

Postsecondary Readiness

NCRERN's postsecondary readiness pilots were designed to improve students' preparedness for pathways after high school, including college, the workforce, the military, and apprenticeships. Interventions were intended to improve students' GPA as well as students' self-reported feelings of several non-academic measures related to their postsecondary readiness, including career readiness, grit, optimism, academic motivation, sense of belonging, engagement in school, and valuing of school.

Student Success Planning

In the Student Success Planning (SSP) intervention, district staff met at least quarterly with students to discuss their goals, academic progress, career interests, and applicable postsecondary milestones. In these conversations, staff might have talked about course planning, how to identify a postsecondary pathway of interest, or other concerns and questions students brought to the meeting. These one-on-one conversations were intended to foster better relationships between staff and students, provide students with customized, relevant information and guidance related to their goals and interests, and help students see the connection between their schoolwork and their long-term aspirations. A mix of counselors, teachers, school leaders, and other staff met with students, with the implementation team varying by district. SSP was piloted by 17 districts in the 2021-22 school year. 15 districts worked with 9th graders, 8 worked with 10th graders, 3 worked with 11th graders, and 2 with 12th graders (districts had different combinations of grades involved in implementation, with the most common configuration being grade 9). SSP was intended to improve students' end-of-year GPA, feelings of career readiness, grit, optimism, engagement in school, and valuing of school.

Career Exposure

In the Career Exposure (CE) intervention, districts worked with students to identify their career interests and goals. At the start of the intervention, students completed a strengths/career finder to help them brainstorm potential careers of interest. Districts then partnered with community members, local businesses, and others to host a speaker at least monthly to talk about their career, the relationship between high school coursework and their current job responsibilities, and their educational journey from high school to their current role. After each speaker, students were to complete a reflection thinking about their goals, interests, and the relevance of school for their career path. In some districts, these reflections included small groups of students interested in similar careers coming together to discuss. CE was piloted by 12 districts in the 2021-22 school year. Eleven of the piloting districts included 9th graders, 10 included 10th graders, 12 included 11th graders, and 9 included 12th graders (districts had different combinations of grades involved with implementation, with the most common configuration being grades 9-12). CE was intended to improve students' end-of-year GPA, feelings of career readiness, grit, optimism, engagement in school, and valuing of school.

What's Your Path?

In the What's Your Path? intervention, districts incorporated 13 structured lessons about postsecondary pathways and milestones into existing classes, such as homerooms, English classes, or other courses taken by all students in the targeted grade level. The lessons provided students with information about postsecondary pathways (college, workforce, the military, and apprenticeships), steps needed to enter those pathways, opportunities to set and reflect on progress towards their goals, and time to explore careers related to their interests, skills, and goals. The lessons included short videos, individual reflections, and, depending on the district, opportunities for students to discuss with each other and their teacher the content of the lesson and their postsecondary plans. The type of school staff member involved in facilitating the lessons varied by district, with a mix of teachers, counselors, and other staff leading the lessons. What's Your Path? was implemented by 17 districts in the 2022-23 school year. Sixteen of the implementing districts worked exclusively with 9th grade students; one district only serves 11th and 12th grade students and implemented with 11th grade students. What's Your Path? was intended to improve students' end-of-year GPA, academic motivation, and sense of belonging.

Postsecondary Entry

NCRERN’s postsecondary entry pilots were developed in response to districts’ desire to facilitate successful transitions for students from high school to their postsecondary pathway of interest, whether college, the workforce, the military, or an apprenticeship. The interventions were designed to increase rates of FAFSA completion, college enrollment, and completion of self-reported “final steps to entry” for students’ identified pathway of interest. Completion of “final steps to entry” are measured through student surveys due to a lack of administrative data on students’ workforce outcomes or entry into other pathways, and includes actions such as having a job or job offer for a position that will begin within 6 months of high school graduation, being accepted to a college, being accepted to an apprenticeship, or meeting all requirements to enter the military (requisite ASVAB score, physical fitness assessment, etc.). The postsecondary entry pilots have been implemented with 12th grade students.

Postsecondary Entry Checklist

The Postsecondary Entry Checklist (PSE Checklist) intervention aimed to facilitate students’ postsecondary transitions through two key mechanisms. First, NCRERN worked with districts to create tailored informational Checklists for students. Checklists served as an easy reference for students to see the key milestones and due dates for a given postsecondary pathway, and incorporate existing district supports for students to complete these milestones. Students could work through one or multiple Checklists, choosing from 4-year college, 2-year college, workforce, and military options. Milestones on the Checklists included steps such as filing the FAFSA (with information about setting up an account, attending a FAFSA night, etc.) or attending a Career Fair hosted by the school. In addition to providing students with more information about the steps needed to enter their intended postsecondary pathway(s), the PSE Checklist intervention also prompted districts to create systems that allowed staff to monitor students’ progress towards completion of the postsecondary milestones and intervene with students if milestones were about to be (or had been) missed. For instance, counselors would be able to see if students interested in attending a 4-year college had not written a college essay with application deadlines approaching and could reach out to provide support to those students so they could apply on time. Districts set up these systems and met regularly internally and with NCRERN facilitators to discuss student progress and next steps. The PSE Checklist intervention was implemented by 18 districts in the 2022-23 school year; all districts implemented the intervention exclusively with 12th grade students. The PSE Checklist intervention was intended to increase the likelihood that students would enroll in college, schoolwide FAFSA completion rates, and students’ self-reported completion of “final steps to entry” for their pathway of interest.

Evaluating NCRERN's Postsecondary Pilots

All of NCRERN’s postsecondary pilots have been evaluated through randomized control trials (RCTs). This allows for strong causal identification and provides districts with trustworthy results that can guide decision-making around continued implementation, intervention modifications, or program discontinuation. The table below summarizes how each pilot was evaluated.

Pilot	Year	Randomization Design	Sample Size
Student Success Planning	2021-2022	Student randomization, blocked on district, school, and grade. Within block, there is 50% treatment probability. All students in targeted grades are included.	Randomization occurred within 25 districts. 17 districts (2,458 students) launched and are the focus of our evaluation.
Career Exposure			Randomization occurred within 13 districts. 12 districts (3,949 students) launched and are the focus of our evaluation.
What’s Your Path?	2022-2023	District randomization, blocked on state and district size (small, medium, and large). Within block, there is 50% treatment probability. All students in targeted grade included.	45 districts were randomized to either the What’s Your Path? (22 districts) or PSE Checklist intervention (23 districts)
PSE Checklist			