate information about the necessary requirements to achieve their education and career goals.

*Curriculum* alignment creates seamless pathways necessary for student success across educational levels to students' future careers. College and high school faculty should work together in a respectful,

trusting, and supportive manner to align the curriculum across educational levels and enable students to smoothly transition to the next level without knowledge or skill gaps.

These 4Cs are shared across educational levels—high school, community college, and university—and with business and community partners, resulting in all stakeholders feeling more comfortable talking with each other. Support for these partnerships should come from high-level leaders, such as college presidents and school superintendents, and key community and industry leaders, such as corporate CEOs. The commitment of high-level leaders is crucial to help develop and sustain systems that ease transitions and contribute to student success. This commitment sends the message that collaborative work is important, and support from the top justifies the dedication of resources to support and advance the work that will result in improved student outcomes.

The activities on Worksheet A (pages 12-13) are designed as a reflective exercise for your group. Use the worksheet to help kick off your significant discussions.

# WORKSHEET A: Why Significant Discussions?

The following questions may help you and your partners clarify and enhance your understanding of the issues and challenges. You may choose to add other questions that are relevant to your partnership.

1. In reading the “Why Significant Discussions?” section, what did you learn that surprised you the most?

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2. What did you learn that you did not know about?

a. Secondary schools?	b. Community colleges?	c. Universities?

