



This appendix contains summaries of evidence-based interventions that fall under the three strategies that are the focus of the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation’s College Matters: Reversing the Trend grant initiative (Table 1). The three strategies are informed and supported by rigorous evidence demonstrating positive impacts on college enrollment or completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The specific interventions¹ described in this appendix have rigorous evidence of effectiveness at improving college enrollment, and some also have been shown to increase FAFSA completion. They are included as examples of the types of interventions College Matters: Reversing the Trend grantees might implement.

The intervention summaries include:

- Descriptions of the interventions and their core components: High-level information about the intervention and a list of components core to the intervention’s design;
- Evidence of success: Impacts reported in one or more rigorous studies;
- Implementation details: Information about how the intervention studied was designed and delivered;
- Implementation partner details: Information about roles and collaboration between organizations that partnered to implement the intervention, as relevant;
- Intervention cost: Intervention cost per student, where available; and
- Considerations for College Matters: Relevance of the intervention and additional context for potential College Matters: Reversing the Trend applicants.

The Foundation recognizes that it may not be possible or appropriate for an applicant to implement one of the example interventions exactly as it has been implemented elsewhere. Some of the example interventions studied and described are still operating, while others are no longer being implemented as described in the study. Applicants are encouraged to develop or customize their own approaches, taking into account the components and characteristics of interventions that have been shown to be effective.

Table 1. Evidence-based strategies and interventions to increase college enrollment

Strategy	Intervention
1. Strengthen college and career counseling	Summer counseling
	Bottom Line
	College Forward
	Expanding College Opportunities
2. Increase families’ financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid	Customized nudging
	H&R Block FAFSA experiment
	School counselor training, outreach, and support
3. Bolster students’ academic preparation for college	Dual enrollment (Texas)
	Early College High School (ECHS) model
	Career and technical education (CTE) concentrators

¹ Each intervention focused on high school–age students, was studied by researchers in or after 2010, and was shown to have statistically significant positive effects on college enrollment; some also have been shown to have statistically significant positive effects on FAFSA completion.

Strategy: Strengthen college and career counseling

Intervention: Summer counseling (college counseling in the summer after high school)

Link to study: [Study & What Works Clearinghouse review](#)

Description and core components

Description: Counselors reached out to 12th-grade students during the summer to mitigate attrition from the college pipeline among high school graduates intending to go to college. Counselors helped with financial aid and other paperwork and supported students facing social or emotional barriers to enrollment.

Core components: Summer bridge program; college discussions; research and interest assessments on colleges and careers; support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; assistance with match and college selection; improved access to counselors; support with FAFSA completion; nudges and other customized, automated informational supports; support with accepted-student processes; supports for college-going culture.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summer counseling improved immediate college enrollment by 3 percentage points in the pooled sample (across both locations).• In Boston, summer counseling to students with a zero Expected Family Contribution (EFC) improved on-time enrollment by 12 percentage points.• In Fulton County, among students who received free or reduced-price lunch, summer counseling increased immediate enrollment by more than 8 percentage points.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There was a 4-percentage point increase in continuous first-year enrollment and a 5-percentage point increase in continuous enrollment into second-year fall.• Summer counseling increased the likelihood that students enrolled at their <i>intended</i> postsecondary institution by 4.5 percentage points.

Implementation details

The counseling program was implemented in two locations: Fulton County Schools (FCS) in Metro Atlanta and Boston Public Schools (BPS). In FCS, counseling was provided by school counselors; in the BPS location, counseling was provided by a nonprofit partner (uAspire). In both sites, counselors made multiple attempts using a variety of methods to contact each student: phone, email, text, and Facebook messaging. Additional information about implementation in each location is provided below:

- **FCS:** Students did not receive incentives to participate, and most meetings were phone conversations. FCS district leaders worked with the head school counselor in each school to select two counselors to staff the intervention. Because FCS counselors spent only a small portion of their time during the academic year on the college application and college choice processes, counselors were offered training on how to help students apply for federal and Georgia-specific financial aid. During their initial contact with students, counselors were encouraged to use an intake form that listed numerous tasks required for college enrollment; however, counselors were not provided with specific protocols for outreach or support. Rather, FCS counselors followed existing protocols for working with students as they would during the academic year. Counselors reported their student support focused on financial aid issues and informational questions, such as how to access a college's web portal, how to complete required paperwork, and what the matriculation process entailed.
- **BPS (uAspire):** Students were offered a \$25 gift card incentive to attend an in-person meeting. uAspire advisors used a protocol for student outreach and support. During the first in-person meeting, counselors completed a college-assessment protocol focused on the student's financial aid award level and unmet financial need, upcoming steps and deadlines for enrollment, and social or emotional barriers. Counselors then helped the student create a personalized list of tasks they needed to complete to start college that fall. During the rest of the summer, counselors followed up with students individually to check on their progress completing these tasks. After the initial assessment meeting, much of the communication between counselors and students was through phone, email, and text, though counselors also conducted in-person follow-up meetings with students when they felt the need.

Strategy: Strengthen college and career counseling

Intervention: Summer counseling (college counseling in the summer after high school)

Implementation partner details

- uAspire is a Boston-based nonprofit that provides students with advisors who are knowledgeable and trained on the financial aid process. uAspire’s High School Advising Program places financial aid advisors in every high school in the Boston Public Schools. Advisors spend at least one day per week working individually with students in their assigned schools for the entire school year. Advisors help high school and college students (particularly students from low-income households) access financial aid and navigate postsecondary systems through in-person and virtual advising. uAspire focuses on ensuring students can pursue an affordable postsecondary plan, and counselors generally encourage students not to take on loans in excess of \$10,000 to \$15,000 annually. During the summer, advisors reported encouraging students whose college plans would have required taking on large debt to instead delay their enrollment or consider an alternative college.
- FCS is a large urban school district in the Metro Atlanta area of Georgia with more than 90,000 students in 100 schools. FCS serves 61% students of color. BPS has more than 54,000 students in 125 schools and serves 90% students of color.

Implementation cost

\$100–\$200 per student.

Considerations for College Matters

- Applicants may consider whether summer counseling would be best delivered by internal staff or an external partner. In this study, both approaches were effective at increasing college enrollment, but the program delivered by counselors from an external partner, who had more experience and training, was more effective.
- uAspire advisors had substantially more experience supporting students with financial aid issues and communicating with colleges than counselors in FCS, who, like many public school counselors, reported a lack of sufficient training in financial aid topics. This may have contributed to the stronger impact of summer counseling on college enrollment among uAspire students (4.6-percentage point increase) than FCS students (2.2-percentage point increase) and offers insights on the potential value of training counselors in financial aid matters or contracting for external counseling support.
- Counselors should be trained in state financial aid application processes. Institutions of higher education, INvestEd, and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education’s outreach coordinators are potential training partners.
- High school counselors who are employed by their districts to work year-round (i.e., 12-month employees) may be available to assist students in the summer.

Strategy: Strengthen college and career counseling

Intervention: Bottom Line

Link to study: [Study & What Works Clearinghouse intervention report](#)

Description and core components

Description: Bottom Line is a nonprofit organization that supports students to navigate the college-going process; enroll in high-quality, affordable colleges; and persist in college to attain a degree. Through Bottom Line’s College Access program, advisors help high school students prepare college applications, apply for financial aid and complete the FAFSA, search for scholarships, and select colleges that align with each student’s goals. They also focus on promoting four-year college enrollment. Bottom Line advisors work full time, have a college degree, and meet with each student to provide individualized support for an hour every three or four weeks during their grade 12 year, at Bottom Line’s office in each community or through texting, email, or video and phone calls. Bottom Line actively promotes the College Access program through high schools and non-profit partners in each community. Students apply to the College Access program during the second half of their grade 11 year. Students are eligible for Bottom Line if their families make less than 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and if they have a high school GPA of 2.5 or higher.

Core components: Summer bridge program; college discussions; mental health and social supports; support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; assistance with match and college selection; improved access to counselors; support with FAFSA completion; nudges and other customized, automated informational supports; support with accepted-student processes; supports for college-going culture.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student enrollment in any college increased by 7 percentage points for treatment group in the full sample. • Student enrollment in four-year colleges increased by 10 percentage points for treatment group in the full sample. • Impacts were somewhat larger for Hispanic students and students with lower high school GPAs, with increases in college enrollment of 8 and 10 percentage points, respectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students in the treatment group were roughly 10 percentage points more likely to have been continuously enrolled in college during the three semesters following high school graduation. This measure includes students who received services from Bottom Line College Success.

Implementation details

Bottom Line offers two primary programs: College Access and College Success. The College Access program is the major focus of the intervention studied, as students meet with a Bottom Line advisor at the end of 11th grade or the beginning of 12th grade. Students share their interests, aspirations, academic history, and family circumstances, and through a series of one-on-one meetings, Bottom Line’s full-time college advisors help navigate the college application process. On average, Bottom Line conducts 10 one-hour meetings with each student (typically 6-7 in the summer and fall; 3-4 more between January and May). Although services differ depending on student needs, college advisors always help students build a list of reach, match, and safety schools; brainstorm, write, and revise application essays; submit college applications on time; apply for financial aid; search for scholarships; review financial aid packages; resolve problems; and select a college that is a good match based on affordability and student fit. Bottom Line advisors encourage students to apply to a set of target colleges and universities in the area that they have identified as providing a high-quality education at an affordable price. In each city Bottom Line operates in, there are about 10-20 target institutions they recommend to students. Students who choose to enroll in one of the target institutions can continue into the Bottom Line College Success program, where advisors support students with completing all enrollment requirements, including scheduling placement tests, preparing a payment plan, and attending orientation. In this program, college students are advised and mentored on campus for up to six years to ensure that students have the support they need to earn a degree.

Strategy: Strengthen college and career counseling

Intervention: Bottom Line

Implementation partner details

Bottom Line has relationships with other nonprofit organizations that provide college preparatory programming and cross-refers students as needed. Bottom Line serves more than 7,000 students in its two primary programs, (1) [College Access](#) and (2) [College Success](#), through its regional offices in [Boston](#), [New York City](#), [Chicago](#), and [Ohio](#).

Implementation cost

The total cost per student for the College Access and College Success programs is approximately \$6,000 over a five-to-six-year period. Bottom Line covers these costs, and the target colleges provide access to their facilities. Students and families incur no costs.

Considerations for *College Matters*

- Applicants may consider whether college counseling services would be best provided in a school setting vs. out of school, or by school staff vs. by external partners. In this study, the intervention was delivered by counselors from an external partner, independent of schools.
- Although Bottom Line does not currently operate in the Indianapolis area, this intervention and its effects may offer useful information to applicants on program design.
- If applicants are interested in pursuing lower-cost counseling options, they may consider exploring opportunities to lower the per-student costs of college advising through partnerships. Opportunities may exist with organizations such as the AmeriCorps-sponsored [College Advising Corps \(CAC\)](#). The CAC program costs an average of \$172 per student and AmeriCorps covers 13 percent of costs (about \$22 per student) ([Center for High Impact Philanthropy, 2019](#)).

Strategy: Strengthen college and career counseling

Intervention: College Forward

Link to study: [Study](#)

Description and core components

Description: In this intervention, College Forward provided one-on-one, in-person advising from students' 11th-grade year in high school through college for a majority Hispanic student population in Texas. The program recruited students from lower-income households from schools in the Austin and Houston areas. Sixty-eight percent of the study population received free or reduced-price lunch, and 75 percent of students in the study were the first in their families to attend college. Advising focused on college entrance exams (initial attempts and retakes), college exploration and applications, financial aid applications and college choice, and the summer transition from high school to college. AmeriCorps volunteers assisted in this transition, serving as Summer College Success leaders who help students entering college select and register for classes, secure financial aid and campus housing, and complete orientation activities.

Core components: College discussions; support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; improved access to counselors; support with FAFSA completion; support with personal essay or other aspects of application; support with college entrance and placement exams; support with accepted-student processes; supports for college-going culture.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">College Forward led to a 7.5-percentage point increase in enrollment in college, driven entirely by increased enrollment at four-year universities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">College Forward students enrolled at institutions with higher average SAT scores among incoming students, higher average graduation rates, and higher average annual earnings among graduates.College Forward students were 12 percentage points more likely to remain continuously enrolled into the third year of college.

Implementation details

The study's applicant pool included students from 11 high schools in Austin and Houston. The study provided few details on partner collaboration with schools. Students participated in 10 to 15 meetings with their advisors per year during grade 11 and grade 12. College Forward recruited and trained AmeriCorps volunteers to help students get into their best-fit colleges and help them plan how to fund their education. AmeriCorps volunteers were "near-peer" recent college graduates; the upper age limit for participation in AmeriCorps is 26.

Implementation partner details

In July 2021, College Forward merged with College Possible, a national organization that provides similar services to students from low-income households to help them attain a college degree, to become [College Possible Texas](#). College Possible's model matches students with near-peer coaches and a curriculum designed to overcome barriers to getting into college and earning a degree. Today, College Possible operates eight regional sites, with Chicago being the closest to *College Matters* applicants.

Implementation cost

The estimated cost per student over the life cycle of the program is \$4,000 (\$1,200 for each year in high school and \$400 for each year in college).

Considerations for *College Matters*

- College Forward served more than twice the share of Hispanic students as any other rigorously evaluated advising program (as of 2020).
- College Forward used AmeriCorps volunteers to assist with or provide counseling. Applicants may consider whether AmeriCorps' [College Advising Corps](#) or another nonprofit would be an appropriate partner.
- In the College Possible model, participating high schools provide office space for a full-time program coordinator and classroom space after hours for College Possible staff. Supports include SAT/ACT test preparation, financial aid consulting, and college admissions guidance. The program is free for participants, but participants agree to provide 8 hours of community service each year in exchange for program services. A 2013 [WWC review](#) of College Possible found increases in postsecondary applications due to the intervention, but no statistically significant increases in postsecondary enrollment.

Strategy: Strengthen college and career counseling

Intervention: Expanding College Opportunities (providing information on process and costs via mail)

Link to study: [Study & What Works Clearinghouse review](#)

Description and core components

Description: Expanding College Opportunities-Comprehensive (ECO-C) was an intervention delivered as part of a study designed to provide information about the college application process and college costs to high-achieving 12th graders from low-income households, 53 percent of whom were from underrepresented minority groups. Students from low-income households are more likely to attend schools with few high-achieving students, so they often have limited access to resources about selective colleges. ECO-C aimed to provide low-income, high-achieving students with reliable information and encourage them to explore selective and “peer” colleges—that is, colleges where the median academic scores fall within 5 percentiles of a student's own scores. In the ECO-C intervention, researchers selected a random sample of students to receive information via mail, including application guidance, net cost, and fee waivers.

Core components: Research and interest assessments on colleges and careers; support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; assistance with match and college selection; nudges and other customized, automated informational supports.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The intervention increased the percentage of students who enrolled in a selective or peer postsecondary institution by 5 percentage points (from 29 percent to 34 percent).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students in the intervention group completed more applications and were admitted to more colleges than students in the comparison group.

Implementation details

Informational materials were mailed to students' homes four to 14 months after they registered for a college entrance examination. The intervention did not offer training or support outside of the mailings. The application guidance component advised students to apply to eight or more colleges representing a combination of "safety," "match," and "reach" colleges for the student. It also included information about deadlines and requirements for applications, tables comparing graduation rates, and tools to explore colleges' curricula, instructional resources, and housing. The net-cost component provided students with information about the actual cost of attending specific schools, including net costs for nearby, state flagship, and selective colleges. Net costs were based on hypothetical families with incomes of \$20,000, \$40,000, and \$60,000. The net-cost materials were intended to demonstrate that list prices are often substantially greater than net costs, especially at selective institutions. Net-cost materials explained how financial aid works, emphasized the importance of completing the FAFSA and College Scholarship Service Profile on time, clarified how a student's expected family contribution is computed, deciphered a typical financial aid offer, and illustrated the trade-offs between loans, grants, and employment while in college. The fee-waiver component provided students with no-paperwork fee waivers they could use at 171 different selective schools.

Implementation partner details

The intervention was designed and implemented by researchers at Stanford University. Researchers used data from the College Board and ACT to identify the random sample of students to receive information via mail. Materials were mailed directly to students, and there was no interaction with schools.

Implementation cost

The estimated cost per student was about \$6. For every \$10 spent, students enrolled in colleges where graduation rates were 13 percent higher and instructional spending was \$5,906 greater.

Considerations for College Matters

- Applicants may consider the best way for distributing information about college and financial aid to students. This intervention was implemented at low cost and required relatively low effort, as information was compiled and mailed to students' homes and no training was involved.

Strategy: Strengthen college and career counseling

Intervention: Expanding College Opportunities (providing information on process and costs via mail)

- Based on surveys, roughly 60 percent of students assigned to receive intervention materials from the Expanding College Opportunities project could not recall receiving them. Intervention designers hypothesize that students may pay more attention to mailings from a well-known organization, such as the College Board, ACT, or their school, which may be a helpful learning for interventions of a similar design.
- The materials provided in this intervention were highly personalized, which is an important design feature. Other studies, such as the EMERGE Fellowship study ([Holzman et al., 2023](#)), showed that general information packets were not effective among high-achieving students.
- Note that all students in the study were both high-achieving and low-income, and some were first-generation college students.
- This school year (2023-24), the Indiana Commission for Higher Education launched *Indiana Pre-Admissions: Your Path to College*, which includes mailed letters to Hoosier high school seniors to inform them of their postsecondary education and training options, as well as the various resources available to help them afford these options. The letters are personalized based on a student's GPA and SAT scores, and they include information about FAFSA and state financial aid. Applicants may consider how additional communication to students about financing college may be complementary, but not duplicative, of this new statewide initiative.

Strategy: Increase families' financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid

Intervention: Customized nudging

Link to study: [Study](#)

Description and core components

Description: This text-message intervention was implemented by OneLogos Education Solutions in partnership with schools. The intervention was delivered to 12th-grade students in areas surrounding Austin and Houston, Texas. Students in the intervention group received weekly text messages related to the FAFSA and college financial aid. Text messages provided practical information about concrete steps students could take to persist through informational and behavioral bottlenecks as well as links to additional resources such as short informational videos on the FAFSA process created by the Office of Federal Student Aid at the U.S. Department of Education. The messages were customized based on students' FAFSA application status and reminded students of upcoming financial aid deadlines, indicated students' FAFSA application progress, and encouraged students to communicate with their school counselors as needed. Students could write back to receive one-on-one, text-based assistance with the FAFSA from their assigned school counselors.

Core components: Support with help-seeking (social and emotional preparation); support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; support with FAFSA completion; nudges and other customized, automated informational supports.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timely college enrollment improved by 3 percentage points (a result of a 5-percentage point increase in enrollment at four-year institutions and a 2-percentage point decrease in enrollment at two-year institutions). Timely FAFSA submission and completion rates were 6 percentage points higher in the treatment group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students in the treatment schools were more successful with the income verification process.

Implementation details

Texas school districts had access to cell phone information for 12th graders who had established Apply Texas accounts, as well as consent to message these students via text about the college-going process. Through the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Apply Texas Counselor Suite Portal, districts also had access to regularly updated student-level data on FAFSA filing and income verification status. OneLogos automated data pulls from this system to provide text message updates for students on the status of their FAFSA application. The messages appeared to come from each student's assigned school counselor and encouraged students to reply by text or follow up in person with their counselor with questions or for further assistance with the financial aid process. OneLogos used the data to classify students into one of four categories: FAFSA not started, submitted not complete, complete, and complete but selected for income verification. The content of the messages to students changed based on their status. Although the initial messages were automated, counselors were responsible for following up on students' responses in a timely manner, and students were encouraged to use community supports available for FAFSA filing, such as local FAFSA completion events.

Implementation partner details

- OneLogos Education Solutions is a data management and communications platform with the capability to push out personalized text messages to students. THECB helped provide data on FAFSA filing and student cell phone information to facilitate the intervention.
- The intervention was delivered to 12th-grade students in the Austin and Houston areas of Texas, where more than 50 percent of the student population is Hispanic. Forty-one percent of sample students faced economic disadvantage.

Implementation cost

The intervention cost about \$8 per student, not including counselors' time.

Considerations for College Matters

- Applicants may consider a combination of automated and personal outreach to encourage students to complete steps to submit the FAFSA or enroll in college. In this intervention, customized messages were automated, but the student's assigned school counselor conducted one-on-one follow-up.

Strategy: Increase families' financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid

Intervention: Customized nudging

- Studies of text messaging and nudge experiments have demonstrated mixed results, but this intervention avoided known pitfalls such as generic messages and a lack of direct relationships between students and the organizations sending the outreach.
- Schools are often understaffed in terms of high school counselors. To implement a similarly designed intervention, schools may need to hire more counselors to keep up with student requests.
- This study did have some contamination (38 percent of control group students received some text outreach through the system), so effects may represent a lower bound of the impact of the messaging campaign. That is, the positive impact on enrollment may be even larger than reported in this study.

Strategy: Increase families' financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid

Intervention: H&R Block FAFSA experiment

Link to study: [Study & What Works Clearinghouse review](#)

Description and core components

Description: Participants identified for the H&R Block FAFSA experiment were from households with low-to-moderate income (less than \$45,000) who had received tax-preparation assistance at H&R Block and had a family member aged 15 to 30 with no bachelor's degree. The experiment tested two interventions against a comparison group that did not receive either intervention. One intervention ("FAFSA intervention") provided an estimate of need-based aid compared against tuition costs for nearby colleges and assistance in completing the FAFSA. The other intervention ("information-only intervention") only provided an estimate of need-based aid against tuition costs. The interventions were implemented by tax professionals in H&R Block offices in the Charlotte, North Carolina area and throughout the state of Ohio immediately after a family completed their tax filing at a local H&R Block tax office.

Core components: Support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; educating caregivers about process; improved access to counselors (advisors at H&R Block); support with FAFSA completion; nudges and other customized, automated informational supports; supports for college-going culture.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Twelfth graders and recent high school graduates who received the FAFSA intervention were significantly more likely than the comparison group to submit the FAFSA (56 percent versus 40 percent), attend college (42 percent versus 34 percent), and enroll in college for two consecutive years (36 percent versus 28 percent).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Independent adults ages 24 to 30 with no prior college experience who received the FAFSA intervention were significantly more likely than the comparison group to submit the FAFSA (43 percent versus 16 percent) and enroll in college (12 percent versus 10 percent).

Implementation details

More than 1,000 tax professionals at H&R Block helped organize and implement the FAFSA assistance experiment. Tax preparers were trained on the FAFSA experiment's procedures and were then initially monitored closely to identify and correct the process if they did not carry it out correctly. There were two intervention groups in this study:

- FAFSA intervention group:** Participants in this group received personal assistance completing and filing the FAFSA through tax software that completed two-thirds of the FAFSA based on their completed tax returns and an interview to obtain the remaining information. The individual then received potential financial aid amounts along with tuition estimates for four local colleges. In the FAFSA intervention group, H&R Block completed the FAFSA for 70 percent of participants.
- Information-only intervention group:** Tax preparers used data from tax returns to provide an estimate of the amount of need-based aid participants would receive, along with tuition estimates for four local colleges, but they did not provide assistance completing the FAFSA.

Participants in both intervention groups also received information on the importance of college and a financial aid brochure.

Implementation partner details

The researchers developed and implemented the experiment in collaboration with H&R Block. The team collaborated to design the necessary procedures and software, then trained tax professionals on those procedures and the software before implementation began.

Implementation cost

Not reported.

Considerations for College Matters

- Applicants may consider exploring partnerships with community-based organizations and public agencies to support families in completing their tax returns, completing the FAFSA, and defraying the costs of

Strategy: Increase families' financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid

Intervention: H&R Block FAFSA experiment

offering tax preparation services. Since the information-only intervention had no significant effects on college enrollment or FAFSA completion, it is important that partnerships go beyond informational assistance and provide direct support as in the FAFSA intervention group.

- The Internal Revenue Service's [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance \(VITA\)](#) and [Tax Counseling for the Elderly \(TCE\)](#) programs offer free basic tax return preparation to qualified individuals. VITA and TCE sites are generally located at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls, and other convenient locations across the country. In Indianapolis, these services are available at community centers, libraries, and other locations throughout the city through the United Way of Central Indiana's [Indy Free Tax Prep program](#).

Strategy: Increase families’ financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid

Intervention: School counselor training, outreach, and support

Link to study: [Study](#)

Description and core components

Description: This intervention provided real-time, student-level data on FAFSA completion to the largest urban school districts across the country. The study focused on 12th-grade students (56 percent of whom were Hispanic) who received the intervention in Albuquerque, New Mexico. School counselors used FAFSA completion information to provide targeted outreach and support to students and families as they navigated the financial aid process. The project encouraged schoolwide, counselor-driven outreach but allowed each district flexibility to design how it would be implemented in their district. The school district studied set up “trusted centers” in 14 high schools throughout the city to encourage students, parents, and the community to safely seek help with financial aid information.

Core components: Summer bridge program; support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; educating caregivers about process; improved access to counselors; support with FAFSA completion.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study results showed a 10-percentage point increase in the total number of FAFSA completions and a 12-percentage point increase in college enrollment when comparing the pre-intervention graduating class and the post-intervention graduating class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional measures were not considered, and results were not disaggregated for subgroups.

Implementation details

The Office of Federal Student Aid at the U.S. Department of Education (ED) conducted a three-hour training session with 75 school counselors across the district so that the counselors could properly assist students and families to complete the FAFSA. Counselors learned about myths surrounding financial aid, different types of federal grants, basic eligibility requirements, the Student Aid Report, FAFSA filing options, the Estimated Family Contribution, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) retrieval tool, and the IRS authentication process. Each counselor logged into FSA’s FAFSA demonstration test site and completed a full FAFSA application based on a fictitious student’s financial information. After the training, all participating counselors passed a post-test to ensure they had the knowledge to provide support to students and families. The district submitted directory information (name, date of birth, and zip code) to ED, which then provided student-specific information on FAFSA submission. Reports identified students who had submitted the FAFSA, the date they submitted the FAFSA, and if the expected family contribution had been calculated. This allowed counselors to reach out to students who had not yet completed the FAFSA or who had submitted it with errors. Programming issues delayed the reports until mid-May, which prevented the school counselors from having access to students’ FAFSA completion status during the school year. Trusted centers were set up in high school computer labs where students and families could complete FAFSA applications. Each high school held a minimum of eight FAFSA completion events in February and March. The FAFSA completion events lasted one to two hours and were advertised on the radio, TV, newspaper, web, and through each school’s automated telephone messaging system. Messages were sent to parents in their native language to notify them of the trusted centers and school counselor support available. When requested, counselors worked with students and parents one-on-one in their offices. Over the summer, students who had not completed the FAFSA as of graduation received calls from school counselors offering support with FAFSA completion and college transition issues.

Implementation partner details

- District and school leaders were supportive of the project and the need to prioritize school counselor time and energy on FAFSA completion.
- FSA trained counselors on FAFSA completion and provided student-level FAFSA data.

Implementation cost

Not reported.

Strategy: Increase families' financial awareness and help students apply for financial aid

Intervention: School counselor training, outreach, and support

Considerations for *College Matters*

- Applicants may consider developing or enhancing school and district partnerships to engage in FAFSA training, sharing updates about financial aid, and collaborating to offer FAFSA completion events, such as with community-based organizations, postsecondary institutions, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, or INvestEd.
- In this intervention, schools did not receive FAFSA information for each student until mid-May due to technical difficulties with the data system. Because counselors did not have official FAFSA information from ED until mid-May, this was not incorporated into their student outreach until late spring and into the summer. This type of intervention may be even more effective if schools have access to student-level FAFSA completion data earlier in the school year, as college-going nudges are more effective when implemented earlier in the application cycle and process, particularly because they give students more time to navigate complex financial aid processes ([The Brookings Institution, 2020](#)).

Strategy: Bolster students' academic preparation for college

Intervention: Dual enrollment (Texas)

Link to study: [Study & What Works Clearinghouse review](#)

Description and core components

Description: Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to take college courses and earn college credits while still attending high school. Offering dual enrollment is a common practice in U.S. high schools, with approximately 1.4 million high school students participating in dual enrollment each year. This study focused on 32,908 Texas students who graduated in 2004 and compared outcomes for students who participated in dual enrollment courses during their 11th- and 12th-grade school years to students who did not participate in dual enrollment courses. Students came from multiple high schools and districts and were tracked for six years post-high school.

Core components: Enrollment in college coursework while in high school.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students who completed at least one college course through dual enrollment were 2.2 to 2.3 times more likely to enroll in and attend any type of college than similar students who did not complete dual enrollment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students enrolling in college who completed at least one college course through dual enrollment were 1.7 to 1.8 times more likely to complete a postsecondary credential at a two- or four-year college within six years than students who did not complete dual enrollment.

Implementation details

Students in dual enrollment programs continue to attend their regular high schools while also enrolled in courses where they are earning college credits. Typically, students are in grades 11 and 12 when they begin taking dual enrollment courses. In many cases, students take classes on campus or virtually directly from an institution of higher education. In other cases, faculty from institutions of higher education teach classes on high school campuses. Upon graduation from high school, these students can continue their college-level work needing less time to complete a postsecondary degree.

Implementation partner details

Dual enrollment bridges two educational systems—secondary and postsecondary—at the local, state, and national levels. It requires two sets of policies and structures to align and integrate the design and delivery of dual enrollment. Successfully bridging these two sectors to design high-quality programs requires deliberate and intentional policy and action across sectors and levels.

Implementation cost

Typically, there is no cost to students enrolled in dual enrollment programs. However, information about costs of dual enrollment to the state or school district is not provided in the study.

Considerations for *College Matters*

- Applicants may consider developing or expanding dual enrollment programs in collaboration with postsecondary partners.
- Indiana has been focused on expanding opportunities for Hoosier students to earn college credit while in high school for many years, and student enrollment in advanced coursework and dual credit courses is included in the accountability framework for Indiana high schools. Applicants interested in expanding dual credit programs should consider how any proposed interventions may align with State efforts to expand dual credit (e.g., additional funding for students who earn dual credit or complete the [Indiana College Core](#)) and/or may be supported by resources already made available through the State (e.g., tuition-free courses for teachers to become credentialed to teach dual credit).

Strategy: Bolster students' academic preparation for college

Intervention: Early College High School (ECHS) model

Link to study: [Study](#)

Description and core components

Description: Early college high schools are small schools that blend aspects of high school and college and focus on college readiness for all students. Frequently located on college campuses, early college high schools incorporate characteristics that have been associated with increased enrollment and success in postsecondary education. These include a curriculum with the courses necessary for entrance into a four-year university for all students, early access to college courses, support for teachers in implementing instructional strategies designed to prepare students for college-level thinking, creation of a college-going culture, and explicit instruction and assistance in navigating the college admissions and financial aid processes. The early college model combines these strategies and others to create a learning environment focused on college readiness.

This study examined the early college model as implemented in North Carolina and included 12 early college high schools located in rural and urban settings in all regions of the state. The early college model in this study targeted students who were the first in their families to go to college, came from families with low income, and were members of racial and ethnic groups that are underrepresented in college. The goal was to provide the academic and social supports that students need to succeed in a strongly academically oriented environment. By locating early colleges on the campus of two- and four-year colleges, students were able to directly experience the college environment while still in high school.

Core components: AP, IB, and other accelerated coursework; enrollment in college coursework while in high school; instruction that encourages critical thinking; rigorous untracked academic program; monitoring data to identify problems early; college visits; college discussions; research and interest assessments on colleges and careers; exposure to college paraphernalia, etc.; advising on course taking to prepare for and be ready for college; advising on career planning and relevant college pathways; support for other college financial planning/financial literacy; educating caregivers about process; developing individual academic and career plans; assistance with match and college selection; supports for college-going culture; location on or near college campus.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">By the beginning of the sixth year after entering 9th grade, 89.9 percent of students selected by lottery to attend an early college high school had enrolled in postsecondary education at least once (including enrollment while in high school), compared to 74.3 percent of students who were not selected to attend, a statistically significant impact of 15.6 percentage points.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">30.1 percent of students selected by lottery to attend an early college high school attained a postsecondary credential compared to 4.2 percent of students who were not selected to attend.

Implementation details

Each early college high school in the study was expected to implement and exhibit a specific set of design principles developed by North Carolina New Schools Project: (1) ensuring that students were ready for college, (2) instilling powerful teaching and learning in schools, (3) providing high personalization for students and staff, (4) redefining professionalism, (5) creating leadership that developed collective vision, and (6) implementing a purposeful design. All students were expected to take a default college preparatory course of study so that, by the time they graduated from high school, they had all the courses required for entrance into the University of North Carolina system. Early college high schools provided academic and social supports that students needed to succeed in a strongly academically oriented environment, offered visits to colleges and universities, and helped students navigate the college admissions process, with many requiring students to complete applications to postsecondary institutions.

Implementation partner details

The North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP), now defunct, was the public-private partnership that managed early college high schools in North Carolina, among other school support service offerings. NCNSP partnered with local school districts and higher education institutions to help schools become

Strategy: Bolster students' academic preparation for college

Intervention: Early College High School (ECHS) model

nimble, rigorous, and focused institutions that graduate every student. NCNSP developed tools and resources to help schools measure and track progress, including design principle rubrics to inform continuous improvement and encourage innovative practice.

Implementation cost

Not reported.

Considerations for *College Matters*

- Applicants may consider developing an early college program or other efforts to increase exposure to college and student participation in college coursework. The study suggests that early college high schools may be particularly valuable in communities that typically struggle to expose students to Advanced Placement or other college-credit-bearing courses.
- Since 2009, the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis has supported schools interested in developing and implementing early college programs. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (CHE) partners with CELL to designate and endorse high schools that qualify as Early College High Schools in Indiana.
- Indiana currently has [44 CELL/CHE-endorsed early college high schools](#). Endorsed Early College High School programs combine earning a high school diploma with one of the following in four high school years: (1) associate degree approved by CHE; or (2) [Indiana College Core](#) (formerly the Statewide Transfer General Education Core, or STGEC), which includes 30 hours of general education, college-level coursework. Early College High Schools must meet the [Indiana College Core Delivery Site Criteria](#).

Strategy: Bolster students' academic preparation for college

Intervention: Career and technical education (CTE) concentrators

Link to study: [Study & What Works Clearinghouse review](#)

Description and core components

Description: CTE programs are broadly defined as programs that offer high school courses aligned to specific career fields and that provide students with the academic and technical skills to succeed in college or the workforce ([Dougherty, 2016](#)). A CTE concentrator is a student who takes a sequence of CTE courses aligned to a specific career cluster. A career cluster is a grouping of occupations that are related by skills or products. CTE programs offered by schools and districts are designed to align to one or more of the 16 career clusters in the National Career Clusters Framework, including architecture and construction, finance, human services, and information technology ([Advance CTE](#)).

This study examined how completing a sequence of CTE courses in high school affected rates of on-time high school graduation and rates of postsecondary education enrollment and completion within two and five years for students in Nebraska and South Dakota with an expected graduation year between 2013 and 2017. In Nebraska, only students who earned three or more credits in a single career cluster were considered CTE concentrators. In South Dakota, only students who earned at least two credits in a state-approved sequence and in a single career cluster were considered CTE concentrators.

Core components: Enrollment in college coursework while in high school; supports for college-going culture.

Evidence of success

<i>Prioritized outcomes</i>	<i>Additional measures of success</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">CTE concentrators were 10 percentage points more likely than non-CTE concentrators to enroll in any type of postsecondary education within two years of graduation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">CTE concentrators were 7 percentage points more likely than non-CTE concentrators to graduate from high school on time.CTE concentrators were 3 percentage points more likely than non-CTE concentrators to earn a postsecondary award, such as a professional certificate, diploma, or associate or bachelor's degree, within five years graduation.

Implementation details

State education agencies in Nebraska and South Dakota enacted CTE-related policies or programs intended to strengthen state collaboration with in-demand workforce fields and reduce gaps between workforce needs and graduating students' skills. Both [Nebraska](#) and [South Dakota](#) recognize 16 career clusters designed to help students acquire the knowledge and skills needed to reach their postsecondary and career goals. Each career cluster has its own set of state-approved CTE courses, and each state provides a sequence of courses and course standards within each cluster. The study did not provide details about how CTE programming was implemented by specific districts or schools.

Implementation partner details

The Nebraska Department of Education collaborates with the Nebraska Department of Labor and Department of Economic Development on the reVISION initiative, which supports districts and community colleges in strengthening CTE programs, including aligning those programs with current workforce needs. Similarly, the Division of Career and Technical Education of the South Dakota Department of Education has developed state- and local-level processes to help schools more easily understand current and future workforce needs and align programs along the secondary-postsecondary career continuum.

Implementation cost

Not reported.

Considerations for College Matters

- Applicants may consider offering CTE course sequences that are aligned with specific career clusters. Given the variability in postsecondary enrollment and attainment rates across career clusters, applicants might consider how their CTE programs align with local, regional, and state workforce needs and whether expanding or enhancing course offerings is feasible.

Strategy: Bolster students' academic preparation for college

- In Indiana, a [CTE concentrator](#) is defined by the State as a “student who completes at least 2 non-duplicative advanced CTE courses” along with any required prerequisites. Beginning with the 2025 high school graduating cohort, students must enroll in a Next Level Program of Study (NLPS) to achieve CTE concentrator status. Applicants interested in expanding NLPS pathways should review the [NLPS Review Document](#) for an overview of the 69 pathways currently available.
- Indiana now offers [\\$5,000 Career Scholarship Accounts](#) (CSAs) to students at state-accredited public and private schools to promote work-based learning and support related activities, including career coaching, navigation services, postsecondary education or training, course transportation, equipment, and certification or credentialing exams. CSA funding may only be spent on eligible programs, including those that are aligned with Indiana’s Next Level Programs of Study (NLPS). Applicants should consider how the newly established CSAs may align with proposed plans to expand NLPS in their school(s).