College-Prep High School

College-Prep High School (College-Prep HS) employs a curriculum that emphasizes personalized learning in combination with modern technology and a college-going culture. The model has already demonstrated early success, with 100 percent of College-Prep HS’s 2016 and 2017 graduating classes graduating from high school and getting accepted into four-year colleges and universities. However, we are still unsure how this model is preparing students for success in college.

This longitudinal research study by the Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice at the USC Rossier School of Education seeks to understand how personalized learning models may help high school students succeed and persist in college. Our research team utilizes surveys, interviews and a case study to understand participants’ college-going behavior, the quality of their college experiences and why they are or are not able to persist to graduation.

Who are College-Prep HS Alumni? *

- 100% of students completed an A-G curriculum and will graduate on time
- 100% accepted to a 4-year college
- 74% Latina/o, 22% African American
- 51% Male, 49% Female
- 85% Qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, 81% First-generation college students

*as reported by College-Prep HS – representing the class of 2016
Who has participated in our study?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total (193 invited participants)</th>
<th>Interview Participants (76)</th>
<th>Survey Participants (56)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and Administrators</td>
<td>12 targeted participants</td>
<td>8 45-minute interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2016</td>
<td>84 alumni</td>
<td>32 45-minute interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2017</td>
<td>97 alumni</td>
<td>36 45-minute interviews</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Gender Identity

Students self-selected based on the following options:

- agender
- androgyne
- demigender
- genderqueer or genderfluid
- man
- questioning or unsure
- trans man
- trans woman
- woman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
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Is English your home language?

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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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Race/Ethnicity

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<td>Asian or Asian American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino or Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
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University Type

<table>
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<td>UC</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cal State</td>
<td></td>
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<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Enrolled</td>
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*student interviews (n=68)*
Where did College-Prep HS alumni from the classes of 2016 and 2017 plan to enroll?

Site Visits

Our research team completed five (5) site visits to higher education institutions where a significant number of College-Prep HS alumni are currently enrolled to collect data and conduct observations. We also conducted several site visits to College-Prep HS.
Selected Student Stories

Caj, class of 2016, is a high academic-achieving student from College-Prep HS’s class of 2016. He is currently attending a highly selective private institution on the east coast with a full-ride scholarship, double majoring in physics and mathematics. At College-Prep HS, he excelled in STEM classes. When he surpassed the STEM classes available at College-Prep HS, Caj had the initiative to take more advanced classes at a local community college. He also started a STEM club at College-Prep HS for students interested in engineering, physics and coding. A College-Prep HS administrator described Caj as a very independent person and student who likes to figure things out on his own even if he knows where he can seek resources as evident in his initiatives. Caj shared that his confidence was built at College-Prep HS, however he discussed how he felt unprepared for the rigor of STEM classes in college. Prior to his first semester, Caj participated in a program for low-income, first-generation students that helps students acclimate to university. That program exposed him to science labs and made him feel comfortable with the transition from College-Prep HS to university. In the summers, Caj heads back to College-Prep HS to tutor students in math.

Jennifer, class of 2017, is a high academic-achieving Latina student. She is attending a highly selective private institution on the east coast, double majoring in Spanish and anthropology. She is an undocumented student and received a fellowship to attend her institution. College-Prep HS funded her visit to her institution so she could visit the campus and participate in a session regarding a community service fellowship she was offered when she was admitted. The mission and curriculum of College-Prep HS have been highly influential on Jennifer’s academic and career trajectory, helping her figure out what she is passionate about and what drives her. She recognizes the lack of resources available in Spanish and has noted errors in translation in a lot of important documents. She chose to major in Spanish to support her goal of starting a nonprofit organization that will serve as a tool to address these issues.

We spoke with Jackson, class of 2016, the summer between his freshman and sophomore year at a private, highly selective institution on the west coast. He believes that one of the reasons he did well his first year is because he was able to go home every weekend to see his family. He stated that he was not involved on campus, but he then shared that he is in a fraternity and works at a physics lab on-campus. He expressed that college has been humbling — he felt really talented and at the top of the class at College-Prep HS but now at his higher education institution, he feels like everyone is like that. He wishes he had more preparation for rigorous college classes, especially in the sciences. As a science major, he dropped a chemistry class thinking he was failing when, in reality, many people in his class at that point had D’s and knew the class would be graded on a curve. He did not know what a curve was at the time he dropped the class. One of his favorite experiences of his first year was connecting with one of his math professors who is also Latino. At his last office hours, they spoke for an hour in Spanish. He expressed that the visit inspired him and showed him that people like him can be successful.

The mission and curriculum of College-Prep HS have been highly influential on Jennifer’s academic and career trajectory, helping her figure out what she is passionate about and what drives her.
Alex, class of 2017, spoke with us at the end of the summer between his freshman and sophomore years at a private, highly selective institution on the west coast. He is in the marching band, which he stated takes up a lot of his free time. Alex disclosed that he is a DACA student, and because of the President’s recent decision to end DACA, he has had a harder time transitioning to college. He expressed that “It’s crushing sometimes. What’s the point of adjusting? It’s a really big thing that takes away your motivation and drive to continue.” He shared that he has not accessed many resources on-campus but has received emails and other notifications for services he can utilize. He is currently a biology major and has plans to be a dentist. Over this summer, he worked full-time at a dental office to job shadow and gain experience for his future career. He found the dental office job because of his previous job working as a valet at a golf club. One of the members happened to be a dentist that graduated from his institution, and the dentist offered Alex the position once he learned that he was an incoming student interested in becoming a dentist.

We interviewed Stacey, class of 2016, during her first semester of her sophomore year at her highly selective institution on the west coast. She shared that College-Prep HS gave her the confidence and support to reach her college goals and ultimately be admitted to her dream school. Stacey expressed it was a big adjustment from College-Prep HS to college with bigger classrooms and academic rigor and said she often felt stressed and discouraged by her grades. While she excelled in science classes at College-Prep HS, she struggled to maintain passing grades in her college classes. Her intended major was pre-pharmacy and chemistry, but she found the pace of the classes for this major challenging. She reached out to her teachers at College-Prep HS who encouraged her to utilize on-campus resources like academic advisors and resource centers. She was able to receive the support she neeed, such as time management and mental health resources that made her feel more confident about her academic performance in the upcoming school year. She is now a biochemistry major with plans to work in the medical field. Stacey shared she is very involved in extracurricular activities on campus. Her freshman year, she lived on a Latinx floor in her residential hall where she felt she was able to find her social community. She discovered other multicultural organizations and spaces through her network. Stacey is in the marching band and volunteers to tutor K-12 students in the local area.
Other Pathways

Based on initial information from College-Prep HS administration as of summer 2018, 14 alumni from the class of 2016 (out of 84 total alumni, or over 16%) and 11 alumni from the class of 2017 (out of 97 total alumni, or about 11%) are currently not enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year institution. The stories below are based on the students we have been able to interview from each class.

STUDENTS WHO CHOSE NOT TO ATTEND COLLEGE

P-rod, class of 2017, shared that he struggled academically at College-Prep HS. He considered going to a local community college but wanted to get started on his career. He is attending an occupational center to become a certified technician.

Justin, class of 2016, explained he was not ready to go to college and wanted to stay close to home. He expressed anxiety about attending the 4-year institutions he was accepted to. He was interested in attending community college but is still deciding which one to enroll in. He is currently working at Target and has an interest in enrolling in music courses.

STUDENTS WHO WERE ENROLLED IN COLLEGE BUT ARE CURRENTLY NOT ENROLLED

Jason, class of 2016, attended a UC school for two semesters as a mechanical engineering major. Jason expressed that he struggled academically and wanted to change his major. He shared he wanted to be closer to his family and reconsider his educational goals before going back to school.

Ken, class of 2016, attended a Cal State school for two semesters after graduating from College-Prep HS. He expressed that his first year was stressful and his classes were dry. He explained that he decided to leave his institution after his first year because he did not have tuition money or money for books. He commented that his FAFSA did not yield the same financial aid for the upcoming year that it did for his first year. He then enrolled at a community college for a semester to eventually transfer back to his four-year institution but stated he “got in trouble.” He is currently not enrolled at any college and does not think he will go back or finish his degree.

George, class of 2016, attended a UC school for one semester as a biology major and shared that he was placed on academic probation. George was taking pre-calculus, chemistry and English for his first semester courses. He shared that his plan is to go to community college, transfer back to his four-year institution and change his major to engineering.

Scarlet, class of 2016, started at a Cal State school in northern California and is currently not enrolled in college. Before College-Prep HS, college was not on the radar for Scarlet. She spent two months at her Cal State institution before deciding to come back home. She said classes were too big, she felt lonely and was too far from home, and she struggled with anxiety and depression. She wished she was able to visit her Cal State institution before committing to attend, as College-Prep HS encouraged students to do so. She chose the cheapest and most affordable college for her, which she regrets. When she decided to drop out of school, she faced difficulties finding assistance throughout the process. She reached out to the College-Prep HS alumni coordinator, who visited her on campus and was able to help her throughout the process. She moved back home and intends to attend a for-profit, online college and major in criminal justice.

Michael, class of 2016, attended a Cal State school for one academic year and is currently not enrolled in college. He shared that his main struggle was the commute to his institution. Michael felt the transition to college was very difficult for him, especially adjusting to larger classroom sizes and balancing academic commitments with a full-time job.
Survey Responses

Compared to when you first entered College-Prep HS, how would you describe your knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY QUESTION</th>
<th>MUCH WORSE</th>
<th>WORSE</th>
<th>ABOUT THE SAME</th>
<th>BETTER</th>
<th>MUCH BETTER</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be academically successful</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to work hard in school</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the world</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to think critically</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to view issues from multiple perspectives</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to solve problems</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to analyze things</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to generate original ideas</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills (e.g. writing, speaking, presenting, etc.)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to be an effective leader</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to continue learning throughout your lifetime</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were not required to answer each survey question.
### Survey Responses continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Much Worse</th>
<th>Worse</th>
<th>About the Same</th>
<th>Better</th>
<th>Much Better</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to having a positive impact on your cultural communities</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to having a positive impact on larger society</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of different cultures</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance of different cultures</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of different cultures</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate with people from diverse communities</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work effectively with people from diverse communities</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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There are several overarching themes based on College-Prep HS students’ first-year transition and college experiences, but we selected three interesting and nuanced themes to share in this report: 1) Lecturing: “This is what real school is like.” 2) Students of color: “It definitely took a toll on me.” and 3) “I wish I would have...”

**LECTURING: “THIS IS WHAT REAL SCHOOL IS LIKE.”**

Students were clear about the benefits they received from College-Prep HS; that is, having experienced a self-paced curriculum, developing time management skills, becoming proficient and skilled with technology. However, lecturing — or being lectured to — was new. It often seemed to make the transition, at least academically, from College-Prep HS to college more difficult.

For instance, Cat said that “One thing that helped [is that college, like CPHS] is self-paced. Like here [in college], no one reminds you of deadlines. They just give you a syllabus and say do it by this date. It’s self-paced, and it’s your responsibility to get work done by the time it’s due.”

Camille stated, “The amount of work we got, and the amount of study time we had at [CPHS] is kind of a — was — a good thing because now that we get all these assignments, we know how to manage our time, and we know like, okay, by this time I should start this assignment, and then I should be finished at this time to start the next assignment.”

Cat perhaps captured it most succinctly stating, “I think that it [CPHS] prepared us really well for college in some sort of aspect as far as the computers go, but I also think that it didn’t prepare us like as far as like lectures went, because we never actually had lectures in high school, and so when we got here it was like, whoa, this is what real school is like. So now I’m struggling. It’s just really hard to keep up.” Cat opined that “when I first had my lectures, I was kind of confused on how to take notes, but like what to do ... listen to the professor or write the notes that were presented, it was kind of conflicting what to do, and I had to see other people and see what their strategy was.”

While some students have figured out how to cope and stay in their first-choice college, other students like Scarlet said...
that “was the main reason why I decided to leave [my institution]. They were making me take 16 units, and then I — it was added to remedial classes. So, it was just way too much for me. Most of the classes were very easy, especially when it came to math, since I love math. But when it came down to bigger classes that had, like 400 students, that’s where I struggled the most, since I got used to smaller classes at [CPHS] and online. I wasn’t used to being in a big lecture class, and most of my classes were like that. So, I realized that a school with a lot of students was not for me, which made me realize that I wanted to go straight to just an online degree.” Perhaps an unintended consequence from the online personalized learning curriculum at College-Prep HS is that some students are likely to feel more comfortable with, and perceive a greater fit with, pursuing a college degree online.

The racial and ethnic diversity of College-Prep HS offers a significant benefit to students' high school experience. When these students of color transition to postsecondary institutions that lack such diversity, they must adjust and adapt to their new educational environment. While the racial and ethnic diversity these students bring to their institutions enriches the overall experience of all students, these students must negotiate a campus milieu where they are the racial/ethnic minority and face moments of alienation and isolation — impacting the dynamics on their first-year experience and engagement in class, co-curricular activities, and overall quality of their college experience. Based on the students' feedback, it is evident that race and ethnicity can have an effect on the quality of experiences for students of color. They must learn how to navigate as minoritized students, find support systems and make friends.

For example, Deer, as a racially and ethnically mixed student, said, “It definitely took a toll on me realizing what it meant to be Asian on campus, [and] realizing what it meant to be Latinx on campus. But getting into campus and becoming like a face or becoming a leader, it was definitely hard because being at [CPHS] ... everyone was an immigrant, everyone was brown, everyone looked like me and everyone had the same ideologies. I think the only difference were like majors and opinions on gun and immigration. Eventually I made my footprint on being a leadership on campus. I was doing the pre-med route and I realized that none of the professors looked like me, no one in the class looked like me either — but there were some. So, I set up a group. I set up a club and association … [it took] me until the very end to realize where I could because I had no idea how to navigate the campus. I had no idea who to talk to, who to be with, so making a face [becoming a leader] on campus or leaving a footprint was all based on yourself. It wasn't anybody telling you how to do it!”

Victoria shared that in “my first year, I did struggle a bit. It was hard for me to ask for help and to take the initiative to go get help because I felt like I was kind of embarrassed to raise my hand in class, especially since in some of my classrooms, I was the only colored student. I learned that in order to be a successful student, I needed to learn how to ask for help and to not be ashamed for it, and to create my own study group, and just to basically communicate myself.”

Not only does one's background as a racial and ethnic minority influence how they experience the curricular and co-curricular campus environment, but the socio-political environment from our national politics seems to also have had an influence on forming and maintaining friendships.

Deer shared that “Friendships were easy at first. I didn't struggle to make friends when I first came on the campus. But friendships slowly turned into a harder struggle once I realized that I was on a liberal arts campus and [in a state university] during the [presidential] campaign, turned into a red state. And that's when friendships became hard. I joined the LSO, which was the Latinx Student Organization, and MEChA, which was another Latinx student organization where kids were like down for the cause, and I realized that my friends that I had first year weren't going to be my friends for very long ... when being with people that looked like me, with a very rare bunch that were there, they
weren't even like me at all. But I had to fit in on campus ... Friendships got easier around spring quarter, which was the very last of freshman year, mainly because we had the May Day March and [it was] after the Trump campaign, friendships turned into understanding struggles. Friendships weren't hard to make, but they also weren't hard to lose.”

And finally, Monique argued that “the Black organizations I’m part of make me realize more of my identity. Being surrounded with people like myself really helps me understand that I’m not the only one here. So it gave me a sense of comfort that, you know, there’s a whole bunch of us that are being successful as well. In terms of the Women in STEM Club ... the organizations that have the mission that I do also shows that this isn’t something I’m just interested in, but so many people are. It’s just another place for me to really de-stress … have a lot of fun and ... relax.”

Like much of the research literature suggests, ethnic and gender specific organizations have the capacity and potential to positively influence the co-curricular campus experiences, friendship groups, and reduce the feelings of alienation and isolation for students of color.

“I WISH I WOULD HAVE…”

This theme captures a thoughtful reflection about their first-year experience and what they wish they would have known. Through deep reflection, Stephanie said, “I think the main thing for me was just not being aware of where I stand in the class. Maybe it was just me not going the extra mile to be like, oh, what’s my grade in this class, you know? I wish I would have been more on top of it. I knew all that stuff because I was actually documenting it, writing. I completed this, that’s five points, I completed this, you know, and I was, like, documenting all of that, and I wish I would have done that from the very beginning.”

Jackson stated, “I would’ve read more in high school because in high school you get by and you don’t really have to read the books. You kind of skim them and you get the gist. But in college, you really have to read to know what’s going on. And even in the science classes, I thought, oh, it’s science, you don’t have to read. You just go to lecture and learn everything. But it’s something I had to pick up my second semester, and it really helped me like do better in my classes. And having known that, I wouldn’t have had such a rough first semester.”

Rose declared that “I think what I would have done differently is not procrastinate in the beginning of high school. Right now, in college, I want to not procrastinate as much as I used to before. So, I feel like with that in mind, it’ll help me through college, because I’ll learn. I learned the hard way because before I would have a C minus, and then I would panic about it and try to, like, hurry up and get my grade up. But now that I’m in college, I know that I just need to do my work right away, so I could just get that A.”

Beyond these common academic strategies, Deer said that “I wish I knew how to really finance off the textbooks. You know, where to get free PDF’s, where to get free textbooks. Of course, I wish I could have done more scholarships, but I think that’s everyone’s thing.” Deer further stated, “I also wish I knew how to talk to people that weren’t like me. That’s also a big thing because it’s not like any of my professors are people of color either. They all have generations of their grandparents going to college or like the last time they were an immigrant is when America was still in its colonies. I wish I knew that before coming here, before going to [college].”

And finally, Kevin said, “In Japanese culture and in Asian culture, it’s very important to go to school, and I already wanted to go to [this highly selective private university] ever since I was nine years old. So, I always knew I wanted to go to some type of university. I already knew that way before I even started at College-Prep HS, but I never knew how to go there, essentially, because of my physical disability.” So, even when you know that you want to go to college and where you want to go, knowing ‘how to get there’ could still be a significant barrier, particularly for a student with disabilities.
Seven (7) teachers and administrators for the class of 2016 and 2017 participated in a phone interview, including:

- College Readiness Course Instructors
- 12th Grade Advisors
- Leadership Team

Two salient themes emerged from our teacher and administrator data collection and analysis: 1) Leading with Care and 2) A Learning Model that Teachers Believe In.

**LEADING WITH CARE**

- Of the seven interviews with teachers and administrators, not including the principal, six interviewees made unsolicited references to the positive influence of Principal Spencer on their personal practice and the school culture.
- Teachers and administrators feel that Principal Spencer supports their development and trusts them to be creative by giving them independence and ownership over their classrooms and curriculum.
- He employs a ‘leadership of care’ orientation, centering on the importance of genuine relationships and happiness among his students and staff while maintaining high expectations.

**A LEARNING MODEL THAT TEACHERS BELIEVE IN**

- The blended, personalized learning model integrates individual pacing, technological fluency, and diverse educational activities across College-Prep HS classrooms. Teachers appreciate the opportunities this model offers, and its flexible application based on the needs of their course content and individual student learners.
- Challenges with the blended, personalized learning model include:
  - Bumpy transition to 9th grade. Teachers mentioned that transitioning into a curriculum with a heavy reliance on technology is especially difficult for students with little prior experience from their middle schools with computers and related skills, such as typing. Pacing is also largely student-driven, so this level of independence can be a significant change and challenge for students to adjust to.
  - Options for revising. Educators feel that opportunities for revision through the learning model are helpful for developing student understanding early in their high school careers. Yet, feedback from recent alumni indicates there is a need to reduce this option as students get closer to graduation to mimic the high-stakes realities of college academics.
  - Ultimately, teachers work hard to make adjustments to better support students through constant revision and teacher collaboration.

“[Principal Spencer] celebrates our students daily, all the time. He’s very aware of their family and home situations and helps them personally so often that there is no doubting the care that our principal has for each of the students at [our school] and that trickles down, right? And so, I think that’s definitely a strength for the school — just being able to spot the care on any given day.”

“I think the pros [of the model] definitely outweigh the cons. Students are not memorizing, they are learning. And that’s what I really love about the personalized model — it allows them to stick with something until it really seeps in.”
Recommendations for Practice & Policy

PEDAGOGICAL EXPOSURE

Students entering today’s college classroom are still likely to experience long lectures among other teaching styles, as well as pedagogical practices like discussion groups that are often attached to lecture-style classes. It appears that College-Prep HS students did not have significant exposure to lecture-style classes, which is preferred in active learning environment. The result, however, is that students are not as prepared to manage their learning during classroom lectures in college. How should I take notes? When do I take notes? Do I raise my hand and ask questions or just listen? We recommend that College-Prep HS students should have more experience with lecture-style teaching and how to manage their learning objectives within the context of faculty-driven lectures. Doing so will likely reduce the kinds of academic struggles students have reported during their transition to, and first year in, college.

LEARNING HOW TO NAVIGATE PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (PWIS)

Students who are fortunate enough to experience racially and ethnically diverse high school environments like students from College-Prep HS may experience cultural shock or some adjustments to college campuses that are predominantly White and their racial/ethnic group is minoritized. Learning how to navigate a targeted postsecondary institution for attendance should include making direct connections to advisors and executive boards for ethnic-specific organizations, interest specific organizations (i.e., major, intramurals, civic engagement, etc.), office for students with disabilities, and other campus resources. We have three recommendations: 1) College-Prep HS should provide training for students on how to navigate PWIs and MSIs (minority serving institutions); 2) Postsecondary institutions should add to their orientation how to navigate the informal classroom experience (i.e., how to participate in lecture-style classes, etc.); and 3) The representative for students with disabilities from College-Prep HS should create a direct relationship with the office of disability services at the top 25 postsecondary institutions that students are likely to attend. As a result, students with disabilities will know how and with whom to seek advocacy for the exact services they need to be successful in the selected college or university.

CRITICAL INSIGHT

Students learned a lot from their transition to college and through their first-year experience. The advice and suggestions offer critical insight for how to prepare for managing the unexpected barriers of college, from being proactive about completing and tracking assignments and grades in class to the ‘know how’ about reducing college expenses to feeling comfortable engaging institutional agents and resources that would help students succeed in college. We recommend that, in addition to hosting student and alumni panels, institutions (both College-Prep HS and postsecondary

“...The biggest thing for my advisees is financial resources. Many of my advisees couldn’t continue at their four-year university, or got in and couldn’t attend, because they had messed up one of their financial forms. It’s the realistic nature of how hard it is to pay for college. They feel so proud about getting in and they deserve that accomplishment. And then, they’re one semester in and they don’t have enough money to pay their tuition. That’s usually a big turnoff point for many of them.”
institutions students attend) can create checklists for managing a college classroom (i.e., do I have a study group, grading sheet, etc.) and tips for managing unexpected college expenses like books, printing documents, buying lunch, transportation, visiting family, etc.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS

It is clear based on student, teacher, and administrator interviews and observations that College-Prep HS has grown immensely since its founding. Teachers and administrators work extremely hard to assess and revise their efforts and systems to better support and prepare their graduates for college. As the number of graduating classes increase, and their alumni advisor continues to work to improve post-graduate persistence for the following year, they may find that they will need to support their graduates beyond the first year following their College-Prep HS graduation. While college for all is the goal as a result of their 100% acceptance rate to a four-year college, teachers and administrators should consider adjusting their school culture to be more supportive of the diverse life experiences that graduates have following high school.

“Alumni, and I mean people in general, feel there is not really a path for students who don’t see themselves as collegebound. So we [as administrators] often have to walk this line of supporting a student who has a different path and promoting different paths to the greater student body.”

LEVERAGING THE WORK OF SCHOOLS BY MAKING COLLEGE AFFORDABLE

Despite all of the work that the College-Prep HS staff do to support a college-going mission (i.e., aligning curriculum with the ACT, providing a college readiness class, hiring an alumni advisor, etc.), alumni are still struggling to enroll and persist in college. While their challenges are explained in detail through students’ experiences and interviews, teachers and administrators note the importance of financial support toward creating a context where students can be successful in college. Policies that encourage increased public and institutional funding for low-income, first-generation students from racially minoritized backgrounds to afford college are ultimately needed to increase access and equity in higher education.
About the Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice

The Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice at the USC Rossier School of Education was launched on Feb. 1, 2017 by Professor Shafiqa Ahmadi and Professor Darnell Cole who serve as the co-directors. Our Center has a compelling interest in eradicating all forms of discrimination based on the intersection of an individual’s identities that include religion, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and disability. Using rigorous research and legal analysis, we empower educators to utilize laws and policies in order to identify and extricate bias and unequal distributions of power within educational institutions.

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CITATION