Ensuring College Readiness and Academic System Alignment for All Students

A TACTICAL GUIDEBOOK October 2015

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Cross-sector partnerships are essential to helping all students prepare for college. As communities work together to ensure that all students are ready to succeed in college, they may have myriad questions about how best to help different student populations navigate the college pathway: *How can communities work to foster students' postsecondary aspirations at a young age? How can they ensure that all students have access to college-readiness curriculum? What kinds of academic and social supports should be made available outside of the classroom to help students, including adult learners, stay on track to postsecondary success?* The answers to such questions inform how we design interventions to improve student outcomes and continuously measure progress.

But cross-sector partnerships and academic system alignment can be difficult to manage and maintain unless communities have clear guidance, objectives, and strategies. Community partners must work together to assess what kinds of programming and initiatives work best for the various student populations within their communities. In other words, what works for one student population, may not necessarily work for another, as each student faces unique circumstances. In an effort to support community-based collaborations on college-readiness among key sectors—education, business, policy, and nonprofit and community organizations—the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) has developed this tactical guidebook with support from Lumina Foundation. The guidebook explains how some communities within the Community Partnership for Attainment (CPA) network overcame obstacles; these communities and already use cross-sector partnerships effectively to create greater academic alignment and increase college-readiness for underserved students.

We hope you will use this guidebook to learn more about different practices and tools that communities are using to improve academic system alignment and support college-readiness for all students, and how you could potentially adopt these practices and tools in your own communities. Our guidebook's opening **infographic** outlines seven points along The Pathway to College: *(1) Develop Students' Aspirations for College; (2) Offer High-Quality College-Readiness Curriculum; (3) Deliver Learning Outside the Classroom; (4) Increase Financial Awareness and Readiness for College; (5) Guide Students Through the College Admissions Process; (6) Create On-Ramps to Get Back on the College Track;* and *(7) Ease the Transition to College.* Each chapter then takes a deep dive into these points and includes: **interviews*** with community leaders about their community partnership strategies and practices; **checklists**, **templates**, **budget summaries**, **calendars**, and **protocols** showcasing the variety of tools already in use; and **additional resources**, with examples of other tools and more information on their implementation.

** Please note that all interviews are summaries of conversations and not verbatim records.*

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to promoting access to and success in higher education for all students. Based in Washington, D.C., IHEP develops innovative policy- and practice-oriented research to guide policymakers and education leaders, who develop high-impact policies that will address our nation's most pressing education challenges.

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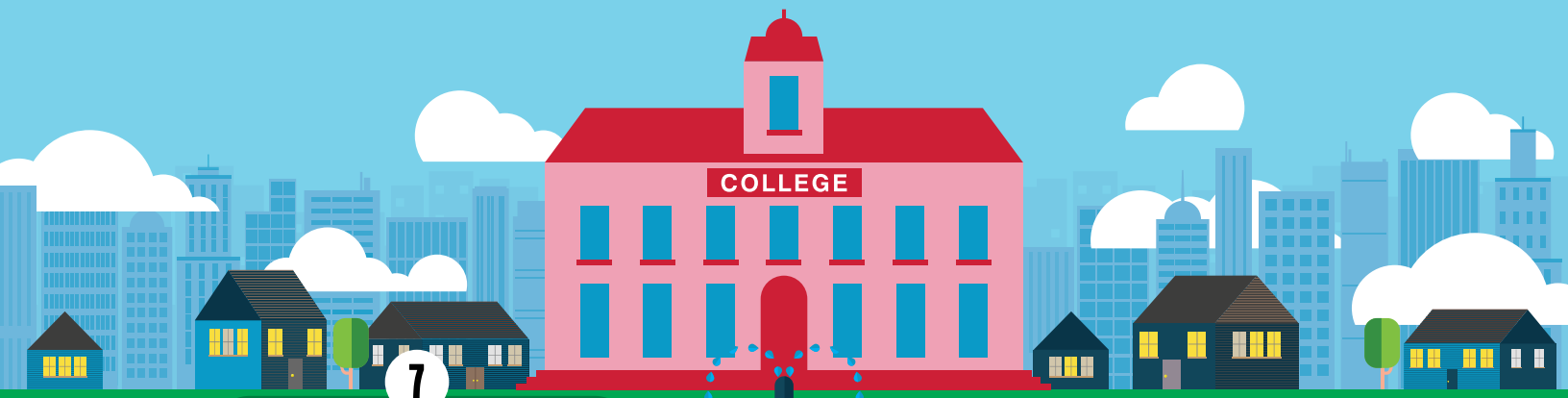
THE PATHWAY TO COLLEGE

A Readiness Framework



7 Ease the Transition to College

Help high school students remediate academic needs before enrollment; target orientation and support services to various student groups, including adult learners, to help them integrate into the college environment.

6 Create On-Ramps to Get Back on the College Track

Continually assess all students' progress to track readiness; re-engage students who get off track and support adults who want to enroll in college.

3 Deliver Learning Outside the Classroom

Offer disadvantaged students summer and after-school learning opportunities and enrichment programs to develop skills and interests.

5 Guide Students Through the College Admissions Process

Intervene early to counsel students on postsecondary options and provide comprehensive advice to both high school students and adults completing applications.

4 Increase Financial Awareness and Readiness for College

Early on, introduce under-resourced families to college financial planning, and support both high school seniors and adults returning to college in submitting aid applications.

1 Develop Students' Aspirations for College

Help all students to see college as possible and advantageous, and to maintain this vision despite setbacks.

2 Offer High-Quality College-Readiness Curriculum

Start college-ready curriculum offerings in middle school and later include high-level math courses and opportunities for students to earn college credit before graduation.

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- ***Tool:*** Learn how to plan a FAFSA completion night for students and families.
- ***Tool:*** Discover how to advise students on making informed financial decisions about college attendance.
- ***Tool:*** Learn how to help adult students prepare financially for college.
- ***Additional Resources***

Chapter Five: .....
How can communities guide students through the college admissions process?

- ***Interview:*** Learn how community leaders in New York City built a community partnership to provide free counselor training to city personnel and improve student outcomes.
- ***Tool:*** Find out how counselors can offer effective feedback on students' college application essays.
- ***Tool:*** Get advice on how to counsel adult students in writing their college application essays.
- ***Tool:*** Learn how virtual college tours allow students to visit campuses from the convenience of their homes.
- ***Additional Resources***

Chapter Six:
How can communities create on-ramps to get students back on the college-going track?

- ***Interview:*** Learn how community leaders in Hartford, Connecticut, built a community partnership to help disconnected youth navigate barriers to postsecondary attainment.
- ***Tool:*** Learn how Youth Development Specialists can oversee the delivery of services that help students get back on track.
- ***Tool:*** Find out how a program model for contextualized bridge curriculum helps to serve disconnected youth.
- ***Tool:*** Learn how to help students study for the GED by providing a term-by-term planner.
- ***Additional Resources***

Chapter Seven: .....
How can communities ease the transition to college for graduating high school students and for adults?

- ***Interview:*** Discover how community leaders in Boston, Massachusetts, extended their student support model to reach out to students during the summer and helped to mitigate summer melt.
- ***Tool:*** Learn how to help students prioritize summer tasks with a sample summer task checklist.
- ***Tool:*** Learn how a template transition course syllabus may help your community better prepare your students for the transition to college.
- ***Tool:*** Find out how to help adult students earn credit for what they already know, thereby easing their transition to college.
- ***Additional Resources***

Chapter One:

How Can Communities Develop Students' Aspirations for College?

Postsecondary aspirations need to be nurtured early on, surrounding students—as well as their teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents—in a college-going culture that raises college expectations for all students. Institutions of higher education, schools, community-based organizations, and other community sectors play an important role in building this supportive environment that enables all students to think of college as a realistic part of their futures.

Community events, workshops, and online tools are examples of programming that can be implemented to build a college-going culture. Greater exposure to different postsecondary pathways can help students identify their education and career options, and opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom can help students learn about academic planning, career exploration, college affordability, and personal enrichment.

Educators and service providers must think about how they can best support students who embark on the pathway to college at later points as well. After being out of school for years, adult students may feel particularly disconnected from academic pathways, but community leaders can provide adequate supports that help them aspire to college as well as manage work and family responsibilities. Below are a few examples of supports that can help myriad students develop college aspirations.

College Access Programs: *Does your community want to offer programs that bring students and their families together to focus on preparing for college?* These programs help students understand what is required for college at an early age so that they see college as a real possibility. Many programs specifically target underserved populations, such as first-generation students and adult learners, to ensure that their distinct needs are met. It is important to include families within these programs, as they are a key component to fostering students' education and career aspirations.

College Coaches: *Does your community want to connect students with individuals who can provide guidance and support throughout the college preparation process?* Having access to coaches with college-going experience allows students to establish one-on-one relationships with those who can serve as role models, monitor their progress, listen to their challenges, and advise them.

Peer Mentors: *Does your community want to show students that others from similar backgrounds have successfully navigated college?* Peer mentors who share similar backgrounds with students understand the unique challenges they face. For underserved students especially, peer mentors serve as role models, helping students to see that others before them have successfully gone through the college application process.

Education and Career Exploration Opportunities: *Does your community want to help students understand how their postsecondary plans connect to future career aspirations?* Helping students identify academic and career interests—in order to create plans that align with those goals—lets students visualize themselves in specific postsecondary pathways and careers. Business community partners can help students understand their options through career fairs and internship opportunities. There are also online software programs that allow students to explore their interests, learn about possible careers, and find information on education and training. Adult learners can also use such software to search work options, research employers, network for opportunities, write résumés and cover letters, and prepare for interviews.

This section of the guidebook features an **interview with the director of the Westside Pathways Project, in Salt Lake City, Utah**. In it, she explains how their university–school partnership begins supporting students as early as kindergarten through classroom mentoring, on-campus activities, and strong parental engagement. This chapter also includes different tools to demonstrate the various ways communities can build students' aspirations, such as a handout for mentors working with middle school students, and the College Success Board Game. This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources**, where you can find more information on helping students develop postsecondary aspirations.

Westside Pathways Project, Salt Lake City, Utah: Building College Awareness and Aspirations Among Elementary School Students

- *Dr. Dolores Delgado Bernal, Professor of Education, Culture, & Society,* ***University of Utah****; Co-Director and Co-Founder,* ***Westside Pathways Project***

IHEP spoke to Dr. Dolores Delgado Bernal from the University of Utah to learn about the merger between two college access programs that established the Westside Pathways Project. Delgado Bernal describes the K–12 postsecondary partnership that established the Adelante mentorship program for elementary school students, the expansion of the program to include middle schools, and the 2013 merger with the Mestizo Arts and Activism program to establish a cohesive system of supports to increase college awareness and college aspirations among low-income, minority students in Salt Lake City. The interview relates innovative practices in building, growing, and sustaining partnership programs between postsecondary institutions and K–12 systems to develop a K–16 pipeline and increase college access for underserved students.

Goals

IHEP: What is the Westside Pathways Project, and what are the program's overall goals in your community?

The Westside Pathways Project resulted from the merger of the Adelante program for elementary students; the Activists, Leaders, and Scholars (ALAS) for middle school students; and the Mestizo Arts and Activism of Salt Lake City (SLC; where Jackson Elementary school is located). The partnership communities are located on the west side of SLC, which is home to a large Latino population as well as other students of color. Our fundamental goal was to develop a college-going culture for all students, beginning in kindergarten. We knew that in order to do this, we would have to change community and teacher expectations for students, our methods for communicating about college with students, and the supports we provide to students.

Today, the Adelante program places freshman undergraduate mentors from the University of Utah in Jackson Elementary School and Bryant Middle School, and provides elementary and middle school students with opportunities to visit local colleges and universities. The Mestizo Arts and Activism program (MAA) has graduate students from the university working with undergraduate student mentors, who then work with high school students to develop and conduct research projects on issues of particular importance to their communities. The same undergraduate mentors also provide guidance to mentees on college preparation and application. Together, these programs provide support to students throughout the K–16 pipeline.

IHEP: What was the impetus for developing the Adelante program, and what are its main components?

The University of Utah created an office to support community partnerships called University Neighborhood Partners, which then completed a large needs assessment of the west side of SLC—a racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse community.

In 2005, based on the findings of the needs assessment, the University Neighborhood Partners office put out a request for proposals for mini-grants to develop community partnership programming that would create educational pathways. As faculty in the College of Education at the University of Utah, Dr. Enrique Alemán, Dr. Octavio Villalpando, and I thought, "This is our community, this is our area of expertise, and, oh, here's this mini-grant [approximately $5,000] to start up a partnership." We gauged interest by speaking with the principal of Jackson Elementary School, and then we applied for the grant and moved forward.

> "This is our community, this is our area of expertise, and, oh, here's this mini-grant [approximately $5,000] to start up a partnership."

There are five components to the Adelante program: *university mentoring, university visits, cultural and academic enrichment, parent and teacher engagement,* and *research for change*. The first two components involve placing freshmen undergraduate students of color in elementary schools to mentor elementary students for an entire academic year; these components also involve bringing the students to the university—either for campus visits or for a weeklong science camp or law camp—starting in their kindergarten year.

The cultural and academic enrichment's third component includes an oral history project and after-school programming. The oral history project gives students an opportunity to learn about their cultural backgrounds and to share this information with classmates and teachers.

A priority for our program has always been parent engagement, part of the fourth component. We actively engage parents through family advocacy weekend workshops and continually seek feedback to ensure that we continue to improve the program by addressing priority issues for parents and the local community. We assisted parents with starting their own organization, called Padres en Acción (Parents in Action), to become stronger advocates. Engaging teachers is also part of the fourth component, and we have provided professional development and strategies for teachers and parents to engage with each other. The last component, research for change, entails constantly thinking about how to connect university research with the school system in order to identify what's working and what is not working for the community, and to take action that leads to change.

IHEP: Why did the Adelante program want to merge with the Mestizo Arts and Activism program?

The Mestizo Arts and Activism program originated as a youth participatory action research program in which high school students worked with undergraduates to research community issues and to use their findings to affect change. Three years ago, Dr. Enrique Alemán and I took over advisory responsibilities for the program and merged the youth participatory action research program work with college readiness mentoring. This means that high school students who participate in the MAA program now receive guidance from graduate or undergraduate mentors on both their research projects and specifically on college preparation and application, providing a more robust mentoring role and seamless college-preparation pipeline for elementary and secondary students.

Partnership

IHEP: Why did you choose to partner with Jackson Elementary School in particular?

Jackson Elementary had a Spanish dual-immersion program that aimed to develop bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural students. We (my family and Dr. Alemán's family) had moved into that community and wanted our children to go to a bilingual school. This is how we became aware of the school and its dual-immersion programming. We thought our idea for the Adelante program could be particularly compatible with the school's model.

IHEP: How did you establish a partnership with Jackson Elementary School?

Prior to applying for the grant, we reached out to the principal of Jackson Elementary to begin a community partnership program. This way, the principal was at the table from the beginning. Since our plan was to start small (two kindergarten classrooms) and grow from there, our next step was to reach out to the teachers who would be teaching those classes to ensure that they were also at the table. One challenge we encountered was that not all principals and educators shared the same vision or social justice orientation, though they expressed support for the program. Given that we've gone through four principals in the span of a decade, another challenge has been to maintain the support of different principals throughout turnover.

IHEP: How did the partnership grow over time?

When we started the partnership, we used a model of strategic growth. At the beginning, we only worked with two Spanish-immersion kindergarten classrooms at Jackson Elementary; we then added a grade every year. As we were moving forward, we quickly realized that we needed to have teachers on board. By the end of the first year, we met with the first grade teachers and said, "Here's what we've been doing. How do you want to change it?" When the first group of kindergarteners moved up to first grade, we brought in the new kindergarten class and their parents. So, every year, we would bring the next group of teachers and the new kindergarten families to the table to establish co-ownership and buy-in. Today, we're working with all elementary school grades, both dual immersion and non-dual immersion.

We didn't want to lose all the students from Jackson Elementary when they moved onto Bryant Middle School in seventh grade. When the first cohort of Adelante students was in fifth grade, we started talking to the principal at Bryant, who was very interested in the Adelante program. In the first year, Bryant Middle School offered the cohort of students from the Adelante program a special advising class as part of their school day. However, since Bryant Middle School already had programming in place, which focused on college awareness and facilitating college visits, we ultimately decided to work closely with the program coordinator at the middle school in order to connect students to programs that were already in place.

IHEP: Who were your partners from the University of Utah?

The director of the University Neighborhood Partners office was very supportive and worked closely with the president of the University of Utah. Having the support of the director proved to be very important to maintaining support for and awareness of the program at the institution level.

> "As faculty in the College of Education, we made a concerted effort to engage other faculty around the idea that this was not just community service—not just outreach—but that it involved an engaged research component."

Initially, the College of Education did not play a significant leadership role other than housing the program. As faculty in the College of Education, we made a concerted effort to engage other faculty around the idea that this was not just community service—not just outreach—but that it involved an engaged research component. As the program continued to expand and awareness increased, the College of Education took on a larger role.

Over the years, our departments have been able to fund the salary for some of our graduate research assistants, and this has strengthened our partnership because those assistants have been key to this partnership and program's success. Over the past 10 years, we have funded 12 graduate research assistants, who have been bilingual and bicultural. Most of them are first-generation college students from communities similar to those we're working in. To date, more than 30 additional graduate students, mostly from the College of Education, have been involved in different capacities in the Westside Pathways Project.

Implementation

IHEP: Can you describe the mentoring model employed by the Adelante program?

When we first started the mentoring program, we partnered with Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), a Chicano student organization active on many campuses.

MEChA assisted us in recruiting undergraduate volunteers and in placing them in elementary school classrooms. As long as the mentors were working with the students directly, we allowed the elementary school teachers to have full autonomy with regard to how they worked with the student volunteers. Elementary school teachers were provided with professional development on working with undergraduate mentors and, over time, began to develop and share their own best practices.

The program was strictly voluntary at first; I think we had about 15 students the first year. During the third year, the vice president for equity and diversity at the University of Utah initiated the Diversity Scholars Program, a cohort model to support freshman students of color. Dr. Alemán and I worked together to develop a course for first-year students of color in the Ethnic Studies Department that would fulfill scholarship requirements and provide students with service learning credit. For one hour a week, the undergraduate students serve as mentors with the same teachers and group of elementary school students for a full year. Mentors participating in the Ethnic Studies course are also required to reflect critically on their experiences for their class.

Today, we have anywhere between 90 and 100 undergraduate mentors. We now place mentors in the Adelante program, the middle school program, and the MAA high school program, in addition to other community sites. Hundreds of undergraduate students have volunteered or have completed their service learning at the university by mentoring students through Adelante.

IHEP: How did you establish and facilitate the university visits component of the program?

In the beginning, when we only had two kindergarten classes, both classes took three trips each semester to the university campus. Once we started working with the whole elementary school, students in first through fifth grades took one field trip per year, and kindergarten and sixth grade classes took two field trips per year. The coordination is intensive. For a couple of years, we had a designated staff person from the university working in community engagement. This person was given about five hours a week to work with us; however, during most of the years a graduate research assistant has coordinated visit planning. I think if universities can invest in a staff person to coordinate trips, it makes more sense, because graduate research assistants should be more focused on doing research.

> "We have been particularly successful with science departments. Many science grants require outreach to underserved communities, but the scientists applying for these grants are not as familiar with how to incorporate the community outreach aspect into their work."

To maintain the connection between school visits and classroom content, we worked with numerous departments and units, such as the medical school; law school; science, engineering, and dance departments; as well as students groups including MEChA, student government, and campus newspapers. We've kept a roster of faculty and staff contacts in each department.

We have been particularly successful with science departments. Many science grants require outreach to underserved communities, but the scientists applying for these grants are not as familiar with how to incorporate the community outreach aspect into their work. So, we say, "Oh, we've got the kids for you. We've got the community. We'll set it up. Do you have lab work to do age-appropriate science experiments?" If you have a faculty member who has these kind of grants or is doing this kind of work, that's your key person. We come back to that person year after year.

IHEP: What other programming do the elementary school students participate in on campus?

For the first two years, we held a science camp during the summer, but it ultimately didn't work because it was difficult to coordinate

with teachers and graduate students outside of the school year. So we moved the camp to the spring and we started doing four-day camps, where the students come to campus during the school day—we both pick them up and drop them back off. There's a theme for the week, and teachers can coordinate it with their core curriculum.

About five years after we started the Adelante program, the law school approached us and told us about something they had in place called Kids Court. They needed more participation, and we had the students, so we were able to incorporate Kids Court into our programming for fifth graders.

IHEP: How did you connect the college access components of the Adelante program to the MAA programs?

MAA was started by three faculty members, none of whom remain at the university. When the faculty left, the undergraduate and graduate student mentors wanted to continue the program and asked me and my colleague if we would be their advisors for the program. We agreed. When we moved into advising positions, the K–16 pipeline became more of a focus. We viewed this as an opportunity for us to support the continued funding and facilitation of the youth participatory action research program while expanding the programming to support students through the transition from high school to college.

The MAA work is really driven by the university students. The graduate research assistants work with them on the curriculum, research projects, college access programming, and undergraduate mentoring. To ensure adequate focus on college preparation while supporting high school students with their research projects, the undergraduate and graduate students designate specific days to focus on college preparation—writing personal statements, applying for scholarships, and turning in applications. Graduate students also maintain records on the number of students applying for colleges, where they are applying, which scholarships are available, and what funding opportunities are available for undocumented students, etc.

IHEP: What resources have you needed in order to achieve all of this?

We always say the graduate students—their time, their dedication, and their commitment—are the heart and soul of the program. They are the reason we have been around for 10 years. At the same time, many doctoral students who come from out of state have said, "I would have never remained in this program nor graduated had I not had this community to support me."

The major expense of the partnership work is funding the graduate research assistants in our department, who each receive a stipend of about $15,000 a year plus tuition waivers. Enrique and I have worked with different departments on campus to assist in funding these positions through university resources. For example, we have asked the Office of Student Outreach and University Neighborhood Partners to each pay $7,500 to cover the expenses for one graduate research assistant who is really helping to meet the goals of both of those units. Strategically identifying areas in which a graduate research assistant can provide support for multiple units is key.

Another big expense has been transportation. We've handled that in different ways over the 10 years. Sometimes, the district has actually picked up the tab for transportation. That would be ideal in any partnership. If you're partnering with a school district, transportation support is one of the easier asks.

We also tap into the city's small foundations and philanthropic organizations to fund this work. Most of our grants have been small—anywhere from $5,000 to $25,000. Right now, we have a grant from the Office of the President at the University of Utah to fund us at $50,000/year, over three years, to continue the Westside Pathways Project.

Impact

IHEP: What outcomes indicate that this work is increasing college aspirations and college access among targeted students?

The students from the first kindergarten class are currently sophomores. From the beginning we knew that we would not be able to use college access as a measure of our success for quite some time, and that we would need to employ other measures. For this reason, we conducted hundreds of interviews with parents, teachers, and students. We conducted four rounds of interviews with our first cohort of students at the beginning and end of their kindergarten year, and repeated this process during their fourth grade and eighth grade years. We have also interviewed the mentors, both while they were mentoring and then later, about their experiences.

In our last interview with the first cohort, students were just getting ready to enter high school, and it was really powerful to hear them reflect back on their experiences. They felt comfortable with the idea of college, they understood that they had to think about what classes they wanted to eventually take in college, and they were beginning to think about postsecondary pathways to careers. It was amazing to hear future first-generation college students articulate their experience visiting college campuses and share

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The qualitative data from teacher surveys really speaks to the change in teacher expectations for students over time as well as to the concerted effort we have made to change those expectations and talk to teachers about the impact of setting expectations. The program has also provided teachers with a context and framework for discussing college with their students early on. We have heard elementary school teachers say, "I've always wanted my kids to go to college, but before this program, we never actually talked about it. Now we have a mechanism for beginning to speak about college regularly with our kindergarten class."

The principal and vice principal at Bryant Middle School have told us, "We see a qualitative difference between the students that come from Jackson and the students who feed in from other schools." There are two main feeder elementary schools representing very similar socio-economic and demographic populations. We plan to perform an analysis on the number of students from Jackson taking honors classes, and their general academic performance, compared with students from other feeder elementary schools.

Though the original cohort from the Adelante program has not yet graduated high school, 90 percent of students who participate in the MAA program go on to attend local two- and four-year colleges and universities.

IHEP: How has the community responded to the program?

Parents express that education has always been a priority, but they now feel empowered by this program to make that priority a reality. Now they feel they can go to the district and say, "This is an issue; this is a problem," because they now understand much more about what it takes to go to college in this community, and they realize that they can affect change.

"We have heard elementary school teachers say, 'I've always wanted my kids to go to college, but before this program, we never actually talked about it. Now we have a mechanism for beginning to speak about college regularly with our kindergarten class.'"

Tools

Mentors Handout

This handout for middle school mentors is meant to advise them on how to best build students' college aspirations early on.

Page length: 2

College Success Board Game

This is a template for a college success board game, with the overall objective of graduating. It was designed by Next Steps Academy at Independence Adult Center & National College Transition Network to build students aspirations, encourage self-assessment, and reinforce college knowledge and awareness.

Page length: ~6 (long because board game template is included)

Additional Resources

Creating a High School Culture of College-Going: The Case of Washington State Achievers (2008: Institute for Higher Education Policy)

This report studies integrated programs designed to address multiple barriers to college access through the Case of Washington State Achievers program. The study examines the effects of early college information, scholarships, and mentoring on college-going culture.

Barriers to College Attainment: Lessons from Chicago (2009: Consortium on Chicago School Research)

This report draws on findings from a multi-year research project on Chicago Public Schools designed to identify determinants of students' postsecondary success and levers for improvement, which may serve as a case study for other communities. It argues that high schools must shift from a focus on only building college aspirations, which are already high, to establishing a clear pathway for students to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education. This includes building college-going cultures in high schools to improve students' academic performance and increasing the information and counseling students receive to access good-fit colleges and financial aid.

Eight Components of College and Career Readiness (2010: College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy)

Designed for K–12 practitioners, the website for the Eight Components of College and Career Readiness charts a comprehensive, systemic approach to school counseling that prepares all students, especially underserved students, for college and career success. The components aim to build and strengthen students' aspirations, expand their social capital, provide them with enriching activities, foster rigorous academic preparation, encourage early college planning, and guide them and their families through the college admission and financial aid processes. The website also offers guides for elementary, middle, and high school counselors to effectively implement these components.

Latino Males: Improving College Access and Degree Completion–A New National Imperative (2012: American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education)

This brief discusses the most up-to-date research on Latino male students, identifies specific barriers faced by this population, and outlines promising practices to support this group. The brief provides guidance to administrators on constructing campus and academic programming, and community partnership engagement strategies to increase college access and success among Latino men.

Supporting Men of Color along the Educational Pipeline: Research and Practice (2013: National College Access Network, Institute for Higher Education Policy & Pathways to College Network)

Although men of color face many similar challenges in postsecondary education, they are not a monolithic group. Acknowledging the implications of these differences in designing program supports and/or policy interventions, this brief outlines research on men of color in terms of access to and success in postsecondary education. Specifically, the brief identifies successful pre-college programs, research, and/or policy initiatives designed to address these issues, and includes interviews with practitioners and researchers who work directly with these students.

Chapter Two:

How Can Communities Offer High-Quality College-Readiness Curriculum to All Students?

Each year, nearly 60 percent of first-year college students require remediation. At the same time, we know that students who need remedial education are less likely to graduate, as remedial coursework requires valuable time and money. It is critical for communities to offer all students high-quality college-readiness curriculum to ease students' transitions and ensure college success. As early as middle school, students should be provided with the opportunity to take rigorous courses, like advanced mathematics and English, which will put them on track for college.

Underserved students in particular benefit from the academic rigor and high expectations that they encounter in college-level courses. Programs that target adult learners must recognize that they may never have had access to high-quality college-readiness curriculum and offer supports that ease their transition to college coursework.

Collaboration across school districts, postsecondary institutions, and state agencies is essential to establish college-readiness curriculum, and it requires the participation of faculty responsible for high school, remediation, and college-level courses. Below are a few examples of programs that can be used to ensure that all students have access to high-quality college-readiness curriculum.

Dual-Enrollment Programs and Early College High Schools: *Does your community want to offer rigorous college-level coursework that enables students to earn college credit prior to enrollment?* These programs enable students to earn college credit while still in high school, which not only saves students time and money but also exposes them to the rigors of college-level curriculum. Students enrolled in these programs are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in college, and earn degrees.

Transcript Evaluations Services: *Does your community want to help students identify coursework required for college admissions?* These programs assess whether students' high school transcripts align with college entrance requirements, evaluate students' college preparation, and inform schools and parents of course patterns necessary for admission. Many transcript evaluation programs also employ shared counselors between high schools and higher education institutions in order to streamline the evaluation process.

Alignment Projects: *Does your community want to align K–16 curriculum across institutions?* These projects build communities of practice among high school teachers and college faculty, allowing educators to gain broader perspectives of student and teacher experiences throughout the K–16 pathway. Encouraging cross-institutional dialogue and aligning curriculum through high school, developmental education, and introductory college-level courses will better prepare students for postsecondary tracks and will decrease the need for remediation upon enrollment.

University Contract Classes: *Does your community want to offer adult students the opportunity to take both non-credit and for-credit classes at a local university?* These programs provide students who have not matriculated the opportunity to sample university courses, with the goal of introducing college coursework to underserved students, such as adult learners, often at low or no cost.

This chapter features an **interview with the president of South Texas College (STC)**, who shares how a partnership between STC and school districts in the Rio Grande Valley offers high-quality college-readiness curriculum to students through dual enrollment and Early College High School opportunities. We include a sample dual-enrollment agreement from STC to help communities looking to establish such agreements between their high schools and higher education institutions, as well as a sample budget summary to help communities develop a financial infrastructure that supports dual-enrollment programs and Early College High Schools. We also include a unit-sharing protocol that fosters cross-institutional dialogue and builds communities of practice between educators. This chapter ends with a list of additional resources, where you can find more information on offering high-quality college-readiness curriculum to all students.

South Texas College, Rio Grande Valley, Texas: College-Readiness Curriculum through Early College High Schools and Dual Enrollment

- *Dr. Shirley A. Reed, President,* ***South Texas College***

IHEP spoke to President Reed about the dual-enrollment partnerships between South Texas College (STC) and local school districts—in particular, the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District—in the Rio Grande Valley. Read this interview to learn how STC established Early College High Schools and other programs in the Rio Grande Valley in order to provide local high school students with rigorous, tuition-free, college-level dual-enrollment courses, and how teachers and faculty in the region have embraced the new model to support student success.

Goals

IHEP: What initially drove South Texas College to pursue partnerships with local school districts to provide dual-enrollment programs?

South Texas College is a relatively new institution as far as community colleges go. We are 22 years old, and we were established in a region of deep south Texas that previously lacked access to a community college and had very limited access to workforce training. In this region, 40 percent of the population lives in poverty, and 96 percent of residents are Hispanic. Twenty years ago, nobody was talking about a college-going culture; our motivation and vision was to establish it.

At South Texas College, we knew that to establish a college-going culture in our community, we would need to develop a system that would ensure that college was accessible, affordable, and expected for all. With this goal as our foundation, we set out to develop a dual-enrollment program that would offer quality, tuition-free college-credit-bearing offerings.

To accomplish this goal, we needed to develop strategic community partnerships. Once we had the right partners on board and had established a mechanism for providing dual enrollment without charging tuition, the program took off. We have offered dual-enrollment to high school students for a little over 10 years now. We are making it affordable and possible.

Partnership

IHEP: How did South Texas College build district-level partnerships to support dual-enrollment programs?

The most important first step was establishing Early College High Schools. South Texas College had the opportunity to access a $1 million grant from the Communities Foundation of Texas to start an Early College High School. We assessed the various high schools in our area, and we believed that Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) Independent School District's superintendent, Dr. Daniel King, would be most responsive to the idea. We needed a district that would be ready, willing, and able to build this program within a two-to-three-month time frame. Identifying a district leader, like Superintendent King, who would take ownership and commit to making the program happen was key to our success.

PSJA provided the facilities for the first Early College High School, Thomas Jefferson T-STEM Early College High School. The first location was an abandoned residence. Eventually, Dr. King was able to renovate one of the original high schools in his school district to be the home for the school. This new facility is equipped with state-of-the-art science facilities, all designed and modeled after college-level facilities.

Initially, we employed faculty from STC to deliver dual-enrollment courses. Shortly after launching the program, PSJA began hiring teachers with master's degrees; such teachers were qualified to become adjunct faculty at STC to teach college-level courses. This presented an excellent opportunity for our program to streamline delivery of dual-enrollment courses and at the same time significantly reduced programmatic costs: we could employ high school teachers as adjunct faculty to teach dual-enrollment courses on the high school campuses. We recruited teachers

> "South Texas College is the higher education partner for 30 Early College High Schools, with 15 different school districts."

from the district who already had a master's degree to apply to become adjunct faculty at STC.

Providing this professional development opportunity to district-level teachers increased our capacity to deliver college-level courses to our district high school students and deepened our partnership with the district.

IHEP: How did STC expand to establish Early College High School partnerships with other districts?

The Early College High School model was designed to serve approximately 400 students, and it targeted first-generation students of color and low-income students. Our goal was to enroll 100 ninth-graders in the first cohort of students. We recruited in the eighth grade and identified 100 students to begin the program as ninth-graders. Families were required to make the final decision regarding whether their students would participate. The mission was to get students college-ready and to offer them dual-enrollment courses by the 10th grade and no later than the 11th. All the Early College High School students are dual-enrollment students, and the expectation is that you will graduate from high school with an associate's degree or very close to it.

South Texas College is the higher education partner for 30 Early College High Schools, with 15 different school districts. The program has grown so large that many of the early colleges have to use a lottery system because they have more applicants than spaces. Some are accepting more than 100 students, just to accommodate the demand.

Once other districts saw the benefit and the success of this model, they were eager to participate. Now 15 school districts in the Valley have an Early College High School, and many have two—some even have three. It begins with the dialogue, "Do you want to implement this model? If so, then these are the expectations." Each district has to be approved by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and designate a partnering postsecondary institution. If TEA approves the Early College High School, we are willing to be their higher education partner, and we are ready to get to work.

When we started Early College High Schools, we thought they would serve as models for innovation and for identifying best practices for redesigning all high schools. We did not intend for them to be standalone entities serving 400 hundred student cohorts; rather, we envisioned them as learning laboratories for improving all high schools and thought that they would be scaled to provide dual-enrollment opportunities to all students.

The model has been so successful with PSJA that Dr. King is taking the next step: he wants to make the entire PSJA district an early college model, meaning that all high school students will have an opportunity to participate in the Early College High School program. He wants to implement the best practices of the model throughout his district, and he's well on his way to doing it. The district now has multiple, distinct early college designs: a standalone Early College High Schools, an early college school-within-a-school, a STEM-focused school, a comprehensive high school converted into an early college, and specialized early college schools for students who have left school or those who are off track.

> "The mission was to get students college-ready and to offer them dual-enrollment courses by the 10th grade and no later than the 11th. All the Early College High School students are dual-enrollment students, and the expectation is that you will graduate from high school with an associate's degree or very close to it."

IHEP: In what other ways has South Texas College partnered with PSJA to ensure that students successfully transition to college upon completing dual enrollment and Early College High School programs?

PSJA places two high school counselors on the South Texas College campus as "transition specialists." They serve as the designated points of contact for incoming PSJA students when they transition to South Texas College. The counselors ease the transition to college for PSJA students and have also been able to provide feedback to the district—identifying the challenges that incoming students face. This feedback loop facilitates continuous improvement in the dual-enrollment and early college programming.

Implementation

IHEP: How did South Texas College identify and develop dual-enrollment courses, and how are the courses evaluated to ensure quality?

Students in Texas are required to receive a college-ready score in reading, writing, and math on a Texas Success Initiative–approved assessment in order to qualify for dual-enrollment courses. If the student receives a college-ready score, then he or she is eligible to take any of the 45 credit hours of core courses that all students attending institutions of higher education in Texas must complete before receiving an associate's degree. *The Common Course Manual* developed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board describes the learning outcomes that are expected for each of the core courses that satisfy this requirement.

South Texas College worked closely with PSJA to identify course offerings for dual-enrollment programs. STC then took the lead in designing the course, the content, and the course syllabi

to align with the standards set by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in the *Common Course Manual*. We expect rigor, and we expect the adjunct faculty to follow our course syllabi so that we are sure of the content and the quality of the course. STC program chairs evaluate our adjunct faculty to ensure quality instructional practice as well.

IHEP: What role have adjunct faculty from district high schools played in the sustainability of the Early College High School model at South Texas College?

Employing high school teachers as adjunct faculty has been fundamental to our financial sustainability model. To facilitate a tuition-free dual-enrollment program, we have had to waive more than $100 million in tuition over the last 10 years. In terms of dual-enrollment programming, the biggest expense to the college is the cost of faculty. The only way we could do this program was to use a faculty member paid for (for the most part) by the school district. High school teachers who are accepted as STC adjuncts receive a $300–$500 stipend; however, all other costs are covered by the district, which significantly reduces the expense of tuition-free dual-enrollment to STC. If the school district does not have qualified adjunct faculty, STC will send faculty to the high school to teach the course. The school district then reimburses STC for faculty salaries and travel costs.

Employing adjunct faculty from district high schools to deliver dual-enrollment courses at the high school locations has created efficiencies in the course delivery process while continuing to deepen our partnership with the district. We try to integrate our high school adjunct faculty into all aspects of the college environment and instill in them a sense of community and pride in being college faculty members despite their being physically separate from the campus.

> “He worked with the local university, the University of Texas-Pan American, to offer master’s degree programs at the high school during after-school hours so it would be convenient for the faculty. Everybody was working together to encourage more of our experienced teachers to earn a master’s degree, and it began to spread to other school districts.”

> “I would hear our faculty say, ‘These are some of our best students. They are so engaged, and they are so committed.’ They would say that if they had a choice, they really would prefer to teach the dual-enrollment students.”

IHEP: What challenges did instructors—faculty members from both the high school and the college—face when starting dual-enrollment classes, and how were they handled?

There was a learning curve for both sides. Initially, there was some pushback from our faculty at STC, who hadn’t planned to be teaching at a high school. Then there were some faculty who questioned whether high school students were ready for college-level work. That view dissipated very quickly within a semester or two. I would hear our faculty say, “These are some of our best students. They are so engaged, and they are so committed.” They would say that if they had a choice, they really would prefer to teach the dual-enrollment students.

From the perspective of high school faculty, early college and dual-enrollment courses were now being offered in lieu of Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and that caused a little tension. Many teachers were comfortable teaching their AP courses, but they weren’t qualified to teach a dual-enrollment course because they didn’t have a master’s degree. We have moved beyond that concern.

Dr. King began a big push to hire more faculty with master’s degrees at PSJA. He worked with the local university, the University of Texas-Pan American, to offer master’s degree programs at the high school during after-school hours so it would be convenient for the faculty. Everybody was working together to encourage more of our experienced teachers to earn a master’s degree, and it began to spread to other school districts.

Faculty work through challenges together. We bring all high school adjunct faculty to campus for professional development activities. Our college faculty also learn a great deal from the high school faculty about how to effectively work with high school students. For instance, the chairman of our psychology department is responsible for all college courses—whether they are taught on campus or via dual enrollment—so he has to evaluate the faculty member in the high school for performance, get feedback from students, look at learning outcomes and grade distribution, and help mentor the high school teacher to be a very effective college-level teacher.

IHEP: What additional services, facilitated by South Texas College provide college-level curriculum options for local high school students?

We also offer "academies" in five disciplines that are designed for gifted and talented students. Students are selected on the basis of a competitive application and spend the mornings at their high schools and then the afternoon at STC. By the time they graduate from high school, they have an associate's degree in engineering, biology, medical sciences, criminal justice, or computer information technology, and they are ready to transfer to the university. There are a variety of pathways for students to participate in dual enrollment. We just started a new model last year as well, with an Early College High School for career and technology students. It is designed for students who want to pursue welding, precision manufacturing, or diesel technology. The industries were selected because of the high demand in our community for these high-wage, high-salaried jobs.

Impact

IHEP: How have high school students in the region benefited from the availability of dual-enrollment programming?

The college-going rate has significantly increased in the region. Sixty percent of our high school graduates are going on to college. In PSJA, the percentage of students graduating from high school increased from 62 percent in 2007 to over 90 percent in 2013. In 2014, 58 percent of students had earned some college credits by high school graduation, and 21 percent of high school graduates had earned an associate degree or postsecondary-level certificate.

Increased access to dual-enrollment opportunities has motivated our students to complete high school and pursue postsecondary opportunities. The availability of dual-enrollment programs has also encouraged high schools to establish dropout recovery programs in the Rio Grande Valley that provide students with dual enrollment and career and technical opportunities as a mechanism for motivating completion and postsecondary planning. These programs have served as a way to engage students who we previously lost, and now we are doing a much better job of not losing them in the first place.

Additionally, we compared student performance data of incoming freshman at the University of Texas, Pan-American (UTPA) who had participated in dual enrollment with those of students who had not participated in the program. We found that students who had participated in dual enrollment and who enter UTPA have higher GPAs and are more likely to persist and graduate with degrees than are their peers without any dual enrollment.

> "Students will absolutely rise to the high expectations we establish for them."

Finally, we hear directly from our students. We have many students who are 18 years old and have already completed two years of college credits. They are going to some major universities and starting as juniors. We ask how they feel about that, and they say, "Well, I'm ready. I'm well prepared. I'm as competitive as anybody else in my class." Their testimony confirms that students will absolutely rise to the high expectations we establish for them.

IHEP: How is the whole community benefiting from partnerships between K–12 and postsecondary institutions to increase local degree attainment?

Ultimately, the benefit is in preparing more graduates—not only for the needs of the immediate community but also for the nation. In 2010, President Obama called for a 60 percent increase in college graduates by 2020. No school district is going to do this alone, and no higher education institution is going to do this alone. It's going to take establishing a close relationship between higher education and the public school system to get more students on the pathway to college and to provide support for those students along that pathway to ensure completion.

This work also fits into a larger economic growth and sustainability plan for the region. The economic health of a community depends on the education attainment level of its population. We understand that by having a better-educated population, this region is going to be much more desirable for business. Increased economic prosperity in the area is the ultimate benefit—not to mention the improved quality of life for these students and their families.

PSJA also recently opened three community education centers in former elementary schools, which provide services for students' parents and other adults in the community. The program offers GED, English as a second language, adult literacy, citizenship, and vocational skills courses. South Texas College faculty teach at these centers at a discounted rate, and services are free to adult students as long as they commit to 10 hours of community service. These high-demand centers currently serve over 2,000 adults.

Looking Forward

IHEP: Do you have any final words of wisdom for communities?

Every state has in place different legislation to govern how the state funds dual enrollment. Some states prohibit dual funding. We are fortunate in Texas that both the school district and the partnering higher education institution are funded. To expand the dual-enrollment program, school districts and higher education institutions are going to have to work very closely with their state's elected officials to put in place legislation that ensures funding for these opportunities. States are going to have to choose their investments, and I cannot think of a more effective strategy for economic community sustainability than investing in a program that will lead to a reduction in unemployment and poverty, and that will improve the social and economic environments in which many low-income families find themselves. Much of this has to be legislated, but it will not happen unless educators call for that initiative.

Tools

Dual-Enrollment Agreement

An excerpt from South Texas College's Dual Enrollment Toolkit, this document serves as a template for establishing an agreement between high schools and higher education institutions.

Page length: 2

Dual-Enrollment Sample Budget

Created by Jobs for the Future and the Hidalgo Independent School District, this budget template not only lists potential expenditures associated with creating dual-enrollment programs but also provides estimated costs, comparing proposed budgets to actual budgets.

Page length: 1

Unit-Sharing Protocol

Created by Graduate NYC! for its Curriculum Alignment Project, and adopted by the National Writing Project, the protocol is designed to help K–16 educators work across institutions and curriculum, providing participants with the opportunity to reflect through targeted questions and activities (see last page of document).

Page length: 1

Additional Resources

A Better 9th Grade: Early Results from an Experimental Study of the Early College High School Model *(2010: University of North Carolina at Greensboro)*

This report examines the results of Early College High Schools established by North Carolina. According to results, these high schools are creating more positive school environments for students, increasing school attendance, reducing suspensions, and increasing the number of students who are on track for college.

A Path to Alignment: Connecting K–12 and Higher Education via the Common Core and the Degree Qualifications Profile *(2013: Lumina)*

This report discusses how educators could use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) to align academic goals across high schools and colleges. The DQP creates a framework for postsecondary institutions to broadly identify what a college graduate should know and be able to do across disciplines. This exercise is intended to help educators across both systems understand how to build on the CCSS to improve both student readiness for and success in college.

Dual Credit in U.S. Higher Education: A Study of State Policy and Quality Assurance Practices *(2013: Higher Learning Commission)*

In light of the significant expansion of dual credits since the 1980s, this report provides policymakers and state officials with an up-to-date description of dual-credit policies in all 50 states. Such policies vary across states with regard to terminology, course oversight, eligibility, and quality assurance. The brief calls for consensus on terminology and the development of cross-state practices that would promote greater transferability of best practices in dual-credit programming.

The Impact of Dual Enrollment on College Degree Attainment: Do Low-SES Students Benefit? *(2013: University of Iowa)*

The report finds that bachelor degree completion rates for low-income students who had participated in dual enrollment increased by 8 percentage points. Moreover, first-generation students are also more likely to benefit from dual-enrollment participation than are those with a college-educated parent, suggesting that students with college-educated parents are likely to attend college and attain a degree. The majority of the gain was for those who took two courses while participating in dual enrollment. The main elements of institutional strategy in

Additional Resources (cont.)

dual-enrollment programs focus on credit-granting agreements and faculty development.

Early College, Continued Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study *(2014: American Institute for Research)*

This study focuses on answering whether Early College High School students have better outcomes than they would have had at other high schools, and whether the impacts of Early Colleges vary by student background characteristics. Through a lottery-based randomized experiment, the study found that Early College students were significantly more likely to enroll in college and earn a degree than were the comparison students. The study also found that these impacts generally did not differ by subgroup, and when the impacts differed, the difference was generally in favor of underrepresented populations.

The Kentucky Model: Business and Education Unite to Prepare Students for College and Career Success *(2014: Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives)*

Written for policy and business leaders, this report offers suggestions for building business–education collaborations to facilitate and alleviate community concerns over the adoption of new state curriculum standards. The report specifically uses the state of Kentucky as a model, highlighting the partnership between the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce and Greater Louisville Inc., and the coordinated strategies the partnership developed to respond to the 2010 implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Chapter Three:

How Can Communities Deliver Academic and Social Supports Outside of the Classroom?

While offering academic support in classrooms is very important, support outside of the classroom is also crucial. Reaching students beyond the school day requires cross-sector partnerships between community-based organizations, school districts, parent organizations, foundations, higher education institutions, city and county governments, healthcare providers, and often business organizations, such as local law firms. These supports can also include targeted hands-on academic support beyond typical school hours, available through after-school and summer programming. Additional hours of learning mitigate learning loss during long periods away from school and keep students moving steadily forward in their education, fostering higher college and career aspirations even when school is not in session.

Students also benefit from non-academic supports for their social and emotional well-being, as well as for their financial stability. These supports should be tailored to address students' unique situations, and may be targeted to serve low-income families, students of color, veterans, or adult learners. Adult students, for instance, may need special supports outside of the classroom, such as child care services to help juggle their various family responsibilities on top of education. Wraparound services ensure that all students—not just those whose families can afford it—have access to myriad supports for personal development and well-being. Below are a few examples that have been used to provide students with academic and social supports outside of the classroom.

After-School Programs: *Does your community want to offer students learning opportunities that take place outside of typical school hours?* These programs enrich the academic experiences of students, helping them to develop new skills and interests, and become college and career ready. After-school programs may focus on a variety of subjects, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Summer Programs: *Does your community want to mitigate learning loss during summer breaks?* These programs help students smoothly transition from one grade to the next, maintain college and scholarship eligibility, combat learning loss, and gain skills and interests. University-sponsored on-campus summer enrichment programs, in particular, expose students to college life and build their postsecondary aspirations.

Community Learning Centers: *Does your community want to establish hubs for community services to create a system of integrated partnerships?* Community Learning Centers strengthen connections within communities, creating spaces that not only promote academic excellence but also provide recreational, social, health, civil, and cultural opportunities in convenient locations. Through a coordinated delivery of services, these centers feature supports such as adult education, art programs, mental health counseling, heath services, and youth development activities.

Wraparound Services: *Does your community want to provide intensive and holistic support to address students' non-academic needs?* These services collaboratively develop individualized plans to help students view postsecondary education as an attainable goal. Wraparound services may include career counseling, health screenings, legal clinics, and transportation assistance.

The following section includes an **interview with the executive director of the Buffalo, New York, chapter of Say Yes to Education**, an organizational model that relies on a number of cross-sector partnerships and a student management data system to make services more accessible to students. We include a sample data-sharing agreement template and theory of action to assist communities with finding new ways to support all students through greater collaboration. This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources**, where you can find more information on delivering comprehensive supports outside of the classroom.

Say Yes to Education, Buffalo, New York: Comprehensive Wraparound College-Readiness Supports

- *David Rust, Executive Director,* ***Say Yes to Education, Buffalo***

IHEP spoke to David Rust about the Buffalo chapter of Say Yes to Education and its numerous community-based partnerships that provide wraparound services to students and their families in the city. By aligning these services, Say Yes aims to build students' capacity to prepare for college and to make use of the promise of tuition-free postsecondary education available in Buffalo. Read this interview to learn what types of services Say Yes Buffalo partners provide, including family support specialists, mental health clinics, and legal clinics.

Goals

IHEP: What are Say Yes Buffalo's goals for students and families?

Our primary goals are twofold: (1) increase the number of high school graduates from our Buffalo public and charter schools and (2) increase the number of college and postsecondary graduates we have who are coming out of our partner institutions, which number more than 125 public and private colleges and universities right now. We have determined that increasing the number of college and postsecondary graduates is critical to the long-term health of our community. Toward that end, the private sector and our largest foundations have made generous investments in this partnership in the form of college or postsecondary tuition scholarships for every graduate of Buffalo public and charter schools. When we launched our scholarship, the graduation rate at Buffalo Public Schools had sunk to 47 percent, a historic low; for young men of color, in particular, the graduation rate was in the low 20s. We were literally losing generations of students. Now, after only two years, we've seen those rates start to increase, which is really exciting.

IHEP: How do comprehensive wraparound services play into these goals?

Facilitating wraparound supports is critical to the work we're doing. Students with behavioral, financial, and health challenges face more barriers to academic success—there is no debating that. By partnering with government and community-based entities to put in place supports like legal clinics, mental health clinics, preventive programs and more, we can remove those barriers and increase student performance and achievement—which will ultimately lead to more students accessing Say Yes scholarship opportunities. All Say Yes partners agree that we need to do whatever is needed to get more kids to and through college, and providing wraparound supports is a key part of that.

“By partnering with government and community-based entities to put in place supports like legal clinics, mental health clinics, preventive programs and more, we can remove those barriers and increase student performance and achievement—which will ultimately lead to more students accessing Say Yes scholarship opportunities.”

Partnership

IHEP: How has Say Yes partnered with local community-based organizations?

Everything we do is in partnership with community-based organizations. Community-based providers organize and host our mental health clinics, our student mentoring programs, and our legal clinics. We also engage quality providers who provide extended learning time. With any program that we've launched, Say Yes serves as a convener or facilitator. We find the sustainable funding stream to ensure that services provided by community-based organizations are going to stay in place for a long time.

We have a collaborative governance model and regular meetings to drive this work. At all times we have representatives at the table from district leadership, parent organizations, foundations, higher education institutions, city and county governments, the school board, community-based partners, and union leadership. Collaboration is hard work; it takes time, energy, political will, and resources. I think what we're seeing in Buffalo is an example of what can be achieved when multiple parties commit to a common cause and common goals on behalf of students.

IHEP: What school-based services do you and your partners offer?

We have behavioral and mental health clinics available in 20 of the 55 school buildings, and we're adding 15 more this fall. These are all operated as satellite clinics by local community-based organizations that focus on the different challenges students face, like depression, anxiety, trauma, suicidal tendencies—basically, behavioral health issues that can really derail academic performance.

With these clinics, a licensed clinician is embedded in a public school building for a day or two each week, working with students who are experiencing behavioral health challenges. We were able to partner with a local foundation to provide a bridge grant, which removes the pressure for clinicians to bill right away. The foundation also helps cover start-up costs for supplies, whether it's for a locking file cabinet or a laptop. The district provides the functional space to locate these clinic services directly in public school buildings. If all 55 schools need this, we'll make it happen.

We also have legal clinics available in four of our school buildings.. These are quadrant-based, so there is a clinic located at a school in each of the four parts of the city and we'll be adding another clinic this fall at a central location to keep these resources easily accessible to families. The legal clinics provide free legal advice to families dealing with immigration, housing, divorce, and access to social service benefits—all issues that can impede a family's success, including academic success. We launched these clinics in January 2015, by partnering with our local Volunteer Lawyers Project. They have a paralegal who manages the data, resources, and clinic rollout. The best part is that the clinics are staffed by lawyers. Right now, there are six major firms in Buffalo participating. Their attorneys are giving up their billable hours to go into our public school buildings to work with students and families. This is a huge private sector investment in our public schools.

“Right now, there are six major firms in Buffalo participating. Their attorneys are giving up their billable hours to go into our public school buildings to work with students and families. This is a huge private sector investment in our public schools.”

IHEP: What happens in the summer, when school is out of session?

This summer we piloted a new summer "camp" model in partnership with the school district and city, operated by community-based and religious organizations for students in grades Pre-K through six. The camps focused on reinforcing grade-specific math and English language arts while also providing enrichment activities, like art, music, and science, and structured recreation. That's the carrot to get students in the door. The goal is to mitigate summer learning loss and to give students safe, healthy places to go during the summer, where they can access enrichment and be supervised by caring adults. We're still building the framework for this, but we have a memorandum of understanding with our public school district that commits funding to the effort for the next seven years.

We also have summer bridge programs for students as they transition into college and postsecondary education. These programs target students who may have diagnostically placed into non-credit-bearing courses. They take extra courses during the summer and learn what it's like to be a college student, with the goal that they transition right into regular, credit-bearing college courses and won't have to burn through their tuition scholarships and financial aid on non-credit-bearing ones. These summer bridge programs are available at our three largest feeder campuses, which about two-thirds of our students attend.

IHEP: What other wraparound services are available?

We provide mentoring to our students by matching Say Yes Buffalo scholars with professionals in the business community, who help students navigate the college-going process and assist them once they get on campus. We do this in partnership with a local community agency, Compeer of Greater Buffalo, which provides all of the professional development, screenings, background checks, and training for our professional mentors.

Implementation

IHEP: How did you decide where to start as you rolled out supports?

Our goal was to make our schools the hubs for all of these support activities and programs. Toward this end, it was important for us to first launch the school-based staff member roles, because they are central in facilitating and convening the services in the public school buildings. We started by providing a Family Support Specialist role in each of our 55 Buffalo public schools. Using chronically poor school attendance as an indicator, these specialists conduct casework with students and families who are at risk of getting involved with child welfare or juvenile justice. They also manage our data system and help build a college-going culture, even in elementary schools. They start talking about the college scholarship opportunity with very young students and with their families.

We knew that we wanted a Family Support Specialist in every public school building. This was accomplished through a partnership with the Erie County Department of Social Services (DSS) and Catholic Charities, a local community-based organization. From there, we had a planned rollout. Out of the gate, we wanted extended school-day programs, behavior and mental health services, and access to financial aid services, so we worked on those things.

IHEP: How are services being provided and funded at each school?

In the past, DSS would respond to a call about a child welfare issue, open a case to identify the problem(s), and then work to improve the situation. Now we have this casework-type position that is proactive, instead of reactive. We can identify families in need of service, whether it's through tutoring or mentoring at the school, or working with families directly in the home. This is a new preventive service, of which there aren't many in New York.

We have a tremendous partnership with DSS; they are the biggest service provider in Buffalo and in Erie County. Our county government is picking up two-thirds of the cost, through a state funding stream, to help us place a Family Support Specialist in each school. We pay the local share of the cost. There is no extra cost to taxpayers because we're taking resources that have always existed and just reallocating them.

When it comes to the other supports, we're facilitating, for the most part; we're not creating anything new. We're just relocating existing services in the community directly into school buildings, so there's not a huge cost involved. And, we're leveraging volunteers, for example, with our legal clinics, which are staffed by local attorneys.

One of our overarching goals with Say Yes is to facilitate services and supports in a SUSTAINABLE way—too many good programs run for a few years and then disappear because of lack of sustainable funding. We put time and resources behind figuring out how to establish these programs so that they will be here for a long time to come, through a combination of public and private funding streams.

Impact

IHEP: What are some of the early results you have seen from the provision of these wraparound services?

We've seen the high school graduation rate go up 8 percentage points, from 48 to 56 percent, since we launched. In addition, we have also seen college matriculation go up 9 percentage points in the first year and 7 percentage points in the second. Those are strong early data points, but we need to continue to improve to get where we need to be as a community and to fulfill the promises we've made to our young people. These are exciting early results, but we know we have a long way to go.

I think it's clear that the idea of attending college for many of our students has moved from hope to reality or real possibility. Lots of students have seen their siblings and their friends go off to a college or postsecondary program. Our parents say that people talk about Say Yes in the barbershops, and that's what we want. I think we've invested time in communicating the services we offer and building trust and relationships so that students and families understand what's available to them.

Looking Forward

IHEP: What are your plans for the future?

We are launching an internship program next year. We are also launching a physical health clinic to provide primary care services to students. Moving forward, we have a lot under our umbrella that we're working on, but we know that we have to continue to strive for quality improvements. We have to ask more questions. For example, just looking at the mental health clinics: Are they being used more heavily in some parts of the city or in some schools? Are we meeting needs efficiently? Those are the types of questions we're going to ask in every program area. The services alone help students and families, but we need to use our data to continuously drive quality improvement across all of our programs.

IHEP: Would you like to offer any last words of wisdom to communities interested in providing wraparound services?

Data sharing has been critical to determining our progress as a community. We pulled all of our partners into a room, decided that we were going to craft data-sharing agreements, and signed a memorandum of understanding that would track progress throughout our system. It has to start with a shared vision and commitment to improving student support services. It will take a few months to get the first agreement going, assuming that you're meeting on a bi-monthly basis. Beyond that, there needs to be an ongoing conversation. We have revisited our data-sharing agreement once already to make edits and adjustments; it is a tool that will change over time, pending the needs. So, everything takes time.

Tools

Data-Sharing Agreement Template

This is a template for creating agreements between school districts and community organizations, by StriveTogether. The agreement is specifically for data sharing for research purposes, but it can be transformed into a general partnership agreement.

Page length: 6

Theory of Action: Creating Cradle to Career Proof Points

This tool is based on Strive Together's Framework for Building Cradle to Career Civil Infrastructure, which consists of five Gateways: Exploring, Emerging, Sustaining, Systems Change, and Proof Point.

Page length: 2

Additional Resources

21st Century Community Learning Centers: Descriptive Study of Program Practices *(2010: U.S. Department of Education)*

This report evaluates the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, a federal program authorized in 1994 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), to assess the nature of activities in centers that are designed to promote student academic development, attendance, and partnerships and data created to improve programing.

Rebuilding Communities: Education's Central Role in Mobilizing Community Reform *(2012: Say Yes to Education)*

Suitable for multiple stakeholders, this report narrates the story of the city of Syracuse's whole-district overhaul to send young (underserved) students to college in partnership with Say Yes to Education, Inc. Specifically, Syracuse guaranteed qualifying graduates of the city's five public high schools free tuition at almost 100 colleges and universities. In this report, the organization describes the strategic plan, along with successes and important lessons and identified strategies to ensure that college access leads to college success.

The Role of Community-Based Organizations in the College Access and Success Movement *(2012: National College Access Network & Institute for Higher Education Policy)*

Written for state-level policymakers interested in increasing the college-going and completion rates of their residents, this brief focuses on the role of community-based organizations on college access and success for underserved students. The brief finds that community-based organizations, such as College Bound St. Louis, are a valuable asset and can facilitate completion across the education spectrum, from early childhood through postsecondary completion, and successful entry into the workforce. For practitioners interested in creating their own community-based organization, the brief provides features of an effective community-based organization program, such as effective assessment and partnerships/cross-systems collaboration.

Leveraging the Power of After-School and Summer Learning for Student Success *(2013: Expanding Minds and Opportunities)*

This article contains research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners on after-school and summer learning programs, and it discusses their benefits for and impacts on students, families, schools, and communities.

Wraparound Services: An NEA Policy Brief *(2013: National Education Association)*

This policy brief examines the benefits of community schools, such as their ability to solve problems faced by students and their families. The brief also makes recommendations for local-level actors, state-level actors, and federal-level actors, and addresses concerns about funding.

Chapter Four:

How Can Communities Increase Financial Awareness and Readiness for College?

Students and their families need information, counseling, and assistance to prepare financially for college, in addition to help completing crucial aid applications in a timely manner. The process should be as simple, transparent, and predictable as possible. Students and families need to be made aware of the different types of aid available, such as federal, state, institutional, and private aid. Communities should also provide educational opportunities to increase students' overall financial literacy, helping them to understand the consequences of accepting different types of aid.

Specialized expertise ought to be offered to students with unique financial needs and situations, such as adult learners and undocumented students. Adult students need to be made aware of GED testing vouchers and how they may benefit from federal income tax credits for education expenses. Information about available scholarships funded by foundations, businesses, higher education institutions, and other community partners for adult learners and other underserved populations need to be readily accessible. Below are a few examples of supports that have been used to help increase students' financial awareness and readiness for college.

Financial Advisors: *Does your community want to connect students with experienced advisors who can offer financial expertise?* Students and their families often have difficulty navigating the complex financial aid system. These challenges are exacerbated for adult students, who no longer have the guidance counselors once available to them in high school. Financial advisors can walk students through the financial aid application process and explain what kinds of aid are available to them.

FAFSA Completion Programs: *Does your community want to provide resources that would encourage students to complete their FAFSA forms on time?* These programs aim to increase the number of students applying for financial aid, particularly among low-income students. Communities can organize events such as FAFSA workshops, which should be held at strategic times that are accessible for working families, such as during weekday nights and weekends.

Financial Literacy Programs: *Does your community want to increase students' overall financial literacy, helping them better manage personal finances?* These programs teach students about money management, credit and debit cards, and risk management, as well as investment and retirement planning. Such financial educational programs can be integrated into existing high school curriculum through partnerships between school districts and local credit unions.

Scholarships: *Does your community want to provide more financial support to students pursuing postsecondary education?* Need-based scholarships offset the high cost of college, allowing students not only to enroll and persist, but also to focus on their education rather than worry about their finances while in college. Many scholarships target specific student populations, such as first-generation, low-income students, and adult learners. Communities should ensure that counselors and mentors working with students are communicating information about the existence of such scholarships.

The following section features an **interview with the executive director and deputy executive director of Denver Scholarship Foundation, in Colorado**, to highlight how they are increasing students' financial awareness and college readiness through community partnerships that boost high school graduation, college enrollment, and degree completion rates. We include a calendar of priorities from DSF that highlights financial-related tasks. We also include tools on how to plan a FAFSA night and a financial aid "how-to" template that help students make informed decisions about college attendance. For adult students, we have included an Adult Student Checklist to help students prepare financially for college. This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources**, where you can find more information on financial awareness and college readiness.

Denver Scholarship Foundation, Denver, Colorado: Financial Aid and Financial Readiness through Counseling, Training, and Partnerships

- *Nate Easley, Executive Director,* ***Denver Scholarship Foundation***
- *Rana Tarkenton, Deputy Executive Director,* ***Denver Scholarship Foundation***

IHEP spoke to Nate Easley and Rana Tarkenton about the Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF), a Promise organization that guarantees financial aid to eligible underserved students from Denver Public Schools (DPS). These scholarships are leveraged to gain additional financial aid and student supports from partner postsecondary institutions across Colorado. Read this interview to learn about the DSF's large network of K–12, postsecondary, and community-based partners, and how they support financial readiness and affordability through FAFSA trainings and school-based Future Centers.

Goals

IHEP: What are the goals of the Denver Scholarship Foundation?

Back in the early 1980s, the biggest worry students had in terms of college was, "Am I smart enough?" Nowadays, the number-one concern students have is, "Can I afford it?" That's a whole different situation. In Colorado, affordability is a huge challenge—not just for low-income students, but for all students. The state doesn't really invest in higher education at a level that most states do. Higher education isn't seen as a public good, so the expectation is that people should pay for it privately.

The DSF was established in 2006 as a Promise organization. We pledged financial resources to enable students from DPS to attend college and graduate; our mission is college completion for all DPS graduates. This is a place-based scholarship, meaning it's only for DPS graduates and it's also only for students going to non-profit postsecondary institutions in Colorado with which we have established partnerships. We don't fund scholarships at out-of-state colleges or at for-profit colleges, but we will work with students to help them attend the college of their choice.

At DPS, over two-thirds of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Very few of them would complete a postsecondary degree if it weren't for DSF and our collaborations. We offer college access advising at DPS high schools, and DSF scholarships, which we leverage to get additional financial support for students from our college partners. The average scholarship we award to students going to four-year institutions is about $2,400 per year for up to four years. That scholarship money not only is leveraged to get more institutional financial aid for students but also is leveraged to get students to behave in ways that make it more likely for them to enroll in and complete college. For instance, we have a scholarship policy that requires students to meet other criteria, like applying to three other scholarships and completing the FAFSA. Our college advisors work with current high school seniors, as well as DSF Scholars in college who return for support. We also support outreach to adult learners who are former DSF scholars that stopped out of college, in order to help them re-enroll.

> "Very few of them would complete a postsecondary degree if it weren't for DSF and our collaborations."

Partnership

IHEP: What kind of partnership agreements do you have with postsecondary institutions?

Today, we have 32 non-profit postsecondary institution partners, all in Colorado. In our student-focused agreements with colleges, we have outcome goals. It's really important to sit down with a college president and say, "Relative to the goal we set last year, here is your progress. Here is where you're doing great, and here is where we need to improve." It's about where "we" can improve because we're in it together. We talk with college presidents about college access and completion rates for low-income, first-generation, and ethnic minority

> That scholarship money not only is leveraged to get more institutional financial aid for students but also is leveraged to get students to behave in ways that make it more likely for them to enroll in and complete college.

students, and—increasingly—students who speak another language at home. Our agreements also help institutions to behave in a way that makes our students successful, because these are written formal documents that we renew on an annual basis. They culminate with outcome goals that say, "Based on this partnership we have with you, this many DSF Scholars will persist from one year to the next, and this many students, who are within [X] credits of graduation, will actually graduate."

IHEP: How did you develop a partnership with DPS?

At the time, the superintendent was Michael Bennet, who is now our U.S. Senator. We had a 20-to-30-page agreement with the school district; it outlined our partnership—explaining what DFS and DPS are responsible for—and how we can share data with one another. It's an open-ended agreement, meaning that this arrangement continues until one of the parties gives the other 30 days' notice to end the partnership.

The school board president was originally on our board at DSF and worked with the school board for support. Principals were also consulted in the development of our program model. Because the partnership really started from the top and didn't involve every level of DPS, including counselors and teachers, there were concerns about whether DSF was a threat. Some people wondered if we were trying to replace school counselors, now that we were putting college advisors in the schools. But through a lot of work and an amazing, talented program team, we made it clear that we're not successful without our partners; none of us will succeed without the other. It's not about egos—it's about students. Since then, we have become an integral part of the schools, and we are considered members of the team, collaborating most closely with the school counselors, teachers, and other precollegiate service providers.

IHEP: How else do you engage with students and staff at DPS?

We meet as a leadership team with principals and counseling staff at least twice a year, at the beginning and end of each year. At the beginning, we say, "Here's how many seniors you have. Let's set goals. How many college applications? How many scholarships? How are we going to meet with every senior?" At the end of the year, we say, "Here's how we did this year. We should start thinking about next year." In most DPS high schools, we also have Future Centers, which are at the core of our college access strategy. They are staffed by experts in financial aid, the college admission process, and postsecondary pathways programs. The advisors meet regularly with school counselors throughout the year to collaborate. Our commitment to DPS is to maintain the Future Centers. Our superintendent says, "For every dollar I invest in DSF, I get $7 back in terms of college access and completion services."

IHEP: How do you work with non-profit partners?

We now have 21 non-profit partners that work with DPS. It's more efficient for us to collaborate with these organizations—they would love to see their kids go to college, too—than it would be to compete with them. No one wins if we're competing. We basically spell out in each written agreement how we're going to get a win-win-win: the students win, the organization wins, and DSF wins. So, for example, with Denver Kids, a dropout prevention program, one of the things we say is, "What is our joint goal for how many Denver Kids students should apply for and receive the DSF scholarship?" We are going to set a goal and work in collaboration toward it.

> It's really important to sit down with a college president and say, 'Relative to the goal we set last year, here is your progress. Here is where you're doing great, and here is where we need to improve.' It's about where 'we' can improve because we're in it together.

Implementation

IHEP: How do your college advisors reach out to students?

Usually, there is one advisor per high school, but our advisors at smaller schools often assist those at larger schools. We also have a TRiO Educational Talent Search program that has two full-time and two part-time advisors affiliated with it. We have written agreements with other college access programs in town, and they help us staff several of our Future Centers so that students can always find the support they need. Ideally, even though we would like our advisors to meet with all ninth-

through 12th-grade students, the reality depends on the school. If the school has about 300 students and 70 seniors, maybe the advisor can meet with all the students or do classroom presentations that reach most students. In one of our largest high schools (about 2,500 students), we are heavily partnered with the school counselors, and we focus more on financial aid for seniors while the counselors focus more on college applications. We try to meet the school where they are so that needs are met collectively and collaboratively by DSF, the school counselors, and other precollegiate programs.

Our college advisors use an intrusive advising model to support students—they don't wait for students to come to them. For example, they're tracking which students have and have not submitted the FAFSA, and they give out passes to students to come to the Future Center to work on it. This is possible because the district is very supportive of our work. Advisors also host a number of classroom-based programs and presentations to talk to younger students about affordability and college exploration.

IHEP: What kinds of training and resources do you provide to college advisors?

All of the college advisors work for DSF as full-time professionals. Most of our advisors have a background in TRiO or similar programs, or in college admissions, financial aid, or a combination of those areas. They go through a training program at DSF, which includes ongoing professional development. Our more experienced advisors help other advisors with learning the nuances of scholarship applications. DSF also provides training around the bigger, more complicated scholarships, like the Gates Millennium Scholarship.

> "I would recommend that communities reach out to their state department of higher education, their financial aid administrators association, and the financial aid offices at local colleges to invite experts to attend their FAFSA trainings."

We have a scholarship directory that is updated annually and publically accessible. It has a mixture of local, regional, and national scholarships that DPS students are eligible to apply for, and it has scholarships for both high school students and undergraduates. All of the directory content is imported into the Naviance system—used by DPS for college and career readiness—so our advisors, as well as DPS students and staff, can access all the scholarship information from there.

> "Through a lot of work and an amazing, talented program team, we made it clear that we're not successful without our partners; none of us will succeed without the other."

IHEP: Are financial aid training and FAFSA workshops provided to advisors and others who work with students?

We offer several financial aid trainings for practitioners every year in January, heading into the FAFSA season. We've partnered with the Colorado Department of Higher Education and our college partners so that financial aid experts present both beginning-level and advanced-level training sessions. We invite our advisors, school counselors, and our precollegiate partners to attend. Some of the organizations that send members include Denver Kids, TRiO Talent Search programs, and state GEAR UP advisors. Not all school counselors are able to attend, but the director of counseling is also invited. The hundreds of volunteers working with our students are invited to these trainings as well. We want to make sure everyone working with our students and families on the FAFSA is doing it right.

All the trainings are scenario based. Over the years we have accumulated a series of actual scenarios that students may face while filling out the FAFSA. For example, our students may have undocumented parents, or the student may be undocumented. We have scenarios of students who are adopted, in foster care, or homeless. We'll give our training participants example students to work with, with fake bios and tax returns. Then, the participants use this information to practice navigating through the FAFSA, all the way from beginning to end.

IHEP: What does it take to host these FAFSA workshops?

The cost is very low; it's mostly the cost of our time. We are gathering people together and bringing in experts to help them work through the FAFSA and talk about different scenarios. I would recommend that communities reach out to their state department of higher education, their financial aid administrators association, and the financial aid offices at local colleges to invite experts to attend their FAFSA trainings. Everyone is happy to help because everyone wants this to be done correctly, as it benefits students and families.

Impact

IHEP: What are some of the biggest impacts you've seen since partnering with DPS?

Our tagline is "It's possible." There is now a belief in Denver that it's possible for first-generation, low-income students of color to attend college and graduate. We have data that show it's happening right now. It's not just a matter of having this system in the high schools, the school district, and the colleges; this belief also exists for students who have seen their siblings, cousins, friends, and neighbors graduate from college.

Through our Future Centers and our work with DPS and our partners, we reach about 17,000 students and their families every year. We have awarded more than $25 million in scholarships to more than 4,600 students. We've seen a 30 percent increase in college enrollment. Over 1,000 scholars—mostly first-generation students—have graduated from college or technical school. We're raising expectations because we don't accept failure. We hold ourselves to a very high standard. Right now, three-quarters of the students in whom we have invested through scholarships, are persisting in college or have graduated. That's impressive, but it's not good enough. If out of 4,600 kids, about 1,200 of them start but stop college, then it's on us to figure out a way to get those 1,200 students back in college.

Looking Forward

IHEP: Would you like to offer any last words of wisdom to communities working on establishing community partnerships?

Before you go to a meeting with a partner, think carefully about what they are getting out of this relationship, not only your objectives. Make sure you congratulate them on their success and wisdom. You also have to constantly work on it; you're never completely "there." Just when you think you've got it, there's a call from someone who is unhappy about something. The fact that we have these partnerships means we have a marriage license: we care about each other, so we're going to sit down and work it out. That's true for anybody in the college access and success business. Our position is "We need you, so let's get through this."

Tools

Denver Scholarship Foundation Calendar Priorities

This calendar helps students prioritize financial tasks through a sample timeline of deadlines.

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Hosting a FAFSA night

This initiative was created by the U.S. Department of Education to help communities host FAFSA events. Communities can set goals; select locations, dates, and times; choose presenters; advertise events; gather handouts; carry out the event; and assess its success.

Page length: 2

Financial-Aid Template

Another tool developed by the U.S. Department of Education highlights how to calculate estimated cost of attendance and payment options, and explains basic financial aid terminology. This handout can be used by counselors and mentors.

Page length: 2

Adult Student Checklist

Also created by the U.S. Department of Education, this checklist is designed for adult students, to help them prepare academically and financially for college. The checklist also includes helpful links that provides additional information.

Page length: 1

Additional Resources

The FAFSA Project: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment and Next Steps *(2013: Eric P. Bettinger, Bridget T. Long & Philip Oreopoulos)*

This project studies the effectiveness of an intervention that streamlines the financial aid application process and students' access to individualized assistance, using a random-assignment research design. The project found that college attendance and persistence increased following the intervention.

FAFSA Completion by High School *(2015: U.S. Department of Education)*

This online database provides information about FAFSA completion rates organized by state or territory that include the school name and city of the high school. Whereas high schools previously relied on self-reported surveys to estimate FAFSA completion rates, Federal Student Aid now provides data on FAFSA submissions and completions to help high schools track their progress and work to ensure students complete FAFSA applications on time.

Federal Student Aid Resources *(2015: U.S. Department of Education)*

This website provides publications, fact sheets, online tools, and additional resources for school officials, parents, and community leaders, to help students prepare and pay for college. This resource includes information on college preparation and the Federal Student Aid Programs, FAFSA application, loan information, and consumer protection.

The Impact of Institutional Grant Aid on College Choice *(2012: College Board)*

The probability of enrollment at highly selective private postsecondary institutions increases by 1.66 percent per $1,000 of institutional grant aid offered, with this effect being particularly salient for students with the greatest financial need.

Chapter Five:

How Can Communities Guide Students Through the College Admissions Process?

The college admissions process is multifaceted. Community partnerships between community-based organizations, higher education institutions, and school districts can help students successfully navigate complex requirements. In order to make informed decisions about where to apply, first-generation students, in particular, may need guidance to understand unfamiliar webs of procedures and terminology. Counselors working with students should also be cautious of *undermatching*, when low-income, high-achieving students choose to attend less-demanding colleges. Counselors can help students identify appropriate colleges with available resources tailored to their specific needs. For instance, adult learners may be interested in attending a college that offers low-cost university child care services or flexible scheduling options that accommodate workplace responsibilities.

Even after students have identified institutions that fit their needs, the college application process can still be daunting due to various requirements, such as college essays and supplements. Institutions may also require students to submit standardized test scores, which could serve as a financial barrier. Counselors should be sensitive to students' different circumstances. Specifically, adults who have been out of school may need guidance on how to obtain appropriate letters of recommendation. By working to ensure that all students have the necessary social capital to make informed decisions about college admissions, more students will be able to successfully navigate the process. Below are a few examples of supports that have been used to help students apply to college.

College Application Week: *Does your community want to increase the number of first-generation and low-income students who pursue postsecondary education?* College Application Week events target students who may not otherwise apply to college. They connect students with counselors who work to help them navigate the complex college admissions process and to ensure that each participating student completes and submits college applications.

Campus Visits: *Does your community want to offer students the opportunity to make on-campus visits to colleges?* Communities should work with institutions to make sure that their campuses are accessible to all prospective students. The more connections students make with a college—through in-person visits and interactions with representatives—the more likely it is that students will view admission as an attainable goal.

Recruitment Events: *Does your community want to work with colleges to host outreach events?* For students who are unable to visit colleges, institutional outreach could provide critical points of contact, increasing the likelihood of students applying to college. School districts and community organizations can also work with colleges to prepare outreach events tailored to underserved students.

Test Preparation Services: *Does your community want to offer low-income students opportunities to prepare for college admission exams?* These services provide low-cost or free test preparation. SAT and ACT registration fees can also be waived for low-income students. Schools can also partner with the College Board or ACT, Inc., to make their school a testing site, enabling students to familiarize themselves with the testing location to ease test-day stress.

The following section features an **interview with the associate director of the New York City Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Readiness**; it highlights how the department has worked to create a partnership with the **Goddard Riverside Community Center** to provide free counselor training to New York City public school personnel. We also suggest tools to help communities guide students through the college admissions process, including a counselor guide to offer feedback on student college application essays, as well as an adult learner guide to help returning students write such essays. We also include an online tool that provides virtual college tours, allowing students to visit college campuses from the convenience of their homes. This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources**, where you can find more information on helping students apply to college.

New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Office of Postsecondary Readiness and the Goddard Riverside Community Center, New York, New York: Free College Counseling Training

- *Andrea Soonachan, Senior Director of College and Career Planning,* ***NYC DOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness***

IHEP spoke to Andrea Soonachan about her work at the NYC DOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness and its partnership with the local non-profit Goddard Riverside Community Center to provide a free college counseling training series to NYC public school staff and college access organizations. Read this interview to learn about how providing counselor training helps improve student outcomes.

Goals

IHEP: What do you hope to achieve through counselor training?

Our goal is to equip school staff with the tools and training they need to offer high-quality college access counseling for our students. Around the city there are lots of great college counselors doing strong work, but there is a real gap in pre-service and in-service training around college counseling. Our staff members who are doing college counseling well at their schools had to really learn how to do it on the job. It's highly likely that you could have a master's degree in counseling and be working in our schools having never taken any coursework on college counseling for low-income, first-generation students in particular. We know that college counseling, in general, is not something that's typically covered in graduate programs.

We also know that across our system, lots of people doing college counseling are not necessarily guidance counselors/school counselors by trade. Counselor training is absolutely critical, because the quality of counseling impacts the quality of college planning and access available to students—particularly low-income, first-generation college students. Research shows that these populations need knowledgeable one-on-one help to improve their rates of postsecondary access and success. For example, when students have trained counselors, they are more likely to apply to college and less likely to "undermatch."

IHEP: How many counselors or staff members across the city did you want to train through this series?

Our goal at the end of the three-year initiative was to have at least one trained person in every high school. We have 544 high schools in New York City, so that was an ambitious goal. Our secondary goal was to actually have multiple trainings for people at every school, recognizing that this work is distributed in different ways in different places. Our schools vary in size, from small schools graduating 100 kids a year to large schools graduating 800 a year. We funded the initiative at the level of one trained person for every 35 seniors, not necessarily expecting to reach that goal but wanting to have the bandwidth to do so.

> "It's highly likely that you could have a master's degree in counseling and be working in our schools having never taken any coursework on college counseling for low-income, first-generation students in particular."

Partnership

IHEP: How did the partnership between the NYC DOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness and the Options Institute at the Goddard Riverside Community Center begin?

Options had a great reputation and was already offering the best training for college access counselors in the city. We knew that lots of NYC DOE staff were paying from their own school budgets to attend, and lots of non-profit partners in the city were also going. The institute offered the nuts-and-bolts training for how to walk through the application process with college-bound students, and how to work with students going on to either two- or four-year postsecondary institutions.

A few years ago, we began working with Options on a small scale, like one-day training sessions with a group of staff or a multi-day series with another small group of schools. Then, in 2011, we were awarded a grant from the Open Society Institute; it was part of a much larger grant made to New York City Public Schools to expand success for Black and Latino young men. We used a part of this grant to design a larger-scale initiative with Options to provide counselor training, because we knew that city-wide projects on training could be transformative for everyone and specifically for the student populations the grant focused on.

IHEP: How did this partnership decide what the training series would entail?

We collaborated with the directors at Options to design the sessions and work on the calendar. We sat down to decide what this would look like and what we could accomplish. We were building off of the eight-day program that Options had been offering to counseling staff for over a decade, so the content was already really strong. We condensed the series into six days, allowing us to spread it out over the school year so that staff would have to be out of their school buildings only one day per month. Alternatively, participants could choose to complete all six days of training consecutively through a summer series we offered each year, which was very popular.

Implementation

IHEP: What does this training consist of, and what do participants learn?

The training begins by focusing on the landscape of higher education. We look at national, city- and school-specific data. We talk about what "college-going culture" means and what having a college planning program in a school means. We train counselors on how to create lists of potential colleges with students. We provide information on New York State (NYS) Opportunity Programs and other special programs across our city and state. The NYS Opportunity Programs are offered at various CUNY, SUNY, and private schools, and are designed to increase college access and success for low-income students by admitting students who would not normally be able to attend due to low grades or test scores. Admitted students have access to pre-freshmen summer programming, tutoring, advising, and financial aid. Counselors need information about these programs and their entry criteria to make sure that kids don't miss out.

We also walk through the college application process. We talk about such topics as the Common Application, essay writing, and letters of recommendation, so counselors understand what is required of students. We then spend the last two days of the series concentrating on financial aid. We take a line-by-line look at the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE, and our state supplemental aid application. We teach counselors how to analyze institutional award packages. Throughout the series, we not only talk about content but also give staff time to reflect about their work days and their school cultures. For each topic, staff think about what has to change in their daily practice and how they can act as leaders and advocates in their schools in order to implement the practices we discuss.

> "Those who complete the training get a certificate. Participants have completed something that they can put on their résumés. We're building a professional community for college access that is new to lots of people."

IHEP: How did you shape the curriculum throughout the series to focus on improving student outcomes?

When we were planning the content, we made sure that each day included role-playing and scenarios covering a diverse set of students. We used fake student transcripts and described student experiences that were consistent with real situations our students face. We wanted the curriculum to be as reflective as possible of our student population and of the unique challenges that a first-generation student faces. For instance, when we talk about working with immigrant students, Options partners with the Legal Aid Society to have an attorney come in to explain the different immigration statuses that are relevant to students. Then, we talk about best practices for working with those students.

At the end of each training day, there's an action-planning activity, and that's where we hammer home the point that counselors "need to be doing this work." The message we want to convey is that students who need help the most will not get help from anyone else if they don't receive help from counselors. We go back to the statistics from day one about who is going to college and succeeding. We really emphasize that for low-income, first-generation students, this work has to happen with counselors in the school. We stress the importance of intrusive advising, and how staff members need to take the initiative to reach out to students.

IHEP: How did you recruit participants from across the city?

We're a really large system. My staff of three and I do not personally talk to 500 schools regularly, so there are several layers of school support management between us and our school contacts. We publish registration announcements in weekly e-mails that go to principals, and we talk about the training program whenever we discuss professional development with schools. We also work with school management staff, who are the liaisons between us and schools. We set up an accountability system with them and create spreadsheets that we update to let them know how many of their schools have staff registered during an open period. This information can prompt the managers to then reach out to their schools, because the managers have ongoing relationships with counselors.

Word of mouth was really strong once the sessions got going; people loved them. They started talking to colleagues about how great the sessions were. We also created incentives to get people involved. Those who complete the training get a certificate. Participants have completed something that they can put on their résumés. We're building a professional community for college access that is new to lots of people. We encourage participants to register for other professional organizations and to really think of themselves as college access counselors.

IHEP: What challenges did you face?

It's really important to build in time for someone to manage the constant cycle of registration, and it's essential to track participation data at the Office of Postsecondary Readiness. Because we didn't have the staff capacity to provide ongoing support, it was a challenge for us to know what happened when participants got back to their schools.

IHEP: How do you plan to sustain these efforts?

With our private funding ending, my office plans to continue offering the Options series on a smaller scale using our public funds. In addition, we offer three professional development events, including full-day conferences and training for college access counselors, three times per school year, in partnership with Graduate NYC! We also plan to continue hosting a one-week institute, twice every summer, as a part of my office's regular offerings. At these institutes, school teams of teachers, administrators, and college counselors have the opportunity to take an in-depth look at building and strengthening the college-going culture at their schools.

Impact

IHEP: What kind of outcomes have you seen from this training series?

As we're coming to the end of our initiative, over 80 percent of schools have sent someone to the free training series—that's 470 schools. Based on some preliminary findings from our external evaluator, we know that between the 2012–13 and 2014–15 school years, we had more than 1,200 participants, with 62 percent of schools sending multiple participants. We also have anecdotal evidence on how participants have used the training information and skills in their schools. We are hoping to obtain more data in the next year so that we can conduct a quantitative analysis of changes—those directly related to improving student outcomes—that have taken place in schools.

IHEP: What kind of participant feedback have you received so far?

We've been doing focus groups to obtain feedback. Participants especially love the financial aid content. It's the topic they feel most shaky about going in, and they report feeling more confident after two full days working with our facilitators. People also really like the local focus: going over special programs offered at local campuses and taking a deep dive with the CUNY and SUNY application processes. Participants expressed that they would like to learn more about special populations, such as students with disabilities, students in foster care or temporary housing, and students going into vocational or technical postsecondary programs.

> "Our training series provides the rare opportunity for school counselors and college access counselors to all be in the same room with each other for a sustained period of time in order to build professional collegiality and to share practices that will ultimately help our students."

Overall, participants agree that the training is very interactive. For instance, during the series, the facilitators ask participants to share what they are doing in their schools or to work through their challenges together. People are just thrilled for the opportunity to hear what someone did at his or her school and say, "I'm going to try that at mine." Staff always leave saying that they can replicate the training activities and do them with their colleagues—or even with their students—at school. Our training series provides the rare opportunity for school counselors and college access counselors to all be in the same room with each other for a sustained period of time in order to build professional collegiality and to share practices that will ultimately help our students.

Looking Forward

IHEP: Would you like to offer any last words of wisdom to communities hoping to invest in college counselor training?

There are lots of funders interested in college access, and many organizations opt to chase those dollars in a programmatic way. These organizations are thinking about how to get more supports into schools because it feels harder to explain the direct connection between professional development and student outcomes. I think it's a worthwhile strategy for any district to engage a funder in understanding the real need for professional development, in the area of college counseling specifically. It may take you a couple of years to see the changes and pay-off from professional development, but it's a move worth making. We know that good counselors lead to good student outcomes. Your ideal fundraising plan would have time and money for training, and then time and money for helping trainees implement the lessons learned.

Tools

Counselor Essays and Essays Arrow

These tools from Goddard Riverside Community Center offer advice to students on writing college application essays as well as advice to counselors on how to offer feedback on such essays.

Page length: 4 (includes both documents)

Back to College: Admission Essays and Personal Statements

These tips written by Peterson's on how to write college application essays are specifically for adult students retuning to college.

Page length: 1

Virtual College Tours

This online tool that allows students to visit colleges virtually is a great alternative for those who cannot visit campuses in person due to time and money constraints.

Page length: varies

Additional Resources

Maximizing the College Choice Process to Increase Fit & Match for Underserved Students *(2011: National College Access Network, Institute for Higher Education Policy & Pathways to College Network)*

This brief focuses on the college choice process of high school students. More specifically, the brief discusses issues of fit and match, and identifies best practices for ensuring that more low-income, first-generation, and racial and ethnic minority students are able to succeed in postsecondary education. The brief discusses the impact of fit and match on the persistent gap in degree attainment between underserved and majority student populations. This brief may be useful for guidance counselors and college advisors in helping students choose a college that will best match their social, academic, geographical, and financial needs.

The Role of Mentoring in College Access and Success *(2011: Institute for Higher Education Policy)*

This brief collects and synthesizes the extant scholarly literature on the role of mentoring to promote college access and success. Aimed at postsecondary researchers, this brief explains the effects of mentoring on college-going behaviors, persistence, and success, and identifies areas for future exploration. The brief includes guidance for college access practitioners interested in developing a mentoring program to increase college attainment and persistence. An example program—Philadelphia Futures' Sponsor-A-Scholar program—showcases the key criteria of an effective mentoring program.

Going the Distance in Adult College Completion: Lessons from the Non-Traditional No More Project *(2012: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & HCM Strategists)*

This report provides state-level policymakers with six state-level examples of effective initiatives that increase access and success rates for returning adult students. It notes that increasing adult degree attainment is an essential step in increasing overall state degree attainment. Each state-level example is contextualized by the policy landscape of that state. The report also identifies successful practices and challenges faced by each initiative. The report encourages state-level policymakers with similar political landscapes to consider these successes and challenges in order to replicate effective programs.

Two-Way Street: When College Mentors Help Students Achieve, Success Is Shared *(2014: Lumina Foundation)*

This issue of Lumina Foundation Focus explores the benefits of mentoring by showcasing three different programs: iMentor, The College Advising Corps, and College Mentoring for Access and Persistence. Each program utilizes adult mentors to guide first-generation and low-income students through the college-going process. This issue brief outlines key information on each program's scope, curriculum, and outcomes. College access practitioners interested in creating mentorship programs and guidance counselors interested in improving their own access initiatives and resources are advised to read this issue.

Chapter Six:

How Can Communities Create On-Ramps to Get Students Back on the College-Going Track?

Students who have either fallen off or are at risk of falling off the pathway to college must be provided with on-ramps to help them re-engage and prepare for college success. Communities can re-engage students by remediating their academic needs prior to college and by accelerating their college application process. Likewise, communities should offer adult learners comprehensive support with college readiness and enrollment, including GED test preparation and adult-based education. By continuously assessing students along the college pathway, communities can provide targeted, timely support.

Beyond college readiness and enrollment, communities need to help construct pathway models to ensure that all students are also career-ready and have access to training and employment services. Partnerships between community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, social service organizations, and local businesses are integral to creating on-ramps that get students back on track. Below are a few examples of programs that have been used to help disconnected youth, adult learners, and others who aspire to get back on the college-going track.

Adult-Based Education Programs: *Does your community want to provide adults with educational opportunities to acquire basic literacy, employment, postsecondary education, and training?* These programs help adults gain the academic knowledge required to earn a college degree and enter the workforce. Adult-based education programs may also offer classes, such as cooking and parenting, to develop life skills that would assist adults in juggling their various responsibilities.

GED to College Programs: *Does your community want to provide pathways for disconnected youth and adult learners who have not earned high school degrees?* These programs help students who have not earned high school diplomas prepare for the GED and offer further pathways to college and careers, by providing GED test preparation, intensive advising, and transitional support.

National Dropout Recovery Programs: *Does your community want to reconnect students and adults who have dropped out of high school or who are in danger of doing so?* These programs empower youth and adults who have dropped out of high school or who are significantly behind in credits and unlikely to graduate with the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while progressing toward a college degree or certificate.

Remedial Education: *Does your community want to reduce the rate of remedial education and time needed for students to complete their degrees?* These programs seek to increase the number of students placed into college-level courses upon enrollment. Remedial education programs target and work with students who have been identified as at-risk students to ensure that they are prepared by their senior year to take college-level courses.

Workforce Development Programs: *Does your community want to offer programs that combine education, vocational training, work experience, and youth development activities in order to link educational plans with career opportunities?* These programs support youth who dropped out of or struggled in high school to obtain postsecondary vocational credentials. They work to provide educational, training, employment, and support services to help students determine a pathway to a long-term educational and/or employment goal. There are also workforce development programs that focus on adult learners, helping them to achieve greater economic mobility with postsecondary credentials.

The following section features an interview with the chief academic officer of Our Piece of the Pie, in Hartford, Connecticut; it highlights how the organization helps 14- to 24-year-olds navigate barriers to obtaining high school diplomas, college degrees, or vocational certifications, in order to become economically independent. We include a handout to help youth development services working with disconnected youth, a program model for a contextualized bridge curriculum designed to serve disconnected youth and adult students who wish to continue their education and professional development, as well as a term-by-term planner to help students studying for the GED. This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources**, where you can find more information on how to create on-ramps to get disconnected students back on track to college.

Our Piece of the Pie, Hartford, Connecticut: Supporting Over-Age, Under-Credited Youth in College Readiness and Access

- *Bob Rath, CEO,* ***Our Piece of the Pie***
- *Christopher Leone, Chief Academic Officer,* ***Our Piece of the Pie***

IHEP spoke to Bob Rath and Chris Leone from Our Piece of the Pie® (OPP), a non-profit organization based in Hartford, Connecticut, that provides academic, social/emotional, and vocational supports to 14- to 24-year-olds who have fallen behind in school; who have dropped out; who face financial and legal obstacles; or who are navigating other barriers to success. By using a relationship-centered model, OPP helps youth navigate these barriers and build plans for their futures through direct, sustained mentoring services. Read this interview to learn how Our Piece of the Pie partners with school districts and community colleges to provide students with sustained academic and wraparound support services.

Goals

IHEP: What is the mission that drives Our Piece of the Pie's student outreach model?

The model is driven by the needs of our community. Our mission is to help urban youth become economically independent adults. We pursue this mission by providing underserved students with the tools, supports, and resources they need to achieve economic mobility and sustainability, and to lead healthy lives. Students who have dropped out of school or who face significant socio-economic or judicial obstacles have specific needs often beyond what school districts are typically able to address. At OPP, we have developed a model that allows us to best serve the specific needs of our students.

We typically work with young adults who are a year or more behind in high school. We want our students to successfully complete high school and then be prepared for success in college and the workforce when they leave.

Partnership

IHEP: Describe the OPP model and how your organization has established partnerships with local school districts?

At OPP, we employ a relationship-centered approach that integrates three fields of practice: education, workforce development, and youth development (think social/emotional development). Each student who participates in an OPP program is matched with a Youth Development Specialist (YDS). The YDS works with the student to identify long-term goals and to develop a plan that connects students with academic, workforce development, and youth development services to achieve these goals.

With this direct support model as our foundation, OPP serves youth and young adults in two ways. Youth throughout the community are able to access our services directly through OPP. We serve students from 60 different high schools in the area, participate in extensive outreach, and also accept students by referrals. OPP also operates three high schools through partnerships, contracts, and charter agreements. The high schools employ the same relationship-centered mentoring model alongside certified teachers, who provide a competency-based learning curriculum that is proven to be particularly successful with students who have fallen behind in school or who have dropped out. The workforce development component includes a career competency development curriculum and both paid and unpaid internship experiences.

Our first district partnership with Hartford Public Schools formed Opportunity High School in 2009. The superintendent at the time had heard of our model and asked us to partner with the district to provide our services, operate all aspects of the high school curriculum, and provide all mentoring and wraparound support services. Hartford School District co-governs the school and is responsible for administrative decisions, such as hiring teachers and staff. Our work operating high schools really grew from there.

In 2012, Bloomfield Public Schools contracted with OPP to operate the Learning Academy at Bloomfield. We have a five-year contract with Bloomfield to provide all aspects of our school model, where we serve about 15 to 20 students per year. We are just beginning the fourth year of the agreement.

In 2013, the State of Connecticut Board of Education approved OPP to serve as the Charter Management Organization for Path Academy Windham. Path Academy can serve up to 200 over-age, under-credited high school students in the Windham, Connecticut, community. To support student success, the school employs our academic, workforce, and youth development model, and our competency-based curriculum.

> We look for districts that will take ownership and acknowledge that provision of services for this population is essential to addressing the drop-out problem—otherwise they won't do the hard work.

IHEP: What does OPP look for in its partnerships with school districts?

In a strong partnership, both the school district and the non-profit are totally focused on the mission and moving forward to evolve and address the needs of over-age, under-credited youth. We look for districts that will take ownership and acknowledge that provision of services for this population is essential to addressing the drop-out problem—otherwise they won't do the hard work. The school district and local community must have the will to work on this issue; they must have the will to find internships and job-related opportunities, and to support this population in their education.

We are now much more thoughtful and methodical in making sure that we fully vet potential partners. We have a specific agreement we work out to make sure everyone is on the same page. First and foremost, we want to know why the district wants to do this. If I'm on the district side of the table, I want to know that the non-profit I'm dealing with is not a fly-by-night organization. If I'm on the non-profit side, I want to make sure that the district truly understands the scope of work, what's going to be delivered, and how it's going to be delivered.

IHEP: How are you working with other community partners from other sectors?

We partner with community colleges both to provide dual-enrollment and campus-visit opportunities to our high school students and to facilitate OPP's model at both the high school and community college levels.

On the community college campuses, OPP provides YDS mentoring, Family Involvement Workshops, and Workforce Development Support. The YDS provides the same one-on-one mentorship to students as with other OPP programs, and YDS assists students with accessing resources, social/emotional development, and self-efficacy. We currently partner with Capital Community College and Asnuntuck Community College.

As part of our work with Asnuntuck, OPP has developed partnerships with local industry to support career pathways in precision manufacturing, insurance, and allied health professions. We worked with the community to assess the needs of the local economy and then worked with both employers and the college to establish pathways for our students to attain careers that will provide them with a family-sustaining wage.

The OPP Workforce Development Team collaborates with local employers to secure job shadowing, internships, and employment opportunities for the students we serve. We offer Career Competencies Development Training, an interactive classroom and hands-on job readiness training program to help students learn about careers and learn job-searching, interviewing, problem-solving, and money-management skills.

IHEP: How are partnerships with school districts established?

For any community interested in establishing a similar support program for youth, it is essential to first perform a needs analysis and assess public will for the program. Decisions makers must see the program as a priority and be willing to work with you to approach funders, business partners, and districts. Once this support is established, it is much easier to work with the districts.

When we begin a district partnership, we work with a number of individuals from the school district. Depending on the district, the superintendent and/or the chief academic officer may be at the table. We work out logistics for the partnership with legal counsel, financial representatives, and council members. The partnership agreement then has to go to a board vote, and then it can move forward.

We perform a needs analysis of the district to ensure that realistic expectations are set; then we establish goals for the students and the school, and develop a plan and timeline for rolling out services. It's not routine, because every community and every setting poses a unique set of challenges. Different boards of education have varying amounts of control, and superintendents have different relationships with their board. I do believe it gets easier with each new partner, however, and we build off the work we've already done each time.

Implementation

IHEP: What specific services and supports does OPP provide?

As mentioned earlier, our model takes a relationship-centered approach to providing academic, workforce development, and social/emotional supports to youth and young adults. This includes ensuring students are receiving the appropriate supports in both math and reading in order to graduate ready for entry-level, credit-bearing college courses. It also means supporting students in postsecondary planning, in terms of college applications, essay writing, financial aid application assistance, college tours, and college overnight stays, if necessary. In some cases, we work with probation officers to address issues that have posed barriers to the student's educational attainment in the past. We also offer social service information so that we can offer assistance to families who need it—for example, we help young mothers find clothes for their newborns and children. It's a vast program, because our aim is to tear down barriers.

“To continue to receive public support to fund this work, you have to show results—and you have to learn to tell your success story with your data. For this reason, we have made it a priority to track outcomes through data and have used the success of our model to drive new funding and partnership opportunities.”

The YDS meets with the youth weekly to set goals, including academic goals, behavioral goals, and attendance goals. The YDS is the central service provider and oversees student attendance at the schools. They're the ones reaching out, making contact, and following up with parents and students. If necessary, on cases where there are multiple absences, they make home visits. The YDS is also the go-to person if the youth has a problem, including peer problems or other problems in their communities. Youth have a single person to provide support in all of these different areas, so it's important that this is someone with whom youth are meeting consistently.

One of our tenets is family engagement. This takes many forms, including conferences, phone calls, home visits, and parent–teacher conferences. Our expectation is that we are in contact every single month with all of our parents. Some of our youth are essentially their own parents; some of the youth are parents themselves. So, there are many different facets to this part of the work.

IHEP: How have you funded this work?

OPP was initially a small non-profit organization that provided support services to many underserved populations in our community. In July 2005, we refined our mission of helping urban youth become economically independent adults to focus on serving youth and young adults (14–24 years old) only through our relationship-centered support model. We received funding from foundations prior to officially launching the new focus of our organization. We also received funding from the Youth Opportunity Grant that allowed us to build the foundation for our work. These initial investments were critical to building our model.

In terms of the funding needed to actually set up locations for services, the first question is whether you have access to a facility or whether you will need to rent space. Regardless, you're then looking at furniture, Smartboards, and technology integration—which will be anywhere from a quarter to a half a million dollars. From there, you're looking at per-pupil cost, which depends on the complexity of the program. Just providing wraparound services could be in the neighborhood of $5,000 per youth. If we're providing full academic services as well, it will depend on the size of the program, but it could range from about $8,000 to $13,000 per youth.

To continue to receive public support to fund this work, you have to show results—and you have to learn to tell your success story with your data. For this reason, we have made it a priority to track outcomes through data and have used the success of our model to drive new funding and partnership opportunities.

As districts and foundations become aware of the success of our model and the potential to scale the model, they reach out to us.

IHEP: Describe Path Academy's competency-based blending-learning model?

The curriculum combines computer-based learning with teacher-led instruction. Research shows that over-age, under-credited youth do best in school when this approach is used. The curriculum is project-based, including digital content and teacher support. The model focuses on integrating the use of technology into everyday learning in relevant and meaningful ways that prepare our students for success in today's job market. The computed-based, teacher-led, project-based learning leaves a lot of room for differentiated instruction as well.

The competency-based learning model also allows us to use a mastery-based progression rather than the traditional seat-time approach. This model lets students earn credits more quickly in the areas that come easier to them—and lets them spend more time on areas that they find more difficult. The mastery-based approach is especially helpful for over-age, under-credited youth because many of these students have already attended some portion of a given class in the past, and they often disengage if they have to sit through the entire course, including the parts they already covered and understand. Mastery-based systems are designed to ensure that students are prepared to move on to the next level of coursework; they enable teachers to monitor each student's progress in order to better guide students on their individual learning paths.

IHEP: How is Path Academy using data to track student success?

We use *Edgenuity* as our primary online learning tool at Path Academy, which has an extensive data management system. It tailors lesson plans to each student's strengths and weaknesses, fills content gaps, and uses diagnostic and concept-mastery exams to determine individual learning pathways. The tool is flexible and personalized, and has been particularly useful in supporting students with special needs, such as English-language learners, students with disabilities, and students who are performing below grade level.

The data from *Edgenuity*, including grades from online work, are shared with the student information system, which also tracks attendance, disciplinary incidents, schedules, and communication with students. Case management data are

> The competency-based learning model also allows us to use a mastery-based progression rather than the traditional seat-time approach. This model lets students earn credits more quickly in the areas that come easier to them—and lets them spend more time on areas that they find more difficult.

entered into OPP's Efforts to Outcomes system, which allows staff to track parental contact, student contact, social/emotional development, student plans and goals, and postsecondary education preparation. All of these databases feed into OPP's reporting database to provide snapshots at the student, staff, class, and school levels, which then are used to identify areas of success and areas for improvement. The system provides a central repository and allows staff to compare and contrast school and student performance within a single source.

IHEP: What policy changes would you suggest to school districts to support over-age, under-credited youth?

One example is attendance policy. Many districts adhere to punitive attendance policies that take credit away from youth for absences. These policies fail to address the root cause of the absence problem; in turn, they establish an additional barrier to the student's long-term academic success.

Credit policy is another example. Some districts award credits not incrementally but rather by quarters or semesters. If a student does not complete the quarter or semester, the student will not receive any credit. Requiring students to complete content they have already mastered but for which they have not received credit presents a major barrier to sustaining student motivation. This is why the competency-based model is so effective with this population. Competency-based learning models empower students to prove their aptitude, accelerating rather than impeding their progression toward degree completion.

> Many districts adhere to punitive attendance policies that take credit away from youth for absences. These policies fail to address the root cause of the absence problem; in turn, they establish an additional barrier to the student's long-term academic success.

Impact

IHEP: What outcomes have you seen among the youth you serve?

Eighty-one percent of OPP youth in Hartford graduate from high school on time, compared to the overall graduation rate in Hartford of less than 50 percent. On average, 77 percent of OPP youth graduate from high school and enroll in an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or postsecondary vocational program. The retention rate of OPP youth who enroll in community college is 87 percent, compared to 52 percent for full-time students overall.

We are currently serving 1,000 students. This year, 118 youth who participated in our program graduated from high school. Sixty-three of these students graduated from one of our high school programs, and the other 55 graduated from local schools. Additionally, 90 students who have participated in our programming graduated with a postsecondary credential/degree this year, and 70 have retained employment for 12 months following placement. We are data driven and are continually assessing our numbers to ensure that we are serving our students.

Looking Forward

IHEP: What is OPP working on next?

The Hartford Board of Education recently approved a five-year agreement for us to transition Opportunity High School into Opportunity Academy, beginning with the 2015–16 school year. The district will pay $8,800 per over-age, under-credited student for OPP to provide student services. This agreement will allow OPP to have increased autonomy and to incorporate the competency-based learning curriculum we administer at Path Academy. We'll be providing differentiated instruction for up to 150 students in grades 9–12, 204 days a year, with internships and individualized education plans. All students will have access to our relationship-centered approach.

Tools

Handout for Youth Development Services

This is a handout on postsecondary planning for OPP youth development specialists.

Page length: 2

Bridge Curriculum Program Model

This sample template explains how to provide a contextualized, career-focused curriculum, developed by the LaGuardia Community College. The model provides sample topics and instructional strategies.

Page length: 2

Term-by-Term Planner

Created by Umpqua Community College and the National College Transition Network, the planner helps adult students track their GED test scores, update goals (as needed), and predict anticipated time to degree completion.

Page length: 2

Additional Resources

ABE Career Connections: A Manual for Integrating Adult Based Education into Career Pathways *(2010: MPR Associates, Inc.)*

This manual provides an overview of career pathways and highlights approaches used by Adult Basic Education Career Connection sites, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, to align training and partnerships efforts. The manual includes information on student recruitment, orientation, and placement; course development; partnerships; and data collection and analysis.

College Impact for Opportunity Youth *(2012: FSG)*

This report focuses on the specific needs of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor employed. The report identifies the priority needs of this population and provides step-by-step strategies, such as a "Collective Impact" model, to guide communities in aligning policies and resources in order to collectively meet these needs. The report includes guidance on building stakeholder engagement, securing funding, developing a common community agenda, and establishing metrics to measure programmatic success.

Reconnecting Opportunity Youth: Education Pathways *(2012: Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives)*

This brief describes several cross-sector programs to help disconnected youth progress to and through postsecondary programs. Supports include transitional services, career pathways, and paid internships. One program, Gateway to College, uses dual enrollment to enable students who dropped out of high school to enroll in community colleges. These students earn a high school diploma and college credit while receiving wraparound services for social and emotional needs.

Getting to the Finish Line: State and Metro Strategies to Increase College Completion by Returning Adults *(2013: Higher Ed Insight)*

This resource provides guidance to states and cities on implementing practices and programs that have been effective in increasing college completion by returning adults. It identifies the specific roles states and cities can play in this effort and outlines strategies for increasing outreach and marketing to adults, coordinating the delivery of targeted support programs across state postsecondary institutions, and assisting institutions in the development and implementation of these programs.

Additional Resources (cont.)

Municipal Action Guide: Reconnecting Youth through Dropout Reengagement Centers *(2013: National League of Cities)*

This municipal action guide profiles strategies across the country that city leaders can use to help disengaged students finish high school, prepare for postsecondary education, and gain valuable workforce skills. The guide offers numerous examples and ideas for city leaders who are considering how best to add re-engagement to their local youth-serving infrastructures. These strategies are drawn from a growing national network of re-engagement centers, which offer a range of services—such as individual academic assessments, opportunities to explore different education options, and referrals to appropriate schools and credential programs.

Promoting Postsecondary Success of Court-Involved Youth: Lessons from the NYEC Postsecondary Success Pilot *(2013: National Youth Employment Coalition)*

In 2009, the Postsecondary Success Initiative Pilot, through partnership with 10 community organizations, analyzed strategies and best practices to support postsecondary access and success for court-involved youth. This paper summarizes the National Youth Employment Coalition's (NYCE) findings on interventions that promote postsecondary success among this group of students. Specifically, the paper outlines what the NYCE learned about practices, strategies, and the role that partnerships can play to inform and improve program design, implementation, and policy. Based on these findings, the paper also offers recommendations for practice, policy, and systems change that can promote postsecondary access and success of court-involved youth.

Chapter Seven:

How Can Communities Ease the Transition to College for Graduating High School Students and for Adults?

The transition to college is challenging for all students, but especially for those whose family experience did not include college. To ease the transition and to increase college readiness and success, students should be assessed early on and take the necessary remediation coursework. In addition to bolstering students' academic skills, communities need to help students develop non-cognitive skills. Workshops on finances, college life, and soft skills can help students get to and through college, especially during the first few semesters.

By working with community-based organizations, higher education institutions, school districts, and those within the technology sector in particular, communities can help students to maintain momentum toward enrollment, avoid summer melt, and integrate into the college campus environment. Cross-sector collaborations can also yield innovative models of intervention, such as two-way texting geared toward reducing summer melt.

Furthermore, when working with students, communities should keep in mind the unique challenges different student populations face. Specifically, adults moving from adult-based education programs to postsecondary education may require help navigating institutional bureaucracy to ensure that they are awarded for their prior learning experiences. By addressing both students' cognitive and non-cognitive needs, communities will be able to ease the transition to college for all students. Below are a few examples of successful programs.

Non-Cognitive Courses: *Does your community want to equip students with skills that help them handle problems that they may face in college?* These courses are designed to help hone students' soft skills and prepare them for college life. They teach students how to access campus resources and adjust to college life, covering topics such as time management, study skills, and note taking.

Prior Learning Assessments: *Does your community want to award college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training for adult learners?* Recognizing that adults have rich life experiences, institutions of higher education can accelerate adult learners' pathways to postsecondary credentials by offering college credit for learning that occurred outside traditional academic environments. Institutions may award credit for work experience, participation in employer training programs, military service, and community service.

Summer Bridge Programs: *Does your community want to provide college-prep opportunities in the summer?* These programs focus on introducing students to college expectations and success strategies. Some programs target high school students, teaching them how to select college courses, adjust to campus life, and access campus resources. Other programs target adult students who would like to refresh their academic skills before taking placement exams.

Summer Melt Programs: *Does your community want to increase the rate of college matriculation for students who have been accepted into college?* To reduce the number of college-intending students who then fail to enroll the fall semester after graduation, these programs provide free counseling to students on financial aid, housing, and other transition issues. This type of intervention can have a significant impact on college enrollment rates at a relatively low cost.

The following section features an **interview with the vice president of research and evaluation of uAspire's Summer College Connection, in Boston, Massachusetts**, who explains the necessity of reaching out to students during the summer to remind them about important college requirements and deadlines. We also include a sample summer task checklist from uAspire that outlines summer tasks for students planning to attend Bunker Hill Community College, a transition

course syllabus to provide guidance on how communities can implement their own programs to ensure that students feel prepared and know what to expect before they enroll in college, and a prior learning credit predictor to help adult students anticipate how many college credits they may be able to earn. This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources**, where you can find more information on how you can help your community's students more successfully transition to college.

uAspire, Boston, Massachusetts: Reducing "Summer Melt" through the Summer College Connect Program

- *Alexandra Chewning, Vice President of Research and Evaluation,* ***uAspire***

IHEP spoke to Alexandra Chewning about her work at uAspire, a national non-profit organization that partners with high schools, community organizations, practitioners, and colleges to provide college affordability support to thousands of young people and their families each year. In 2011, uAspire started the Summer College Connect program to ensure that students who plan to attend college following high school graduation actually matriculate in college the following fall. Read this interview to explore the most effective interventions and models for reducing the phenomenon known as "summer melt."

Goals

IHEP: What was the impetus for launching the Summer College Connect program?

Our organization's direct service programming serves primarily low-income and first-generation high school students. In 2010, in collaboration with Drs. Ben Castleman and Lindsay Page, we looked at our data to assess whether students who expressed the intent to attend college at the end of their senior years actually matriculated to a postsecondary institution in the fall. We had been operating under the assumption that when students said, "I'm heading to college—I'm all set," or "I got accepted to college; I'm good to go" at the end of their senior years that they would attend college in the fall. When we looked at the data, however, we found that about 20 percent of our students never enrolled in college. This phenomenon is commonly referred to by practitioners as "summer melt."

Many students, especially first-generation students, may not yet feel connected to their colleges even post-admission; during the summers, they wait to hear from their colleges or wait until classes begin to engage with colleges. Colleges do communicate with students over the summer through online portals, but students who do not have computer access at home, or may not have Internet access during the summer when they're no longer connected to their high school computer labs, do not receive these messages. Even if they have computer access, they may not be aware a college portal exists or appreciate its importance. There was a very real disconnect for students during the summer, where they were largely detached from support on both the high school and college side.

IHEP: What goals did you set to achieve?

Once we saw those data, we decided that we needed to ramp up our summer programming to support the students we had served during high school in their transitions to college. In the past, we had had very little contact with students during the summer. In the short term, we wanted to build students' awareness of the tasks that are required over the summer in order to ensure that those who plan to attend college actually matriculate in the fall. Our long-term goals were to reduce summer melt, increase college enrollment, and, ideally, make an impact on student persistence from the first year to second year of college.

Partnership

IHEP: Which community partners did you work with?

Though we collaborate heavily with high schools and community organizations to serve students during the academic year, we were largely on our own during the Summer College Connect programming. We realized that a lot of practitioners, understandably, thought that once students were accepted to college, it was time to move on to serving other students. When we found that there weren't a lot of other players in the summer space, we wanted to help both postsecondary and K–12 systems realize the opportunity for connecting with students during this unique time: high schools could carry students longer into the summer, and postsecondary institutions could engage students a little bit earlier and with more structure during the summer.

Through our work, we have become veterans with Signal Vine, a premier text messaging platform built specifically for live student advising. Programs delivered via Signal Vine regularly demonstrate high student engagement and statistically

significant outcomes. We helped the company build its texting platform, and it is now one of the leaders in the educational texting space. Signal Vine is engaged in projects with higher education institutions, school districts, and state departments of education, and it works all across the country—anyone wishing to move the needle on student outcomes can seek to partner with them.

Implementation

IHEP: What kind of help did students need over the summer?

Over the summer, we started working with uAspire students whom we had previously engaged during the school year because we already had their contact information and had provided them with college affordability advising as high school seniors. Instead of placing our advisors physically into the school system, as we traditionally do during the academic year, our advisors are located at our uAspire offices during the summer. Based on our advisors' experiences and what we learned from our implementation data, we were able to communicate with individuals within the higher education sector. Many higher education institutions were quite receptive to hearing from us and learning from our experiences.

It was incredibly eye-opening for us to see the content that students brought to us. We'd had no idea how much confusion there was during the summer. Take something as "simple" as missing an e-mail from the college that says you have a bill waiting to be paid. If the student doesn't think they have to pay for college until after the first year, they could be completely dropped from being able to register or even enroll. So, we created one-pagers on this kind of information, based on our knowledge of what tasks students were going to need to complete over the summer in order to successfully enroll.

We have also expanded outside of our traditional focus area—affordability—to address administrative topics, like housing, placement tests, and orientation. While we offered this varied support, we still saw that the greatest need for advising revolved around affordability and financial aid tasks; we observed that students often found themselves at crisis points, not knowing if they were going to be able to go to college because of the financial hurdles they were facing in attempting to plan for and finance college.

IHEP: Why do you use a random control study design to analyze the effects of summer melt counseling?

In 2011, we implemented our first summer melt pilot, which was uAspire's first experience ever engaging with the random control trial (RCT) design. I think it's really exciting to see a non-profit in an education space engaging in an RCT, when it's appropriate and comfortable for the organization, because the opportunity for learning is so large. There were a few factors that led to this decision. Because we had not previously done formal summer programming, we felt that any programming that we were able to provide was a new add-on, so we didn't feel that we were turning students away or reducing services—which I know can often be a sticking point for other organizations thinking of using RCTs. We simply didn't have the capacity to serve all students over the summer, so we needed to triage and only serve a subgroup. We felt that an RCT design, where we randomly assigned students to either receive the summer services or not, was appropriate for us.

One important qualifier was that any student who reached out to us proactively, on his or her own, would get as much support as he or she needed from uAspire. In that way, our control group actually mirrored what we had been doing for 20 years, which was being on call for students who reached out during the summer. But we were also piloting a brand-new treatment in the form of proactive summer outreach and support. As we continued to run Summer College Connect, we tweaked those treatments each summer to better understand what worked well and what needed improvement. In summer 2011, we used Proactive Advisor Outreach programming. In summer 2012, we used a peer mentoring approach as well as a one-way texting model. In summer 2013, we moved to a two-way texting model; by summer 2014, we were using two-way texting with supplemental in-person advising, as we found this model to be the most effective. Our geographic coverage changed over time, too. In 2011, we were only running Summer College Connect in our Boston site. In 2012 and 2013, we expanded it to include two other uAspire sites in Massachusetts: Springfield and Lawrence. In 2014, we added Fall River, Massachusetts, and Miami, Florida. In 2015, we added San Francisco and Oakland, California.

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IHEP: Starting with the first intervention used in summer 2011, Proactive Advisor Outreach, what happened when you tried to reach students?

In 2011, in Boston, we had small caseloads of about 40 students assigned to each advisor. The advisors were tasked with communicating with students through phone calls or e-mails, and getting students to come to the office for an in-person meeting. There was also an incentive; we had a $25 Target gift card for any student who attended an in-person meeting. At first we found that students were very hard to reach, because they tended not to call us back or seemed not to listen to voicemail, and we sometimes had wrong numbers or outdated e-mail addresses. But by July, students would start getting notified of deadline-driven tasks, like paying a college bill, and we finally started to reach students and see more engagement. We ended up seeing almost 50 percent of the students in the office, and we also connected with a few more over e-mail and phone.

IHEP: What happened when you tried using peer mentoring and one-way texting in 2012?

We thought that having current college students serve as peer mentors to initially reach out to students, conduct a high-level needs assessment, and make appointments for them with uAspire advisors would increase our efficiency. We assumed that students might be more likely to engage with their peers, but we found that they were uncomfortable talking to someone they didn't know, even if that person was young and in college. This dynamic may have been enhanced by the fact that students needed to discuss personal financial situations and concerns, and had already built trusting relationship with uAspire staff. In the end, the peer mentor model was not the efficiency win we had hoped for. However, we found peer mentors to be very powerful when we invited groups of uAspire students to come in for events and get "the real story" on college success from a panel of current college students who had graduated from the same public school system as our students.

When we started texting, we translated the one-pager of summer tasks we had built into bite-sized nuggets and sent texts based on those tasks to students. The first text would be about signing on to your college portal, the second might be about orientation, and the third might say "Your bill is due on ___." All of the messages contained information specific to the student's intended college; it was customized nudging. A text about the online portal could literally say, "Congrats on UMass-Boston. Have you had a chance to log in to your UMass-Boston COIN account?" And there would be a link to that specific online portal.

The limitation in our first texting model was that even though we were sending texts out, we couldn't see in-bound responses. The advisor would get an e-mail that said the student had texted back and would then have to call him or her, bringing us right back to the 2011 situation of calling students who weren't answering. However, we saw quite a strong impact on college matriculation even with one-way text nudging, especially in Springfield and Lawrence, which are smaller towns in Massachusetts. This led us to believe that students were reading the text messages and taking action to complete the tasks, even if we weren't always able to speak with them one-on-one.

IHEP: How did you begin using two-way texting, and what results did you see?

In 2013, we started using Signal Vine, a two-way interactive texting portal. We had a very positive experience, as we were able to respond to students in real time. The following summer, we gave every advisor across Massachusetts and in Miami his or her own caseload on the texting portal. This is an online platform for us, but it looks like normal texting to students on their phones. We used the same approach as in one-way texting, where we customized the texting content based on a student's college, but each text would also invite students to text back with questions or to set up an appointment with an advisor for an in-person meeting. Over time, we became more efficient and were able to serve more students per advisor, which led to cost savings. Because of texting, we went from 40 students per advisor in 2011 to over 400 students per advisor last summer. In fact, we stopped calling and e-mailing students in summer 2014 because we had more than enough data to demonstrate that texting was the most efficient method.

Impact

IHEP: Do you recommend one particular intervention for every community, or does it vary?

I think it depends. The most important piece, I would say, is being in contact with the student over the summer months, whatever "contact" looks like for a particular community or relationship. For a long time, we were very wedded to the idea of in-person meetings, so texting was a bit outside of our comfort zone. We eventually learned that this work does not require in-person, face-to-face interactions, and practitioners may need to be more open to using technology to support students and achieve impact. Texting has been incredibly powerful for us and it's been the best way to get students to respond. However, if a practitioner has a very small cohort and/or has other successful methods to engage students over the summer, then there may be different ways to serve them.

IHEP: How has summer-melt counseling helped low-income students in particular?

The reality is that low-income students often face gaps—sometimes quite large gaps—between the financial aid they were offered and the college's cost of attendance, which means there are out-of-pocket costs due before they even set foot on campus. A student may not be able to enroll if he or she can't come up with, say, $3,000 to pay a bill due three weeks after that bill posts to the portal. Our summer work on bills, for example, is a combination of helping students to anticipate and plan for costs before that bill posts and helping them find ways to cover their costs once it does. Without summer counseling, students may not proactively anticipate or manage their costs, which can prevent them from attending college altogether.

In each of our summer intervention models, we see a statistically significant impact on college enrollment. This is hugely encouraging because it provides anecdotal evidence for the

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type of impact we experience each day during Summer College Connect. Additionally, our data show that those students who have an expected family contribution of zero on their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) are especially likely to benefit from summer-melt counseling. These low-income students are eligible for Pell Grants and likely received free or reduced-price lunch while in high school. They are also more likely to be first-generation college students.

IHEP: How has uAspire been sharing the results seen from the Summer College Connect program with other organizations or institutions?

We have been doing a lot of conference presentations on the national circuit. We also conduct trainings for local school- and community-based practitioners, and run webinars on summer-melt issues. You can find more information on these offerings on our website. In Boston, we sat down with several directors of financial aid from many of the institutions that have partnered with the Success Boston initiative. We had them do activities where they mapped out the summer timeline in terms of tasks, deadlines, and departments that are overseeing these tasks at their particular institutions. We put everything on a big whiteboard, and the misalignment from a student perspective was eye-opening to them.

We also communicate to higher education institutions that it can be difficult for students to navigate the college's various online portals, especially if they have limited Internet access. We at uAspire even have trouble navigating these portals. Moreover, higher education can be very siloed, and so students will be tasked with navigating the bursar's office, financial aid office, academic advising, and orientation before they start classes or have an understanding of how to navigate these systems. Some of the tasks don't make chronological sense, and each campus department may be diligently marching ahead without necessarily seeing where their office fits more holistically within the enrollment pipeline. For example, the health insurance waiver in Massachusetts is very important; otherwise, students are automatically billed for private student health insurance, even if they have a comparable source of insurance. However, the waiver process is often administered by an external vendor, and the waiver may not be due until after the student has paid his or her college bill. Students who have a comparable source of health insurance may not understand that they are being double-billed and can waive the school's insurance. As a result, we found some students were not going to college because they couldn't pay their college bill with the $2,500 additional cost of student health insurance, and they didn't realize that they could waive this cost.

In addition, uAspire had the opportunity to contribute to the book Summer Melt: Supporting Low-Income Students through the Transition to College by Drs. Ben Castleman and Lindsay Page, and to the Harvard Strategic Data Project's Summer Melt Handbook.

IHEP: Can you give an example of what you have seen colleges do with this information?

One of the higher education institutions we partner with used our summer melt one-pagers to distill into an easy format all the pre-enrollment tasks that incoming students need to complete. Although many colleges do have checklists by office or department online, not all colleges have centralized, hardcopy communication about core pre-enrollment tasks in one simple document. Further, financial tasks may be left off of centralized communications because they vary across students. This partner recognized the benefit of our centralized one-pager and used it to create a one-pager to give out to all freshmen.

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Looking Forward

IHEP: Would you like to offer any last words of wisdom to communities on reducing summer melt and improving the transition to college?

We want practitioners to fully challenge their own beliefs about college-accepted students not needing support over the summer, and to try to have at least one point of contact with them during the summer to assess their situations. Practitioners can also benefit students by having a general understanding of the colleges that their students intend to attend and the specific tasks that are required at those institutions. We've heard from practitioners who worry that they aren't experts in financial aid or that they don't know enough about the practices and protocols of all of the different colleges their students attend. However, it's often much more about helping students navigate bureaucracies, systems, and online portals than it is about being an expert in any one specific content area. Imagine the student who is expected to navigate these complex systems on his or her own. A practitioner can help the student identify and complete these tasks; the student and practitioner can call the financial aid office together, for instance. Such individualized support provided over the summer not only may help students overcome critical barriers to information but also may make the difference in whether students ultimately enroll in college.

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Tools

uAspire Summer Task List

This tool provides a checklist of summer tasks for students planning to attend Bunker Hill Community College.

Page length: 2

Transition Course Syllabus

This is a sample syllabus by Austin Community College from an Advanced Intensive Adult Based Education Writing & Study Skills course. The class is designed for those who want to continue on career and/or postsecondary paths after taking the GED.

Page length: 3

Prior Learning Credit Predictor

This online tool was created by Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to help adults create a personalized action plan based on the estimated amount of college credits they have already earned.

Page length: varies

Additional Resources

Getting Ready for College: An Implementation and Early Impacts Study of Eight Texas Developmental Summer Bridge Programs *(2011: National Center for Postsecondary Research at Teachers College, Columbia University)*

This report evaluates eight summer bridge programs in Texas that were designed to provide intensive remedial instruction in math, reading, writing, and college preparation content for students entering college with low basic skills. Student participants were more likely to pass college-level courses in math and writing in the fall semester following the summer programs. The brief outlines key program outcomes and descriptive details that will enable practitioners to develop their own summer bridge programs devoted to increasing the math, reading, and writing proficiencies of students.

State Policy Approaches to Support Prior Learning Assessment *(2012: The Council for Adult & Experimental Learning & HCM Strategists)*

This report provides guidance to state policymakers on promoting the use of prior learning assessment (PLA) by institutions of higher education. The guide provides specific guidance on assessing current institution-level and state-level policies that govern the provision of PLA services, and developing new policies by either implementing higher education regulatory language or passing state legislation. The resource includes examples of promising state approaches to building support for PLA programs, case studies, sample state policy language, and links to other resources.

Strategic Data Project–Summer Melt Handbook: A Guide to Investigating and Responding to Summer Melt *(2013: Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University)*

This handbook explains how school administrators, high school counselors, and community-based organizations can reduce summer melt." It offers strategies for helping districts collect data on summer melt among their students and provides various examples of how a district can decrease its rate of summer melt, depending on its resources, information, and connections with local colleges or college access organizations. The handbook includes five case studies of initiatives from community organizations and schools to implement summer melt interventions, detailing costs, timelines, and results.

Summer Melt Supporting Low-Income Students through the Transition to College *(2014: Benjamin L. Castleman & Lindsay C. Page)*

Summer Melt analyzes the primary factors that influence student postsecondary matriculation following high school graduation. The book provides guidance to schools and districts on implementing effective, low-cost interventions, including peer mentoring, counselor outreach, and the use of social media to ensure that students successfully transition from high school to college.

Adult College Completion in the 21st Century: What We Know and What We Don't *(2015: Higher Ed Insight)*

Suitable for practitioners, policymakers, and academics alike, this report synthesizes what has been learned about the needs of adult college students, particularly those returning to college after stopping out. In 2010, the Lumina Foundation funded 10 large-scale projects aimed at serving adult students who have completed some college course work but not a degree. The report draws from the considerable body of recent research on adult learners and also looks at data gathered during Higher Ed Insight's recent evaluation of Lumina's grantees and its other adult college completion efforts. The report aims to identify areas where further inquiry is needed to demonstrate effective ways to support degree completion for adults.

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