

## A Portfolio Approach to Partnerships

The goal of a portfolio approach to K–12/college partnerships is to have a set of strategically aligned programs. Individual programs may only address a specific population or priority, but together, the components of a strategic portfolio complement one another and collectively serve the entire student population. The portfolio is curated to meet the full breadth of a community’s priorities for postsecondary transitions.

Not every community has the same capacity or need for alignment, but as you assess your individual partnerships, it is worth considering how well coordinated they are with one another and how directly they are focused on your community’s goals.

- **Level 1 / No Coordination:** One or more partnerships operate, between the college and school districts, but they are not aligned or coordinated in a strategic way toward a shared goal.
- **Level 2 / Institutional Alignment:** Either the college or the school district has aligned all of its partnerships under the umbrella of a common goal and a strategic plan. In these cases, that institution typically takes the lead in assessing the full portfolio of programs and partnerships.
- **Level 3 / Mutual Alignment:** Both partners have jointly determined a common goal, which partnerships are included in their shared portfolio, and how the entire portfolio will be assessed.

A strategic and equity-driven portfolio:

- Does not seek to provide all students with the same or “equal” opportunity but directs resources to overcome structural inequities and gives traditionally underrepresented students the additional support and guidance they may need to access these programs
- Does not simply enroll more students in programs but seeks to use programs as entry points to successful educational and career pathways that ultimately promote social and economic mobility and strengthen communities
- Is not developed in isolation but evolves with a diverse set of stakeholders to promote a sense of shared commitment to supporting students, their families, and the community as a whole



Scan for more information about K-12 Partnership Services  
<https://achievingthedream.org/areas-of-expertise/k-12-partnerships/>

[www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org)

Achieving the Dream’s vision is for every college to be a catalyst for equitable, antiracist, and economically vibrant communities. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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## Building Better Bridges

### ATD’S GUIDE TO K–12/COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS







BUILDING STRONGER K–12/college partnerships is an essential part of ATD’s vision of advancing community colleges as profoundly accessible hubs of learning, credentialing, and economic mobility. Effective partnerships are strategic, center equity, and provide students greater access to education and careers.

This tool is an excerpt from the Building Better Bridges Guidebook, which is designed to help community college leaders respond to the local context of their community as they develop a portfolio approach to equitable K–12 partnerships. No single blueprint will serve every community’s needs, but a consistent set of questions can help a college and its partners assess existing pathways to postsecondary education and determine whether their efforts are leading to the attainment and workforce outcomes they want to achieve.

K–12 and college partnerships are as diverse and varied as the communities they serve, but they generally fall into one of these six categories.

- **College Readiness** (P–12) programs help students gain an awareness of college and a sense of identity as college-oriented students. Activities include exposure to a breadth of careers and the education pathways required for them, as well as developmentally appropriate programming to foster a sense of belonging.
- **Bridge Programs** prepare students for college, typically through summer programs after graduation. However, innovative bridge programs can prepare students for postsecondary success much earlier in their academic careers.
- **Dual Enrollment** refers to a wide range of models in which high school students take individual college courses, including concurrent enrollment, dual credit, early college courses, and other programs. They remain the most common form of partnerships between K–12 districts and colleges, supported in many places by legislation and codified funding models.
- **Early College High Schools** are comprehensive grade 9–12 programs or schools that build college readiness through a scaffolded experience, beginning with exposure to college content and skills and gradually increasing enrollment in college courses.
- **Career Pathways/Career Technical Education** programs introduce students to career pathways with economic value through awareness, advising, and college-level courses in career technical education (CTE) fields.
- **Shared Professional Development** creates opportunities for K–12 counselors and faculty to build a shared understanding of resources available to students in the programs described above and better alignment between high school coursework and the college courses that follow.

# Assess Your College's K-12 Partnerships

Partnership Assessment Area							
Program Type	<b>SHARED VISION</b>  Do your college and K-12 leaders collaboratively articulate a vision for combined impact in their community? Each partner may not have the same primary reason for partnering, but a shared vision maps program objectives to meaningful accountabilities for each partner.	<b>DEPTH OF PARTNERSHIP</b>  Does the partnership cultivate meaningful collaboration among stakeholders? This should lead to sustainable efforts that are supported with sufficient staffing, resources, and information to consistently achieve community objectives.	<b>EQUITABLE ACCESS</b>  Do your leaders seek to expand access to higher education and remove barriers to student participation and persistence? Programs and partnerships should be designed with an equity frame and feature clear, quantifiable targets for expanding access and reducing equity gaps.	<b>STUDENT ENGAGEMENT</b>  Does the partnership help students develop a sense of belonging in programs that meet their academic and career goals? Students should be participating in activities and services that normalize their enrollment in college and receiving holistic support to persist and succeed.	<b>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</b>  Are stakeholders responsive to the needs and context of their community? Partnerships should include both formal and informal roles for community members, and communication should be widely available and accessible.	<b>OUTCOMES</b>  Does the partnership include regular assessments of program quality, equitable access, and student impact? Programs outcomes should be shared regularly with stakeholders and leaders should be willing to make any appropriate changes to increase impact.	
	College Readiness						
	Bridge Programming						
	Dual Enrollment						
	Early College High Schools						
	Career Pathways/ CTE						
	Shared Professional Development						