

Unveiling paths to inclusion: Harnessing insights from college and career readiness curricula models to advance inclusive elements in high school college guidance counseling.

by

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B.A., California State University San Marcos, 2011
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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

In the early 20th century, the United States guided high school students toward their desired career paths through educational reforms, leading to the creation of College and Career Readiness (CCR) programs. Initially, these programs were centralized, but during the Obama administration, they became decentralized, transferring CCR efforts to state control. An inclusive CCR curriculum would empower school counselors to present students with a variety of post-secondary options, facilitate differentiation to meet all students' needs, provide support, and ensure accessibility for all students nationwide, regardless of their location. The lack of inclusive programming broadens equity gaps, particularly in urban and rural areas with higher counselor-to-student ratios.

Historically, vocational guidance was established in response to the societal changes of the late 19th century, evolving into a broader form of counseling that encompasses personal and psychological support in schools. Despite the continued focus on holistic student development, challenges persist in ensuring equitable access to resources and support for college and career readiness. The “Every Student Succeeds Act” (2015), which aimed to improve college attendance, has favored four-year universities while overlooking alternative career pathways, thereby worsening existing inequities.

While school counselors play a vital role in promoting CCR across the states, resource allocation and counselor-to-student ratios significantly impact the effectiveness of state programs. Disparities in curricula among states further hinder equitable access, worsened by insufficient funding and inadequate evaluation methods. Additionally, school counselors often lack specialized training in CCR programs, limiting their ability to support students effectively.

Several CCR models, such as Independent Educational Consultants to classroom learning environments, pose challenges in guaranteeing equitable access and awareness for all students. Sociocultural and Constructivist theories provide the frameworks for creating inclusive curricula that emphasize social interactions, cultural contexts, and personalized learning experiences.

This study addresses the gap in inclusive CCR curricula to improve inclusive practices in high school counseling. Conducting a qualitative document analysis of state CCR curricula aims to identify key components of inclusivity and recommend improvements for equitable access to post-secondary opportunities. Using deductive coding will reveal the essential elements needed to support all students in their goals beyond high school.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my grandmother.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In the late 19th century, the United States shifted its high school efforts to guide students toward their desired careers (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). Since then, the College and Career Readiness (CCR) programming has evolved alongside other educational reforms. Initially, individual school districts designed the curriculum; today, the structure of CCR curricula has transitioned from the federal level to the state level (Cincotti, 2014; Leahy et al., n.d., 2015; Watson, 2017; William & Mary, 2022). Many high schools now employ general school counselors to advise students on their post-secondary plans while also addressing their social and emotional needs (Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018). However, the absence of inclusive CCR programs heightens student equity gaps (Boulden et al., 2021; Ilic & Rosenbaum, 2019; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Novakovic et al., 2021). Despite the national standards set by the “Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015,” states have struggled to create a comprehensive program that meets the diverse needs of their students. High counselor-to-student ratios, especially in urban and rural areas, combined with inadequate training for counselors, further widen these disparities.

In response to the societal shifts brought by the Industrial Revolution, vocational guidance emerged in the early 20th century, geared at assisting individuals in locating employment based on their skills (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). The creation of a formal career counseling center was designed by Frank Parsons in 1909, followed by the “Smith-Hughes Act of 1917,” which addressed the growing need for vocational guidance nationwide (Leahy et al.; n.d., 2015). By the early 1930s, vocational guidance resources were lacking in urban schools, highlighting disparities in access early in its inception (Pope, 2000). Vocational counseling expanded to veterans after World War I, along with the compulsory

education laws passed by Congress (Leahy et al., 2015). Vocational counseling started to address economic needs and evolved to address the personal aspirations of individuals, which was addressed when the Pupil Personal Services included psychological support in schools (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). The post-World War II era brought further changes to the scope of vocational training when STEM education was emphasized and brought a shift in counselor training (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). As the 1970s began, it marked a shift in addressing a holistic approach to student development (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). At the same time, subsequent decades brought changes to graduation requirements and a transition to a standards-based education, which also shifted the focus of CCR programs (Team, 2020). While the transitions of education goals shifted, the goal of preparing students for life after high school has remained consistent, with each era building on the former (Pope, 2000).

Push for College and Career Readiness

Under the 2015 “Every Student Succeeds Act” from the Obama administration, the responsibility of CCR shifted from the federal level to the individual states, aiming to increase the number of students seeking college-rooted careers (Bahl, 2015). The emphasis on college readiness has disproportionately favored four-year universities and not highlighted other career readiness initiatives available to students. This continues to fuel the equity gap in post-secondary educational settings (Holland, 2015; Vega et al., 2015). CCR encompasses many competencies, including content knowledge, self-efficacy, and student ownership of learning, with literacies, such as global awareness and financial literacy, playing critical roles (Hanover Research, 2016). The definition of college readiness involves students not only meeting the basic college entrance requirements but also demonstrating their ability to manage college courses (Malin et al., 2017).

Similarly, career readiness emphasizes an individual's cognitive skills needed to enter the workforce, focusing on competencies in higher-order thinking, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills (Hanover Research, 2016).

Implementing the "Every Student Succeeds Act" led states to develop their own CCR curricula, resulting in various standards and definitions of proficiencies across the nation (Malin et al., 2017). Furthermore, the discretion states have given local school districts in selecting materials and implementing the resources has led to further disparities in access to resources and the effectiveness of CCR programs (Mokher et al., 2018; Malin et al., 2017). While standardized tests have been used to measure students' proficiencies in CCR, they are not able to fully represent a student's ability. Schools need a more effective means of evaluating the success of the programs they have implemented, a challenge many face with limited resources provided by the states (Hanover Research, 2016; Roderick et al., 2009). There is a growing emphasis on college readiness, which is often equated with taking advanced courses and meeting rigorous graduation requirements, which may overlook a student's diverse needs and career goals (Hanover Research, 2016; Kanno, 2018; Le et al., 2015; Roderick et al., 2009). Consequently, underserved students face inequities in accessing CCR programs and are often underprepared for college or career paths due to limited exposure to options and support from their stakeholders (Mayes et al., 2019; O'Connor, 2018; Roderick et al., 2009; Hanover Research, 2016). Efforts should be made to address the disparities across each state and provide tailored support and interventions, allowing all students the opportunity to a CCR program that meets their needs (Hanover Research, 2016; Kanno, 2018; Le et al., 2015; O'Connor, 2018).

Development of College and Career Readiness Programs

School counselors, one of the pivotal stakeholders in shaping a school's culture of higher education, act as gatekeepers of college readiness for students (Hanover Research, 2016). Despite their multifaceted responsibilities, which include Social Emotional Learning (SEL), academic advising, and CCR, school counselors find that their time is disproportionately allocated to other tasks imposed by schools (Hanover Research, 2016; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Mayes et al., 2019; Novakovic et al., 2021; Yavuz et al., 2017). Literature suggests that 80% of a school counselor's time should be dedicated to CCR tasks; the reality is that they typically dedicate about 20% of their time to this task (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; O'Connor, 2018). The challenge is exacerbated by high student-to-counselor ratios, with smaller caseloads correlating with reduced equity gaps and improved individualized attention for college-bound students (Barr et al., 2019). Although the national average student-to-counselor ratio has improved, standing at 408:1 in 2021 compared to 482:1 in 2015, it still falls short of the recommended 250:1 ratio necessary for counselors to effectively distribute resources, build relationships, and guide students toward their next steps (Krell & Pérusse, 2012; O'Connor, 2018). Enhancing counselor-to-student ratios is essential to ensure counselors can fulfill their roles as advocates for students' post-secondary aspirations, fostering a supportive environment conducive to academic and career success (Bauman, 2017; Krell & Pérusse, 2012).

School counselors often lack focused preparation for incorporating CCR despite holding master's degrees and meeting state certification requirements (O'Connor, 2018). Due to insufficient training and time constraints, they struggle to integrate state-mandated CCR curricula into their practice (Cook et al., 2018; Ilic & Rosenbaum, 2019; Novakovic et al., 2021). To enhance their skills and confidence in guiding students toward post-secondary paths,

counselors seek specialized CCR training- which is found through limited options, through twelve certificate programs in the United States. A few of the certificate programs can be found through the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), the extension programs of the University of California San Diego, Los Angeles, Berkely, Riverside, and Irvine campuses, Rice University, and Lehigh University. Financial barriers hinder participation in conferences and professional development programs offering valuable CCR insights. Despite counselors' desire for more CCR training, the lack of funding for professional development and the absence of mandatory training requirements in CCR laws pose challenges to comprehensive skill development in this critical aspect of their role. Efforts to address these barriers are essential to ensure counselors are equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to effectively support students in navigating post-secondary pathways (Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018; Mokher et al., 2018; Malin et al., 2017).

Models of College and Career Readiness Counseling

Literature on CCR counseling models, which include Independent Education Consultants (IECs), School Counselors, Student-Counselor Meetings, and non-profit Career Readiness Programs, highlights the need for a variety of approaches to support students' goals beyond high school (IEAC, 2023; Martinez et al., 2016). IECs, who offer personalized college guidance for a fee, may intensify the equity disparities, as their services are geared toward those with financial means and focus on four-year college options (IEAC, 2023). Conversely, school counselors who provide school-based support often lack the training and resources for students. Regardless of who provides the student-counselor meetings, apart from IECs, individualized college or career guidance is restrained by caseload size and resources (O'Connor, 2018). While classroom

settings allow school counselors to distribute information to all students related to CCR, they often lack the personalized guidance students need (Robinson & Roksa, 2016).

Additionally, CCR programs, targeting underserved students, aim to bridge equity gaps by providing tailored support and exposure to various post-secondary paths, albeit requiring students to apply and raising awareness challenges (Martinez et al., 2016; Gee et al., 2020). Outreach programs, such as College Bound and Gear Up, offer targeted support to specific student groups, including foster care and Native American students, enhancing access to CCR resources and opportunities (Detgen et al., 2021; Johnson & Strayhorn, 2019). Diverse CCR counseling models play a crucial role in addressing students' post-secondary needs, though challenges persist in ensuring equitable access and awareness of available resources (Kanno, 2018; Malin et al., 2017; Mokher et al., 2018; Novakovic et al., 2021; Toler Hilliard & Wharton-Beck, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Theories of Sociocultural and Constructivism provide a framework for inclusive CCR curricula that cater to diverse student populations can be designed for (Jaramillo, 1996; Sjøberg, 2010). Grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1930s and 1960s) and Piaget (1970s), these theories indicate the influence of social interactions, cultural contexts, and prior knowledge on learning and development (Allman, 2018; Brau, 2020; Cherry, 2022; Jaramillo, 1996; Main, 2023; Sjøberg, 2010). Sociocultural Theory (Allman, 2018) indicates the role of language and the participation of stakeholders in shaping cognitive development, emphasizing the importance of social interactions in learning (Jaramillo, 1996). When counselors involve stakeholders and consider students' cultural backgrounds, they can create a supportive environment conducive to learning (Mercer & Howe, 2012; Turner et al., 2018). Constructivism highlights the need for

curricula to align with students' interests and experiences, promoting active learning through assimilation and accommodation (Brau, 2020; Miller et al., 2019). Interactive lessons centered on modeling, coaching, and collaborative learning have been shown to help students reflect on their goals and explore a variety of career pathways (Allman, 2020; Cherry, 2022). Integrating these theories into CCR programs can foster a culture of inclusivity and trust, which empowers students to consider options beyond high school and work to close equity gaps (Mayes & Hines, 2014). By creating a curriculum that meets the needs of all students and engages stakeholders, counselors work to fulfill the goals of the "Every Student Succeeds Act" (2015) and increase student participation in post-secondary opportunities (Allman, 2020).

Problem Statement and Purpose

Over the past century, the landscape of CCR curricula has shifted significantly. However, a comprehensive examination of its inclusivity still needs improvement. The absence of an inclusive CCR curriculum for counselors perpetuates disparities among at-risk students, hindering equitable access to post-secondary options (Mokher et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2016). Although school counselors often integrate CCR with Social Emotional Learning, their high caseloads and insufficient training prevent personalized guidance and continue to show that underserved students are undermatched during their application cycles (O'Connor, 2018; Krell & P russe, 2012). This exacerbates equity gaps, as many underserved students encounter barriers in navigating the complex application process and lack access to essential resources (Le et al., 2015). Rural and inner-city schools, which have limited resources and support, struggle to prepare first-generation college students for higher education (Kryst et al., 2018; Tieken, 2016). The focus on four-year colleges neglects alternative pathways, prompting a broader approach to post-secondary planning (Le et al., 2015; Conley, 2007). Addressing these challenges requires

comprehensive CCR support tailored to diverse student needs, ensuring equitable access to higher education and career opportunities (Turner et al., 2019).

Despite two decades of literature highlighting the disparities faced by underserved students in accessing post-secondary education options, this research focuses on how CCR curricula should incorporate inclusion practices, an essential component of social justice. Through this analysis, the study aims to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of existing CCR curricula across the United States, offering recommendations to enhance current programming and promote inclusion and equitable access to post-secondary opportunities for all students.

Positionality Statement

I grew up in a white, low-middle-class family and am a first-generation college graduate. When I applied for university, I had to figure out the entire process independently as I needed a counselor, teacher, or parent to turn to. After becoming an educator and working with students, I became a teacher to help encourage them to discover their passions and help them discover colleges and careers to reach for. I became a college guidance counselor to help students find their abilities and pursue their dreams. While I have had the privilege to work in schools where each student, regardless of their socio-economic background, race, gender, family status, or disabilities, I am aware of the number of students who do not have access to these resources.

My experiences have shaped my research, stemming from my belief that every child deserves access to a counselor or teacher who can help them realize their potential. When I see the data on how many groups remain underserved due to inequities in the education system, it motivates me to find ways to modify curricula for easier use by teachers and counselors striving to help students prepare for college or career readiness programs. They often lack the tools and

time to create these resources. This drive inspired my research into how curricula address inclusion in the materials available for school counselors to utilize when discussing college and career readiness with their students.

Research Questions

My research examines what states have in their CCR curriculums and identifies how they address inclusive issues raised in the literature. My research addresses the questions,

- 1) What components are commonly present in CCR curriculums?
- 2) How are inclusivity principles represented in the current CCR curricula?

A content analysis was performed to address the research questions and operationalize key research objectives. I examined and analyzed the curricula of the CCR programs by reviewing materials from three states and one private curriculum.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to explore multiple state CCR curricula. It aims to identify essential components of inclusivity necessary for ensuring equitable access to post-secondary opportunities nationwide. Examining the curricula of all 50 states, Washington DC, and three private organizations, the research seeks to reveal how inclusivity principles are currently integrated and inform potential enhancements to high school CCR programs. Content analysis, foundational to document analysis, offers a comprehensive means to discover prevalent components of inclusion.

This study contributes to the conversation about equity and inclusion in education by examining the inclusivity of curricula across various states and emphasizing how current educational models can incorporate inclusive elements to meet the diverse needs of the students these states serve. Narrowing the curricula from 54 to four was crucial for conducting a

qualitative content analysis of CCR programs. The use of attribute coding and deductive coding enabled the systematic selection of key curricula for a thorough investigation.

The deductive coding identified key components that should be included in all CCR programs to ensure equitable access and support for students. Ultimately, this methodological approach aimed to pinpoint curricular elements that foster equitable access and support for all students in achieving their college and career aspirations.

Definition of Terms

College: A higher education institution where individuals earn undergraduate degrees. This includes trade schools, workforce programs after high school, two-year and four-year institutions.

Counseling: Assistance in making decisions about higher education opportunities.

Equity: Within the study, equity is defined as postsecondary planning that ensures all students have access to options that meet their unique needs, interests, and goals, presented in a way they can understand. It empowers them to make informed decisions and tailor their paths to the opportunities best suited for them beyond high school (Hines, Mayes, Harris, 2022).

School Counselor: A professional who assists high school students in identifying the best post-secondary choices that align with their needs and career aspirations.

Underserved: Individuals for whom programs were not specifically designed. Examples include first-generation students, low socioeconomic families, rural students, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous individuals, DACA recipients, students in foster care, neurodivergent students, and students with learning gaps.

Social Justice: Guarantees that all students have sufficient access to resources and opportunities, regardless of their backgrounds and higher education aspirations (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020).

Inclusion: A component of Social Justice that ensures all students feel seen and can participate in activities that meet them where they are (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020).

Conclusion

The evolving landscape of CCR curricula reflects a century-long journey shaped by societal changes, legislative actions, and educational reforms. From the rise of vocational guidance in response to the Industrial Revolution to the recent transfer of CCR responsibilities to individual states under the “Every Student Succeeds Act” of 2015, this landscape has consistently adapted to meet the changing needs of students. Nevertheless, persistent challenges continue, including disparities in access, inadequate counselor-to-student ratios, and insufficient training for school counselors. Furthermore, the emphasis on college readiness has frequently overshadowed alternative pathways, widening equity gaps in educational programs. However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for comprehensive reform. By integrating inclusivity principles into CCR curricula, addressing disparities, and ensuring tailored student support, we can strive for a more equitable education system. Through thorough analysis and enhancement recommendations, this study will contribute to the ongoing dialogue of inclusion in education, advocating for more inclusive practices that empower all students to pursue their goals beyond high school.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

During the early 20th century, a movement began in the United States to help high school students decide which career to enter. Over the past century, the structure and activities of CCR have changed with the education landscape. For many years, the philosophy of having a dedicated person in high schools to help with college and career planning had been determined by the individual school districts. As with many other educational reforms in the United States, how students are introduced to their options beyond high school has changed along with them. The changes brought a new career field to the mid-1900s. Today, the states determine the CCR programming after having been under the scope of the federal government.

Today, in most high schools nationwide, a general school counselor is responsible for students' Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and advising them on post-secondary plans (Team, 2020; Walsh University Online, 2021). In schools that do not have a dedicated college and career guidance counselor, this role is often filled by a teacher who may require training but is eager to assist students with the college application process (Martinez et al., 2016; Mokher et al., 2018; Roderick et al., 2009). Although there are curriculums that states must follow, the inclusivity of CCR programs needs improvement, which further exacerbates the equity gap for all students (Duncheon, 2018).

While there are national standards for CCR that all students should meet, there needs to be more guidance to the states on how to write a comprehensive curriculum that will meet the needs of all students (ESSA, 2015). Despite the benefits of having counselors dedicated to ensuring the school's overall health, the system has many flaws with counseling in higher education (Novakovic et al., 2021). Counseling-to-student ratios are high, particularly among

students in urban and rural areas who need more funding or resources to help them (Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Le et al., 2015; O'Connor, 2018) In addition, counselors' training to work in a school focuses more on the social and emotional aspects of the role, with little training in handling the bulk of their responsibilities (Novakovic et al., 2021). These factors lead to a widening gap in under-represented students in higher education. Literature solely focused on the inclusivity of the curriculum needs to be included in case studies and journals in the field. As such, the literature review will look at the history of CCR, the training of school counselors, and how the curriculum has been effective overall for the entire population to help evaluate the current curricula of different states and how it can inform inclusion in CCR programs now and in the future.

Background of Research

History of College Guidance Counseling

Historical Background

In the late 19th century, as the Industrial Revolution prompted more families to transition from agricultural lifestyles to cities, educational methods began to evolve in response to the new demands on labor (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). Schools initiated what later became known as vocational guidance to assist individuals in finding the right job for them. Students sought counsel from teachers and administration, who shouldered these additional responsibilities to determine the career path or job most aligned with their skills and interests (William & Mary, 2022; Leahy et al., n.d., 2015; Watson, 2017; Cincotti, 2014).

Frank Parsons opened the first formal career counseling center in Boston in 1909 to aid adults and students. Less than a decade later, the "Smith-Hughes Act of 1917" was passed, making vocational guidance compulsory for all students and providing funding (Leahy et al.,

2015; Team, 2020). By the 1930s, more than half of urban schools lacked vocational guidance (Leahy et al., 2015; Pope, 2000). At the end of World War I, vocational guidance was extended to those who had fought in the war. Around the same time, compulsory education laws were enacted in the United States (Leahy et al., 2015). Following the example of Jesse Davis, who introduced vocational training into schools, this practice became a part of the curriculum for many schools (Leahy et al., 2015).

The work in vocational training laid the foundation for what was to come. There is a direct correlation between changes in the guidance of students on CCR and changes in society and policy (Leahy et al., 2015; Pope, 2000). The 1920s brought two significant changes to the field. The first was the “Soldiers’ Rehabilitation Act of 1918” and the “Smith-Fess Act of 1920,” which implemented vocational counseling for those with disabilities to enter or reenter the workforce (American Rehabilitation Counseling Association, 2023; Leahy et al., 2015). The approach to counseling also changed, and the new idea of vocational counseling being more clinical became a debate within the field (Gysbers, 2010). The emphasis shifted toward personal adjustment and away from the economic issues students faced at the turn of the century.

The word ‘counseling’ was used for the first time in print to describe the services provided to students (Leahy et al., 2015). Along with the name change, the organizational structure also morphed. Effectively, the name of the services changed to Pupil Personnel Services (Pope, 2000). Secondary schools were just some of the ones to receive assistance, as the psychological aspects of growth were also being addressed (Gysbers, 2010; William and Mary, 2019). Legislation deemed it essential to incorporate counseling into urban elementary schools (Team, 2020). The emphasis moved away from college and careers to SEL frameworks (Team, 2020; William and Mary, 2019). By the 1940s, counseling had become all-encompassing, with

many disciplines growing. Vocational Training, once the main form of counseling, quickly became its category during the 1940s and 1950s (William and Mary School of Education, 2022).

After World War II, policies continued to shift, and the counseling sphere began debating what counseling should look like in schools. Counselors argued for an emphasis on one specific area of focus (SEL, vocation, or academics) (Gysbers, 2010; Team, 2020). In contrast, others felt that having a mix would be healthy and allow them to keep working as they had grown accustomed (Gysbers, 2010). At the same time, the United States pushed for more STEM-related professions from young students due to the Cold War, leading to more funding for the counseling field (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). This helped the number of trained counselors to triple between 1958 and 1967 (William and Mary School of Education, 2022; Pope, 2000).

The 1970s focused on “exposing students to opportunities for personal, social, and educational development” (Team, 2020; William and Mary School of Education, 2022). It became easier for counselors to focus on a mixed way of advising students, as the model of teachers acting as counselors was no longer permitted, and full-time counselors entered the field as an established profession for the first time (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). During this decade, college enrollment dropped, and the number of counselors in the field decreased (Cinotti, 2014). There was still a political push for counselors to continue providing their services, and initiatives for serving a more diverse group of individuals were introduced.

The 1980s brought changes to the graduation requirements under the Reagan administration; however, the CCR standards did not face changes until the 1990s. “The 1990s shifted to standards-based education and Leave No Child Behind” (Team, 2020). The shift in policies was a move away from counselors focusing on vocation and shifting to Social Emotional

Learning, or SEL (Team, 2020). As the educational requirements changed in the early 2000s under the Bush administration, “academic achievement became a national priority and legislation, vocational training, and standards for college counseling changed” (Walsh University Online, 2021). The shift in CCR was used by most states when the Common Core Standards were implemented in most states, with the standards for counselors to use deriving specifically from the Common Core Standards (Malin et al., 2017). Under the Common Core Standards, students were required to take a proficiency test to demonstrate they had mastered the content to graduate, including the College Readiness courses implemented by most states. By 2012, the U.S. Department of Education, Labor, and Health & Human Services announced their support for CCR to be aligned with the market demand (Castellano et al., 2017).

While the titles for college preparation have changed over time and “have distinct meanings that are time and culture-specific (Pope, 2000),” the concept of preparing students for life after high school has been the focus of each administration. Since the early 20th Century, each standard and policy has been a platform for the next generation to build on. As the United States transitioned into the early 21st Century, the push for CCR remained steadfast under the Obama administration with the shift from a federally-focused program to a state-focused initiative to meet students’ needs based on the state’s individual needs and definitions. States that did not have a program in place often adopted the Common Core State Standards to meet the program’s requirements established in 2015.

Push for College and Career Readiness

Under the Obama administration, the 2015 “Every Student Succeeds Act” was imposed, and the CCR responsibility was put to the states. The government established this initiative to increase the number of students in white-collar positions (Bahl, 2015). Emphasis on CCR

became more about pushing students to four-year universities rather than incorporating trade schools or career readiness initiatives. This has continued to keep an equity gap in the services students receive nationwide. CCR is not just about content knowledge but also about self-efficacy and students' ability to take ownership of their learning. To help offset the skills that students need for both CCR, a few topics have been identified to help students be better prepared for life after high school. These Literacies include but are not limited to Global Awareness, Financial, Economics, Business and Entrepreneurship, Civil, Health, and Environment, as they can cross into either direction a student should choose after graduating high school (Hanover Research, 2016).

The definition of college readiness from the literature shows that students can enroll in a four-year university and graduate without needing remediation from high school courses taught (Roderick et al., 2009). To ensure this, it also includes factors of how a student's GPA matches up with the school, standardized test scores to give the students the best advantage to a college acceptance, and the courses students have taken (Le et al., 2015; Lombardi et al., 2022; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Turner et al., 2018). In essence, the factors in determining if a student is college ready are whether they meet the basic entrance requirements for universities, will the student be able to handle the college courses, and can all students attend any college they want to apply to (Malin et al., 2017; Hanover Research, 2016; Roderick et al., 2009).

Career Readiness is defined as students having the cognitive skills to enter the workforce and should be able to complete any entry-level certificate course they would want to take with understanding and proficiency (Malin et al., 2017; Hanover Research, 2016). The skills students must demonstrate to show they are ready to enter a career field are based on three competencies: higher-order thinking, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Hanover Research, 2016). Course

selection and other factors should be driven toward students finding a program they are interested in, ensuring they build the skills needed to thrive in the workforce (Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Mokher et al., 2018).

The Eight Components of CCR Counseling, according to the College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, are (College Board, n.d.):

1. College Aspirations: Schools should create an environment that encourages college awareness and finds ways to help students overcome obstacles. By creating a culture of college awareness, students can receive the support they need.
2. Academic Planning for CCR: Help students select courses to advance their knowledge of the subject and push themselves academically to take the most rigorous program.
3. Enrichment and Extracurricular Engagement: Students' activities should allow them to explore new interests while working on their skills. Engagement in the activities should be inclusive for all students.
4. College and Career Exploration and Selection: Students are given enrichment opportunities to explore their interests.
5. College and Career Assessments: All students should be allowed to take assessments related to their future goals after preparing and participating in different activities.
6. College Affordability Planning: Students and their stakeholders in their personal lives should be given tools to know how financial aid works and help students understand how college could be affordable for them.

7. College and Career Admission Processes: Early exposure to opportunities allows students to identify schools they would be interested in and apply to them before the deadlines.
8. Transition from High School Graduation to College Enrollment: Once students receive their acceptances, counselors help them connect to their universities to ensure a smooth transition.

The literature on CCR points to ensuring that counselors meet these eight points to ensure the curriculum they use is inclusive and assists students in meeting their goals (College et al.; Lombardi et al., 2022). Counselors have the autonomy to select the aspects of the curriculum they provide a comprehensive program to meet their students where they are while working to increase the bar so they are pushed to be College or Career Ready (Hanover Research, 2016; Bouman, 2017; G. DeRonck et al., 2019). At the same time, counselors are meeting the needs of the students. They must balance incorporating the rigorous programs that states developed to ensure all students have the skills they need to navigate finding their interests for a career path (Hanover Research, 2016; Malin et al., 2017; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Mokher et al., 2018). Through the programming, sharing options for taking higher-level courses and participating in dual enrollment programs is one way counselors meet the demands of having students better prepared for life after high school (Malin et al., 2017).

Students who have access to robust resources for college preparation are more successful with their college selections and education because they have had the opportunity to build their soft skills and discover their interests faster (Turner et al., 2018; Gee et al., 2020; Novakovic et al., 2021). When counselors deliver the curriculum, they are more efficient in being college or

career-ready, especially when relationships can be built, and the counselors can dedicate most of their work hours to helping students explore their options (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; Hanover Research, 2016; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Novakovic et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2018). However, counselors need other school stakeholders to help them be effective (Hanover Research, 2016). The school's leadership creates a welcoming community that thoroughly encourages the CCR program and shows students they have a network to support them (Turner et al., 2018). Teachers are the other stakeholders to which students pay attention (Mokher et al., 2018). Most teachers are happy to help the students learn the life skills they need to be successful in what they want and will push students to find the best path to achieve their dreams (Mokher et al., 2018).

Issues with College and Career Readiness

Having school counselors greatly benefits students when they have access to the services they provide around CCR. The reality is that schools with high college attendance rates after high school and have a low counselor-to-student ratio spend more than 70% of their time counseling students on their options (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; 'Connor, 2018; Mokher et al., 2018;). In contrast, schools with low college attendance rates after high school have high counselor-to-student ratios and can only spend about 30% of their time counseling students on options (O'Connor, 2018; Mokher et al., 2018; Hanover Research, 2016). The students in larger schools tend to see more students entering the workforce rather than looking at other options (Turner et al., 2018).

Under the "Every Student Succeeds Act," states are forced to develop their curriculum, and "states created varying standards and definitions of proficiency, comparing student learning to across the 50 states is not possible" (Malin et al., 2017, p.813). Additionally, the

implementation and selection of the materials are at the discretion of the local school districts, which does not allow for a comprehensive program across each state, giving all students access to the same resources (Mokher et al., 2018; Malin et al., 2017). One way in which states have tried to determine if their students are college-ready is to use a standardized test to assess CCR across the grades (Le et al., 2015). However, tests do not always indicate what students can do. Other schools do not have a way of measuring the effectiveness of their programming, making it difficult to know if schools are meeting the benchmarks the states have implemented (Mokher et al., 2018). Tracking the CCR programs also takes money, a resource many schools lack, making it challenging to put measuring tools in place to determine if students are meeting the benchmarks (Gibbs Grey, 2018; Hanover Research, 2016; Le et al., 2015; Roderick et al., 2009).

To meet the needs of the CCR standards, counselors are pushing an agenda for higher education without helping students pick an adequate program within the school setting to help them develop the necessary skills (Kanno, 2018; Lombardi et al., 2022; Malin et al., 2017). College readiness has become more about taking the most advanced courses and making the graduation requirements more challenging, aligning with the higher standards from the CCR program for achievement (Hanover Research, 2016; Roderick et al., 2009).

Many problems arise from the state curriculums, and the equity gaps must be closed as intended (Malin et al., 2017; Toler et al., 2023). The assumption is that all students are motivated to go to college and will take the time to prepare for it (Mokher et al., 2018). Some students need to be more engaged in the programs or recognize the program's benefits. In contrast, others may have already doubted their ability to attend college for various reasons and refrain from participating in the CCR programs when offered (Malin et al., 2017; Mokher et al., 2018; Malin & Hackmann, 2017).

While the curriculum is to include career planning, it is often not a topic that is promoted—some skills transfer between college readiness and career readiness. However, employers state that students need more soft skills to be successful in entry-level positions (Malin et al., 2017; Hanover Research, 2016; Mokher et al., 2018). The fault cannot lie alone with the counselors and how they approach their programming when looking at career options. Colleges have yet to promote their programs to allow students to see they have viable options to go to college and earn a certificate to help them enter the workforce (Mokher et al., 2018). The implications of this puts the primary focus on students looking at being only college ready (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Turner et al., 2018).

The CCR policy allows the curriculum to be changed to accommodate the workforce needs (G. DeRonck et al., 2019; Hanover Research, 2016). Implications of these changes affect diverse learners. They are creating inequities in the opportunities provided for underserved students. These disparities they face in other aspects of the educational journey put an equity gap in the college readiness of underserved students. These students tend to underapply to college and box themselves into specific schools if they apply because they do not realize the available options (Roderick et al., 2009). Supports and interventions should help these students achieve the benchmarks for CCR (O'Connor, 2018; Roderick et al., 2009; Hanover Research, 2016).

Development of College and Career Readiness Programs

Counselors play a vital role in developing a school's culture and ideas of higher education (Mayes & Hines, 2014; Turner et al., 2018). While they cannot do it alone, they are the gatekeepers of college readiness for students. They have more responsibilities than other stakeholders in the schools as they are responsible for each student and are able to focus on their educational journey (Hanover Research, 2016; Yavuz et al., 2017). The primary role of a school

counselor will vary from school to school across the nation. Their responsibilities will depend upon the school's needs, including Social Emotional Learning (SEL), academic advising, and CCR. However, most of their time is spent on other responsibilities the schools put on them (O'Connor, 2018; Hanover Research, 2016). In the literature found on the roles of school counselors, the time dedicated to CCR should be about 80% of their time, yet the reality is that they only spend about 20% of their time on this responsibility (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; O'Connor, 2018). Counselors cited that they are tasked with many other tasks, helping students or fulfilling administrative tasks that are added on to the roles, making it difficult for them to find the time to dedicate to their primary responsibility of CCR (Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Yavuz et al., 2017; O'Connor, 2018).

Literature on the ratios for counselors reveals that the smaller the caseload, the more benefits there are for students, and the equity gap in these schools shrinks (Barr et al., 2019). There are very few schools where the student-to-counselor ratio is small enough to ensure that students can receive the individualized attention needed to manage the college application process. According to the 2021 report by the American School Counselor Association, the national average of students to college guidance counselors is 408:1, a step in the right direction from the ratio in 2015 of 482:1 (O'Connor, 2018). The literature shows that the recommended caseload of counselors should be 250:1 to ensure counselors have the opportunity to distribute more resources to the students and their stakeholders, build relationships to ensure appropriate colleges are applied to, and kids are met where they are and pushed towards the next step (Bauman, 2017; O'Connor, 2018; Krell & Pérusse, 2012).

Professional Training for Counselors

School counselors are required to have a master's degree or higher in counseling while additionally needing to meet the state certification requirements for the role (O'Connor, 2018). Programs nationwide for counseling encompass various topics, primarily focusing on mental health and very little attention on the CCR aspect of the job they are to perform (Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018). The lack of consistent training and time to dedicate to their primary role in schools of ensuring students are ready for the steps they will take after high school prevents them from adequately providing these services for students and need to learn as they go how to incorporate the CCR curriculum their state uses (Ilic & Rosenbaum, 2019; Novakovic et al., 2021; Boulden et al., 2021; Krell & Pérusse, 2012).

Need for College and Career Readiness Training

Counselors understand the importance of preparing students for their steps after high school. However, they need to prepare to conduct the activities needed for the CCR curricula. Many in the field understand a direct correlation between counselors who believe CCR is essential and try to put more time into this aspect of their work with students (Novakovic et al., 2021). They are left with few options that include doing what they can with the resources at their fingertips, relying on others with the expertise in the field to get the necessary resources for the CCR activities, or seeking specific training on CCR to feel more confident in helping their students (Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018).

There are currently five certificate programs in the United States that help guide counselors and give them skills and an overarching picture of the role they will play in the lives of high school students. The schools offering the certificate program are California State San Diego, University of California Los Angeles, Harvard, University of California Irvine, and

NACAC. This is the only official training available for individuals who specialize in the field and demonstrate to employers that they have trained to learn the field.

In addition, college counselors can participate in many conferences, professional development programs, and journals to share updated information for the application cycles and best practices. These programs require fees to get much of the information. Access to these opportunities is a barrier for most counselors who need help paying the yearly dues to access the programs fully. The literature shows that counselors want more training on how to build their CCR programming; however lack of funding for professional development is not offered or provided, and the CCR laws in place by the federal and state governments do not require professional development on this aspect of their job, even though it is the primary focus of their role (Mokher et al., 2018; O'Connor, 2018; Malin et al., 2017).

Models of College and Career Readiness Counseling

There are a variety of models in which students can obtain CCR counseling to begin looking at their options for higher education. The literature needs to include more on the CCR Counseling models in which counselors, such as Independent Education Consultants (IEC) and School Counselors, can take various approaches. The effectiveness of Student-Counselor Meetings, whether conducted in a Classroom Setting or through dedicated CCR Programs, also requires further exploration, alongside their success in adhering to the CCR guidelines. What has been published in the literature is that any higher education support students can receive is beneficial to helping them think about their options if they have knowledge or access to their counselor or other stakeholders knowledgeable about how to prepare for life after high school (Cook et al., 2018; Hanover Research, 2016; IEAC, 2023; Turner et al., 2018).

Independent Educational Consultant

Families hire an Independent Educational Consultant (IEC) to provide students and families with an individualized college selection plan (IEAC, 2023). Their sole responsibility is to select colleges that fit the needs of the students and would be a good match based on the student's academic records. The hours that an IEC works are usually outside the traditional workday to be available when students are not in school. As these services are only available for pay, there is a discrepancy in who benefits from them, keeping a disparity in equity among the services students have available to help them obtain properly matched college searches. An IEC's role is to help plan for college, which benefits students who want to attend a four-year college; however, it lacks additional guidance for other paths a student may want to take.

College Guidance Counselor

A College Guidance Counselor is an individual who focuses their attention on the CCR of students in an educational setting. They will often provide the academic advising needed to help students select an educational path to help them achieve their goals after high school. They do not hold the other responsibilities that a school counselor would hold, although they may hold a few other administrative duties within the school. No current standards or requirements exist for an individual to become a College Guidance Counselor. Many enter the position from teaching or other professions and learn on the job and through networking with other college guidance counselors. Only some will seek the resources available for the training or certification programs and pay for these out of their resources to further their career development or get the tools they need to assist their students confidently.

Student-Counselor Meetings

In this model, students meet with their College Guidance Counselor, School Counselor, or IEC to discuss their future goals and create a plan (Martinez et al., 2016; Novakovic et al., 2021). The number of interactions with the student will vary depending upon the role of the advisor helping the student. Ideally, these meetings would focus on getting to know the student and their future aspirations. For school counselors with a small caseload, college guidance counselors and IECs provide an individualized list of colleges or programs that would fit the requirements students shared during their meetings (Castellano et al., 2017). Additionally, students would receive feedback on their application process to help ensure they present themselves in the best light possible when submitting their packages to universities (Roderick et al., 2009). Parents/Guardians would also be brought in on the discussions to ensure that these stakeholders were educated on the process and to best support the family with their individual needs (Hanover Research, 2016; Turner et al., 2018). Based on the current national caseload average, these services are complex for school counselors to provide, and they need more time and resources to provide these opportunities (O'Connor, 2018; Yavuz et al., 2017). Counselors with large caseloads often only see the students who come to see them and do not go seeking other students. Spending substantial time helping research schools would be challenging for many counselors struggling to complete their needed tasks.

Classroom Setting

School counselors, teachers, and college guidance counselors use classrooms to address a large group of students at once and share pieces of the CCR curriculum for their area. This is an ideal way for information to reach students, maximizing the time a counselor can share the steps

and answer students' questions (Martinez et al., 2016). In addition, it ensures that all students meet and work through steps to help them figure out which direction they might want to go.

College and Career Readiness Programs

As the literature has shown, there needs to be more consistency in how effective counselors are with their more significant and often unmanageable caseloads (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). To ensure that CCR initiatives are being met, several private agencies have been created to help support students (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; Le et al., 2015). The agencies were developed to pick up the slack from the schools and precisely target underserved students (Martinez et al., 2016). Programs create a specific pathway to allow students to look at different options for their future, whether to go on to higher education, trade schools, or the workforce (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2019; Turner et al., 2018). However, there is more emphasis on attending college. Students are exposed to various careers, even lesser-known ones, to help them figure out what they would and would not like to do in the future (Gee et al., 2020).

While these programs have many benefits, there are also a few areas of concern when bridging the academic gaps among specific groups. Students need to apply for the programs, as they are targeted at students from low-income families and are first-generation collegegoers (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2019; Turner et al., 2018). The initiatives are targeted to the specific area where the students reside, allowing them to be seen and heard by others who understand the culture of the neighborhoods they serve. Due to the nature of students needing to apply for these opportunities, they would need to be aware that these resources exist, which is only sometimes the case (Le et al., 2015). While these programs receive federal funding, much of the funding comes from philanthropic donations, giving these organizations autonomy to design programs based on what they want (Le et al., 2015). College Bound is one such organization that can be

found in many cities throughout the country to serve a specific group of students and get them ready for college. Another organization is Gear Up, which is competitive, and students undergo a comprehensive application process. Their focus is on improving the readiness of students to go on to higher education. Bridge to Employment program gives students the skills they need to enter the workforce. It is sponsored by many businesses and organizations nationwide (Detgen et al., 2021).

Outreach programs can bridge the gap for some of the underserved student groups, and students have benefited from them. For example, students in the foster care system are often moved around and face many challenges when looking to the future (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2019). Access to these services gives them the attention they need while showing them their possibilities. Students who are tribal members have college access, going to programs on scholarships that are specific for Native American students. How they find out about the programs appears outside the literature. For students who might otherwise get lost in the shuffle in school, programs to help with CCR are beneficial when students know they exist.

Need for Inclusive Curriculum

Definition of Inclusive Curriculum

There is a curriculum for the many subjects that educators must teach to meet the school, state, and federal requirements. The University of Cambridge states, “Inclusive curriculum design involves consideration of the overall course structure - including both content and delivery - to ensure that all students are provided with an equitable and supportive learning experience that offers them the opportunity to succeed whatever their background” (2025). What is lacking is an easily accessible inclusive curriculum for counselors to utilize as CCR frameworks are race and class-neutral, limiting the access and applicability for at-risk students

(Duncheon, 2018; Mayes et al., 2019). Having access to a robust curriculum that helps students see what their options are after high school would help ensure all students have access to the same information regardless of their race, socio-economic status, abilities, location, language abilities, and citizenship (Mokher et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2016; Novakovic et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2018; Martinez & Baker, 2022). An “inclusive curriculum is one where all students’ entitlement to access and participation in a course is anticipated, acknowledged and taken into account” (Morgan and Houghton, 2011). This can be achieved by embracing an inclusive model “of universal learning design which accommodates the needs and abilities of all learners and eliminates unnecessary barriers in the learning process” (University of Cambridge, 2025). Achieving inclusive CCR curricula should include an effective practice that can be used by all groups, while designed to help one particular group, it should also benefit all students who participate in the lessons (Morgan & Houghton, 2011).

Components of Inclusive Curriculum

“Inclusivity and accessibility should not be approached as an afterthought or only on a case-by-case basis but should be included from the start” (Queen Mary Academy, 2025). Numerous characteristics of an inclusive curriculum are discussed in the literature. According to Morgan and Houghton (2011), an inclusive curriculum is anticipatory, flexible, accountable, collaborative, transparent, and equitable (p. 12-13). The need for flexibility in presenting or delivering lessons, along with adjusting deadlines as necessary, provides students with the opportunity to achieve learning goals in ways that meet their individual needs (DMU, 2016; ECIO, 2023; Morgan & Houghton, 2011; NYU, 2025). NYU elaborates on anticipation, flexibility, and transparency by stating, “faculty should assign only as much work as needed to help meet learning goals and should consider adjusting that workload as needed” (2025).

Additionally, students must see themselves represented in the curriculum (OFS, 2025), covering all post-secondary exploration options during CCR (Castellano et al., 2017; Leahy et al., 2015; Malin et al 2017). This approach also helps lessen the workload of the school counselor, who must ensure that information is delivered to students during the limited time available for CCR. Furthermore, student-centered and multi-sensory lessons can help bridge the equity gap in understanding post-secondary options and provide a more inclusive curriculum model (Advance HE, 2025). According to ECIO (2023), training and support for school counselors are equally vital, as they assert, “The well-being of teaching staff is actively addressed, and excessive workload is countered. Interventions are available for the welfare of teachers, just as student wellbeing is worked on.” CCR counseling is one area where counselors desire more training, as they often lack adequate training in the field and learn as they go since research on CCR and best practices is not readily available, and when training is provided, it tends to be inconsistent among programs (Boulden et al., 2021; Ilic & Rosenbaum, 2019; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Leahy et al., 2015; Novakovic et al., 2021; O’Connor, 2018).

Challenges of an Inclusive College and Career Curriculum

Schools without a college guidance counselor but with a school counselor often combine resources with the Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum that schools invest in (O’Connor, 2018). This creates additional challenges, as school counselors cannot always meet with students one-on-one to help them identify the best colleges for their needs and academic records. This meeting is essential for building a comprehensive list of higher education options. Moreover, this obstructs the effort to close equity gaps, a primary goal of the initiatives at various government levels. Not only do the high caseloads of counselors prevent them from serving all students adequately, but they also lack the training in CCR with an emphasis on how to work with

underserved students (Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Boulden et al., 2021; Malin et al., 2017). This prevents counselors from being able to address reasonable options for students instead of them being under matched, as they do not seek out the advice of their counselors and do not have the resources to ensure students are appropriately matched, which continues to increase the equity gap (Rosenbaum et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2016; Le et al., 2015; Bhat & Stevens, 2021; Novakovic et al., 2021). The literature shows that several underserved students choose not to go to college because the application process is complicated, they do not always know who they can turn to, and they often do not meet specific college requirements, such as testing policies. Additionally, information shared with students is not always consistent, or they are not pushed to more selective colleges when the opportunities arise.

One area that has received the most attention is the rural schools, where the numbers of students attending a four-year university are lower than those in the urban and suburban areas. Many factors play into this: a limited number of courses offered, families' financials, lack of support from family and school staff, and limited knowledge of programs available (Kryst et al., 2018). Many students graduating today are first-generation college students and lack the resources needed to make informed decisions about what they could do after high school to pursue higher education (Tieken, 2016). Ensuring the stakeholders in the student's education agree on the next steps for high school students solidifies their willingness to look at all the possibilities. Ensuring information on all types of higher education to the student's support systems is vital to assisting the student in making informed decisions and increases the number of students applying to universities (Turner et al., 2019; Moker et al., 2019).

“Urban students with high post-secondary aspirations often lack information about the college application process and often have difficulty taking the concrete steps needed to apply to

and enroll in 4-year college” (Roderick et al., 2009). These schools serve more under-represented students, receive less funding, and have fewer resources to offer advanced courses and a college-going culture. In addition, many of these schools lack interactions with their counselor to be College and Career Ready.

The idea of having all students go to college has put less emphasis on career development, making options for those not wanting a 4-year college experience without knowledge of other options available to them. Due to underserved students not being held to the same standards, not provided with a rigorous high school curriculum, or given adequate help to ensure they are college counselors need to address other post-secondary options that are viable and important for all underserved students (Le et al., 2015; Conley, 2007; Kanno, 2018).

Students who face other academic challenges, such as being pulled from classes and put in programs to help with their learning needs, should be given more support to ensure they meet the benchmarks to complete high school while also supporting them to transition to a College and Career Ready program.

Intended Outcomes of Inclusive College and Career Readiness Curriculum

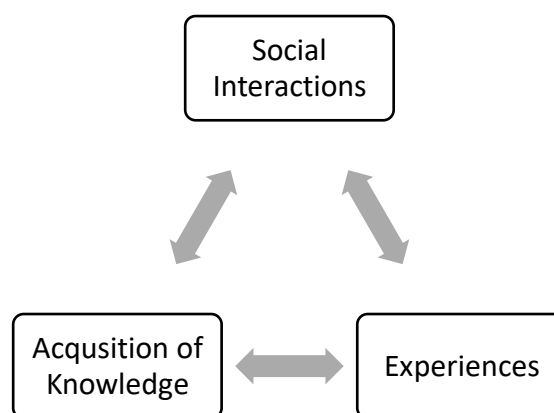
Providing an inclusive approach to CCR benefits students in many ways. Students who receive information about postsecondary options that will help them achieve their career goals, also gain emotional benefits. They find a sense of belonging when they see themselves in their activities (Eredics, 2018). Allowing students to recognize they have options beyond high school removes the stigma associated with non-traditional post-secondary paths. Molena et al (2021) stated that “inclusive educational environments are related to more positive attitudes toward diversity” amongst students for whom CCR curricula are typically designed for. To ensure that an inclusive curriculum can be provided to students, providing school counselors with

appropriate and adequate training would benefit students to receive the benefits of the aims CCR provide for all students (Abraham, 2021; Rangel-Pacheco & Witte, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

I believe there are two theories that best align CCR curriculums with creating an inclusive student environment. Lev Vygotsky designed Sociocultural in the 1930s in Russia, and constructivism was developed around the same time by Jean Piaget in Switzerland. Both theories did not start influencing the world of psychology and later education until the 1960s (Jaramillo, 1996; Sjøberg, 2010). Many concepts overlap in the ideas that focus on the developmental stages of the individual. A common theme in both theories is that learning is based on the learner's social interactions and experiences and influences knowledge acquisition (Brau, 2020; Cherry, 2022; Main, 2023; Sjøberg, 2010). While both agree that there is a relationship between learning and development, their viewpoints oppose one another. Vygotsky said learning drives the development of the individual, while Piaget stated that development drives learning (Jaramillo, 1996). Despite these differences, they claim to help students of all abilities learn information. They will influence what data is gathered in my research, as both address how educators can effectively reach all students.

Figure 2.1. The Relationship Between Socio-Culture Theory and Constructivism Theory



A component that the Sociocultural Theory addresses that constructivism does not directly reference is the importance of language and stakeholders. Vygotsky believed that how stakeholders interact socially with students “lays a foundation for what a child thinks and will do in certain situations (Jaramillo, 1996)”. While it varies amongst cultural groups, cognitive development is significantly impacted by the adults that students interact with at a young age and then with their peers as they enter social situations (Cherry, 2022; Main, 2023). When stakeholders introduce language about different life events, they can interact in their environments, leading to a deeper understanding of their world and helping them feel more confident and competent about the topics discussed amongst their peers (Jaramillo, 1996; Mercer & Howe, 2012). When school counselors address CCR lessons with their students, all stakeholders must be brought in to help support the students in their journey (Hanover Research, 2016). When stakeholders are missing the language given to students, it is just as important for school counselors to meet with the parents and help them understand the new language their students are bringing home, as the lack of information can create a barrier for underserved students (Allman, 2020; Cook et al., 2018; Toler Hilliard & Wharton-Beck, 2023; Turner et al., 2018).

Sociocultural and Constructivism Theories agree that school counselors must understand not only their students’ language but also the cultures in which students come from, as learning is derived from the ideas of the world they have already established (Main, 2023; Sjøberg, 2010). Knowing how intersecting identities impact students and how they will interact with their environment allows for understanding what their students need and how they will receive information about education after high school (Mayes et al., 2019; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Main, 2023). Research on the impact of culture on CCR states, “Students from historically underserved

groups often face academic, accessibility, and affordability barriers that impact their CCR” (Mayes et al., 2019). Utilizing the Sociocultural and Constructivism Theories by bringing in student’s previous knowledge, relationships, and culture can provide a robust exchange of information, enhancing the learning environment and making students feel safe (Jaramillo, 1996; Turner et al., 2018). When school counselors make diversity and inclusion a priority based on a student’s background, they would be able to provide a culture of higher education for all students they serve (Jaramillo, 1996; Mayes & Hines, 2014), as “CCR can be culturally responsible, equitable, and systematic in nature” (Mayes et al., 2019).

To make the curriculum more inclusive, “teachers should obtain knowledge about how students categorize their world to devise interdisciplinary themes or schemata networks that correlate with students’ interests” (Jaramillo, 1996). Constructivism states that learning should contain assimilations, where new information fits into new experiences and previous information, and accommodation, where the external world fits into new experiences (Brau, 2020; Miller et al., 2019). These concepts fit well with a sociocultural theory about curricula representing both parties’ interest in building a connection between the material and the student (Brau, 2020; Jaramillo, 1996). When school counselors take time to learn about their different students’ needs and how it impacts their academics, they possess the capacity to create a CCR plan that works to include all students (Allman, 2020; Boulden et al., 2021; Cherry, 2022; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Mayes et al., 2019). Sociocultural Theory states that teachers should be able to teach any subject effectively to any child at any level of their development, and modeling and scaffolding of the lessons should parallel the students’ abilities (Jaramillo, 1996).

While school counselors have high caseloads and need to meet the needs of each student, creating lessons that contain modeling, coaching, and collaborative learning centering around a specific task related to ensuring students are college and career-ready will help students reflect on what they want after high school (Allman, 2020; Brau, 2020; Cherry, 2022; Jaramillo, 1996; Mercer & Howe, 2012; Miller et al., 2019). These interactive lessons will help students interpret the information they are presented with based on their culture, personal views, and past experiences (Brau, 2020), focusing on how students learn in both the Constructivism and Sociocultural Theories. By understanding new ideas and concepts, they may be able to apply the information they have learned to real-world situations, allowing students to see their options for their future (Allman, 2020; Miller et al., 2019; Sjøberg, 2010). Ensuring that all demographics of underserved students participate in CCR activities helps bring different perspectives into the conversation. It improves the learners' ability to build on their thinking (Jaramillo, 1996). While ideas presented can be at odds with what a student understands to be their truth, it allows them to gain new knowledge through reflection of discussions with their social circles (Brau, 2020; Jaramillo, 1996; Sjøberg, 2010).

Constructivism and socio-cultural theories can have significant implications in the classroom in reaching students regardless of their background, knowledge, culture, or abilities. When a CCR curriculum allows students to see that they have many options after high school, and it is implemented well by a school counselor, the culture of the school changes. In addition, stakeholders learn the language and build a community that supports college or career aspirations and works to close the equity gap. When school counselors take into consideration the backgrounds and needs of all students served, they work to create a sense of security and trust that allows for new and different ideas to be considered for higher education from students who

might not have had the opportunity before. These pieces together help meet the “Every Student Succeeds Act” of 2015 initiatives by improving the number of students exploring new opportunities beyond high school.

Introduction to Methodology

In this study, I rigorously evaluated CCR curricula from a sample of states that provide comprehensive programs. Focusing on summative content analysis, I determined which curricula demonstrate inclusivity. The selected curricula comprise those readily available on the open market from the state’s Department of Education and those offered by three prominent organizations dedicated to equipping school counselors with resources.

This analysis used a dual lens to examine the integration of sociocultural and social constructivist theories within the curriculum models. This approach is essential as it informs how these theories are personified in college, career content, and pedagogy, thereby shaping students’ abilities to extract information effectively. By discerning the presence and application of sociocultural and constructivist principles, insights can be gleaned into how students navigate their educational journeys, ultimately informing their decisions regarding higher education opportunities.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

Over the past century, the approach to promoting higher education has evolved to meet the job market's needs and align with various presidential educational policies (Malin et al., 2017). The CCR curriculum proves effective when students can access a school counselor to help them navigate their higher education options (Cinotti, 2014). However, there is a disparity in who receives the support that the curriculum was designed to provide, primarily due to school counselors' large caseloads and numerous responsibilities. Recent statistics indicate the average caseload for school counselors is 415:1 (American School Counselor Association, 2021-2022), and they spend more than half of their time addressing students' social and emotional needs or administrative tasks rather than preparing students for college or career programs (Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018; Yavuz et al., 2017). Research indicates that underserved students are the ones most likely to miss out on the services provided by school counselors, leading to lower participation in higher education opportunities, thereby perpetuating the equity gap (Hanover Research, 2016; Mokher et al., 2018; O'Connor, 2018). Under the "Every Student Succeeds Act" in 2015, states gained the autonomy to develop and implement a CCR curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Overall, the curricula employed by the states are not inclusive for all students and could be enhanced to integrate inclusion elements.

My research question is explored through a content analysis of specific curricula developed by the states. By analyzing the comprehensive curricula offered by three states and one prominent private organization, I identified gaps in inclusion. I highlighted potential changes to create a more inclusive curriculum for students. Inclusivity initiatives and sociocultural and constructivist theories shaped the methodological approach I employed in my research. This

chapter discusses the rationale for selecting the curricula for evaluation while offering insight into my research design.

Research Questions

In the over 100 years of CCR, the curriculum has shifted, and a comprehensive look at ensuring the curriculum meets the needs of all students has yet to be conducted to make changes. The literature and research show the discrepancies that underserved students face when considering options for higher education. My research examines what states have in their CCR curriculums and identifies how they address inclusive issues raised in the literature. My research addresses the questions,

- 1) What components are commonly present in CCR curriculums?
- 2) How are inclusivity principles represented in the current CCR curricula?

A content analysis was performed to address the research questions and operationalize key research objectives. I examined and analyzed the curricula of the CCR programs by reviewing materials from three states and one private curriculum.

Research Methodology and Design

This study examines qualitative document analysis of CCR curricula from various states to identify the components of inclusivity present across all curricula, ensuring equitable access for all students nationwide. By exploring the details of the curricula, I uncovered the degree to which inclusive principles are integrated into the curriculum sample. This information guides how inclusive components could be incorporated into CCR programs offered by high schools.

The selected methodology for this research is qualitative content analysis. This approach enabled me to explore and understand social realities both subjectively and systematically (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). Content analysis, a fundamental aspect of document analysis,

emerged in the social sciences during the 1950s (Krippendorff, 2013) and has since been applied in nursing, social work, and education (Archer, n.d; Hsich & Shannon, 2005; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

The content analysis allowed me to highlight the underlying social constructs found in the collected curricula. As I analyzed the documents, I drew upon the principles of social constructivism and socio-culturalism, two theoretical frameworks I employ in my research. As the literature indicates, school counselors should gather insights from the students they serve to create a program that encompasses their aspirations. Social constructivism and socio-culturalism support an inclusive program model (Allman, 2020; Brau, 2020; Cherry, 2022; Jaramillo, 1996; Malin et al., 2017; Mokher et al., 2018; Roderick et al., 2009). Examining the frameworks compiled by states for their school counselors' data analysis was the most comprehensive approach to uncovering the existing inclusivity components. This study contributes to the ongoing discussion of equity and inclusion in education by meticulously analyzing various states' CCR curricula. Through qualitative document analysis, my research demonstrates how current educational models can adapt to the diverse needs of all students.

Criteria of Curriculum Selection

As my research focused on the curricula provided by states for their school counselors, I began collecting materials from all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and three private organizations specializing in CCR. The first criterion for inclusion was that the state curricula needed to be publicly accessible through each state's Board of Education without requiring a password or account. My research revealed that 13 states and one private CCR program lacked accessible materials, reducing my initial sample to 40 curricula for coding and analysis.

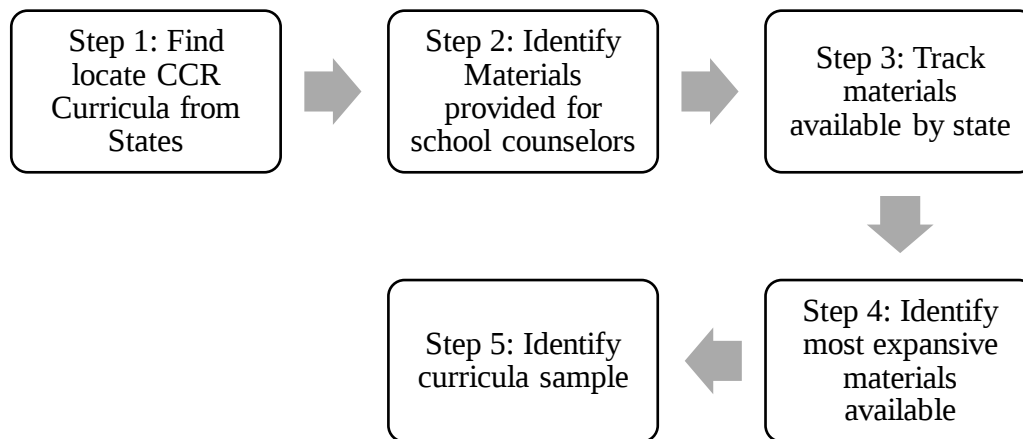
Next, I performed a thematic coding, which is finding a pattern within the data (Bowen, 2009), of the materials provided by the states for school counselors. To systematically track the elements included in each curriculum, I created an Excel spreadsheet to document and categorize the content. Through this process, I identified 12 common themes across the 40 programs.

- Curriculum specifically for counselors only.
- Materials available in multiple languages.
- List of grades for which materials were available.
- Modified lessons stated as available.
- Only core or state standards provided as materials.
- Printable materials for students.
- Combination of online and paper sources for students.
- CCR integrated into core classes.
- Focus solely on college. Focus solely on careers.
- Materials available for both counselors and students.
- Outline of CCR for the state.
- Guides available for teachers.

My next step was to determine which of the identified themes provided sufficient information to code for elements of inclusivity as defined in my research. I established that states needed to provide school counselors with detailed lesson plans to narrow the sample curricula. Additionally, states had to include at least one other element, such as materials in multiple languages, modified lesson plans, or stakeholder information. These criteria were selected to ensure that both school counselors and the students they serve had access to resources that support informed decision-making about postsecondary options. This narrowed the list to five

curricula, including four states and one private CCR program. This process utilized a systematic approach based on established steps in content analysis to create a manageable set of four curricula (Hsich & Shannon, 2005; Saldaña, 2021; White & March, 2006).

Figure 3.1. Process for Selecting Curricula Sample



Data Source Coding

Once the final sample was determined to include four state curricula and one private curriculum, I identified the codes to apply to the materials. Drawing from my research on CCR programming, I selected my coding framework based on the components required by the Obama administration following the passage of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act and key elements identified in the literature. For my first round of attribute coding, which involves sorting data into categories for further organization (Bingham, 2023), these components included the elements listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. *Inclusive Elements from Literature Review*

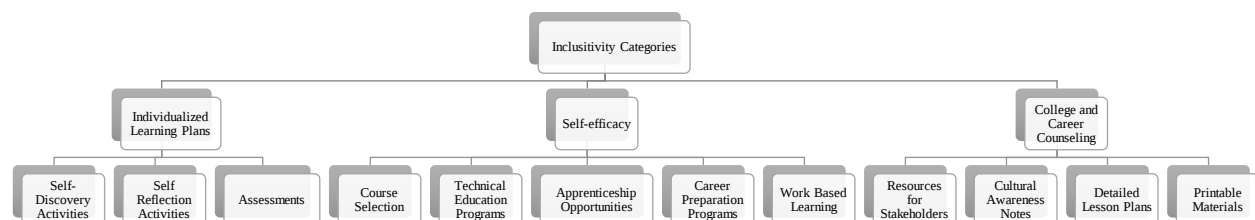
Inclusive Elements Identified in Literature	
Source	Elements Identified
2015 Every Student Succeeds Act	Culturally Appropriate/Relevant
	Multiple Languages
	Technical Education Programs
	Mentoring/Internships/Job Shadowing
	Apprenticeships
	Access to Dual Enrollment/AP/Honors Classes
	College Counseling
	Career Preparation Programs
	Personal Stories/Narratives
Literature Review	Peer Interactions/Collaborative Learning
	Strength/Skill/Career Assessments
	Self-Discovery Activities/Self-Reflection
	Stakeholder Information Sessions/Support
	Transition Skills/Skill Development
	Group/Individual Counseling Sessions
	Test Preparation
	College/Career Fairs
	Financial Counseling
	Summer Programming
	Individualized Lesson Plans
	Academic/Career Search Self-Efficacy
	Trauma Informed Program Design
	Prevention Intervention

I developed an Excel spreadsheet to apply attribute coding to the four curricula, which allowed me to identify their most common elements through hand coding. I subsequently utilized deductive coding to categorize these elements into similar groups, resulting in a comprehensive list that streamlined the upcoming round of coding and analysis. By implementing attribute coding and deductive coding, this study aimed to identify the key elements in the curricula that aligned with the principles of inclusivity (Bingham, 2023). Deductive coding relies on the researcher's expectations of what might emerge from the data (Bingham, 2023). Therefore, I applied my expertise in curricula and CCR programming; I organized the data into three broad

topics, each containing smaller subcategories to emphasize the inclusive elements. The identified inclusivity categories include: 1. Individualized Learning Plans (Portfolios) which encompass subcategories such as self-discovery activities, self-reflection exercises, and assessments that assist students in identifying their strengths, skills, and potential career fields. 2. Self-efficacy, as defined in CCR, refers to advocating for oneself and selecting activities that students believe they can accomplish; it includes subcategories such as course selection, apprenticeship opportunities, career preparation programs, technical education programs, and work-based learning. 3. College and career counseling entails providing school counselors with detailed lesson plans to help students navigate their paths, as well as resources for stakeholders, cultural awareness notes for counselors, financial literacy (information about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, scholarships, grants, loans, paying for college), and printable materials.

Figure 3.2 breaks down how I categorized inclusivity categories in my analysis.

Figure 3.2. Process for Selecting Curricula Sample



A second round of deductive coding was conducted using Delve, an online coding database, to efficiently sort and organize the materials for the analysis portion of my research. Emphasis was placed on extracting data that provides the most relevant information for inclusive components (White and Marsh, 2006). By identifying key criteria for inclusivity, which include flexibility, accountability, transparency, and equitable access (Morgan & Houghton, 2011), my research aims to identify which elements are most represented in the curricula and how inclusivity is represented.

Analysis

The initial step in narrowing the data involved skimming through the 54 available curricula to identify the materials provided by the states to find the curricula sample I would use; this process enabled a swift assessment of the offerings from each state (Bowen, 2009). After a round of attribute and deductive coding, I identified the elements in the four curricula that made up my sample.

The first round of deductive coding, combined with attribute coding, identified three broad categories essential for an inclusive curriculum. These categories were informed by the literature review and the *2015 Every Student Succeeds Act*”, which outlined key components of equitable education. Attribute coding was used to classify specific characteristics within the curricula, allowing for a systematic organization of inclusivity elements.

During the analysis, I also examined the key components of an inclusive curriculum to address my second research question: *How are inclusivity principles represented in college and career readiness (CCR) curricula?* These elements, as identified in the literature (Advance HE, 2025; Queen Mary University of London, 2025), include:

1. Diverse and Representative Content
2. Differentiated Instruction
3. Culturally Responsive Teaching
4. Accessibility and Equity

I utilized deductive coding to identify the inclusive components of the research. I then integrated these principles of inclusivity into the coding framework. This improved the categorization of key themes and facilitated a more thorough examination of how inclusivity is

reflected in CCR curricula. This method provided me with a clearer understanding of how various states and organizations address equity and accessibility in postsecondary planning.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the necessity to address the elements within CCR curricula, including inclusive education, to ensure an equitable program across the nation for all students. With over a century of educational evolution, the literature shows that disparities still affect underserved populations when identifying opportunities for higher education. My research, which utilizes qualitative content analysis, aimed to uncover the gaps identified in the literature, its relationship with the current CCR curricula that incorporates inclusive principles, and how these can be implemented to ensure that all student populations receive equitable programming. By examining both public and private curricula, this research seeks to empower educators, counselors, and policymakers to develop a more equitable CCR program that supports each student's aspirations for higher education.

Chapter 4 - Findings

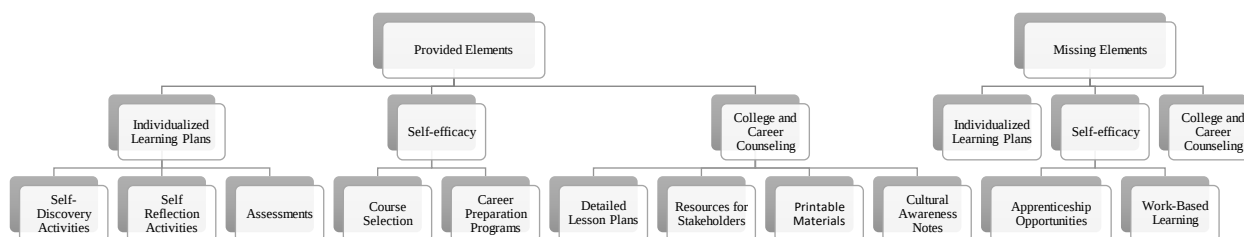
This chapter focuses on the findings related to the components of inclusivity within the CCR programs. These components were identified based on the requirements of the 2015 “Every Student Succeeds Act” and insights from the literature on CCR, highlighting the elements necessary to ensure that all students receive an equitable experience as they prepare for their paths after high school. The data is organized in this chapter first by state and then by inclusivity components. Through deductive coding, I identified the three inclusivity categories to be: 1. Individualized Learning Plans (Portfolios) encompassing subcategories such as self-discovery activities, self-reflection activities, and assessments that help students identify their strengths, skills, and potential career fields. 2. Self-efficacy, defined in CCR as advocating for oneself and selecting activities students believe they can accomplish, includes subcategories such as course selection, apprenticeship opportunities, career preparation programs, technical education programs, and work-based learning. 3. College and career counseling involves providing school counselors with detailed lesson plans to assist students in navigating their paths, as well as stakeholder resources, cultural awareness notes for counselors, financial literacy (information about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, scholarships, grants, loans, paying for college), and printable materials.

California State: Career Advising Model

The California Department of Education’s Career and College Readiness program was recognized for the materials it offers to school counselors and the lesson plan components it supplies to students. The analyzed materials included the National Career Development Guidelines Framework, CCR Anchor Standards, the Career & College Readiness Lesson Plans:

Educator Guide, the Career and College Readiness Lesson Plan Series Content Overview, and the Career & College Readiness Lesson Plans for Grades 5-12. Counselors receive detailed lesson plans that incorporate methods for integrating and modifying lessons as needed. Student materials are accessible online; however, all resources can be printed, ensuring students have access to each lesson’s components. Additionally, materials for students are available in Spanish, enabling these students to participate fully in activities with confidence.

Figure 4.1. California College and Career Readiness Curriculum



Individualized Learning Plans

The California State Board of Education encourages students to have an Individualized Learning Plan that they refer to as a Career Portfolio in the Career & College Readiness Lesson Plans: Educator Guide (p.1). There are two ways in which students can create their Career Portfolio in the CCRLP Educators Guide it states, “It is recommended that you have them [students] create a hard copy Career Portfolio so they have a place to save copies of all the work they completed. Many lessons will use CalCRN online tools that allow students to save work online; but as students’ progress through middle and high school, they will find it helpful to have their accumulated career and college readiness work in one place, so it is easy to access as one cumulative record” (p. 1). The only other mention of a Career Portfolio is in the Grade 9 lesson, What’s the Plan? Career Planning which states, “At the end of this lesson, students will be able

to create a personalized High School Graduation Plan saving it online in their My Stuff student account” (p. 1).

Self-Discovery

During the Learning About Myself lesson for 5th grade students, starting to identify career possibilities is done by having students “complete the Career Interest Inventory-Pictorial activity” where students identify careers they might be interested in based on images. This activity is designed specifically with handouts as many students do not have access to the online resources due to their ages (CCRLP Educators Guide, p. 2). In sixth grade, students participate in assessments designed to identify potential careers that align with the interests indicated in the questionnaires (My Dream Career, p. 3; Me and My Career, p. 1; I Have ‘M.I.’ Strengths!, p. 1). Each of these lessons includes an assessment that suggests potential careers for students to explore, helping them understand what each course entails. The lessons for exploring interests and possible careers continue into 7th grade as students “complete the California CareerZone Interest Profiler and explore career options including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) occupations” (p. 1) in the Possible Careers lesson. To build upon career options, 8th Grade students “learn about the wide range of occupations available in the military and understand how to have a military career” (p. 1) in the Exploring Military Career Options where students “describe a military occupation option that is interesting to them” (p. 1).

While students learn about College Technical Education options in ninth grade during the Learning Skills to Pay the Bills lesson, they investigate various paths, looking for one that aligns with their desired career (p. 4). This lesson provides all students the opportunity to explore one post-secondary option in detail as it relates to their career goals. Although not every student will choose this option, it helps diminish the stigma associated with it, giving those who select this

path greater confidence in discussing their choices. In the Due Dates, Deadlines, & Decisions lesson for 11th graders, students receive a calendar outlining the tasks to complete in their junior and senior years. One task involves exploring post-secondary options, during which school counselors are instructed to explain that whether students plan to attend a four-year college or university, a two-year community college, or a technical college, or if they are still uncertain, it's valuable to understand the college application process (p. 3). The handout accompanying this lesson assigns students the task of researching college programs that support their career choice, confirming that the programs they are interested in meet the educational requirements for their chosen career. They don't want to invest their time and money only to discover they need a different program (Junior Calendar Year Handout, p. 1)! This approach keeps options open for all students, helping them explore available choices and providing them with the information needed to make informed decisions about their futures.

Self-Reflection

During the 10th Grade lesson, I'm Ready to Work, students are asked to fill out a job application, and part of the lesson has students "discuss activities they can put in their experience section...things like leadership in activities, participation in sports, or volunteer positions" (p. 4). This lesson has students reflect on the skills they have learned in the different aspects of their lives and how they translate to the workforce. This is helpful for students to see that regardless of what they are involved in, they are learning valuable skills for their future endeavors.

The grade 11 lesson titled "Ready, Set, Test!" has students take practice standardized tests. During the lesson procedures, school counselors are encouraged to "have students complete a practice test. While they are completing the practice test, have them record things they feel make taking the test a challenge" (p. 4). During 12th Grade students are walked through the

lesson titled Telling My Story. During this lesson, students “develop a personal statement that can be used in the college admissions process or for application to other programs” (p. 1). The lesson plan procedures has students review the prompts for the personal statements and select three questions they feel comfortable writing about (p. 4). The prompts for college applications require students to reflect on something in their life to write about that gives institutions an opportunity to get to know the student.

The California State Board of Education recognizes that students identify intelligence in different ways and has created a lesson called I Have “M.I.”! for sixth graders to participate in. During this lesson, students are asked, “Is there more one way to be smart? (p. 3)’ and then broken into groups to share their answers and discuss their thoughts. This lesson is designed to demonstrate to students, through activities and discussions, that “people with different intelligence strengths like doing different things” (p. 3). This exercise challenges traditional definitions of intelligence and encourages students to recognize and value diversity, which is vital to an inclusive learning environment. It also empowers students to see themselves as capable and valued members of their community.

Assessments

Career Exploration: My Dream Career, Grade 6, p. 3: “Demonstrate completing the Quick Assessment. Select ‘view results’, then scroll through the list of occupations. Explain these occupations were chosen because they match the interest areas you choose. Select an occupation from the list and open its profile. Walk students through the profile sections. Tell students the occupational profiles have all the information they need to complete the sheet.” The interest profiler assessments are revisited in the lessons Where Am I Going (grade 8), Matching Interests & Careers (grade 9), What’s a Hot Job (grade 10), and What Occupation Interests Me?

(grade 11). Having students continue to take interest surveys it opens new career possibilities as skills, values, and interests change over time. Allowing students to recognize that career exploration is an ongoing process of self-discovery and assessments over time provide them with an opportunity to see how they have grown and where some of their interests have stayed the same.

The Junior Year Calendar, a handout for students as a part of the Due Dates, Deadlines, & Decision lesson plan in grade 11, mentions when students should consider taking the standardized assessments. On page 1, the checklist lists: “Take the Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in October, if you didn’t take it as a sophomore.” and on page 2, in the winter/spring section, “register for and take entrance examinations. For four-year colleges: confirm which, if any, tests the college requires; Take the SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and/or ACT in the spring of your junior year; Take the AP test for AP classes you completed. For community colleges: no tests are required; community colleges accept all students with a high school diploma. For technical colleges: Each school has its own requirements. Check with the school you want to attend.” The Senior Year Calendar, on page 1, lists students should take the required entrance exams in September-October and states, “depending on your plans and the requirements of the program you chose, register and take one or more of the following tests. Talk with your guidance counselor or contact your chosen programs if you need more information. Make sure your scores are sent to each program you are applying for: Take the SAT and or the ACT again if you think you can raise your score.”

The Ready, Set, Test! lesson is provided for grade 11 students where “students will be introduced to the common examinations (PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, ACT, ASVAB). They will learn and practice test-taking strategies, which are designed to improve student confidence and

performance” (p. 1). The lesson plan procedure of the same lesson states, “have students go online to one of the testing sites... have students take a practice test” (p. 4).

Taking self-assessments to identify skill, values and interests help students to begin to understand themselves and the qualities they bring to the community. Utilizing these assessments to help students explore interests helps school counselors to give students opportunities to explore options they might not have thought about previously due to lack of exposure in other areas of their lives, which helps to normalize all career paths and remove stigmas associated with others.

Providing students with guidance on taking standardized assessments to prepare for post-secondary options gives all students exposure to what is needed for their future paths, while offering realistic timelines to ensure they can meet deadlines. Allowing students to take practice exams is a powerful tool to help them gauge their understanding of the material, familiarize them with the types of questions being asked to reduce test anxiety, and identify gaps in learning so they can prepare effectively for the assessments.

Self-efficacy

High School Course Selections

Students begin discussing high school graduation requirements in the grade 7 lesson, The Next 6 Years, where students “complete the Graduation Requirement Worksheet and the High School Plan Worksheet” (p. 4). They continue the exploration of graduation requirements in the Planning for Middle and High School lesson the same year (p.4), the only addition is students add in the component of possible career interests (p. 4). These activities encourage students to “make choices instead of circumstances making choices for you; sync class schedules with friends and outside commitments; alleviates stress of scheduling classes, work, and life; helps

you work out your online and on-campus classes; and ensures you will meet all the requirements” (Planning for Middle and High School Lesson, p. 4). Planning for high school continues into the 8th grade lesson titled Transitioning to High School, where one of the components of the course is for students to “plan courses (p. 4) as they think about how they will transition to their high school. This is particularly important for students who will be attending a new school to understand what courses are offered and how to ensure they not only meet the graduation requirements but also know what classes they can take to explore their interests.

During the What’s Plan? Lesson students partake in 9th grade, students reevaluate their classes, “at the end of class, they will be able to identify classes that can lead to personal success, classes that support a potential career choice, and district graduation requirements (p. 1). The benefit of students identifying personal success helps students identify what they believe to be successful and not base it on the standards of others. In addition to making sure the classes they have and will take meet graduation requirements, they are able to explore classes that could help them identify interests leading to a career choice.

Apprenticeships

The topic of apprenticeships is mentioned only once in the lesson plans. It appears in the Grade 10 lesson “What Are My Options?” in the vocabulary handout for students, which includes the definition of an apprenticeship.

Career Preparation

In the Grade 6 activity Road Map to Success, students are asked to work on goals, which helps them synthesize their short-term and long-term goals while also evaluating the steps they will need to take to achieve the goals (p. 3).

In two of the 7th grade lessons, students participate in activities that provide steppingstones to help them be successful in their future endeavors. The Lesson Evaluating Websites helps students to “learn how to analyze online content for Timeliness, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose (TRAPP) evaluation criteria (p. 1)” which sets the standards for students to use as they research in other classes and build the foundation for postsecondary options, they may pursue that require research. This lesson is followed up in Grade 9 when students learn “the importance of properly citing information and the potential consequences of plagiarizing (p. 1)” in the Plagiarism is Stealing! Lesson.

The California Department of Education emphasizes that career preparation involves more than merely understanding available career options and pathways. The 7th-grade lesson, Workplace Skills, teaches students about “the 21st Century Skills and Qualities to be successful in the workplace” (p. 1). This is followed by the 8th-grade lesson, How to Succeed in Life, where students explore the importance of the character traits “Committed, Confident, Courageous, Creative, Determined, and Integrity... as important qualities used in the workplace” (p. 3). Another activity outlined for 8th graders is Preparing for My Future, where students “identify their interests, potential careers, and activities that support those options and analyze the relationship between career choices and school-based or community-based activities” (p. 1). In 9th grade, students are “introduced to the concept of transferable and job-specific skills needed for the labor market” (p. 1) in the lesson What Skills Do I Need?, which is elaborated upon in 10th grade through the lesson What Matters to Me? Where students “understand their work values... then identify the relationship of work values and career selection” (p.1). In the 10th grade lesson, I’m Ready to Work. Here, they “will learn the key requirements of a standard job application and use the California Career Center’s My Stuff Job Central to create a master job

application (p. 10” which pulls from the grade 9 lesson What Skills Do I Need? And the grade 10 lesson, I’m Ready to work. This concept is further developed in the 11th grade lesson My Best Resume, where “students will learn how to create an effective resume using the California Career Center My Stuff Job Central-Resume builder” (p. 1). The lesson also informs students that their resume can be used to apply for “volunteer positions, internships, jobs, or any situation where someone wants to know more about them” (p. 4). The 12th grade students engage in four lessons focused on career preparation that build upon previous knowledge. One lesson, Etiquette? What’s That?, guides students in discussing business etiquette related to “people, email, telephone, meetings, and workspace... where students will demonstrate both good and bad business etiquette” (p. 3). The lesson Writing Right teaches students how to craft four common types of business letters: cover, informational interview request, reference request, and thank you” (p. 4). In the lesson In the Interview Hot Seat, students have the opportunity to “learn about commonly asked interview questions and how to respond effectively to them” (p. 1). The final lesson focused on career preparation for 12th grade students, Learn to Reach Out, allows students to “research professional associations through networking and social media and conduct an informational interview” (p. 1).

During the What’s the Plan activity for 9th grade, students “discuss post-high school options that may impact their academic plans. For example, “do they need to take classes for: college admissions; military enlistment; entry into the skilled trades/apprenticeship; or general employment” (p. 4) and research the admission requirements. During their 10th grade year, students participate in the lesson What Are My Options? where students explore post-secondary options such as: Training (apprenticeship, industry certification, technical school); work (get a job, create a business); Gap year (travel, volunteer, study); College (2-year/4-year, public or

private); Military service (enlisted or officer); National service (AmeriCorps, Job Corps)” (p. 3). Providing students with an avenue to explore other options to reach their career goals they might not have known about prior. In addition, students participate in a lesson titled Gaining by Giving which has students “research community volunteer opportunities and learn they can develop career skills through volunteering” (p. 1). This exercise provides an opportunity for students to explore how they can obtain skills that will benefit them in the workforce that have low stakes, help build their resume, and provide additional resources they would not have access to without the opportunity to volunteer.

Two lessons focus on students recognizing workplace safety and workers’ rights. The first lesson is designed for 8th grade students and introduces the topic. The lesson outcomes include: “identify ways that young workers get injured on the job; categorize the different types of job hazards; discuss possible solutions to control job hazards; and develop an understand of the rights employees have under U.S. labor law (Occupational Safety and Health Administration - OSHA)” (p. 1). This is achieved through the “PowerPoint, ‘Workplace Safety for Young Workers’” (p. 5), provided to school counselors. The second lesson is aimed at 11th grade students and builds on what they learned in the 8th grade lesson. Hazards in the Workplace utilizes a PowerPoint “Workplace Safety for Teens (p. 4) to meet the learning objectives for students: “recognize and reduce hazards on the job; identify laws that protect teens from working in dangerous jobs and from discrimination and harassment; assess ways to solve health and safety problems in the workplace; and name some of the agencies that enforce health, safety, and child labor laws” (p. 1). These lessons are crucial for students, as they are vulnerable workers entering the workforce with little to no training, which makes them more susceptible to

workplace injuries, exploitation, and unsafe conditions. When they understand their rights and the laws protecting them from systemic injustices, teens can advocate for themselves.

Technical Education Programs

During the vocabulary section of the 8th Grade lesson on Transitioning to High School, students are exposed to the Career Pathway and Career Education terms through a vocabulary handout provided to school counselors in the Lesson Plan (p. 6). This ensures that as students research their high schools, they can more easily understand the options available to them and make a plan to incorporate these options into their high school experience. When students enter 9th grade, their school counselor conducts a lesson titled, Learning the Skills to Pay the Bills: CTE, where students will “learn about their local Career Technical Education (CTE) courses and career pathways to find programs that support their career goals” (p. 1).

College and Career Counseling

Detailed Lesson Plans

School Counselors have access to detailed lesson plans for students in grades 5-12. These plans incorporate the National Career Development Guidelines Framework and the CCR Anchor Standards in English Language Arts and literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical subjects. The lessons are designed to help students develop skills applicable to future academic and career success. They are organized by grade level and centered on four key topic areas: Self-Knowledge, Career Exploration, Career Planning, and 21st-century Skills.

An educator’s guide explains how the lesson plans are organized and outlines the available materials. This resource equips school counselors with tools to engage students in career development activities that foster informed decision-making skills and prepare them for post-secondary opportunities. The introduction of the Career & College Readiness Lesson Plans

(CCRLP): Educator Guide states, “These lessons provide California educators with a key tool for implementing and incorporating critical career and college readiness knowledge and skill development into their classroom instruction, as well as supporting advisory and life skills classes” (p. 1).

The purpose of the CCRLPs is to “enable students to identify a broad range of careers and occupations, explore potential life and work goals, and build awareness of the array of postsecondary education and training options available to them” (CCRLP Educator Guide, p. 2). Enhancing awareness of post-secondary options helps students understand that they have numerous choices beyond a four-year college or university. This exploration removes barriers and reduces the stigma associated with alternative options in various communities. Engaging in activities that explore goals beyond just career-focused ambitions provides opportunities for students to broaden their definition of success by recognizing personal growth that is not solely tied to a high-paying or prestigious career.

Each of the lesson plans follows the same format which allows for school counselors to know what to expect and clearly outline what is to be expected for each lesson. The formula for the lesson plans is found in the CCRLP Educators Guide on pages 3- 5 with the heading and brief description of the section. It is as follows:

- Lesson Identification

The first page of each lesson includes the program title, “Career & College Readiness Lesson Plans,” the lesson plan title, and the topic area.

- Header

Each page of the lesson has a header which includes the lesson title and the topic area.

- Grade Level(s):

This shows the recommended grade level for this lesson; however, in most cases, a lesson can be used in a variety of grade levels.

- Overview

The Overview is a brief description of the information the lesson is designed to convey and the activities students will undertake to complete the lesson.

- Learning Outcomes

The Learning Outcomes describe what skills, knowledge, or abilities, students will acquire and what products students must complete by the end of the lesson.

- Language Objectives

The Language Objectives describe how students will demonstrate their mastery of the lesson by reading, writing, speaking, or listening.

- Standards Alignment

This section describes how the lesson aligns to the various educational standards or guidelines that will help students become career and college-ready, including:

- California Common Core State Standards: College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards
- California Career Technical Education Anchor Standards
- California Standards for Career Ready Practice
- National Career Development Guidelines
- International Society for Technology in Education Standards
- English Language Development Standards

- Materials

This section lists all the materials needed to teach the lesson.

- Academic Vocabulary

This section identifies key vocabulary that will be used in the lesson.

- Activity

This section provides a brief description of the activity(ies) that students will engage in as they participate in this lesson.

- Lesson Procedures

This section provides a sequential set of steps to follow for teaching the lesson.

- Estimated Time

This section provides an estimate of how many class periods it will take to complete the lesson. Most lessons can be delivered in one class session.

- Evaluation

This section identifies the student outcomes which can be used to evaluate student performance.

- Additional Resources

This section provides additional resources you may wish to use to enrich your lesson delivery, extend the lesson activities, or build on the lesson.

- Adaptations

This section identifies changes which can be made to enhance the lesson, to use different activities, or better address the needs of various student populations.

- Attribution

This section identifies and credits lesson ideas or topics that were initially developed by outside sources.

Providing learning outcomes helps school counselors grasp the expected results of each lesson. Equipping students with the language used in lessons narrows the information gap, giving all students a shared foundation in understanding terms related to CCR. The California State Board of Education draws from various resources, including the National Career Development Guidelines and CCR Anchor Standards, which are incorporated into the Career and College Readiness Lesson Plans. The lesson plan procedures outline the steps school counselors should follow to effectively execute the lesson. This aspect is particularly beneficial for school counselors lacking training or experience in CCR programming, as it boosts their confidence in teaching the lessons. Providing an estimated time for the lessons ensures that school counselors know how long lessons will take, allowing them to make necessary adjustments to students' schedules. The most significant component in the lesson plans is the adaptations section, as it offers school counselors alternative ways to meet course objectives while ensuring each student's needs are addressed.

Another resource available to school counselors is the Career and College Readiness Glossary, which assists students by providing vocabulary they may not know, ensuring they can fully understand the CCR-related content. By equipping students with a shared understanding of terms, the glossary levels the playing field, reduces barriers to success, and promotes equity in learning. Also available to school counselors is the California Career Resource Network, whose "primary duty is to distribute career information, resources, and training materials to middle school and high school counselors, educators, and administrators, in order to ensure that middle and high schools have the necessary information available to provide a pupil with guidance and instruction on education and job requirements necessary for career development" (CCR Educators Guide, p. 6). Training for school counselors was highlighted as a need in my literature

review. California’s State Board of Education has found a way to ensure training is provided for those providing CCR programming to students in the state. This closes the information gap for school counselors, opening more opportunities for all students to receive the information relevant to their post-secondary needs.

The Career and College Readiness Lesson Plan: Educators Guide on page 7 provides recommendations for school counselors on naming conventions of documents. It states, “A naming convention of words, letters, or numbers which are uniformly applied. The purpose of naming conventions is to make it easy to manage online resources. Whether or not you use a naming convention to assist students in setting up online accounts, you must ensure student identities are protected.” The suggestions for school counselors are beneficial for students in a multitude of ways. Protecting students’ identities teaches all students about how to be safe on the internet and helps to safeguard their personal information, particularly for student groups who are at greater risk of their identities being exposed online. Naming conventions helps avoid confusion and ensure fair access to materials. They also help students who do not have prior experience navigating digital systems while also helping to prevent lost, duplicate, or misidentification of documents.

Printable Materials

Each lesson plan features a printable component for activities, ensuring that all students, regardless of their access to technology, can fully engage with the CCR programming. This strategy addresses the digital divide, supporting students and schools that may lack the necessary technology. Furthermore, the Educators Guide for Career and College Readiness lesson plans recommends, “When you introduce students to the CCRLPs, it is recommended that you have them [students] create a hard copy Career Portfolio so they have a place to save copies of all

work they complete... a hard copy Career Portfolio also provides a resource that is easy to share with a counselor, teacher, parent, or guardian” (p. 1).

To further promote equity and inclusion, students are encouraged to keep their materials in their preferred language when online formats are not available in their native language. This ensures that multilingual learners can fully engage in career and college planning without the additional barrier of translation issues. Furthermore, by providing a standardized platform for presenting materials, all students have equal opportunities to showcase their achievements and plan for their futures.

Stakeholder Information

The Due Dates, Deadlines, and Decisions lesson for 11th grade offers an adaptation that states, “Schedule a College Application Night for students and their families to help them understand the college application process” (p. 5). Engaging stakeholders in informational sessions helps them grasp financial literacy as it pertains to post-secondary options, enabling them to converse with their students and aid them in making informed decisions. These lessons were the sole resources provided to assist school counselors in delivering essential information to stakeholders.

Cultural Awareness Notes for Counselors

The Career and College Readiness Lesson Plan: Educator’s Guide states, “The student handouts in the lesson plans have been translated into Spanish to support English learners who may need primary language assistance. Please note this was done to support the largest student population that speaks a language other than English; in this case, Spanish-speaking” (p. 5). The California State Board of Education acknowledges the language gaps within the education system and ensures that these students have access to the same materials as their English-

speaking peers, striving to close the language gap and provide equitable access to CCR resources. They also recognize the gaps faced by students who read and speak languages other than Spanish or English. The lesson plans are available in a Word document, and school counselors may utilize translation services to offer the information in additional languages if they wish to do so.

Financial Literacy

Three lessons are designed to help students understand the impact of finances on their futures. The first lesson is introduced to 7th grade students in My Future Lifestyle, where “students will use the California CareerZone’s Make Money Choices tool to create a budget, research occupations, and learn there is an interconnectedness of lifestyle, income, and career choice” (p. 1) with the outcome of students understanding how to budget based on “how income impacts lifestyles” (p. 4) and the “difference between ‘Essential’ and ‘Discretionary’ expenses” (p. 4). This lesson is duplicated for 10th grade students in Choosing My Lifestyle, where they utilize the Make Money Choices Tool again, incorporating aspects of “identifying financial issues that arise from independent living, how to make informed decisions about financial issues that arise from independent living, and making financial decisions by systematically considering alternatives and consequences” (p. 1). During the lesson, students are “asked how their findings might impact their postsecondary plans” (p. 4). This lesson connects to the 11th grade lesson, College: Plan Well and Pay Less, where students “research and analyze the cost of postsecondary education and analyze different ways to pay for it” (p. 1). This lesson is specifically crafted to help students make financial decisions about which college to attend by “naming the four most common types of colleges they can attend in California” (p. 3) and “review the cost of college information on ‘Focus on Net Price, Not Sticker Price’” (p. 4).

Additionally, students learn about the extra college-related expenses to fully comprehend the costs associated with attending different institutions (p. 4). The 7th and 10th grade lessons emphasize how career choices will impact students' lifestyles, giving them a chance to reflect on what is important to them and how their choices influence other aspects of life. These lessons are relevant for all students, regardless of their post-secondary choices, while the 11th grade lesson specifically focuses on two-year and four-year college options. This does not illustrate how other options relate to making decisions.

In the adaptations portion of the Due Dates, Deadlines & Decisions lesson plan for 11th grade families, it says, "schedule a Financial Aid Family Night to provide information about the California Student Aid Commission, the FAFSA, CSS Profile, scholarships and grants and to engage parents/guardians in the financial aid process" (p. 4). This same lesson in the handout titled Senior Year Checklist lists that in November-February, students should apply for financial aid.

Complete your FAFSA form as soon as it becomes available. Check federal, state, and the institutions' deadlines carefully to meet them all. Complete the CSS Profile form if required by the programs you're applying to. Check your college's requirements carefully to confirm deadlines. Complete the profile as soon as it becomes available October 1. You need information from your parents, so start this process early; Ensure a certified transcript showing your GPA is sent to the California Student Aid Commission; Complete any other scholarship and financial aid forms required by the schools and or programs you are applying to. Submit them before the deadline. Be sure to file for merit- and need-based financial aid. (pp. 5-6)

Null Curriculum

The California Career and College Lesson Plans lack two key inclusive elements identified in my research: work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities. Although one lesson mentions apprenticeship opportunities, it does not provide students with sufficient information to determine whether this is a viable option when exploring careers. Including these two components in the lesson plans is essential for offering students all available postsecondary options. Equipping students with information about all career exploration opportunities helps ensure they understand their choices, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

California Summary

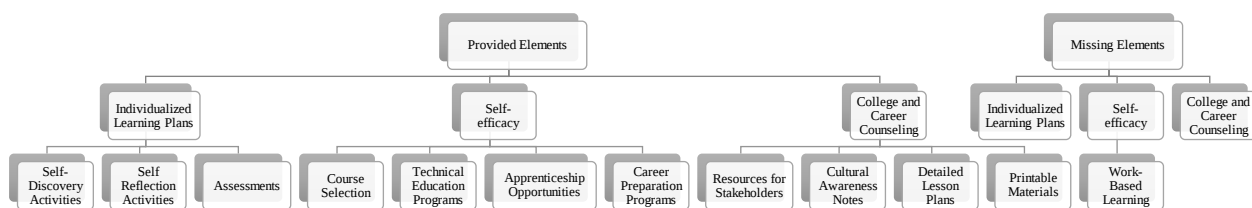
California's curriculum included all but two components identified in the research as necessary for providing an inclusive education for all students. School counselors have access to lesson plans that clearly outlined the requirements for each lesson and the steps for implementation. Modified lesson suggestions were also provided to tailor the lessons to the specific needs of the student groups they served. Throughout the lessons, students engaged in a variety of activities to explore their interests, potential careers, and understand how their course selections in secondary school impact their post-secondary options. California's Board of Education recognized the need for materials to be available in Spanish for students and stakeholders, ensuring an inclusive environment. Additionally, the curriculum emphasizes that materials should be printed, not solely stored on devices, enabling all students to build a portfolio as they prepare for their postsecondary endeavors.

Florida State: Career Advising Model

The Florida College Access Model was chosen for its extensive range of materials available online, offering numerous opportunities to explore the inclusive aspects integrated into

its lessons. In the initial coding, the following elements were identified on the Florida State Board of Education’s website: resources for both counselors and students, information for stakeholders, a mix of online and printed materials for students, the availability of resources in multiple languages, and the integration of the CCR standards into the State Standards for Education. The documents assessed for their inclusivity components included Plan It Florida: Helping Students Plan for College and Career; Virtual Plan For It Florida Addendum: Helping Students Plan for College and Career; CCR Guide (pamphlet), Make A Plan (handout), Teachers Guide for the Career Cruiser, Florida’s Career Readiness Education Framework and Needs Assessment (a PowerPoint), and Florida Department of Education Career Cruiser Lesson Plans.

Figure 4.2. Florida College and Career Readiness Curriculum



Individualized Learning Plans

Florida encourages schools to use the Xello: College & Career Readiness software system to create individualized plans for elementary and high school students. This program is mentioned in Florida’s Career Readiness Education Framework and Needs Assessment PPT on slides 22 and 23. On Slide 23, counselors are shown how Xello connects to different individuals to assist students. The program connects a “Success Manager for each district, instructors, work-based learning coordinators, administrators, and counselors for students across all grade levels.”

Slide 22 breaks down what each grade level can do with the program.

“Elementary: play career games, explore careers, set goals, develop critical thinking skills, engage with a number of grade-specific lessons across all of K-12. Middle School: listen to interviews of men and women in various industries, learn about pathways, create a personalized career and academic plan, and get familiar with labor market data. High School: take a career assessment, analyze career and postsecondary data, find work-based learning, write a resume, curate a professional portfolio, find financial aid, apply to college” (FDOE, 2024).

In addition to Florida’s Career Readiness Education Framework and Needs Assessment PPT, the Xello program is integrated into each Career Cruiser lesson plan. This program’s inclusion in the lesson plans expands postsecondary options for students by offering an interactive and personalized career exploration tool. Through Xello, students can research careers (Career Exploration Step 1, Lessons 1 and 2; Step 2, Lesson 1), assess their skills and interests (Career Exploration Step 1, Lesson 3; Career Preparation Step 5, Lessons 5 and 6), and create individualized plans to achieve their goals (Career Exploration Step 3, Lessons 1-3; Career Planning Step 4, Lessons 1-3). All students have access to the program, ensuring they have a valuable resource to explore careers, educational opportunities, and financial aid information. School counselors also benefit from the program, as it allows them to tailor their counseling for students and help them explore available resources to make informed decisions about their postsecondary plans.

Self-Discovery

The Florida State Board of Education offers students the opportunity to explore their future career goals, develop their skills, make informed financial choices, understand various training pathways, and select courses and extracurricular activities through self-discovery

exercises included in the Career Cruiser lesson plans. Each category of the Career Cruiser features activities that build on one another, allowing students to take charge of their futures by equipping them with the tools to make informed decisions. Students also have access to the Xello program, which helps them develop their portfolios while providing school counselors with the necessary resources to complete each activity without a computer, ensuring that all students have equitable access to explore and pursue their career aspirations.

The initial steps for students, as outlined in the lesson plans, can be found in the Career Exploration lessons. In the first three lessons of this unit, students investigate various topics. School counselors can guide students through Holland's Career Themes (Step 1, Lesson 1), career skills (Step 1, Lesson 2), and Career Values (Step 1, Lesson 3). These lessons lay the foundation for the remaining CCR programming in which they will engage. Since each student's results will be unique, so too will the paths they explore as they begin making decisions about their future. The subsequent steps in this category focus on the careers highlighted in the first three lessons that align best with the students and their interests. In Step 2, students start researching careers and are encouraged to ask, "After high school, do I want to pursue enrollment, enlistment, employment, or entrepreneurship (Lesson 4)?" as they explore their career options. In Lesson 5, students learn how to use data to compare occupations and understand the labor market in relation to their careers. During Lesson 6, students have the opportunity to interview someone in the career field they are interested in to further investigate their options. Step 3, Lessons 7-9, involves students examining the training they will need for their career choices. Students will consider "local training options, apprenticeships, technical college, state or community college, and university" (Lesson 7). In lessons 8 and 9, students will

begin personalizing the path they will take to achieve their career goals based on their discoveries in Lesson 7.

Step 4 lessons include the Career Planning unit in the Career Cruiser lesson plans. Lessons 1-3 concentrate on helping students explore the career pathway that is most suitable for them. In these lessons, students assess the training they require, identify the best schools for that training, and understand the requirements needed to enroll in the programs. The final three lessons focus on financial literacy and aim to help students grasp the various ways in which post-secondary education can be financed. In Lesson 5, students receive information on undergraduate and graduate aid available as grants, federal loans, tax credits, and federal work-study. During Lesson 6, students investigate how post-secondary education will benefit them while also learning about common post-secondary training expenses, estimating school costs, and understanding the ‘net price’ for attendance.

The final lessons are a part of Step 5, where students take what they have done in first four steps and begin the Career Preparation portions of the Career Cruiser lessons. While many of these activities are geared more towards students creating usable documents for the workforce, activities are designed to help students express what they have learned about themselves in practical applications. In Step 5, Lesson 1, students discover how to look for jobs and read the postings for what is required for the position. Lessons 2-4 have students apply their discoveries about skills, values, and interests into a resume and cover letter. The next steps have students discovering how they will fill out a job application for their careers (Lesson 5) and how to interview for the roles they apply for (Lesson 6).

The culmination of activities provides students with an achievable plan to pursue their future endeavors. By encouraging self-exploration, students identify their interests and

understand how to access the resources they need to achieve their goals successfully. The skills they develop through this process lay the foundation for preparing them for career advancement and lifelong personal and professional growth.

Self-Reflection

Reflection plays a significant role in the Career Cruiser lesson plans designed for school counselors. Each course overview includes a concluding activity that encourages students to reflect on the assignment and its relation to their personal goals and plans. Every lesson empowers students to choose their own career paths, with activities tailored to help them understand the careers they have selected. By allowing students to pursue their interests, the time spent reflecting on the activities aids them in comprehending the necessary steps for their careers while also assessing the best path to achieve their goals. Additionally, reflection enhances students' ability to shape their futures instead of following a predetermined track influenced by systemic biases.

The Career Cruiser plans provide a series of lessons on Career Exploration, enabling students to understand their interests and skills while exploring careers that may interest them. These lessons benefit all students regardless of their background, family expectations, and social pressures. By focusing on individual interests rather than external influences, students are empowered to make decisions about their futures that align with their personal interests. The following reflection activities are a part of the Career Exploration lessons:

Have students discuss in pairs which Holland Codes results they most agree with, least agree with, and which career(s) they would like to learn more about (Career Exploration, Step 1, Lesson 1).

Have students discuss in pairs which career skill assessment results they most agree with, least agree with, and which career(s) they would like to learn more about (Career Exploration, Step 1, Lesson 2).

Have students write a report or give a presentation about an occupation aligned with their career values assessment results. In the report/presentation, have them explain what they like about the occupation, what they do not like about the occupation, and a business or organization they could work for (Career Exploration, Step 1, Lesson 3).

These reflection activities are based on assessments that students can take online using the Xello program or via pencil-and-paper assessments printed by school counselors.

Understanding what the assessments reveal about a student and how they relate to careers is essential. Expressing their agreements, disagreements, or areas they wish to explore further allows students to have agency in shaping their career paths. By providing structured career exploration, school counselors can help bridge gaps in access to information and opportunities for students.

Have students discuss in pairs what they learned about their top career choice- what they liked, what they did not like, and one thing the students would like to learn next about the career(Career Exploration, Step 2, Lesson 4).

Have students discuss in pairs who they interviewed, what they learned and how their interview experience affected their career goals (Career Exploration, Step 2, Lesson 6).

Structured lessons on exploring careers further provide all students with an opportunity to evaluate which careers interest them and why. Activities that offer more information give

students additional chances to make informed decisions about their potential career paths. These activities are designed for all students, regardless of their trajectory after graduation.

Have students discuss with a partner how much time they want to spend in training, how far they are willing to move for training, and what programs they are leaning towards (Career Exploration, Step 3, Lesson 7).

Have students discuss with their partner what training provider data metric impressed them the most and which data number disappointed them the most (Career Exploration, Step 3, Lesson 8).

Break the class up into groups and discuss: What you want a postsecondary school to have. What you need a postsecondary school to have (Career Exploration, Step 3, Lesson 9).

While these activities are geared more toward college-bound students, all students would benefit from them. They help them critically evaluate training programs, certificate programs, or postsecondary options that align with their future career goals. Students can then make realistic decisions about their future goals and understand all the options that are available to them.

Within the Career Planning unit, student activities relate to the skills they will need and the steps they can take in high school to help them develop the skills for their chosen careers. By guiding students to recognize these skills early on, the curriculum prepares them for career-related opportunities they may not have outside of school. Through participation in these activities within the school environment, counselors can work to eliminate systemic barriers, enabling students to gain the proficiency and confidence needed to pursue their aspirations. The following reflection activities are provided for students:

Have students discuss in pairs and collectively their reasoning for prioritizing their top career over all other possibilities (Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 1).

Encouraging students to share their reasoning for their top career interest enables them to discuss possible career choices with others and helps them synthesize the information they've gathered about the career, allowing them to make informed decisions about their future plans.

Students will reflect on key questions as well as the pros and cons of each of their top postsecondary training providers (Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 3).

This activity helps students process the training or education they will need for their career choices. Giving students an opportunity to consider the pros and cons of their postsecondary options helps them make informed decisions about the path they want to take.

Have students discuss in pairs what they found out in their research about application deadlines, requirements and what they think will be the hardest part of applying (Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 4).

Have students discuss with a partner what scholarships, grants, work-study, or loan opportunities they are most interested in learning about (Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 5).

Have students discuss with a partner how much training will cost, what the main expense categories are, and how much they expect to receive in grants and scholarships (Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 6).

These three bullet points will primarily benefit students who intend to pursue postsecondary learning opportunities, whether by attending a trade school, seeking apprenticeships, or enrolling in a two- or four-year college. Students who plan to enter the

workforce immediately after high school may find these lessons challenging, and school counselors will need to ensure that the lessons feel relevant to their career aspirations.

Have students discuss with a partner what courses and extracurricular activities they are interested in participating in to prepare for postsecondary or career (Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 7).

This reflection activity is intended to help students connect their high school courses and extracurricular activities to explore their interests and make choices that align with their needs and goals. Regardless of a student's post-graduation plans, these skills will benefit all students and prepare them for decision-making in the career field.

The Career Preparation lessons focus on the career readiness skills that students will need. School counselors guide students in understanding the skills essential for their future careers through self-discovery activities and assessments. At the end of each lesson, students have time to reflect on what they learned and the product they created during the session. The following reflection activities are provided for students:

Have students discuss with a partner or as a class what job requirements surprised them (Career Preparation, Step 5, Lesson 1).

Students need to understand whether they are willing to meet the job requirements and decide whether to continue pursuing that career or find a similar one that better utilizes their skills and interests.

When discussing how to get a reference, recommendation, or endorsement, students are advised: "Choose someone that knows you well, you have a good relationship with, and have relevant expertise. Explain why you want the document. Give them a list of qualities,

abilities, and accomplishments you think they might include” (Career Preparation, Step 5, Lesson 2).

Reflecting on who in their lives can positively influence their future aspirations helps students connect their current situation to the future circumstances they hope to pursue. Encouraging students to create a list of qualities, skills, and achievements allows them to contemplate the attributes they contribute to a larger community while also nurturing personal growth. As each student is unique, their letters will reflect who they are, allowing them to stand out among other applicants.

Have students discuss with a partner what their resume’s strengths and areas of potential growth are (Career Preparation, Step 5, Lesson 3).

Have students discuss in pairs how they are customizing their cover letter for the specific company and position they chose (Career Preparation, Step 5, Lesson 4)

Have students discuss which interview questions they struggled to answer the most and what they would do differently the next time (Career Preparation, Step 5, Lesson 6).

These three points are directly related to students’ personal activities to showcase their identities. By sharing with their classmates, they can receive feedback on their work, which opens the opportunity for others to highlight elements they might have overlooked and should include. Reflecting on their work gives students the chance to recognize where they can achieve personal growth to better align with their future goals.

Have students curate their own professional portfolio and reflect on how it could be improved in the future (Career Preparation, Step 5, Lesson 5).

Students will search themselves online, identify what (if any) information is available on them, rate available information as professional/unprofessional, determine what they would like for their personal, online ‘brand’ to be, and consider strategies to reduce unprofessional content and increase professional content (Career Preparation, Step 5, Lesson 7).

Assessments

The Florida Department of Education has provided school counselors with resources for various lessons aimed at helping students assess themselves and prepare for any assessments they may need for their post-secondary options. Within the Career Cruiser lesson plans, activities build upon one another and reference assessments that students complete in Step 1, Lessons 1-3. The purpose of these assessments is to ensure that students understand their career choices and can tailor their CCR journey to their individual desires. Having a personalized approach enables students to meet their unique needs and comprehend the steps they need to take for their own growth. Standardized tests, like the ACT, are also talked about in the materials counselors have access to as a way for students to have an additional element to provide higher education institutions with as a part of their application process.

Students’ assessments include a career assessment (Career Cruiser, Career Exploration, Step 1, Lesson 1) that they can complete online or on paper. School counselors can choose which format to use based on the school’s resources and the individual needs of students. The Florida Board of Education has provided school counselors with two suggestions for assessments: the O’Net Interest Profiler and the Advance CTE Career Cluster Interests Profiler, which is also available in Spanish. Offering a test in Spanish benefits students who struggle with English, allowing them to feel more confident when completing the profiles to obtain results that align

more closely with their interests. This helps to remove a barrier that some students may face when participating in the lesson. However, this is the only lesson that mentions materials in a language other than English.

The Virtual Plan It Florida Addendum of the Helping Students Plan for College and Career Handbook provides school counselors with the MyCareerShines website, enabling students to “complete career inventories, explore career fields, and view profiles of colleges they might be interested in applying to. By completing these career inventories, students will receive guidance on potential careers or college majors that may interest them. They can also access their student records to determine if they are on the right track for college admission” (p. 11). This tool benefits students by consolidating information related to the assessment results, making it easier to find what they need. Allowing students access to their records on the platform empowers them to take ownership of their education, aligning with their goals and enabling informed decisions about which courses to take.

In the second lesson of the Career Exploration unit of the Career Cruiser, students are directed to an online platform to take a skills assessment that aligns with careers associated with the skills identified in the assessment. This provides them an opportunity to discover careers that were not included in the interest survey from the first lesson. The third lesson involves an evaluation of career values that have an “internet and digital device access. Alternatively, a print version of the career values assessment can be found” (Step 1, Lesson 3). The final lesson of the Career Cruiser’s Career Preparation unit focuses on students assessing their online media presence and its impact on future employment. This lesson is crucial for students to understand how their digital footprint can influence career opportunities in ways that may not always be equitable. The lesson involves students:

“Take the perspective of an employer searching for your name online and consider what you think the employer might think. Would they consider what they found as a professional? Unprofessional? After considering this, make a plan to remove, hide, or reduce the amount of unprofessional content and find ways of posting more professional content, either through social media or professional platforms.”

This self-evaluation lesson helps students understand how bias, discrimination, and digital profiling can impact hiring decisions. It also empowers them to evaluate the narrative they wish to convey while staying true to their authentic selves as they learn how the professional world uses potential employees’ online presences.

The lessons from the Florida Department of Education emphasize self-assessments to help students explore career options and provide standardized test information to meet their needs. In the Career Cruiser Career Planning Unit, Step 4, Lesson 4 focuses on the requirements for postsecondary training and states, “Have students research ways to make their applications more competitive. Example research topics include how to study for the SAT, ACT, or ASVAB, how to request a letter of recommendation, and how to write a personal statement or essay.” The same lesson in the student section also states, “Typical Competitive Admission Requirements: Test scores and dates from your college entrance exams” (SAT, ACT, etc.). The CCR Guide advises 11th grade students to “Take the SAT or ACT no later than the spring semester,” providing tips on what to accomplish each year as they prepare for postsecondary options. While lessons emphasize taking standardized tests, it is not the main focus of preparing students for their next steps. Including information about testing benefits and needs helps break down informational barriers for students who may not know what is required for college applications while also making them aware of what they need to focus on.

Self-efficacy

The Florida Department of Education offers several lessons aimed at promoting self-efficacy through career preparation, regardless of the path a student wishes to pursue. These lessons include guidance on how students can choose courses to explore their interests and discover the opportunities available to achieve their goals. The Career Cruiser lessons build on each other, providing students with chances to explore their options and keep their Individualized Learning Plans updated.

High School Course Selections

Throughout the materials provided for both students and school counselors, several mentions are made of students selecting their high school courses to align with their interests and future goals. The documents containing information on course selections include the Career Cruiser Lesson Plan, the CCR Guide for students and families, the Teacher’s Guide for the Career Cruiser, and the Plan It Florida: Helping Students Plan for College and Career guidebook for counselors. Students learn about their options through activities with the school counselor, except for the CCR Guide.

In the Career Cruiser Career Planning unit, Step 4, Lesson 7 focuses on helping students understand the connection between the courses they take in high school and their post-secondary goals. The lesson plan informs school counselors that the Xello system includes a “Course Planner” to assist students in planning future high school coursework. In the lesson overview, it states that students will “learn about options related to schools, courses, and extracurricular activities” and “develop a prioritized list of courses and extracurricular activities relevant to CCR.” This individualized process allows students to create a plan that aligns with their interests, while also ensuring that the tailored courses support their long-term goals and career preparation.

In the learning section of the lesson designed for students, they will explore the options available to them within Florida. Three categories of options are outlined for students: school choice, course options, and extracurricular activities. Regarding school choice, it states,

“In Florida, students have options when it comes to choosing the school you attend, which affects which courses and opportunities are available to you. Below are just some of the examples of schools that you can choose to enroll in, at no cost: Magnet Schools, Charter Schools, Virtual Education, and Dual Enrollment. The Florida Department of Education’s School Choice website has much more information on options including for private schools. In addition, your local school district will have information on local options and explain the application process” (Career Cruiser, Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 7).

It is important for students and families to understand that they have options for which school to attend. This ensures that students can select a school that meets their distinct needs. Access to clear information about school choice empowers families to make informed decisions that support their students’ needs. While not all students will choose to leave their local school, equitable access to choices in educational institutions provides all students with the opportunity to select an environment where they can thrive.

The course options available to students will vary depending on which school they attend. The lesson further states, “What courses available to you will vary based on what school you go to. Below are a few courses relevant to career preparation, and you can talk to your school or district staff to see if you can locally enroll.” The courses listed include “Career and Technical Education (CTE), work-based learning, Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC), and early college credit courses (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Advanced

International Certificate of Education, or Dual Enrollment)” (Career Cruiser, Career Planning, Step 4, Lesson 7). By providing students with various course offerings, they can find options that align with their interests and have greater opportunities to explore topics that help solidify their preferences—allowing students to choose the courses they take grants them autonomy and equips them with decision-making skills essential for entering the workforce.

The Career Cruiser, Career Planning Step 4, Lesson 7 continues with, “there are many other activities that can help you build skills, relationships, and a competitive resume or application. Below are a few extracurricular activity ideas to consider. Check with your school on what is currently offered and, if it isn’t yet offered, see if there’s a way you can help start something!” The activities listed are: “Join an academic club and competition; gain job skills and experience through Career and Technical Student Organizations, Civil Air Patrol, Junior Achievement, Employment, and Entrepreneurship/Freelancing; develop leadership skills through student government, Model UN, The American Legion’s Boys and Girls State, speech or debate club, and Beta Club; engage in your community; and take up a hobby.” Providing students with a list of opportunities to gain skills outside of academics helps them explore their interests differently and learn vital skills that they might not encounter in a classroom setting, which will benefit them in their post-secondary aspirations. By emphasizing various ways of skill development, students are given more options to make informed decisions about their participation in different opportunities.

In the Teacher’s Guide for the Career Cruiser, the activity “Career and Technical Education - Doorway to Your Future!” outlines objectives for students to “recognize the importance of choosing school courses related to personal, educational, and occupational interests” and “identify high school courses that align with tentative career goals.” This lesson

encourages students to take classes not only for educational and occupational purposes but also to follow their interests, fostering self-exploration. It removes barriers for students who wish to enter the workforce directly or who are uncertain about their career paths after high school. The appendix of the Teacher’s Guide for the Career Cruiser includes a list of objectives related to the Career and Educational Planning Course Standards, which encompasses the standard that students will “develop a career and education plan that provides for short and long-term goals, high school program of study, and postsecondary/career goals.” For students participating in their CCR program virtually, the lesson for school counselors in the Virtual Plan It Florida Addendum of the Helping Students Plan for College and Career Handbook states, “students can take their results from MyCareerShines [an online interest assessment] and use them to decide what subject/interest areas they might want to experiment with through school clubs, afterschool activities, or volunteering” (p.11). Establishing the standard for what students should gain from assessments and outlining course selections sets the expectation that all students, regardless of background or aspirations, are aware of their options to make informed decisions. The Virtual Plan It Florida Addendum of the Helping Students Plan for College and Career Handbook does not place all the responsibility on students to make decisions for themselves; it reminds school counselors to “keep in mind that students will likely need assistance and guidance in interpreting their results” (p. 11). While students should decide which courses to take, school counselors should help them understand all the possibilities available, as they may have knowledge of programs the students might not be aware of. Providing students with all their options eliminates barriers to accessing information.

The CCR Guide is a pamphlet for students and their families. It provides steps for students in grades 6-12 to be college—and career-ready each year. The following excerpts from

the pamphlet help students understand what academic decisions they should make each year to prepare them for their career aspirations.

Grade 6-9: “Notice which subjects you enjoy the most, and/or which you are the strongest in, and get extra help in the subjects you struggle with. Research options for high school, and consider magnet schools or career academies.”

Grade 10: “Start taking advanced classes in subject areas that interest you. Consider options like AP, Honors, and dual enrollment.”

Grade 11: “Research the admissions requirements for colleges that interest you, and make sure you are taking the classes you will need.”

Apprenticeships

The topic of apprenticeship opportunities is explicitly stated in three lessons. The Career Cruiser Career Exploration Step 3, Lesson 7 in the student section offers guidance on how students can locate apprenticeship opportunities. Students are referred to the US Department of Labor’s Apprenticeship Job Finder website and provided with these instructions to assist them in the process: “Using either the ‘Apprenticeship Jobs’ or ‘Apprenticeship Programs’ tab, leave the occupation field blank (or add in a career you are interested in) and search by your city, state, or zip code. Review one or more that are locally available. Record the name of the employer, the apprenticeship program they offer, and one thing that stuck out to you about the opportunity.” While in the Career Cruiser College Planning unit, students learn that the “Apprenticeship requirements vary but often are applied to like a job application-resume, cover letter, etc.” (Step 4, Lesson 4). In the Plan It Florida: Helping Students Plan for College and Career, school counselors are provided with an activity for students called “Apprenticeship Program,” which is described as:

“Apprenticeships provide on-the-job training while meeting the needs of business for a highly-skilled workforce. They connect Education and work by combining theoretical and hands-on learning. The U.S. Department of Labor describes the foundation of the apprenticeship model as the continual building of skill. A benefit to students is they have the ability to earn while they learn.” “During the programs, apprentices attain stackable credentials and in many cases, they can receive college credits that may lead to an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. Help students assess their career goals to determine if an apprenticeship is the right career pathway for them” (p. 29).

Providing students with information about exploring potential career opportunities through apprenticeships enables them to experience careers they are interested in and understand their roles, helping them make more informed decisions. Additionally, these opportunities can eliminate barriers associated with higher education. This program is beneficial for students lacking financial resources for traditional post-secondary options, allowing them to earn while they acquire valuable job skills. For students who find traditional educational settings challenging, experiential learning offers a way to gain real-world skills applicable to careers, enhancing their career readiness.

Other opportunities similar to apprenticeships that offer experiential learning and equip students with job skills are highlighted in Plan It Florida: Helping Students Plan for College and Career, including shadowing, internships, and volunteering. On page 26, the activity description states, “Students can learn more about careers that interest them by interviewing or shadowing adults with those jobs.” For the lesson on Internships, Volunteering, and Work on page 28, the activity description explains, “Working part-time in a paid or unpaid setting can give students the opportunity to get hands-on experience in a particular field. This can help them determine if they

are interested in pursuing this field and getting the necessary education.” The Teacher’s Guide for the Career Cruiser includes a lesson on volunteering and its benefits. In the student section, students are encouraged to “explore service areas that match your career interests. What better way to figure out if certain areas of work are a good fit for you (p. H)!” Meanwhile, the Virtual Plan It Florida: Helping Students Plan for College and Career provides guidance on helping students find virtual internships that are “more accessible to students who don’t have transportation to travel to a physical location to gain this experience” (p.12). Volunteering, Job Shadowing, and Internships offer similar benefits by allowing students to learn about careers they are interested in, providing insight into what they would need to pursue. In addition, students acquire skills that are transferable to any job they might take. These opportunities also help students build professional networks, which are often lacking for students from underserved communities while offering various commitment options that fit into a student’s schedule.

Career Preparation

The focus of all plans provided by the Florida Department of Education is on career readiness. Students take assessments to discover how their interests and skills relate to potential careers while creating an Individualized Learning Plan to achieve their goals, no matter which path they choose. In Career Cruiser Career Planning Step 4, Lesson 1, school counselors are informed at the beginning of the lesson overview, school counselors are told, “Choosing a career can feel overwhelming for some students- like they are being asked to make massive decisions they feel unqualified to make that will have multi-decade ramifications. Reassure your students that, in many ways, they are more choosing a direction to head towards than they are deciding their lifelong fate. It is acceptable for your students to change their minds later on! In fact, the economy will change so much in their future, they will likely have to change.” In the same

lesson, the students learn: “Many students who do not know much about careers end up choosing what college, university, or other training provider to enroll in before choosing what career they wish to pursue. Some of these students will switch majors multiple times, adding to the time and cost of their schooling. It is recommended that you put effort in not to learn about careers, choose a career goal right for you, and then based on that career goal, pursue training in alignment with that goal. Starting with the end in mind- a career right for you- can save you time, money and help you choose the training best for your career path.” By clarifying that students do not need to have everything figured out and that they might change their minds about a career, it provides them the freedom to explore multiple options and discover the direction they want to take.

The Florida Department of Education intentionally incorporated different paths in the materials it provides for students and school counselors to ensure that students understand they have many options after high school. The CCR Guide dedicates an entire page of the pamphlet to the paths available to students, which include: Career and Technical Schools, two-year colleges, state colleges with formal 2+2 agreements, four-year colleges or universities, the U.S. military, AmeriCorps, and employment. Each category comes with an explanation. This same chart appears in the Teachers Guide to the Career Cruiser (Appendix J) and Plan It Florida: Helping Students Plan for College and Career (p. 5). Additionally, a list of credentials and the type of education associated with each is provided for students in the Career Cruiser Lesson Plans: Career Exploration Step 2, Lesson 4, and Career Exploration Step 3, Lesson 7. These lessons further offer students a visual graph outlining the paths they can pursue after high school and ways to “stack credentials to get credit for prior learning and add more credentials later on while maintaining the progress you have already made” (Career Exploration, Step 3, Lesson 7). By

showcasing the many available paths, the materials dispel the misconception that one path is superior to others, emphasizing that all students have unique journeys to achieve their career and personal goals. This also enables students to broaden their career opportunities that they may have overlooked if they believed they needed to follow a specific route. Once the misconception around career paths is eliminated, students can concentrate on careers that align with their skills, interests, strengths, and passions.

Technical Education Programs

Technical education programs are mentioned three times in the lesson as a standalone topic. Although they are referenced in other lesson plans, they are typically discussed alongside other programs and only appear in the Career Preparation portion of this section. During the Career Exploration unit in the Career Cruiser, school counselors are given an extension activity encouraging all “students to visit GetThereFL.org (a site aimed at raising awareness of Career and Technical Education and Adult Education programs) and/or FloridaShines.org (a site with a wide variety of Florida CCR content). Have the students list three or more postsecondary training providers, a program each offers that is of interest, and one fact that they learned about each institution or program” (Step 3, Lesson 7). In the Career Cruiser Career Planning Step 4, Lesson 4 plan, students learn about the requirements for different programs, including that “Florida technical colleges require: you are at least 16 years of age and no longer enrolled in high school.” The Teacher’s Guide to the Career Cruiser includes two full pages of information on Career and Technical Education in the Appendix. Appendix E informs students that “Career and Technical courses are rigorous and relevant.” Three sections provide students insights into how this program might benefit their career aspirations. The first section outlines what students can expect from the program, highlighting “hands-on learning” and the opportunity to “leave

high school with skills and experience that employers expect” (Appendix E). The next section discusses how CTE serves as a stepping stone for students, followed by a list of benefits. Appendix F presents students with a chart to help them determine if CTE is the right choice for them. The left side of the chart lists activities that students enjoy, while the right side matches those activities to the career cluster that aligns best with their interests. Offering these opportunities for students to explore Career and Technical Education enables all students to consider various paths to follow their dreams. It also benefits students who are not interested in other educational options, giving them dedicated lessons to consider their alternatives and helping to remove the stigma associated with choosing different directions.

College and Career Counseling

Detailed Lesson Plans

The Florida Department of Education provides school counselors with resources to guide students in planning their CCR. School counselors have access to two curricula, the Career Cruiser and Plan it Florida, designed to help students explore career pathways, develop individualized plans, and engage in structured activities that prepare them for success. These curricula equip school counselors with the necessary tools to implement age-appropriate activities that support students at all grade levels while actively involving stakeholders in the process. Lessons emphasize inclusive strategies, such as financial literacy workshops, family engagement activities, and career exploration fairs, ensuring that all students have access to the information and support necessary for making informed decisions about their futures. These initiatives address barriers to college access by familiarizing students and families with financial aid opportunities and encouraging early exposure to postsecondary options.

The Florida Department of Education offers school counselors various resources to assist students in their CCR planning. The Career Cruiser curriculum, provided by the Florida Department of Education, features three components for counselors to utilize: a teacher's guide, a PowerPoint to assist teachers in assessing their school's needs, and the Career Cruiser lesson plans. These lesson plans are categorized into three areas: Career Preparation, which includes seven lessons; Career Planning, which consists of six lessons; and Career Exploration, which contains nine lessons. These lessons provide school counselors with specific timeframes, the materials, how to integrate the Xello program into the lesson for students to build their portfolios, an overview of the lesson with step-by-step guidance, and a section for students to explain what they will learn through the day's activities. Additionally, a paper version of the student activity is provided, enabling school counselors to offer activities to students who may not have internet access. This inclusion ensures no student is left behind and bridges opportunity gaps by supplying students with essential tools and support to explore their career interests.

Additionally, the Florida Department of Education College & Career Planning website provides a link to the Plan It Florida curriculum. This curriculum includes a handbook for activities that schools can implement at all grade levels, highlighting activities for stakeholder participation.

The Teacher's Guide "is a companion to *Career Cruiser* to assist teachers, career specialists, and counselors in their mission to promote career development for middle school students. The format corresponds to the three stages of career development: Access, Explore, and Plan" (p. 1).

The Plan It Florida Addendum and the Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbooks include a chart that lists the activities offered, the corresponding page numbers in the

handbook, the appropriate grade levels from Kindergarten to 12th Grade, and the categories they fall under (4 E's: Expose, Explore, Experiment, Execute). The online addendum (p. 4) features a virtual link to 11 activities, along with a detailed write-up in the handbook on pages 5-13. In contrast, the program designed for in-person guidance includes 34 lessons that school counselors can find in the Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbook (p. 8). According to the introduction of the Plan It Florida curriculum, the lessons aim to “help students engage in college and career preparation activities to graduate high school with a plan for what comes next, whether they enroll in postsecondary education, enlist to serve their community or country, or seek employment ideally equipped with a short-term credential that can enhance economic mobility” (p. 4).

The lesson plans provided by the Florida College Access Network vary in the information available for school counselors to assist students. The lesson, “Career Chats,” found on page 9 of the Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbook, is the only lesson that offers different options to achieve the same objective. This plan, like all others, lists the appropriate grade level at the top, the cost associated with the lesson, the categories of the 4-E's covered, necessary supplies and materials, as well as the activity description. Nine of the lessons in the Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbook involve bringing in community members to discuss careers and pathways to achieve them. Three lessons that engage the community are available in the Virtual version of the handbook.

Based on the literature provided, it is inferred that the Florida College Access Network focuses on larger group settings for students to obtain the information about careers and college opportunities. Activities such as, “Financial Aid Night” (p. 53), “High School Fair” (p. 40), “Family College Nights” (p. 40), “College/Career Fair” (p. 32), “Clubs/Extracurricular Fair” (p.

31), “Workplace Visit” (p.10), and “Lunch and Learn” (p. 10) are the lessons that can be done with small groups or large groups

Printable Materials

In addition to online resources, the Florida Department of Education provides a copy of the activities with each lesson plan that school counselors can reproduce. The Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbook includes game materials for activities such as “Career Term Bingo” (pp. 12-19), “Career Taboo/’You Don’t Say’” (pp. 21-22), and handouts for the “Career Interviewing/Shadow” (p. 26) and “College/Career Interest Portfolio” (p. 34) activities.

School-wide initiatives, as provided in the Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbook, address the integration of school stakeholders into CCR curricula.

The “College Talk” (p. 37) activity states, “one easy way to expose students to their options for education beyond high school is to change the way you talk so students can hear discussions about college and careers from an early age,” and “many schools divide up the building by ‘wings’. Rather than calling them ‘east wing’ and ‘west wing,’ these wings could be named for area colleges/universities or their mascots.

The “Graduating Class” activity (p. 38) aims to establish the expectation that students will graduate high school by encouraging everyone to refer to them by their graduating class rather than their grade level. This initiative is also recommended in the Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbook to engage all stakeholders in the schools.

Financial Literacy

Almost one-fifth of the Career Cruiser lesson plans, the Plan for It: Helping Students Plan for College and Career Handbook, Virtual Plan It Florida: Helping Students Plan for College and Career Handbook, and the CCR Guide cover financial literacy elements. While the Career

Cruiser lesson plans were designed specifically for students to explore different ways to pay for college, the CCR Guide is intended for both students and their stakeholders, whereas all other activities are geared toward students and their families.

In the Career Planning unit, two of the lessons align with the state standard of “Develop a budget and plan to pay for postsecondary training” (Step 4, Lessons 5 and 6). In Lesson 5, the objective is for students to “explore financial aid options and apply.” In the students’ learning section, options for financial aid are introduced with:

While it is common for students to be surprised by how much postsecondary training can cost, there are many options available to help you pay for it! The U.S. Federal Government provides over a quarter of a trillion dollars a year on undergraduate and graduate aid in the form of grants, federal loans, tax credits, and federal work-study. And that’s just federal dollars! There’s also state, private, philanthropic, and institutional funds that can help students pay for postsecondary training! There’s money out there! Given that, how much a training program costs should not be an initial determining factor- first see how much financial aid you can get and then weigh your options” (Step 4, Lesson 5).

The remainder of this section presents various options for students to explore in order to help fund their college education, such as Free Money (Scholarships and Grants), Savings, Earnings, and Loans (Federal and Private). The final section focuses on Florida Scholarships and includes links to the Florida Financial Aid Application (FFAA) and the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship for students. This lesson benefits all students, showing that regardless of the programs they may pursue after high school, they could qualify for financial assistance, thereby

making postsecondary education options more accessible. It also offers valuable resources that students might not have otherwise discovered.

Step 4, Lesson 6 requires students to create a budget that includes standard living expenses and school costs to help them understand the financial implications of their decisions. The lesson also outlines the definitions of in-state and out-of-state residency and how these affect tuition costs. At the end of this section, the Florida Department of Education states, “Remember: While education is expensive, it can increase your salary later, and many grants and scholarships are available! Education is an investment.” This statement acknowledges the cost-benefit aspect of post-secondary education but oversimplifies the reality of how students finance college, thereby perpetuating the equity gap. The lesson also has students select the Net Price Calculator to estimate their educational costs, which calculates financial aid they may receive and their out-of-pocket expenses for their chosen schools. This tool helps students to make informed decisions about their post-secondary options.

Career Cruiser Career Exploration features two lessons aimed at helping students link potential financial earnings in a career with post-secondary education completion. In Step 2, Lesson 5, students analyze salary data for their chosen career and discover how that income relates to the lifestyle they aim to achieve. Step 3, Lesson 8, provides students with a chart of terms and definitions associated with post-secondary options and career salaries. It also explains the importance of each metric listed when determining their career and educational goals. Key terms include Average Annual Cost, Median Total Debt After Graduation, Graduation Rate, Median Earnings, Enrollment, and Acceptance Rate. This activity, when built off of the previous financial literacy activities, helps students calculate the cost of postsecondary education to the

data on their selected careers, further providing students the implications of their decisions to make informed decisions.

Stakeholder

The activities for families included in the two Plan It Florida handbooks are designed to ensure that all stakeholders participate in exploring higher education options. The activity “Family College Nights,” mentioned in the Helping Students Plan for College and Career handbook (p. 40), states,

It is important to expose both students and their parents to post-high school options starting at an early age...for parents of younger students, it is important to introduce them to options for paying for college early...familiarizing parents with these resources can increase their confidence that college is obtainable for them and can help parents start planning early.

In addition to the “Family College Nights,” the “Financial Aid Night” for 11th and 12th grade students features a lesson plan in the “Helping Students Plan for College and Career” handbook (p. 53) and the virtual addendum for the same handbook (p. 13). The lesson plan provides examples of how to assist stakeholders and students in navigating the financial aid process, including inviting experts to present and offering computers for families to complete the FAFSA.

The CCR Guide outlines the activities 12th grade students should engage in to make informed decisions about their training programs and how to find money for education costs. This includes: “Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as early as possible to qualify for free money for college. Complete the Florida Financial Aid Application (FFAA) to apply for Bright Futures and other state aid. Research and apply for local and national

scholarships. Compare financial aid packages from the schools that accept you, and talk to your college guidance counselor for assistance” (2016). By detailing ways students can find funds for college, the guide ensures that all students have access to resources that can help reduce their out-of-pocket educational expenses. This levels the playing field for all students.

Null Curriculum

The Florida Department of Education offers school counselors various resources to address students’ needs and engage all stakeholders in CCR. I identified one missing element for ensuring equitable access to CCR in the materials. The first missing element is Work-Based Learning. This program enables students to apply their classroom knowledge to real-world experiences and is available in all fields, providing more opportunities for students to explore potential careers through apprenticeship opportunities, career preparation programs, and technical education programs. According to the literature, school counselors should have access to materials that offer information on cultural awareness to help them understand the population groups they serve and the challenges they may encounter. Understanding diverse populations allows school counselors to help dismantle barriers for underserved students and tailor lessons to address their needs.

Florida Summary

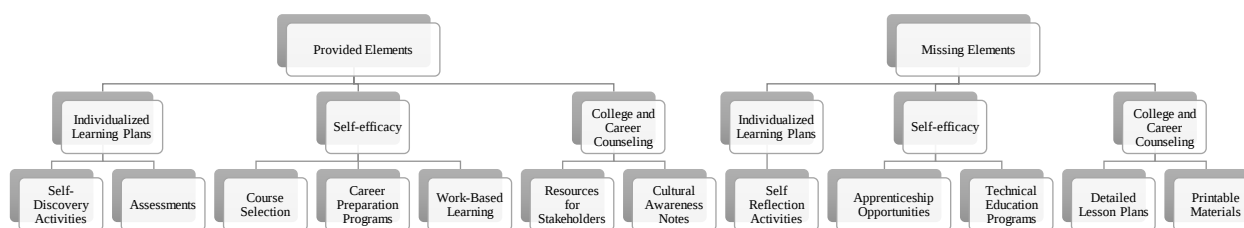
Materials provided by the Florida State Board of Education offer school counselors several resources on their website, including materials for CCR that can be done virtually or in person. Lessons are divided into three categories to give students information about post-secondary options, career choices, and future planning through financial literacy resources. Although students are encouraged to use an online platform to create their Individualized Learning Plans, printed copies are also available for their use. Florida provides lessons on

selecting high school courses, exploring school choice to access available educational opportunities, and career exploration programs. Stakeholders are included in the planning for school counselors to ensure those in a student’s life are receiving information they need to make decisions. This was the only program to incorporate all but one inclusive element identified in the research.

Kansas State: Career Advising Model

This curriculum was selected for its inclusion of materials beneficial for school counselors and students. It provides resources that can be tailored to address the needs of school counselors, and it also includes materials for stakeholders. During my initial coding of the Kansas State Department of Education resources, I noted claims of having an equitable component in the Individual Plan of Study Digital Reference Guide (p. 27) with the state’s definition of equity, which states, “Equality means giving everyone the same resources; equity means giving each student access to the resources they need to learn and thrive.” My evaluation of resources centered on the following materials available on the open web: Kansas Career Advising Model Advisor Guide, Electronic Portfolio Reference Guide (for Advisors), Individual Plan of Study Digital Reference Guide, PDF version of the Individual Plans of Study (IPS) – Student, Kansas Post-Secondary Exploration Guide, Career Clusters: Pathways to College & Career Readiness: The Modernized National Career Clusters Framework Guidebook, Employability Skills: Measuring and Reflecting Student Learning, and Individual Plans of Study: An Overview for Families, Individualized Plan of Study: Components Guide.

Figure 4.3. Kansas CCR Curriculum



Individualized Learning Plans

Of the nine resources, six were dedicated solely to developing an Individualized Learning Plan, with four allocated to the school counselor. One document was intended for students, and another served as an informational sheet for parents. The push for students to have an ILP allows Kansas to meet the needs of each student equitably. Students create a plan that suits their needs while a school counselor guides them toward programs, classes, and other opportunities to explore their interests and pursue a path to achieve their individualized goals. This tool not only helps students set educational and career goals and assists them in making informed decisions about coursework, but it also helps track the experiences they have participated in. Additionally, it ensures students will graduate from high school with a plan that aligns with their strengths and goals, which improves their chances of success in higher education and the workforce. By providing personalized guidance and a support plan for all students, educational experiences can be tailored to individual needs and goals regardless of the student's background.

The Individual Plans of Study: An Overview for Families outlines that an Individualized Plan of Study (IPS) is both a product and a process. This IPS assists students, with the support of school counselors, teachers, and families, in defining their career goals and postsecondary plans, enabling them to make informed decisions about their courses and activities during high school. The Kansas State Department of Education: Individual Plan of Study, IPS Digital Reference Guide (pp. 4, 8), and Electronic Portfolio Reference Guide (p. 1) outline the four essential components that the IPS provides for students:

1. A graduated series of strength finders and career interest inventories to help students identify preference toward career clusters.

2. Eighth through 12th-grade course builder function with course selections based on career interests.
3. A general postsecondary plan (workforce, military, certificate program, two - or four-year college).
4. A portable electronic portfolio.

Self-Discovery Activities

The first component outlined for the IPS includes assessments that help students identify their skills, strengths, and career interests, as specified in the Kansas State Department of Education: Individual Plan of Study, IPS Digital Reference Guide (pp. 4, 8), and Electronic Portfolio Reference Guide (p. 1). These assessments assist in identifying career clusters, which students use during their career planning.

Assessments

According to the Kansas Department of Education in the IPS Digital Reference Guide, “The Kansas Legislature appropriated funds for a statewide contract to provide one free ACT assessment and one free WorkKeys suite of assessments to all public high school juniors” (p. 5). The WorkKeys assessment evaluates skills that “employers say are critical for on-the-job training and career success” (IPS Reference Guide). The Electronic Portfolio Reference Guide offers counselors a list of resources to assist them and materials for students to help them understand the WorkKeys results (p. 9).

Self-efficacy

Kansas offers three components identified in my research as part of self-efficacy: course selection, career preparation programs, and work-based learning. While not every student will take advantage of these opportunities, they are available to all students who choose to

incorporate these elements into their Individualized Learning Plan. These components empower students to explore their interests, develop skills that will benefit them beyond high school, and gain real-world experiences that will enhance their postsecondary success. Students acquire practical knowledge through these programs, aiding their transition into higher education or the workforce. Ensuring that access to these components helps close the opportunity gaps historically faced by underserved students is vital. Kansas promotes educational equity by providing these resources to help all students reach their full potential.

Course Selection

The basic high school graduation requirements for students in Kansas are outlined in four online resources: the Kansas State Advising Model: Advisor Guide, the Kansas State Post-Secondary Exploration Guide, the IPS Digital Reference Guide, and the Individual Plans of Study (IPS)-Student. While these resources identify the requirements for all students, the Kansas State Advising Model: Advisor Guide also allows school counselors to customize student plans, enabling them to pursue a Career Pathway Course Sequence (p. 48). By customizing a career pathway, students can set their own goals, choose courses that prepare them for the future, and assist in decision-making.

The Kansas Qualified Admission (an accelerated curriculum) that guarantees Kansas State high school graduates gain admission to six state universities is explained to school counselors in both the Kansas State Advising Model: Advisor Guide (p. 53) and the IPS Digital Reference Guide (p. 29). According to the Kansas State Advising Model: Advisor Guide (p. 53), students must complete either the Qualified Admissions or Kansas Scholars curriculum with a 2.0 GPA while meeting one of the following criteria: 1. ACT score of at least 21; OR 2. SAT score of at least 980; OR graduate in the top one-third of their class. For college-bound students,

the opportunity for direct enrollment in state schools through the Qualified Admission program is one option to consider when they know they want to pursue higher education.

The Kansas Post-Secondary Exploration Guide provides resources for students and school counselors to understand transfer credits and other credit options available to students outside their high school curriculum. One highlighted resource comes from the Kansas Board of Regents, which provides a list of courses that transfer from one public postsecondary institution to another. Kansas also offers Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), defined as “a process used by post-secondary institutions to award academic credit for a student’s knowledge and expertise acquired through life and professional experience, as long as the student’s knowledge and skills are determined to be equivalent to college-level learning” (2020). According to the Kansas Post-Secondary Exploration Guide, these credits can be earned from advanced courses students have taken in high school, military experience, and more. Allowing students to pursue additional courses or programs to prepare for their careers benefits them by providing choices in deciding the paths they want to take to achieve their goals.

Career Preparation

As part of the Individual Plan of Study, students complete various assessments that, according to the Electronic Portfolio Guide (p. 4) and the IPS Digital Reference Guide (p. 7), “promote the need for and completion of postsecondary training.” From these assessments, students receive results outlining the career clusters that align with their interests. School counselors obtain information about the different career clusters from the Kansas State Department of Education. This information is detailed in the IPS Digital Reference Guide (pp. 35-38), The Modernized National Career Clusters Framework Guidebook (2024), which explains the clusters and provides sample careers, and the Kansas Career Advising Model: Advisor Guide

(pp. 38-39). School counselors benefit from reviewing the data from the assessments students take, which guides conversations to help them understand their options for course selections, programs to participate in, and the paths they can pursue after high school to achieve their career goals. Students can use this information to research careers and start identifying what may interest them, while also helping them make decisions on courses and programs to pursue during their secondary education years.

Work Based Learning

One aspect Kansas offers to help prepare students for the workforce is Work-Based Learning, a component included in students' portfolios. The guide, *Employability Skills: Measuring and Reflecting Student Learning*, is dedicated to school counselors and states, "It is important that schools and districts measure the essential employability skills and knowledge that students gain from Work-Based Learning (WBL) experiences and provide students with an opportunity to document and reflect on their learning" (p. 3). This guidebook provides a comprehensive look at WBL, the required components for students, and sample IPS documents to assist school counselors in ensuring students include the required elements (pp. 8-14). The guidelines for the portfolio are outlined on page 9 of the *Individual Plan of Study Digital Reference Guide*. Meanwhile, the *Electronic Portfolio Reference Guide* on pages 5-6 details the IPS requirements and offers resources and workshops for counselors to use with their students.

College and Career Guidance Counseling

The Department of Education provides school districts with an *Individual Plan of Study* informational sheet (2016) outlining various models that school counselors can use for CCR programming: "1. Counselor-Centered (IPS curriculum implemented by counselor) 2. Career

Advisor System (all school staff members implement IPS curriculum) 3. Career Advocates (individuals hired to implement IPS curriculum) 4. Hybrid (any combination of models” 103).

Both the IPS Digital Reference Guide (p. 26) and the Kansas Career Advising Model: Advisor Guide (p. 31) outline a 3-1 model that presents the steps of career advising in a sequence for better understanding. These guides clarify how the model functions between school counselors and students. The first step in the model is labeled “inquiry,” which involves building rapport with students and understanding their advising needs. Next, school counselors proceed to the “inform” section of the model, where they assist students in setting career goals, help them understand available exploration interventions, and clarify how the skills acquired in high school will apply after graduation. The “integrate” portion of the model is when school counselors implement the Individual Plan of Study and work with students to evaluate their progress. This model ensures that students receive personal guidance throughout their academic journey. By prioritizing a personalized program and building relationships, it ensures all students receive guidance tailored to their unique needs and understand their options as well as the steps they need to take to achieve their goals. This structure strengthens students’ self-efficacy by providing them with the tools and knowledge to navigate their career pathways confidently.

Detailed Lesson Plans

The Kansas State Board of Education website does not provide explicit lesson plans for school counselors to implement the Career Development Process Model intended for students from Kindergarten through 12th grade. Instead, the IPS Digital Reference Guide (pp. 17-24), the Individual Plans of Study Information Guide (2016), and the Kansas Career Advising Model: Advisor Guide (p. 35) present a visual representation of the Career Development Process. This

visual also integrates social and emotional learning objectives with the career development model, which serves as a framework for schools in applying IPS to students.

The Employability Skills: Measuring and Reflecting Student Learning (2019) offers school counselors a comprehensive overview of the Individual Plan of Study, highlighting its key components. On page 4, a guide outlines the Work-Based Learning section, which includes a sample rubric for assessing the work students submit to demonstrate the employability skills acquired through the program, crucial for their career readiness. Additionally, pages 8-14 provide school counselors with examples of student work categorized by career clusters, offering models to help students understand their expectations. When incorporated, these resources equip school counselors with tools to better support their students' success beyond high school.

Stakeholder Information

The IPS Digital Reference Guide (pp. 48-51) provides school counselors with information on involving stakeholders in the CCR programming they offer. On page 48, the Kansas State Board of Education states, "It is essential that families are an active part of the Individual Plan of Study process and are provided with as much, if not more, career development and guidance information. This goes beyond a once-a-year, student-led conference." Two topics covered in the IPS Digital Reference Guide for sharing with stakeholders are "Hirepaths," an online resource that helps stakeholders see the options available to students in different career paths (p. 49), and the "Work-Based Learning" opportunities that students have, enabling all stakeholders to assist them in selecting the right path to follow (p. 51). The Kansas State Board of Education provides stakeholders with a two-page Individual Plans of Study: An Overview for Families, which answers the questions: 1. What is an Individual Plan of Study (IPS)? 2. How and when is the Individual Plan of Study (IPS) used? 3. What information is included in an

Individual Plan of Study (IPS)? 4. How can families participate in the development of the Individual Plan of Study (IPS)? 5. How can families find out if their student’s school has an Individual Plan of Study (IPS)? 6. Do students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) also need an Individual Plan of Study (IPS)?

Cultural Awareness for School Counselors

Kansas provides advisors with information on how to “Meet the Needs of Each Student” in both the IPS Digital Reference Guide (p. 27) and the Kansas Career Advising Guide: Advisor Guide (p. 40). The IPS Digital Reference Guide states, “To address individual needs of these students [underserved students], a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. There are strategies that can be used to better meet the needs of special populations.” The tips on page 27 are as follows:

- Facilitating equitable access to rigorous content, participation, peer interaction, and teacher attention.
- Respecting and encouraging cultural perspectives (e.g., youth culture, disability culture, students’ community and family backgrounds).
- Providing access to and/or extending grade-level content by adjusting content, lesson processes, and projects to meet the diverse academic and linguistic needs of individual students.
- Comprehensive, individualized planning and course selection should be provided to each student. CTE is one way to address equity while giving students the skills they need for the real world of life and careers.

The IPS Digital Reference Guide (p. 40) states that all students should be provided with educational opportunities that challenge them. It emphasizes, “In order to ensure this,

education needs to move from equality to equity, from providing the same resources and opportunities to all students to redistributing access and opportunity to them, specifically those students who are in special populations.” The Kansas Career Advising Guide: Advisor Guide (p. 40) highlights the challenges schools face when working with students, noting, “It is impossible for any school to offer every possible combination of courses to meet the needs of every student. By using online resources, students can select courses in their career interest areas.” The guide also lists resources to share with students, including the Kansas Virtual Technical College, Massive Open Online Courses that provide free courses, and a link for School-Based Online Curriculum.

Financial Literacy

The Kansas State Department of Education shares information about financial literacy in three of the resources available on its website. In the IPS Digital Reference Guide, school counselors have a section titled “Personal Finance Literacy,” which has two components. The first is a definition of financial literacy, “which means the ability to use knowledge and skills to manage one’s financial resources effectively for lifetime financial security, which is more inclusive of all financial aspects, not just personal finance” (p. 33). It is then followed by a note stating, “KSDE has partnered with several non-profits to offer teacher training and guidance counseling” (p. 33). Four online resources are available for school counselors to pick from.

The Electronic Portfolio Reference Guide provides a link to Kansas DegreeStats, which counselors can share with students. This resource is an interactive online tool that reviews cost and earnings data from real graduates for each undergraduate degree program offered at a public university or college in Kansas (p. 13). Ensuring that families are aware of and

understand how these tools work is crucial for helping students make informed financial decisions about their education. By equipping school counselors with these resources, they can assist families, particularly those unfamiliar with the college process. Kansas has made efforts to help families understand how to navigate financial aid, compare costs, and evaluate the return on investment, demonstrating that college is a feasible option for students who wish to pursue higher education.

The final document for financial literacy to appear is in the Kansas Post-Secondary Exploration Guide (2020). The first element this document presents is a chart listing all schools in Kansas, categorized into three groups: Public Universities, Public Community & Technical Colleges, and Independent Colleges & Universities. This chart features clickable links to each school's homepage, admissions office, financial aid, and new student information, enabling students to access the details they need about the schools quickly. The last element is included in the Financial Aid & Scholarships section. This section states, "student financial aid includes grants, scholarships, and loans. It can be available through the federal and state governments, private corporations, and philanthropic organizations, to name a few" (2020). Students are given links to resources and programs specific to Kansas, the FAFSA website, and information on how to address questions regarding financial assistance offered by the Kansas State Board of Regents.

Null Curriculum

Although the Kansas State Board of Education provides school counselors with various documents to support students in CCR programming, there are some missing elements that could hinder school counselors from offering equitable programming. For example, the self-efficacy section lacks information on Apprenticeship Opportunities or Technical Education Programs.

Additionally, the College and Career Counseling category lacks detailed lesson plans for school counselors. This is crucial, as literature indicates that school counselors receive insufficient training on providing CCR for students, and detailed lesson plans would ensure that all elements related to preparing students for higher education are addressed. While materials are made available online for students and families through the IPS curriculum, this limits access for families who may not speak English and require materials in another language or do not have internet or computer access at home to assist their children.

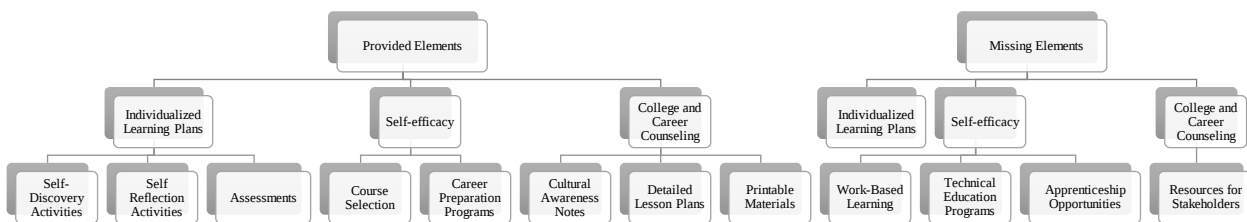
Kansas Summary

The materials provided by the Kansas State Board of Education are designed for students to receive a personalized plan for their post-secondary options. Lessons guide students through activities of self-discovery to understand their interests and potential careers. In addition, students are exposed to various career exploration programs and options from post-secondary institutions tailored to fit their individual needs. Stakeholders receive information, which is a component included for school counselors to access. The Kansas State Board of Education was the only state to specify that school counselors needed to consider the needs of all students and understand their cultural backgrounds. Yet, they only provide the materials in English which hinders non-English speaking student and stakeholders from being included in the CCR process. Students are encouraged to use technology to participate in the activities and create their ILP, which could be a barrier for families. School counselors are not provided with in-depth lesson plans that help guide the activity details, requiring school counselors to spend time building on the lessons with their busy schedules. Two components of self-efficacy were missing from the material provided

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC): Career Advising Model

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) offers free lesson plans for school counselors. These lessons were chosen because they include materials that can be printed for students ranging from kindergarten through 12th grade. Additionally, NACAC provides resources that can be shared with stakeholders to ensure families comprehend the processes and steps students must undertake during their journey to prepare for post-secondary opportunities. The following resources were examined for their inclusive components: Step by Step: College Awareness and Planning for Families, Counselors, and Communities, which includes Elementary School Curriculum, Middle School Curriculum, Early High School Curriculum, Late High School Curriculum, and Parent/Guardian Workshops, as well as the Guiding the Way to Higher Education: Families, Counselors, and Community Together PowerPoint series.

Figure 4.4. National Associate College Application Counseling CCR Curriculum



Individualized Learning Plans

According to the National Association of College Admission Counseling, in the Step by Step: Middle School Curriculum, “students should designate a large file folder, box, drawer, or some other specific place in which to keep samples of their best work in the core academic

courses and the arts. Students may also choose to create an electronic portfolio (p. 138). This is the only mention of students keeping track of their CCR activities.

Self-Discovery

The first time students begin exploring their interests is in first grade with Session 1, Activity 2 of the Step by Step: College Awareness and Planning lesson plans, when students identify what job they would like to have when working with penguins (p. 11). Fourth grade students begin to identify their interests in Session 1, Activity 5, when they “take an online career test” (p. 18). The second session of the Elementary School Curriculum, which was developed for 4th and 5th graders, is focused on researching colleges and what they would like in their postsecondary education. The activity College Knowledge has students take the “College Knowledge survey and review their responses (p. 23). The second and third activities utilize college guidebooks for students to begin exploring “the characteristics to consider when thinking about the ‘best fit’ college” (p. 28). Taking the middle school lessons to the next step in the young high school Session 5 activities have “students begin to personalize the search process, first by determining the questions to ask about what colleges can offer and second what they convey to colleges through the application process” (p. 211).

Session 1, Activity 2 in middle school focuses on “getting students to think about careers and goals is important, but having them consider what interests them and how these interests could connect to careers is just as important. Thinking about why students like certain classes and activities can help them learn more about themselves” (p. 63). This is followed up by Activity 3, where students “think about what they like and how their interests could lead them to a future path, they should be encouraged to think about specific careers they would like to learn more about” (p. 65).

In the Middle School curriculum, students take a survey on their interests. This lesson aims to make students “aware that colleges want to see applicants who have been actively involved in high school, either through school-related activities or community-based commitments. It is important for students to realize before entering high school that each year ‘counts’ and they should plan to get involved in their freshman year” (p. 97). This is done again in the Lower high school lesson, which leads students to see how their interests are preparing them for college in Session 1, Activity 3 (p. 149). These activities are revisited again in Session 4, Activity 3, in the lower high school lessons where students begin to piece together what they have done and are introduced to a timeline of activities they should do each year as they explore their interests and begin to think towards the future (p. 191).

Self-Reflection

“Students are encouraged to be honest and thorough because it will help them in the future” (p. 123), in the evaluation activity at the conclusion of the curriculum for middle school, early high school, and late high school. This activity is designed for students to track their growth and gain insight into their aspirations after high school. During late high school Session 1, Activity 3, students take “time to reflect on their individual goals and accomplishments” (p. 255), as a means for them to discover the best direction for their plans.

Assessments

Students are introduced to standardized tests as early as fourth grade, specifically in Session 2, Activity 4, where they explore college terminology. College entrance exams are described as follows: “The ACT and the SAT are tests designed to measure a student’s level of knowledge in basic areas such as math, science, English, and reading. Colleges may require the results of either test before granting admission” (p. 31). The next lesson that includes assessment

information is the middle school Series 3, Activity 4, where students are given a list of websites focused on college exploration. Nine websites are provided with information on the ACT, SAT, PSAT, test preparation resources, and how students can access fee waivers for the exams (p. 83). The conversation on standardized test scores continues into Session 5, Activity 1, when students evaluate the pieces colleges consider with the application package, which addresses that “standardized test scores include the results of the SAT Reasoning Test, the ACT test, the SAT Subject Tests, and Advanced Placement (AP) tests. Colleges will let you know which of these tests you will need to submit. The SAT Reasoning Test and the ACT scores are the two most requested” (p. 104). Providing students with this information in middle school helps them plan which tests they wish to take and the best times to take them.

The lower high school Session 3, Activity 2, and 3 focus on standardized testing at a deeper level. Activity 2 (p. 175-178) provides a list of questions and responses on what the different standardized tests are, when to take them, how to register, and the testing structure. Providing students with examples and testing strategies for the SAT and ACT are provided for students (p. 179-184; 271-285). When students enter the upper high school curriculum, they are provided a checklist for their junior and senior year for taking their standardized tests, in addition to other tasks to prepare for postsecondary options (p. 261-266).

Self-efficacy

High School Course Selections

Session 4 activities in the middle school curriculum focus on the topic How Do I Get To College? The first activity aims to help students understand the high school classes needed to prepare for college preparation, featuring a handout that states, “Beginning in ninth grade, the majority of your classes should be ones that prepare you for admission to and, perhaps even

more importantly, success in college. Most admission officers tell you that the first thing they look at is your choice of classes—even before they look at grades” (p. 86; 173). Activity 2 in Session 4 provides tips for students to make sure they make the most of their high school experience by “planning classes that prepare you well for college admission and success. Your counselor knows which high school classes are required for college” (p. 94). Encouraging students early to seek advice for classes to take informs them that they do not have to make uninformed decisions when selecting their high school courses.

As middle school students discuss which courses they should take, another Activity 1 of Session 5 highlights the components of a college application that they need to understand to make informed decisions about their academic paths. Two key elements that NACAC identifies which colleges look for are “overall high school grades—your transcript will list every class you have taken in high school along with the grade you received. Colleges will be assessing whether you chose challenging courses or took the easier route” (p. 104). Additionally, “college prep course grades (AP and honors)- for the most selective institutions, college prep courses count more than those of regular courses. If your high school doesn’t offer those advanced courses, try to take the most challenging courses available” (p. 104). Emphasizing that some schools may not provide advanced courses helps students recognize that they can still gain college admission without them; they simply need to focus on the options available and challenge themselves accordingly.

Career Preparation

The National Association of College Admission Counseling curriculum begins by introducing careers to students in kindergarten to “explore different job possibilities and think about different job environments” (p. 9), and “discuss the fact that many jobs in this book [*When*

I Grow Up] are non-traditional careers, such as a scuba diver,” as well as to “introduce the Community Helper cards” (p. 9). First-grade students talk about “what jobs related to penguins or their habitat” (p. 11) they are interested in while completing a worksheet activity. The activity titled *In the Future*, designed for 2nd graders, engages students to “identify the job titles and required education related to the today/someday activities in the book [*Someday*]” (p. 13). The exploration of college continues with 3rd graders when school counselors “explain to students that most jobs today require some form of education or training after high school (certificate program, two-year college, four-year institution, etc.)” (p. 15). Career preparation through interviews is aimed at 4th and 5th-grade students in Session 1, Activity 6 (p. 20). Activity 6 in the *Elementary Curriculum for Series Two* helps students understand their learning styles and the qualities they value through an activity that shows how their personal choices have lasting impacts (p. 58). This same lesson is repeated at the end of the middle school activities (p. 112-113).

The middle school lessons are designed for students beginning to explore postsecondary options. In Series 3, Lesson 2, *Getting to Know the Possibilities* (p. 77-79), and the lower high school Series 2, Activity 2, of the same name (p. 160-162) has students examine these options through college vocabulary. The terminology addresses various types of colleges and universities, including liberal arts colleges, universities, technical institutes, professional schools, historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions, women’s colleges, community colleges, junior colleges, proprietary institutions, public colleges and universities, private colleges and universities, financial aid, grants, scholarships, undergraduate degrees, associate degrees, and bachelor’s degrees (p. 78-79; 160-162). Listing these different types of colleges and universities helps students recognize the many options available to them.

This lesson marks the first instance in which various postsecondary educational options are presented to students, offering them multiple avenues to find the institution that best meets their needs.

An activity that school counselors can have students engage in to build a transferable skill into the career force is the middle school Session 4, Activity 4, which is understanding how to manage time (p. 100). Taking the middle school activity further, the Early High School Session 1, Activity 1 has students set goals. This activity has students “think about their values, skills, and interests as they look ahead to their life after high school” (p. 147). Goal setting enhances time management skills as it teaches individuals to prioritize tasks, set time to complete a task, and have something to work towards. Continuing the transferable skills in young high school Students can be found in Session 4, Activity 2, where students create “a resume of experiences, skills, and educational background” (p. 189).

The first mention of options beyond an educational path for students planning after high school appears in the plans for the young high school stakeholder workshop, which states, “some students move directly from school to a job. These students may have pursued a vocational or technical education while in high school... other students may decide to take time off before continuing their education so that they might save money for college or explore their interests” (p. 240). It is also the first time military service is listed as an option for students seeking a career. These options are essential for students to recognize and understand, as they have multiple choices to achieve their career goals. Not discussing these options in class it denies students the opportunity to comprehend the various paths available to them. While attending a four-year college can be an option for all students to consider, it is not the only path available, and they have the right to make informed decisions about their future.

College and Career Counseling

Detailed Lesson Plans

The Table of Contents for the Step By Step: College Awareness and Planning curriculum provides detailed information on the resources available to school counselors. The lesson plans begin with guidance on how school counselors can organize and conduct workshops for both students and parents. The lesson plans for school counselors are divided into four categories: Elementary (K-5), Middle School (6-8), Early High School (9-11), and Late High School (11-12). Additionally, resources for a parent and guardian workshop about financial aid cover four topics: the College and Financial Aid Events Calendar, How Much Will College Cost?, Assessing Student Need, and Types of Financial Aid. School counselors also receive sample letters for parents and students that discuss the Step By Step: College Awareness and Planning lessons, along with evaluation forms for students to fill out regarding their facilitator and the program itself. Handouts containing websites and a glossary are also included in the index.

Notes for the school counselor on organizing and conducting student workshops are listed on page 2 and state:

We encourage you to personalize any of the information about the graduation requirements or local college and university admission requirements. Some schools have an advisory time that could be used to deliver the messages from these workshops. Most activities in a session can be completed in 15-20 minutes, so sessions could be split up to accommodate your schedule. If you only have one or two total hours during the year to meet with students about preparation for college, then use the activities from different workshops that will best support your message to the students. Finally, you could offer before and after-school workshops to students to present the entire curriculum- especially

targeting those students who otherwise may not have access to someone who has knowledge of the college process.

Equipping school counselors with strategies to modify and adjust lessons fosters autonomy and enables students to receive information tailored to their needs. Offering guidance on when to schedule sessions to support students gives school counselors more opportunities to allow students to explore their postsecondary options, which is crucial as they grow older and start making important decisions.

The tips for organizing and conducting parent/guardian workshops in the Step by Step: College Awareness and Planning lessons are more comprehensive and provide strategies for engaging target audiences (p. 3). The first stage focuses on planning and designing workshops, which includes processes for “identifying the target audience in the school and community, conduct planning meetings with school or agency and other colleagues, and identify the specific agenda to be presented (p. 3)” among others. Stage 2 emphasizes the implementation of the workshop, followed by a follow-up in Stage 3. Additionally, strategies for preparing the venue for presentations and potential guest lecturers are detailed on page 4.

This section provides information on conducting workshops specifically geared toward postsecondary options, which is beneficial to school counselors who have not prepared workshops before or need guidance to ensure they meet the community’s needs. It also highlights the importance of bringing in stakeholders and providing them with the critical information necessary to help them understand postsecondary options and processes.

Each curriculum section is divided into sessions, with each session offering a variety of activities that align with the overall theme. Additional lessons suitable for any grade level are also included. The session introduction page outlines the session’s overarching theme, along with

the activity's purpose. A set of objectives is provided to ensure school counselors cover essential topics. A list of activities and corresponding handouts indicates the appropriate grade levels for each activity. Each activity includes the name of the activity or handout, a list of required materials, and instructions for school counselors to follow. Necessary handouts are included with the lesson materials for school counselors to copy and distribute to students.

Lessons for the K-2 activities require school counselors to have additional materials beyond printouts to implement the lesson plans and make them relatable to students. Supplemental materials, in addition to crayons and colored pencils or computers/tablets for the Elementary School Curriculum, include specific books (*When I Grow Up* by Tin Louise and Oliver Corwin (Session 1, Activity 1, p. 9); *Who Counts the Penguins? Working in Antarctica* by Mary Meinking (Session 1, Activity 2, p. 11); *Someday* by Eileen Spinelli (Session 1, Activity 3, p. 13); *When I Grow Up* by Al Yankovic (Session 1, Activity 4, p. 15)); Community Helper Cards (Session 1, Activity 1, p. 9); and College Guidebooks and Viewbooks (Session 2, Activity 2 and 3, p. 26, 28).

Printable Materials

Each lesson includes a printable activity or handout to reinforce the content. These hands-on activities enhance retention of the material and cater to students' diverse learning styles. Along with the materials for students to explore their interests, handouts for families are also provided. By offering materials in paper format, we eliminate any barriers students may face when using technology, ensuring equitable access to CCR programs that empower them to make informed decisions about their futures.

Stakeholder Information

The National Association of College Admission Counseling provides school counselors with a series of resources to provide informational sessions for stakeholders. The Step by Step: College Awareness and Planning Middle school parent workshop sections states, “before they [parents] can be effective in helping children become successful in school, family members must first be acknowledged as important care providers, and their personal self-esteem must be addressed...this workshop is to help parents and guardians learn how to get the most out of school for the benefit of their students” (p. 125). Providing stakeholders with the same information as the students ensures information is clearly understood and helps close information gaps amongst families while the process of college applications continues to change.

The primary resource school counselors offer to stakeholders is parent workshops designed for families of middle school, young high school, and late high school students. The middle school workshop provides families with information on how to help guide their students in selecting courses that will challenge them (p. 130) and explains the importance of extracurricular activities (p. 126). The young high school workshop focuses on the types of postsecondary institutions (p. 240), academic college preparation (p. 241), and the types of financial aid (p. 242-243).

PowerPoint presentations titled Guiding the Way to Higher Education: Families, Counselors, and Communities Together. Each PowerPoint addresses a specific topic to help organize the aspects of CCR. The first PowerPoint is Essential I: Building a Foundation for Educational Success. This informational session emphasizes how families and schools can collaborate, offering tips such as: “meet your student’s teachers and counselors early in the school year to establish these ties and check in throughout the year. Don’t wait until poor grades

are received to check in with the school” (slide 3). Slide 5 highlights how parents can participate in the “decision making process” by “joining the parent organization at school.” Slides 6 and 7 discuss how families can motivate students to succeed academically. This is further elaborated on slides 9 and 10, which outline steps families can take to encourage student achievement. The next two slides concentrate on what families can do at home to create a supportive learning environment. Slide 15 guides families on how to “Build Self-Esteem and a Positive Self Image.” Slide 16 concludes with the quote, “Families should have ongoing, direct involvement in the education of their students.” Educating families on how they can support their students academically is vital for enhancing students’ academic outcomes, as they benefit from having support at home. Families who are engaged in their students’ education can identify challenges early and collaborate with the school to secure the necessary support for their child, fostering a cohesive relationship between the school and family. Families who are active in their child’s learning become more aware of academic resources, enabling them to advocate for their students effectively.

The second PowerPoint in the series is titled Essential II: Setting the Stage for Dreams to Become Reality. In this presentation, school counselors share the various options students have after high school that are both educational and work-based. Educational options include “College or University, Community or Junior College, Trade, Business, or Technical School,” while work-based options comprise “Work, Military Service, Public Service, and Gap Year” (slide 5). Slide 6 elaborates on the educational options and lists the different certifications associated with each one. Slide 7, titled “Setting the Stage for College,” helps families appreciate the importance of attending college. Slides 9-12 focus on “Connecting with Your Student at Home,” providing parents with tips to help students build the skills necessary for postsecondary options.

Suggestions include “Talking to your student to help him or her become aware of academic and personal stresses” (slide 9), “clearly stating values and acceptable behaviors” (slide 10), “ensuring that middle and high school students take challenging courses” (slide 12), and “utilizing community resources such as after-school programs, adult education classes, libraries, athletic programs, and religious organizations” (slide 12). Building on the discussion of academics, slide 13 emphasizes the courses that middle school students should take to prepare for high school. Slide 14 states, “Taking challenging courses in middle school gives students the opportunity to enroll in more advanced courses in high school and college.” This aims to encourage students to challenge themselves academically, setting them apart from their peers. As students begin preparing for applications, slide 15 advises them to “keep everything in a folder or portfolio, including records of any awards or honors and the dates received.” In addition to tracking their accomplishments, slides 16 and 17 highlight the importance of extracurricular activities: “Extracurricular interests enable students to discover their talents and skills in athletic, artistic, academic, community service, and other areas” (slide 16). The presentation then shifts to financial literacy by explaining how to calculate the cost of college (slide 18) and comparing the expenses of two-year and four-year colleges (slides 19-20). The final four slides of the presentation concentrate on paying for college (slide 21), calculating a family’s financial need (slide 22), and understanding how to finance college, detailing the types of aid available to students, including grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study programs (slide 23). By covering essential information on courses, extracurricular involvement, and beginning the conversation about funding postsecondary options, this session prepares families and students for the steps they need to take next. This information session provides a general overview to ensure families

are not overwhelmed with too much information at once and helps close the information gap regarding students' options.

The third PowerPoint in the series, Essential III: Charting a Challenging High School Experience, offers families an overview of post-high school options (slide 5) and includes a brief description of the educational opportunities: Colleges and Universities (slide 6), Community College, Junior College, Technical College (slide 7), and Trade, Technical, or Business Schools (slide 8). These slides are followed up by the general core course work that is required for colleges and universities on slides 9-11. Building on the preparation for postsecondary options, families are encouraged to learn about their child's individual characteristics (slide 13-14) as these will help students understand themselves and think about future possibilities. Slides 15 and 16 focus on how school counselors can help students be prepared to apply to their postsecondary options. The last slide states, "seek assistance from people or programs in the community that can offer aid and expertise in the college admission process (slide 17), that helps tie in how the community can support families.

The next presentation in the series, Essential IV: Follow the Road to College, focuses on the college admission process. Slide 3 is aimed at helping students determine how to choose the right college for them by providing a list of questions to consider. Slide 6 presents how to gather information about colleges and universities. The process for applying to college is outlined for families on slides 7 and 8. These steps include: "making a list of needs and wants, keeping college information organized, noting likes and dislikes, and setting up a checklist for college applications (slide 7)" as well as "reading all information sent by colleges, making copies of all applications, and keeping a calendar to track important deadlines, contacts, interviews, etc." (slide 8). School counselors continue the discussion on slide 10 by explaining how colleges and

universities make their decisions and listing the elements of an application package that students need to be aware of. Families are shown the overall steps students should take each year in high school (slide 12). The final slide addresses Families' Roles in the application process, stating: "the application period can be a time of anxiety for students; assist your child in following the procedures correctly, meet all deadlines, and be an active participant in the exploration process" (slide 13). Outlining the steps necessary to apply for postsecondary options early on helps students realize that the decisions they make will impact the outcome of their higher education applications while also reinforcing the idea that all students can enhance their chances of attending college.

The final PowerPoint in the series, Essential V: Paying for College, is aimed at helping families understand the various methods for financing college. Providing this information early allows students and families to recognize that college is an attainable option when they understand the available resources to help fund their education. The presentation begins with a review of how to assess college costs, including both direct and indirect expenses (slide 5). Next, it explains how colleges and universities calculate students' financial need (slides 6 and 7). The financial aid process is outlined on slide 8, detailing the "Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), College Scholarship Service (CSS) profile, and institutional aid applications" to assist families in comprehending how schools allocate financial aid. To enhance understanding of financial aid types, slides 14-17 describe grants (slide 14), scholarships (slide 15), work-study (slide 16), and loans (slide 17), enabling families to make informed financial decisions when considering the aid packages sent to students.

Cultural Awareness Notes for Counselors

The list of websites focused on college exploration in the middle school lesson, Session 3, Activity 4, and lower high school Series 2, Activity 4, includes resources aimed at specific students (p. 83; 169). Websites for members of the undocumented students, first-generation college students, Hispanic students, and Black community are available to provide students with additional information on resources and how to navigate the college application process. Giving students access to resources about their specific situation helps to relieve anxiety around applying to college and improves equity and access by providing them with information and opportunities to make informed decisions.

At the end of the Middle School Curriculum school counselors are provided with information to help them plan and execute a parent workshop. The objectives of the workshop are “to demonstrate the importance of families in student achievement and success. To provide methods of collaboration between families and schools that foster self-esteem, motivation, and academic achievement” (p. 124).

Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is a key component of the NACAC curriculum for both students and their stakeholders. These topics appear in activities for students as early as 4th grade and continue with informational sessions for stakeholders. These discussions are geared toward helping students understand the postsecondary educational options available and the resources available to assist them in achieving their goals of attending higher education.

The first appearance of financial literacy occurs in Series 2, Lesson 4 in the Elementary Curriculum. In this lesson, students are introduced to the terms “financial aid: money that helps the student pay for college. Financial aid includes grants, scholarships, student loans, and work-

study; scholarship: a type of financial aid that is awarded to students who meet or exceed the criteria identified. A scholarship does not have to be repaid; work-study: a program that helps students get jobs on campus to help them pay for college or other expenses” (p. 31). In middle school, the topic of paying for college is revisited with an activity that takes place in the classroom and is then sent home for students to continue with parents. In Session 5, Activity 2, of the middle school curriculum (p. 107) and lower high school curriculum (p. 152) students show their knowledge of financial aid by taking a quiz and then discussing the points of the quiz which include understanding that applying for financial aid is not difficult, that college is not the only way to get a job, and how pay is associated with postsecondary choices (p. 107). This is followed by a handout that provides families with the various ways postsecondary education can be obtainable through scholarships and grants (p. 108) and definitions and terms associated with financial aid (p. 109). Session 6, Activities 1 and 2 focus on the financial aid opportunities and helping students to make an informed financial decision before deciding on their postsecondary option (p. 331-340). The stakeholder meeting suggested in the late high school curriculum is centered on financial assistance (p. 369-376) and available aid types.

As stated in the section Stakeholder Information, school counselors present the facts about financial aid in two PowerPoint presentations, each providing a different layer of information. Essential V: Paying for College is a presentation dedicated to the various ways in which postsecondary education can be obtainable for those who choose this route. Essential II: Setting the Stage for Dreams to Become Reality provides an overview of financial aid and how schools determine a student’s financial need.

In addition to these PowerPoints, the Step-by-Step College Awareness and Planning Lesson Plans describe how school counselors can organize a workshop on Resources for Financial Aid (p. 370).

This section affords the Step by Step presenter in a number of opportunities to engage in dialogue with parent participants. Some of the questions and discussion topics to interject are listed below:

- During the discussion of college costs, the step-by-step presenter may wish to present a case study of actual costs incurred by a family in sending a student to college. Inviting parents who are currently paying college costs to participate in the workshop can provide for relevant and lively discussions.
- Due to the technical nature of many financial aid programs and the changing nature of legislation that authorizes these forms of aid, having a financial aid office participate in the workshop as a guest presenter can be valuable.
- Many states operate financial aid programs for state residents. Become knowledgeable about these programs and invite representatives to present information about them (p. 371).

The benefit of the discussion topics is that it gives school counselors an idea of what information could be presented. In addition, it provides ideas on how to bring in experts on financial aid specifics, so they do not need to be the expert on this topic, in addition to the information they present on CCR. The suggested activities are hands-on and provide an opportunity for families to not feel overwhelmed when they need to go through the process with

their child. Activities include, “have families calculate college costs, then estimate their Expected Family Contribution and prospective federal aid eligibility by completing the FAFSA4caster; Fill out the FAFSA to become familiar with the process; and contact institutions’ admission offices or browse their websites for schools that offer scholarships, grants, and work-study programs” (p. 371). Each of the activities comes with handouts to help explain the topic of discussion that aligns with the activities.

Null Curriculum

While NACAC offers in-depth knowledge on preparing for four-year colleges as students explore their career aspirations, it does not provide information on apprenticeship opportunities, technical education programs, or work-based learning. Although it is important for students to recognize that a four-year college degree is an option for everyone, NACAC’s lessons do not equip students or their stakeholders with detailed information about these alternatives, nor do the activities actively promote seeking options other than a four-year college.

NACAC Summary

NACAC offers a CCR program for students starting as early as Kindergarten. The lessons build upon one another over the years, providing opportunities for students to reflect on how they have changed or remained the same while also allowing those who missed lessons to access CCR information. This program focuses exclusively on college counseling, which does not benefit students who do not plan to attend a four-year program. The materials provided for school counselors to use with stakeholders at various stages of a student’s secondary education enable them to grasp the language and process early on, assisting in guiding their students through decisions about what to do after high school. Students participate in activities that help them understand how their interests can relate to their future careers. In addition, students partake in

activities to understand how their decisions in high school will have an impact on their post-secondary options.

Conclusion

The four curricula examined provide insight into how CCR programs can be inclusive for all students, helping to close the equity gap. The three states and NACAC each offer resources to deliver the most comprehensive information to everyone involved in their programming. However, critical components addressing all aspects of inclusivity were absent from each curricula. Lessons on financial literacy are present in several lessons designed to show students how their careers influence wages, while understanding how to pay for college.

Each curriculum included a component for creating an individualized learning plan; however, NACAC offered the least information to assist students in tracking their progress toward achieving their postsecondary goals. Self-discovery activities in each curriculum emphasized students discovering their interests and how these relate to potential careers to explore. Self-reflection is crucial for students to start understanding what they want for their future and the path they should take to achieve it. Assessments were an integral part of each curriculum, helping students identify their interests. This section also focuses on providing students with essential information on standardized tests based on their postsecondary needs and offers tips on when to take the tests.

Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in ensuring that students receive essential information about the various options available to them after high school, enabling them to make informed decisions. Overall, this was the area where information was the weakest, particularly regarding apprenticeships, technical education, and work-based learning. When this information appeared in the lesson plans, it was inconsistent, and, with the exception of Florida, students did not

thoroughly explore these post-secondary options. Each curriculum analyzed provided comprehensive guidance on selecting courses that fulfill graduation requirements and offer insights for students to choose courses that interest them. Furthermore, career preparation is closely linked to transferable skills applicable in both college and the workforce.

The main factor in choosing CCR programming from California, Florida, Kansas, and NACAC was the lesson plans available for school counselors. Although the formatting and sequence of the lessons varied across all plans, they provided materials for school counselors to use in both digital and print formats, ensuring that all students had access to the same information. Moreover, involving stakeholders in students' lives is crucial for helping them make informed decisions. By supplying resources to stakeholders, we can address information gaps, reduce stigma, and eliminate misinformation. This component was included in all four curricula. However, one shortcoming of the curricula was the lack of guidance for school counselors on delivering information relevant to different cultures and underserved students, ensuring that all students received the information they needed. Financial Literacy was integrated into several lessons across all curricula and revisited multiple times, equipping students with the knowledge of resources available to make their educational postsecondary options viable and helping them make informed financial decisions.

Chapter 5 will explore recommendations to strengthen CCR programs that work to bridge the equity gap using insights from California, Florida, Kansas, and NACAC. This chapter will examine reforms to enhance lesson plans and resources for school counselors, students, and stakeholders aimed at expanding access to postsecondary options for all students, particularly those who are underserved. Additionally, it will analyze the implications of the policies put forth by the Trump administration in January and February 2025, assessing how funding, accessibility,

and student support systems will be affected. Comparing the state initiatives and the new national policies will provide an understanding of how to promote equitable CCR programs moving forward.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Introduction

The literature review indicates that college and career guidance counseling originated in the early 20th century to assist individuals in finding jobs that align with their skills (William and Mary School of Education, 2022). After World War II, vocational counseling expanded alongside educational legislation aimed at meeting the country's economic demands while addressing individuals' skill sets (Leahy et al., 2015; William and Mary School of Education, 2022). In the 1970s, college guidance counseling transitioned to a holistic approach and continued to adapt with educational goals focused on preparing students for postsecondary opportunities (Pope, 2000; Team, 2020). A significant transformation took place in 2015 under the Obama administration with the enactment of the "Every Student Succeeds Act," which shifted CCR programming from the federal government to the states (Bahl, 2015).

As a result of the transfer of college and career guidance counseling to the states, standards and proficiencies varied nationwide. This allowed local school districts to select the materials for implementing CCR, leading to increased disparities (Mokher et al., 2018; Malin et al., 2017). The growing emphasis on college readiness often equates it with more advanced classes, potentially neglecting the diverse needs of all students and their college and career ambitions. A point emphasized in the literature review is that greater efforts are needed to bridge the gaps in CCR to meet the needs of underserved students (Hanover Research, 2016; Kanno, 2018; Le et al., 2015; O'Connor, 2018).

School counselors spend a significant amount of their time addressing students' social and emotional needs, which reduces the time available to meet the recommended 80% of their day assigned to college and career programs (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; O'Connor, 2018).

Furthermore, although the national average student-to-counselor ratio improved to 408:1 in 2021 from 482:1 in 2015, it still falls short of the recommended 250:1 ratio necessary for counselors to effectively allocate resources, build relationships, and guide students toward their next steps (O'Connor, 2018). In addition to facing high ratios and the challenge of concentrating on their primary responsibility of college and career guidance, school counselors often lack the training and preparation needed to provide the required programming, despite holding master's degrees and meeting state certification requirements (Cook et al., 2018; Ilic & Rosenbaum, 2019; Novakovic et al., 2021).

My research analyzed how CCR curricula, offered by individual state Departments of Education and three private organizations, were structured to explore their integration of inclusion that addresses disparities for underserved students, as highlighted in the literature review. I employed attribute coding to determine my data source, which included the states of California, Florida, and Kansas, as well as the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC). Deductive coding was subsequently utilized to identify the inclusivity incorporated within their CCR through qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that each selected curriculum included many of the inclusive elements discussed in the literature review and the 2015 "Every Student Succeeds Act," which are crucial to ensuring an equitable experience for all students while assisting underserved students in understanding their post-secondary options. This chapter presents the overall findings, describes how my research has contributed to the field, outlines the limitations of my study, and offers recommendations for future research.

Findings

My research question, “How do current college and career readiness curriculum provide inclusive models to ensure access to higher education in high school guidance counseling curricula?” was addressed through the four curricula—California, Florida, Kansas, and NACAC—that made up the curricula data, providing insight into how the CCR programs can be inclusive for all students and help close the equity gap identified in the literature review.

Through content analysis, the following questions assisted in answering my research question:

- 1) What components are commonly present in CCR curriculums?
- 2) How are inclusivity principles represented in the current CCR curricula?

R1: What components are commonly present in College and Career Readiness curriculums?

I began my research to identify at least two states that provide school counselors with detailed lesson plans and printable resources for CCR programming for all students, addressing the equity gap highlighted in my literature review. I was pleased to find that three states—California, Florida, and Kansas—would be included in the study, offering insights into how school counselors access materials intended to bridge the equity gap identified in the literature. The literature indicated that while school counselors understand the importance of CCR, they were not adequately prepared to conduct the necessary activities (Novakovic et al., 2021). Ideally, providing school counselors with ready-made lesson plans and activities would help close the gap in their preparedness and enhance the effectiveness of CCR initiatives. Furthermore, I anticipated that the three private CCR programs I discovered would meet the criteria outlined in the initial attribute coding, offering multiple resources for school counselors. These agencies were established to fill the void left by schools and specifically target

underserved students, ensuring that CCR initiatives are effectively implemented (Martinez et al., 2016). These programs could allocate more time and resources since their primary focus was on college and career guidance counseling, exceeding what state requirements mandated. I was surprised to find that only one private program met the criteria of having lesson plans with printable materials for students and an additional component likely to possess inclusive attributes that school counselors could utilize, ensuring every student served had the opportunity to make informed decisions.

One important component in assessing how schools incorporate inclusive elements is by providing stakeholders with information alongside the students (Cook et al., 2018; Hanover Research, 2016; Turner et al., 2018). The literature indicates that any postsecondary support students receive is beneficial in helping them consider their options, especially when stakeholders are also informed about how to prepare for life after high school (Gee et al., 2020). Sociocultural theory states that when students interact with the provided information, they can apply it to themselves, which highlights the importance of offering students options (Cherry, 2022). When school counselors address CCR lessons with their students, all stakeholders must be involved to support students in their journey (Hanover Research, 2016). Ensuring that all types of higher education information reach students' support systems is crucial for helping them make informed decisions and increases the number of students applying to universities (Turner et al., 2019; Moker et al., 2019). When school counselors share information with both stakeholders and students, constructivism theory is applied, enabling the integration of new information with prior experiences related to higher education options. This provides students with fresh insights to engage with their world (Sjøberg, 2010). Finding curricula that equip school counselors with resources for stakeholders was as essential as providing printable materials for students, which is

why California, Florida, and Kansas were analyzed in my research. These states offered abundant information for school counselors to utilize.

Financial literacy was an essential element to include in the criteria for curricula to analyze. This topic was integrated into various lessons throughout the curriculum and revisited multiple times in the lesson plans provided by the curriculum sample, equipping students and their stakeholders with the knowledge of available resources to make their postsecondary educational options viable and help them make informed financial decisions (Mayes et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2018). The definition of financial literacy for coding purposes was the understanding of financial aid terms, such as grants, scholarships, work-study, and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). According to the College Board's Eight Components of CCR Counseling, college affordability planning for students and their stakeholders in their personal lives should provide tools to understand how financial aid works and help students grasp how college could be affordable for them (College Board, n.d.). The repetitive lessons align well with socio-cultural theory, which states that modeling and scaffolding of the material should be parallel with what students are learning, allowing them to internalize the meaning of the lessons and draw their own conclusions over time (Allman, 2020; Jaramillo, 1996). Constructivist theory also applies to the process of repeated lessons. When students are presented with information on multiple occasions, their interactions with the material enhance their ability to interpret how it relates to them and see how the financial aid information applies to their own post-secondary options (Brau, 2020; Miller et al., 2019).

Curricula that encourage Individualized Lesson Plans (ILPs) are another criterion for inclusion in the curricula sample. While each curriculum defines what this should look like for students and the methods for maintaining it vary, providing students with opportunities to

explore their interests and develop a tailored path is essential for equity in CCR. A hands-on approach to self-discovery aligns with socio-cultural theory and best applies to the studied curricula (Cherry, 2022; Jaramillo, 1996). The literature suggests that there is an assumption that all students are motivated to attend college and will invest time in preparing for it (Mokher et al., 2018). However, some students may be less engaged in the programs or may not realize they have many options and would also gain from college and career guidance counseling. Others may already doubt their abilities to attend college for various reasons and might hesitate to engage in CCR programs when offered (Malin et al., 2017; Mokher et al., 2018; Malin & Hackmann, 2017). Having access to a comprehensive curriculum that helps students recognize their options after high school early on would ensure that all students receive the same information, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, abilities, location, language skills, and citizenship (Mokher et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2016; Novakovic et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2018; Martinez & Baker, 2022).

R2: How are inclusivity principles represented in the current College and Career Readiness curricula?

To address this question, I analyzed lessons through the lens of socio-cultural and socio-constructivist theories. Activities from California, Florida, Kansas, and NACAC incorporated both theories, emphasizing learners' social interactions and experiences that influence knowledge acquisition (Brau, 2020; Cherry, 2022; Main, 2023; Sjøberg, 2010). These lessons cover topics that promote a deeper understanding of the world while enhancing students' confidence and competence in discussions with their peers (Jaramillo, 1996; Mercer & Howe, 2012). Individualized learning plans, self-assessments, and self-efficacy integrate socio-cultural theory into curricula, reflecting the shared goal of building a connection between the material and the

students (Brau, 2020; Jaramillo, 1996). By examining the presence and application of socio-cultural and constructivist principles, this analysis provides insights into how students navigate their educational journeys, ultimately informing their decisions regarding higher education opportunities.

Materials provided by California, Florida, Kansas, and NACAC encompass various aspects of inclusive principles. The term most frequently identified during deductive coding was financial aid. Students need to understand that post-secondary options are available to them once they grasp how financial aid works. This concept is evident in the California lesson titled “Focus on Net Price, Not the Sticker Price,” where students learn to calculate their actual expenses for their chosen educational path. Furthermore, the activities involve identifying financial issues arising from independent living, making informed decisions regarding these financial challenges, and systematically considering alternatives and consequences when making financial choices (Choosing My Lifestyle, p. 1). Florida dedicates its Career Planning unit to financial aid, featuring two lessons aligned with the state standard of “Develop a budget and plan to pay for postsecondary training” (Step 4, Lessons 5 and 6). Students are presented with various funding options for their college education, such as Free Money (Scholarships and Grants), savings, earnings, and loans (Federal and Private). Engaging stakeholders in understanding financial aid is the focus of the Family College Nights lesson. Lesson plans inform school counselors that “It is important to expose both students and their parents to post-high school options starting at an early age... For parents of younger students, it is essential to introduce them to options for paying for college early... Familiarizing parents with these resources can increase their confidence that college is attainable for their children and help them start planning early.” Additionally, Kansas has made efforts to assist families in navigating financial aid, comparing costs, and evaluating

return on investment, demonstrating that college is a feasible option for students who want to pursue higher education through their handouts and information sessions. NACAC also offers guidance on family sessions surrounding financial literacy. Two PowerPoints for informational sessions aimed at stakeholders contain information on expenses associated with post-secondary options, while the Step by Step College Awareness and Planning Lesson Plans illustrate how school counselors can organize a workshop centered around financial aid resources (p. 370). The informational sessions for stakeholders fit within the socio-cultural model as the interaction between students and their stakeholders “lays the foundation for what a child thinks and will do in certain situations” (Allman, 2020). When school counselors understand the needs of students and stakeholders, they can promote collaboration and bring together different communities of learners, building the language of post-secondary education and creating an environment where students are confident in discussing their future endeavors (Allman, 2020; Cherry, 2022; Jaramillo, 1996).

The attribute of Individualized Learning Plans was present in all four plans; however, the degree to which they were addressed varied. The literature review indicated that school counselors should tailor CCR programs to meet the needs of students, providing equitable support for all learners (Krell & Pérusse, 2012), which is a vital aspect of both constructivism and socio-cultural theories. According to constructivism theory, the student is at the center of learning and actively works to construct knowledge that is tailored to their cognitive level (Brau, 2020; Sjøberg, 2010). As indicated by the Kansas State Department of Education: Individual Plan of Study, IPS Digital Reference Guide (pp. 4, 8), and Electronic Portfolio Reference Guide (p. 1), a strong Individualized Learning Plan includes:

1. A graduated series of strength finders and career interest inventories to help students identify preferences toward career clusters.
2. Course builder with course selections based on career interests.
3. A general postsecondary plan (workforce, military, certificate program, two - or four-year college).

These activities tie into the socio-cultural and constructivist theory, which focuses on students participating in experiential learning to identify interests. This allows school counselors to assess where students are in their thoughts on post-secondary education and develop relevant lessons (Brau, 2020; Cherry, 2022; Jaramillo, 1996; Miller et al., 2019).

NACAC mentions that students should designate one location to keep work samples from all courses or create an online digital portfolio (Step by Step: Middle School Curriculum, p. 138). The Kansas State Board of Education provides school counselors with a handbook specifically dedicated to the ILP in the IPS Digital Reference Guide. Additionally, *Employability Skills: Measuring and Reflecting Student Learning* (2019) offers school counselors a thorough overview of the Individual Plan of Study, emphasizing key components to include for Work-Based Learning (p. 4) and examples of portfolio formats based on career clusters (p. 8-14). Florida employs the online platform Xello to construct their portfolios, which are integrated into the lesson plans provided by the Department of Education. The California State Board of Education encourages students to develop an Individualized Learning Plan, referred to as a Career Portfolio in the *Career & College Readiness Lesson Plans: Educator Guide* (p. 1). School counselors are advised to have students create a hard copy of their career portfolio and will have access to the CalCRN online tools (CCRLP Educators Guide, p. 1). A part of socio-cultural theory suggests that students need to engage with the information to effectively relate their learning to

themselves; providing printed materials as needed helps eliminate barriers faced by some underserved students (Cherry, 2022).

Each curriculum requires students to create portfolios focused on the inclusive aspects of self-discovery, self-reflection, and assessments provided throughout their lessons, while integrating elements of self-efficacy related to career planning. These lessons aim to help students explore their interests and potential careers, enabling them to develop a graduation plan and make informed choices about post-secondary options. The age at which students start exploring CCR varies by program: NACAC offers programming for kindergarten students, California's lessons begin in grade 5, elementary school students can utilize Florida's Xello programming, and Kansas initiates its program at the high school level. These points align with the frameworks of the California State Board of Education, Florida State Board of Education, Kansas State Board of Education, and NACAC lesson plans for college and career counseling. This aligns with literature indicating that students with access to strong resources for college preparation are generally more successful in their post-secondary choices and education, as they can develop their soft skills and explore their interests more effectively (Turner et al., 2018; Gee et al., 2020; Novakovic et al., 2021). The interactions students have with the material provide opportunities to gain new insights on how their interests are important, employing both socio-cultural and constructivist theories (Miller et al., 2019; Sjøberg, 2010).

CCR involves content knowledge, self-efficacy, and students' ability to take ownership of their learning. The curricula sample offers lessons dedicated to helping students choose their educational path (Gee et al., 2020). Kansas enables students to customize a career pathway, where they can set their own goals, select courses that prepare them for the future, and aid in decision-making. NACAC has a lesson for eighth-grade students featuring an activity designed

to help them understand the high school classes necessary for college preparation, including a handout that states, “Beginning in ninth grade, the majority of your classes should be ones that prepare you for admission to and, perhaps even more importantly, success in college. Most admission officers tell you that the first thing they look at is your choice of classes—even before they look at grades” (p. 86; 173). In California, students start discussing high school graduation requirements in the seventh-grade lesson, *The Next 6 Years*, where they “complete the Graduation Requirement Worksheet and the High School Plan Worksheet” (p. 4). The Florida Career Cruiser Career Planning unit, Step 4, Lesson 7, emphasizes helping students understand the connection between the courses they take in high school and their post-secondary goals. Florida also provides lessons focused on informing students about school choice, course options, and extracurricular activities throughout the curriculum. By equipping students with the skills to decide on their high school courses, they gain a voice in exploring their interests while also learning to set goals, skills that will benefit them in their careers.

Theoretical Framework in Inclusive Elements

The activities included in the lesson plans all incorporate elements of Sociocultural Constructivism Theory. Each selected curriculum introduces students to the language of college and career readiness early on, providing them with essential language exposure, a key aspect of Socio-Cultural Theory (Allman, 2020). Lesson plans, like those offered in California, empower school counselors to adapt programming to meet students’ needs (California Department of Education, 2025). This approach aligns with an inclusive curriculum, adhering to Socio-Cultural Theory and facilitating necessary scaffolding (Jaramillo, 1996). Providing stakeholders with information found in the curricula aligns with the Socio-Cultural theory of interactions between students and stakeholders, laying a foundation for what a child thinks and will do in certain

situations (Allman, 2020; Bouman, 2017; Hanover Research, 2016; Krell & Pérusse, 2012). This foundation corresponds with the collaborative aspect of what an inclusive curriculum entails. The activities provided by the states and NACAC enable students to apply real-world applications to discovering their interests and building individualized lesson plans, an element of Constructivism theory (Brau, 2020; Miller et al., 2019), which also aligns with the necessity for students to achieve their individual goals—an essential element of providing an inclusive curriculum (DMU, 2016; ECIO, 2023; Morgan & Houghton, 2011; NYU, 2025). Reflection, an element found in Constructivism Theory (Brau, 2020), can be seen in various stages of the curricula analyzed while also including aspects of an inclusive curriculum of transparency (Morgan & Houghton, 2011), where students take time to see how the lesson applies to their own goals and understanding of themselves.

Inclusivity Gaps

The research revealed that the most common element missing from the lesson plans was in the self-efficacy attribute. Regarding self-efficacy, all four curricula failed to discuss work-based learning, which is one crucial way to help students explore their interests and pursue a career without the pressure of discovering them while enrolled in a post-secondary program. Additionally, all but Florida neglected to thoroughly inform students about apprenticeship opportunities, which can be an excellent way to start, uncover interests, and learn critical job skills early on for certain professions. While technical education was addressed in the California and Florida curricula, it was absent from the other two. Providing students access to various post-secondary options beyond two-year and four-year degrees shows that there are many avenues to explore for gaining knowledge, allowing for informed decisions about the direction students wish to take and the various pathways available to achieve their goals. The literature

indicates that students, particularly underserved ones, require better support (Bouman, 2017; Gibbs Grey, 2018). Providing information on all types of higher education to students' support systems is vital for helping students make informed decisions and increasing the number of students applying to universities (Turner et al., 2019; Moker et al., 2019).

College and career guidance counseling was another element of inclusivity missing in at least half of the curricula reviewed, hindering the development of a more inclusive CCR program. According to the literature, access to a comprehensive curriculum that assists students in understanding their options after high school would ensure that all students receive the same information, regardless of their race, socio-economic status, abilities, location, language proficiency, or citizenship (Mokher et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2016; Novakovic et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2018; Martinez & Baker, 2022). Although the Kansas State Board of Education provided lesson plans and some printable materials, these were not as extensive as the resources offered by the State Board of Education for school counselors in California and Florida, or through the privatized lessons from NACAC.

Cultural awareness in CCR encompasses culturally responsive advising, equity-centered college preparation, diverse representation in college planning, and identity-affirming retention strategies to ensure all students feel seen, supported, and empowered throughout their educational journey. As noted in the literature (Advance HE, 2025; Queen Mary University of London, 2025), these principles include diverse and representative content, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and an emphasis on accessibility and equity. Elements of cultural awareness were lacking in the curricula for Kansas and NACAC, forcing school counselors to independently determine how to reach underserved students, if at all, to ensure that lessons meet their needs, as addressed in the literature review (Conley, 2007; Cook et al., 2018;

Gibbs Grey, 2018; Kanno, 2018; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Roderick et al., 2009; William and Mary, 2019). This situation prevents counselors from effectively addressing reasonable options for students, leading to instances where students are undermatched. These students often do not seek their counselors' advice and lack the resources necessary for appropriate matchings, which continues to widen the equity gap (Bhat & Stevens, 2021; Ilic et al., 2020; Le et al., 2015; Mokher et al., 2018; Novakovic et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2016; Roderick et al., 2009; Rosenbaum et al., 2019). Furthermore, NACAC primarily focused on planning for four-year colleges and universities and did not address other post-secondary options in its lessons. While these lessons can show students that a four-year degree is an option, the reality is that not all students will require a four-year degree to pursue their careers (Ilic et al 2020). Inclusivity is a crucial element in achieving social justice within the framework of CCR. The literature highlights that an inclusive curriculum addresses the needs of all students, regardless of their background or abilities (Queen Mary Academy, 2025). By providing access to flexible curricula that present students with post-secondary opportunities, schools advance equity by ensuring that every student—regardless of race, socio-economic status, abilities, location, language proficiency, or citizenship—receives the same essential information (Bouman, 2017; G. DeRonck et al., 2019; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Martinez & Baker, 2022; Mayes et al., 2019; Mokher et al., 2019; Novakovic et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2016; Turner et al., 2018;).

However, my research revealed that only four out of 54 curricula provided school counselors with sufficient materials to establish even a partially inclusive CCR program. While these curricula marked an improvement over others examined, they still failed to offer truly equitable access, limiting students' ability to explore post-secondary options and make fully informed decisions about their futures. This gap in inclusivity continues to affect students from

historically underserved communities, reinforcing the existing systemic inequities (Kanno, 2018; Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Mayes & Hines, 2014).

A significant barrier to implementing inclusive CCR is the excessive workload placed on school counselors. Research shows that counselors juggle numerous responsibilities, including administrative tasks and social-emotional support, leaving them with little to no time for CCR (Krell & Pérusse, 2012; Yavuz et al., 2017; O'Connor, 2018). When states fail to provide counselors with sufficient time, training, or curricula to address more than students' immediate social-emotional needs, counselors must depend on limited resources, external expertise, or personal professional development to fill the gap (Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018). This lack of training for school counselors also worsens the disparities, as students in underfunded schools are more likely to receive inadequate, if any, CCR guidance, further restricting their understanding of post-secondary opportunities (Cook et al., 2018; Ilic & Rosenbaum, 2019; Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018).

An inclusive approach to CCR has significant social justice implications. Ensuring equitable access to post-secondary planning resources helps remove structural barriers and creates pathways for all students to achieve their career goals. By closing opportunity gaps, states can empower students with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions about their futures. A student-centered, multi-sensory curriculum can play a crucial role in promoting educational equity by addressing diverse learning needs and fostering a more inclusive CCR model (Advance HE, 2025).

Ultimately, inclusive practice in CCR aligns with broader social justice efforts by addressing systemic inequities in education and ensuring that all students—regardless of background—are given the tools they need to succeed in post-secondary pursuits. Addressing

these disparities requires intentional policy changes, increased investment in school counseling resources, and the development of curricula that prioritize inclusion and accessibility.

Contributions

My research aimed to identify the components of college guidance curricula that address equity gaps in CCR. It explicitly addresses the elements of individualized learning plans, self-efficacy, and college counseling. Through attribute coding, I discovered four curricula that feature lesson plans for school counselors and materials for students, demonstrating how states have developed CCR to meet the needs of all students they serve. Deductive coding was applied in the content analysis to identify the attributes of individualized learning plans, self-efficacy, and college counseling present in the resources available on the open web from the California, Florida, and Kansas State Boards of Education, along with the private curriculum provided by the National Association of College Advising Counseling. These curricula were selected specifically to provide school counselors with lesson plans to follow and handouts for students. In addition, to create the curricula sample, one other aspect was needed for selection and could include materials for stakeholders, available in multiple languages, and stated lesson plans could be modified.

My research is the first to identify what is provided in CCR programs by the states, specifically the elements that address inclusivity for an equitable program. Lessons that addressed the needs of all students were the key component for ensuring inclusive elements were included. The first inclusivity component to be analyzed was whether Individualized Lesson Plans (ILP) included lessons that encouraged students to discover their interests, reflect on their findings, and participate in understanding which assessments best identify students' interests and which are most suitable for assisting with post-secondary options. Self-efficacy elements to help

students make decisions after high school included identifying and selecting courses that allow them to explore their interests and better align themselves for their futures. Lesson plans were analyzed for how students are encouraged to explore careers and the program options available to further understand career choices. College Counseling components identified the specific resources school counselors could utilize in and out of the classroom to promote CCR initiatives. The first resource was for detailed lesson plans to assist school counselors who lacked training or confidence in CCR, enabling them to provide sessions for students. Additionally, access to paper copies of the activities was essential to ensure all students had access to the materials, regardless of their background. Materials for stakeholders were also crucial to bridging the information gap between parents and students, ensuring parents understood the options available for their child to pursue their dreams. The final aspect identified was financial literacy, which ensured that all aspects of funding post-secondary education options are clear and that students understand what they can afford, enabling them to explore higher education opportunities without feeling as if they could not afford to do so.

Limitations

While my research offers valuable insights into incorporating inclusive elements in lesson plans, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. My research relied solely on publicly accessible materials found on the open web. I gathered information from each state's Department of Education website for state-level data and utilized resources from NACAC obtained through their official site. This approach ensured transparency but also meant that information restricted to educators, school districts, or organizational databases limited my ability to conduct a comprehensive analysis across all schools. Although the four selected curricula provided valuable examples, it is possible that other states had additional lesson plans that could further

illustrate how inclusive content is integrated into educational materials. Without access to a broader range of curricula, my findings may not fully capture the diversity of approaches used across different states. By recognizing these constraints, my research remains transparent and open to further exploration, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how inclusive education is implemented across various regions.

Recommendations

As this is the first time research has been conducted on how states include inclusive components in their CCR programs, there are numerous directions for future research to explore and build upon this work. As the literature review stated, one-way states have attempted to determine if their students are college-ready by utilizing standardized tests to assess CCR across various grades. However, these tests do not always accurately reflect what students can do. Furthermore, some schools lack a method for measuring the effectiveness of their programs, complicating the assessment of whether schools are meeting the benchmarks established by the states (Mokher et al., 2018). Therefore, the use of testing—which is an ineffective means of evaluating the impact of curricula on CCR—should be reassessed to ensure that inclusive elements are present for all students. This reassessment should include tracking the number of schools with counselors capable of implementing college and career counseling, assessing the effectiveness of their programs, and considering how states will adjust their programming to align with the 2025 Executive Orders of the Trump administration regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as guidelines from the Department of Education.

How others can Build on my research

Providing a curriculum for school counselors is insufficient for understanding the effectiveness of the lessons. To enhance the research, a deeper examination of how effectively

the CCR programs deliver comprehensive lesson plans and handouts for students is necessary. Tests must be developed, and longitudinal studies should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of materials provided by the State Board of Education and the private sector. Additionally, it is essential to consider how the material is presented to students and the demographics of the student population. Research could begin at one school and then expand statewide to gather comparative data on the curriculum's effectiveness. Longitudinal studies could track each of the underserved community groups to see if and how they progress each year. Considerations such as student-to-counselor ratios and the time dedicated to CCR counseling must be taken into account; according to the 2021 report by the American School Counselor Association, the national average of students-to-college guidance counselors is 408:1. In contrast, the literature indicates that the recommended caseload for counselors should be 250:1 to ensure they have the opportunity to allocate more resources to the students and their stakeholders, build relationships to ensure appropriate colleges are applied to, and meet kids where they are while guiding them toward the next step (Bauman, 2017; O'Connor, 2018; Krell & Pérusse, 2012). The study should also address the type of training received by school counselors. The literature review highlighted that school counselors are required to have a master's degree or higher in counseling while also meeting the state certification requirements for the role (O'Connor, 2018). Counseling programs nationwide encompass various topics, primarily focusing on mental health, with very little attention given to the CCR aspects of their roles (Novakovic et al., 2021; O'Connor, 2018).

A study could also be conducted on a smaller scale by comparing the school counselor-to-student ratio to the recommended national average, providing in-depth training for the counselor, and undertaking a longitudinal study on the curriculum's effectiveness, with

breakdowns by various population groups, including all underserved communities, to determine the impact of training school counselors alongside detailed lesson plans. This study would incorporate the elements of the literature review that indicated ratios needed to be reduced and that more training should be provided for school counselors since they often lack adequate training during their initial programs for their position.

Trump Administration Executive Orders

As I write this research, the Trump administration has implemented six Executive Orders concerning education, particularly at higher education institutions, between January 20, 2025, and February 25, 2025. These orders represent a significant shift in the federal government's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, which were central to the Biden administration's efforts to ensure an inclusive education for all students in America. The removal of previous Executive Orders that promoted racial and social equity fundamentally changes how schools can support underserved populations. Furthermore, by dismantling DEI these policies restrict the ability of states to develop inclusive CCR programs. Future research on the curricula states provide for CCR should analyze the impact of these measures over time, offering insight into how access to post-secondary education evolves under the Trump administration compared to previous and future administrations.

The removal of federal mandates supporting DEI is likely to directly impact the inclusivity of CCR curricula. For instance, the elimination of Executive Order 13985 (Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities) means that federal agencies, including the Department of Education, will no longer be required to prioritize equity-driven policies. Consequently, schools that serve historically underserved communities may continue to struggle to maintain programs aimed at closing the equity gap. Without funding and policy support,

resources such as culturally responsive counseling, mentorship programs, and financial aid guidance tailored to first-generation postsecondary students may decline, further widening existing educational disparities.

Another key implication is the reduction of training and materials available to school counselors, who play a critical role in CCR programming. The Executive Order banning DEI-related training in K-12 schools will prevent educators from receiving professional development on best practices for supporting diverse student populations. For example, many school counselors rely on DEI-informed strategies to help students navigate their daily lives. This will create additional systemic barriers to higher education, exacerbating the existing challenges concerning the training school counselors need to provide inclusive college and career counseling. Without these resources, educators may struggle more to address the specific needs of students from underserved backgrounds, resulting in lower post-secondary enrollment and persistence rates among these groups.

Finally, the redefinition of gender identity policies under Trump's Executive Order on "Restoring Biological Truth" has significant implications for inclusivity in CCR programming. Students who do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth may face additional barriers when accessing college and career resources, particularly if institutions receiving federal funding must adhere to these restrictive definitions. For example, scholarships, mentorship opportunities, and campus support services aimed to assist LGBTQ+ students may lose funding or be dismantled entirely. This shift could discourage some students from pursuing higher education or limit their access to inclusive spaces that foster academic and professional success or provide a safe environment for self-expression. Overall, these executive actions threaten the progress made in creating equitable educational opportunities and present significant challenges in ensuring all

students have access to a comprehensive education, particularly within an inclusive CCR program.

Closing Thoughts

When I set out to conduct my research, it was because I noticed disparities in college and career guidance counseling between the students I worked with and their peers. While pursuing my certificate in college and career counseling, I found the resources available to me in the country, and then the state, I was in to be inadequate. This prompted me to explore the curriculum available to school counselors nationwide, focusing on how they ensured inclusivity after conducting a literature review and research on legislation passed by various administrators. Initially, I thought my paper would conclude with recommendations for how states could enhance their curricula and suggestions for further research. However, as I was finalizing my research, President Trump was re-elected and, within his first month in office, signed six executive orders eliminating DEI from college and career initiatives. These orders specifically targeted the inclusion of DEI initiatives in federal programs, including those related to CCR, requiring significant shifts in how these initiatives are implemented going forward.

With these new changes, CCR programming is on the brink of another transformation following the passage of the 2015 “Every Student Succeeds Act” under the Obama administration. Over the past century, CCR programs have gradually evolved alongside educational reforms and societal changes to become more inclusive and better serve underserved students. While earlier efforts fell short, DEI initiatives under the Biden administration worked to close equity gaps faster than any previous administration by providing incentives for higher education institutions to create more opportunities for underserved students to enroll.

However, the push for an inclusive curriculum that promotes social justice may face new challenges in the coming weeks and months. Amid executive orders requiring DEI initiatives to be dropped, states must revise their curricula to ensure inclusivity remains a priority in school counseling programs. Providing school counselors with detailed lesson plans and activities would alleviate some of the pressures they face in helping underserved students close gaps. School counselors will need to confront the challenge of ensuring that while DEI language must be removed from handbooks, these principles can still remain and be built upon to ensure equity remains at the forefront of CCR. For example, counselors can still promote inclusivity by emphasizing culturally responsive counseling practices and providing equal access to post-secondary resources for all students, regardless of background.

Additionally, addressing the student-to-counselor ratio would enable counselors to effectively support students while continuing to integrate SEL into their work. SEL helps foster an inclusive environment by supporting students' emotional well-being and resilience, which is especially important for underserved populations. To mitigate the impact of counselor shortages, states should explore alternative strategies, such as increasing funding to hire more school counselors, create more partnerships with colleges and businesses to supplement CCR efforts, and integrate tools that provide students with career and college planning resources. Professional development in culturally responsive counseling will also be critical in equipping counselors with the skills needed to support diverse student populations. Ongoing professional development should focus on training counselors in cultural competency, equity-focused advising, and strategies to address the unique needs of underserved groups.

To further strengthen college and career counseling, states should invest in ongoing professional development for school counselors, facilitate informational sessions for

stakeholders, and stay informed about the latest policy changes under the Trump administration and future administrations. States must also advocate for legislation that allocates additional funding to hire more counselors or adjusts funding formulas to reflect the need for greater counselor support in highly underserved districts. Advocating for policies that lower the student-to-counselor ratio will ensure that all students receive equitable support in their postsecondary planning.

Inclusion is more critical than ever in today's rapidly changing educational landscape. As we face shifting political and social dynamics, ensuring that every student—regardless of background, race, or socioeconomic status—has access to the resources and guidance they need to succeed in college and career pathways cannot be overstated. The challenges of exclusionary practices and systemic inequities in education demand that we increase our commitment to inclusivity, especially in college and career readiness programming. By equipping school counselors with the tools, training, and resources to support diverse student populations, we can create a more equitable future where all students have the right to thrive. Now, more than ever, it is essential that we prioritize inclusion, as it is the key to closing the opportunity gaps that continue to affect underserved communities across the nation.

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Appendix A - Coding Material

Appendix A Figure A.1: Materials Provided by States for School Counselors

State	Equitability Component	Guide for Teachers	CCR Outline Only	Counselor and Student Materials	Stakeholder Components	Career Focus Only	College Only Focus	CCR in Core Classes	Online/Printed: Students	Material Online Only: Students	Printable Material: Students	Core/State Standards Only	Modified Lessons	Multiple Languages	Set Curriculum For Counselors Only
AL												X			
AK															
AZ												X			
AR															
CA				X							X			X	
CO								X							
CT					X										X
DE												X		X	
FL				X	X				X			X		X	X
GA												X	X		X
HI															
ID												X			
IL															X
IN				X	X				X						X
IA			X												
KS				X	X				X				X		
KY															
LA													X		X
ME															
MD												X			
MA													X		
MI													X		X
MN													X		X

MS														
MO												X		
MT				X							X			
NE	X			X										
NV				X										
NH														
NJ				X										
NM	X													
NY														
NC														
ND														
OH													X	
OK														
OR	X													
PA	X					X								
RI	X		X								X			
SC	X													
SD														
TN	X					X								
TX	X													
UT	X													
VT														
VA				X										
WA	X									X				
WV				X										
WI				X			X							
WY														
DC														
Others:														
CB												X		X
CCCC														
NACAC												X		

Appendix A Figure A.2: Inclusivity Components Included in State Curricula

	<i>California</i>	<i>Florida</i>	<i>Kansas</i>	<i>NACAC</i>
Individualized Learning Plans	X	X	X	X
Self-Discovery Activities	X	X	X	X
Self-Reflection Activities	X	X	X	X
Assessments	X	X	X	X
Self-efficacy	X	X	X	X
Course Selection	X	X	X	X
Apprenticeship Opportunities	NULL	X	NULL	NULL
Career Preparation Programs	X	X	X	X
Technical Education Programs	X	X	NULL	NULL
Work-Based Learning	NULL	NULL	X	NULL
College and Career Counseling	X	X	X	X
Detailed Lesson Plans	X	X	NULL	X
Resources for Stakeholders	X	X	X	X
Cultural Awareness Notes	X	NULL	X	NULL
Financial Literacy	X	X	X	X
Printable Materials	X	X	NULL	X