Making Caring Common School Campaign
Actions to Promote Equity and Access

Making Caring Common’s new national campaign seeks to mobilize high schools and middle schools to prepare young people to be constructive citizens who create a better world. Learn more about the campaign at highschools.makingcaringcommon.org.

To join the campaign, we are asking schools to commit to take action to advance one or more of the following goals: 1) deepen students’ care for others and their communities; 2) increase equity and access for all students in the college admissions process; and 3) reduce excessive achievement pressure. These goals align with and build on our successful Turning the Tide initiative that has engaged more than 175 college admissions offices nationwide.

This document offers school leaders the opportunity to take the lead in this work by committing to a significant, new action to promote equity and access. (Our campaign’s other goals—deepening students’ concern for others and reducing excessive achievement pressure—are taken up in separate documents).

Why equity and access?
Justice—and any healthy democracy—depend on a fair and equitable education system. Such a system is also fundamental to the core goal of this initiative—preparing all young people to be informed, constructive community members and citizens. Yet access to key educational opportunities and resources, and specifically to resources in the college admissions process, clearly differ dramatically in this country based on students’ economic class, race, and ethnicity. It’s vital to level the playing field for economically, racially, and ethnically diverse students.

What’s different about this campaign’s approach to equity and access?
Rather than duplicating the many important access efforts underway across the country or recreating the many strong resources on best practices in promoting college access, we will soon provide a toolkit for schools containing links to several resources that might be useful to you in general, as well as spark your thinking about a new step. Please keep in mind that, to be included in this campaign, your action needs to be substantial enough to significantly improve the post-secondary prospects of your students or students outside your school.

Below we focus on four types of actions that we think hold promise and tend not to receive a great deal of attention in college access work: 1) More effectively and fairly capturing the strengths of students facing disadvantages in the college application process; 2) Forming
reciprocal partnerships with other schools focused on college admissions that enable partnering schools to draw effectively on each others’ assets and resources; 3) Making college admissions resources available (if you are a school with considerable resources) to students outside of your school; and 4) Utilizing data effectively to identify students who need additional supports.

How can schools take the lead?
Below is a menu of specific actions that you might take in each of these four areas at your school. Please don’t feel confined by the list. Any new, significant steps to advance this goal will support our collective cause. What’s important is that the action is meaningful enough to significantly affect access and equity in your community or in other communities.

We are specifically interested in new actions or efforts to substantially augment existing actions to advance this goal. By “new” we mean a commitment that is at least in part a response to this request to join the campaign. If you are making a commitment aligned with this effort, we hope to include your school among a group of schools taking the lead to make a difference in an upcoming report that we expect will attract significant media attention. We know that certain changes can take time, and commitments to make changes to be implemented in the future are entirely sufficient at this point. We also know that many of you are utilizing promising practices that would be valuable to share, and we will be in touch in the coming weeks about ways you can share these practices.

If your school is committed to taking any of the following actions, please let us know by emailing highschools@makingcaringcommon.org or filling out the online form at https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/commit-take-action.

Your school’s commitments

We, __________________________ [name of school], commit to the following (please indicate to us which of these steps your school is committed to taking):

❑ Capturing the strengths of students facing disadvantages

Why: The strengths of many students who do not do well on traditional measures such as the SAT or ACT are not adequately captured in the current college application process. Often, the college application process fails to capture the strengths of low-income students and students of color in particular who are dealing with demands and burdens of various kinds. A student might, for example, work 20 hours a week to support his/her family and take care of a sibling after school and still manage to obtain a “B” average, but this student’s impressive determination and aptitude is not typically captured in the college admissions process.
**How:** Our team is generating free guidelines focusing on helping school staff support students in articulating in the college application process the various demands on their lives. These guidelines also equip staff to help students better articulate their social and emotional strengths in their applications—strengths that are of strong interest to many of our 175+ *Turning the Tide* endorsers. Some of our *Turning the Tide* endorsers have also expressed interest in themselves providing support in the application process, such as application fee waivers, for students who demonstrate resilience or strong ethical character.

**Please consider as your action as part of this initiative:**

- If you are not doing this already, develop a system that enables all students to compile and articulate information about their background, goals, and out-of-school time commitments that demonstrate diligence and resilience in the college admissions process (see our guidelines).

If you have connections to college admissions representatives, please also consider asking them if and how they consider these strengths in the admissions process, and if they’d be willing to provide application fee waivers or other forms of support to students demonstrating these strengths in the application process. Consider asking college admissions offices if and how they consider social and emotional strengths as well as information about students’ backgrounds in the admissions process.

**Partnering with other schools in reciprocal relationships that promote equity and access**

**Why:** In the college admissions process, many high school students can benefit from reciprocal relationships between high schools that draw on each school’s particular strengths and assets. Partnerships between high schools that differ substantially in race, class, and culture can be especially useful. Yet these partnerships also present many challenges. Too often, such partnerships are structured in ways that are, for example, patronizing to economically disadvantaged students and to schools lacking financial resources and fail to adequately draw on these students’ and schools’ many strengths. Too often, such partnerships also don’t adequately prepare students to collaborate effectively with students from different backgrounds, and too often students are unprepared for the anger and disillusionment they may feel when fully confronted with vast disparities in resources between their schools and other schools. **Thoughtful attention to these challenges, including careful preparation for these students, is vital.**

**How:** These partnerships can take many forms. Consider, for example:

- Partnering with other schools on a college counseling institute where counselors from a diverse set of schools can share best counseling practices or exchange information about effective college search tools for students. Schools can bring different strengths to these partnerships. Schools with large numbers of
immigrant and low-income students, for example, often have particular expertise on guiding these students in the admissions process.

- Providing regular opportunities to share resources—e.g., guidebooks, college planning tools and admissions-related curricula—as well as to share contacts with admissions officers and with others who may be helpful in admissions.
- Bringing students from a diverse set of schools together several times a year to learn about bridge and gap year programs or about the many non-traditional, alternative pathways to postsecondary success.
- Forming peer networks across a diverse set of schools that enable students to share information about colleges and the college application process, as well as about alternative pathways to careers.
- Co-sponsoring career exploration fairs, beginning in 9th and 10th grade, that expose students to a wide range of possible careers.

- ❏ Providing support to students outside of your school

  Why: There are great disparities in college admissions resources between schools. Some schools, for example, provide SAT prep courses or transportation for college visits to students, advantages that are not available to students in most schools. Yet there are many ways that schools with considerable assets can advance equity and share resources with students outside of their school.

  How: Consider using your school’s resources to support others—especially schools and students that have fewer resources and/or limited access to higher education. For example:

  - If you offer standardized test prep for your students, consider inviting students without access to this prep to join your prep for free.
  - If you rent a bus to take your students on college tours, invite members of a local school that might not otherwise travel to that college. Recruit parents and students from your school to invite students who cannot afford these trips to join them on college visits.
  - If you host a program for families or students about college options, invite families or students from a neighboring community that may not otherwise be exposed to this information.
  - If you provide or pay for training for your staff about college preparation or admission, expand these opportunities for staff in other schools that cannot afford this training.

- ❏ Utilizing data to guide continuous improvement

  Why: Squeezed for time and resources, schools often don’t have a clear picture of which students are—and are not—receiving adequate support and guidance
in exploring post-secondary options. Yet even a small commitment of time and resources can yield very useful data that can be used to identify students needing more support.

**How:** Consider the following data collection strategies:

- Track post-secondary data for all students in your school to identify which groups are least likely to attend college or to embark on another promising post-secondary path. Develop an action plan to better serve the needs of those students.
- Collect survey data from students about the support they received from your school as part of the college admission process. Questions might invite students to share whether they received enough support, the right kinds of support, and what steps the school took that were most and least meaningful. Develop an action plan based on students’ feedback.

*We would be thrilled to have you join us in this campaign. Please consider taking one of these steps—or generate an idea of your own! Ready to commit to an action?* [Click here](mailto:highschools@makingcaringcommon.org) or email highschools@makingcaringcommon.org.