

INTRODUCTION TO THE HIDALGO  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

BUILDING STRONG COLLEGE  
PARTNERSHIPS

OPERATING AND FINANCING AN EARLY  
COLLEGE DISTRICT

RECRUITING, DEVELOPING, AND  
RETAINING TALENT

ALIGNING COURSES AND CAREER  
PATHWAYS FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

CREATING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE  
STUDENT SUPPORTS

ENGAGING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY



## GPA AND COLLEGE COURSES

The counseling department at Hidalgo High School developed a method for calculating grade point averages across high school and college courses, for use in determining class rank.

The methodology is explained in Hidalgo's Curriculum Bulletin, available on the USB drive.

It takes time and persistence to align curriculum between K-12 schools and colleges. For early college districts, curriculum alignment may be the most important transformation but also the most difficult to achieve. There are two reasons: the secondary and postsecondary educational systems have developed as separate enterprises for over a century; and curriculum and instruction, which are at the heart of education, are firmly established at both levels.

### TO ALIGN COURSEWORK, WORK BACKWARDS FROM ENTRY-LEVEL COLLEGE

**EXPECTATIONS.** Too often, students who graduate high school find that they lack the knowledge and skills to succeed in college coursework. Early college, which bridges the two institutional levels, is a powerful tool for closing this preparation gap. We've found the following strategies helpful in making steady progress toward curriculum alignment.

- » **Visit early colleges and similar programs in your state and region.** Instead of reinventing the wheel, we have found it helpful to build on existing resources that others have developed. For example, we sent teachers, counselors, and administrators to other early colleges in our state, including UT-San Antonio.
- » **Establish working relationships with faculty at nearby colleges.** Visits to early college programs provide important context, yet deeper progress comes closer to home. We work hard to create working partnerships between our teachers and faculty at local colleges. A great place to start is with deans who support the early college concept and college faculty members who have taught high school students. Fruitful discussions can grow from the sharing of course syllabi and assignments for entry-level college courses.
- » **Build career pathways that are aligned and articulated with community college programs.** At Hidalgo, we work with college faculty and administrators to connect the high school's career pathways with certificate and other training programs offered by college partners. For example, the course sequences in business and marketing include introductory and advanced computer science classes, both of which provide students with high school and college credits.
- » **Engage in discussions with colleges about moving remedial coursework to high school.** Despite our best efforts to have all students prepared to take college-level classes in math and English by the eleventh grade, some juniors and seniors have not passed the state's college readiness assessment—some in math, some in English, and some in both—which means they cannot take key college courses for credit. We are working with a community college partner to provide high school seniors with remedial courses in math and English, taught by our teachers under supervision of college faculty. Students who complete the courses would be approved to take college-level math and English



### PLUG IN TO LEARN MORE!

Learn more by exploring the USB drive, which contains related resources and example documents from Hidalgo.

Access the web version of this toolkit at [hidalgo.jff.org](http://hidalgo.jff.org).



without taking the state assessment again. This program will save taxpayers the cost of providing remedial education in college for our students.

**BE CLEAR ABOUT NEW ROLES FOR YOUR COUNSELORS AND TEACHERS.** In Hidalgo, our counselors play a crucial role in understanding the range of local college programs and helping students decide which college courses to take. Teachers also play a crucial role by learning about the entry-level skills and knowledge needed for their fields of study.

» **Charge high school departments with responsibility for alignment.** At the high school, we schedule common planning periods for teachers in the same department. This gives them time each week for meetings to plan a variety of tasks, including adjusting the curriculum so that it supports student preparation for college-level courses. Also, we assign each assistant principal to work with particular departments, so that teachers have strong and focused administrative support. All departments have made their curriculum more rigorous. For example, the English faculty has shifted its essay prompts for 12th grade down to the 11th grade and then to the 10th grade. As a result, students are ready for college English in 11th or 12th grade.

» **Create curriculum alignment committees across schools.** Curricular adjustments made in high school have ripple effects in middle school and elementary school. Each summer, we bring together groups of teachers and administrators to work backwards from the high school curriculum down the sequence by grade level. We began with math, English, social studies, and science. As a result of this process, we now teach algebra to more eighth graders and offer more pre-AP courses in middle school.

**CONNECT CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH.** One reason curriculum alignment is challenging is that it also involves professional development for teachers as they learn and adjust to new curricula. At Hidalgo, we've found that as our high school teachers learn more about the specific expectations of college courses, they can better adapt their instruction and curriculum to lead students more seamlessly into college-level academic work.

However, this adaptation is not a straightforward process, partly because many college faculty are not experienced in identifying the knowledge and skills they expect of students entering their classes. This can be a learning process for them too.

We have had success with the following approaches:

» **Encourage high school teachers to get their Master's degrees and teach college courses.** We offer an annual bonus of \$3,000 to teachers who earn a Master's degree in their teaching field. After applying to our partner college to become an adjunct teacher, they receive an additional \$500 bonus per semester for college courses they teach at the high school. Teaching college courses helps our instructors learn the college curriculum firsthand. It establishes and deepens their contacts and relationships with college faculty. And it expands their knowledge of their field.

» **Seek grants for curriculum development.** We have won state-level grants for curriculum alignment and development across systems, particularly between high school and middle school. For example, these grant opportunities, some of which include professional development, have paid summer stipends for high school and middle school teachers to align their curricula.

» **Facilitate information exchanges between teachers and college faculty.** In Hidalgo, we believe that every meeting or information exchange between high school teachers and college faculty is an opportunity for professional development. During the summer, we pay high school teachers to tutor groups of students who are taking college classes. As part of this job, the teachers attend college classes with the students in the mornings, and often establish ongoing working relationships with the faculty. We also make sure that administrative barriers—such as email and Internet restrictions—do not prevent teachers from communicating with college faculty.