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"YOU CAN'T POINT FINGERS AT DATA"

Cross-agency Collaboration and Shared Data from a Community Perspective

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RUBY'S STORY

Ruby Dominguez graduated from San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and decided to get a job in lieu of a postsecondary education.[1] After working at a minimum wage job for two years, she realized that earning a living wage in San Francisco would be impossible. She decided to visit City College of San Francisco (CCSF) to "see what this college thing was all about," with hopes of increasing her earning potential with a college degree in hand. Ruby would be the first in her family or network of friends to pursue college.

On her first visit to CCSF, Ruby intended to simply enroll in classes. She expected the process to be stress-free. Instead, she was overwhelmed by the lengthy enrollment process. As a new first-time student, Ruby had lowest registration priority and could not get into any of the classes she

needed. Having been away from school for so long, she was not pleased with her placement test score results at CCSF and felt that they did not reflect her potential. She asked for an opportunity to retake the exams, but learned that the college policy required a three-month wait time for retesting; by then she would be well into her first semester. Ruby met with a college counselor who explained that it might be four or more years before she would even be eligible to transfer to a four-year college, due to her low placement scores and the difficulty of accessing the key math and English courses she needed. Her day ended with her in tears, distraught with a sense of being overwhelmed, confused, and alone. Defeated, Ruby decided that college was not meant for her and decided to leave. As she left campus, a small sign caught her attention; Latino Services Network offered a glimmer of hope. As a Latina, she wondered if there were others like her who also struggled with such barriers and wondered if there were ways around them. She wandered into the office and broke down crying. She felt immediate comfort when a counselor convinced her to stay and offered to personally mentor her through the barriers before her.

Unfortunately, Ruby's story is a common one among students who are first in their family to pursue college. Entry into the community college can be a stressful transition that involves social, emotional, and academic adjustments for many prospective students. There are policies that can be especially challenging for traditionally underrepresented students, who typically enter having less familiarity with the college experience. These students tend to have more difficulty navigating the processes needed to succeed in community college, such as developing a plan for graduation and successfully enrolling in the required courses. A recent partnership between SFUSD and CCSF, called Bridge to Success, has been tackling such issues with promising results.

HOW WE SPEAK ABOUT OUR WORK

This chapter focuses on the Bridge to Success (BtS) initiative, a partnership among SFUSD, CCSF, and other San Francisco agencies to improve postsecondary success for underrepresented youth. SFUSD and CCSF came together to make concrete changes to local policies and practices,

and many of these proposed changes came from linking data between these two different educational institutions. These linked data provided the first opportunity for these San Francisco agencies to study how students transitioned from high school into their postsecondary education.

This chapter uses the perspective of "we," meaning both SFUSD and CCSF. We make a concerted effort to use "we" and "our" as our common language, regardless of the agency for which we work, because this is how we see ourselves in this work—two organizations acting as one. Too often, agencies work in so-called silos, acting independently instead of through coordinated cross-agency actions, and only seeing students as "theirs" when they are enrolled in their particular system. In contrast, we recognize that "our" actions will make a difference in the lives of the students we collectively serve. In the BtS initiative, even when only one agency was responsible for implementing a particular action, we see this as resulting from our work together, and not one agency acting in isolation. Thus "we" indicates a collaborative spirit between our two agencies; when we want to refer to the actions of one agency alone, we explicitly mention SFUSD, CCSF, or the other agency responsible.

BACKGROUND OF BRIDGE TO SUCCESS

The BtS work formally began in June 2009, when the Mayor's Office worked with SFUSD, an urban K–12 district serving 55,000 students, and CCSF, an urban community college serving 100,000 students, to apply to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the recently released Communities Learning in Partnership (CLIP) planning grant. This one-year grant provided $250,000 and required partners to work across agencies to identify areas of focus and create a strategy for action.

While the CLIP grant began the formal partnership, both agencies were already engaged in deep conversations and self-reflection around improving postsecondary success for all students. CCSF had begun a series of "equity hearings" to examine the achievement gap between African American and Latino students and their white and Asian counterparts. SFUSD had just adopted a new strategic plan, which also focused on closing the same achievement gap and preparing all students to be successful in college. In

addition to collective recognition of these important issues, concrete partnerships had begun to take place. SFUSD formed a partnership called San Francisco Promise with the Mayor's Office and San Francisco State University (SF State) to increase the number of African American and Latino students graduating from SF State. The San Francisco Education Fund secured a grant to partner with three SFUSD high schools to double the number of students who successfully completed their postsecondary education, and the Mayor's Office, SFUSD, and CCSF partnered to successfully launch Gateway to College, a program to reengage and move students who had dropped out of high school toward college completion.

Inherent obstacles exist when multiple government agencies work together, and these projects, which occurred prior to beginning BtS, were no exception. Yet the work progressed, and a great deal of trust was built among these various San Francisco teams while working through the bureaucratic, legal, programmatic, and financial obstacles. We learned many lessons, the most important quite possibly being, *it's worth it!* The CLIP planning grant and the subsequent Gates Foundation three-year implementation grant had perfect timing, giving us an opportunity to focus these different initiatives around a unified framework; but without the shared recognition and desire to improve postsecondary success for underrepresented students, it is unlikely that the money alone would have caused significant action to occur.

CONNECTING WITH THE YOUTH DATA ARCHIVE

Through our early work, even prior to BtS, we recognized the value of data. In 2009 SFUSD began using National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data to see the number of students who were enrolling in and completing college.[2] It was the first time SFUSD had access to data about the pathways of all students after graduation, rather than relying on students' self-reported information about their plans after high school or returning students' anecdotes that were shared with teachers, counselors, or other staff. Once the data were shared, SFUSD staff were surprised by the number of students not attending or getting through college. These data brought up more questions than answers: Where are the students who did not enroll in

college, and do they have some common characteristics? For the students who enrolled in college, where are we losing them, and why?

In order to answer these questions we knew we needed more detailed data, and we enlisted the Youth Data Archive (YDA). (See chapter 1 for a description of the YDA and its parent organization, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, or JGC.) Our previous projects had not linked data on an individual level, and we saw that the resulting analyses tended to produce simple snapshots of our students that lacked essential details that could have helped our decision making. For example, after the first year of San Francisco Promise, the number of SFUSD graduates who enrolled at SF State increased by 20 percent, but without linked data there was no analysis that described which students were most likely to apply and what could be done to proactively support the next round of students. The YDA approach gave us what we needed, which was individually identifiable, longitudinal data that followed students over time. The leaders of the BtS initiative realized that having the YDA provide data analysis was imperative for us to do the work, especially for stakeholders who required data before they were willing to move into action. Designating 20 percent of the annual Gates Foundation grant funds to data support, which included YDA support and staff time for researchers at both SFUSD and CCSF, also prioritized data-driven decision making and accountability.

YDA researchers had been in conversation with SFUSD and other San Francisco agencies prior to the BtS initiative, but formal data-sharing agreements had not been signed. In the case of SFUSD, the district saw a benefit to participating in the YDA but needed to identify a critical research question linked to their strategic plan before they were willing to commit the time and resources needed to overcome the internal legal and political concerns about sharing data. Once the BtS initiative had formally begun, we were able to champion the idea of data sharing around the specific goal of college readiness, which was a much easier message than the abstract notion of "data sharing." We were also sold on the YDA's approach to community partnerships, which gave us the right to approve publication of their work and not just review their analysis before release.

Having a consistent message of college readiness and knowing that the YDA would use the data to assist our work, instead of simply furthering an independent research agenda, helped us translate this collaboration to internal leadership and negotiate with our colleagues who were initially averse to data sharing. These negotiations were assisted by CCSF's equity hearings and by the changes to SFUSD's strategic plan, described above, that brought a renewed focus on preparing all students for college. Through this process, we finally committed to and negotiated data use agreements with the YDA.

HOW DID DATA HELP MOVE THE WORK?

After we decided to partner around the issue of postsecondary success, how did linking data actually help make change? Using research to make decisions was not a comfortable practice for many in our organizations, and the new research frequently raised questions about the status quo. Dealing with these challenges is hard enough within one organization, and can seem even more daunting when collaborating with external partners, but linking SFUSD and CCSF data helped push people to move beyond the mentality of "this is how it's always been done" and revisit the issue of postsecondary success from a new perspective.

We found that linking data and studying the results served as an impetus for action by highlighting key issues of our practice, providing a neutral forum for partners to discuss the findings, and raising the stakes by bringing more attention to any inequities. We were careful to choose an initial analysis that could be completed quickly and that was less likely to be controversial, as we still needed to take time to build trust among our organizations. We started by looking at the critical "loss points" where we were losing students through the educational pipeline: how many ninth graders graduated from high school, how many graduates attended a postsecondary institution, and how many attendees earned some type of postsecondary credential. These initial data helped build momentum and gave us a neutral set of data points to start discussions about student pathways.

Having these linked data also helped change the way we thought and spoke about our work; instead of "SFUSD" students and "CCSF"

students, we began to speak about "OUR" students. This language was used in all our presentations and reports, and helped break down barriers and unify staff around what really mattered—the students we were all trying to help. Working in silos made it easy to blame students' low levels of postsecondary completion on problems within other institutions; CCSF could blame SFUSD for not adequately preparing students for college, and SFUSD could blame CCSF for not knowing how to teach to SFUSD students and not honoring the high school curriculum that SFUSD students had learned. By coming together, we began to appreciate the unique challenges faced by each institution. As a result, SFUSD and CCSF staff initially focused on the parts of their own systems that they could control; this strategy allowed us to gradually build trust, which in turn led to more probing questions and challenging conversations about the problems we experienced with each other's practices.

The linked data brought attention to a number of issues that were previously unrecognized, and that would likely have remained unrecognized had we continued to work in silos. We learned that many SFUSD students were not taking English and math courses in their first year at CCSF, and that these students had significantly lower transfer and degree completion rates even five years later. Using both the YDA's quantitative analysis and consultations with SFUSD students and counselors, we learned that this was occurring because students were locked out of their courses (as in Ruby's case) rather than due to a lack of motivation or academic preparation, as some had suspected. Like Ruby, first-time SFUSD students desperately wanted to take math and English in their first semester but were not accessing them due to a college policy that offered new students the last choice of classes. Using these data, CCSF's chancellor pushed for a change to the registration enrollment system to ensure that all SFUSD students who registered at CCSF the fall after they graduated from high school would receive the courses they needed. This early and powerful action had a huge impact on the partnership. Previous projects had also had opportunities to review data, but the conversations rarely used data to provoke action. For BtS, this decision by the chancellor, subsequently approved as a pilot by the CCSF shared governance system, not only sparked momentum but

also created significant buy-in by sending a message to all involved in the project that their voices were heard and would shape how we went about our work as partners. When this policy change was communicated back to the college counselors and other site-level staff they saw the impact of their work and felt empowered, which increased their motivation to participate in the initiative. This response by the chancellor created a major shift in the partnership; at this juncture we officially moved away from finger-pointing and moved toward resolving barriers affecting *our* collective students.

BtS participants were open to learning from these data because YDA researchers acted as a neutral third party with no vested interest in promoting the interests of one organization over the other. YDA researchers were able to present findings that some staff considered negative without being seen as "critical," allowing SFUSD and CCSF staff to approach the research with an open mind. One telling example was CCSF's High School Report, an annually produced document that looked at the performance of students who self-identified as coming from SFUSD. We saw that the basic findings from CCSF's High School Report—the number of SFUSD students attending CCSF in a given year, their placement test results, their long-term completion rates—were not substantially different from the results the YDA produced. Unfortunately, the High School Report had often been ignored by SFUSD staff, many of whom did not completely understand CCSF's placement policies and harbored some mistrust of the findings. For example, the High School Report showed that, on average, 8 to 10 percent of SFUSD graduates placed into college-level English, but SFUSD officials knew that more than half of their eleventh-grade class had met state standards on their annual standardized test (this topic is discussed in more detail below). Without being able to explain this disconnect between CCSF entry-level test score results and SFUSD students' exiting proficiencies, SFUSD staff were inclined to mistrust the entire report as not being accurate. Ignoring this report also allowed high schools to be proud that their students had graduated, until we had data showing some of the deficits in students' performance at CCSF.

We used the data for more than just producing research reports, but also created opportunities for partners to engage in regular discussions about

the results and what they meant for practice. SFUSD underutilized the CCSF research report not only because it came from an external source, but also because previously there was no forum where SFUSD staff could come together and react to the data, have a discussion about the findings, or ask CCSF more probing questions to build a shared understanding of the issues. Through BtS we designated forums, such as a monthly steering committee that brought together approximately forty staff from SFUSD, CCSF, and other city agencies, to give staff opportunities to discuss research findings and subsequent actions that needed to occur.

These meetings raised the stakes by bringing more attention to an issue and creating peer pressure for action. One way this occurred was through multiple professional learning communities (PLCs), each of which was focused on a different aspect of the educational system: counseling, teaching, transitions, outreach, and workforce/pathways. Each PLC was made up of faculty from both SFUSD and CCSF, and each group shared highlights of their work at the BtS steering committee meetings. This format made it clear that the responsibility for change was not in any one institution or program but would be shared by the collective group. Sharing their progress at monthly meetings gave each PLC an opportunity to learn from others, but having some PLCs further along than others also added some healthy competition between the groups. This motivated the PLCs to push harder in their own work and design actions to fix the problems they had identified. As another example, SFUSD students constitute only a small part of CCSF, but knowing that San Francisco's Mayor's Office and SFUSD's superintendent were paying attention to the results helped prioritize this population in the eyes of CCSF. When left to themselves, organizations have an easier time deflecting or ignoring negative data. Therefore, promoting transparency and open dialogue was important to create a climate of action among the BtS initiative's participants.

Having forums for discussing research findings, such as the PLCs, gave partners an opportunity to create a unified set of recommendations that captured a multitude of perspectives and experiences. A benefit to this approach was that these recommendations carried more weight than would that of any one individual, especially when the work was grounded in

data. A few years before the BtS initiative, one individual at CCSF proposed having a systemic, comprehensive process whereby high school seniors would complete CCSF's five-step registration and placement-testing process during the school day at their high school; this was important, as many high school graduates would not arrive at CCSF until the fall semester, expecting to enroll in courses that had filled up during the fall registration period over the summer. Several individual leaders at SFUSD and CCSF agreed that it was a good idea, but the proposal was presented to district leaders separately, instead of through a powerful partnership, and was not grounded in data that would have demonstrated how transitional barriers are an important issue for equitable student access. However, when BtS advocated for this change it was quickly approved, and the cross-agency forums provided a venue to plan the logistics needed to implement this process. Had this process existed when Ruby was in high school, perhaps she would have completed the appropriate CCSF enrollment steps prior to graduating, providing her with ample time to successfully enroll in CCSF and access the courses she needed.

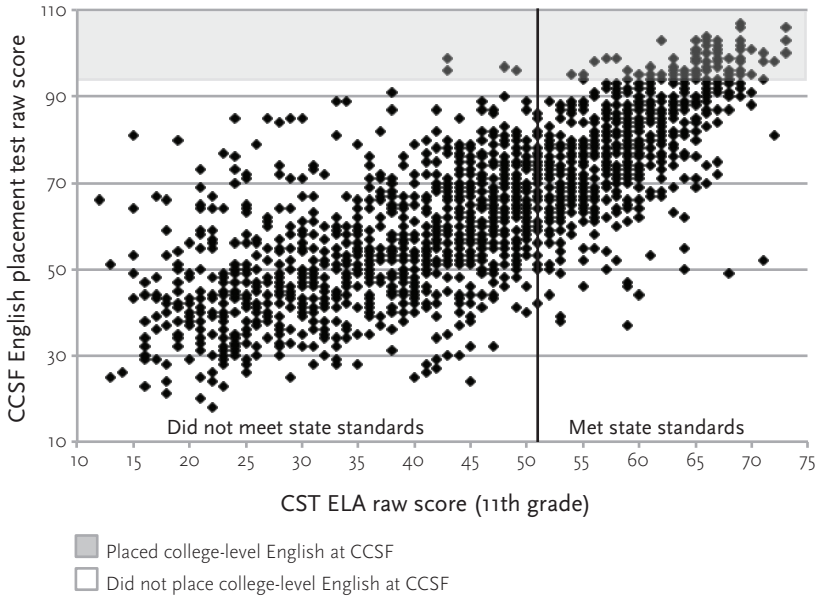
We used YDA analyses to push for changes, but data are not flawless, and do not necessarily address why students behave the way they do. As a result, we did not wait for perfect data or analysis that would comprehensively answer all our questions. We built momentum slowly by choosing as our first analysis one that could be completed quickly and was less likely to be controversial. To make the findings more meaningful and actionable, we also supplemented YDA's quantitative research with qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and informal conversations with students and staff. A student advocacy group at CCSF comprised of African American, Latino, and Pacific Islander students that the initiative aimed to serve joined the partnership and contributed with powerful voices. This strategy connected us to how the barriers affected real students. These student voices, such as Ruby's, helped us identify problems of practice and led to concrete changes, such as the early enrollment program for SFUSD graduates. Before making early enrollment a permanent policy, we spent a year piloting the approach with three hundred SFUSD graduates and found that the students averaged a course load of twelve units in their first

semester, up from an average of eight units in previous years, and that the increase was mainly due to more students accessing math and English courses. All of these approaches—having both quantitative and qualitative analysis, adding a student voice, piloting and studying changes before full implementation—helped us implement effective policies.

As the initiative progressed, and after we had several small wins, we went beyond the less controversial analyses and moved toward confronting the larger policy issues. For example, one of the more contentious issues was that fewer than 10 percent of SFUSD graduates placed into college-level English at CCSF, with many of these students needing four or more semesters of remediation before reaching college level. Initial conversations touched on very sensitive issues. Was the high remediation rate the fault of the high school district for having graduated unprepared students? Was it the fault of CCSF for having an overly difficult placement exam? Was it the fault of the state for having misaligned curricular standards between secondary and postsecondary institutions? Was it something else entirely? Asking these questions was, at times, threatening to both institutions, as the answers would require some serious rethinking about the way we engaged in our work.

YDA analysis showed that the high English remediation rate for SFUSD graduates was a combination of various issues. YDA researchers determined that the simplest way to present the data was through a scatterplot (figure 5.1). Each dot in the scatterplot represents one student, with his or her eleventh-grade English California Standards Test (CST) results on the x-axis (from zero to 75 questions correct) and the same student's CCSF English placement test results on the y-axis (from zero to 110 questions correct).[3] From this chart we learned three major lessons: 1) The CST and CCSF placement exam were well aligned, as students who scored high on one test tended to score high on the other test; 2) approximately two-thirds of SFUSD graduates who attended CCSF did not meet English state standards in eleventh grade (left box), and these students almost never placed into college-level English (top box); and 3) even students who met state standards (right box) only placed into college-level English (top box) when they exceeded state standards by a very significant amount.

Figure 5.1 Scatterplot of 11th-grade English CST scores and CCSF English placement test scores



It would have been easy to stay focused on smaller, more manageable tasks, but the ability to learn the answers to these difficult questions helped pull people toward a more concrete understanding of the problem. The English score scatterplot was an effective way of presenting this controversial issue, as it translated a complex topic into a single image. This representation facilitated conversations among staff across institutions and created a common understanding that allowed us to engage in productive dialogue, instead of remaining siloed organizations with negative assumptions about each other's practices. CCSF's chancellor frequently utilized the scatterplot to engage the CCSF faculty in understanding the urgency of the problem, and this diagram helped convince CCSF's English department to lower their placement cutoff scores to more closely align with high school state standards. One lesson for researchers from this experience is that they can help districts and other youth-serving agencies by going

beyond traditional presentations, such as regression results, and designing striking visual representations that help organizations better understand the issues they are trying to address.

Our approach to tackling these difficult issues was to work on multiple issues simultaneously, rather than focusing on one small piece of the postsecondary puzzle. One way we accomplished this was through our PLCs, each of which was responsible for addressing different challenges students faced in the educational pipeline. This approach made explicit our belief that there was no silver bullet to support postsecondary success; as a result, individuals doing the work did not feel that their particular department or area of focus was being singled out for criticism—we were in this together. This stance also allowed the more challenging areas of the work, where there were political concerns, data problems, or simply more reticence among staff, to progress at their own pace. Provided that each PLC was making some progress, this approach relieved some of the pressure that might make staff feel pushed into action before they were ready. PLCs that were eager for data helped show more hesitant PLCs that the data were being used to make informed decisions, and not to "shame and blame" anyone for past performance.

As a result of our multipronged approach—using the YDA to analyze linked data, bringing together multiple agencies to discuss the findings, recognizing that each part of the educational system needed to improve, and relying on participants' institutional knowledge to push for change—we developed a number of changes we believe will help students complete their postsecondary education. One was "FRISCO day," which is an all-year, multistep initiative designed to smooth the transition into CCSF. As part of this initiative we brought CCSF's five-step enrollment process into SFUSD's high schools, to systematically enroll all CCSF-bound students as well as those students who wanted to go to college but did not have concrete postsecondary plans. In conjunction with the enrollment process, we designated one day where every graduating high school senior visited one of three local colleges, with CCSF being one of the three destinations. Each college visit was packed with workshops and activities to educate students about what it meant to attend that college and how best

to access the multitude of support services. All these steps, which could only occur through a strong partnership between the two organizations, minimized the impediments associated with high-school-to-college transitions that were brought to our attention through both the data and personal stories such as Ruby's. Additional actions from the BtS initiative included a "summer bridge" program to help a concentrated group of underrepresented students get a jump on their postsecondary plans; shortening CCSF's placement test retake policy from three months' wait time to two weeks; and piloting a multiple-method approach to English and math placement to help students begin their postsecondary education in the most appropriate course. This short list does not reflect other work happening in the PLCs that have not yet resulted in permanent changes to the system: facilitating dual-enrollment, implementing early warning indicators, and improving career and technical education, among others.

HOW WE BUILT SUPPORT FOR THE WORK

Although the data supported action, they are only one part of the solution. Changes in policy and practice can take years to implement, but in order to engage students like Ruby we needed to create a sense of urgency, before more students were lost. A number of actions helped us build a strong coalition and advocate for changes. Yet we believe, more than anything, that each organization will have different political and practical challenges, and the work must be attuned to these institutional differences.

First, it was critical to assign leaders who were "champions," either from inside or outside the organizations, who would prioritize the goals of the initiative as a part of their daily workload. We believed that these leaders needed to be middle managers, such as a dean at the community college and an equivalent director at the high school level. The benefit was that middle managers were able to connect to both the highest level of leadership as well as the on-the-ground staff. The connection to high-level leadership was important to ensure that the initiative aligned with an agency's strategic plan and that leadership was prioritizing the work and sharing it as a part of their overall vision. The connection to the site-level staff was needed to establish staff buy-in, lead staff in implementing the changes,

and understand how these changes were affecting staff workload. In BtS, these middle managers presented the data findings and the proposed actions to an executive committee that included the chancellor of CCSF, the superintendent of SFUSD, the San Francisco Mayor's Office education advisor, and other leaders. Middle managers often referenced the participation of the executive committee to get buy-in from site-level staff, who were impressed that the top leaders from each institution came together and discussed the specific challenges they faced in implementing the work. Our ability as middle managers to share these findings back with site-level staff and negotiate between the "big ideas" and the "on-the-ground" implementation was critical in keeping practitioners motivated and involved. Connecting to both sides of the organization helped us anticipate the best way to maneuver the work forward, taking into account issues of implementation, union constraints, policy barriers, and a host of workforce issues.

The leaders, with data in hand, worked to build a coalition within each respective institution. The framing of the work was incredibly important to rally support. For SFUSD, it was important to emphasize that examining college readiness was not in addition to our work, but was the core work identified in the strategic plan with a slightly different lens. For CCSF, it was critical to emphasize that the college needed to revisit policies and procedures to examine how they were affecting students of color. In both cases, it was clear that the initiative did not mean we needed to change our missions, but rather emphasized the need to shift the way we thought about our existing work. We increased buy-in by using the data not just as a bunch of numbers but as a way to paint a real and emotional picture about the kids we all served. Sharing students' stories, such as Ruby's, made our case stronger.

Once we developed our message it was time to present the data to as many constituents as possible, a process we called our "road show." Because CCSF has over 100,000 students and thousands of employees, the road show was presented more than forty times at various college committees, departments' shared board meetings, and councils, with some presentations made to the same group more than once, to ensure that the entire college had an understanding of the data and the urgency of necessary change. This road show was important, because CCSF's culture embeds

decisions within a shared governance system that would have been impossible to move without this process. SFUSD presented at many different forums that included the superintendent's cabinet, school site principals and assistant principals, central office department leads, lead teachers, and counselors. Presentations were tailored to each audience and created space for reaction and information gathering, but creating a sense of urgency was imperative so that leaders were willing to act now and work toward a solution. The district also met individually with key stakeholders to solicit feedback, which helped create a collaborative solution that made everyone feel they were a part of the decision-making process. Having built support among leaders was critical at this stage, so that presentations to top leadership were not just a cause for alarm but came from a unified staff that had taken the time to develop potential solutions for these concerns.

CONCLUSION

The transition from high school to college occurs between distinctly different institutions, and strong partnerships between these organizations can help students better navigate this challenging time in their lives. This has been the case in San Francisco, where we formed a partnership among the community college, public high school district, and Mayor's Office to tackle these transitional issues. However, partnerships need to go beyond getting leaders into a room. We need to move away from working in isolation, as large bureaucratic institutions often do, toward a more unified approach. Every high school should have a college access strategy, but this strategy will likely only be successful if the colleges meet them halfway. We found the following strategies vital to our progress:

- Partnerships among youth-serving organizations should be attuned to the specific realities in each local community.
- Each institution should assign a practitioner to lead and champion the work at their respective institution.
- Cross-agency partnerships must think carefully about what needs to be accomplished and how it needs to be communicated. We felt that even the small decisions—such as including the names of the

institutional leaders from the two districts and the Mayor's Office on every important e-mail or document that went out—sent an important message that the goals of the initiative were citywide, further emphasizing that these are "our kids."

- Partnerships need to be strategic, intentional, and grounded in data-driven decisions.
- Data should be transparent and presented to all participants in the initiative.
- Recruiting an outside institution to conduct the analysis can help to maintain neutrality and minimize bias.
- Researchers need to proceed at a pace that complements the partners' ongoing responsibilities, and must work hard to explain findings in a clear and concise manner so that the partners understand what can and cannot be interpreted from the data.
- Analyses should be complemented with input from practitioners and those individuals—in our case, students—whom you are intending to help, in order to create a realistic strategic plan.
- It is important to take the necessary time to bring all participants along; the iterative nature of seeing data multiple times can help practitioners understand the results and come up with practical solutions.

We also feel deeply indebted to the Gates Foundation, whose funding in a time of few resources provided the space for these cross-agency conversations and supported the all-important data analysis. In this era of budget cuts, many educational leaders and staff have an overwhelming workload, and questions of "but who will pay for this" and "will we need to pay someone overtime to do this" were immediate inquiries. Outside funding helped alleviate concerns among staff that this initiative was just one more task on their never-ending list of things to do. Having private dollars to finance the initiative also allowed us the flexibility to use the money in creative ways that bypassed strict state regulations on how to expend funds. For example, changes in the law on affirmative action prevent institutions of higher education from serving students based on race, but the private

funding allowed us to focus on the ethnic groups that the data revealed to be the students being disproportionately affected by policy barriers. Once it was revealed that funding would not be a problem, we were able to move forward in addressing head-on the issues we cared about.

Although the BtS partnership has shown significant progress toward addressing the access and completion gap, we are well aware that the work has just begun. To that end, our sustainability plan has been incorporated throughout the process, and the third year of this initiative will focus on implementation and institutionalization. We recognized from the beginning that this initiative is really "the work" of our separate institutions, and that this way of working together should become our new norm. We have expressed to site-level staff that this collaboration will become a part of their regular job moving forward, and we have shifted priorities on individual job descriptions to ensure that the work continues to be performed. We are also working on a data-sharing agreement between CCSF and SFUSD that will ensure that we can continue to use linked data to make decisions that benefit our students. Of course, the only pieces of work that will remain from these first years of working together will be the policy and practice changes that the data show have demonstrated an effect on students' lives.

Instead of pointing fingers at each other, we relied on data-driven decisions, and you cannot point fingers at data. This, coupled with powerful student stories such as Ruby's, can create the sense of urgency necessary to change the trajectory of her life—and others like her—toward one that would allow her to participate in the educated citizenry as she deserves.

WHAT RUBY'S STORY COULD HAVE BEEN

The three authors developed this chapter by meeting at various San Francisco cafés, using this time to outline our thoughts and write as a team. While working on the finishing touches, we had a final meeting at a café, when a CCSF student asked to share our table. We had just written about the topic of heavily impacted courses, and we asked her whether she had ever had problems accessing her classes at CCSF. She indicated that she had no problem getting all the courses she needed, but she was not sure that her experience was typical for other students as she was only in her

first year at CCSF. Guessing the answer, we asked her where she was the year before, to which she replied, "I just graduated from SFUSD and got an early registration date." Her story adds to our evidence bank that policy changes, such as the early enrollment program, can dramatically impact students' lives by shortening the amount of time it will take to graduate from college and earn a living wage. This example would likely have not had the swift impact or results without a solid, data-driven, cross-institutional partnership. Hearing the direct result of our work in action made a perfect bookend to this chapter.