Tri-Level College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS)

Education leaders across the country are confounded by a growing phenomenon: too many students are not college ready when they leave high school. Although indicators exist to identify students at-risk of dropping out of high school, few indicators of students' college readiness are currently in place, and few districts have linked indicators to practices and policies in ways that would enable action to create meaningful, lasting change.

Features of Tri-Level College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS)

The groundbreaking Tri-Level College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS) initiative will develop and study the implementation of a system of signals and supports designed to significantly increase the readiness of students to enter and succeed in college. The CRIS initiative builds upon and enhances existing early warning systems (EWS)[1] in districts because it features the following:

- Indicators that focus beyond the goal of high school graduation to target factors directly relevant to college readiness and success, in particular students' **academic preparedness**, which refers to key academic content knowledge and skills and key cognitive strategies needed to succeed in doing college-level work; **academic tenacity**, which is defined by the underlying beliefs and attitudes (such as motivation and aspiration) and accompanying academic behaviors that drive student achievement; and **college knowledge**, which is the knowledge base and contextual skills that enable students to successfully access college and move through the system once they arrive.[2]
- A **tri-level approach** that utilizes college readiness indicators and informs action at the individual, setting and system levels:
    - Individual Level**:** students' personal progress toward college readiness (e.g., courses and credits, study skills, persistence, expectations for future, knowledge about college requirements and choices).
    - Setting Level**:** the resources and opportunities for students provided by a program, classroom or school (e.g., teachers' efforts to push students to high levels of academic performance, college-going culture and resources, instructional coherence and rigor).
    - System Level**:** the policy and funding infrastructure that impacts school contexts, student programs and college readiness supports (e.g., district-level resources for school-level counseling, professional development for administrators and teachers on establishing supports for college-going, resources to support data generation).
- A mechanism that **connects indicators at all three levels with a corresponding set of targeted supports** or interventions that will move a student, school or district toward postsecondary success.

The CRIS Initiative: Background, Strategies and Activities

The John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) at Brown University are partnering on a three-year initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to develop models for **College Readiness Indicator Systems (CRIS).** The CRIS initiative involves close

[1] Early Warning Systems use readily available data early in students' academic trajectories to provide districts and schools with a set of indicators that identify students who are at the highest risk of dropping out before graduation. The CRIS initiative shifts the emphasis to college readiness, identifying students who are at risk of not being college ready.

[2] Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2009). *Student support strategy*. Seattle, WA: Author. Conley, D. T. (2008). Rethinking college readiness. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 144, 3-13.

collaboration with a small number of selected school districts or school networks[3] across the country—several of which have already been deeply involved in the development and implementation of EWSs. The JGC will develop and study the implementation of the tri-level CRIS in conjunction with districts, using a flexible, "design-build" approach. The AISR will focus on cross-site learning; brokering expertise and supports for districts; understanding issues related to district, municipal, state, and federal contexts; and process documentation.
Specifically the JGC will support districts by:

- Synthesizing the latest research on indicators associated with the key domains of college readiness (academic preparedness, academic tenacity, and college knowledge) to create an empirically-based foundation for the work;
- Mapping how indicator data are currently collected, disseminated, and used by various actors within each district;
- Developing a menu of college readiness indicators at all three levels (individual, setting, system) for districts or networks of schools to choose from, enabling customization to local conditions and building upon their existing EWSs;
- Providing assistance with strategies for data infrastructure, collection and use;
- Conducting implementation research as districts pilot their indicators, assisting with mid-course corrections and creating a set of psychometrically sound indicators that will serve as a model for districts around the country; and
- Helping districts link college readiness indicators to policies and practices to address students' needs in time to enter college.

Each participating district will develop a unique scope of work tailored to its particular needs that will be directly linked to the development of the tri-level system of college readiness indicators.

For more information about the College Readiness Indicator Systems initiative, please contact Angela Ongoco at aongoco@stanford.edu or Mary Arkins Decasse at mary_arkins@brown.edu.

[3] In some areas of the country, individual public schools voluntarily enter into a school network that offers instructional and technical supports designed to build school capacity and streamline operations.