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News from NASFAA

A Real Solution to College Access: The Kids2College Program

Washington, D.C. (June 2008) –When we talk about early awareness and outreach efforts in higher education we are usually talking about reaching students in the sophomore or junior years of high school. But a recent report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) found that the middle school years may be the most crucial stage to reach families, when students and parents begin making choices that will affect whether they attend college.

The IHEP report, “[From Aspirations to Action: The Role of Middle School Parents in Making the Dream of College a Reality](#),” summarizes findings from a 2007 study about middle school student’s and parents’ perceptions about college. The study found that most middle school parents expect their students to attend college, but most families lack any resources needed to begin preparing financially to meet that expectation. More than two-thirds of middle school parents have not taken any steps to begin saving for their children’s education and only 8 percent said that their college savings included a 529 savings plan. Further, 94 percent of middle school parents surveyed believe their child will receive financial aid when they go to college, but only 11 percent had done any actual research on the matter.

How do we bridge the gaps for families between their expectations and reality at such a young age? A new early intervention program – Kids2College – may have an answer.

Kids2College Program

Kids2College (K2C) is a program that exposes low-income and minority sixth-grade (middle school) students to the value and accessibility of a higher education. It is based on partnerships among local community groups, schools/districts, and colleges and universities that reach out to local sixth graders to take them through the six-session program. The program uses hands-on activities to inform these students about various careers while also helping them prepare academically and financially for college. The program culminates with the students and their parents visiting a local college campus.

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The national curriculum was recently updated and developed by the Sallie Mae Fund in partnership with the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP). The curriculum includes student handbooks and a companion teacher's guide to help facilitators master the program. Related take-home materials are also used to encourage a student's entire family to get involved in the process.

The program is divided into six sessions that cover the following topics:

- **Education Options (Lesson One):** Discusses the types of postsecondary institutions that exist and the hierarchy of college degrees available to students along with the associated economic benefits of those degrees.
- **Career Exploration (Lesson Two):** Helps students describe where they see themselves in 15-18 years and requires them to complete a career interest inventory with a list of compatible careers that meet their interests and talents.
- **I'm Going to College (Lesson Three):** Helps students to identify all the factors that colleges consider when evaluating applicants, specific classes to take in high school to be college ready and eligible, and their individual learning styles.
- **Paying for College (Lesson Four):** Explains ways that financial aid can help students pay for college. This lesson also identifies basic financial aid terms and opportunities for academic support and enrichment.
- **Connecting College and Careers (Lesson Five):** Gives students hands-on knowledge of their career interests by connecting them with working professionals from the field.
- **Career Day (Lesson Six):** Allows students to demonstrate what they have learned through a career day presentation. Also helps them plan for their upcoming college visit.

The K2C curriculum and resources are available free of charge to financial aid administrators on college campuses, school districts, middle and junior high schools, and community groups that have the capacity to implement the program on local levels.

Measurable Success Rates

The IHEP report examined middle school students' attitudes toward college both before and after going through the K2C program. After going through the six-session course, students:

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- Had a greater awareness of the availability of financial aid for college. The program had a particularly strong impact on Hispanic students and students whose parents did not attend college, with the percentage of these students who agreed that their families have access to information about financial aid increasing by 45 percent and 53 percent, respectively.
- Were 24 percent more likely to say that they could imagine themselves in college. For Hispanic students and students whose parents did not attend college, the number saying they could imagine themselves in college increased by 50 percent.
- Were 33 percent more likely to say that they had spoken with teachers about going to college.
- Displayed increased awareness of the need to take college preparatory classes early in high school and to take more years of English and math.

“This program has a proven track record of helping students,” said Marcia Weston, NASFAA director of college access program, who oversees NASFAA’s role in the College Goal Sunday early awareness program. “Often financial aid administrators only witness what happens when a family has underprepared for their college education. This program allows us to help them get started early, which increases our chances of success.”

Getting Involved

So far the K2C program has served more than 70,000 students nationally, but more can be done. The Sallie Mae Fund has invited schools, colleges, and community groups to become more involved in bringing the program to more students.

Financial aid administrators or other college administrators are needed to perform the following tasks:

- Provide campus liaison to help plan the K2C sessions and provide expertise at a minimum of one in-classroom session
- Organize and host the day on campus, including providing a meal and customizing the experience for the students
- Provide feedback to the program coordinator about the success of the program

Since the program requires coordination at several levels, it may make sense for a state association’s college access or college outreach committee to spearhead the project in cooperation with local school districts where at least 50 percent of the students qualify for a free or reduced lunch.

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For more information on the Kids2College program and how you can participate, visit www.kids2college.org.

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) is a nonprofit membership organization that represents more than 14,000 financial aid professionals at nearly 3,000 colleges, universities, and career schools across the country. Each year, financial aid professionals help more than 16 million students receive funding for postsecondary education. Based in Washington, D.C., NASFAA is the only national association with a primary focus on student aid legislation, regulatory analysis, and training for financial aid administrators. In addition to its member Web site at www.NASFAA.org, the Association offers a Web site with financial aid information for parents and students at www.StudentAid.org.

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[Editor: A photograph of the author is available for download at www.NASFAA.org/Subhomes/MediaCenter/JustinDraegerPhotoMediaCenter.jpg.]