Promoting Critical Conversations Based on Data

Once high-quality, actionable data are in hand, promoting critical conversations is the next step toward change.

Promoting critical conversations based on data can lead to deliberate changes in policy and practice to improve college readiness and success. Seeing new data for the first time—especially data on postsecondary remediation, enrollment, and persistence rates for one’s own students—can be a sobering experience. If these data are intended to support improvement efforts, however, then steps should be taken to present the data as an opportunity to learn and improve rather than as something shameful or blaming. States should consider how they will communicate about, and roll out, new data and reports to districts and schools. As part of the pilot, “Actionable Data Workshops” were held with school teams from 22 districts in the three participating states. The workshops were designed to provide a safe environment for inquiry and examination of one’s own district and school results and involved the following key components:

- Offering the workshops as professional development;
- Selecting a small set of (four) reports to serve as an introduction to the data and results; the most common pilot reports included: ¹
  - Immediate enrollment in postsecondary education, comparing the school’s results with their district and state results
  - Immediate enrollment in postsecondary education, by 9th-grade attendance rates
  - Remedial course-taking during the first year of postsecondary education, by gender, race-ethnicity, and economic disadvantage status
  - Remedial course-taking in math during the first year of postsecondary education, by proficiency level on the state’s high school math test
- Facilitating each step in the process from data to action, including:
  - Reviewing the data to clarify data sources, definitions, and limitations;
  - Analyzing and interpreting the results;
  - Designing an action plan for improving the results; and

¹ Detailed information on definitions of measures can be found on the Selected Measures in Depth Section of the pilot dissemination web site.
- Emphasizing dialogue among pairs and within small groups.

The pilot also trained district-level trainers to support the above activities with school teams and to support school staff in an ongoing way after the end of the pilot. Sample materials can be found on the Professional Development Materials section of the pilot dissemination web site.