Research-Based Practices for College and Career Readiness

Organizations require research and data to support their efforts to prepare students to be college and career ready. Strategically used research and data can help to eliminate barriers; identify actions to be taken; and guide program planning, monitoring, and decision making. The college and career readiness group at American Institutes for Research (AIR) relies on research and data in two critical ways. First, the AIR team uses literature reviews and environmental scans to identify research-based practices focused on college and career readiness. Second, the team analyzes data and develops tools to help clients connect research-based practices directly to actions—bridging the gap between research and practice.

CASE STUDY: Building College and Career Data Systems for the Chicago Public Schools

The Challenge

In fall of 2008, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) undertook an effort to revamp its continually failing Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Despite repeated efforts to turn toward positive results, the CTE program suffered from low program completion rates and mediocre postsecondary outcomes for its graduates. CPS sought technical assistance to support its new approach centered on accountability and management. Turning to AIR, CPS asked for technical expertise in utilizing data to support its revamped CTE program.

The Response

AIR worked with CPS to identify the college and career data elements that were critical to the success of the CTE program. The AIR team used these data elements of program completion, on-time graduation, college and career planning, and college and career readiness to build a monitoring system that identified when students needed support to keep them on track. The monitoring system provided school-based educators with student-level information to flag when a student needed additional support and to identify which action to take based on the flag. These student-level data tools proved crucial to the plans envisioned by CPS for its revamped CTE program.

CASE STUDY: Creating a Community-Based Plan to Increase College Access and Success in St. Louis

The Challenge

The St. Louis Regional College Access Pipeline (CAP) Project is a group of community-based organizations, foundations, private businesses, and local school corporations. CAP set a goal to help the St. Louis region reach 50 percent of its students with a postsecondary

degree by 2020. CAP received funding to create a three-year action plan to engage the community and work toward its goal. CAP tapped AIR to help develop a strategic plan that fully involved the community.

The Response

AIR worked with CAP to create three work groups comprised of more than 100 volunteers from the community. The volunteers represented the stakeholders engaged in the college and career readiness and success fields in the St. Louis region. The three work groups were focused on expanded and coordinated service delivery, promoting a college-going culture in high school, and improving college persistence. Through a series of planning meetings, the AIR team worked with these groups to identify goals, actions, and timelines that became the basis for their three-year strategic plan. The strategic plan focused on shared resources, better utilization of existing funds, and common metrics so that programs could be compared and outcomes for students could be analyzed across the region—all objectives of CAP.

About AIR's College and Career Readiness Work

AIR is a nonprofit organization founded in 1946, currently home to more than 1,600 employees in offices throughout the United States and in 27 countries around the world. AIR has a particular strength in education research and development of practical tools and practices. This expertise includes designing and conducting rigorous and relevant research and evaluations; developing and delivering tools, services, and resources targeted to individual schools, districts, state and federal agencies, and community groups; and analyzing and synthesizing education policy trends and practices.

The college and career readiness group is a dedicated team of individuals with on-the-ground experience and a diverse set of technical and research skills, which include the following:

- Developing data tools that target students for interventions for improved success at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels
- Implementing early warning systems for identifying students at risk of dropping out of high school
- Collecting and analyzing data
- Providing detailed policy analysis with a focus on implementation