Parents and Youth for Change empowers families to improve educational opportunities. We are parents, siblings, recent graduates, high school and middle school students, our newest Vermonters and those who have lived here for generations. This year, we focused on understanding how students develop and reach their college and career-readiness goals. To pick this issue, we heard from over 300 parents and youth, in one-to-one conversations and small group meetings.

We learned about this issue by: organizing 10 research meetings with BHS high school and guidance administrators, middle school principals, Partnership for Change, and school partners; visiting a school; reviewing national research on college-readiness; looking at 8th grade test data to better understand high school readiness and surveying 100 BHS students.

**What We Learned:**

1. BHS has started to make important changes. Planning continues toward a student centered learning system where all students thrive.

2. There are opportunities for students to learn about college and careers through courses, college workshops, internships and special college preparation programs for about 90 students (VSAC and Upward Bound) who would be the first in their family to go to college.

3. At BHS, working with a Guidance Counselor is the main way that students are supported in planning for high school and beyond. Students are expected to meet with their Guidance Counselor at least once a year. Guidance Counselors can meet with students and parents more, as requested. Each Guidance Counselor works with about 260 students. In 11th and 12th grade, students gets forms about internet college resources, teacher recommendations, requesting transcripts, some college exam preparation and registration information and scholarships.

Many teachers and community partners work with students one-on-one to help them with their college essays, provide recommendations and help students to reach their college and career-readiness goals.

**Path to College-Readiness**

To understand what it takes to reach college-readiness, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform helped us to review national research. We learned that the path to college includes: (1) Good attendance; (2) Knowing college expectations and taking appropriate courses in high school; (3) Accessing support to prepare for college; (4) Understanding college entrance exam requirements; (5) A “college-going culture” at school - a belief that all students can go to college and ongoing encouragement and support to gain the skills and information needed to get there, and; (6) Understanding and successfully accessing financial aid.

When we surveyed 100 students directly about their goals, worries and needs, we learned that:

1. 90% of 12th Graders said their goal is to go to a 4-year college; At graduation, on average, about 60% of 12th Graders plan to attend a 4-year college.

2. Many students don’t feel like they have enough time, support, or opportunities during high school to plan for their future, explore their interests, understand their skill level and college entrance expectations, select from different college/career preparation options, and understand the financing.

When we looked at students skills and how students explore their college/career interests, we learned that:
1. Many students are not reaching high school readiness as measured by 8th Grade test scores (NECAP)- this is particularly true for students whose families have less money.

2. To take courses in high school that match 4-year college-entrance requirements, students must reach a certain “skill level”. If they don’t, it is hard to take the courses in high school that lead to 4-year college. Taking college classes during high school and the Upward Bound college prep program also require that students reach a certain “skill-level.” Many students who would benefit from these opportunities cannot access them.

3. Many students do not currently access opportunities to explore their interests and possible careers.

**Proposed Solution: A Strong and Effective Advisory Advisory Program**

To develop and reach college and career-readiness goals and skills, students need the time, space and a strong relationship with someone who knows them well. We met with Partnership for Change fellow Beth Brodie to learn about Advisory systems. We also met with Vermont Adult Learning, looked at personal learning plans, and visited a school in New Hampshire that has a strong advisory program.

An advisor is a teacher who meets with 12 to 15 students, usually every day. Typically, guidance counselors support over 250 students, while, over the span of a four year high school experience, each student interacts with 20 to 30 teachers and each teacher engages with 300 to 400 students. The depth of relationship needed is difficult to achieve with such large numbers. Small advisory groups with more individualized attention and a long-term relationship ensure that all students are challenged and supported to reach high expectations.

About 85% of high schools in Vermont have some type of high school advisory program that focuses on every student being known well. Only 3 high schools in Vermont that graduate more than 50 students do not have an advisory program.

In a strong and effective advisory program:

- A student has the same teacher advisor for all of high school.
- The teacher advisor is a point person who helps students with academic goals, identifying interests and future planning for after high school.
- The teacher advisor is the primary contact for families.
- The teacher advisor encourages students to connect with resources and try different learning options like internships, college classes, and community service linked to their post high school planning and goals.

When we visited Pittsfield Middle/High School in New Hampshire, we saw an advisory system where the teacher advisor knows each student well, encourages students to set goals, access support and reach high expectations.

In our survey of 100 BHS students, 70% of students said it would be helpful to work with a teacher advisor as part of their regular school schedule to make the most out of their high school experience, to access opportunities and support, and to develop a plan for after graduation.

We are convinced that students will be more likely to succeed if they have one advisor for their four years of high school who knows them well and can help them develop a personal learning plan. Developing a strong and effective advisory program at BHS is important so students can achieve their goals for college and careers and be prepared for their future.