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AMERICORPS A KENTUCKY

Pursuing Pathways:

Evaluating the Kentucky College Coaches Program
2011-2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kentucky College Coaches Program Overview

The Kentucky Governor's Higher Education Work Group in 2008 reported that expansion of both college access and affordability initiatives would significantly benefit the citizens of the Commonwealth. The Kentucky Campus Compact and Berea College, in response to these findings, submitted a grant proposal to the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service for the establishment of a high school based near-peer mentoring program designed to create a direct intervention opportunity to assist high school students in planning and preparing for college. The Corporation for National and Community Service awarded a federal grant that provided funding to implement this access and affordability initiative throughout the Commonwealth, which became the Kentucky College Coaches (KCC) program.

The Kentucky Campus Compact and Berea College planned to place recent college graduates in high schools for an entire academic year to act as mentors and coaches. These coaches would have the opportunity to establish one-on-one relationships with students identified by the host high schools as underserved students, potential first-generation college students and/or low-income students eligible to participate in the federal Free or Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) program with the explicit goal of helping guide those students individually through postsecondary selection, application, admission and affordability.

The Kentucky Campus Compact placed recent college graduate AmeriCorps members in Kentucky at selected high schools to serve as college coaches/mentors to the high schools' selected groups of "core" students, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th-graders (high school seniors).

In order to maximize resources, for the Kentucky Campus Compact program, the Kentucky Campus Compact partnered with Berea College, the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) and the Kentucky Department of Education Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE). These partnerships established by the Kentucky Campus Compact, allowed for coach training and facilitated day-to-day communications with the coaches through each agency's appointed Program Advisors reporting to the Kentucky Campus Compact Program Director and Executive Director. The Kentucky Campus Compact performed the duties

as overall administrator of the KCC program and coordinated the supervision of AmeriCorps member-coaches at the individual host site high schools.

High school host sites included 32 public high schools and seven area technology centers (ATCs) that agreed to participate in KCC for the 2011-2012 academic year. There were 7,186 students enrolled in all grades at the participating schools, which designated 757 students (approximately 10.5%) as "core" students to work directly with the college coaches.

Assessment Overview

This research evaluation focuses on the effectiveness of the AmeriCorps funded Kentucky College Coaches (KCC) program during the academic year 2011-2012. The KCC program provided in-school, individualized, near-peer mentoring assistance to a group of "core" students identified by their high school teachers, counselors and administrators at selected high schools across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Specific activities and services were designed to prepare the students for the college application and admission process using a near-peer mentoring model and thereby enhance the likelihood those students will be successful in college.

A secondary objective of the KCC program was to aid in the development, emphasize and expand a cultural tradition among all of the high school students of the value of further formal education beyond high school. To realize such a comprehensive evaluation, the research focused mainly on evaluating if the KCC program had made a positive impact upon a core group of students who participated in the program relative to non-core students at the same high schools. The program evaluators, in addition to measuring changes in college application and college going behavior, added a qualitative component to the evaluation in an effort to gain insight into whether a cultural value emphasizing going to college was growing within Kentucky.

Introduction and Purpose

The program evaluators were contracted through the AmeriCorps grant administrator, the Kentucky Campus Compact, to provide an evaluation of the KCC program and to assess whether the KCC program had been effective in achieving its three main program goals:

1. To increase the number of Kentucky high school students graduating from high school;

2. To increase the number of Kentucky high school graduates choosing to pursue postsecondary education;

3. To help build a college-going culture among Kentucky high school students.

The evaluation of the first two goals, increasing high school graduation rates and the rate of high school students going to postsecondary education, was addressed using primary data collected at the participating high schools by the college coaches assigned there. The data was assembled and provided by the Kentucky Campus Compact with some supplemental data gathered by the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA).

The third goal, measuring the building of a college-going culture in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, was addressed by analyzing data provided by the various agencies involved in the administration of the KCC program. In addition to the quantitative data used throughout the rest of the evaluation, qualitative data resulting from numerous in-person and telephone interviews conducted by the evaluators with KCC administrative personnel at many different levels, high school administrators and counselors, as well as individual college coaches, team leaders, and mentored high school students was collected. The richness of both the data collected and provided allowed the program evaluators to determine the effectiveness and impact of the KCC program.

Significant Findings

The single year evaluation of the impact of the 2010-2011 Kentucky College Coaches program revealed:

- ***Kentucky College Coaches "core" students were not statistically distinguishable from the overall high school population before being assigned a college coach by their high school administration.***

Prior to being assigned a KCC college coach, the "core" group of mentored high school students had grade point averages and ACT scores that were at or slightly below the averages for their class at their individual high schools. Selection as a "core" student and assignment to a KCC college coach was at the discretion of students' high school administrators, counselors, and teachers. In general, the high schools were asked to identify potential "core" students who were otherwise underserved, potentially first generation or low income.

- ***The Kentucky College Coaches Program was very successful in improving high school grade point averages for KCC "core" student participants.***

Participants in the KCC program had an average GPA of 3.04 at the end of academic year 2010-2011. Non-KCC program participants at the same high school had an average GPA of 2.86. This is 6.4% increase in GPA for -KCC program participants receiving coach/mentor services.

- ***The Kentucky College Coach Program was exceptionally successful in creating a "College going culture" among the students that were in the program.***

The research revealed that students were exposed to multiple dimensions of higher education possibilities through contact with their college coaches. In some cases, coached students shifted their aspirational goals to not only attempt college, but also to attempt a degree in a STEM field. Students in the program also gained invaluable individual coaching and assistance completing the FAFSA and obtained other tips and techniques related to applying to higher education institutions.

- ***Actual first year college enrollment after high school graduation skyrocketed for KCC mentored high school seniors.***

The group of "core" participants in the KCC program enrolled in college at a dramatically higher rate (65.7%) than that of non-participant students (49.4%) at the same high schools. This represented a 16.3% difference between the two groups.

- ***The KCC program actually enhanced the development a professional workforce in the communities where coaches were located.***

The KCC program has been an important component of the economic engine for workforce development. Kentucky College Coaches in fact worked with students and families in the broader community beyond just the students in the KCC program (when the rules permit such assistance). This a multiplier of the program impacts in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The KCC program in essence provided additional on-site job training for The AmeriCorps members serving as coaches. This additional training for the recent college graduates significantly expanded their opportunities to be employed in the teaching and counseling professions after their KCC program experience.

Recommendations

- ***Implement multi-year follow-up surveys or interviews of coached high school graduates.***

There are many college access programs but none with the prolonged, indiv700idualized, and personal intervention strategies of the KCC program. All indications point to its substantial impact on high school graduates intention and commitment to pursue postsecondary education. Long-term follow-up would allow the measurement of the permanence of this effect. Thus, this information may also be used to assist in expanding the program, resulting in positive outcomes for even more students in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

For future analysis, collecting data on KCC cohorts as they proceed through higher education institutions will be important to analyze whether or not the KCC participants were ready for college level coursework. In addition, data on the retention and graduation rates of KCC participants in higher education institutions may be compared to the overall retention and graduation rates of non-KCC participants in KCC host schools as well as other Kentucky high schools without KCC programs. This data would assist greatly in analyzing the success of the KCC program at higher education institutional levels.

- *Upgrade or replace the current KCC information system.*

A newer or improved KCC information system would significantly ease the administrative workload of coaches, freeing more of their time for contact with students, as well as being able to collect data in a uniform format for improved analysis. The new information system should allow for the collection of qualitative data (surveys) from students, high school administrators and counselors, and college coaches.

- *A ten-year evaluation of the KCC program is highly recommended.*

A longitudinal study can be invaluable for evaluating the KCC program's effects and determining other, as yet unrealized benefits and positive outcomes of the KCC program. A ten-year window also allows for a more complete assessment of the issues surrounding the creation of a "College going culture" in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. An evaluation period continuing through 2020 would provide five years of data on six-year graduation rates for the earliest cohorts participating in the KCC program.

- *A new survey of the KCC program coaches is highly recommended.*

A follow-up survey of the college coaches on their professional development may reveal how the KCC program has enhanced their career prospects. This information is an economic indicator that could be valuable to the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

*** Please refer to the complete volume:*

Pursuing Pathways:

Evaluating the Kentucky College Coaching Program 2011 - 2012

*for more detailed information.***