
College Preparation Programs – Best Practices and Example Programs

Prepared for Arlington Public Schools

In an effort to increase the number of first generation students enrolling in and completing college, many organizations, including the U.S. government, various schools and school districts, and non-profits have sought to introduce college preparation programs to provide students with the skills and the encouragement necessary to motivate them to apply for and complete college. In this report, a brief introduction will outline the importance of a postsecondary education for many of America's youth, and will outline some of the characteristics of a "typical" first generation student. The report will go on to review the literature regarding best practices for college preparation programs, and then profile several successful programs which have been designed to assist students, particularly first generation students, apply to and succeed in higher education.

Introduction

The importance of a college education in today's global economy can hardly be overemphasized. The U.S. Department of Labor has estimated that "six of every 10 jobs in the U.S. economy depend on highly trained workers with skills only available through postsecondary education."¹ Moreover, economists have estimated that by the year 2020, the United States could face a shortfall of 14 million workers who have the knowledge and skills to complete for middle-income jobs in the current global economy.² The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has projected that 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs in the nation will require some form of post-secondary education.³

In addition to meeting the labor needs of a dynamic economy, attending and completing college provides graduates with a number of advantages. According to the Census Bureau, "Over an adult's working life, high school graduates earn an average of \$1.2 million; associate's degree holders earn about \$1.6 million; and bachelor's degree holders earn about \$2.1 million."⁴

College graduates also enjoy other benefits besides their often increased income. A 1998 report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy found that college graduates enjoy "higher levels of saving, increased personal/professional mobility, improved quality of life for their offspring, better consumer decision making, and more hobbies and leisure activities."⁵ In addition to this, a report by the Carnegie Foundation found that non-monetary individual benefits of higher education include the tendency for post-secondary students to become more rational, more consistent, less authoritarian, and more open minded, among other traits. These benefits are also passed on to succeeding generations.⁶

Despite these facts, many high school students do not successfully transition to college. **First generation students (students whose parents have no education beyond high school)⁷, ethnic minorities and other socially or economically disadvantaged students enroll in and complete college at a lower rate than their counterparts.** For example, a December 2006 report by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education found that out of 100 high school

¹ *Public High School to College Transitions: Barriers and Best Practices – A Snapshot of Texas Within a National Context.* http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Perf_Rvw_PubEd/White_Papers/Higher_Ed_Continuum.pdf, p.2.

² *Ibid.*

³ Dounay, Jennifer. "Strategies to Empower Low-Income and Minority Students in Gaining Admission to and Paying for College." Education Commission of the States. <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/79/03/7903.pdf>, p.1.

⁴ Porter, Kathleen. "The Value of a College Degree." ERIC Digest. <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-3/value.htm>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ It should be noted that some studies define "first generation" students as students whose parents have not *completed* a postsecondary degree, rather than students whose parents have not attend college at all.

graduates, students whose parents earned only a high school diploma or less were significantly less likely to continue on to and achieve success in higher education.⁸

Table 1: Level of Students' Educational Attainment by Parents' Educational Background

Level of Students' Educational Attainment	Students with Parents with a High School diploma or Less	Students with Parents with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher
<i>Enrolled in College</i>	47%	85%
<i>Earn a College Degree</i>	27%	68%
<i>Earn a Bachelor's Degree</i>	12%	58%

Source: Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. "Straight from the Source What Works for First-Generation College Students." The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Pg. 16. Op.cit.

A report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that not only are first generation students less likely than other students to attend college within eight years after completing high school, **they are also more likely (43 percent) to leave college without a degree.**⁹

As noted above, first generation students, ethnic minorities, and other socially or economically disadvantaged students enroll in and complete college at a lower rate than their counterparts.¹⁰ With this in mind, **what can be done to encourage access to and participation in postsecondary education for disadvantaged populations?** Different institutions and authors have focused on different ideas and strategies, not all of which can be covered here. Nonetheless, we profile the "first-generation student" and put forth some practices that are believed to increase college access and preparation for these individuals.

⁸ Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. "Straight from the Source What Works for First-Generation College Students." The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. http://www.pellinstitute.org/files/files-sfts_what_works.pdf, p.16.

⁹ Chen, Xianglei. "First-Generation Students in Post Secondary Education A Look at Their College Transcripts." U.S. Department of Education. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005171.pdf>, p.5-6.

¹⁰ Dounay, Jennifer, Op. cit., p.1.

The “First-Generation” Student

In this section, we examine some of the characteristics of first generation students in order to gain a better understanding of the target population before entering into a discussion of best practice college preparation programs.

General Attributes

Compared with the general student body, first-generation students tend to be older, lower-income, female, minority, married, independent, part-time, off-campus, non-bachelors, receiving federal or state aid, and working full-time.¹¹ Surveys have found that first-generation students are more likely than the general student population to be:¹²

Table 2: Characteristics of First Generation College Students

Attribute	First Generation Students	Students with Parents who Attended and/or Completed College
<i>Gender – Female</i>	57%	51%
<i>Low income (less than \$25,000 a year)</i>	42%	22% of students with parents with some college 18% of students with parents with a bachelor’s degree
<i>24 years or older</i>	31%	13% of students with parents with some college 5% of students with parents with a bachelor’s degree
<i>Married</i>	18%	5%
<i>Independent of parental support</i>	37%	13%
<i>Studying part-time</i>	30%	13%
<i>Living off-campus</i>	84%	60%
<i>Studying for a degree or certificate other than bachelor’s</i>	88%	43%
<i>Delayed enrollment in higher education after high school</i>	46%	19%
<i>Working full-time and/ or full-time off-campus</i>	33%	24%
<i>Receiving federal or state financial aid</i>	51%	42%

¹¹ McConnell, Penny J. “ERIC Review: What Community Colleges Should Do to Assist First-Generation Students.” http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0HCZ/is_3_28/ai_72685312/

¹² Tym, Carmen, et al. “First Generation College Students: A Literature Review.” Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation Research and Analytical Services. Pascarella, et al. “First-Generation College Students: Additional Evidence on College Experiences and Outcomes.” The Journal of Higher Education. Retrieved 9/8/09 from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3838816>. Chen, Xianglei. “First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at their College Transcripts.” U.S. Department of Education. Saenz, et al. “First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971.” Higher Education Research Institute.

Additionally, 52% of all community college students are first generation students and first generation students tend to be less prepared for college, as measured by college entrance exams, senior achievement scores, and enrollment in high-level math courses.¹³

It should also be noted that first-generation students are more likely to be African-American or Hispanic. A 2001 report by the National Center for Educational Statistics found that of 1995-1996 beginning postsecondary students, approximately 18.1 percent of first-generation students were Hispanic, 13.5% were black, and 61.3% were white students. Likewise, the percentage distribution of non-first-generation students was approximately 76.1% white, 7.4% Hispanic, and 8.2% black.¹⁴ Consequently, many of the “best practice” college preparation programs reviewed later in this report use strategies applicable to increasing participation among African-American and Hispanic male students, even if the programs are not specifically designed for this population.

Motivations for Entering Higher Education

Often, first generation college students cite different motivations for entering higher education than their peers who have parents who have completed college. First-generation students tend to believe that college is important, but for different reasons than their peers. While students whose parents have some college or a bachelor’s degree or greater (second-generation students) give their primary reason for attending college as personal growth, **first-generation students tend to perceive higher education in terms of career advancement and improved salary.**¹⁵ Their choice of school was governed more by cost-and location-related factors, as demonstrated in the following table.

Table 3: Factors Affecting School Choice for First Generation Students Compared to Students with Parents Attended/Completed College

School-Choice Factor	Students with Parents with a High School diploma or Less	Students with Parents with a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher
<i>Receive Financial Aid</i>	36%	25%
<i>Able to Live at Home</i>	53%	35%
<i>Able to Work While Enrolled</i>	53%	36%

Choy, Susan. “Students Whose Parents Did Not Go to College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment.” National Center for Education Statistics. 2001.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴ Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. “Straight from the Source What Works for First-Generation College Students,” p.16. Op.cit.

¹⁵ McConnell, Penny J. “ERIC Review: What Community Colleges Should Do to Assist First-Generation Students.” Op.cit.

Educational expectations, meanwhile, tended to lag behind those of their peers:¹⁶

- ❖ As early as 8th grade, only 55% of students whose parents hadn't attended college aspired to obtain a bachelor's degree, compared to 71% of students whose parents had some college and 91% of students whose parents had a bachelor's degree.
- ❖ Only 25% of first generation students were likely to take the SAT or ACT, compared to 42% of students whose parents had some college and 73% of students whose parents had a bachelor's degree.

Sense of Academic Self-Confidence

The gap between first-generation and second-generation students in high school achievement is well documented and appears to persist through college or university. Amount of time spent studying, self-confidence in academics, math and writing abilities, critical thinking, and time management all tend to be lower among first-generation students.¹⁷ These weaknesses are reflected in lower GPAs and SAT scores. However, **some studies have shown little or no difference in actual academic abilities, implying that the majority of differences are in self-perception**, with first-generation students consistently rating lower on self-confidence and self-ratings of their own abilities.¹⁸ These differences in self-image point to potential focus points for college preparation programs.

Need for College Preparation Programs

Overall, the characteristics of first generation students provide some valuable insights into the ways in which college preparation programs may choose target populations, structure program goals, objectives, and attributes, and the ways in which the program may define success. The need for college preparation programs for first generation students is high, especially considering the fact that this population appears to be less engaged with high school teachers and student groups/organizations and more in need of “academic validation,”¹⁹ and many of the problematic characteristics of first generation high school students persist into higher education.

Fortunately, however, research provides examples of best practices in first generation student college preparation programs, discussed in the preceding section. Perhaps

¹⁶ Choy, Susan. “Students Whose Parents Did Not Go to College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment.” Op.cit.

¹⁷ McConnell, Penny J., Op. cit.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., et al. “First-generation college students: Characteristics, Experiences, and Cognitive Development.” p.17.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/29/b2/14.pdf.

in part due to the efforts of college preparation programs, a recent study found that although first generation students still lag behind the general population, **long-term trends point to gradually increasing educational expectations among first-generation students as well as the general student body.**²⁰ 65% of first-generation students in the study aspired to a master's degree or higher, up from 50.8% in 1974. Perhaps most strikingly, one 2003 study showed that more than 9 in 10 Hispanic families expected their children to attend college.²¹ These positive trends provide evidence of program effectiveness as well as support for ongoing efforts.

²⁰ Saentz, et. al. "First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971." Higher Education Research Institution. 2007.

²¹ Schmidt, Peter. "Academe's Hispanic Future: The Nation's Largest Minority Group Faces Big Obstacles in Higher Education, and Colleges Struggle to Find the Right Ways to Help." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/article/Academe-s-Hispanic-Future/20497>.

Best Practices in College Preparation Programs

College preparation programs can vary widely in scope, goals, and implementation. Different programs and different actions can have similar results. As such, finding “best practices” in college preparation programs can be difficult. Nonetheless, some tentative conclusions can be drawn.

A U.S. Department of Education report on K-12 intervention programs provides some general guidelines for effective college preparation programs. The study found that effective programs generally had the following elements in common:²²

- ❖ They provide “**a key person who monitors and guides the student over a long period of time**—a ‘mentor,’ program director, faculty member, or guidance counselor.” However, studies are unclear on which of these are most effective.
- ❖ Effective programs also **provide high-quality instruction** through access to more challenging courses, special coursework that supports and/or enhances regular course offerings, or by revamping the curriculum to better address the needs of students.
- ❖ They also **focus on long-term rather than short-term interventions**. The longer students were in a program, the more they benefited from it.
- ❖ They are **sensitive to the culture and/or background of students**. Many programs have more success with one group of students than another, suggesting that the background and skills of the staff and directors helped to create cultural connections with students that led to greater program success.
- ❖ Effective programs **provide a peer group** which gives students social/emotional support and fosters student academic aspirations.
- ❖ Finally, effective programs **provide financial assistance and incentives**. Financial incentives can be important to access academic “leveling” experiences, such as SAT preparation courses.²³

These guidelines are elaborated upon in a variety of best practice recommendations for first generation student college preparation programs. In addition to recommendations for college preparation efforts regarding the need for comprehensive multi-year programs that focus on academic growth, PSAT/SAT

²² “Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K-12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth,” p.9.
<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001205.pdf>

²³ Ibid.

preparation, and by cultivating college awareness through student activities and special speakers, the following paragraphs provide further suggestions regarding program attributes, goals, and objectives:

1) Identify factors that first generation students see as barriers to higher education

Schools and/or administrators seeking to institute a college preparation program should be guided in their efforts by what first generation college students traditionally identify as barriers to a college education. A study by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education illustrates some of these barriers to college enrollment that first generation students commonly perceive in order to determine which messages and services have the most impact on first generation student college enrollment.²⁴

The Pell Institute study involved focus groups with 135 first generation students in Texas who were recent alumni of pre-college TRIO programs (Talent Search and Upward Bound). All of the students were enrolled in two- or four-year institutions in the state.

The focus groups identified several factors that they saw as barriers to college admissions and enrollment. For one, many first generation students indicated simply that a lack of college awareness was a major issue. In the words of Engle, Bermeo, et al.,

Barriers to higher education:

- ❖ Lack of college awareness
- ❖ Low self-confidence in academic abilities
- ❖ Concerns about college affordability

Many first-generation students had limited educational and career goals prior to getting involved in a pre-college program. According to students, getting informed about the long-term economic benefits of earning a college degree helped raise their educational and career aspirations.²⁵

Another barrier for first generation students was their low self-confidence concerning their own academic abilities. Many students did not see themselves as “college material” and reported that pre-college programs helped raise their college aspirations by increasing their self-esteem and confidence in their academic abilities.²⁶ Raising awareness about college could also be helpful.

Often finances may be a barrier to college attendance for first-generation students. In order to address this issue, best practice literature suggests providing activities such

²⁴ Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. Op. cit., p.13.

²⁵ Ibid, p.22.

²⁶ Ibid.

as financial aid workshops and college visits.²⁷ Successful programs took the time to inform students and parents early on about college affordability, scholarship and aid sources, as well as helped students and parents complete financial aid forms prior to eligibility deadlines.²⁸

2) *Navigating the college admissions process*

Related to first generation students' perceived barriers to attending college is the need to help students navigate the complex college admissions process. A review of the most successful programs found that it was important to provide first generation students with college information early and to provide it often. It helped to get the entire family involved when going through the step-by-step process – from college entrance examinations to college visits, applications, and financial aid forms – in order to keep first generation students moving toward college enrollment.²⁹

Navigating the admissions process:

- ❖ Provide college information early and often
- ❖ Get the whole family involved
- ❖ Set-up college visits
- ❖ Help students and families fill out financial aid and college application forms

Simple measures used to help students navigate the college admissions process included ensuring the students were prepared for and took the appropriate college entrance exam early, providing counselors to assist students in their college search, coordinating college visits, and assisting students in completing college applications.³⁰

Finally, the first generation students found that the college admissions process could be helped by involving the entire community in the effort, often by referring students to the local resources available.³¹

3) *Engage students in career-focused activities*

The students in the Pell Institute study noted that the success of the college preparations was in part due to the offering of career-focused activities such as career interest inventories, career day programs and speakers, and job shadowing and

²⁷ Ibid. p.6.

²⁸ "Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do." National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences. September 2009. p.11.
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/higher_ed_pg_091509.pdf

²⁹ Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. Op. cit. p 5-6.

³⁰ Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do." National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences. Op.cit. p.11.

³¹ Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. Op. cit. p 6.

internship programs. As a result of these activities, students reported an increase in college aspirations.³²

Examples of Career-Focused Activities:

- ❖ Career interest inventories
- ❖ Field trips and hands-on engagement
- ❖ Speakers
- ❖ Job shadowing and internship programs

In particular, the use of hands-on opportunities for students to explore different careers is mentioned in a variety of literature.³³

4) *Offer a variety of academic preparation services*

In addition to providing career-focused activities, a review of effective urban college preparation programs found that the most successful programs offer comprehensive approaches and combine a variety of services.³⁴ In addition to offering a variety of services and college entrance exam preparation activities, the review found that:

The most effective college preparation programs are of substantial duration and focus on “readiness” rather than “re-mediation”... They begin offering students services and information about college and financial aid as early as possible, certainly in time to influence the educational outcomes for the students.³⁵

Other suggestions for effective preparation programs include:

- ❖ Monitoring students’ progress in completing core courses such as algebra, geometry, etc. so that students can gain skills needed for standardized testing as well as have a competitive transcript for college admissions.
- ❖ Provide workshops and/or courses on study skills, such as how to take notes, and test preparation (i.e. SAT prep).³⁶

Academic Preparation Services:

- ❖ Focus on college readiness
- ❖ Four-year curriculum planned to prepare students for college
- ❖ Study and writing skills workshops
- ❖ Academic progress monitoring
- ❖ SAT/ACT test prep

❖ Ensure that students understand what constitutes a “college-ready” curriculum by 9th grade.

❖ Develop a four-year curriculum plan with each 9th grader that will prepare students for college by the end

of 12th grade.³⁷

³² Ibid.

³³ Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do.” National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences. Op.cit. p.11

³⁴ Oesterreich, Heather. “Characteristics of Effective Urban College Preparation Programs.” <http://www.ericdigests.org/2001-3/effective.htm>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

5) *Provide first generation students with social supports*

First generation students also often thought of college as unachievable because few people that they knew had gone to college and graduated. Activities which provide social support to first generation students through exposure to others who have gone through similar experiences can help to show these students that it is possible to go to college even though others in their families or community did not.³⁸

Social support is also important. Parental involvement is an important facet in student success and one study found that students whose parents discussed education goals with them had higher levels of post-secondary students than students whose parents did not enter into this discussion.³⁹

Peer support can also have a positive impact on current students. Oesterreich, among other things, notes that effective programs deal with social and cultural capital for college students. In the words of Oesterreich,

Social Support:

- ❖ Provide exposure to other first generation students who have successfully enrolled in/completed college
- ❖ Engage parents in the college discussion
- ❖ Partner with other organizations to maximize resources and program effectiveness

Social capital for students preparing for college is the availability of information-sharing networks about college and financial aid. Cultural capital is the value placed on obtaining a college education, and the information available about the means of acquiring one (McDonough, 1997). Effective programs create this capital by teaching social norms, values, and expected behaviors necessary for college admittance and persistence.⁴⁰

Additionally, peer support can help to ease many first generation college students' anxieties regarding the transition to college.⁴¹

Finally, best practice literature recommends that schools and communities provide college preparatory information to all students as early as possible. Partnerships with school-based, community-based, and state- or federally-funded college preparation programs can help disseminate information and maximize the resources to be used to better serve students.⁴²

³⁷ Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do.” National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences. Op.cit. p.11

³⁸ Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. Op. cit., p.22. .

³⁹ Oesterreich, Heather. “Characteristics of Effective Urban College Preparation Programs.” Op.cit.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Engle, Jennifer, Bermeo, Adolfo, et al. Op. cit., p.7.

⁴² Ibid. p.7

A Look at Several College Preparation Programs

This section contains three examples of successful college preparation programs that use a variety of techniques in order to increase the rate of first generation or otherwise disadvantaged students entering and/or completing college.

AVID Program

The AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program is a fourth through twelfth grade program designed to prepare students “in the academic middle” for four-year college eligibility.⁴³ The AVID program was developed in 1980 by Mary Catherine Swanson at Clairemont High School and in 1992 AVID Center was established as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.⁴⁴ **AVID students are “students in the academic middle - B, C, and even D students” who typically will be the first of their families to attend college.**⁴⁵ Overall, “AVID serves more than 70,000 students enrolled in over 1000 middle and high schools in 20 states and 14 countries.”⁴⁶

Goals, Objectives and Requirements

At its heart, the AVID program revolves around “untracking,’ or **placing underachieving students who would otherwise be in the general or vocational track into college preparatory classes.**”⁴⁷ These classes fulfill four-year college entrance requirements.⁴⁸ A 2002 report by Guthrie and Guthrie reports that “AVID programs now require all AVID students to enroll in at least one AP course in their four years.”⁴⁹

For a school to receive certification as an AVID site, the following essential elements are required:⁵⁰

- ❖ Prior to the implementation of the program the teacher/coordinator, the site administrator, and a team of subject area teachers must attend an AVID Summer Institute.

⁴³ “AVID 101 (Introduction).” AVID. <http://www.avidonline.org/info/?ID=549&tabID=1>.

⁴⁴ “About Us.” AVID. <http://www.avidonline.org/info/?ID=2224>.

⁴⁵ “AVID 101 (Introduction),” Op. cit.

⁴⁶ “Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID).”

<http://www.aypf.org/publications/rmaa/pdfs/AVID.pdf>.

⁴⁷ “Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K-12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth.” U.S. Department of Education. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001205.pdf>, p.62.

⁴⁸ “Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID),” Op. cit.

⁴⁹ Guthrie, Larry F., and Guthrie, Grace Pung. “The Magnificent Eight: AVID Best Practices Study.” Center for Research, Evaluation, and Training in Education. <http://www.avidonline.org/content/pdf/310.pdf>, p.6.

⁵⁰ Points From: “Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID),” Op. cit.

- ❖ The school must identify resources for program costs, purchase program materials and commit to ongoing participation in the AVID staff development and certification process.
- ❖ Student selection must focus on underachieving students in the middle who have the ability to succeed in a college preparatory curricular path.
- ❖ Participation must be voluntary.
- ❖ The program must be implemented as an integral part of the school day.
- ❖ Tutors must be available, and receive training, to implement AVID curriculum writing assignments, made relevant to the students' lives, and problem solving that fosters critical inquiry.
- ❖ The AVID curriculum must provide the basis for instruction in the classroom.
- ❖ Program implementation and student progress must be monitored and results analyzed.
- ❖ The school must feature an active, interdisciplinary Site Team.

Academic Preparation Activities

Youth in the AVID program are provided with extensive support services that focus on academic preparation and motivational activities. Students:⁵¹

- ❖ Meet daily in an AVID class with a trained AVID teacher who teaches a targeted curriculum.
- ❖ Meet two days a week in small groups for academic tutoring.
- ❖ Spend two days a week in activities devoted to writing development, note-taking, test-taking, and study strategies.
- ❖ Spend one day a week in activities involving guest speakers, field trips, and other motivational activities.
- ❖ Begin each year with preparation courses for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT) so that they are ready to participate in one of these exams in their junior and/or senior year.⁵²

⁵¹ "Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K-12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth," Op. cit.

⁵² "The AVID Course Description." San Diego County Office of Education.

<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/lret/avid/Resources/CourseDescription.pdf>, p.1.

It is also noted that “AVID uses ‘writing as a tool of learning’ as a basis for all assignments.” Freshman AVID students begin with lessons on textbook and lecture note taking. At the sophomore and junior level, students focus on specific writing strategies, such as comparing and contrasting. Finally, senior AVID students “Work to improve the skills acquired in the previous years by writing essays in various discourse modes and by applying these skills to timed writings, which prepare them for the college English placement examinations.”

AVID also provides students with academic study skills, including library research and textbook reading. Moreover, AVID tutors assist students for two hours per week in all academic areas. These tutors primarily assist students in small groups. These study groups emphasize the Socratic method of inquiry and help teach students to seek and use help, a skill often underdeveloped amongst the students that the AVID program targets.⁵³

A look at the AVID program offered by the San Diego County Office of Education provides further details about the AVID class in that area. The San Diego County Office of Education notes that:

AVID is offered as an elective course that, like any other class, meets regularly. Each week, students receive two hours of instruction, two hours in tutor led study groups, and one hour in motivational activities and academic survival skills, including critical reading and writing skills.⁵⁴

Social Support Activities

In order to build a sense of social support, **AVID provides “markers” in an effort to develop a sense of community** – AVID students carry special notebooks with the AVID logo, students participate in AVID-only activities, and students eat lunch and socialize in an AVID room.⁵⁵ AVID students are also **tutored by trained college students and exemplary high school peers.**⁵⁶

These activities are monitored at each participating school by a site coordinator/teacher who “works with colleagues to implement AVID methodologies school-wide, to place students in college preparatory curriculum, and to work with counselors to guide students through the college application process.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid, p.2.

⁵⁴ “What Is AVID?” San Diego County Office of Education.
http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/lret/avid/?loc=what_is_avid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “AVID 101 (Introduction),” Op. cit.

Program Success

Numerous studies have concluded that the AVID program as a whole is effective in sending students to college. In fact, **nearly 95 percent of AVID graduates enroll in college** – an especially impressive statistic considering the fact that AVID’s target population is not the most academically prepared.⁵⁸ In addition to this, **77 percent of AVID graduates enroll in four-year colleges, and more than 80 percent of AVID graduates remain enrolled in college two years after admission.**⁵⁹ A separate evaluation of the AVID program by Mehan et al. found that:

Of the 248 students who completed the AVID program and were in the study sample, 48 percent reported attending a 4-year college immediately after high school, 40 percent attended a 2-year college, and 12 percent “were doing other things.” The researchers note that these figures compare favorably with the data for San Diego public schools as whole, where 37 percent of students in the district went on to 4-year colleges. They also found that the AVID completers compared favorably to the students who only participated for 1 year or less; 34 percent of these students went on to 4-year college.⁶⁰

It was also noted that **AVID appeared to be particularly effective with black and Hispanic students.** Indeed, among Hispanic students, “Only 25 percent of Hispanic students in the San Diego schools went on to 4-year colleges in 1992, 43 percent of AVID completers did so.” Among black students, 55 percent of AVID students enrolled in four-year colleges compared to 38 percent of all other black students in the district.

Interestingly, the study also noted that AVID students from homes where neither parent had been to college were actually more likely to enroll in college than AVID students whose parents were college graduates.⁶¹ However, it should be noted that in this study “The lack of true controls and factors associated with the selection of AVID students suggest that it is important to exercise caution in interpretation of the data.”⁶²

The Total College Preparation Experience - YES Prep

YES Prep Public Schools is a free, open-enrollment public charter school system located in the Houston area **designed to increase the number of local students**

⁵⁸ “Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID),” p.1. Op. cit.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.1-2.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.63.

⁶² Ibid.

who “graduate from a four-year college prepared to compete in the global marketplace and committed to improving disadvantages communities.”⁶³

YES Prep schools serve 3,500 students on seven campuses from the 6th to the 12th grade.⁶⁴ YES Prep schools function differently from the typical public school experience in that students enter a lottery to be selected to attend. **90 percent of YES Prep students are first-generation students and 80 percent are from disadvantaged backgrounds.**⁶⁵ In addition to this, most YES Prep students are at least one grade level behind in Math and English.⁶⁶

Goals, Objectives and Requirements

Students, their parents, and teachers are required to sign a contract which stipulates each party’s commitments.⁶⁷ In order:

To qualify for a [high school] diploma, students are required to earn 22 credits, including 4 in English, 4 in mathematics, 3 in foreign language, 4 in science, 4 in the social sciences, 1-1/2 in physical education and health, 1 in both fine arts and technology, and 1-1/2 in electives ranging from painting, video production, and photography, to psychology, yearbook, and robotics.⁶⁸

Academic Preparation Activities

YES Prep schools also feature an extended school day compared to more traditional schools which lasts approximately 9 hours, though they can last even longer.⁶⁹ These longer school days include time for tutorials and study halls to provide extra academic support time for students.⁷⁰ YES Prep schools also require their students to dedicate one Saturday each month to community service projects and are required to participate in a three-week summer school (for students entering grades 6, 7, 8, and 9).⁷¹ The focus of this summer program differs for each grade. Indeed,

In the summer before the sixth grade year, students learn about the organization and workload of YES and the culture in which they will begin

⁶³ “About YES Prep.” YES Prep Public Schools. <http://www.yesprep.org/about/index.htm>

⁶⁴ “History.” YES Prep Public Schools. Retrieved 9/8/09 from <http://www.yesprep.org/about/history.htm>.

⁶⁵ “Overview.” YES Prep Public Schools. Retrieved 9/8/09 from <http://www.yesprep.org/about/index.htm>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “YES Prep Public Schools Whatever It Takes Contract.” YES Prep Public Schools. Retrieved 9/8/09 from <http://www.theanswerisyes.org/downloads/Contract.English.pdf>.

⁶⁸ “Work With Parents & the Community.” U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved 9/8/09 from http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charterhs/report_pg23.html.

⁶⁹ “YES Prep: Achieving 100 Percent College-Readiness in Houston’s Low-Income Urban Core.” Michael and Susan Dell Foundation. Retrieved 9/8/09 from http://www.chartergrowthfund.org/media/MSDF_Success_Story._YES_Prep.pdf, p.2.

⁷⁰ “Practices Worthy of Attention.” Retrieved 9/8/09 from <http://www.utdanacenter.org/pwoa/downloads/yesprep.pdf>, p.6.

⁷¹ “YES Prep Public Schools Whatever It Takes Contract,” Op. cit., p.2.

working on their academic careers. Some academics are involved, but mainly the summer school for incoming sixth graders is focused on the new culture of YES.

In summers before seventh and eighth grades, summer school is more focused on academics; students have opportunities to take intersession classes as well as remediation classes, if needed.

In the summer before ninth grade, summer school is a combination of activities done in the previous summers for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, except students are focusing on the high school component— learning about expectations, workload, and the culture of high school.⁷²

YES Prep schools do everything possible to ensure academic success. As noted above, school days feature tutorials and study hall periods built into the schedule. Upon admission, students take the Stanford 10 test in an effort to identify academic strengths and weaknesses.⁷³ Students receive up to two hours of homework a night,⁷⁴ and teachers have school-sponsored cell phones for students to contact them during the evenings and weekends with questions.⁷⁵ YES Prep schools offer a range of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and all students are expected to take at least two AP courses.⁷⁶ In addition, “Students are assessed by teachers in their sophomore and junior years, and those not demonstrating performance levels aligned with four-year college admissions requirements are held back for more preparation.”⁷⁷

YES Prep also **finds co-curricular activities important**, so schools provide teacher-led clubs that focus on academic and non-academic activities, such as martial arts and knitting.⁷⁸ The student-teacher ratio averages 24:1, and 6th and 7th grade classes are team taught so that children lagging in reading and math can receive more personalized attention.⁷⁹

Social Support Activities

YES Prep schools also **attempt to get parents involved** in their child’s academic success. Parents are encouraged to join the YES Prep Parental Advisory Association, a group that meets at least once a month.⁸⁰ YES Prep staff members also regularly

⁷² “Practices Worthy of Attention,” Op. cit., p.7.

⁷³ “Grade 6-12 College Readiness Model.” Texas Education Agency.

http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/bestprac/summaries/Yes_Prep_College_Ready_12-1-08.pdf, p.2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Overview,” Op. cit.

⁷⁶ “Grade 6-12 College Readiness Model,” Op. cit., p.2.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.3.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.6.

⁷⁹ “YES Prep: Achieving 100 Percent College-Readiness in Houston’s Low-Income Urban Core,” Op. cit., p.2.

⁸⁰ “Grade 6-12 College Readiness Model,” Op. cit., p.3.

communicate with parents about student progress. Weekly notes are sent to parents in Spanish and English, and parents are given teacher's cell phone numbers and encouraged to call at any time.⁸¹

Activities to Help Navigate the College Admissions Process

YES Prep schools **also feature a college counseling program that students participate in starting in the 10th grade.**⁸² YES Prep counselors:

Serve no more than 30 students each, with targeted responsibilities to prepare students for the college admissions process. Counselors teach a mandatory year-long college counseling class during grades 11 and 12 to assist students with applications. Students are required to submit no fewer than three college applications, apply for a minimum of 10 scholarships, and submit financial aid applications.⁸³

YES Prep schools also take steps to **cultivate college awareness.** College posters and quotes are displayed across campus to reinforce student expectations and motivation.⁸⁴ Students can earn the privilege of wearing a college shirt instead of a school uniform on Fridays.⁸⁵

Beginning in the 6th grade, YES Prep students spend a week each year visiting college campuses.⁸⁶ College representatives also visit YES Prep schools.⁸⁷ YES Prep schools also hold a Senior Signing Day each spring during which each senior publically signs a letter of acceptance to the college that he or she has selected. This ceremony is held in front of the combined student body.⁸⁸

Program Success

The YES Prep model has proved hugely successful in preparing students for college. As the YES Prep web site relates, **“for the ninth consecutive year, 100 percent of YES Prep’s graduating seniors have been accepted into four-year colleges, including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Rice, Stanford, Texas A&M, the University of Texas-Austin.”**⁸⁹ Furthermore, “84% of YES alumni have graduated from or are still enrolled in a four-year college,” and the YES Prep system has also

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Practices Worthy of Attention,” Op. cit., p.6.

⁸³ “Grade 6-12 College Readiness Model,” Op. cit., p.3.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Results. YES Prep Public Schools. <http://www.yesprep.org/about/results.htm>.

been rated as “exemplary” or “recognized” at each campus, every year of its operation.⁹⁰

The College Crusade of Rhode Island

Though the College Crusade of Rhode Island, a non-profit organization founded in 1989, is not specifically directed at first-generation students, it is **designed to reduce school dropout rates and to increase educational and career success for youth in low-income urban communities.**⁹¹ Students participating in the College Crusade program are slightly more likely to be eligible for free or reduced priced lunch or be a member of a minority group than the typical student from an urban district in Rhode Island.⁹² Fully 83 percent of the students participating in the College Crusade program are members of racial and ethnic minority groups, compared to 75 percent of students in Rhode Island urban districts.⁹³ Moreover, 83 percent of the students in the College Crusade program are eligible for free or reduced priced lunches, compared to 79 percent of students from Rhode Island urban districts.⁹⁴

The College Crusade of Rhode Island features a \$4.3 million annual budget, with approximately three-quarters of its budget coming from federal funds.⁹⁵ As of April 2009, the College Crusade employed 22 full-time advisors.⁹⁶

Goals, Objectives, and Requirements

Altogether, the College Crusade helps “Crusaders” **prepare for college by “providing caring Advisors and sustained academic and social support from grades 6-12, combined with scholarship incentives.”**⁹⁷ Students must apply for the College Crusade when they are in fifth grade and must attend sixth grade at a public school or public charter school in Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, or Woonsocket.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ “The College Crusade of Rhode Island.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/en>.

⁹² “The College Crusade 2008 Annual Report Card.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/arc/2008arcdata.pdf>, p.2.

⁹³ “The College Crusade of Rhode Island.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. Op.cit.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Macris, Gina. “Students on a Crusade for College.” The Providence Journal. http://www.projo.com/news/content/college_crusade_tour_04-17-09_LPE2KU8_v18.3788fd2.html.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Our Mission.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/en/mission/index.php>.

⁹⁸ “Welcome to Admissions.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/en/admissions/on-season-admissions-welcome.html>.

Each year, the College Crusade serves approximately 3,700 students.⁹⁹ All “crusaders” participate in a variety of programs and activities depending on their grade. The College Crusade features “Core Requirements,” as well as “Electives” which students can take but are not required. The programs and activities for middle school students and high school students are laid out below.

Academic Preparation Programs/ Activities to Help Navigate the College Admissions Process

Middle School

- ❖ **Middle School Orientations** – Each year all crusaders attend an orientation which provides them with an overview of the school year, in which students will learn about the College Crusade’s grade-level requirements, any changes in their advisory program, and electives and activities that can be selected.
- ❖ **CAAP 101 (Crusade Adventure and Academic Program)** – CAAP is a ten-week program designed to boost the confidence and self-esteem of crusaders by having the students take part in problem solving tasks, group challenges, and “risk-taking adventures.” Each week the program also has a literacy component, and runs during the school year for ten consecutive Saturdays.
- ❖ **Advisor Services** – Each crusader has an advisor who provides support, guidance, and resources. Crusaders and their advisors meet on a monthly basis.
- ❖ **Summer Reading** – Students entering the 7th and 8th grades are required to read two books and write a book report on both.
- ❖ **Ways to A’s** – A special summer program designed for incoming 6th graders that requires all incoming students to attend three days of study skills and one day of orientation over the summer.
- ❖ **Career Day** – A conference which exposes middle school students to a variety of careers, with students learning about the educational requirements and training necessary for different professions.
- ❖ **Transition Activities** – Over the course of the year, 8th grade crusaders will be provided with information and activities to ensure a smooth transition to high school.
- ❖ **Cru Club Activities** – Every middle school crusader must participate in a minimum of 10 hours of Cru Club activities from a wide selection. Activities

⁹⁹ “The College Crusade of Rhode Island,” Op. cit.

include science workshops, homework help, a book club, as well as non-academic activities such as group mentoring, community service, college visits, and career guest speakers.

- ❖ **Electives** – Crusaders can also participate in electives, such as a Saturday Academy which takes place over the course of 10 Saturdays for three hours a day and allows students to improve their reading, writing, and math skills; a three-week summer camp; college visits; and career speakers and visits.¹⁰⁰

High School

Many of the College Crusade programs directed at high schools include a **mixture of academic preparation activities as well as activities designed to help students navigate the college admissions process.**

- ❖ **High School Orientation** – Crusaders attend one orientation per year of high school which keeps students informed about program information and expectations.
- ❖ **Advisor Services** – Students must meet with an advisor regularly who supports their students and helps them along their path to college.
- ❖ **College Visits** – College visits allow students to gain information about many colleges in the New England area, with particular focus on schools in the College Crusade’s Scholarship Collaborative. Students can visit colleges every year.
- ❖ **Cru Club Activities** - Every high school student can select from a variety of activities, including creative writing workshops, homework help, a book club, as well as non-academic activities such as peer mentoring and guest speakers.
- ❖ **Electives** – Students can also chose to participate in a variety of electives, such as Smart Start, a comprehensive math and English skill-building course for 10th and 11th graders; SAT test preparation offered through Princeton Review for 11th grade students, and FAFSA Nights, where College Crusade staff meet with students and their families individually to help them fill out their the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form.¹⁰¹

Students who participate in the College Crusade can also take advantage of the **Pathways to College Program**, which includes services such as:

¹⁰⁰ All Points Adopted From: “Middle School Programs and Services.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/en/programs-and-services/index.php>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

- ❖ PSAT/SAT/ACT test preparation classes
- ❖ College applications assistance and fee waivers
- ❖ Assistance with college essays
- ❖ Financial aid information
- ❖ Information on programs of study and college majors
- ❖ Scholarship search assistance¹⁰²

Social Support Activities

The College Crusade of Rhode Island also provides “Family Engagement Workshops” which **teach parents how they can address concerns about their child’s education to school officials and inform parents about the positive effects that parental and family involvement have on their child’s academics.**¹⁰³ The College Crusade also **offers scholarships which can be used at all public and private colleges and trade schools in Rhode Island;** students can apply for these scholarships by filling out the FAFSA and signing a pledge to stay in school, avoid troubles with drinking, drugs, and the law, and avoid early parenthood, among other things.¹⁰⁴ Since 2001, the College Crusade has awarded over \$20 million in scholarships to more than 2,700 Rhode Island Students.¹⁰⁵

Program Success

The College Crusade appears to have succeeded in raising the college enrollment rates of high school students in Rhode Island.¹⁰⁶ **Data show that students that participate in the College Crusade program graduate and go on to college at a higher rate than Rhode Island’s urban students.** The College Crusade of Rhode Island reports that for every 100 students who enter 9th grade who participate in the College Crusade program, 70 graduate on-time and 48 continue to higher education.¹⁰⁷

Conversely, for every 100 students who enter 9th grade in Rhode Island urban districts (i.e. students similar to those that are targeted by the College Crusade program) only 61 graduate on time and only 31 go right on to higher education.¹⁰⁸ By comparison, for every 100 9th grade students in all of Rhode Island, 74 graduate on time, and 40 go right on to higher education.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Points From: “Welcome to Our High School Site!” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/en/high-school/2.html>.

¹⁰³ “Welcome to Family Engagement.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/en/parents/welcome.html>.

¹⁰⁴ “The College Crusade of Rhode Island 12th Grade Exit Information and Crusader Pledge Affirmation.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island.

<http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/images/docs/scholarship/2007AffirmationForm.pdf>, p.1.

¹⁰⁵ “Welcome to Our Scholarship Page.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island. <http://www.thecollegecrusade.org/main/en/scholarship/2.html>.

¹⁰⁶ “The College Crusade 2008 Annual Report Card.” The College Crusade of Rhode Island, Op.cit. p.1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

While first generation students face many obstacles on their path to higher education, the rewards of a college degree are both lasting and great. However, in order to successfully enroll in and complete college or university, many first generation students need the help of college preparation programs. This report outlines a number of characteristics of the most successful programs, including:

- ❖ A focus on long-term, rather than short-term, interventions.
- ❖ Program staff that are sensitive to the culture and/or backgrounds of the students, and who are able to design programs such that they address first generation students' perceived barriers to higher education.
- ❖ Aid in navigating the college admissions process, including providing college information to students and parents early and often, coordinating college visits, and helping students and families fill out financial aid and college application forms.
- ❖ Engaging students in career-focus activities – like career day programs, speakers, and job shadowing or internships – in order to raise first generation students' aspirations of higher education and for the future.
- ❖ The provision of a variety of academic preparation programs, from college-ready curriculum planning, to college entrance exam test preparation, study skills and writing classes, and academic progress monitoring.
- ❖ The provision of social supports, including peer groups, family and community involvement, mentors, and interactions with other first generation students who are successfully enrolled in or who have completed college or university.

The three examples of college preparation programs in this report, AVID, YES Prep, and the College Crusade of Rhode Island, each demonstrate the use of these best practice recommendations to achieve positive results. All three programs provide evidence of increasing the college enrollment and/or completion rate of first generation students – from AVID's approximately 95% participant enrollment in college and strong college retention rate, to YES Prep's 84% participant graduation or enrollment in four-year colleges, to College Crusade's finding that program participants graduate high school and go on to college at a higher rate than Rhode Island's urban high school students. The potential for success of college preparation programs is high, given that these programs are designed with the needs of the target population in mind.

Note

This brief was written to fulfill the specific request of an individual member of The Hanover Research Council. As such, it may not satisfy the needs of all members. We encourage any and all members who have additional questions about this topic – or any other – to contact us.

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