



Grades 9-12

COLLEGE INQUIRY

CARA

The College Inquiry model builds the capacity and infrastructure of schools to embed college and career exploration, increasing postsecondary preparation and enrollment.

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OVERVIEW

CARA's College Inquiry model aims to establish a comprehensive college-going infrastructure in schools by implementing a college access curriculum, establishing a college office, and building staff capacity. The program works with schools to increase their capacity to support students from postsecondary access to enrollment, embedding college and career exploration in the regular schedule from 9th to 12th grade.



Beginning in 9th grade, the program integrates a college-access curriculum into relevant subjects, exposing students to crucial aspects of the college process. By the time students reach 11th and 12th grade, dedicated classes ensure in-depth coverage of the application process. Emphasizing individual advising, the program utilizes counselors in a dedicated college office, fostering a dynamic hub for student support. The optional peer-to-peer advising component provides additional one-on-one support.

CARA offers partnership for schools interested in implementing the program. CARA coaches collaborate with schools to strategically embed these critical components in sustainable ways. CARA currently operates in three states and the College Inquiry with optional peer-to-peer advising has demonstrated impact on college enrollment, with schools with College Inquiry programming reporting enrollment rates 8 percentage points higher than comparable schools.

What Makes This Model Innovative?



High Expectations with Unlimited Opportunities

The College Inquiry model provides all students, regardless of their unique needs, with equitable access to college-going support so they can progress toward their college and career aspirations.



Relevance

Students' interests are integrated into a college-going curriculum, empowering them to navigate the college landscapes, application processes, and financial aid, relative to potential careers.



Connection & Community

Students cultivate a relationship-rich environment by collaborating closely with a dedicated counselor and forming meaningful connections that foster support and social capital in their college exploration.

DESIGN

Goals

College Inquiry ultimately aims to increase awareness and preparedness for postsecondary success among students.

Knowledge of Postsecondary Pathways

Students know how their interests and strengths can be applied to different college and career options and develop defined postsecondary plans.

Postsecondary Pathway Navigation

Students are able to navigate college application processes and make decisions to matriculate into the postsecondary path of their choosing.

Experience

CARA's College Inquiry program focuses on supporting first-generation-to-college students, low-income students, and students of color through a comprehensive college-access curriculum starting in 9th grade. The curriculum can be integrated into other classes in 9th and 10th grade to expose students to college planning, mock admissions, and career exploration. In 11th and 12th

grade, dedicated classes ensure time for addressing the application process, financial aid, and individualized support.

The program emphasizes individual advising in a dedicated college office to ensure continuous and customized support. Peer-to-peer advising, an optional but highly recommended component, complements the College Inquiry model by increasing the college office's capacity to provide individualized support. The college office serves as a dynamic hub, integrating key access milestones into events, and thus ensuring high completion rates in the postsecondary process.

College and Career Exploration

CARA's College Inquiry program leverages a comprehensive college-access curriculum. The curriculum is strategically structured to address the unique challenges faced by first-generation-to-college students, low-income students, and students of color, drawing insights from current, extensive academic and applied research. The curriculum's primary focus is on bridging the gap in college planning processes, often overlooked amidst efforts to raise academic standards.



The curriculum advocates for an early start, beginning in 9th grade, and emphasizes a spiral approach, revisiting these critical topics each year with content tailored to students' developmental stages. [Sample Curriculum Map](#) The overarching goal is to empower students to make informed choices about their educational journeys beyond high school. Allocating time for lessons varies by grade: 9th and 10th grade content can be built into advisory or through subjects, while 11th and 12th grade content is a separate college and career-focused seminar.

- **9th Grade:** Beginning in 9th grade, students engage in activities such as surveying their knowledge about college, mapping out postsecondary options, and understanding financial aid. The lessons can be led in advisory or in subject-based classes.
 - **10th Grade:** Moving into 10th grade, students experience mock admissions, college visits, exploration of majors, and a scavenger hunt on a college campus. This phase builds on the foundation laid in the previous year and sets the stage for the more intricate aspects of college preparation. [Sample Lesson: Exploring College Majors](#)
 - **11th Grade:** As students progress to 11th grade, they enroll in a dedicated class during the second semester of junior year and the first semester of senior year. This class focuses on the college application process, including transcript reviews, understanding application steps, and creating college lists. Students learn more about paying for college and engage in discussions covering financial aid, educational opportunity programs, and comparing aid packages.
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- **12th Grade:** In the first semester of their culminating year, 12th-grade students delve deeper into the college application steps, engage in further financial aid comparisons, and explore careers. They participate in activities such as career fairs and investigate career interests, which highlights the link between majors and careers and provides a comprehensive and experiential approach. Throughout the program, 12th graders receive individualized support to address the complexities of the application process.
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College Office and Counseling Supports

College Office: CARA recognizes that individual advising is one of the best supports to ensure students matriculate into college. As such, CARA ensures students receive tailored support from counselors in a dedicated college office space. The college office serves as a dynamic support hub where students engage in various activities at each grade level, contributing to their overall college preparation and understanding. [College Office Resources](#) This is where they meet with their counselors to get support on the college application process. Additionally, staff from the college office can integrate key college access milestones into existing events involving students to ensure high completion rates. For example, students at a high school with College Inquiry programming participate in FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) day during senior portrait day.



Counselors: Students engage with counselors in a dedicated college office space to receive tailored support in the postsecondary process. Counselors guide students in navigating challenges, addressing financial aid gaps, and working to overcome barriers to enrollment. Students also work alongside counselors and peer advisors to track steps in the college process, through tools such as Naviance. This allows counselors to tailor support to individual needs when barriers arise. The additional well-trained counseling resources that peer advisors bring to the college office allow the counselors to spend more time on tasks that only they have the expertise to do, such as helping students create good-match lists for private colleges or determining how to fill out FAFSA forms in complicated family situations.

Peer-to-Peer Advising

In order to provide one-on-one support for all students, peer advisors can be used as a valuable addition to a school's capacity in advising through the postsecondary process. CARA offers a peer-to-peer advising program that can be run in addition to College Inquiry or as a standalone program within schools. This program places well-trained peer advisors, current college

students, at their alumni high schools to support current high school students through navigating the postsecondary process. These peer-to-peer interactions are proactive, relational, and continuous throughout educational transitions as opposed to a “drop-in” model during discrete moments in time, ensuring that students have access to one-on-one advising throughout the school year and in the summer after high school graduation. Peer advisors receive at least 70 hours of training and stable employment with competitive hourly wages, as well as ongoing supervision by experienced professionals at their school-site. [▶Being a CARA College Bridge Coach](#)

Supporting Structures

To implement the College Inquiry model, schools need to make shifts in their curriculum, culture, adult roles, schedules, and more to foster the college-going culture and build the postsecondary preparation infrastructure.

Schools leverage the College Inquiry curriculum for grades 9–12 to build the postsecondary knowledge and skills students need for college application and matriculation.

The College Inquiry curriculum provides a well-structured and experiential progression through each grade, equipping students for their academic and professional journeys beyond high school. Backed by research, the curriculum covers topics that have been found to be critical in navigating the college-going process. [📄Curriculum Rationale](#) [📄Curriculum Table of Contents](#)



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

The four central topics covered in the curriculum are:

- **Mapping the Landscape of College:** The curriculum addresses the need for students to explore a diverse range of colleges beyond well-known institutions, helping them identify suitable matches based on their abilities and interests.
- **Exploring Careers:** Recognizing that first-generation-to-college students may lack exposure to various professions, the curriculum encourages students to explore different careers, intersecting professional work, and the paths leading to and through college.
- **The College Application Process:** The curriculum guides students through the college application process, ensuring that they understand all of the requirements, from transcripts and teacher recommendations to extracurricular activities and essays.
- **Paying for College:** Recognizing the financial barriers that first-generation-to-college students often face, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of understanding the costs associated with higher education and the financial aid options available,

ensuring that students and their families can make informed decisions about affording college.



SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Establishing a college-going culture is critical for students to feel confident in pursuing their postsecondary pathways of choice.

Schools must create a college-going culture that fosters a supportive environment for students' postsecondary journeys. This involves ensuring that the staff comprehensively understand the college process, and are thus able to provide informed guidance to students. The presence of college-related materials and information also reinforces the idea that pursuing higher education is an achievable and celebrated goal. Instilling this culture in schools encourages students to explore their college options with confidence.

Schools must create a college access team to lead implementation, and all staff are required to participate in professional development.

Many adult roles are critical to the implementation of College Inquiry, each playing a distinct part in ensuring a comprehensive approach to college access:

- **School Administrators:** School administrators are responsible for ensuring that there is staff alignment and a shared understanding of the school's vision and mission in relation to college access.
- **Small College Access Team:** A small team of administrators, teachers, and counselors representing all grades leads the implementation of the program, including assessing existing initiatives, identifying goals, formulating a school action plan, and developing a scope and sequence to integrate the college-access curriculum into classes.
- **Counselors:** Counselors establish the college office, ensure that it is equipped with the necessary resources for college advisement, and liaise with CARA, including attending CARA supervisor meetings. It's recommended there be at least one counselor for every 80 students. Counselors are also responsible for the recruitment and supervision of peer advisors.
- **Peer Advisors:** Peer advisors attend 70+ hours of training in counseling content and professional skills from the CARA team. Peer advisors must be on-site working with students and attend weekly meetings with their supervisor. It's recommended to have one peer advisor for every 100 students. [Peer Advisor Training Content](#) [Peer Advisor Core Competencies](#) [Peer Advisor Career Capacities](#)



ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

All teachers and counselors engage in professional development sessions to foster a collective commitment to enhancing postsecondary access. CARA coaches also collaborate closely with the small college access team and provide support in developing the college office.

Schools must dedicate instructional time for the College Inquiry curriculum for grades 9–12.



SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

Schools need to find creative ways to build the college-access curriculum into the schedule. While 9th- and 10th-grade content can be addressed in advisory or through subject-based classes, it's strongly recommended that schools implement separate classes or seminars for 11th and 12th grade. These classes should specifically focus on college and career access activities, encompassing exposure, preparedness, and the practical aspects of filling out college and financial aid applications.

Organizing special event days, where regular schedules are temporarily put on hold and the entire school or a particular grade concentrates on college access tasks and lessons, such as FAFSA forms, can contribute to effective scheduling.

Schools should integrate family support into the process as much as possible.



FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Schools should actively engage with families to improve college access for first-generation-to-college students. It's essential to work with families to build understanding and support in pursuing postsecondary pathways. Families are also critical in applying for financial aid and should be provided with opportunities for support in navigating the process. Successful approaches include implementing weekly emails to update parents on their child's progress, conducting one-on-one appointments, and organizing tailored workshops addressing specific concerns like scholarships and FAFSA.

Schools need to establish a physical space for a college office where counseling supports are provided.



SPACE & FACILITIES

Schools are required to set up a dedicated college office, offering a physical space where students can easily access counseling support. This space should be designed to be welcoming and functional, providing resources for different stages of the college application process. Counselors and peer advisors actively engage with students in this designated area, offering personalized guidance so that students have easy access to essential support services, promoting informed decision-making about their academic and future paths.

Additionally, schools should display college banners throughout the school to serve as a visual representation of diverse higher education options.

Counselors should use tracking tools to help students navigate their postsecondary planning journey.



TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Counselors should utilize advanced data tracking tools to guide students efficiently through the college application process. Examples of these include Naviance, Beyond 12, and other customized tracking tools. [PowerSchool Naviance](#) [Beyond 12](#) While CARA does not require the use of a specific platform, data tracking is critical to successful implementation. These tools enable counselors to monitor progress, manage documents, and facilitate seamless communication with colleges. By leveraging these tools, counselors empower students to set and achieve personalized academic and career goals, fostering a culture of informed decision-making and postsecondary success.



BUDGET & OPERATIONS

Schools are responsible for the upfront cost of CARA coaching as well as yearly curricular resources.

Schools cover the cost of partnering with CARA to implement the model, which requires extensive coaching. Once schools have developed the staff capacity to lead their college access strategy on their own, they continue to pay for the curriculum. Additionally, for peer-to-peer advising, schools need to allocate funds from their budget to compensate peer advisors at an hourly rate at or above minimum wage for school-based work and training.



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Students and teachers participate in surveys to understand and improve the college-going culture.

A College Inquiry rubric is utilized at the beginning of the school year to establish benchmarks and set goals. As part of the mandatory data tracking, schools submit data to their CARA Coach. The CARA Coach compiles mid-year and end-of-year reports, which are shared with the school to aid in planning for the next semester or year. The data is used to revisit the rubric during these checkpoints to assess progress, make adjustments, and ensure effective planning for continuous improvement. [College Inquiry Infrastructure Rubric](#).

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[CARA](#) offers the following support to help you implement its approach.

College Inquiry

Cost Associated



CARA provides curriculum, as well as professional development and coaching to support college counseling and program development. Schools typically undergo three to four years of coaching, gradually reducing support in the third and fourth years. This phased approach enables schools to take ownership of their college readiness initiatives and provide ongoing support for students. Coaches assist in communication systems and event planning, while also providing evaluation support with data tracking and assessments using program rubrics for ongoing improvement.

[Get in Touch](#)

College Bridge

Cost Associated



CARA provides coaching support to establish the College Bridge peer-to-peer advising program within schools, where high school alumni advise seniors in the transition to college.

[Get in Touch](#)

Reach

In the 2023–2024 academic year, CARA operated in three states, reaching staff and students with programming.

70

School-based
Staff Trained

44

Sites

3,100

Students

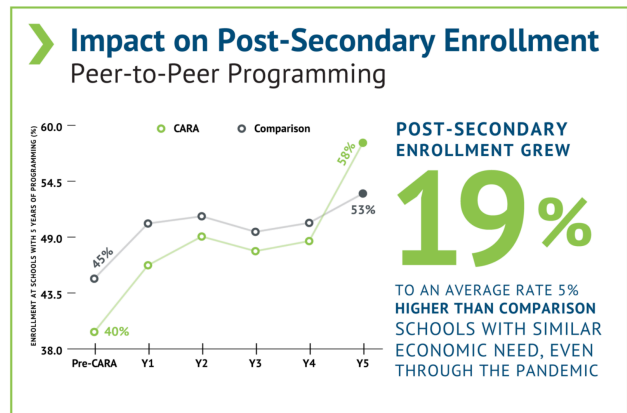
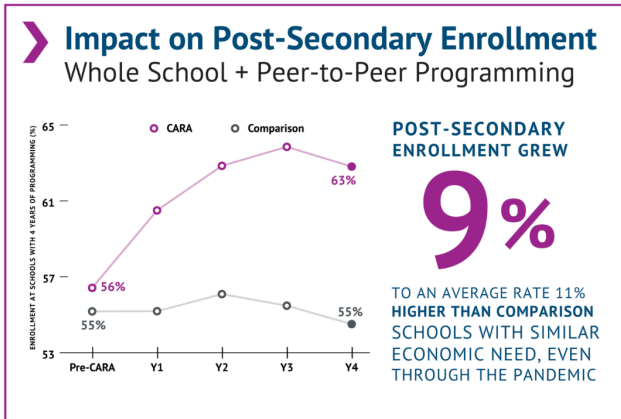
77%

Economic
Need Index

Impact

College Inquiry has demonstrated an impact on postsecondary enrollment when combined with peer-to-peer programming. Peer-to-peer programming also demonstrates a strong impact as a standalone program in schools.

- Schools implementing the College Inquiry program saw postsecondary enrollment grow 9% to an average rate 11% higher than comparison schools with similar economic need, even through the pandemic. [By the Numbers: Whole School](#)
- Schools implementing the peer-to-peer programming demonstrated a 19% increase in postsecondary enrollment to an average rate 5% higher than comparison schools with similar economic need. [By the Numbers: Peer-to-Peer Programming](#)



Contact

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RESOURCES

[Sample Curriculum Map](#)

Sample curriculum map for College Inquiry covering 9th–12th grades.

[Sample Lesson: Exploring College Majors](#)

Sample lesson for the 10th-grade College Inquiry curriculum.

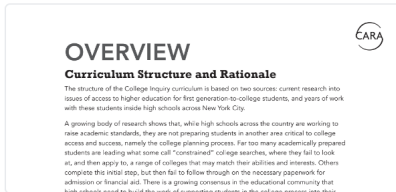
[College Office Resources](#)

Overview of training content for the role of the college office.



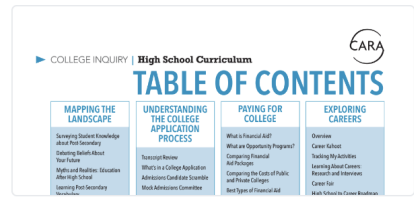
Being a CARA College Bridge Coach

A video of College Bridge coaches sharing the experience of peer advising.



Curriculum Rationale

Rationale for the development of the College Inquiry curriculum.



Curriculum Table of Contents

Overview of what is covered in the College Inquiry curriculum.



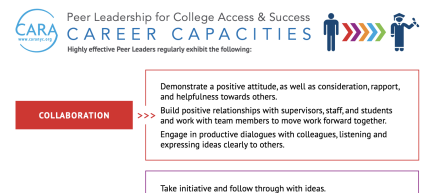
Peer Advisor Training Content

Overview of what is covered in the peer advisor training.



Peer Advisor Core Competencies

Competencies of the peer advisors.



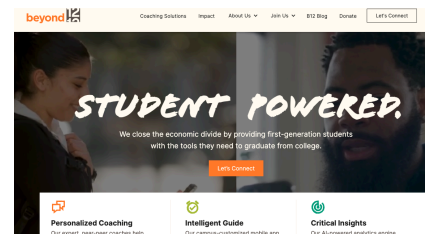
Peer Advisor Career Capacities

Career capacities developed by the peer advisors.



PowerSchool Naviance

Example of a college access and enrollment data tracking tool.



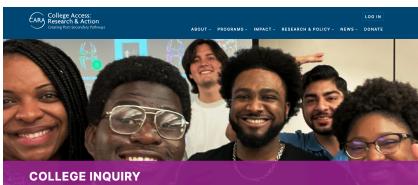
Beyond 12

Example of a college access and enrollment data tracking tool.

School	Senior Cohort Size			
	Highly Developed	Developed	Developing	Not Yet Developed
College Access and Career Exposure & Understandings	98% Grade 10-11+ 100% Grade 12-14+ 100% Grade 15-18+ 100% Grade 19+ (4+)	98% Grade 10-11+ 100% Grade 12-14+ 100% Grade 15-18+ 100% Grade 19+ (4+)	98% Grade 10-11+ 100% Grade 12-14+ 100% Grade 15-18+ 100% Grade 19+ (4+)	98% Grade 10-11+ 100% Grade 12-14+ 100% Grade 15-18+ 100% Grade 19+ (4+)
Average Number of College & Postsecondary Sites by Student by Start of 11th Grade	5+	3-4	1-2	0
Assessment of growth in student knowledge	In each grade	In multiple grades	In a single grade	Not at all
College-Counseling Staff (Full-Time/Part-Time)	< 1:80	1:81 to 1:150	1:151 to 1:224	1:225 or more

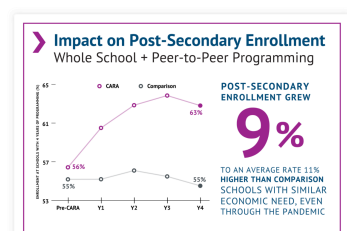
College Inquiry Infrastructure Rubric

Rubric used to assess progress on embedding College Inquiry into schools.



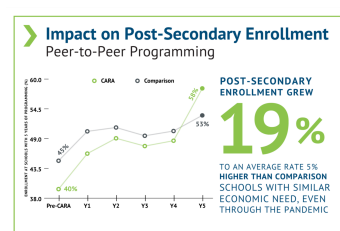
CARA College Inquiry Website

The College Inquiry page on CARA's website.



By the Numbers: Whole School

Data showing the impact of CARA's College Inquiry and peer advising programs.



By the Numbers: Peer-to-Peer Programming

Data showing the impact of CARA's peer advising programs.