

A Blueprint for Success:

Case Studies of Successful
Pre-College Outreach Programs



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Ten case studies of
effective student success
programs from around
the United States



The Educational Policy Institute (EPI) is an international organization dedicated to the study of educational opportunity. Our researchers are dedicated to the mission of enhancing our knowledge of critical barriers facing students and families throughout the educational pipeline. In addition, EPI has developed extensive partnerships and collaborative arrangements with other leading research and educational organizations, further supporting our mission and ability to conduct policy-relevant research for practical use.

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V — The Boys Hope Girls Hope - The College Road

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The Boys Hope Girls Hope College Road is a model of a comprehensive program that supports students from 6th grade through college (and in some cases, graduate school) completion. In addition to local supports for students, a core element of the program involves bringing students together from across the nation for summer events and campus visits. While this increases the program costs related to travel, it effectively expands the horizons of the participating students and exposes them to new places. Students have frequent face-to-face contact with local supports and they are also a part of a larger national network through web-based social media. All program improvements are driven by frequent data collection and analysis, and the assessment strategy was designed with the curriculum so that they align.

Program Overview

The College Road is a comprehensive college access, persistence, and completion program for students in the Boys Hope Girls Hope (BHGH) organization. Participants, called BHGH scholars, are first generation college aspirants, often also the first in their families to graduate from high school. Most scholars are in out-of-home placement although non-residential services are also provided to students. The “build out” of The College Road began in 2002, though the first program component was delivered in 2003. Since then, The College Road has grown and continues to develop according to scholar needs, external trends, and internal evaluation of each component’s effectiveness.

History & Mission

Boys Hope Girls Hope was founded in 1977 in St. Louis, Missouri. Since its inception, the organization has provided homes, educational opportunities, and family-like support to “young people

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- Program began operation in 2000
- This is a Non-profit Program
- This is a community-based program
- This program operates during the:
 - Academic Year
 - Summer
 - Both
- Services are provided during
 - Regular school hours
 - After school hours
 - Weekends
- Services students in:
- Urbanicity: Urban area
- Duration of Program: 6th grade through 16th grade
- Typical number of years students are in the program: more than 5 years
- Primary services are provided at: College campus, elementary and secondary school, and community center/agency
- Grade level when students enter the program: 6
- Students served:
 - 2008-09 = 350
 - 2009-10 = 400
- **Parental Component:** Yes. FAFSA counseling/guidance; Campus visits and tours; Meeting with college/university faculty or students; Participation in student activities
- **Program Funding Provided By:** AmeriCorps; Private Foundation; Individual; Fundraising
- **Targeted Population:** Low income; First generation to attend college; High school grads (pre-matriculation); High school students; Middle school students

whose potential was best developed in an out-of-home placement.” The organization’s success has led to its replication across the country with program affiliates in 16 states and locations abroad throughout Latin America.

With the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer in 2001, the Boys Hope Girls Hope underwent changes to support new organizational and scholar outcome goals. Specifically, board members and the new CEO put resources and energy into helping scholars finish college. They established a new set of goals: 100 percent of BHGH scholars in residence would graduate from high school, and 75 percent of collegians would complete their college degrees. This latter goal was an effort to drastically increase the organization’s college graduation rates from 46 percent. Thus, the concept of The College Road was created in 2000 to work with students as early as 6th grade and prepare them for postsecondary access and success.

Goals

The College Road’s primary goal is to reach (or exceed) the board-established benchmark that 75 percent of collegians will complete their degrees. When the goal was first articulated in 2001, it specified “within four years.” Later, it changed to five years, which is the referent used in the *Collegian Success Formula* to evaluate how individual affiliates’ scholars are progressing. That said, College Road supports and works with any scholar who wishes to complete their degree, so cohorts are kept open if any scholars in that cohort are still enrolled. The Chief Academic Officer, Julie Allen, indicated that “even if it takes 10 years – that is okay. We keep our cohort open for as long as we need to.”

Admissions & Selection

The College Road is careful and thoughtful about who joins the program. Scholars must demonstrate appropriate motivation for their age level and some type of family support, such as letting kids go into the primary care of the program. Initially, students were accepted into The College Road program when they joined the Boys Hope Girls Hope program as residential students. The BHGH program has expanded to provide community-based services to students who live at home, but who meet the same profile as students in the residential program. The scholar profile is defined as students “who could not have succeeded without help.”

All of the young people on The Road have been accepted as Boys Hope Girls Hope scholars, either in the residential program or non-residential programs. In order to be accepted, they must demonstrate need, desire and potential. The official entry to The College Road is Campus Camp. Upon successful completion of that experience, students participate in an induction ceremony and are invited to join the “college-bound fraternity.” The fraternity was developed in response to the large body of literature that points to the power that rites of passage can have towards positive developmental outcomes.

Students join the BHGH program for many reasons, and typically join the program in 6th to 8th grade. The size of the cohorts vary from 11 (the first cohort) to 48. On average, the cohorts have about 35 students. When students are invited to join The College Road, they receive a packet identifying them as a College Bound scholar and presenting them with an overview of the program. The College Road runs at a national level and works with students in different BHGH sites through a central team.

Program Staffing

The College Road has three full-time staff members, one AmeriCorps coordinator, college interns, and about 40 AmeriCorps members who are full-time. The program is also supported by various consultants, over 500 mentors, and 1500 volunteers.

Program Components

Once “on the road” there are a number of requirements for the scholars. These include completion of Essential Experiences and journaling about them on the Compass, use of the MAP, academic progress, and meeting On Course for College (OCC) goals appropriate to their individual needs each quarter. The OCC goals correspond to the “Am I Ready” rubric and the Profile of a College-Ready scholar.

One of the key components of The College Road program is a national event that takes place every year. Rather than replicating the event in multiple regions, College Road scholars across the affiliate programs attend a program in a secluded rural setting. The program is facilitated by Ph.D. level consultants who have worked with The College Road over the years. The strength-in-numbers at the national level, the seclusion from distractions, and exposure to a different environment all provide students with opportunities for diverse experiences. “When students see a cornfield in Nebraska after growing up in a city – there is some value to shaking students out of their comfort zones,” described Ms. Allen. In addition to the national program, students also participate in the following program components: College Bound, Academy to Campus, Lettered Scholars, and Collegian Support.

College Bound

Students participate in College Bound in grades 7 and 8. Among some of the goals for this component are for each scholar to understand their learning style and how to apply it to a variety of educational settings. Scholars develop effective time management and study skills and practice positive decision-making. Some of the activities in which they participate include:

- College Compass, a web-based portfolio that guides scholars through a series of activities that correlate to four compass points: Personal Competency, Intellectual Development, Arts Appreciation, and Career Planning. The Compass program encourages scholars to read and plan for college.

- Campus Camp, a week-long college immersion experience where students stay on a college campus. The camp simulates the college classroom and campus environment and aims to make college-going feel like a normal routine for scholars.
- Alpha Lambda Omega, a college-bound fraternity created to make the students' experience in the program more similar to what they will experience in college. An annual induction ceremony officially sets 8th graders on The College Road program.

Academy to Campus

In grades 9 through 12, scholars participate in Academy to Campus activities where they master higher-level personal competencies and develop unique talents and vocational interests. Students take a survey called "Am I Ready?" that measures how prepared they are to ask for help, seek vocational interests, and identify a postsecondary institution and major. Academy activities include:

- Mapping College: scholars switch from the online college compass to a second online portfolio that serves as an information/resource center that guides scholars through the college search process. It also helps scholars set academic and personal goals as well as prepare for college entrance exams such as ACT and SAT.
- The Great American College Road Trip takes 10th grade students to different types of colleges and universities. Scholars from all affiliate programs travel as cohorts and visit HBCUs and Hispanic Serving Institutions, research universities, liberal arts colleges, etc. The aim is to help students identify a good fit for them from the beginning of their college careers to decrease transfer rates.
- Collegiate Preparation Seminars: students participate in seminars for two consecutive years after 11th and 12th grade. They attend a College Success retreat to discuss how to have a successful senior year in high school and freshman year in college. They participate in college activities; they are introduced to college discourse by college professors, and learn how to manage four classes, among other college preparation activities.

Lettered Scholars

The Lettered Scholars is a reading program for all College Road scholars. Program staff members believe that reading is critical to college success and, therefore, make sure that all scholars starting in 6th grade participate in reading activities. The goal of the Lettered Scholars program is to equip scholars with the cultural capital and literacy skills to confidently approach college-level studies. The Lettered Scholars activities include:

- Cadre, a network of volunteers whose role is to mentor scholars and support them in personal and academic matters.
- Read for the College Road, which challenges scholars in all affiliate programs to develop strong literacy skills and exposes them to a variety of literature and thought. One of the ongoing activities is Read, Investigate, Prepare (R.I.P.), where students have to read 35 "dead

or nearly dead” authors. Students who read 35 such authors qualify for additional scholarships. Every year, students in the 9th grade also attend the “Get R.I.P.’d Weekend,” an author-immersion experience where students trace the steps and careers of influential writers. The College Road has recently established a National Literacy Advisory Board that includes young adult advisors and college students.

Collegian Support

The Collegian Support program provides “last dollar” scholarships for scholars who meet the communication and grades/course load criteria. Regarding the communication requirement, freshmen scholarship recipients are required to make contact with the Chief Academic Officer or her designee a minimum of 1 time per month, while sophomores, juniors and seniors are required to make contact at least twice during the course of each semester. This communication can take the form of letters, email, or phone calls, but it must be initiated by the student.

Further, freshmen are required to be enrolled in at least 12 semester hours and earn a grade point average of at least 2.0 each semester. Upperclassmen are required to enroll in at least 12 semester hours and earn a 2.5 grade point average each semester. Grades are due as soon as they become available, but no later than January 15 for the first semester and June 15 for the second semester. Scholarship requests are not processed without grades. Students who do not achieve the minimum academic performance requirements are placed on a plan for academic improvement. The plan is developed jointly by the Chief Academic Officer and the scholar to positively address the academic, social or personal challenges that have created barriers to the collegian’s success. Two consecutive semesters below the minimum academic requirements may result in temporary suspension of the scholarship.

Actions related to suspension of scholarships are based largely on how much effort the scholar is putting forth to improve their academic position. It is not the intent of College Road’s guidelines to be punitive, but rather to encourage students to seek the resources and guidance they need to complete their degree.

On average, The College Road offers \$25,000 to \$30,000 per student over their college career. Program outcomes for collegians include co-curricular engagement and an ability to manage stress and personal health issues. Collegians will be able to successfully manage their college career and a minimum of 85 percent will persist to graduation. The College Road provides additional social and academic support for collegians throughout their time in college through services and annual retreats like Freshmen Connections, Sophomore and Junior Support, Senior Launch, Transition Services, and Leadership Development.

Data-Driven Practices

The College Road collects two types of data: process and outcome data. The process data reflects the programs and processes in place to help scholars move along “The Road.” The data collected on the

processes help inform the development and continuous improvement of the programs and in some instances, data is also used to assess larger BHGH organizational systems and structures that contribute to the scholars' holistic development. The outcome data are collected and used to measure scholars' college retention and degree completion rates.

For collegians, The College Road staff collects information on their grades, GPA, academic major, enrollment from semester to semester, participation in community service, student organizations, the number of years to degree completion and even the financial aid package each scholar is receiving. The College Road is also starting to follow students into their graduate programs.

To improve program practices, staff use process data to analyze whether services and support to pre-college and collegian scholars are effective and sufficient to their needs. These data are also correlated with external trends that might expand, strengthen or lessen the need for certain services or program components. To collect the different data elements, staff utilize student transcripts, scholarship application forms, financial aid award letters, and college-generated confirmations of course enrollment. For some of the scholars, The College Road also uses the National Student Clearinghouse as a tool to track students. For pre-collegians, staff collect academic data twice a year via the school-issued grade reports.

The College Road also conducts a literacy skill assessment through two standardized assessment tools: MAZE (Reading Comprehension Measure) and a CRI (Content Reading Inventory). Both MAZE and CRI are research-based tools endorsed by the Consortium on Reading Excellence. In addition to benchmarking, MAZE scores provide the BHGH Academic Team, AmeriCorps Academic Coaches, tutors, and mentors with an indication of the amount of support and scaffolding that specific scholars will need to succeed academically. MAZE is administered to all scholars twice yearly. CRI was developed by Robert Cooter, a professor of Urban Literacy at the University of Memphis, and offers a simple and straightforward method for assessing students' level of competency in reading comprehension and fluency. CRI is administered to all scholars who test in the "Strategic" or "Intensive" range on the MAZE assessment.

In addition to assessing literacy skills, program staff also monitor scholars' college readiness through two online platforms called The Compass and MAP.

College & University Partnerships

The College Road has a large network of individuals in higher education across function and discipline that participate in the organization's programs and contribute to their development and improvement. Although to date there are no formal institutional partnerships, The College Road is working toward this goal in the upcoming years.

Evidence of Success

The two primary benchmarks for The College Road are high school graduation and college graduation. Since 1991, 100 percent of Boys Hope Girls Hope's US alumni have gone on to college. The college retention and graduation rates have improved as The College Road has evolved and developed over the years. For the high school graduating classes of 2002 through 2010, the overall percentage of students completing their degrees or persisting to degree completion is 86 percent.

Scholars officially join The College Road in the 6th grade and remain part of the program through college graduation. Cohort 23 (the class of 2008) was the first cohort to receive all three components of The Road (College Bound, Academy to Campus, and Collegian Support) from 6th to 12th grade (i.e., seven years of support). For these last three cohorts, who received the highest number of years in support, the persistence and graduation rates are consistently higher than previous cohorts (above 90 percent for all three cohorts).

For the 2010-2011 academic year, The College Road worked with 400 students. Of this number, 135 are collegians and 13 are pursuing graduate degrees.

Sustainability

Over the years, the College Road has engaged in a consistent fundraising strategy to secure multiyear funding commitments from corporate and private foundations to support the building and maintenance of the program. Current major funders include: Emerson, Black Entertainment Network, and CNN. Past funders included Morgan Stanley and NFL Charities. Additionally, the Board of Directors is actively involved in fundraising efforts. All of the corporate and private foundation support has come as a result of Board member introductions/support. They are very committed to the College Road and the benefits it affords the scholars.

What We Do Best

Julie Allen, Chief Academic Officer, indicated that The College Road is most successful at creating an effective wrap-around and long-term support structure. She noted “the breadth of support, services and experiences we provide, and most importantly the depth of relationship we have with our scholars” as key strengths of the program.

She attributed this success to “creativity and ‘no boundaries’ thinking, which keeps the program growing and evolving.” She noted that the program strives to “be a better program tomorrow than we are today.” She feels this enables The College Road to “respond to the ever changing environment,” which in turn “contributes to success both in program outcomes and in attracting and sustaining the funding needed to deliver the program.” She continued:

The College Road is successful because of our ‘collective impact’ approach. We don’t rely on any one intervention or experience, but rather the cumulative effect that is achieved

over the time a scholar is in the program. Along the same lines, the philosophical foundation of our program (comprehensive and long-term) allows us early intervention and a depth of relationship with the scholar and their family that is based on authentic understanding and trust.

Another aspect that Allen attributed to the program's success relates to setting high expectations and standards. She noted that "setting those expectations was intentional when we developed the program and was at the forefront when we identified the staff members who would lead it." There was an interesting unintentional aspect that came from these high expectations. Allen explained:

What was unintentional around the commitment to high expectations was how relationships among the scholars themselves would affect the climate and culture of the program (i.e., how the scholars in each cohort hold each other accountable for those standards and common goals). Because we have cohorts staying together for potentially 11 years, scholars are developing deep and abiding relationships with one another that endure into and through college – without regard to the distance they may be separated.

Lessons Learned

One of the major lessons The College Road staff has learned over the years is to utilize the data to reflect on program practices rather than focus all the attention in the development and implementation of programs. CAO Julie Allen explained that is easy to get caught up in building out the program, but staff members or parties involved need to be mindful to use data and look at what it shows about program outcomes before incorporating new program elements. Programs should have a mechanism in place to quantitatively and qualitatively assess services and practices and, particularly with new programs, it is useful to build assessments alongside with the curriculum. "Don't wait to connect the dots," noted Ms. Allen, "you can learn so much from early data and information." The College Road is exploring the option to conduct an external evaluation on the program's 10th anniversary.

In addition, The College Road is engaging a team of researchers to help develop tools and "deep impact measures" to ensure that program assessment is robust. The program wants to have these measures determined by experts, and in the meantime, they continue to look at the number of college graduations and college persistence data. Students are tracked by cohort, which according to CAO. Allen, makes it easier to track true outcomes since services to each cohort have differed as the program evolved.

When asked what one thing she would do differently given the opportunity, CAO Allen responded, "connecting the dots." She explained:

We built The College Road in segments over a period of years. While we had a strong view of where we were headed overall, sometimes the pieces didn't fit together seamlessly. This is

true both of the programmatic elements, but also the way in which we collected outcome data across each of the “lanes.” Often the glitches were small things but, taken together, they did slow us down a bit in realizing the full impact of The Road. The learning for us was the need for creative force AND detail management.

There are two main challenges CAO Allen identified in The College Road’s future:

The first is that we want to continue to grow The College Road. Although we’re quite proud of the breadth of the program, there is still room (and need) for ‘widening the road,’ if you will. Presently, we’re in the process of building out the parent and family ‘lane’ and identifying additional colleges and universities for partnerships/participation in our program components, both of which we see as vital next steps. In addition, we see significant need to further develop the services and opportunities the scholars receive at the various grade levels. The challenge comes in determining which of the several options we’re considering will have the greatest impact and where the resources are to sustain those.

Secondly, there are so many young people with high need and equal potential and we would love to be able to count more as our scholars. One of our greatest strengths (deep-level investment and long-term commitment) is also a challenge as we consider how to scale up without diluting the program or diminishing impact and outcomes. We’re actively talking about and struggling with the best ways to expand our capacity to directly serve more children or how we can help other organizations replicate our program.

Table 5. The College Road: Students Served by Year and Outcome

	College Bound	Academy to Campus	Graduate from HS	Enrolled in College	Persist 2nd year	Persist 3rd year	Persist 4th year	Graduations
2003-2004			18	18				13
2004-2005			24	24				20
2005-2006			16	16				12
2006-2007			14	14				12
2007-2008			16	16				14
2008-2009	25	19	19	19	18	18	18	
2009-2010	25	29 (4)	29	29	27	27		
2010-2011	27	29 (2)	29	29	27			
2011-2012	42	39	39	39				