Integrating College and Career Readiness (ICCR)
Annual Report

Prepared for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

July 2014
Executive Summary

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) funded five school districts—Chicopee, Gill-Montague, Hampden-Wilbraham, Northbridge, and Weymouth—to serve as demonstration sites for the Integrating College and Career Readiness (ICCR) Demonstration Initiative. The purpose of this competitive grant program is to provide start-up support to districts to create a comprehensive approach to college and career readiness through the creation and integration of activities that mutually support both academic and workplace readiness goals for all students in grades 7–12.

All five of the districts used the 2013–2014 school year as a planning year, with program implementation scheduled for September 2014. This report highlights key findings from the planning year, gathered through grantee meetings, interviews, surveys, and document review.

Planning Year Successes

District representatives were asked to identify successes and challenges of their grant’s planning phase. Reported successes were fairly consistent across the five sites, and a summary of the most frequently cited successes is provided below.

- **Assembled a Planning Team** – All districts noted assembling a collaborative planning team as a successful phase of their planning process.

- **Strengthened Communication and Collaboration between Middle School and High School** – All districts included representatives from both their middle school(s) and high school(s) on their planning teams. Respondents from three of the districts cited the strengthened collaborative relationships built between middle school and high school staff.

- **Conducted Needs Assessments of Key Stakeholders** – The majority (84 percent) of planning team members reported that they gathered teacher and guidance counselor input on college and career readiness needs and/or feasibility of planned initiatives. In addition, two districts surveyed multiple stakeholders (i.e., teachers, students, and parents).

- **Increased Outreach and Awareness of ICCR Initiative** – Approximately two-thirds of planning team members reported that their team was ‘effective’ or ‘very effective’ at generating awareness at their school about the ICCR initiative. Representatives from three districts noted the success of building awareness among key stakeholders including: district-level administrators, building administrators, school committee members, school staff, students, and parents.

- **Increased Outreach with Local Employers** – Three districts increased outreach to local businesses and other employers during the planning phase.

- **Piloted ICCR Activities** – Three districts piloted or expanded ICCR-related initiatives at the middle school and/or high school level. Piloted initiatives included a middle school career fair, CCR lessons and research projects in classroom and advisory formats, a career breakfast event with local employers, guest speaker presentations, the initiation of an individual learning plan process, and expanded summer programming.

- **Completed ICCR Implementation Plan** – All five districts submitted their ICCR implementation plan to ESE. Three-quarters of planning team respondents reported that their team was either ‘very effective’ or ‘effective’ at deciding what and how ICCR strategies and activities will be implemented during the 2014–2015 school year.
- **Initiated or Scheduled CCR Curriculum Writing** – All five districts have begun or scheduled summer institutes to develop CCR lesson plans and activities to be incorporated into their classrooms, developmental guidance, or advisory periods for the 2014–2015 school year.

The planning team members commonly identified the following key factors for their early success.

- **Inclusion of a Planning Year** – All districts noted the inclusion of a planning year as a critical element of their success. The extended planning time period enabled all teams to be strategic and realistic about their selected ICCR strategies and modes of implementation, provided time for small-scale piloting of career readiness initiatives, supported collaboration and team building within and across schools and between districts, and allowed planning team members the opportunity to gather input from and educate key stakeholders on the importance of integrating college and career readiness cohesively and systematically into the middle school and high school experience.

- **Strong Planning Team** – All districts noted the importance of dedicated and motivated planning team members along with strong leadership on ICCR planning teams. Consistent collaboration among members and defined roles and responsibilities were viewed as essential to success. In addition, several respondents noted the importance of diverse stakeholder representation on planning teams to offer varying viewpoints. Respondents also noted the importance of a commonly held belief about the importance of ICCR and the related positive impacts on students.

- **Support from School and District Leaders** – All districts noted the importance of gaining support and buy-in from both district-level and building-level administrators. Three of the five districts reported strong support at both the school and district levels, noting that this support was essential to the planning process. The remaining two districts both suggested engaging with administrators early in the process.

- **Building on Established CCR Initiatives and Relationships** – Respondents reported the importance of building on established activities and relationships as a means to garner additional buy-in and support. Furthermore, participants discussed the advantages of piloting activities with established collaborators and dedicated partners or teachers prior to implementing on a large scale.

- **Dedicated Funding and Support** – All districts cited the importance of receiving dedicated funding and technical assistance from ESE to move their ICCR initiative forward.

- **Collaboration with Other ICCR Grantees** – A few respondents spoke to the importance of communicating and collaborating with other demonstration grantees to brainstorm ideas and discuss lessons learned.

**Planning Year Challenges**

Planning team members from each of the five districts also reported facing numerous challenges in the planning process. Based on the planning team survey findings, the most commonly identified challenges to advancing the ICCR initiative include:

- **Available Time for Scheduling ICCR Activities** – The most frequently cited challenge was finding available time for scheduling ICCR activities into the middle school (61 percent) and high school (48 percent) day.

- **Available Common Planning Time** – Nearly half of all respondents reported finding available common planning time for teachers and counselors at the middle school (47 percent) and high school (42 percent) as a key challenge.

- **Appropriate Staffing** – Respondents noted the challenge of appropriate staffing in place at the middle school (56 percent) and high school (24 percent) for implementing planned ICCR strategies. In addition, approximately one-third of respondents noted the challenge of gaining support from middle school teachers who are not part of the ICCR planning team.
Available Time for ICCR Planning Team to Meet – Approximately one-quarter of planning team members cited the challenge of meeting as a full team, given the diversity of stakeholders across multiple schools or organizations.

Underlying all of these challenges is the universal and primary concern of longer-term sustainability. The question of whether these ICCR initiatives could survive over time without additional funding was a mainstay in planning team discussions and decisions. Districts also focused their efforts on piloting activities with select groups or grade levels and building on established activities and relationships. Other commonalities for reaching long-term goals included strengthening staff alignment and communication between middle school and high school, expanding external partnerships, conducting ongoing assessments of ICCR initiatives, and gradually expanding ICCR programming.

Introduction

In October 2013, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) funded five school districts—Chicopee, Gill-Montague, Hampden-Wilbraham, Northbridge, and Weymouth—to serve as demonstration sites for the Integrating College and Career Readiness (ICCR) Demonstration Initiative. The demonstration sites are tasked with creating a comprehensive approach to college and career readiness through the development and integration of curricula and activities that mutually support both academic and workplace readiness goals for all students in grades 7–12. The goal of the grant program is to support districts in their work to promote student engagement, enhance academic achievement, support social-emotional development, and provide workplace readiness skills that will lead to more students graduating from high school who are ready for career and postsecondary success.

Based on recommendations from the 2012 “From Cradle to Career: Educating our Students for Lifelong Success” report, the grant provides the five selected districts with two years of funding to plan and implement strategies that engage key stakeholders and increase the availability of career readiness programs for students. Demonstration sites are expected to work towards one or more of the following eight strategies:

- All students participate in career readiness activities starting at least by grade 7,
- All students use the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan to set goals and assess learning when participating in workplace experiences,
- All students participate in the development of an individual learning plan (ILP) to manage their educational and career pathways,
- All students have the opportunity to complete an expanded MassCore, which integrates career readiness activities into a rigorous high school program of study,
- Students play an active leadership role in developing an evaluation of an integrated academic and career readiness system,
- Districts develop and expand partnerships with employers and local workforce development agencies to enhance college and career readiness programming,
- Districts implement the Massachusetts School Counseling Model (Mass Model) at the high school level, with the option to do so at the middle school level, and,
- Districts create and expand collaborative team time for teachers to work on the integration of academic and career-related curriculum.

All five districts decided to use the 2013–2014 school year and the summer of 2014 as a planning period, and to begin implementation in September 2014.
The ICCR Demonstration Initiative is being evaluated by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI). The primary goals of the evaluation include:

- Documenting the planning and implementation process of the five demonstration sites,
- Providing ongoing feedback to support program planning, implementation, and improvement,
- Measuring program impacts on participating students, as well as changes to district, schools, and external partners, and,
- Exploring the potential for scalability of ICCR programs.

More specifically, district teams were asked to conduct the following tasks during their planning stage:

- Assemble an ICCR planning team,
- Attend the three ICCR grantee meetings to share progress, challenges, and lessons learned throughout the planning year,
- Conduct a needs assessment to identify current district- and school-level strengths and weaknesses or gaps in career readiness services for middle and high school students,
- Identify the key ICCR strategies their district will be prioritizing, and,
- Create an implementation plan for the 2014–2015 school year.

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1 From Cradle to Career: Educating our Students for Lifelong Success. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, June 2012.