



National Student  
Clearinghouse®

## Improve Student Success:

California's Riverside County Office of Education  
Improves Students' Postsecondary Success with  
Data and Education Insights



Riverside County is one of California's largest counties, with 2.45 million residents as of 2018.<sup>1</sup> The county stretches across 23 school districts. Its 103 traditional and alternative high schools serve more than 425,000 students, about 32,000 of whom are high-school seniors. The county's schools serve a diverse population: 63 percent of students are economically disadvantaged, nearly 6,000 are in foster care, and 21 percent are English learners.

The Riverside County Office of Education provides guidance and support to the county's 23 K-12 school districts. In addition to overseeing school districts' budgets and the teacher credentialing process, the office provides "overarching educational goals, support and services leading to high school graduation, college readiness, and career preparedness of all county students enrolled in public education."<sup>2</sup> The office is divided into seven divisions and is dedicated to the goal that "Every student in Riverside County will graduate from high school academically and socially prepared for college, the workforce, and civic responsibility". (<https://www.rcoe.us/our-pledge/>)

According to a study by Georgetown University Public Policy Institute's Center on Education and the Workforce, 65 percent of jobs will require some kind of postsecondary education by 2020.<sup>3</sup> **And Riverside County is in danger of being left behind.**

**"Every student in Riverside County will graduate from high school academically and socially prepared for college, the workforce, and civic responsibility."**



A 2016 study of the 25 largest metropolitan areas in the country, published by the Lumina Foundation, revealed Riverside County's challenges in reaching its goals. The metropolitan region that includes Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ontario, California – a region locally known as the Inland Empire – ranked as the 13th most populous, with 4.4 million residents. However, when it came to college degree attainment, Riverside's metropolitan area ranked dead last. Nearly 28 percent of the region's residents had earned a four-year college degree.<sup>4</sup>

The Riverside County Office of Education is committed to changing those numbers by improving students' trajectories. To succeed in this effort, it's crucial for the county's educational leaders to know what happens to students after they graduate from high school.

The National Student Clearinghouse's StudentTracker for High Schools is the only service that provides verified college enrollment data that tracks a school's graduates for up to eight years after graduation. It's not a snapshot of a moment in time. It's a story that unfolds over years, as students persist in college, or transfer to a different college, or take some time away from college, or drop out and follow a different track.

Tracking each graduating class over time enables unique insights to emerge. It can help schools, districts, and counties answer important questions, such as:

- What percentage of students plan to enroll in college, but are not enrolled for the first fall semester after high school graduation (a phenomenon called "summer melt")?
- How many students drop out or stop out during or after the first year of college?
- How many students transfer schools? Are they transferring from a 2-year or 4-year institution?
- What percentage of a graduating class's students graduate from college in four years?

### **A fruitful partnership**

In 2006, the office began partnering with the Clearinghouse to use StudentTracker for High Schools in every school district in the county. In 2012, the office also put data-sharing agreements in place with each district, so that the office has the big-picture view, bringing together data from all of the districts to get a clear, county-wide perspective.

The missions of Riverside County Office of Education and the National Student Clearinghouse showcase that learning and success is a continuum that has no end point. "It is a progression. It is about all the other opportunities that go on in lifelong learning," said Gil Compton, director of college and career readiness, education services, for the Riverside County Office of Education.

The Riverside County Office of Education is well positioned to affect the change the region needs, because its leaders are neither school- or district-level administrators nor state-level policymakers.

<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau. "Quick Facts: Riverside County, California." <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/riversidecountycalifornia> Accessed September 19, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Riverside County Office of Education. "About RCOE." <https://www.rcoe.us/about/about-rcoe/> Accessed September 20, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University Public Policy Institute. "Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020." [https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES\\_Web\\_.pdf](https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_Web_.pdf) Accessed September 21, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Lumina Foundation. "Degree Attainment in the 25 Most Populous Metropolitan Regions in the Continental U.S." 2016. [https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/stronger\\_nation/2016/A\\_Stronger\\_Nation-2016-Metro\\_Map.pdf](https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/stronger_nation/2016/A_Stronger_Nation-2016-Metro_Map.pdf) Accessed September 20, 2019.



“We’re change agents,” Compton said. “It’s our responsibility to take the information from the state and the national level, digest it, synthesize it, and produce a product that our school districts can use, specifically the district offices, but also down to the high school, middle school, and elementary school level.”

Their commitment to improving Riverside’s students’ postsecondary outcomes grows out of their belief that when K-12 schools own the outcome at the postsecondary level, great things can happen. “We in K-12 have to own the outcome at the postsecondary level. We can’t just get our students across the graduation stage. We also have to understand the outcomes beyond graduation for our high school students,” Compton said. One of the best ways to do that is to look at postsecondary data – not just the admission rate, but enrollment, persistence, and completion rates as well. For that data, the county relies on the Clearinghouse.

### Goals, collaboration, and measurement

As a necessary first step, the county concentrated on improving high school graduation rates. “They can’t get into college if they don’t graduate from high school,” Compton said. The county’s high school graduation rates have improved from about 78 percent in 2010 to nearly 90 percent in 2018.<sup>5</sup> Next, the county formed the Riverside County Education Collaborative, bringing stakeholders together to focus on the following four college and career readiness initiatives:

- Increase the percentage of students applying to three or more colleges
- Increase the percentage of graduates enrolling in postsecondary education
- Increase the percentage of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act application completions
- Increase the number of students who are “college ready” as measured by several indicators<sup>6</sup>

StudentTracker for High Schools has been a key part of the collaborative’s ability to track, measure, and improve students’ progress toward these goals. “Our partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse since 2007 has catapulted our efforts to engage our county school districts in a continuous improvement process to increase postsecondary enrollment and persistence,” said Catalina Cifuentes, Executive Director of the College and Career Readiness Unit of the Riverside County Office of Education. “The StudentTracker reports – which show us where our graduates go to college, how long it takes them to earn their degrees, whether they transfer schools, and more – have served as a critical tool to measure the success of this initiative.”<sup>7</sup>

When districts improve their graduation rates significantly, it tends to raise questions about whether the increase has more to do with lower standards at the high school level than true improvement at the student level. Using StudentTracker for High Schools gives Riverside County confidence. For example, as the county improved its graduation rates, it correlated with a slight increase in reading and math scores. However, using StudentTracker for High Schools, the county was also able to show that it increased the number of students annually enrolling in college from 15,066 to 18,274 (out of over 32,000 graduating seniors). In 2018 there were an additional 3,208 college enrollees showed that more students weren’t just graduating – they were, in fact, meeting the requirements for college enrollment.

StudentTracker data enables the Riverside County Office of Education to see and understand their students’ postsecondary outcomes. Using this, school and district leaders can make key determinations about how their work affects student outcomes, and what changes might improve those outcomes.

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Executive Director  
College and Career Readiness Unit  
Riverside County Office of Education

“When do we maximize? What are the most effective methods? What are the most efficient? We would not have any understanding about that without the Clearinghouse’s data,” Compton said. By filling in those information gaps, the National Student Clearinghouse enables the office to provide the guidance and leadership necessary to move the needle on postsecondary student outcomes across Riverside County.

Collaboration is another key. Once the county started working collectively across its 23 school districts, it began to make real improvements. “We think we’re the only county in California that has a memorandum of understanding with all of our school districts” to share data and work together, Compton said. The goal for sharing the data is simple: improvement. They do not take a punitive approach. They start where they are and move forward from there, using a growth mindset. Data sharing is a key component of their success. “The support the county office can offer is exponential with the data sharing agreement in place,” Compton said.

### Examples of benefits and impact

For the Riverside County Office of Education, the Clearinghouse’s data provides several benefits. First, it enables good data visualization. It makes the data clear and understandable, which helps everyone, even those who are not well versed in statistics, understand and use the data. Second, the data provides a common starting point that cuts through assumptions and helps educators understand the current reality.

The data is full of surprises. For example, the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program is a four-year elective program dedicated to closing the achievement gap by giving kids a strong foundation in study habits and organizational skills to prepare them for school success.<sup>8</sup> AVID programs at the school level collect self-report data from AVID graduates about post-secondary plans.

According to AVID reports, ninety-two percent of AVID students complete the California requirements for college eligibility. The data reveals that 87% apply to college, 77% are accepted by a post-secondary institution, and 72% attend college in the first year after high school graduation. Going beyond student self report data, the AVID Center confirms enrollment numbers using the National Student Clearinghouse data. While AVID program managers might have initially been dismayed by the data, it was a wake-up call


<sup>5</sup> California Department of Education: DataQuest. “4-year Cohort Outcomes.” <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> Accessed September 23, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Riverside County Education Collaborative. <http://www.rcec.us/> Accessed September 20, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Advancement Via Individual Determination. <https://www.avid.org/> Accessed September 23, 2019.

<https://www.avid.org/cms/lib/CA02000374/Centricity/domain/8/snapshots/AVID%20Snapshot%20California.pdf>



California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office  
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Transfer Velocity Cohort - Parameter Selection Area

Select State-District-College  
Districtwide Search

Select District-College  
Riverside CCD

Select Cohort Year  
2012-2013

Select Years to Transfer  
2 Years

View Report

Export To -> ☒ Excel ☐ CSV ☐ Text

Records Per Page: 10

☒ Simple Layout ☐ Advanced Layout

Transfer Velocity Cohort Report - Data & Format Area

Report Area

☒ Years to Transfer - 2 Years

Cohort Year 2012-2013

	Transferred Student	Cohort Student
Riverside CCD	39	3218

and an opportunity to change more students’ lives. The first step in making up that 20-point gap was to understand the reality. Then, with the right data in hand, we can go about making changes to improve.

Another technique uses data analysis to learn what is working, and what’s not. Riverside County uses transcript analysis to study student pathways. For example, the team takes a high school with 3,000 students, 525 courses, and more than 100 teachers and studies every student’s transcript, mapping their journey through high school and plotting out which of those students were accepted into college, and where they enrolled.

The Clearinghouse data shows the enrollment, but Riverside supercharged that data by looking back over the high school careers of students who succeeded in college to discover what they did, what classes they took, what grades they earned, what activities they did, and more. School leaders then use the results of the transcript analysis to, as Compton put it, “replicate the good transcripts, and try to decrease the bad transcripts.”

Using transcript analysis, the Riverside County Office of Education provides school counselors detailed student level data to provide guidance to their students about their pathways through high school and to college, whether to a two-year or four-year institution. With caseloads often over 400:1, school counselors need efficient and effective ways to monitor student performance. With smart data analysis, StudentTracker for High Schools can change the trajectory of students across a school or district for years to come. The transcript analysis project has been used by high schools in Riverside County to increase college eligibility by 20 percentage points.

In some cases, the data helps to identify, and avoid, dead-end pathways. For many school districts and counties, community colleges are an important pathway for students. Riverside County works with community colleges regularly to ensure a smooth transition and, ultimately, successful outcomes for students. To verify that students are successful through this pathway, the county also takes a close look

at outcomes using StudentTracker for High Schools. StudentTracker helps Compton and his colleagues analyze the current reality, identify challenges and opportunities, observe patterns, and identify actions.

County officials discerned a troubling trend as they studied the data. Students heading to the local community colleges were not staying enrolled, and they were not transferring to other institutions. For many students, the pathway through the two-year institutions were not fruitful.

“Our data from the National Student Clearinghouse report for these two-year institutions is concerning. Our transfer rates are in the single digits. During a meeting with our Riverside County Education Collaborative we discussed the data and collectively agreed we can do better.” The Riverside County Education Collaborative is a grassroots network of five school districts, two community colleges, and the University of California, Riverside.

“The data showed large numbers of our high school graduates were enrolling in our local community colleges each year but very few were earning an Associates Degree and/or transferring to a four-year institution. It was clear that the community college pathway needed to improve. I couldn’t have gone into a meeting like that with confidence if I hadn’t had the Clearinghouse’s data.”

Because the Riverside County office has engaged so deeply with the Clearinghouse’s data, Riverside can support schools and districts in their attempts to improve student outcomes even earlier than high school. The county is now using StudentTracker data to map student pathways back to middle school – an initiative the office is calling “Magnify the Middle.”

Some of the county’s elementary school principals are asking for the StudentTracker data to track a past class of fifth-grade students all the way through high school and on past graduation. Who made it, and who didn’t? What lessons can be learned? “That’s how deep and rich the data the Clearinghouse produces for us is, and how deeply it can impact us,” Compton said.

Using StudentTracker for High Schools, the Riverside County Office of Education can evaluate how well initiatives are serving students – and make changes to serve them better in the future.

The goal of education is to create a better future for all of us. Through the Clearinghouse’s data, Riverside County Office of Education inspires that change better, faster, and more effectively.

“Education is the game-changer for us. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a traditional pathway or not, because collectively, it’s about social change,” Compton said. **“The Clearinghouse’s data gives us the power, and the leverage, and the strength to get better. And we’re using that data to change kids’ lives – one kid at a time, but collectively, as a nation.”**







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