

From Special Education to Higher Education: A Community College-High School Collaboration to Promote College Readiness and Retention for Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

Significance. College readiness and retention is at the top of the nation's education agenda. Increasing needs for remedial coursework of entering freshmenⁱ, and decreasing college completion ratesⁱⁱ, suggest today's high school graduates are not sufficiently prepared for the rigors of college. An estimated 11% of undergraduatesⁱⁱⁱ are students with disabilities. Compared to their non-disabled peers, they are (1) less likely to attend college, (2) of those who do, more likely to attend a 2-year college than 4-year college, and (3) less likely to complete a course of study and earn a credential^{iv} To address this, high schools and colleges have a long history of partnerships, with the goals of increasing readiness, enrollment, and persistence at college^v.

We report on the pilot year of a planned 2-year research project and seek feedback on our implementation and assessment from colleagues at SREE. We are systematically assessing the implementation and efficacy of a full-time college preparation program (housed at Nassau Community College (NCC)) for high school seniors with disabilities (enrolled at Nassau BOCES) designed to improve their college readiness and retention, and to use results to guide future decision-making and planning in the region and research community (supported by UMASS Dartmouth). Drawing from empirical research, expertise and educational training, and our longstanding working relationships between our three institutions, we strive to promote an infrastructure of opportunity for our students.

Program Model. The program model includes (1) an alternative to short-term bridge programs by spanning a full academic year, and (2) a variation on early college high school programs, including components that have been found to be effective- a close working relationship between a college and local school districts, provision of transportation, professional development for staff, and parent involvement.

Research Aims of the Partnership. We are building a college-based college preparation program for high school seniors with disabilities that provides academic and social learning activities and supports to increase readiness and retention by targeting self-advocacy skills,

academic self-confidence and social connectedness at college. To improve college readiness and retention of students with disabilities, additional learning experiences and supports are necessary. Matriculating in college courses during their senior year of high school will provide students the opportunity to learn and practice how to self-identify to the disability services office and advocate for accommodations on campus. By participating in workshops, seminars, campus-wide events, student organizations and having lunch in campus common areas alongside college students, high school students will have the opportunity to connect socially on campus and develop social self-confidence. By having access to college research and technology resources to do high school and college coursework, students will learn skills they will need to complete independent research assignments required in college courses with confidence.

We study the efficacy of the model by (1) reviewing data collected through focus groups at the beginning/end of the 2-year project, and (2) assessing students' academic and relevant non-academic skills at the beginning/end of their senior year of high school and first year of college. To assess student outcomes, differences in students' attained scores on measures of academic and non-academic skills, self-advocacy skills, and postsecondary planning before and after participation in the one-year program will be analyzed. Scores of program participants will be compared to scores attained by students in the control group who participate in a full-day academic course of study for seniors at their respective BOCES regional high schools. During Year 2 of the research period, students from the Year 1 Cohort who enroll in college will be assessed regarding non-academic skills, postsecondary performance and persistence and results will be compared to the control group of students with disabilities who attend NCC (See Figure 1). Findings will provide evidence needed to support both continuation of the program at the research site for subsequent larger cohorts as well as future development of the program at additional higher education settings.

Setting/Population/Sample: Nassau Community College, Garden City, New York. In Years 1 and 2 of the research period, thirty-six high school seniors and matched controls who are eligible, attend regional high schools for students with special needs, are participating in coursework required for a high school diploma and express interest in attending college after graduation will participate in the project.

Key Measures: ACCUPLACER, ACT Engage (Grades 10-12 and College Forms), Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Questionnaire, Post Secondary Readiness Rubric, College Performance Profile (Partner Developed)

Research Design. A pre-test/post-test control group design with random assignment is used to assess changes in scores on the dependent variables in the quantitative component of the study and on other measures of student growth and development in the qualitative component of the study in order to obtain preliminary evidence about the effectiveness of the program. In addition, Year 1 Cohort scores on assessments of non-cognitive skills and post-secondary performance and persistence will be analyzed. Pre-post questionnaire data will be compared using a nonparametric alternative to the repeated measures t-test appropriate for small samples (Wilcoxon signed-rank test). will be examined for each of the ten scale scores on the ACT Engage (Grades 10-12 and College Forms), the three ACCUPLACER subtests, the Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Questionnaire and the two postsecondary planning measures. A more liberal significance level of $p < .10$ will be used to define pre-post differences given the low power to detect significance, and we will also report the effect sizes (Cohen's *d*).

Data collected from focus groups at the beginning of Year 1 and end of Year 2 will be analyzed using computer assisted qualitative methods to identify central themes raised by participants regarding the usability, efficacy, and appeal of the intervention. Findings will be summarized to identify themes and issues to be addressed in subsequent iterations of the program and will inform program changes in the year thereafter to promote evidence-based decision making.

Figure 1. Theory of Change

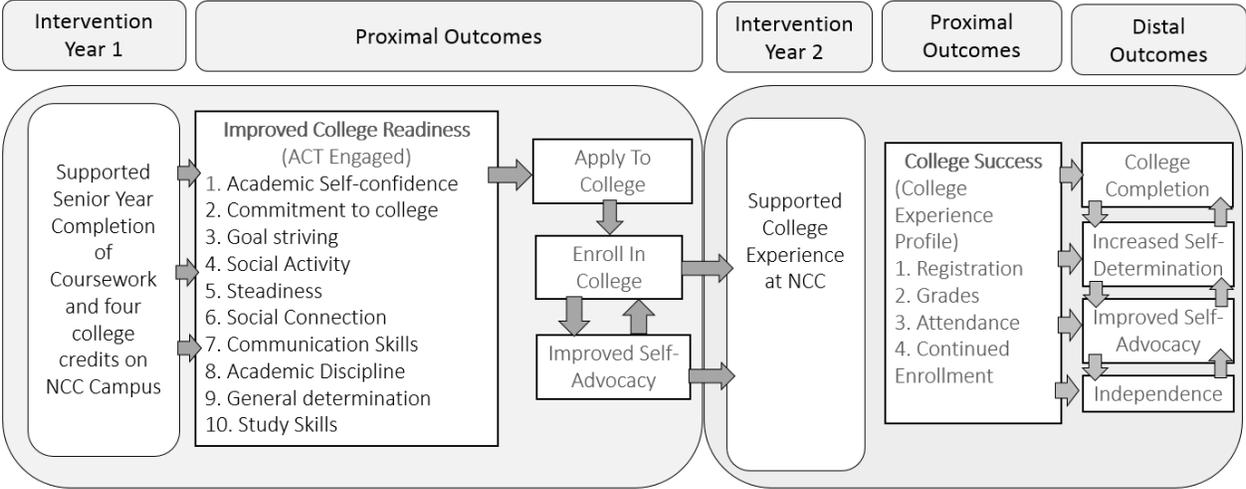


Table 1. Project Timeline and Tasks

AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL
PROJECT YEAR 1: AUGUST 1, 2018 to JULY 31, 2019											
*Initial meeting GPA *Send invites & consents to Cohort 1 subjects *Select dates & personnel for Focus Groups at BOCES & NCC *Assign personnel to work groups *Review timeline	*Cohort 1 begins program *Administer baseline assessments *Introduce research objectives to BOCES & NCC faculty *Key personnel tour BOCES sites and NCC *Assign & train personnel to conduct Focus Groups	*Conduct Focus Groups at BOCES & NCC *GPA meets for status review – work groups report out *Compile baseline assessment data for Cohort 1 HS students	*Research Personnel analyze Focus Group data *PIs review Focus Group data *Report Focus Group data to BOCES & NCC faculties, students & parents	*GPA meets to review and adjust recruitment protocol per Focus Group data *Begin Cohort 2 recruitment *Work groups	*Cohort 2 recruitment *Final selection of Cohort 2 subjects *PIs attend annual IES meeting	*Cohort 1 college applications *GPA meets to review progress of partnership *Plan May PD event at BOCES & NCC	*Cohort 1 college placement testing *Identify Cohort 2 controls	*Meeting to review status of Partnership development	*Spring PD events at BOCES & NCC	*Cohort 1 completes program *Admin. Post-Assessments *Research personnel analyze Cohort 1 Pre- and Post-data *Program review *Submit Letter of Intent - IES 2020 Continuous Improvement Research in Education Grant	*GPA reviews Pre- and Post-data *PIs complete application for IES 2020 Continuous Improvement Research in Education Grant
Implement Intervention - Cohort 1 – Senior Year High School											
PROJECT YEAR 2: AUGUST 1, 2019 to JULY 31, 2020											
*Full GPA meeting *Send invites & consents to Cohort 2 subjects *Review timeline *PIs submit application for IES 2020 Continuous Improvement Research in Education Grant	*Cohort 2 begins program *Administer baseline assessments to Cohort 2 *Cohort 1 begins Freshman Year College	*Compile baseline assessment data for Cohort 2 *GPA meets for status review – work groups report out	*Meet with BOCES & NCC faculties to review status of project	*Begin recruitment of Cohort 3 (Post-funding) *1st semester of college ends for Cohort 1 Freshmen: Administer ACTEngage College and complete College Experience Profile	*Analyze data Cohort 1 Freshmen *Recruitment of Cohort 3 (Post-funding) *Final selection & notification of Cohort 3 *PIs attend annual IES meeting	*Cohort 2 college applications *GPA meets to review progress of partnership *Plan May PD event at BOCES & NCC *Select dates & personnel for Yr. 2 Focus Groups at BOCES & NCC	*Cohort 2 college placement testing *Identify Cohort 3 controls (Post-funding)	*PI & Co-PIs attend AERA conference *Partnership development review *Conduct Yr. 2 Focus Groups at BOCES & NCC	*Research Personnel analyze Yr. 2 Focus Group data *Cohort 1 completes Yr. 1 College *Admin. Post-Assessments to Cohort 1 College Freshmen *Spring PD events at BOCES & NCC	*Cohort 2 finishes program *Admin. Post-Assessments to Cohort 2 *Research personnel analyze Cohort 2 data and conduct final aggregate analyses *Program review	*GPA reviews Pre- and Post-data and Yr. 2 Focus Group data *Planning for dissemination of findings *Article preparation; identify relevant journals and professional meetings *Plan Fall meetings with BOCES & NCC faculties, students & parents re project results and future research
Cohort 1 - Freshman Year College											
Implement Intervention Cohort 2 – Senior Year High School											

College Experience Profile

Student Name:	Completed By:
Instructions: Provide the following information for the designated student as it becomes available. Date and initial each entry.	

College Application and Placement Testing

YES	NO	ACTIVITY	INITIALS	DATE
		Student was accepted at NCC as a matriculated student for Fall, 2019		
		Student participated in ACCUPLACER placement testing on _____		
		Student achieved the following scores on subtests: 1. Reading Comprehension _____ 2. Arithmetic _____ 3. Elementary Algebra _____ 4. Other _____ 5. Other _____		
		Student placed into all college credit bearing courses		
		Student placed into the following non-credit remedial-level courses:		
NOTES			INITIALS	DATE

Course Registration and Completion by Semester

COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	FINAL GRADE	CREDITS EARNED	INITIALS	DATE
FALL 2019					
WINTERIM 2020					

COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	FINAL GRADE	CREDITS EARNED	INITIALS	DATE
SPRING 2020					

College Experience Profile

SEMESTER	Student met with CSD counselor _____ on the following dates each semester:		
FALL 2019			
WINTERIM			
SPRING 2020			
SUMMER 1			
	Student requested use of accommodations on the following dates:		
FALL 2019			
WINTERIM			
SPRING 2020			
SUMMER 1			
NOTES		INITIALS	DATE

ⁱ (ACT, 2011)

ⁱⁱ (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012)

ⁱⁱⁱ (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012)

^{iv} (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012)

^v (Barnett & Hughes, 2010).