ADVOCATING FOR THE NEED OF A COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS PREPARATION ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Mellodie Brown

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ADVOCATING FOR THE NEED OF A COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS PREPARATION ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Mellodie L. Brown
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
June 2017
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April 5, 2017

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ABSTRACT

This proposed policy advocates for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to adopt a College and Career Readiness Preparation Accountability Policy wherein CPS sets district-wide criteria and structures for student college and career readiness at every grade level and ensures that resources and supportive services are available for its most at-risk students in underperforming schools. Also, it is important that CPS recognize the limited capacity of its teachers to transition students toward meeting Common Core State Standards. This can be addressed through professional development aligned to a proposed matrix for college and career readiness for all students. Supplemental funds are needed to ensure quality educational programming for students and families, time-in schedules for teacher collaboration, and a college-going culture at all schools.
PREFACE

All students, regardless of their race and socioeconomic status, should be afforded a high-quality education in the city of Chicago. Several students within the district have an opportunity to attend a selective enrollment school. However, unfortunately, many students are required to attend their neighborhood schools (both underperforming and performing) and, therefore, may have limited access to highly trained and effective teachers who promote critical thinking skills, a positive learning environment, and teach a robust curriculum as aligned to the Common Core State Standards. In some instances, due to several factors, Black and Hispanic students are left with limited options, opportunities, and an advocate to assist them with being college and career ready during their educational journey. One factor is having limited exposure to early learning due to their home environments. As an administrator, far too often I observe students entering school for the first time at the age of five or six with limited language acquisition skills; this leads them to being academically behind their peers who come from home environments that focus on early learning prior to entering school. Another limiting factor for these students is their school learning environments. Students attending underperforming schools spend a substantial amount of time in classrooms with teachers who have limited experiences and lack the skills that would enable them to close the academic achievement gap and provide effective teaching practices for all students. “Nationally, children in the highest-poverty schools are assigned novice teachers almost twice as frequently as children in low-poverty schools” (Payne, 2008, p.71). Their narrow professional training has not prepared them to teach in some of the most challenging school environments.
When considering how best to propose this policy that would address college and career readiness accountability for all students in the district, I automatically began to think of the number of students who were not academically prepared for high school, who dropped out of high school, and those who were not able to attend a higher-performing school that would prepare them to be college and career ready. This led me to conduct the research for this policy that would assist school leaders and parents with providing better opportunities for Black and Hispanic students living in poverty in the city of Chicago through a clearly articulated definition of college and career readiness for teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools and detailed aligned resources for program budgeting.
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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Policy Issue

Although the district has a college and career readiness policy, there is a need for a College and Career Preparation Accountability Policy in Chicago Public Schools. This will assist with influencing the improvement of teaching and learning across the district. When considering a clear definition of what college and career readiness is within a school district, Conley (2014) provided an explicit research based definition that is applicable to students within the district.

Students who are ready for college courses leading to a baccalaureate degree, a certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental course work. They can complete such entry-level, credit bearing courses at a level that enables them to continue in the major or program of study they have chosen. (p. 51)

During my tenure as an educator and administrator in the Chicago Public Schools District 299 for more than 16 years, I had the opportunity to observe each new chief education officer’s term. During each one’s term, a new platform is introduced to assist the district in growing students academically, socially, and emotionally as well as developing its stakeholders. The platform addresses several areas of creating a successful school district as well as its schools and its leaders. This includes the following areas: (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) family and community engagement, (c) effective teachers and leaders, and finally, (d) operational management and sound fiscal systems. The platform is created and defined through research from educators, politicians, community leaders, and families.
In this new 2013–2018 platform, there are several pillars that are the foundational works of District 299. District 299 has determined that this is an action plan for the next four years that will move the district forward (Chicago Public Schools [CPS], 2013). Therefore, there is an attempt to align district priorities, initiatives, and policies to this action plan. The video, *The Next Generation; Chicago’s Children*, featured the previous Chief Education Officer Dr. Barbra Byrd-Bennett who led this action plan initiative. When I viewed this City of Chicago (2013) video, three key elements that drove this district planning work stood out:

1. Every child must have equitable access to high quality education for all students.

2. Work is driven by the core value of holding high expectations for all students and adults of every child.

3. A rigorous and well-rounded instructional program is provided where students will graduate prepared for college, prepared for career, and prepared for life.

Another critical element cited in this action plan was creating a robust system of supports that meet all of our students’ needs from a holistic approach. However, at this point, it has been noted that this is just an initiative on paper and in school leaders’ evaluations.

As I engage in conversations with former classmates, family members, as well as the students and parents of students in the school I serve, I often see the disparity in the public education system. There are a vast number of adults and students who are products of the Chicago Public Schools system that inadequately provided an accountability system or policy for all students to be college and career ready upon exiting the school system, at one time or another, regardless of their neighborhood and or
high school. As a result of this, these individuals’ needs were not met so they could be successful beyond their secondary education experience. A number of these people did not have the skills or the support system in the school to assist them with completing high school, obtaining a general education degree, or being prepared for college, career, or life in most cases. Barriers were not removed so as to prepare them for the next phase of their lives, which was readiness for college and career.

Over the past six years, there has been a significant educational shift in the United States. “States recognized that students were not being taught at levels that adequately prepared them for college and careers and stepped up to develop and implement more rigorous standards” (Rosenberg, 2014, p. 1). After reading this information, I cannot help but reflect on the vast number of individuals who were educated prior to this “shift” in education. Why did it take several generations of males and females of African American and Latino descent who were discounted in a system that failed to ensure that they were prepared for the next phase in their lives before this problem was addressed? Thinking about how early encounters with schools can shape students’ intelligence and identity, there are several questions to be raised as to how one can generalize this correlation with school-based processes as opposed to family- and street-based factors.

What we know definitively is that one part of the pattern they identify—giving inferior teaching resources to the students who most need them—has been implicit national policy, at least until very recently. We should understand first that poor children start off as a more-difficult-to-teach population. (Lee & Burkam, 2002, p. 71)
In Lee and Burkam’s (2002) study, it was affirmed that children from the highest socioeconomic status (SES) group start school with achievement 60% higher on average than children from the lowest SES group.

They start out behind, and then we systematically undermine them with poor schools. Poor children start their school careers in much lower-quality schools where they will be in larger classes, with less well-prepared teachers who have a weaker sense of collective responsibility and professional community than the teachers of more advantaged children. (Lee & Burkam, 2002, p. 74)

Payne (2008) described how children in our most bottom-tier schools are going to be underserved by teachers with weak skills and bad attitudes and who fail to educate these children for the long haul.

After a number of educational reform acts and policies that continued to be proven unsuccessful over time for children of poverty, now there is a call to action for equitable access to high-quality education for all students. What are the accountability systems in states, districts, and schools for this required “equitable access to high quality education”? Payne has often expounded on the failure of urban school reforms by maintaining that this failure is not at all surprising. In addition, Payne (2008) and other scholarly educators have observed truth in the statement “the essential problem in our schools isn’t children learning; it is adult learning” (p. 179). Equally important, Payne’s work with urban schools and communities includes critical observation of Chicago school reform that has allowed him to assert that “most discussion of educational policy and practice is dangerously disconnected from the daily realities of urban schools, especially
bottom-tier schools; most discussion fails to appreciate the intertwined and overdetermined nature of the causes of failure” (Payne, 2008, p. 5).

As an instructional leader in a high-needs school, I often hear conversations in the staff lounge or during professional development workshops about students who are challenging in classes and appear to be unresponsive to learning. At times, I would hear comments such as “this student is too low”; “they don’t want to learn”; “their parents don’t care”; and the list goes on and on. Nevertheless, where is the self-reflection and the belief that all students can learn regardless of the challenges, trauma, and social-emotional issues they daily bring with them to the school environments in high-poverty areas? “Educators committed to equity and to providing all children with the opportunity to engage in deeper learning often think creatively about how to design and implement responsive educational strategies to meet students’ needs” (Noguera, Darling-Hammond, & Friedlaender, 2015, p. 13). Encouraging teachers to be reflective and solution oriented on a regular basis can become disheartening at times when optimism does not appear to be an option for some of them. This may be due to the number of incidents with students, parents, and a lack of resources or supports for wrap-around services. More importantly, this lack of reflectiveness can be directly linked to the teacher’s mindset with regard to educating children from high-needs areas. Needless to say, as an educator, I firmly believe that it is our first priority to ensure that we convey knowledge and obtain instructional strategies to reach our most difficult students on a daily basis so as to ensure student success. This includes building more positive relationships with individual students and creating responsive classrooms that support their learning and their psychological challenges and intellect. The Responsive Classroom is an approach to
teaching and learning that originated from the work of the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC). “NEFC’s mission is to help schools become caring communities in which social and academic learning are fully integrated throughout the school day, and in which students are nurtured to become strong and ethical thinkers” (Denton & Kriete, 2000, p. 13). There are seven beliefs which were formed based on developmental and social learning theory. According to Denton and Kriete (2000), these beliefs are:

1. The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum. The balanced integration of the two is essential to children’s growth.
2. How children learn is as important as what children learn. Ideally there should be a balance between teacher-directed and child-initiated experiences.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction. Children learn the most when they are engaged in meaningful ways with others.
4. There is a set of social skills that children need in order to be successful academically and socially. The skill of CARES—cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control—should be taught throughout the school day.
5. Knowing the children we teach is as important as knowing the content we teach. The science of child development is the most important academic discipline for teachers.
6. Knowing the parents of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children. The greatest gains are made when educators work with parents as partners.
7. Teachers and administrators must model the social and academic skills which they wish to teach their students. Meaningful and lasting change for the better in our schools requires good working relationships among the adult community. (p. 13)

Working toward these beliefs and putting them into practice in our schools and classrooms would allow for increased positive learning experiences, more trustworthy relationships with students and parents, as well as enhanced student academic and social-emotional learning outcomes.

In a study conducted by Rimm-Kaufman (2006) with six schools that had populations that were one-half minority students, one-third of children who were English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, and one-third from low-economic homes, teachers from three of those schools were required to implement the Responsive Classroom approach, and teachers in one school were not. As can be seen in Figure 1, in the schools that implemented Responsive Classroom practices, students experience greater gains in math over three years.

![Graph showing test score gains over three years](image-url)
Figure 1. Responsive Classroom math test scores. (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006)
In this study, not only did students experience growth, but teachers also felt more effective and positive about teaching. Children who were taught at schools where the Responsive Classroom approach was widely utilized consistently saw an increase in academic achievement in both subject areas of reading and mathematics over the course of three years.

Jensen (2013) offered some challenging advice to teachers who may have students who are not engaged and not academically succeeding:

To get kids to graduate, we need to keep them in school. To keep them in school, we need to make our classrooms relevant, engaging, and full of affirming relationships. If your students are not engaged, it is time to upgrade your skill set and, possibly, your attitudes about students. Students do not magically become more interested and engaged every year they attend school unless you get better each year, too. (p. 2)

Consideration needs to be given to the brutal fact that if we are seeking high-performing students in our schools, then as teachers and instructional leaders, we must eliminate excuses and student blaming and embrace the fact that educators have the power to change the lives of students.

When educators have the competencies and capacity—the knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes, experiences and supports—to effectively address the diverse academic, social, and emotional learning needs of all students and to build positive conditions for learning, they not only can begin to redress the overrepresentation of students of color in the pipeline to prison but also put more
students on paths to successful futures. (Coggshall, Osher, & Colombi, 2013, p. 435)

Unfortunately, educators can influence the school-to-prison pipeline. In order for us to make a difference, we have to continually develop our capacities and competencies in an effort to close the pipeline. Coggshall et al. (2013) described these competencies for educators as “student relationship, educator attitudes, and social-emotional competence ensuring conditions for learning and educator approaches to discipline.” (p. 175).

We must work toward building our capacity as educators and becoming “Game Changers” in our classrooms and schools.

When educators come to understand just how much potential all children have to learn—if given the kinds of support and stimulation that encourage the growth of new and stronger neural connections—they can better implement practices that intellectually challenge and nurture all students. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 6)

There are three well-established fundamental principles of learning that line up with emerging research in the neurosciences and are especially important for teachers to understand in order for them become game changers for children in education.

According to Noguera et al. (2015), these three principles are:

1. Students come to the classroom with prior knowledge that must be addressed if teaching is to be effective.
2. Students need to organize and use knowledge conceptually if they are to apply it beyond the classroom.
3. Students learn more effectively if they understand how they learn and how to manage their own learning. (p. 6)
Research on effective teaching aligns with these principles and found that highly effective teachers support the process of meaningful learning by: (a) creating ambitious and meaningful tasks that reflect how knowledge is used in the field; (b) engaging students in active learning, so that they apply and test what they know; (c) drawing connections to students’ prior knowledge and experiences; (d) diagnosing student understanding in order to scaffold the learning process step by step; (e) assessing student learning continuously and adapting teaching to student needs; (f) providing clear standards, constant feedback, and opportunities for revising work; and (g) encouraging strategic and metacognitive thinking so that students can learn to evaluate and guide their own learning. However, it has been noted that these learning opportunities are often only occurring for students in upper track and affluent schools and not in our neighborhood and underperforming schools.

As an administrator, I have first-hand knowledge of the need for a District 299 policy that addresses the accountability for college and career preparation for all students. Often times, our students’ needs are left unmet due to various factors, such as parents not having access to the resources they are in need of, and our assigned specialist having only limited knowledge about how to assist them. “To the degree that deeper learning remains unavailable to students of color and children of low-income families, America will never be able to solve its equity dilemma” (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 4.). We must raise the bar regarding expectations for teaching and learning with our students as well as the adults and the school district as a whole in order for us to envision college and career readiness for all.
Critical Issues

There are several critical issues that make this policy a problem that needs to be addressed by adding a more improved implementation of an accountability system to the existing policy. One such critical issue is the fact that children in trauma, living in low-income homes, and having low self-esteem are unable to see their future through the eyes of college and career readiness. There are several teachers who lack the mindsets, knowledge, professional training, and the initiative to support these students due to various factors. These teachers lower their expectations, make excuses for students’ low performance, and spoon feed students a curriculum that does not require critical thinking skills due to their own lack of being fully equipped and prepared to do robust teaching and present challenging content. There has to be a change in students’ and teachers’ mindsets in order for us to see the type of progress we are expecting of them. Sociologist Robert Dreeben conducted a study on reading instruction for 300 Black and White first graders across seven schools in Chicago area. The results indicated that differences in reading achievement were almost entirely explained not by socioeconomic status or race, but by the quality of curriculum and teaching the students received. Therefore, he suggested:

Our evidence shows that the level of learning responds strongly to the quality of instruction: having and using enough time, covering a substantial amount of rich curricular material, and matching instruction appropriately to the ability levels of groups… When Black and White children of comparable ability experience the same instruction, they do about equally well, and this is true when the instruction is excellent in quality and when it is inadequate. (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 1)
Poverty has a direct impact on the success and or lack of success of students. Many of our students in the inner city who are attending neighborhood schools, both elementary and high schools, are faced with the challenge of graduating or becoming disengaged from school in one form or another. According to Jensen (2013), poverty and student success play a major role in the education of children of color:

The academic record of students who live in poverty is not good. In the United States, if you are poor, your odds of graduating are lower than those of a middle-income student. If you are also Hispanic or black, your odds just dropped again. Half of all poor students of color drop out of school. (p. 1)

Over the last 30 years, the segregation of students on the basis of race and socioeconomic status has intensified.

While dropout rates have declined recently, they remain extremely high in some parts of the country, particularly in urban areas. As of 2011, 25 percent of the nation’s African American high school students and 17 percent of Latino high school students were enrolled in what some call “dropout factories”—schools that see their enrollment decline by 40 percent or more between ninth and twelfth grade; only 5 percent of white students attend such high schools. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 2)

I am sure that if we conducted research in our CPS district, we would find that this critical issue of dropout rates holds true for many of our students. According to the Chicago Public Schools (2015a) One-Year Grades 9–12 Dropout Rates, 2015 Method, it was reported that in 2011, 10.8% of Black non-Hispanic school students and 6.1% of Hispanic school students dropped out of school. As an elementary school principal, I
have been fortunate to keep in touch with several students who graduated from our school as I observed them riding their bicycles through the neighborhood and when they visited the school. During the 2016–2017 school year, I had the opportunity to ask at least nine Black male students how school is going for them. Of those nine, three shared that they either no longer attend, or they find school boring so they do not attend consistently and or do not feel connected in the school. This always left me feeling truly disappointed to hear of their decisions and outlooks on their high school experience. “Seventy percent of all children who do not graduate from high school spent at least a year living in poverty” (Hernandez, 2012, p. 8). This observation of Hernandez reflects the experience of these former students of mine who had in fact spent their lives living in poverty. Figure 2 graphically depicts the comparative percentages of the poverty experience of all children and the poverty experience of children who do not graduate from high school. These statistics convey the reality that poverty is a critical issue that impacts student academic success and persistence in pursuing education.

Figure 2. Poverty experience of all children and the poverty experience of non-graduating children. (Hernandez, 2012)
Student failure and their socioeconomic status can affect the dropout rates in urban areas. “In 2009, the dropout rate of students living in low-income families was about five times greater than the rate of students from high-income families, 7.4 percent versus 1.4” (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011, p. 6). I am certain that there is a correlation between the research conducted in the study and what is observed and experienced in our some of the neighborhood schools.

Unfortunately, far too often we hear of student failure due to the aforementioned conditions. Consequently, it is imperative that we bear in mind the root causes of this critical issue of failing students put forth by Jensen (2013):

This is not a failure within the students. There are no poor students with deficits; there are only broken schools that need fixing. There are no failing students; there are only schools that are failing our students. There are no unmotivated students; there are only teachers whose classrooms are frightfully boring, uncaring, or irrelevant. Such classrooms fail to engage students enough to be able to meet their needs. (p. 1)

There are three problem areas that this college and career readiness policy seeks to address: (a) meaningful teaching and learning, (b) professional accountability, and (c) resource accountability. When thinking about the importance of meaningful teaching and learning in our schools, there are several dynamics that should be considered. The students are to be at the core of the instruction that takes place in the classroom. Consideration must be given to each student’s needs, both academically and behaviorally. Furthermore, students’ interest should be taken into account as well as their
developmental factors. Too often, students are just mere receivers of information. They are not asked the critical thinking questions that would allow them to be risk takers in the class, such as: “What do you think about that?” “How does this information ___?” “What facts can you gather___?” “What criteria would you use to assess___?”

Students very seldom are allowed to justify their thinking during the learning. At times, teachers are too impatient and do not allow adequate wait time for students to process the information that will form their thinking. I believe that if educators planned and constructed lessons with this in mind, the majority of students would be more anxious to attend school daily and to learn. How often are educators taking into consideration these factors?

In Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind, Jensen (2013) described several key components that are linked to student engagement, which are explored through the following four actions to elevate energy and focus: “(a) get students moving, (b) energize students in their seats, (c) lower energy to increase focus, and (d) influence energy levels with music” (p. 113). Jensen further enumerated and discussed the five actions to automate engagement: (a) establish rituals, (b) foster leadership and teamwork, (c) captivate with curriculum, (d) integrate technology, and (e) cultivate school-wide social support. If these key components occurred regularly in our classrooms, our students would be more enthusiastic to participate in the learning in the classroom, to raise their hands without being called upon, and to take ownership of their own learning. With these informal lessons regarding the hidden curriculum, students are more apt to learn how to engage in school as it relates to morals, social class, language, and cultural expectations. Students would create their own learning paths for the school day with
regard to author and genre studies and projects during their social science and writing periods. Students would also determine the concept elements they would like to dig deeper into for a unit over a course of time. The more eager our students are about school, their classes, and their teachers, the more parental buy-in we will obtain. Parents want to engage in partnerships with schools and their child’s teachers. However, we must acquire a method to hook parents into partnering with us. When the teaching and learning is meaningful and powerful, the parents and students will turn up to receive it, especially when they are aware that high academic expectations are set in place.

Teachers can ultimately determine the success factors and pitfalls of their lessons and units of study in their teaching. A study conducted by Pianta, Belsky, Houts, and Morrison (2007) (as cited in Jensen, 2013) found that despite students’ overwhelming preference for group activities, 5th graders, on average, spent 91 percent of their time either working alone or listening to a teacher, with less than 5 percent of their time spent engaging in group learning activities. In fact, teachers spent over 20 percent of instruction time telling students how to manage materials or time. More critically, children from poverty had only a 10 percent likelihood to experience highly engaging, quality instruction across multiple grades. (p. 2)

As a result of this study, authors have referred to its findings regarding the nature and quality of learning opportunities in elementary schools in the United States as “sobering.”

How do teachers determine if their teaching is meaningful? What are the key components that make teaching meaningful in classrooms? As an administrator for eight years, I had the opportunity to observe instruction in a number of classrooms of novice
teachers as well as veteran teachers. In some instances, I too have sat in classrooms waiting for student engagement, awaiting the connection from the concept or skill to real life application that would be meaningful for all learners. These teachers engaged in ongoing lecture-style teaching, with minimum interaction with students such as asking students to share their thinking, allowing them to process the information with a classmate, or to check for understanding. Some students were slumped over their desks, engaging in off-task behaviors, and some even appeared to be uninterested in the information being shared. The lessons appeared to be isolated information shared with the absence of a meaningful text or article, or an application of the information. As I sat there awaiting the teachers to really teach and make it meaningful for all learners, the connection never surfaced and students seemed to be confused due to the teaching of information in isolation.

These teachers were engaging in the banking system of education. According to Freire (2005), the banking educator is only concerned with students reiterating the information that they received. The banking system of education is focused on students being empty vessels that their teacher can deposit information into. Because students are not allotted time to share their thinking, or build upon their peers’ thinking, students become disengaged. On the contrary, problem-posing teachers are better able to determine the success of their students because students are actively engaged in conversation. These teachers see their students as co-investigators of a bigger problem. Freire (2005) elaborated on the banking system of educators:

It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator’s role is to regulate the way the world “enters into” the students. The teacher’s task
is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to “fill” the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge. (p. 74)

During instructional debriefs with teachers, reflective conversations are often limited due to specific cognitive coaching that would push instructional practices. Being that it may be difficult to push banking teachers beyond the thinking and planning that they engaged in during the particular lesson being observed, I attempted to bring forth research-based articles, texts, or other instructional materials to assist with the reflecting on the lesson. As an administrator and a previous instructional coach, I would share educational videos to assist us with observing students and teachers engaging in meaningful teaching and learning to push their practice toward more student engagement in the classroom. According to Freire (2005), there are strategies to assist with moving teachers’ practice, one being problem-posing education.

Problem-posing education, which breaks with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but he-who-is-himself taught in a dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (p. 80)

Equally funding schools in the district is another critical issue in District 299. Although there are funding formulas and sources that are set by state, federal, and local
government, the disparity continues to exist within our schools based on the neighborhood. The “numbers game” with student enrollment continues to impact the resources needed for the school to adequately educate students. In addition to the funding sources provided at the district level, the in-kind donations are scarce for certain schools in particular communities. As a result, the resources needed for a college and career education for all are limited.

To reiterate the critical issues for a better implementation policy addresses the fact that children in trauma living in low income homes, and having low self-esteem are unable to see their future through the eyes of college and career readiness. There are teachers within the district with limited professional training to support these students. Also, poverty has a direct impact on the success and or lack of success of students.

Recommended Policy

The policy recommendation I am making is for a college and career readiness policy that can be impactful for all students, especially our students from low socioeconomic communities and of various backgrounds. When considering this policy recommendation, there are several areas of focus that need to be addressed in order to assist with the implementation of a meaningful and effective policy. This includes an approach to meaningful learning by professional skilled and committed educators and more importantly, adequate and appropriate resources for all students.

On October 28, 2009, District 299 adopted a policy on elementary school promotion. In the *Chicago Public Schools Policy Manual*, it is noted under the Elementary School Promotion Policy that
the purpose of this policy is to provide the standards and guidelines for the promotion and retention of elementary school students. In providing these guidelines, the Board demonstrates its commitment to several key objectives: (1) promoting high educational standards for its students; (2) ensuring that there is consistency in the educational opportunities provided to all students; (3) implementing a plan of system-wide monitoring to verify that the quality of instruction and type of instructional materials provided to students are calculated to achieve student mastery of the skills and knowledge which are assessed in making promotion decisions; (4) early identification of at-risk students and the implementation of systematic academic intervention as the most effective method to help all children achieve success in school and avoid grade retention; and (5) ensuring that the District’s educational objectives are met in a fair and non-discriminatory manner. (CPS, 2009, para. 1)

This policy does not address the needs of college and career readiness at the elementary school level. This policy addresses district assessments such as the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), student attendance, student progress in reading and mathematics, summer school requirement, personal learning plans for retained students, and the promotion standards for students in 3rd, 6th, and 8th grades.

In contrast to the Elementary Promotion Policy, the High School Promotion Policy adopted January 28, 2004 states:

The Chicago Board of Education believes that promotion from one grade in high school to the next must indicate that students have passed a series of academically challenging courses in the core subject disciplines of English, mathematics,
science, and social sciences, as well as courses in other areas such as world
languages, fine arts, physical education, and career education that are aligned with
the Illinois Learning Standards. Students who successfully earn course credits
should display their understanding of and competency in course subject matter
through both standardized exams and appropriate assignments and assessments
developed by teachers. (CPS, 2004, para. 1)

In the same way, the policies for elementary and high school identify the requirements
for grades in core courses (i.e., units of credit in high school) as attendance and
assessments of student work. That aside, there is no information addressing the shift
observed in educational practices and the requirements to prepare students for being
college and career ready. Another policy, the Minimum High School Graduation
Requirements Policy adopted in June 28, 2006, states the goal of this policy: “The policy
regarding minimum high school graduation requirements increases academic rigor and
prepares students for postsecondary education and the world of work. The graduation
requirements meet or exceed requirements for entry into Illinois public colleges and
universities” (CPS, 2006, para. 1).

The Minimum High School Graduation Requirements Policy addresses the
requirement of community service learning, completion of State non-credit requirements,
and taking the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). Consequently, there is
no record of an identified policy in the policy handbook for the district that addresses the
requirement of preparing all students within the district to be college and career ready
before graduation. Over time, the district has begun to increase the number of Career and
Technical education (CTE) high schools so as to focus on preparing students for careers.
The policy recommendation I am making is for a college and career readiness policy that can be impactful for all students, especially our students from low socioeconomic communities and of various backgrounds. When considering this policy recommendation, there are several areas of focus that need to be addressed in order to assist with the implementation of a meaningful and effective policy. I am advocating for an accountability approach that focuses on meaningful learning, enabled by professional skilled and committed educators and supported by adequate and appropriate resources so that all students regardless of background are prepared for both college and career when they graduate from high school. (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014, p. 1)

An accountability approach to the pillar “Systems of Supports That Meet All of our Students’ Needs” (CPS, 2013, p. 7) in the district’s action plan would fully support and most likely guarantee that students would be more prepared as they exit high school to be college and career ready.

A policy is needed to address the critical issues that plague students in impoverished communities who have parents who lack the knowledge to become better advocates for their children(s)’ success. This policy would also require teachers to engage in additional course work and professional development in an effort to more effectively educate students in trauma from low-income families and prepare them to be college and career ready. This policy recommendation would allow school leaders and District 299 to train parents and students in 6th through 12th grades to recognize college and career readiness teaching and learning through a core workshop model. This policy will address the second pillar “Systems of Support That Meet Student Needs” in the
document *The Next Generation: Chicago’s Children, 21st Century Preparation for Success in College, Career and Life 2013–2018* which will ensure that all students’ needs are met. The Harlem Children’s Zone addresses some key components of this policy such as wraparound services for families and community programs which works to increase educational opportunities for students and working to strengthen families. The Harlem Children’s Zone has been cited for success in urban education towards helping a community lift itself out of poverty and low educational attainment.

Many students are unsuccessful in school due to a number of factors. These factors include learning gaps from their early childhood experiences, educators who have been comfortable with traditional teaching and teaching to the middle and also lack a plethora of teaching strategies and methodologies, and school specialized service teams that are unable to provide the proper resources or supports to assist students with social-emotional developmental issues. These are only a few highlighted internal factors; however, there are a number of external factors as well, such as addressing health-related barriers to learning. A college and career readiness policy would assist all students in meeting their needs through a solid plan for “Systems of Support That Meet Student Needs” as presented in the *District 299 Action Plan 2013–2018*. The accountability system for this policy is aimed at raising the bar of expectations for learning for children, adults, and the system as a whole and triggering the intelligent investments and change strategies that make it possible to achieve these expectations. With the assistance and support of the community, the district, professional educators, and the state, with reference to establishing goals and contributing to their attainment, this policy will be beneficial for all students. Input should be solicited from parents and students as to what
relevant teaching skills should be addressed for future success and are responsive to students’ needs. “A new paradigm for accountability should rest on three pillars: a focus on meaningful learning, enabled by professionally skilled and committed educators, supported by adequate and appropriate resources” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014, p.4).

In summary, the pillars of this paradigm are:

1. meaningful learning,
2. professional accountability, and
3. resource accountability.

Addressing these three key elements will assist with working toward all students being college and career ready even in the lowest performing schools in the district.

Addressing the Problem Through Effective Policy Implementation

I envision this policy to be an effective approach to dealing with the problem of not having all high school students ready for college and career upon their exit from high school, although we know educational deficits begin to manifest in elementary school. This policy will assist with the improvement of supporting the requirements to meet the goals of this policy. Too many students from underperforming high schools within the district are dropping out of school, scoring low on the ACT, and are not maintaining the grades or taking the course work needed in order for them to attend college or be career-ready. According to Conley (2014), students need skills for college and career readiness that include key cognitive strategies, such as problem formulation, research, interpretation, communication, precision, and accuracy. In addition to these, key content knowledge, key transition knowledge and skills, key learning and skills and techniques, key cognitive strategies are required as well. Implementing a system for higher-quality
assessments that lends itself toward how students think and perform will serve as another accountability tool for this policy change when advocating for meaningful learning in schools.

When considering professional accountability, it is my belief that the following components must be addressed in meeting the problem: educator capacity, high-quality preparation, and evaluations based on multiple indicators of practice. Consideration must also be given to the school’s capacity to meet student needs as well as a few other key areas that will assist with ensuring that educators obtain the knowledge and skill sets required to actualize college and career readiness for all students by high school graduation.

Funding and or the lack thereof requires districts and schools having a large number of students living in poverty to clearly understand the importance of equity when making decisions. Secada (1989) described the difference between equity and equality:

There is a history of using terms like equity and equality of education interchangeably. Though these constructs are related, equality is group-based and quantitative. Equity can be applied to groups or to individuals; it is qualitative in that equity is tied to notions of justice. (p. 23)

Funding for resources is a deterrent that also plays a major role in students being college and career ready. There has not been equitable funding in schools across the United States, in particular, in urban areas with high-need districts. “Equity in education means providing students with what they need to succeed, regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic background. Children living in poverty may need and should receive more support than those in other communities” (Milner, 2015, p. 34). Therefore,
resource accountability is needed for several reasons. States should be held accountable for allocating resources for schools that are fair and equitable for the goals of college and career readiness. If educators and educational reformers are going to fight against poverty in education, then consideration should be given to exactly what students need in order for them to be successful, and more importantly, what they need to be ready for college and career.

Funds should be allocated to schools based on student needs. School needs should be determined and funded by using multiple measures. Adequate support should be considered for high-need students through the use of state funding formulas. Equity involves ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality curriculum and instructional materials that support students’ learning the standards and access to science and computer labs. Finally, a resource accountability system based on equity must provide well qualified, prepared teachers and educational support staff for all students and fund this effort in a manner that would allow these educators to be effective. I believe that addressing these key elements will result in remediating and eventually eradicating the problem of the lack of student readiness for college and career. Milner and Lomotey (2013) suggested that when considering funding, “our goal should of course be to eliminate poverty for all racial groups, but examining how resources are used, for whom, and the outcomes that result could help elucidate why so many more children of color live in poverty” (p. 38).
SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

This section focuses on Chicago Public Schools District 299’s need for ensuring that all students are ready for college and career. The areas of focus are education, economic, social, political, and moral and ethical. Each of these areas is discussed based on the district’s ability to address college and career readiness with all students in mind at the elementary and high school levels.

Educational Analysis

A headline of the Chicago Public Schools Spotlight newsletter of October 2011 read: “Despite Some Progress Made, Chicago Public Schools is Not Meeting the Needs of Students for College Readiness, Graduation Rates and Closing Achievement Gaps.”

The article stated:

While student achievement has seen some gains in CPS over the last several years, too many students are either not graduating from high school or not graduating college and career ready, while achievement gaps continue to widen. Only 7.9% of all 11th graders in 2011 tested college ready, while the graduation rate stands at 57%. There are 123,000 underperforming seats in schools throughout our system—representing nearly a third of all seats in CPS. (CPS, 2011, para. 1)

In comparison to the data for the 2013–2014 school year, there has been minimal progress made to show that students are performing college and career readiness in the district. On average, in the high schools, we have students scoring an average score of 18.0 on the ACT Composite; this is the record high for the district thus far, per the Office of Accountability. Nevertheless, regarding the 2014 graduating classes, it was indicated
that only 11.0% of CPS students met college readiness benchmarks on all four tests (reading, math, science, and English). As a result, we continue to have to face the fact that we are not preparing all students to be college and career ready per the district’s action plan for the 2013–2018 school years. Based on the findings of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) results for the district on the Illinois Report Card for the 2014–2015 school year, a score of 25% (composite score) of students were on track for college and career readiness, and 33% (composite score) of students in the state are on track for college and career readiness. College and career readiness is in reference to students who are ready for college and career and can qualify for and succeed in entry-level college courses, or a career path in a training program, without having to do remedial course work. In spite of the many efforts by the district, state, and national policy makers regarding every school establishing systems that ensure students are on track for college and career success, it is apparent that as a district and the state as a whole, we are not preparing all students to be college and career ready. Although steps have been taken to bring forth the phrase “College and Career Readiness” and the creation of the Common Core State Standards for teaching and learning, these steps are simply not enough for us to achieve this goal without an accountability policy in place for all students in both elementary and high schools.

Critics of the accountability movement have argued that an emphasis on narrowed framed academic goals has made it more difficult for educators to pursue deeper learning with students. One advocate, Ted Sizer, the founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, argued that “high school curriculum had become little more than an amalgamation of scattered facts and skills, lacking coherence and more likely to elicit
boredom than serious engagement” (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 3). As a result, there was a call for *depth over breadth* by placing emphasis on instruction in critical thinking, problem solving, and habits of mind that would foster lifelong learning and in addition, requiring students to acquire and use knowledge to tackle new problems and develop new ideas, products, and possibilities. Although there has not been much traction with regard to this concept of teaching and learning, it has especially not gained much traction in schools that serve children of color in areas where poverty is concentrated. Harvard education professor Jal Mehta (2014) (as cited in Noguera et al., 2015) suggested that “advocates of deeper learning have a ‘race problem,’ in that the practice of deeper learning in the U.S. is much more white than the nation as a whole” (p. 3). Mehta (2014) (as cited in Noguera et al., 2015) further added that “many educators and civil rights advocates have been skeptical of calls for deeper learning” and as a result,

students in more affluent schools and top tracks are given the kind of problem-solving education that befits the future managerial class, whereas students in lower tracks and higher-poverty schools are given the kind of rule-following tasks that mirror much of factory and other working class work. (p. 3)

As emphasized in “The Next Generation: Chicago’s Children—Our Framework for Success,” pillar two, which focuses on systems of supports that meet all our students’ needs in order for them to be college and career ready, does not fully bring forth what this would look like at the primary, intermediate, and middle school level. What benchmarks and data of student learning will be evident? How can we hold administrators and teachers accountable for meeting these benchmarks? Furthermore, how can we present this information to parents and students as well as make them cognizant of the
benchmarks for college and career readiness in elementary school in lieu of reviewing and disaggregating summative assessment data? This begins with examining and implementing the practices utilized by the schools that demonstrate understanding of how they operationalize their simultaneous commitments to equity and deeper learning. These practices are comprised of key elements:

1. Authentic instruction and assessment in the form of project-based learning, performance-based assessment, collaborative learning, and connections to the world beyond school;

2. Personalized supports for learning in the form of advisory systems, differentiated instruction, and support for social services and social-emotional learning along with skills;

3. Supports for educator learning through opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and leadership, as well as professional development. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 8.)

It is apparent that schools that incorporate these key elements are more apt to develop students who more likely will have transferrable academic skills, obtain a sense of purpose and belonging to the school, and importantly, graduate and go on to college and be prepared for the job market. Of more importance, these elements look at the student as a whole person by providing personalized systems of supports within the schools to address health care, mental health services, and social supports that often are what most inner city, underperforming schools and students are lacking.

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) provides low socioeconomic students access to college and career readiness. With the inception of the
No Child Left Behind Act, the achievement gap between students of different economic classes has been brought to the forefront. Although, this much needed attention has forced educational reform, it has also reinforced dated tracking systems that predetermine a student’s educational and life career. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), for example, does not allow for a deeper understanding of content in the classroom; this educational reform transitioned to curriculum that focuses on testing at all levels in schools and does not teach students to think critically. Unfortunately, test scores create an educational system that funnels students into remedial courses and classes that deny them access to deeper, higher-level critical thinking. Apparently, what was to be a quick fix with these educational polices, actually widened the achievement gap and reinforced inequalities in education. However, even though the CCSS are not an easy fix for schools, they do push students to go deeper into their understanding of their learning. Engaging teachers and students in the teaching and learning of the CCSS may at first be somewhat difficult for struggling learners, but doing this will prepare these students for college and career readiness.

While the No Child Left Behind Act brought a needed measure of attention to the achievement of often neglected groups of students, high-stakes testing has inadvertently reinforced long-standing tracking systems based on assumptions about differential ability and the future life roles of students. This has occurred because (1) in many schools, especially those serving low-income students, the curriculum has been narrowed to mirror the test; and (2) test scores have been used to allocate differential access to the curriculum, with the result that students of color and low-income students have often been denied access to a thinking
curriculum and instead relegated to remedial, rote-oriented and often scripted course of study. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 10)

The district is in need of an accountability system as well as a structured plan for successful implementation of college and career readiness at the elementary school level. Based on the ideas of the district, it has been noted that the policies that are currently in place focus on assessments and implementing Common Core State Standards, with a major focus on high school students. Based on the ideas of college and career readiness for all students, the district focus should include meaningful learning, multiple measures, resource accountability, and reciprocal comprehensive focus on capacity building for professional accountability. All students, including students from low-performing schools, students of various cultures, students with disabilities, and students having low socioeconomic status, must be able to visualize themselves as college and career ready upon exiting elementary and high school.

Economic Analysis

As reported by Chicago Public Schools District 299 leadership in several reports and meetings, the district is facing a difficult point in time regarding the financial state of the schools. In fiscal year 2012–2013, the district was facing a $480 million dollar budget gap and in 2014–2015, a $1.1 billion deficit. Over time, District 299 has worked to decrease the deficit with layoffs, making cuts to funding programs, and providing more transparent policies regarding school and district spending. With that fiscal information as background, it is realistic to acknowledge that implementation of this policy would incur costs. Funds for professional development would be required to assist school staff members with engaging students in meaningful teaching and learning that are aligned to
the Common Core State Standards. For example, funds would be required to compensate staff members for attending the professional development sessions. Also, school administrators should consider the financial cost of professional development materials and resources such as professional text materials, workshops, and paying substitute teachers to continue the teaching and learning in the classroom during the absence of the teacher.

Another financial need related to this policy would be the cost of ensuring the curriculum programs for students are aligned with the Common Core State Standards. This includes English language arts and mathematics instructional materials and supplies. At some point, there will need to be a financial investment in procuring a summative assessment instrument to monitor our students’ quarterly progress towards being college and career ready. The implementation of an intervention program would require budgeted funds to compensate teachers who provide additional instruction in before or after school programs.

In order for schools to foster a college and career culture in the classroom and the school as a whole, funds will be required for social-emotional learning so as to meet the needs of all students. Educators have noticed an increase in the need to address the social-emotional learning issues of our students. Addressing these issues upfront with students and families will assist in changing the mindset of our students. Our students will learn the importance of a college and career-going culture as well as the impact their decisions will have on their future. Communicating the importance of attending college and or choosing a career can only provide so much insight to students. However, exposing our students to this method of thinking, and research-based information on the careers of
individuals who have attended college, or participated in a tradesman program, or simply just are employed would allow students to visualize how wonderfully different their lives could be when not limited by poverty. With this being said, resources must be properly and effectively utilized to assist our students with forward thinking about their futures.

Schools serving underprivileged students, already underresourced, have struggled to maintain a broad curriculum in the face of budget cuts. Many have shifted significant amounts of classroom time to test preparation in an effort to boost student performance on high-stakes exams. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 24)

In a 2013 report to the U.S. Secretary of Education entitled *For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Educational Equity and Excellence*, the National Commission on Excellence and Equity documented these widespread disparities and defined an equity agenda to address the following needs:

- the need to restructure the school finance system to ensure equitable distribution of resources,
- the need to ensure access to quality teachers,
- the need to ensure access to high-quality teachers,
- the need to ensure access to high-quality early childhood education,
- the need for external supports to address the social needs of children, and
- the need for a new accountability system to hold policymakers responsible for conditions within schools. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 2.)

This report addressed the issue of equity in several forms that included teaching learning. However, in order to ensure equity in access to deeper learning for students, both
practices and policies must address the context for education within the school as well as outside of the school.

Another essential economic focus is providing ongoing parent training to assist parents with understanding CCSS and their alignment with college and career readiness. This includes working with parents and training them to identify the benchmark progress towards college and career readiness of their children at various points in their educational journey. Also, parents will gain an in-depth understanding of the CCSS and the major works of each grade. Once parents are properly trained to understand the importance of CCSS, college and career readiness, and how to best support and advocate for their child, they will be able to make more informed decisions about their child’s education. This includes obtaining additional resources to assist them in selecting better performing schools outside of their neighborhoods, and partnering with schools to become a more informed advocate for their child. It is my belief that this new learning experience for a parent will also have a positive impact on their future and build their confidence as a more knowledgeable person of educational practices.

A budget would need to be considered to provide ongoing parental training as well as light refreshments for them. As with any programming in schools, increasing funding and resources for schools with a high number of students living in poverty can in fact make a difference if the resources are adequate, equitable, and properly utilized. In order to support this policy, instructional leaders in schools would have to be trained on aligning funding sources to college and career readiness and identifying the needs of the school, students, families, and the community. Additionally, this would have to be a focus in the schools’ Continuous Improvement Work Plan, which is known in the
Chicago Public Schools as the CIWP. A study demonstrated the importance of providing adequate resources to schools in order to transform academic outcomes. According to Noguera et al. (2015) found that “in districts that substantially increased their spending as a result of court-ordered changes in school finance, low-income children were significantly more likely to graduate from high school, earn livable wages, and avoid poverty in adulthood” (p. 11).

Research was conducted to determine if the several million dollars in funds to support high-poverty schools actually had an impact on student achievement. Unfortunately, as a result, Title 1 funding has been somewhat innocuous in advancing the progress of our children living in poverty.

While it may be unfair to characterize the reform efforts . . . as a total failure, it is accurate to point out that the changes enacted as a result of the grants did not result in the large-scale improvement that was hoped for. It was especially clear that very little progress was made in the poorest communities where school failure was more pervasive. (Milner, 2015, p. 37)

As a school district, how can we ensure that funding and resources will have their greatest impact on supporting schools in poor communities? Is it the responsibility of District 299, the school leaders, the local school council, or a joint partnership amongst them all? Consideration should be given to the thought of progress monitoring funding utilization resources in schools for maximum effect on student achievement and parental training. Ensuring that there is a clear alignment of funding, programming, and training will assist us with moving towards accountability measures for college and career
readiness in schools. In his 2013 State of the Union address, President Obama called for a re-envisioning of the American high school experience and described this as the opportunity to explore new designs and features that mark next generation learning. It also highlighted the importance of collaboration between education, business, and postsecondary partners to reinvent the high school experience so that it better equips and empowers students to seize opportunities in today’s innovation economy. (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, para.1)

If we want to better engage students in high school, stronger connections to students’ educational needs and interests on an individual basis must exist. Additionally, schools must offer new opportunities to personalize instruction and support students with wraparound services. Innovative approaches to restructure the time spent learning and engaging in educational technologies that empower learners is also required. “The Principles of Next Generation High Schools” were outlined and shared by President Obama:

- Redesigning academic content and instructional practices to promote active and hands-on learning, aligned with postsecondary and career-readiness;
- Personalizing and tailoring academic content and learning to strengthen the connection to the educational needs and interests of individual students;
- Ensuring strong content knowledge and skills for teachers in all subjects, including STEM;
- Providing and personalizing academic and wraparound support services for those students who need them;
• Providing high-quality career and college exploration and counseling on options for students after high school graduation;
• Offering multiple opportunities to engage in postsecondary learning, including earning college credit while still in high school; and
• Redesigning the scope and sequence of learning time in more innovative and meaningful ways, incorporating innovations such as educational technologies, project-based learning, and competency-based progressions. (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, para. 3)

As with any new redesign, in particular American high schools, there are the demands of implementing change as well as guaranteeing that funding sources will be available to accomplish the challenging task set before states and school districts in order for it to be successful. Therefore, it can be seen that school funding plays a major role in the success and or lack of success of students in public schools, specifically, students in high school who may not be afforded the opportunities this next generation high school requires.

School funding formulas must enable all children to receive the fundamental supports and services they need, along with access to an engaging, relevant curriculum that promotes the acquisition of deeper learning skills. Having established the challenges faced by schools serving children with higher needs, we turn now to teaching and learning, first by describing the scientific basis for pedagogical strategies that promote deeper learning and then by discussing examples of schools that use these strategies successfully. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 5)
In 2015, a key aspect regarding the next generation high schools surfaced as a result of summit data that revealed the necessity for change as well as a national effort to redesign the high schools in America based on the collective impact of federal and local improvement efforts over the past five years. Data from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), in conjunction with the America’s Promise Alliance, Civic Enterprises, and Everyone Graduates Center, showed a tremendous reduction in the percentage of students who do not complete high school within four years. The numbers revealed that 1,015,946 students graduated in 2008 but fell to 744,193 students in 2012, which is a 27% decrease over four years. Projecting these data to the next decade, the achievement dividend translates into 2.3 million more students graduating from high school and $150 billion of additional lifetime wages earned. With these alarming statistics, a call to action was made by President Obama for a deeper perspective into the manner in which we educate in our high schools. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, only 50% of high schools in the U. S. offer calculus, only 63% offer physics, and between 10–25% of high schools offer zero or none of the typical sequence of core math and science courses such as Algebra I and II, geometry, biology, and chemistry. We must ensure that all students have access to the full suite of courses that will prepare them for success in the innovation economy, and that begins with having access to rigorous coursework in high school. (The White House, 2015, para. 4)

Based on this catalyst data, new federal investments and several new resources to support the effort to redesign U.S. high schools were announced by the Obama
administration. Over $20 million in federal grants were to be awarded through its investing in innovation grants to specifically support the reform and redesign of high schools that serve a high percentage of low-income students. Funding of this magnitude would assist in supporting this policy implementation for a large urban school district to actualize the goal of having more low-income students graduate college and be career ready. It is through these efforts that I will elaborate on how the impact of public education funding is directly related to the students’ socioeconomic status, cultures, backgrounds, and their engagement in school and plays major role in their success in being college and career ready.

Social Analysis

The link between the college and career readiness expectations and the actual graduation rate within District 299 is unbalanced. As stated by the mayor of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools saw an increase in graduation rates in an upward trend over the past 5 years. However, after a deeper analysis of the data, it was reported that in 2014, a total of 21 out of 140 high schools graduation rates were revised downward by more than 5%. This information can be correlated to student preparedness in elementary schools as well as their learning paths in high schools. There are many contributing factors that play major roles in student success, graduation rate, as well as college and career readiness.

Students’ backgrounds, cultures, socioeconomic status, and their engagement in school play major roles in their success in being college and career ready. Resources are limited when it comes to addressing the issue of neighborhood conditions that contribute to student success. Milner (2015) recommended that district leaders make certain that school personnel understand the neighborhoods in which their students’ reside so as to be
able to identify strategies the work best with families to improve their communities which in turn would lead to the advancement of student learning and social development. It is important to be mindful of the whole child in order for these strategies to be successful. Often times, educators forget the conditions and backgrounds that are an integral part of their students’ lives. This sometimes limits educators’ ability to move students toward academic progression because they overlook the bigger issues at hand, the social issues our students are faced with daily.

Poverty also limits the amount and quality of academic and social support students receive outside of school. Whereas middle-class parents can generally provide their children with a broad range of opportunities—such as quality preschool, summer camp, homework assistance, music lessons, and the like—that support healthy development and enhance the likelihood of academic success. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 4)

This is not the case for lower-class parents; unfortunately, they may lack the education and financial resources needed to provide these kinds of opportunities.

As a principal and teacher, I can recall several instances in which I or my colleagues were caught off guard by students’ behaviors, conversations, and comments during in-school experiences as well as field trip learning experiences. I often encourage teachers to plan field learning experiences as aligned to their instructional unit at the beginning of the school year. Each grade level team member is required to engage in at least two field learning experiences per semester. It is my opinion that our students will have an opportunity to be exposed to learning beyond the four walls of the school. It also provides them with the opportunity experience and become exposed to the various
neighborhoods of the city. Due to our students’ limited experiences, knowledge, and exposure in life to other cultures and venues beyond the school and their neighborhood, our teachers were often faced with, as described by some of them, disappointment and a sense of embarrassment. These teachers conveyed the excitement of the students regarding visiting and experiencing something new; however, due to the students’ lack of exposure, their excitement appeared to consist of a lack of manners and inappropriate language and physical behaviors. As a result of this experience, we worked as a school staff to teach and inform our students about our expectations via virtual experiences to field learning and the utilization of the Responsive Classroom to address what is known as the hidden curriculum.

Students’ social issues and neighborhood conditions can be major factors in the classroom with reference to engagement, time on task, and social-emotional learning skills. Policies and practices, at both the district and state level, should be reshaped to respond to various neighborhood conditions. The students’ residential areas influence their life experiences and chances of success in the school.

Student engagement is another critical area of focus when considering student success toward college and career readiness, specifically in underperforming schools and high-poverty areas. “The correlation between student engagement and achievement is consistently strong and significant; research shows that for every 2 percent disengagement rises, pass rates on high-stakes test drop by 1 percent” (Jensen, 2013, p. 2). As suggested, engagement is especially important for low-socioeconomic-status (SES) students. “In their study of more than 1,800 students living in poverty, Finn and Rock (1997) found that school engagement was a key factor in whether students stayed in
school” (Jensen, 2013, p. 2). According to the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (2014), in District 299 in 2014, only 14% of freshmen in high school go on to graduate from a four-year college by the age of 25. Student engagement is one of many key factors impacting whether students attend school and remain in school so they can be prepared for life as a productive citizen. In addition to student engagement in the classroom, other essential realities that should be taken into account are the paucity of resources available to students from low-income families, the students’ and their families’ social-emotional needs, and the fact that many students living in poverty are also living in trauma. Another key factor that must be taken into consideration is the number of students and families living in homeless situations. There are many educational barriers that homeless students face when attending school. Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) asserted that homeless children are particularly at risk for poor educational outcomes, which can have lifelong consequences for their future livelihood and economic independence. If school systems do not provide special education interventions to address the particular educational barriers that these children face, then it is likely that these children will stay marginalized in the lowest economic rung of society. (p. 289)

As discussed previously, there are limited resources available to provide wraparound services when challenged to educate the whole child and meet all students’ needs for them to be college and career ready upon their exit of high school. Subsequently, additional programs are needed to address the whole child, and to begin this work, a district and school-wide comprehensive counseling program needs to be
developed that provides the additional services needed by low-income students and families. Establishing ongoing external partnerships are also needed to assist with capacity building and being well prepared to educate and address these exigency issues that students living in poverty bring with them to the school on a daily basis.

Political Analysis

Historically, politics have played a major role in public education across the United States. This stems from the legislation and reform acts of politicians, and the funding for education. When funding public education, many political decisions are based on political affiliates, interests, and motives. There are individuals making decisions on public education policies and funding who are not educators or people well versed in public education. There are many entities that should be considered when thinking about the politics of public education. Public education has been at the center of political affairs and policies for decades. This includes schools individually, major school districts with record numbers of underperforming schools, as well as the student population and demographic information. In large urban school districts, there are several political factors that drive policies and reform; however, very little progress has been made with students of poverty. Milner and Lomotey (2013) offered a historical observation:

The Regan era introduced a new theory of reform focused on outcomes rather than inputs—that is, high-stakes testing without investing—that drove most policy initiatives. The situation in many urban (and rural) schools deteriorated over the decades. Drops in real per-pupil expenditures accompanied tax cuts and growing enrollments. Meanwhile student needs grew with immigration, concentrated
poverty and homelessness, and increased numbers of students requiring second-language instruction and special educational services. Although some federal support to high-needs schools and districts was restored during the 1990s, it was not enough to fully recoup the earlier losses, and after 2000, inequality grew once again. (p. xii)

Research has revealed that children living in poverty are most likely to be less successful than those who do not. One major determination is test scores, which are the first piece of data that this is analyzed to determine next steps for public policies in education. As a result of this, there is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that took effect in the United States and shaped public education policy.

While the No Child Left Behind Act brought a needed measure of attention to the achievement of often-neglected groups of students, high-stakes testing has inadvertently reinforced long-standing tracking systems based on assumptions about differential ability and the future life roles of students. (Noguera et al., 2015, p. 4)

There are several reasons why this has occurred. First, in many schools, particularly those that have low-income students in attendance, the curriculum has been narrowed to reflect the tests. Second, the data from test scores have been utilized to allocate differential access to the curriculum; this has produced the result that students of color and low-income students have often been denied access to a critical thinking curriculum. Instead, they are exposed to basic remedial, rote-oriented, and scripted courses. NCLB demonstrated very little to no evidence that displayed increased student achievement, observable teacher practices that yielded change in student outcomes in learning, or
increased parental involvement. However, with the ongoing changes in education, a blueprint reform was established with regard to NCLB. As indicated by the U.S. Department of Education (2010), *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* outlines the following:

This blueprint builds on the significant reforms already made in response to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 around four areas: (1) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness; (2) Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools; (3) Implementing college- and career-ready standards; and (4) Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions. (p. 3)

Since 2014, CPS has been struggling with the political backlash of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), the battle with Springfield regarding teachers’ pensions, and the Illinois Governor who has attempted a state takeover of the school district due to serious budget deficits. Also, there are the political issues of funding sources due to a one billion dollar budget deficit. The leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union has voiced their strong concerns regarding their new teachers’ contract with respect to the pension pickup, pay increase, and other points of interest. The proposed contract was voted down by union members due to several negotiation points that they felt were not met, such as pay raises and pension pick-ups. The Chicago Board of Education has requested that parents, community members, and school leaders assist with soliciting Springfield politicians to equally fund our schools. Governor Rauner and top Illinois Republicans called for a state takeover of the Chicago Public Schools district:
Gov. Bruce Rauner directed his State Board of Education to begin a financial review of Chicago Public Schools and start a search for a new superintendent, even though legislation he wants to authorize a state takeover is dead on arrival in the Democrat-controlled legislature. (Garcia & Perez, 2016, para.1)

This “state takeover,” would allow the Governor’s selected state superintendent to choose up to seven members of an independent authority to replace the current school board that is selected by the mayor. The takeover of CPS was suggested as a result of a nearly $1 billion budget deficit.

Despite the political realities of a Democrat-run legislature unwilling to turn over control of the state’s largest school system to a first-term Republican governor, Rauner said he is not deterred. He directed the state education board to prepare for a possible takeover anyway, with his office sending a memo asking education officials to identify someone who could serve as interim superintendent. (Garcia & Perez, 2016, para. 6)

However, due to the number of democratic members who were not in favor of several decisions Governor Rauner has made with respect to Illinois programs, budget cuts, and other factors, this decision and request was quickly voted down by the state legislature in Springfield.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

When exploring all students’ college and career readiness with the implementation of CCSS within school districts across the country, confronting the achievement gap amongst students should be carefully examined. According to Wagner (2008), for the last ten years or so, education reform efforts have been focused on “the
gap between the quality of schooling that most middle-class kids get in America and the quality of schooling available for most poor and minority children—and the consequent disparity in results” (p. 8). In light of Wagner’s observation, the focus on closing the achievement gap merely through the implementation of Common Core State Standards makes the buzz words and phrases of all children being college and career ready appear to be simply a part of the district’s written action plan.

The accountability measurement and policy are the missing links in this effort. As part of District 299’s efforts, there are connections to various components of systems of support that meet student needs. There is a moral and ethical responsibility for the following: (a) ensuring that all students attend a safe and secure learning environment; (b) establishing universal standard for positive learning climate in every school that makes students feel valued, challenged, and supported; (c) addressing health-related barriers to learning; (d) providing students with academic and behavior supports needed to be successful; and (e) targeting struggling schools for intensive district support. Although, there are other connections to the system of support, I chose to only highlight these five because they resonate the most with the action plan for progressing all students, even those from the lowest performing schools and most impoverished neighborhoods, towards college and career readiness for all students.

Additional resources must be emphasized in order to effectively address these five areas. Parents, students, communities, as well as educators, must be able to visualize themselves in this arena in spite of the challenges that are faced within schools towards meeting these needs. One such emphasis should be on providing resources that ensure the professional capacity and accountability that guide how educators are prepared and
how they teach and support students. Payne (2008) aptly stated that “we know that teacher quality matters, and matters most to the most disadvantaged schools” (p. 71). For various reasons, underperforming schools are less likely to obtain highly effective teachers and are more likely to lose the good teachers they do have.

The tasks of providing ongoing professional development and building teacher capacity have to remain at the center of the work between teachers and instructional leaders in schools. “Raising teacher quality can make a difference even when other things don’t improve, even when leadership or school culture remains problematic” (Payne, 2008, p. 95). It is especially important to place the best effective teachers in front of students of low socioeconomic status.
SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

Policy Goals and Objectives

Working towards college readiness for all students in schools should be determined by school districts and educators at both the elementary and high school level. Determining the key aspects regarding what it really means to be college and career ready, obtaining measures of indicators of this work at various points in students’ educational experiences, and determining an accountability system will assist school districts in achieving this goal. As the country moves to shift changes in education for a more aligned college and career readiness amongst all states, the development and implementation of the Common Core State Standards are being taught in school districts across the United States. In addition to this, assessments to measure teaching and learning are also in place. Although, school districts, states, and the federal government look at assessment data to determine if students are being successful and prepared for college and career readiness, as educators, we know that there are other data points other than assessment data that must be taken into consideration. Unfortunately, it is clearly apparent that test data are the sole determinant for student success. Over time, consideration needs to be given to several other indicators that are described in this policy.

When considering important aspects of a policy to support an accountability system for college and career readiness for all students, the policy’s goals and objectives need to be addressed. The goal of this policy is to provide an accountability system for Pillar Two of The Next Generation: Chicago’s Children; 21st Century Preparation for Success in College, Career and Life in Chicago Public Schools 2013–2018 Action Plan.
The goal is to increase academic achievement for all students by creating an accountability system that focuses on four major areas for improvement and the objectives for this policy goal are described as follows:

1. Increase parental, student and teacher capacity of college and career readiness.
2. Increase meaningful teaching and learning at both elementary and high school levels.
3. Increase the professional capacity of all teachers and administrators.
4. Ensure that there is resource accountability for college and career readiness.

These objectives will support this policy of college and career readiness for all students.

In order for students to be college and career ready, among other things, the District administrators will have to put an accountability system in place for professional accountability outside of the scope of the REACH (Relationships, Effort, Aspirations, Cognition, Heart) Framework for teaching and learning.

Needs, Values, and Preferences

Students, along with their parents, deserve a high-quality education to prepare them for their future. A quality education is defined differently by several individuals, institutes, and the U.S. government. However, in order for the achievement gap to be reduced and even closed, students of poverty must be afforded the same opportunities as their White and upper-class counterparts. Equity in education must be considered a serious and central factor when working toward the goal of providing a high-quality education that prepares students for college and career readiness.

When considering the students within District 299, conscientious thought must be given to the number of students in the district who are classified by race, culture, and
socioeconomic status. Within the district, in the 2015–2016 school year, there were 396,683 students from pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade. Of the students enrolled at that time, there were 86.02% students who were economically disadvantaged and 15.7% students who were English Language Learners (ELL). According to the 2014–2015 CPS Stats and Facts, there were 39.3% African American students, 3.6% Asian students, 0.01% Asian/Pacific Islander students, 45.6% Hispanic students, 1.1% Multi-Racial, 0.3% Native American/Alaskan students, and 9.4% White students. After reviewing these data, it is stunning to see how racially diverse the school district is.

As identified in the 2015–2016 Illinois State Report Card, 33% of the students in Illinois met the requirement for the PARCC assessment, 46% of the students were identified as ready for college, and the graduation rate was 86%. In District 299, 25% of the students met the requirement for the PARCC assessment, 28% of the students were assessed as ready for college, and the high school graduation rate was 77%. The relationship between the achievement gap, the racial make-up of students in the district, and the summative assessment data show a direct correlation to the number of students within the district who are not college and career ready at the elementary level and secondary level. Hence, there is supporting evidence that the majority of the schools within the district do not aggressively promote student achievement to the level that prepares our students to be college and career ready. There are some neighborhood schools that are underperforming at a record high. These are the schools that 86% of economically disadvantage students must attend due to the limited number of options they have based on their academic ability. It can be seen that if we continue to have this upward trending of underperforming elementary schools for students, then there will be
no evidentiary data that support the fact that we can expect these same students to be prepared for schools that provide better opportunities for them to graduate and be prepared for college.

Students—disadvantaged students, in particular—need schools that are focused on providing them with the skills they will need to succeed in today’s society, schools that are flexible enough to try a variety of teaching methods until they succeed in reaching these goals. (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 266)

Darling-Hammond spoke of creating systems of successful schools, schools that are designed to serve low-income students of color well is not impossible. The problem lies in supporting successful innovation in schools. Darling-Hammond mentioned historian Lawrence Cremin and his argument that “the success of progressive education reforms did not spread widely because such practice required ‘infinitely skilled teachers,’ who were never prepared in sufficient numbers to sustain these more complex forms of teaching and schooling” (Cremin as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 265). In short, the truth of this statement can be observed in the teaching practices and outcomes of student achievement in District 299.

Goals and Objectives: Appropriate and Good

Making progress towards ensuring that all students are college and career ready is the future of our city. Given that we have many students who are being educated in schools and school districts without an accountability system that focuses on meaningful learning, professional accountability, and resources accountability, there is a significant possibility that students will continue to remain unexposed to higher expectations for their learning. Therefore, they will also remain ill-prepared for their futures.
The term “college and career ready” has become widely used as a result of the proposed Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and Common Core State Standards movement. As we move toward what may be considered a moral and economic imperative for our nation’s students, it is essential that we first identify the gaps of college and career readiness both in our students and within our systems of practice. (Westover, 2012, p. 12)

As shown in Figure 3, defining college and career ready is viewed according to four attributes based on research. As a district, there not only needs to be a focus on its students’ abilities and performance using the four attributes of college and career ready students; but concentration also needs to be focused on assessing the effectiveness of its student support systems. This effort requires effectively increasing the meaningful teaching and learning of our students.
Figure 3. The four attributes of college and career ready students. (Westover, 2012)
It is important to make certain that District 299 has a policy in place to support the various needs of all stakeholders that provides a clear and concise understanding of college and career readiness. This will assist them in working towards the kind foment needed to change mindsets to include future opportunities to grow for all students and families. Shifting teaching and learning in schools will increase the capacity of teachers and students. It will also help in the aid of building more critical thinkers and learners within our schools and communities. Increased accountability for teachers and administrators will push up the leader lever in schools showing a significant shift that allows students to have better opportunities to attend high schools where they are afforded increased opportunities to graduate college and be career ready. Continuing down the path of allowing students in our district to attend underperforming schools, both elementary and high schools, should not be allowed. This pattern continues to widen the achievement gap of African American and Hispanic students of color within the district. After reviewing the district’s data concerning racial makeup, I observed that only 9.4% of the students in the district were White. Therefore, a person can research and determine the direct correlation between the achievement gap, underperforming schools, and the fact that 84.9% of the district’s students are African American and Hispanic. Identifying the number of Black and Hispanic students who are actually attending higher-performing schools outside of their immediate neighborhood would add another lens to this accountability policy as being good for all stakeholders.

The question of funding for accountability is another factor that needs serious attention. Resource accountability for college and career readiness will ramp up the progress of students in underperforming schools to have greater and more intentional
opportunities that would narrow the achievement gap and provide more access to higher functioning and performing schools. In District 299, a billion dollar deficit is at the center of the city’s attention, the hot topic of Springfield, IL, and the ongoing conversation in schools amongst educators. Nevertheless, there is no clear and concise plan aimed at decreasing the budget deficit. However, there needs to be a resource accountability policy to ensure that funds are properly disseminated to specific programs for instruction as aligned to CCSS as well as ongoing professional development for teachers, administrators, and parents. This will assist with ensuring that all students are receiving the necessary teaching, learning, and other enriching education experiences that would place them at an advantage similar to their peers who attend selective enrolment and magnet schools as described in the creation of an accountability system that I presented in the four major areas of improvement.
SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

The Glaring Lack of Equity and Accountability

This policy argument section is a pro and con essay on the merit of the advocated policy based on research findings, public and professional opinions, and other relevant factors. The option that all students in District 299 will be college and career ready is not a reality for many students in underperforming neighborhood schools. The majority of the students in this situation are African American and Hispanic students who are from low-income homes and have few to no college-educated parents. Not always by choice, these students attend several neighborhood schools, some of which are underperforming; this is due to the limited knowledge of their parents as well as the limited resources that these families have access to. Many of these students are from homes and extended families where adult role models who have a post-secondary education are nonexistent in most cases. While interacting with students engaged in taking a survey that determines school ratings, a majority of the students discussed how they would be first-generation college graduates. This information can be found in the district’s data which are public knowledge on the Internet. However, there is no accountability system in place to ensure that all students will be college and career ready, including the students who attend underperforming neighborhood schools that, in some cases, lack the teacher capacity to execute meaningful teaching and learning and lack the resources to solve this problem.

Darling-Hammond (2010) offered a nation-wide perspective on the long-time, losing battle for the attainment of equity in U.S. education that is sobering:

Although many U.S. educators and civil rights advocates have fought for higher quality and more equitable education over many years—in battles for States
desegregation, school finance reform, and equitable treatment of students within schools—progress has been stymied in many states over the last 2 decades as segregation has worsened, and disparities have grown. While students in the highest-achieving states and districts in the United States do as well as those in high-achieving nations elsewhere, it is our continuing comfort with profound inequality that is the Achilles heel of American education. (p. 8)

Having a policy in place to address this need should be mandatory for all states and school districts so as to ensure that our students are better prepared for post-secondary educational experiences. According to the district’s “The Next Generation: Chicago’s Children—Our Framework for Success,” the vision for the district is that every Chicago public school student in every neighborhood will be engaged in a rigorous, well-rounded instructional program and will graduate prepared for success in college, career, and life. Having a policy in place for the underserved and underrepresented students and families of the district should be one that holds true to the district’s vision. What are the necessary steps and approaches that need to be taken in order to achieve this vision?

Communicating this vision message to all stakeholders should be a requirement and mandate of the district. “The challenge is not simply to get students into postsecondary programs. . . . It is to prepare them to succeed . . . not simply to complete high school” (Conley, 2010, p. 14). When considering this statement, one should ponder the thought of how District 299 can work towards preparing all students to succeed in all schools, including our neighborhood schools that are underserved and underperforming with the most at-risk students enrolled.
According to a report from the National Governors Association (2012), “there is a national consensus that schools should focus on students’ college and career readiness” (para. 1). What are the characteristics of a school district that supports college and career readiness? Most educators have accepted the theory but have failed to create a plan for supporting readiness. This ideology is prevalent within District 299. There appears to be a focus on college and career readiness, and yet, as of 2016, there was not a clear plan for supporting this theory readiness for all, or an in-depth emphasis placed on how to begin to address the issues surrounding this. Thus far, this theory has been justified based on test scores, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and the loose utilization of buzz words and phrases regarding the term “College and Career Readiness.”

The 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) emphasized standards-based instruction, assessment, and accountability for all students, underscoring the nationwide mandate to prepare students for academic success. In the current economic environment, high school success has been redefined as not only ensuring that all students graduate from high school, but that they graduate ready for college and careers. The U.S. Department of Education waived certain provisions of ESEA in exchange for reforms undertaken by states that relate to the following principles: (a) achieving college- and career-ready expectations for all students; (b) developing differentiated recognition, accountability, and support systems; (c) supporting effective instructional leadership; and (d) reducing duplication and unnecessary burden.

There are three areas that I will explore when considering this policy argument. First, I will share meaningful learning in a new paradigm for educational accountability put forth by Linda Darling-Hammond and Jon Snyder. Second, school District 299 needs
to determine a definition of college and career readiness as it relates to our school communities and student populations at every level. Having a common definition across the country as well as within the district would be the first step toward recognizing such a policy. Third, I will provide insight as to how race, poverty, instructional leadership, teacher capacity, and other factors impede the reality of all students being prepared for college and career. President Barack Obama, in his August 2012 weekly address, stated, “If we want America to lead in the 21st century, nothing is more important than giving everyone the best education possible—from the day they start preschool to the day they start their career” (Obama, 2012, para. 11). Thus, this is the mindset that our district leaders, principals and teachers must take on as well.

A New Paradigm for Accountability in Education

Many scholars have provided insight into the need for an accountability approach to meaningful learning in all schools. “Traditional academic approaches—narrow tasks that emphasize memorization or the application of simple algorithms—won’t develop students who are critical thinkers or students who can write and speak effectively” (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 3). The challenges inherent in meaningful teaching and learning play a major role in student achievement:

Students learn more deeply and perform better on complex tasks if they have the opportunity to engage in more “authentic” learning- projects and activities that require them to employ subject knowledge to solve real world problems. Studies have shown a positive impact on learning when students participate in lessons that require them to construct and organize knowledge, consider alternatives, engage
in detailed research, inquiry, writing, and analysis, and to communicate
effectively to audiences. (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 8)

A study by Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1995) of more than 2,100 students in 23
schools found increased higher achievement on intellectually challenging performance
tasks for students who experienced this kind of “authentic pedagogy.” The use of these
practices resulted in stronger academic performance regardless of race, gender, or prior
achievement.

As shared in many studies, via school progress reports and the graduation rates in
our district, we cannot afford not to address this policy need. This policy will require
“professionally skilled and committed educators, and support by adequate and
appropriate resources so that all students regardless of background are prepared for both
college and career when they graduate from high school” (Darling-Hammond et al.,

for an accountability approach to be truly responsible for the outcomes our
children deserve and our communities require, it must support a system that is
cohesive, integrative, and continuously renewing. It should enable schools to
offer a high-quality education, reduce the likelihood of harmful or inequitable
practices, and have means to identify and correct problems that may occur. (p. 3)

In District 299, moving towards a system that mandates high-quality education as
it aligns with Common Core State Standards has only been viewed through the School
Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) and the REACH Framework for teaching. The SQRP
came into existence in the 2013–2014 school year for District 299. On the other hand,
the REACH Framework for Teaching policy became effective in the 2012–2013 school

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year. Through the district’s School Quality Rating Policy, each year each school receives a school quality rating and an accountability rating that are determined by student test data and other measures (Chicago Public Schools, 2016). Due to the fact that there are several types of schools within the district with different populations, different indicators are utilized for the SQRP to determine the school rating, which focuses on the areas where the data are collected such as parents, teachers, students, attendance, and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment data. The key areas of focus are outlined in the Figure 4.

Figure 4. Chicago Public Schools SQRP indicators. (Chicago Public Schools, 2016)

Even though, the information obtained from these matrixes provides insight into a school’s performance as a whole (SQRP), the information obtained does not include data that show a correlation to college and career readiness at the elementary level or an in-
depth view of elementary and high schools. The SQRP rating determines the success or lack of progress of a school; hence this rating does not inform us of the full picture and context of the school community. Therefore, there needs to be an alignment of measurement tools to determine meaningful teaching in schools and its correlation to college and career readiness for all students within the district and across the state outside of the REACH Framework for Teaching. Working towards meeting the needs of the students in the district will require additional support systems to be in place. To begin this work, there needs to be a common definition of what it means to be college and college ready at all levels in our states and District 299. As it stands now, there are no benchmarks in place to determine the requirements of being college and career ready for every student in every school.

The Need for a Common Definition of College and Career Readiness

Many state boards of education and scholars have defined college and career readiness in various ways. The Massachusetts State Board of Education (which the Massachusetts public school district is ranked the number four school in the U.S according to U.S. News 2015 Education Report) has adopted a definition of college and career readiness that was approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. The Massachusetts definition describes student goals: “Massachusetts students who are college and career ready will demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities that are necessary to successfully complete entry-level, credit-bearing college courses, participate in certificate or workplace training programs, and enter economically viable career pathways” (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2013, para. 1). In order to meet these
goals, the Commonwealth went on to define a set of learning competencies, intellectual capacities, and experiences that are essential for all students to become lifelong learners; positive contributors to their families, workplaces, and communities; and successfully engaged citizens of a global 21st century. Beyond achieving college and career ready levels of competence in English language arts, literacy, and mathematics, all high school students should develop a foundation in the academic disciplines identified in the MassCore course of study that aim at building competencies for workplace readiness as articulated in the Task Force on Integrating College and Career Report, and applying academic strategies to problem solving in diverse professional and life contexts appropriate to individual student goals. Massachusetts used its 2011 curriculum frameworks, which include the Common Core State Standards, as the basis for an educational program that provides students with the needed academic knowledge, skills, and experience. After examining the definition of college and career readiness set by the Massachusetts Department of Education, I see that there are several areas of focus that are being used to determine students’ college and career readiness at the high school level, but I am left wondering what the areas of focus are for elementary school students.

“The Illinois State Board of Education has adopted a definition of college and career readiness and included the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) request for flexibility” (Mishkind, 2014, p. 10).

Although readiness includes being prepared to take credit-bearing postsecondary courses in core subject areas, Illinois’ college- and career-readiness objectives also extend to developing employability skills and opportunities for students to
pursue a personalized education plan based on their academic and career interests.


This definition appears too vague and does not identify specific areas and specific goals to work toward or factors to take into consideration regarding college and career readiness. In short, consideration has not been given to how educators and school districts should move elementary and middle school level students to college and career readiness beyond the implementation of CCSS in schools. As can be seen in the simple readiness definition presented Figure 5, college and career knowledge and skills feed into the definition of readiness. My advocated policy will allow for stakeholders within District 299 to have a common understanding of what being college and career ready looks like and means for all students within the district including the most at-risk students in poverty-stricken communities. Therefore, the common definition that I am proposing is defined by Conley (2014):

Students who are ready for college courses leading to a baccalaureate degree, a certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental course work. They can complete such entry-level, credit bearing courses at a level that enables them to continue in the major or program of study they have chosen. (p. 51)

My advocated policy also seeks to ensure that there are clear components, benchmarks and milestones in place for instructional leaders, teachers, students, and parents.
College and career definitions in over 21 states share the key factors of concrete knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students must demonstrate mastery of so as to be prepared for postsecondary success. The skills previously mentioned are aligned with six categories: (a) academic knowledge, (b) critical thinking, (c) problem solving skills, (d) social and emotional learning/collaboration and or communication, (e) grit/resilience/perseverance, (f) citizenship and or community involvement. The adoption of the Common Core State Standards within the district nudged educators on to believe that we are preparing students to be college and career ready. However, there are other areas to consider when delineating a readiness definition. Until there is a clear and concise definition, teachers cannot teach with the end in mind and schools cannot adequately assess the students’ progress towards college and career readiness. Equally
important, principals, school leadership teams, and network chiefs cannot guide or frame
the work for this progression in schools, communities, and network areas.

Factors That Impede College and Career Readiness

In order to begin to combat these challenges, administrators need to be prepared
to effectively build the capacity in teachers towards shifting instruction to a high-quality
education and support teachers with professional development that produces critical
thinkers and writers. There will need to be a change in the mindsets of all stakeholders
within schools and within the district. Darling-Hammond, (2010) described the role of
leadership in the process:

School leadership is a key factor in schools that outperform others with similar
students. Researchers found that achievement levels were higher in schools
where principals lead a school-reform process, act as mangers of school
improvement, cultivate a shared vision for the school, and make use of student
data to support instructional practices and to provide assistance to struggling
students. (p. 1)

Consequently, without an aligned approach within District 299 to school leadership, the
limited capacity of teachers to develop students to be critical thinkers and writers by
engaging them in meaningful learning will prohibit the district from shifting towards
college and career readiness for all students.

Weber (2015) asserted that if teachers and principals do not understand this new,
shift it will be difficult for them to transform teaching and learning experiences.
Predicting which students will pursue college and which will decide to enter the
workforce is impossible. In light of this unpredictability, all students should graduate
from high school with multiple options because their education prepared them to make life choices. A report from the American Diploma Project Network declared that this kind of readiness is no longer a radical reform idea of just a handful of states; instead, it has become the new norm for all states. To begin to create new mindsets regarding readiness, district leaders should consider asking staff members the following questions:

- What does college and career readiness look like?
- What are you doing in your grade level or subject area/department to prepare more students to graduate college and career ready?
- How can central services support college and career readiness in your school?


The goal in asking these questions is that they will stimulate new conversations that will lead to ensuring the advancement of all students in the district. As previously discussed, there needs to be clear end goals in mind at the district level in order to tackle the achievement gap and ensure that we are in fact preparing all students. Hence, a clear, goal-oriented policy is needed that outlines the central ideas and expectations for both elementary and high schools for all students.

While campaigning to become president, Barack Obama touched on the large race- and class-based achievement gaps we experience and named these as morally unacceptable and economically untenable. Children of color comprise the majority of students in most urban districts and this is true for Chicago. CPS is facing pernicious gaps in academic achievement that fuel inequality and are short changing our youth as well as our country. Darling-Hammond (2010) made the assessment that “today, in the United states of America, only 1 in 10 low-income kindergartners becomes a college
graduate. A greater number join the growing ranks of inmates in what the *New York Times* recently dubbed our ‘prison nation’” (p. 3). When considering this statement and reflecting on the children and community that I serve, it is astonishing to me that this insight is actually visible today. A large number of students who enter kindergarten are underprepared and academically performing far below their peers in middle-income families and their White counterparts who enter kindergarten. We know that students from low-income families enter school with vocabulary, language, and skill development deficiencies.

A study conducted by the University of Kansas researchers Hart and Risley (2003) found that children from low-income homes heard about 616 words per hour, children from working-class homes heard about 1,251 words per hour, and children from professional homes heard roughly around 2,153 words per hour. One of the results of this study was the finding that, by the age of three, there was a 30 million word gap for children in low-income homes. To review, as educators continue to work with students to prepare all students for college and career readiness, CPS is faced with many challenges and adversities in its efforts to effectively serve its families and students.

As an elementary school administrator, I have first-hand experience of disparity among our students. Therefore, the importance of ensuring that teachers as well as teacher assistants are capable and well equipped to provide intervention to assist our students in overcoming these types of challenges is a priority for me. This work must include early intervention programs for the child and their parents. This intervention includes providing ongoing workshops and training to support low-income families with education on how to provide more effective language development and exposure at the
early childhood level. In the same way, we must train our staff and create a sense of urgency about the importance of daily language development and acquisition in our classrooms and throughout the school and the school day. With this focus, I believe we would be able to decrease some of the negative factors influencing the achievement gap at the primary levels of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.
SECTION FIVE: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A Compelling Need to Act

I fully understand that advocating for District 299 to implement a policy for college and career readiness for all students will require a tremendous shift in mindsets, how schools are measured for success, and what success looks like for students in every neighborhood. Even though leaders and educators are aware of the many disparities across the district within neighborhood schools as well as the number of different communities that exist in the district, there continues to be a need to level the playing field so as to increase opportunities for most, if not all, disadvantaged students in the district to obtain a high-quality education; to obtain the resources needed to enhance teacher capabilities and practices; and create a culture wherein our African American and Hispanic students will be college and career ready. However, the observable fact is that as a district, we are currently limiting the progress of our most at-risk students. This is due to the limited professional capacity of teachers and administrators as well the unclear definition and expectations at every level of both elementary and secondary schools within the district. Therefore, it is a goal of my research to advocate for this policy implementation plan that will outline the need for additional educational activities, staff development plans, time schedules, program budgets, and progress monitoring activities. As research has shown, the most disadvantage students require the most intentional additional supports, programs, resources, and the most highly qualified, motivated, and educated teachers in order for them to become more prepared to be college and career ready.
As a principal in an elementary school wherein 96% of our student population is comprised of students from low-income homes with limited resources, there is visible evidence on a daily basis of the need for additional support. The school’s data show that 9.7% of our student population are diverse learners and has a mobility rate of 35.1%. In terms of racial demographics, 94.1% of our students are Black and 5.4% are Hispanic. One would consider this school context to be one in great need of intentional support and resources with regard to preparing students to be college and career ready. On a daily basis, I have the opportunity to observe the high needs of our students, families, teachers and the local community. Our students often struggle with a lack of intrinsic motivation and self-esteem, as well as the skills to build positive relationships with peers and adults within the school community due to various difficult life experiences and living in trauma. Despite these many challenges, there is an ongoing effort to increase these much needed skills with our students through communication, modeling, and setting high expectations for all learners across our school with shared beliefs and a common language amongst students and staff members, and through our partnership with families; however, progress is slow. We have also engaged our students in the social-emotional learning curriculum to assist with progression.

In addition to continuing to energize this ongoing effort, it is important that we work toward ensuring that all staff members deeply understand and believe that all students can learn and subsequently, from kindergarten to 8th grade, hold high expectations for students regarding their ability to grow into being college and career ready. Hence, there must be a concrete plan for professional development that has well-defined goals and objectives aimed at assisting staff members in the school community to
understand what the college readiness expectations are and to develop the use of common language and practices across the district and within schools.

Creating a Vision for a College and Career Readiness Policy

In order for this policy to be implemented within the district, there are several areas of programming that need to be addressed. These areas include educational activities; professional development for all staff members; workshops for parents to foster stronger relationships, increase parental knowledge of college and career readiness, and to expand their knowledge of the Common Core State Standards; rescheduling to ensure best practices of instructional minutes as well as scheduling efficiency; and an aligned budget to address college and career readiness at all levels in every school. Prior to addressing the program needs, as a district and at the school level, mindsets geared toward developing a college-going culture must be at the forefront of every school. This requires a vision of what this would look like at the school level. A vision has to be created with buy-in from the staff, students, and families to achieve this. Therefore, as a school community, we would have to create a vision for a college and career ready school with expectations and non-negotiables for students, staff, and families. While this is the critical work needed at the school level, there continues to be a need for district level direction regarding practices and common language among all schools.

Milner (2015) explored several indicators of a framework that should be implemented to assist with limiting the number of students in poverty through educational practices. Elements of this framework include: (a) providing additional people (human capital)—school principals, teachers, social workers, counselors, tutors, and community members—to supplement student learning and social development in
high-poverty schools (in every classroom), a recommendation that Noguera has consistently found to be essential to improving student outcomes; (b) developing relevant training and support opportunities for the increased human capital and also for educators who are periodically in the school/district, such as substitute teachers, community members serving as mentors, and other school volunteers; (c) securing ongoing professional development for educators (teachers, librarians, counselors, coaches, leaders) to enhance their instructional capacities and practices; (d) increasing funding and resources to support afterschool and out-of-school programs that advance student learning and social development as well as assist their families; and (e) examining the progress of students from various racial and ethnic groups living in poverty in order to pinpoint what forms of support work best and for which groups of students (Milner, 2015, p. 39).

Creating a vision for a college and career ready culture in a school would first begin with meeting with all stakeholders to inform them of what a college- and career-going culture consists of in a school. In the “Principal Evaluation Rubric” from the Office of Accountability-Educator Effectiveness, the district has provided Competency C—“Builds a Culture Focused on College and Career Readiness.” “The Principal works with staff and community to build a culture of high expectations and aspirations for every student by setting clear staff and student expectations for positive learning behaviors and by focusing on students’ social-emotional learning” (CPS, 2015b, p. 1). This directive is in place to assist school principals to self-evaluate their schools regarding a college going culture and it would definitely be a clear launching point for school leaders.
Additionally, further support would be required to assist instructional leaders with distinct outcomes for this work in their schools.

Educational Programming and Contributors to Policy Implementation

*Intervention programming*

As we begin to think about educational activities that would support this policy implementation, one should consider the educational programming in schools that have a large population of students that is underperforming academically, especially in an underperforming school. The programming suggestions include educational activities that would benefit students being college and career ready. This programming includes, but is not limited to, reading, writing, and mathematical programs before, during, and after school. Critical to the success of such programs is ensuring that through their teaching, all teachers are exposing students to grade level appropriate standards-based learning utilizing the Common Core State Standards. This effort begins with collaborating and working with the school’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to identify a curricular program that will address the needs of college and career readiness aligned with the CCSS. This work includes making certain that we work with our primary students, pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade for grade level readiness prior to exiting the grade, using researched best practice instruction and curriculum programming. Work with the ILT is also required to identify subgroups of students that would benefit most from additional support in the classroom, such as intervention periods during the school day and additional staffing to support the educational programming for struggling readers, writers, and mathematicians. Teachers will be charged with identifying students who would benefit from additional educational activities. This involves obtaining student
information to assist with designing professional learning plans for the students who are struggling most as well as for the students in need of enrichment teaching. Often times, due to limited instructional strategies and unclear teaching methods of differentiating instruction in classes, teachers often resort to “teaching to the middle” in their classes. This common practice limits the potential of growing students academically at their individual pace; this, in turn, leads to more students having learning deficits and not being college and career ready due to the unintentional lack of support from their teachers.

As we shift our instructional practices to support the teaching of the CCSS, our students will be taught in a manner that would be beneficial for every learning.

If we use the standards as our guide, we can teach all students equitably. The risk is our focus will shift to the standards and away from the child. With the tools of differentiated instruction, we can keep the focus where it belongs and take each student as far as he or she can go. (Lopez-Stafford Levy, 2016, p. 164)

As part of this policy implementation, it is important to address the educational activities that will fully support all students being college and career ready at all levels of their educational journey. When considering elementary school college and career readiness, as an instructional leader, it is important to meet the needs of the learners, including struggling learners, diverse learners, and those students who would benefit from enrichment educational activities and programs. Struggling learners would best benefit from ensuring that Multi-tier Systems of Support (MTSS) is in place at the start of each school year. When implementing MTSS, which is a state mandate and one of the district’s new priorities, I work with the MTSS team to ensure that we have interventions
in place for both reading and mathematics. To elaborate, in our master schedule, I have worked to schedule an intervention block in the schedules of all students K–8th grade during the school day to allow for the instructional programming for both reading and mathematics for a 30 minute interval. In addition to this and in accordance with the directive from the Chicago Board of Education, every school is required to have an intervention block for 30 minutes per day for every grade level. To assist in providing instructional programming for this designated time, it would be beneficial for schools to invest in online intervention software programs. Additional staff members may need to be employed and required to teach direct instruction for reading such as the Leveled Literacy Intervention program by Fountis and Pinnel, Read 180 by Scholastics, and other various intervention programs aimed at decreasing the achievement gap in reading at the elementary school level. These educational programs have been researched and proven successful for student outcomes toward grade level readiness which in turn transcends to college and career readiness when implemented with fidelity.

*Supplemental programming and creating a culture of readiness*

In addition to the intervention educational programs, ongoing supplemental programming should be implemented throughout the school year to assist with a college-going culture such as before school, after school, and Saturday enrichment programming. In addition to these programs, an early intervention program for students in kindergarten through 2nd grade will assist with combatting the readiness issue as well as closing the various deficiency gaps our students who enter pre-kindergarten and kindergarten have in language acquisition. When considering implementing educational programs for kindergarten through 8th grade students, the instructional leader should work with the
instructional leadership team as well as the teachers to tier the students according to student assessment data so as to maximize the instructional learning paths for each individual student. Tiering the students academically will assist with creating instructional learning plans that would ensure that every student will obtain the required skills, strategies, and concepts to assist with college readiness. Each educational program, whether or not it is geared to struggling learners or students at or above grade level, would be beneficial for all learners. These additional programs will assist students with retaining the instructional content taught in school as well as reduce the learning loss that occurs over the summer. Due to the fact that there are a significant number of students in schools within the district from low-income homes or who may be classified as Students in Temporary Living Status (STLS), these living situations may not be ideal places in which to engage in homework, so studying after school in an after school program would assist with reinforcing previously taught information and completing homework assignments. This will also afford the students an opportunity to feel successful outside of the school day.

*Parents and partnerships*

As discussed, educational programs to support this policy implementation can take form using a number of methods; but beyond the method, school leaders should also consider how to involve families in understanding what college and career readiness is and in learning the benchmarks for student achievement at every level. A priority outcome for this policy implementation should be ensuring that parents and guardians are educated on the requirements and criteria for entering the highest-ranking high schools in the district as well as requirements for college acceptance. The more we educate parents
on the importance of college and career readiness, the better the opportunities are for student success as well as increased parent partnerships at the school and district levels.

Parents are also interested in assisting their children to obtain better educational opportunities that are not limited to selective enrollment, magnet, and or classical schools. However, for low-income parents who have limited educational resources, assisting their child(ren) with becoming college and career ready could be a hindrance for some of them. In light of the importance of providing educational programming for students, it is essential that elementary schools consider partnerships with community organizations, universities, and high schools that can possibly aid the school in providing programs that expose our students and perhaps parents to the importance of being college and career ready. Furthermore, educators want to ensure that students and parents are able to comprehend and visualize the skills and knowledge needed to work towards the trajectory of entering college or a career. Hence, it is essential to foster stronger relationships with parents and increase their knowledge regarding college and career readiness, along with obtaining more in-depth information on the Common Core State Standards.

Attaining partnerships with nonprofit organizations and universities with the schools will lead to numerous opportunities for students and their families. Additionally, these partnerships will provide educators with another lens on how to prepare and engage in more intentional conversations with students through real-world experiences about college readiness. Through these ongoing partnerships, educators will have an opportunity to participate in professional development, professional learning communities, and possibly course work geared toward district-wide efforts related to
college and career readiness. Figure 6 displays a graphic summary of the people who would be needed to contribute to actualizing this policy.

Figure 6. Contributors involved in implementing a college and career readiness plan. (Learning First Alliance, 2016)

Developing an Action Plan for Implementation

Staff development

As we work to implement this policy, it is important to consider the staff developmental needs for the school. A staff development blueprint would have to be formed based on a needs assessment of the school and the district as a whole. As an instructional leader, I am aware of the importance of building the capacity of staff members that will enable them to assist with student growth.
As our country, state, and district work to shift instructional teaching and learning toward the Common Core State Standards, providing educators with the necessary training to shift their instruction as well as gain an in-depth knowledge of what college and career readiness actually is at all levels of education should be at the forefront of the work we engage in daily. With this in mind, a professional development plan over the course of a school year will need to be mapped out by each quarter, a development plan that addresses the instructional priorities with the following points of reference: (a) teacher look-fors, (b) teacher outcomes, (c) teacher evidence, (d) student look-fors, (e) student outcomes, and (f) student evidence. This plan will need to include an intentional timeline with check-in dates for evidence of the work or theory in action in each classroom across the school as a whole.

Peer observations of instructional practices regarding the classroom environment and classroom instruction will be scheduled for all educators in grades pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. These observations would be aligned to the Core Actions through Achieve The Core which is an observation and reflection tool that assist teachers with building their understanding and experience with the CCSS aligned to their instructional practices in both English language arts and mathematics. During this phase, teachers will utilize an observation tool and protocol to assist with guiding the peer observation for best practices. Observations will be based on trends across the school and individual teacher needs. In addition to this work, educators will be asked to attend professional learning communities throughout the school year utilizing an anchor text to assist them with theory in action within the school to push the instructional practices as well as develop common school-wide language and practices as aligned with instruction.
Time schedules

Time schedules are another important component of the policy I am advocating for schools. Ensuring that school schedules are aligned with specific frameworks and criteria would assist in ensuring that we are addressing the areas of need in order for us to support a college-going and career-ready culture. The schedule would take into consideration before school programs and during school and after school hours. Every minute within the school day should be taken into consideration as we work to build a college and career-ready culture. Focusing attention on the schedule will assist teachers and students with closing the achievement gap for low-income students in neighborhood schools.

Chicago Public Schools mandated a longer school day as well as required instructional minutes for English language arts (ELA), mathematics, social science, and science. This included a 120 minute requirement for ELA in kindergarten through 5th grade and 90 minutes for 6th–8th grade. Mathematics would consist of a 60 minute requirement from kindergarten through 8th grade. Included in every schedule is an intervention block that required an additional 30 minute block for ELA or math in kindergarten through 8th grade, schools were able to decide which area focus for intervention they wanted to include based on school needs. Schedules would also include opportunities for teachers to collaborate within their grade levels to dialogue about student progress, curriculum, and methods to involve parents in their child’s educational process. Additionally, on a weekly basis, teachers, education support staff, and administrators will work in partnership, review student work samples, and plan instruction aligned with the CCSS for at least 60 minutes during this designated
professional development. This work will also include reviewing instructional videos to assist with shifting instructional delivery towards teaching the CCSS, combing through unit plans in ELA and math to assist with understanding student misconceptions and other instructional priority foci, reviewing student work samples for alignment to the standards-based objective, as well as disaggregating data of interim assessments and district assessments.

Additional time should also be allocated for after school professional development opportunities for teachers to engage in building their capacity regarding meaningful learning, instructional practices, and developing teacher understanding of what it means to be college and career ready at every school level in elementary and high schools. Included in this work will be a focus on creating a college-going culture in the elementary school setting. This creates a professional community that Payne identifies as a high-impact instructional program one of the big six.

The scheduling items that have been discussed are just a few of the areas of concentration within a school. Scheduling consideration should likewise be given to additional instructional programming before and after school to address the needs of our students to prepare them towards college and career readiness. Essentially, in struggling neighborhood schools, most after school and before school intervention programming targets and focuses on our most struggling students. This leaves a small population of students in the school who are functioning at grade level or college readiness according to our district-wide assessment isolated from additional academic opportunities to assist them with maintaining their academic strengths or increasing their academic knowledge that would move them to the next tier in their learning. In the same way, we observed a
tremendous decrease in our population of students who were reading, writing, and performing math tasks at or above grade level in grades 2 through 8. This was due to our teachers not being equipped with strategies to differentiate and scaffold instruction, or provide enrichment opportunities at both the teaching and administrative levels. Therefore, in the 2016–2017 school year, we were intentional in providing a before school program for our “College Scholars.” This program was offered three days a week for 45 minutes prior to the start of the school day for students in grades 4 through 8. The students are engaged in academic tutoring. This aligns to Payne’s (2008) first high-impact instructional program characteristic of the “The Big Six”: Instructional time is protected and extended.

Scheduling and creating times for instructional programming can be challenging for some school leaders. Therefore, when considering scheduling and timing for programs, schools should employ stakeholders within the school to disaggregate data regarding academic and social-emotional learning to determine the best programs for after and before school time. More importantly, time should be provided for enrichment and intervention opportunities throughout the school day. Allowance for scheduling efficiency is seldom thought of when constructing schedules for diverse learners. Often, when reflecting on school scheduling needs, we leave to chance diverse learners’ needs as a last minute thought and option. As a best practice, diverse learners should be scheduled as a priority so as to better address their needs. Subsequently, having the efficacy that diverse learners are able to reach college and career readiness is a direct outcome of the services we provide in the schools via time schedules and programming for our most at-risk students who have been identified and have Individual Learning
Plans on record. The guidelines from a school district in Maryland address effective scheduling for students with special needs:

Because the range of instructional needs of students with disabilities varies, the master schedule must be flexible to ensure access to consultation, resource, co-taught, and self-contained options. Both the special education and ESOL [English Speakers of Other Languages] teams are central to ensuring that the school’s master schedule is designed to provide the necessary time and structure for their students’ programming. (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2009, p. 7)

Unfortunately, in many schools, it is prevalent that diverse learners are often an afterthought, with some educators thinking with the mindset that the majority of the students will not achieve college or career readiness during their educational experience in elementary or high school. According to the United States Embassy (2013), social perceptions toward those with impairments are major determinants of whether the disable are provided equal access to education. When parents, school administrators and community members believe that impairments make a child less worthy of being educated, or less able to benefit from education, it is unlikely that children with disabilities will be given equal access to education. (para. 3)

On the other hand, if funding for efficient scheduling through appropriate time allocations were customary, we know the outcomes would be much more positive for our most at-risk students in the city of Chicago. Figure 7 enumerates Payne’s (2008) “The Big Six”: Characteristics of High-Impact Instructional Programs in Urban Contexts, which correlate with various points previously discussed.
The ongoing conversations regarding the education budget crisis, limited funding from the State of Illinois, and the Chicago Public Schools deficit starkly acknowledge that there are limited financial resources to assist with strengthening the focus on college and career readiness. As with any policy implementation or initiative, program budgets have got to be given serious consideration. Working within a school district that is in a fiscal crisis with major funding cuts, deficits, and financial turmoil, determining program funding can be very difficult for many instructional leaders as they struggle to focus on defining college and career readiness at all levels in a school. Nevertheless, it remains important to prepare students to be college and career ready, especially when focusing on our most needy high-poverty schools that have student populations performing well below the academic standards as defined by the state on the PARCC exam (not the school district’s NWEA assessment which also indicates below-grade-level performance), due to the low expectations some classroom teachers have for these students.

\textbf{Figure 7.} Characteristics of high-impact instructional programs in urban contexts. (Payne, 2008)

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\textbf{Characteristics of High-Impact Instructional Programs in Urban Contexts} \\
\hline
1. Instructional time protected or extended \\
2. Intellectually ambitious instruction \\
3. Professional community (teachers collaborate, have a collective sense of responsibility) \\
4. Academic press combined with social support \\
5. Program coherence (i.e., institutional focus; are we all on the same page?) \\
6. Teacher “quality” / diagnostic ability \\
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Because of these fiscal challenges, more than ever, serious attention must be paid to creating a program budget that will effectively prepare every child to be college and career ready at every level, especially in elementary schools. To aid in this effort, this advocated policy proposes that administrators fiscally plan for five important areas:

1. Plan for the professional development for all staff, with specific emphasis on teachers. This professional development would also link to partnerships with consultants, universities, and others entities that could assist with shifting teacher instruction to meet the needs of the CCSS and a college-going culture.

2. Fiscally plan to incorporate additional educational programs that include instructional curriculum material, supplies, as well as supplemental materials and assessments aligned to CCSS quarterly.

3. Budget for technology equipment and software licensures that will support programming for this advocated policy.

4. Fiscally plan to provide monetary compensation for teachers who will be engaged in additional teaching opportunities aimed at academically moving all students, including the most challenging students, toward college and career readiness.

5. Financially plan on to support creating a college-going culture where the school community addresses the whole student academically, along with their social-emotional learning needs.

I will elaborate on these five budgetary areas and, a detailed plan will be forthcoming that will outline and address the budget needs for this advocated policy implementation.
Regarding the first area of professional development for all staff, with specific emphasis on teachers’ need for increased instructional capacity, this would also include partnerships with consultants, universities and other entities to assist with shifting teacher instruction to meet the needs of the CCSS and a college-going culture. Teachers would need to be compensated for their required attendance at professional development opportunities. Therefore, per the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) contract, teachers are to be paid the non-instructional rate of $39.11 per hour. Prior to the school year, a professional development (PD) plan should be established to align the school’s instructional priorities with the PD workshops offered during the school day and after school. This would allow for a further focused comprehensive program to align to the goals of the school. On a quarterly basis, teachers should be encouraged to engage in 10 hours of professional development at the school level, and at least 16 hours at the district level. However, the Chicago Public Schools would have to ensure that the PD is also aligned across the district, is content heavy, and is presented in a meaningful manner that allows teachers and other educators in school buildings to have the opportunity implement the content in their classrooms and schools.

Based on the size of the school and the total number of teachers that are identified for the PDs and are required to attend, schools should plan for a minimum of $45.56 per hour in their budgets. In addition, the number of required sessions for professional development and the outcomes need to be taken into consideration. Over the course of a school year, a professional development plan would have to be shared with staff at the beginning of the school year that covers the following touch points: (a) the outcomes of the professional development, (b) the instructional implementation, (c) evidence of
student learning, and (d) evidence of college and career readiness with benchmarks at every grade level. Setting the course plan and organizing the professional development opportunities into segmented pieces over the course of a school year would enable educators to see the bigger picture of the learning outcomes and the expectations for learning at various phases of the school year.

Regarding the second area of budgeting for additional programs, this is another difficult area because funding for public education and education reform challenges are facing some states and school districts. Nonetheless, funding for additional educational programs needs be in place for this policy implementation plan to be successful, and this includes instructional curriculum material and supplies as well as supplemental materials and assessments aligned to the CCSS quarterly. Educational programs for pre-kindergarten through 8th grade would need to parallel the standards at each grade level. Ensuring that the curriculum materials are a good fit for the school demographics and population is equally important. School administrators must begin to plan for a budget that provides the supports needed to establish and maintain a college- and career-readiness culture in the school. The budget should be inclusive of curriculum programs, an assessment measure, as well as materials and supplies that will support the teaching in the programs. The supplies needed for students to be successful in school, despite their home environment and family economics, should also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, attention should be given to fiscally securing additional staff so as to effectively support this policy implementation at the school level. This may include the hiring of intervention specialists for reading and mathematics, guidance counselor assistants, and finally additional teachers or instructor assistants. This will provide more
intentional support to the students who are working toward college and career readiness. Conley offered ideas on the key skills all students need and suggested that college and career readiness goes beyond the foundational content knowledge that is common across a range of programs. Conley (2014) found that

the elements shared most consistently are the learning skills all students need to be ready for a variety of postsecondary learning environments:

- Study skills,
- Time management skills,
- Goal orientation,
- Persistence (also called tenacity, determination and grit),
- Ownership of learning (or human agency). (p. 42)

These skills are essential to the success of students and often require the intentional assistance of guidance counselors and assistants. Conley also noted a several other important skills such as student self-awareness of content learning and help seeking, which is described as students having the ability to obtain the necessary resources when need be to assist them, and technological proficiency, knowing how to use a variety of technology tools effectively and appropriately.

The third budgetary area, technology, addresses the fact that there are several underperforming schools and neighborhood schools that lack the needed updated technology and equipment to provide students with a different, more impactful learning experience. The integration of technology into content areas assists with increased student engagement and academic achievement. According to Apple Computer Inc. (2002),
at-risk students show substantial improvement when technology is introduced into their curriculum. Experts believe the reason for this is that technology provides educators with a way to individualize and customize the curriculum to match learners’ developmental needs and also provide a nonthreatening and motivating environment for repetitious learning tasks. (para. 4)

Students should be afforded the opportunity to work on and with devices such as Chromebooks, laptops, and iPads throughout the school day to enhance their learning. In most neighborhood and underperforming schools, students are limited to encounters with technology through a technology class where they work on online software or web-based reading and mathematics programs once or twice a week during their special classes, which are only 60 to 64 minutes during the school day. Because so many students attending these schools are in homes with limited resources and have significant learning deficits prior to attending kindergarten, these students should have multiple opportunities and resources at their disposal to narrow the achievement gap and prepare them for being college ready and beyond. Moreover, administrators of schools should give careful thought to creating a three to five year technology program for the school which may be viewed in the following manner:

- Pre-kindergarten to 2nd grade students—one-to-one iPAD Digital Device Learning for each student for a significant portion of the school day. Students would have the opportunity to explore and engage in independent learning time through language development, mathematics, and world experiences of geography, sciences, and current events. Specific applications and online opportunities would have to be researched and reviewed for implementation.
This will increase these students’ vocabulary knowledge as well as expose them to different experiences that they may not necessarily be exposed to due to their community, family background, and economic status.

- Third to 8th grade students—individualized Chromebooks for digital device learning to be utilized during their school day while in content classes. Teachers would have to determine the best method to increase student engagement through specific applications, web-based programs, software applications, podcasts, and online programs that would increase critical thinking skills as well as increase students’ exposure to experiences that expand the teaching and learning in the classroom on units in various subjects. However, ongoing conversations will be required to remind teachers that the increased technology is not intended to replace authentic teaching and learning on any grade level during the school day. Science and mathematics content area teachers in middle school will have the opportunity to integrate iPADs in the classroom for digital learning.

An assessment of the technology equipment in the school would need to be undertaken to determine the required updates needed in order to have a more sophisticated technology program that would be compatible with emerging new programs and testing requirements. Unfortunately, most computer labs in underperforming schools are outdated and rarely allow for compatibility with new programs or software. There were many schools in the district that were faced with technology challenges when implementing the PARCC assessment due to technology issues with old equipment and the inability to update. Planning for and undertaking an ongoing, methodical assessment
would assist with eliminating a number of technology issues and challenges and prevent this kind of experience.

The three-to-five-year technology plan will outline teacher requirements for professional development to ensure best practices and effective use of technology equipment, applications, web-based programs, software, and other instructional tools. An instructional tool for walk-through observations of technology usage in classrooms should also be a part this plan. Student outcomes and evidence at every level would be captured utilizing this tool. Subsequently, evidence of student learning and mastery of CCSS using a progress monitoring tool would be required in the plan to determine efficacy. In addition to students engaging in teaching and learning through digital learning in the classroom, they will continue to have the opportunity to participate in a technology class during the school day as a special class.

Partnering with parents is a significant piece in this plan and promoting parental involvement is important as well. School administrators should inform parents of how this increased technology would ultimately benefit their children’s learning experiences during the school day. Technology classes and workshops geared toward parental education would be beneficial in assisting them with understanding the requirements and expectations for their children regarding the use of technology at every grade level. Another essential point is that parents may not be familiar with the technology plan that will be set in place or the outcomes. Parents may not have first-hand knowledge of the various devices, equipment, programs and software. An introduction to these tools and programs would actually provide them with insight into their child’s digital educational program. Tips and advice as to how parents can best monitor their child’s usage of
technology from a cyber-safe prospective can assist them with more intentional monitoring in the home. Hence, parents and guardians will be engaged in training sessions on the devices, programs, and software. This will provide them with an experience that offers more insight into digital learning. In addition, this hands-on training may peak their interest in investing in technology in their home to increase both the parent and student knowledge of the digital learning side.

The fourth budgetary area of funding for compensating teachers for engaging in additional teaching opportunities to assist with academically moving all students towards college and career readiness should be planned for. In order to compensate teachers for providing additional services in an extended school day program, an instructional leader must budget for supplemental costs. For example, according to the CTU contract, a teacher must be paid $45.55, which is the after school instructional rate of pay.

Therefore, if a program is in progress for 30 weeks at three times per week with eight teachers teaching additional instruction, on average, a school can anticipate an average cost of $65,592.00 for budgeting purposes. However, these costs could possibly be decreased based on the number of teachers selected and the number of days the additional support program would be offered.

These additional teaching opportunities include before school tutoring, after school tutoring, and weekend academic enhancement programs to increase student achievement and target specific students’ skills and concept deficits as aligned to both the district required assessment Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA/MAP) for students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade, and the state required Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)
for students in 3rd through 8th grades. The additional teaching opportunities will provide support for students as well as offer teachers additional time to decrease student deficits through targeted instruction. Furthermore, these additional teaching opportunities will allow for increased student achievement and exposure to content beyond their experiences during the regular school day. Students in underperforming neighborhood schools and from low-income families would benefit from attending additional programming, both academic and enrichment, which would assist them in becoming more well-rounded and informed students.

The fifth budgetary area of focusing on creating a college-going culture, where the school community addresses the whole student academically as well as their social-emotional learning needs in a school, can be a bit challenging. Budget considerations should be preplanned and include (a) curriculum, (b) instructional resources, (c) the social-emotional component, and (d) supplemental programs. A curriculum aligned to CCSS in both reading and math could cost approximately $15,000.00–$30,000.00, depending on the publishing company. Supplemental instructional resources aligned to CCSS should be both digital and non-digital. Digital programs, for example, could be purchased at a flat rate of $19.95–$30.00 per student, depending on the software company. Budgeting for the social-emotional learning component can vary, depending on the resources that are needed. For example, in the school I lead, we utilize the Second Step program, which is designed to teach students strategies that are aimed at listening, paying attention, and teaching students to control their behavior and get along with others. The cost of this program can vary based on the grade levels targeted and could range from approximately $1,200.00–$4,300.00. There are additional supplemental
programs that instructional leaders can consider as well based on the funding available to them, and this is discussed in the section dealing with program budgets.

Working with a school team to plan out this budgeting and implementation process, based on outcomes and next steps, can be aided by situating the progressive tasks in perspective. Conley (2010) described how schools should move to improve their programs systemically in ways that lead toward higher levels of preparation for postsecondary learning:

This process begins by developing a profile of the school’s current capacity to enable students to become college ready, including analysis of which types of students have the opportunity to reach readiness levels. Next, the school identifies and commits to outcome measures of success that provide a clear target against which progress can be measured. This is followed by a consideration of the gap between current practice and desired outcomes along with a determination of the capacity the school has to close the gap and meet the target. (p. 177)

Conley further explained each one of these four essential dimensions of college readiness. These are key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual and awareness skills. Administrators can also begin Conley’s improvement process in their own schools and plan accordingly based on the school’s profile. As of 2017, as a school district, schools’ instructional programs are based on the Chief Network Office decisions; therefore, there are various instructional programs in numerous parts of the school system. However, regardless of the instructional programming, it should measure up to the following four essential dimensions of college readiness which include key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic
behaviors, and college knowledge. Based on the outcome, a plan should be devised to provide the greatest improvements for a college-going culture in the school. When thinking about identifying outcome measures of success, school administrators and the instructional leadership teams should determine which goals they will set based on the school’s capacity to create a college-going culture. These goals should include student academic behaviors and data as well as teacher practices and behaviors. Once the goals are established, the team can be very specific with respect to the areas that will be focused on to meet the goals. This includes determining what progress measures should be employed to assist with identifying success toward the established goals.

Consideration should be provided as to how the district can support the actions and implementation of a more intentional college-going culture within a school, in addition to looking into student academic behaviors and data and teacher practices and behaviors. There are several methods by which the district can assist with school efforts in terms of this process. This assistance includes schools having access to and using the instructional support leaders (ISL) and data strategists within the Chief Network Office as well as other district departments and offices. Instructional leaders should also consider support from various departments within the district such as; the Office of College and Career Success, which focuses on wraparound services for students in grades K–12 to keep students engaged in school and on track for success. The district’s Office of Core Curriculum and Academic Programs can assist with content area support in literacy, mathematics, science, social science, arts, libraries and civic engagement/service learning information. The Office of Diverse Learner Supports and Services can assist with ensuring that special education and interventions, with full compliance, are available for
diverse learners. The assistance of the Office of Early College and Career Education, which focus on career and technical education (CTE) and dual credit and enrollment opportunities for students, can be sought. The Office of Literacy as well as the Office of Magnet, Gifted, and International Baccalaureate provides additional support to school programs of magnet, gifted and international baccalaureate status. The Office of Teaching and Learning provides ongoing support and trainings for teachers and administrators so they are better able to provide quality learning experiences to students. There are several other district supports that can be leveraged to assist school administrators and instructional leadership teams with creating and supporting a college-going culture in a school for effective change. Accessing these additional resources to support improvements in schools can lead to the changes necessary to focus on college and career readiness with students and staff members. Additional support from external partnerships within the district as well as outside of the district area can lead to the changes a school wants to incorporate based on the goals set for the school that are not just limited to student academic behaviors and data and teacher practices and behaviors.

An essential factor that schools need to identify in order to prepare for college and career readiness is identifying the gaps in the process for our students and within our systems of practice. The gaps in the college and career readiness of our students can be found in their less than adequate academic language, higher-order skills, academic behaviors, and real-world applications. “These four attributes both define a college and career ready student and demonstrate the gaps within student abilities. Closing these gaps truly is a moral and economic imperative of our nation’s schools” (Westover, 2012, p. 12). Therefore, an analysis of the schools current data regarding college and career
readiness is to be disaggregated to assist with prioritizing actions that will lead to a well-defined implementation plan. There are several key points of data that should be examined. To begin with, one should consider the students’ academic behaviors and data. Student academic behaviors and data allow for more intentional planning aimed at uncovering what opportunities students lack and then providing for opportunities they should have in order to reach college readiness. A comprehensive plan needs to be in place if students are to be effectively assisted with being on track for college readiness. On-track data include a student’s grades in core subject areas and their attendance in school. The relevant data to disaggregate include student school attendance and the number of students with failing grades of D and below in both reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8. With regard to high school students on track for measurement for college and career readiness, a review of the outlined components for 9th through 12th grade will have to be reviewed, communicated, and monitored for student progress.

Student attendance is the other data point to examine when determining if a student is on the path toward college readiness. Counselors in the schools should have a progress monitoring tool as well as a concrete program and systems of support to aid students with their personalized learning paths to be on track towards college and career readiness.

A school needs only to assess its students’ abilities and performance using these attributes to identify the extent to which student cohorts are prepared for college and ready for the workforce, and in doing so assess the effectiveness of its student support systems. (Westover, 2012, p. 13)
Additionally, teacher practices and behaviors data will shed light on the next steps to support teachers professionally in order to be successful in the school community. The instructional leadership team along with the assistance of both external and internal partnerships should focus their attention on Conley’s (2010) four dimensions of college and career readiness rather than just learning to pass exit examinations.

*The Implementation Action Plan in action*

Successfully implementing an action plan is much like the creative process of weaving wherein the artist reflects on what she wants the end product to look like, plans in advance so as to ensure that all the essential materials that are needed are at hand, and then goes about using all of her skills to make the meaningful connections that will bring her vision to life. So too is the work of envisioning, planning, financing, and finally actualizing a college and career readiness policy implementation plan. Figure 8 visually depicts this policy implementation process and the interacting components that are critical to its success.
Figure 8. Policy Implementation Action Plan critical components.
SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

The implementation of a successful policy of college and career readiness preparation accountability will need to be determined by having key factors and outcomes to observe regarding this policy. The success of this policy implementation requires the district, administrators at the school level, parents, and students to monitor the progress and evaluate the outcomes and results of the policy. Given the importance of monitoring, this section discusses the policy’s assessment plan. Examining the number of stakeholders responsible for the policy’s implementation as well as the administrators who will be held accountable for reporting on its progress is essential in this policy assessment plan. This will be explored through obtaining a clear definition of college and career readiness correlated with the expectations in elementary and secondary schools, building the professional capacity of teachers and administrators through staff development, providing additional activities and programs for students through effective schedules, program budgets, and progress monitoring of the programs.

Student Progress Data

Evidence of this policy implementation indicators of success will be contingent upon the number of students we detect making progress towards the identified definition of college and career readiness, the test scores of students living in improvised communities and attending underperforming neighborhood schools, the number of students attending more selective enrollment high schools as well as college, parent awareness of student progress towards college and career readiness, the increased teacher capacity towards teaching students as aligned with CCSS, as well as understanding and utilizing the four attributes of college and career ready students in classrooms on a daily
basis which are student academic behaviors, higher-order skills, academic language, and real-world application. Observing these indicators in schools and with students will provide the district with an overall measure of a college and career readiness progression in schools.

As a district, it is important to determine the number of students we detect making progress towards the identified definition of college and career readiness of the students in the district. Once the district has established a common definition of college and career readiness for all students in all schools across the district with identified benchmarks, instructional leaders will be able to identify those students making academic progress in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade towards the matrix. This should include assessments provided at the beginning and end of the school year to determine this progress. Standardized test scores across the state and district have been the key indicators in the past that determined student, school, and district success. However, these scores do not lend themselves to the whole portfolio of whether or not a student will be college and career ready or successful in the next phase of their educational journeys.

With this being said, the test scores of students living in improvised communities and attending underperforming neighborhood schools will need to display improvements and a record number of these students being enrolled in the selective enrollment, magnet, and gifted program schools. Tracking these data of student enrollment can begin at the school level with the counselor and then shared via tracking documents within the Network Office and Central Office to assess progress. These data for tracking can include the following information points:

- Student ethnicity
• Student gender
• Student grade
• Student socioeconomic status
• Student neighborhood
• Student neighborhood school
• Student selected enrollment, gifted, or magnet school option acceptance

Once these data are obtained, the district and or networks can engage in a deeper dive to obtain information about how the particular “feeder” schools that have significant increases in their students being admitted to selected enrollment, gifted, or magnet schools shifted their instructional practices, culture, climate, and student mindsets that led to these opportunities. In addition, the Office of College and Career Readiness, College and Career Success and the Office of Accountability would need to track and monitor the progress of the students attending two-year and four-year colleges as well as those students working in careers that the Career and Technical Education (CTE) prepared them for during their studies in the high school. Several CTE individuals would be responsible for tracing and matching students in their areas of study. It begins with the CTE coordinators ensuring that students are matched with meaningful internships that would lead to careers after high school.

Professional Development for Teachers and Administrators

The important efforts directed toward building the professional capacity of teachers and administrators through ongoing staff development is also emphasized in this advocated policy. At the district level, the Office of College and Career Readiness in conjunction with the Office of Teaching and Learning should set the tone regarding the
expectations for administrators to be well versed in the areas of college and career readiness at both the elementary and secondary school levels. To elaborate, the district will have to create, evaluate, and progress monitor the plan for professional development to ensure coherence across the district with school-wide practices and expectations utilizing a tool to capture these data on a regular basis. Instructional leaders at the school level will be responsible for creating and implementing a professional development plan to increase teacher and parent awareness of student progress toward college and career readiness.

Parents and Internal Partners

This initiative and its outcomes should first be outlined by the Office of College and Career Readiness so as to provide guidance to school leaders. In addition, parents need to be informed about how District 299 will include them in preparing their children toward college and career readiness. There are several departments within the district that can assist with educating parents with respect to college and career readiness. These departments include the Office of Local School Councils, College and Career Success and the Office of Family and Community Engagement. Principals and instructional leaders at the school level should consider engaging internal partnerships within the district to assist with providing the best possible programs and ongoing workshops to assist with increasing the capacity of parents to understand this goal. This will also assist with creating and building stronger relationships with parents by informing them about how to become more knowledgeable advocates for their children and their children’s futures. At every school, there would need to be a liaison to assist in this effort.
A team composed of the school’s guidance counselor, a teacher, and the principal and parent liaisons would need to be created to form an organized effort. Each team member will have a role and responsibility to carry out these efforts. Ongoing meetings, workshops, and surveys will assist with obtaining information regarding parental knowledge and awareness of student progress toward college and career readiness. Observing parents engaging and communicating effectively regarding this policy implementation, initiating and advocating for more high-quality programs with regard to their children being college and career ready, along with enrolling them in higher-performing and alternative schools outside of their underperforming neighborhood school will be true indicators of the effectiveness of increasing parental capacity in this area of college and career readiness.

Building Teaching Capacity in Teachers

Assessment is needed to aid in monitoring the increased teacher capacity towards teaching students as aligned with CCSS as well as understanding and utilizing the four attributes of college- and career-ready students in classrooms on a daily basis as described as student academic behaviors, higher-order skills, academic language, and real-world application. The principal, school-based coaches, instructional school leaders (ISL), and the instructional leadership team (ILT) would be responsible for increasing teacher capacity. Several matrixes would be utilized to assist with monitoring and observing the shifts within the classrooms and the schools. To begin, several phases would need to be rolled out in this assessment part of the implementation plan of action in order for a team to view trends toward the intended outcomes. These phases are the following:
• A well-written scope and sequence for the professional development of teachers
• An identified curriculum that lends itself to the Common Core State Standards
• An in-depth understanding and utilization of the four attributes of college and career ready students
• A school-wide philosophy of a college-going culture
• A common understanding and approach to school-wide teaching practices and languages
• Designated time and compensation for after school professional development

Keeping this information in mind and relating it back to the teaching of CCSS, it has been shown that “the most effective urban educators, in every discipline at every grade level, connect the academic rigor of content areas with their students’ lives” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 187). Therefore, there needs to be careful consideration given to the additional educational activities that schools are providing. More importantly, it is essential to align these activities so they fully support college and career readiness for all students, especially diverse learners and struggling students of color within the district. Major focuses of this advocated policy’s assessment plan are progress monitoring and assessing the benefits of these educational programs, mainly interventions, through the collection and reporting of student data.
Efficient Scheduling for Additional Programs

Evidence of the identified additional educational programs contributing to the creation of a college-going culture should be visible through efficient scheduling of the school day that lends itself to intervention blocks, before school programming, after school programming, and utilizing Academic Centers on Saturdays. Students would be expected to follow their personal learning paths as observed based on their individualized academic data during the programs. This additional time will assist with closing various deficiency gaps struggling students have in reading and mathematics that limit their ability to think critically through academic content. Student and school-wide data should be collected and disaggregated based on a tiered system according to students learning paths and grade level bands. Reviewing these data and determining next steps would be a key component of evaluating the outcomes and results of requiring schools to implement additional college and career educational programs, particularly in underperforming schools, that are parallel to specific content and frameworks that support a college-going culture. Examining these data results will also provide insight into the effective utilization of time before, during, and after the school day as this relates to increased student achievement.

Funding

In this advocated policy, funding to support this program budget to assist with every child being college and career ready at every level is essential. Assessing the effects of implementing a professional development plan to build teacher and parent capacities towards college and career readiness through partnerships is also important. The monitoring of these professional development efforts would be conducted through
the Continuous Improvement Work Plan for school, the Area Network Office, and the amount of money spent from NCLB funds for the parental workshop portion and the amount of discretionary funds expended for the teacher portion. The funding of additional educational programs, which includes curriculum material, supplies, and supplemental materials aligned with the CCSS, would be observable and expenditures would be monitored through the Central Office’s approval of spending procedures. Additionally, during instructional rounds, evidence of curriculum and supplemental materials use would be observable during the teaching and learning process. Additionally, increased student achievement on the PARCC assessment would be observed as well as the students’ achievement on the district’s performance tasks.

Updated as well as new technology equipment and software are also critical in order for the district to observe an increase in the number of students being college and career ready. Therefore, instructional leaders would be required to align funding sources with the expected outcomes of digital learning. Personnel from the district’s Informational Technology Systems Department along with the staff from the Office of Teaching and Learning would be required to conduct school audits to determine if a school’s technology program is appropriate to support online teaching and learning through a cohesive digital learning program. Finally, the most central funding target in the budget would be financially supporting a college-going culture where the whole student’s academic and social-emotional learning needs are being addressed. The district would have to provide the funding requirements for Networks and Instructional Leaders prior to the beginning of the fiscal year and monitor this spending. To support this advocated policy, a matrix would need to be created that identifies the non-negotiables in
funding lines with set amounts across the district to ensure fairness and to limit the disparities among schools.
SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

An Escape Route Out of Poverty

The impact of the vision that drives this advocated policy can be immense in terms of the quality of human life. This policy’s goals, when supported by funding, hold the potential to break the deadly cycle of poverty that entraps so many low-income students of color in hopelessness by providing for them an escape route based on the very real promise of creating a meaningful future through postsecondary education and career. When applied on a broader scale, this promise holds true for all students. A college and career readiness policy within Chicago Public Schools for students at every school will increase the number of opportunities students will have to attend higher-performing schools that will lead the way for them to be exposed to college and or be prepared for a career. Providing students with the following educational experiences will have a significant impact; this includes meaningful learning experiences, being taught by educators who have the professional capacity to teach them according to the requirements and key areas that define college and career ready students. In addition, this advocated policy ensures that the resource accountability portion of the policy addresses the areas of need in schools, provides these areas with adequate resources related to the students’ learning needs, thus ensuring equitable access to a high-quality curriculum and instructional materials that are aligned with the CCSS, and provides learning experiences with one-to-one technology, a STEAM focus, and project-based learning. One key factor in this policy is developing well-prepared teachers and other professional staff for all students in settings that allow them to teach students effectively as well as meet their socio-emotional needs.
The adoption of this college and career readiness policy is best and appropriate for all students and families within District 299. This policy adoption will inform and educate parents on the meaning of college and career readiness. In addition, this policy will allow parents to gain more knowledge of the education processes and procedures so they can better understand the performance of their neighborhood schools as well as provide opportunities for their children to be accepted into higher-performing schools outside of their neighborhoods, such as selective enrollment, magnet, and classical schools that will offer more diverse experiences for their children. Another essential point in this policy is the fact that all schools, school leaders, educators, and students will have a common understanding and definition of what college and career readiness actually means. There will be a common definition as well as outcomes and expectations across the school district. With this being said, professional development opportunities must be a priority for the district and its school leaders and teachers. Subsequently, professional development would need to be streamlined across the district with a foundational platform and with equivalent requirements for all educators and schools through an adult learning path as designed by the district. In brief, this policy will definitely allow for more equality, meaningful learning opportunities, and better schools, especially for Black and Hispanic students in struggling, underperforming schools who live in poverty. Moreover, this policy will lead to increased numbers of students in this particular subgroup who will graduate and be college and career ready. The exposure to learning will be high caliber and will mirror the four critical attributes (see Figure 9) that Conley (2010) referred to regarding preparing students for college and career readiness.
and were identified as: “key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual and awareness skills” (p. 31).

![Diagram showing the relationship between contextual skills and awareness, academic behaviors, key content knowledge, and key cognitive strategies.]

*Figure 9.* Four critical attributes of preparing students to be college and career ready. (Conley, 2010)

Another essential point that makes this policy best and appropriate is addressing the issue of resource accountability for all schools, but in particular, struggling schools. Funding schools, especially the lowest performing schools, so that they are able to provide additional learning resources, adult educators, and the needed technology equipment would be of benefit in narrowing or closing the achievement gap that has had a negative and ongoing impact on the lives of poor students. That said, there would have
to be specific guidelines as to how the additional funds should be spent to address this policy’s goal of working toward college and career readiness.

Values at the Center of the Policy

At this center of this advocated policy are the school instructional leaders, teachers, students, and parents. Due to the most recent roll out of the CCSS, several instructional leaders are building their own instructional capacity based on their understanding of what meaningful teaching and learning encompasses at both the elementary and secondary school levels. Instructional leaders understand the importance of the instructional shifts and the demands for high-quality education to progressively move all students toward college and career readiness. However, there have been reflective conversations as to how to lead a team of educators and a school as a whole towards this educational shift and initiative that would improve the quality of education for all students within Chicago Public Schools. “We cannot treat our students as ‘other people’s children’” (Lopez-Stafford Levy, 2016, p. 91). We are reminded that we all have a connection to this work of educating children:

Their pain is our pain. False hope would have us believe in individualized notions of success and suffering, but audacious hope demands that we reconnect to the collective by struggling alongside one another, sharing in the victories and the pain. This solidarity is the essential ingredient for “radical healing.” (Lopez-Stafford Levy, 2016, p. 91)

It has been shown that having instructionally-sound school leaders will lead to a more effective and college-going culture in a school where students can actually envision
themselves as students preparing to enter college and or careers. As described by Carter (2001), there are seven common traits of high-performing, high-poverty schools:

1. Principals must be free. Effective principals decide how to spend their money, who to hire, and what to teach.

2. Principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement. High expectations are one thing—the relentless pursuit of excellence is another.

3. Master teachers bring out the best in a faculty. Improving the quality of instruction is the only way to improve overall student achievement. Teacher quality is the single most accurate indicator of a student’s performance in school.

4. Rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement.

   Modern-day reform jargon speaks of assessment and accountability.

   Principals of high-performing schools speak of testing.

5. Achievement is the key to discipline. A command-and-control approach to discipline is limited by the number of guards you can hire. When self-discipline and order come from within, every extra person is part of the solution.

6. Principals work actively with parents to make the home a center of learning.

   In high-poverty schools, a lack of parental involvement is often the first excuse for poor performance. Effective principals overcome this excuse by extending the mission of the school into the home.

7. Effort creates ability. Time on task is the key to success in school. School is hard work, and great principals demand that their students work hard. (p. 9)
As this advocated policy previously acknowledged and discussed, there are teachers within the district who require additional supports to prepare them with strategies and insight on how to best teach and expose our most struggling students to learning that leads to the highest level of increased student achievement. Dayzia Terry, a then 6th grade student at KIPP DC: Key Academy, Washington, DC made the statement: “Now that Barack Obama is president, I have one question: What does that mean for my education?” When considering her statement, I am sure that many students across the nation had similar questions about how his election to the presidency would change education for students and educators. In her eyes, “the Obama-Biden administration will help me get to college and be able to afford it” (McLaughlin & Kelly, 2009, p. 208). This student felt that Obama’s presidency would mean better-educated teachers for schools that really need them. In addition, the solution to the lack of education effectiveness lies in the Obama administration and every administration thereafter fixing the dropout crisis.

Implementation of the Policy is Consistent With the Vision

The College and Career Readiness Policy presented in this paper envisions that all students within Chicago Public Schools will have access to college and career readiness teaching and learning as well as meaningful opportunities to be exposed to critical and higher-order thinking skills and content. With the actualizing of this policy’s vision, race, poverty, instructional leadership, teacher capacity, and other factors that impede the reality of all students being prepared for college and career will no longer be obstacles, especially for struggling students from low-economic homes. District 299 will obtain a common definition for this readiness along with identified outcomes and benchmarks at every grade level to guarantee that there is commonality and equity of teaching and
learning throughout the district in both underperforming schools and subsequently, performing schools. Socrates is quoted as saying, “All great undertakings are risky, and as they say, what is worthwhile is always difficult” (Plato, 2003, p. 220). Implementing the vision of this policy will be difficult. However, in the long run, the importance of transforming a large urban school district will be beneficial to all stakeholders involved. According to Duncan-Andrade (2009),

as educators, we must take great risks and accept great challenges if we are going to be effective in urban schools. We must confront our failures and know that no matter what we do in our classrooms, there will still be forms of social misery that confront our students. This kind of self-reflection will be painful, but it is necessary all the same. (p. 189)

This policy implementation envisions and plans for these key elements: resource accountability to provide the necessary funding and resource support for the most struggling schools and neighborhoods; meaningful learning through a curriculum that is not watered downed for our most struggling students; and professional accountability and reciprocal comprehensive professional development that is focused on the capacity building of all educators to prepare them for the type of teaching and learning we must consistently see, especially in our most needy schools that are underperforming.

Needs and Concerns of All Stakeholders Are Sufficiently Included

Stakeholders in a school are key players who assist with establishing a successful school that is conducive for all learners, educators, and partners. At the center of this advocated policy are the internal and external partners who are major stakeholders, the students, teachers, parents, and community. Addressing the needs and concerns of
students within the district will be met through the adoption of this College and Career Readiness Policy. This policy is aimed at addressing the absence of a clear plan and matrix or benchmarks that determine if students and or schools are moving students toward college and career readiness. Moreover, the data and information that the district has depended upon thus far for this determination are test scores generated from NWEA/MAP, PARCC, and the On-Track data for freshmen and the high school graduation rates. While this is the case when considering student success, this information lacks an in-depth look at meaningful teaching and learning, teacher capacity, and resources. It has been noted that test scores should not be the only matrix when considering students to be college and career ready. This policy will afford more opportunities for all students, especially students in underperforming neighborhood schools, to be exposed to a curriculum and an environment that provide the types of exposure, opportunities, and tools that students from more affluent schools, neighborhoods, and higher-educated parents are provided with on a daily basis.

The implementation of this policy advocates for the district to mandate that all schools meet all of the policy’s requirements. More importantly, underperforming schools with students of low socioeconomic status and students of color, both Black and Hispanic, would need to have additional support and resources to ensure the effectiveness and success of this policy in these schools. Furthermore, this policy also responds to the academic needs of low-income students who receive less than average teaching and learning experiences. Therefore, District 299 must also address the needs of the teachers, staff, parents, and community members. In the past, the district has not communicated a clear plan of professional development that would meet the needs of instructional leaders,
teachers, and staff with regard to teaching toward college and career readiness. This policy, through its professional development requirement will build the capacity of the educators in the schools. Capacity building in educators will provide the most effective instruction to learners who struggle the most. Additionally, engaging in these professional learning communities will allow educators to take risks, become more honest about their areas in need of growth, and instruct them in how to leverage data and in-the-moment feedback that will enable students to access the learning through the CCSS.

The role of parental education in this policy provides parents with a deeper understanding and knowledge of the Common Core State Standards as well as the meaning of college and career readiness for all students. Providing parents with the most important tools that enable them to become more effective advocates for their child(ren) in the district could be a significant game changer for students from low-income homes headed by parents with limited resources. Through this policy, parents would now know and have the essential information and resources needed to make better and more informed choices when it comes to the selection of schools for their children and to become more vocal when needed with principals and teachers with respect to the content or lack of content that children are exposed to on a daily basis. Equally important, parents would become more conscious of how to best support their children in the home and at school. Moreover, there would be an increased number of positive parental partnerships within the district and in schools.

I believe that community partnerships within District 299 will generate an observable surge of support for this college and career readiness policy for students. For
this reason, there will be additional resources available to students that are directly related to these partnerships based on identified areas such as educational services, social-emotional services, and career services. This policy requires school counselors and administrators to progressively match partnership services with students’ needs at every level within the school to actualize more students being college and career ready. Increasing these partnerships will have to take root at the elementary school level in order for the district to observe a significant increase in readiness at the secondary level. A district-wide matrix would have to be established in order for the Chicago Public Schools to accomplish this.

Traditionally, Chicago’s public schools have not done an effective job educating all students within the district, in particular, educating Black and Hispanic students from low-income homes in underperforming neighborhoods. Thus far, the high school dropout rates continue to be a concern for specific neighborhood high schools, although the district as a whole has observed an increase in the high school graduation rate. The district’s dropout rate underscores the need for a college and career readiness policy for elementary and high schools. Implementation of this policy will begin to plant the seeds of hope for a better future at the elementary level that will grow and be nurtured and come to fruition by the time these students graduate from high school, evidenced in sustained heightened motivation and achievement.

Even though District 299 has established the College and Career Success Department, there appears to be no clear pathway and or district-wide alignment across schools and neighborhoods that would benefit all students. The implementation of this advocated policy fills that void and thereby will benefit all students, parents, educators,
and instructional leaders within District 299. I believe this advocated policy is a modern day embodiment of the old adage: “Give a man [or woman] a fish, and you feed him [or her] for a day. Teach a man [or woman] to fish, and you feed him [or her] for a lifetime.” As an educator, this policy advocacy effort has inspired me and gives me hope for the future, especially the futures of our students living in poverty and their potential, life-enhancing emancipation from the U.S. welfare system.

I believe this advocated policy will assist us with revisiting the importance of educating children of color and breaking barriers of an educational system that has not afforded Blacks and Hispanics the level of challenge needed for them to become critical thinkers who have well-trained educators who teach the skills and present various opportunities for these students to experience success in a large urban area school district. Therefore, we should take account of the words of W. E. B. Du Bois (2016/1905):

And when we call for education we mean real education. We believe in work. We ourselves are workers, but work is not necessarily education. Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have a right to know, to think, to aspire. (para. 10)
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