

# WHO DOES WHAT?

## Findings and Recommendations for Clarifying Roles for Overlapping College and Career Service Providers

### Introduction

This brief is the second in a series of three that report the findings of a study examining promising practices for college and career access providers working in NC high schools. This brief will focus on how clarity on the roles of individual staff members can impact the effectiveness of these individuals in their work. The research team collected and analyzed qualitative data from organizations and school staff working in three high schools in the northwest region of the state. These data show the importance of role clarity on the ability of college and career services staff to collaborate and effectively serve students. Alleghany, Ashe County, and West Wilkes High Schools would all benefit from solidifying the roles and responsibilities of each college and career service staff member and from communicating them to the larger school community.

### Key Points

- When college and career service staff have clearly defined roles, it reduces redundancies in providing services to students and allows them to focus on tasks prioritized in their job description. This in turn frees these staff members to provide more advanced programming to students and their families.
- Many people in and around schools, including principals, district officials, and families, are unclear of the exact responsibilities of different college and career service providers working at the school. Making school staff and families aware of the roles and responsibilities of different college and career support staff could better connect students with necessary resources.
- Formalizing a process by which the roles and tasks of college and career service staff are outlined can be a simple but effective strategy to provide clarity on the roles of these staff members.

### Data and Methods

This study follows up on [an initial study by the Belk Center at NC State University from 2021](#) that investigated how these organizations operate throughout North Carolina. As such, this descriptive investigation should be seen as continuing an initial foray into learning how college and career support organizations partner at the secondary school-level to serve students. The project used a qualitative approach to investigate how different college and career service providers work together to serve students at three high schools in northwestern North Carolina. As discussed in Brief 1, the selected schools differ by their student populations and local context, but they share a strong participation in the Career and College Promise program and many of the same college and career service providers. Based on the data, the research team devised recommendations for developing promising practices for coordinating the work of multiple college and career service providers. For additional detail on methods, see the Appendix.

## Findings

Given the importance of college and career coaching to the development of students themselves and to the economic future of local communities, northwestern North Carolina (NC) has a wide variety of important resources and services to aid in these efforts. These resources to support students in their postsecondary and career plans included faculty and staff within the three high schools chosen as sites for this project—Ashe County High School, Alleghany High School, and West Wilkes High School—as well as staff from Wilkes Community College, and coordinators and coaches from grant-funded projects like Gear Up, Upward Bound, and the College Advising Corps. To be sure, this broad network of people and organizations dedicated to students' college and career success is invaluable and ensures that students have multiple supports as early as middle school and into college.

However, in our interviews with the various staff and stakeholders involved in college and career coaching, many participants described a lack of clarity around which individuals were responsible for particular services within their school. This ambiguity around responsibilities appears to have a ripple of adverse effects that begins with frustration among counselors and career coaching staff, expands to confusion about college and career coaching services among teachers, and ultimately confuses students who are unsure of the resources available to support them. [A separate study of the NC Career Coach program](#) found similar role ambiguity among Career Coaches. Conversely, at high schools where there was a clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities, those working on college and career coaching were able to effectively communicate to others what their roles and goals were, which equipped teachers and school leadership to more efficiently connect students and families to the right resource. Notably, greater clarification of roles also inspired more collaboration among staff, who seemed more aware of where their responsibilities began and ended, and thus were more willing to provide supplementary help when they noticed a gap in services or pool their time and energy together to address particularly complex problems.

Thus institutions with more role clarity around college and career advising were able to both deliver their programming more efficiently and to develop and execute more advanced programming to the benefit of their student populations. Strategies to clarify roles and responsibilities were often quite straightforward and included scheduling regular meetings with college and career advising staff and partners to update colleagues on current projects and goals, collaborating to communicate programs and offerings to students and families, and developing a strategy for onboarding new staff and partners.

## Recommendations

- **REDUCE OVERLAP IN RESPONSIBILITIES AND TASKS OF COLLEGE AND CAREER PROGRAMMING STAFF TO MAXIMIZE THEIR ABILITY TO HELP STUDENTS.**

As multiple participants noted in their interviews, there is an abundance of resources for college and career support. Taking advantage of the full breadth of these resources, however, is hampered by an overlap in responsibilities among college and career staff. To manage this issue, college and career staff should develop a list of unique responsibilities and tasks for each staff member. This list should include duties they will complete throughout the year, such as enrollment in WCC courses, leading FAFSA presentations to families, helping students develop a college and/or career plan, among other tasks. School, district, and WCC administrators should provide input on the responsibilities of different staff members; however, this may be limited by current state legislation.



In general, due to differences in positions and personnel between schools, each school should be given the flexibility to determine these responsibilities. Nevertheless, there are some considerations that might limit this flexibility. One consideration is that some positions might be better suited to take on some roles because of their specific training. WCC Career Coaches who are more familiar with the dual enrollment program, should be responsible for enrolling students in courses at WCC. Similarly, because of their mental health training, guidance counselors should be responsible for attending to the mental health of students. It may still be helpful for other college and career services staff to learn about the dual enrollment program and signs of mental health challenges in order to make referrals to the appropriate staff. Another consideration when it comes to determining roles and responsibilities are the metrics each organization uses to gauge success. Each college and career service providing organization should disclose the different measures it relies on when evaluating whether it has met its goals. For instance, schools may value FAFSA completions more than other organizations. In this case, it might be best to have a school employee, like a guidance counselor, to be responsible for planning FAFSA-related events.

Lastly, some external organizations only work with a subgroup of students. To avoid redundancies in working with students, these subgroups should be discussed and identified when determining the roles and responsibilities of college and career staff members. The process for developing the list of responsibilities and tasks should take place prior to the start of the academic year in order to help staff prepare for their roles and to inform the school community. To avoid confusion during the year, staff members should maintain their responsibilities throughout the year, barring exceptional circumstances. After each year, college and career staff should reflect on whether any changes to these responsibilities should be made.

#### **• CREATE A WRITTEN DOCUMENT DESCRIBING THE SPECIFIC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL-LEVEL COLLEGE AND CAREER STAFF.**

In addition to the organizational chart, a more detailed description of each staff member's responsibilities and tasks will alleviate the confusion of students, families, school administrators, and teachers. It will also be a useful resource for new school staff, especially if they are new to the district or area. This document should be based on the responsibilities and tasks described in the first recommendation for this theme. The most useful document will describe the details of the specific roles and responsibilities in clear and plain language. It may be helpful to include contact information, office location, and how best to reach each individual. Publishing the document on the school website and sending it home to students would increase its accessibility. At the end of each year, pertinent staff should reflect on and make necessary changes to the document.

#### **• CREATE A CLEAR ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF COLLEGE AND CAREER PROGRAMMING STAFF.**

The numerous organizations and staff offering related but different services can create confusion among the school community, according to the data. To address this issue, the research team recommends creating an organizational chart of college and career programming staff at each school. This chart should be developed by school administrators, WCC personnel, and school-level college and career programming staff. The chart should include each staff member's name, position, contact information, their external organization if applicable, and a brief description of roles and responsibilities of each individual position. The organizational chart will serve as an easy reference tool for new school or WCC staff. It could also be used to resolve conflicts or identify the best individual to address novel situations when they arise. The chart should be made available to all school staff and families. It would be helpful to publish the chart on the school's website and send hardcopies to families at the beginning of every academic year. Pairing it with the written description of roles and responsibilities may be a good way to provide a simple but useful resource to staff and families. As with the previous recommendation, this chart should be edited as needed at the end of each academic year.

## Conclusion

Many individuals and organizations have worked hard to create a network of college and career support within the high schools and across the communities of northwestern North Carolina. However, with broad collaborations around such important outcomes, clarity around roles, goals, and responsibilities is imperative. As outlined above, assessing where there are organizational redundancies in college and career coaching and working to eliminate them where appropriate would allow counselors and coaches to serve students more efficiently and allocate extra time to more in-depth programming.

Further, creating and widely disseminating explicit job descriptions and organizational charts can go a long way toward ensuring all school faculty and staff, as well as college staff, community organizations, parents, and students are aware of the many resources available to students and the variety of talented and committed professionals available to support them.



## About the Belk Center

The Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, at North Carolina State University, develops and sustains exceptional community college leaders who are committed to advancing equitable college access and student success, the social and economic mobility of their colleges' students, and the economic competitiveness of their regions. The Center provides professional development and research related to current and emerging student success opportunities and challenges facing community college leaders and policymakers in North Carolina and the nation. The Belk Center commits to dismantling systemic barriers to racial equity in education through evidence-based strategies that focus on the outcomes of Black, Latin\* and American Indian students ([read our full Commitment to Equity here](#)).

## About the John M. Belk Endowment

Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, the John M. Belk Endowment is a private family foundation committed to transforming postsecondary educational opportunities to meet North Carolina's evolving workforce needs. Its mission is aligned with the vision of its founder, the late John M. Belk who served four terms as mayor of Charlotte and was CEO of the department store company Belk, Inc. He created the John M. Belk Endowment in 1995 to fund a national merit scholarship program for his beloved alma mater, Davidson College. Now led by Mr. Belk's daughter, MC Belk Pilon, the John M. Belk Endowment continues to partner with innovative, results-oriented programs in North Carolina to further Mr. Belk's values, legacy, and focus on the value of education as a means to personal fulfillment and community vitality. For more information, please visit <http://jmbendowment.org>.

## About the Authors

Victor Cadilla is a doctoral student at NC State University in Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis and is a collaborator with the Belk Center.

Dr. Sarah Deal is a research affiliate at the Belk Center and focuses on policy and practitioner-focused research.

Dr. Catherine Hartman is a research affiliate at the Belk Center, focusing her research on community college student persistence and engagement.

Dr. Laura Maldonado is a Senior Research Associate at the Belk Center and focuses her research agenda on career development and career and technical education.

Dr. Kaitlin Newhouse is a senior research associate at the Belk Center and oversees the PACE Climate Survey. Her researcher interests focus on using mixed methods approaches to improving educational outcomes, especially for poor and working-class students.

Greyson Norcross is a research associate at the Belk Center working on the PACE Climate Survey and Belk Center communications.

## Acknowledgments

Cecilia Holden, President and CEO of MyFutureNC, provided feedback on previous versions of this brief. Additional edits and feedback were provided by Dr. Holley Nichols and Dr. Audrey Jaeger of the Belk Center. Dr. Erin Schleiden provided the graphic design for this brief.

## Suggested Citation

Cadilla, V., Deal, S., Hartman, C., Maldonado, L., Newhouse, K. & Norcross, G. (2022) *Who does what? Findings and recommendations for clarifying roles for overlapping college and career service providers*. Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, North Carolina State University.

## Appendix: Methods Detail

Once selected, stakeholders connected the research team with potential participants, who were contacted for availability for interviews and focus groups. Of the 25 potential participants, 18 participated in either a focus group or an interview. School-based employees made up 16 of the participants, and 3 organizations outside of school districts were represented among the participants. The participants varied in their experience level, though most worked in either their school or district prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Qualitative Research Questions:

1. What are the conditions at selected high schools that facilitate or inhibit effective collaboration between college and career access service providers?
2. In what ways do college and career access service providers interact with one another to provide complementary or overlapping services in WCC's public high schools?
3. What gaps might exist in the services provided for students in Ashe, Wilkes, and Alleghany counties?
4. What promising practices help service providers collaborate to supplement and complement college and career access supports in Ashe, Wilkes, and Alleghany counties?
5. What are barriers to the provision of college and career support services in Ashe, Wilkes, and Alleghany counties?
6. What roles do community-based organizations play in providing college and career support in Ashe, Wilkes, and Alleghany counties?
7. How does high school leadership and staff turnover influence the ability of service providers to support students through college and career choices?

Using the projects' research questions, a semi-structured interview protocol was created to be used in each of the interviews with minor changes to questions depending on the individual's position and organization. Stem questions were developed to address one or more of the research questions, with potential probing questions or topics for the interviewer to use as needed. In all, the research team conducted 3 focus groups and 10 interviews virtually via Zoom, each lasting about an hour in length.