Evaluation Report Brief

College Summit National Capital Region: *Launch Program*

Corporation for
NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE ★★★

What is the community challenge?

Individuals with higher levels of educational attainment significantly and persistently accrue higher lifetime earnings compared to individuals with lower levels of educational attainment. Despite decades of focus on increasing access to higher education for students from economically disadvantaged families, large discrepancies remain between students from more- vs. less-economically advantaged families.

<div>

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: College Summit - *Launch Program*

Grantee: Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP)

Subgrantee: College Summit (NCR)

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Youth Grades 9 through 11

Communities Served: 19 Schools in the National Capital Region (NCR) of MD, VA, and DC.

</div>

What is the promising solution?

The College Summit Launch program (Launch) aimed to improve the college-going culture and college enrollment rates in high schools serving large numbers of low-income, minority, and first-generation college-going students. Launch was a pilot program that offered similar supports to freshmen, sophomores, and juniors as the older College Summit Navigator Program (Navigator), which targeted high school seniors. Launch aimed to provide students with greater knowledge of the college search and admissions process along with the support and tools needed to begin understanding how to navigate the college selection and enrollment processes. Core components of Launch included the College Summit curriculum, the CSNav website (which allowed students to research colleges and careers and organize their college applications), Student Milestone and the Annual College Enrollment Rate Reports, the use of Peer Leaders (juniors and seniors) to communicate messages with other students, and professional development and support for school staff.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of Launch by AIR began in 2011 and finished reporting in 2017. The purpose of AIR's evaluation was to understand the extent to which Launch was implemented with fidelity across participating schools located in the National Capital Region (NCR) and to document any differences in school outcomes between Launch schools and comparison schools. To answer these questions, AIR conducted an implementation and impact study. The impact study used an interrupted time-series design with a matched comparison group and the implementation study analyzed observations from site visits, focus groups, and a survey of staff, teachers, and administrators. Launch was implemented at 19 schools.

What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee/subgrantee of the Social Innovation Fund, VPP's College Summit engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate Launch. Evaluation findings suggest:

- Changes in 9TH to 10TH grade persistence rates were similar in NCR College Summit Schools and comparison schools.
- NCR College Summit schools had slightly higher graduation rates compared to the College Summit schools prior to the program. After the start of the program, the average graduation rate was similar in NCR College Summit Schools and comparison schools.

- College enrollment rate in any college increased slightly faster in treatment schools than comparison schools for the first year of implementation, but the effect seems to disappear in the second year of implementation. College enrollment rates in four-year colleges followed a similar trajectory.

Notes on the evaluation

Due to small sample sizes, the evaluation team could not conduct analyses that would have tested the statistical significance of any changes in Launch schools compared to comparison schools. Given the small number of participating schools included in the school-level outcomes analysis and that the impact analyses only included descriptive analyses, readers are urged to use caution when interpreting results. Furthermore, the implementation of Launch varied substantially both within and between schools over time (including variation in the grade levels participating, the number of students served, and the implementation of program content).

How is College Summit using the evaluation findings to improve?

The evaluation observed several important lessons learned. Although the selection and engagement of Peer Leaders is important, they were limited in their actual ability to influence change. College Enrollment Rate and Student Milestone Reports were not seen as a crucial form of data for districts and schools.

Informed by key findings from AIR's evaluation of the Launch program, College Summit adopted the new name PeerForward and launched a new initiative in 2016 utilizing the influence and power of Peer Leaders and advisors to guide high school students in grades 9-12 to and through college. The new initiative is not included in this evaluation PeerForward leveraged lessons from observation and evaluation of the Navigator and Launch programs, including information captured as part of this study. PeerForward seeks to improve on the Navigator and Launch programs through teams of eight high school juniors and seniors (who are referred to as Peer Leaders) and their PeerForward advisor to guide their classmates to and through college using school-wide campaigns. Each campaign is tied to an outcome that has been proven to boost college enrollment: applying to three or more colleges, filing early for financial aid, and connecting academics to college and career. PeerForward partners with schools to identify, train, and support these Peer Leaders and an advisor to plan and execute the model.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

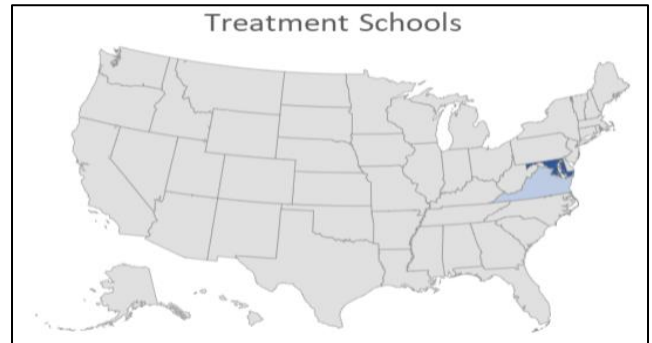Evaluation Design(s): Interrupted time-series design with a matched comparison group and implementation study

Study Population: High school students grades 9 - 11

Independent Evaluator: American Institutes for Research

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

Treatment Schools