KIPP: Public Schools

The Promise of a Choice-Filled Life

MEETING STUDENTS' COLLEGE AND CAREER NEEDS, FROM CLASSROOMS TO CONGRESS

> *A lot of time the conversation around access and completion ends up becoming a conversation about students and deficits and what they're not bringing to the classroom. But what our research, and the work a lot of folks are doing, shows is that it's actually the way our higher education institutions are set up that is producing a majority of the barriers we see holding students back from being able to complete their college goal.*

AUDREY DOW
Senior Vice President, The Campaign for College Opportunity

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Executive Summary

For most young people, a college degree is still the surest stepping stone to rewarding work, a steady income, self-sufficiency, and life success.

On average, college graduates earn more, vote more, volunteer more, enjoy more job security, and are healthier than people without a college degree.[3] **A college degree also increases the likelihood of intergenerational economic mobility.**[4] Of course, many students do not choose to go directly to college or attend college at all.

At KIPP, we believe it is our responsibility to prepare students for economically self-sufficient, choice-filled lives, whatever pathway they choose. The stakes have never been higher for our children or for our nation's prosperity.

Current outcomes are not inexorable; they are unquestionably the product of decisions adults make, from the classroom to the U.S. Congress. What decisions will we make going forward?
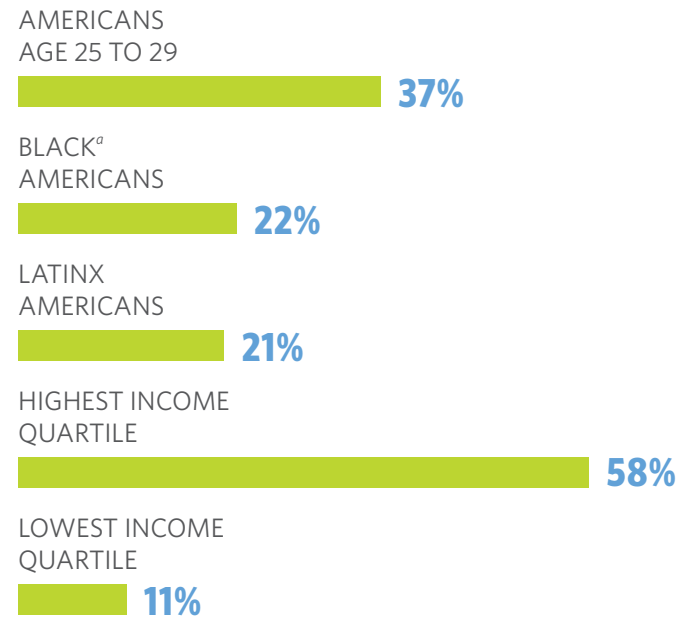
[a]The terms Black and African American are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau to identify any person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The terms are used interchangeably throughout this report.

Students with a Bachelor's Degree[1,2]

AMERICANS
AGE 25 TO 29
37%

BLACK[a]
AMERICANS
22%

LATINX
AMERICANS
21%

HIGHEST INCOME
QUARTILE
58%

LOWEST INCOME
QUARTILE
11%

KIPP BY THE NUMBERS
2018–19 SCHOOL YEAR

NEARLY
100,000
PREK-12 STUDENTS

89%
ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR
REDUCED PRICE LUNCH
in 2017-18 school year
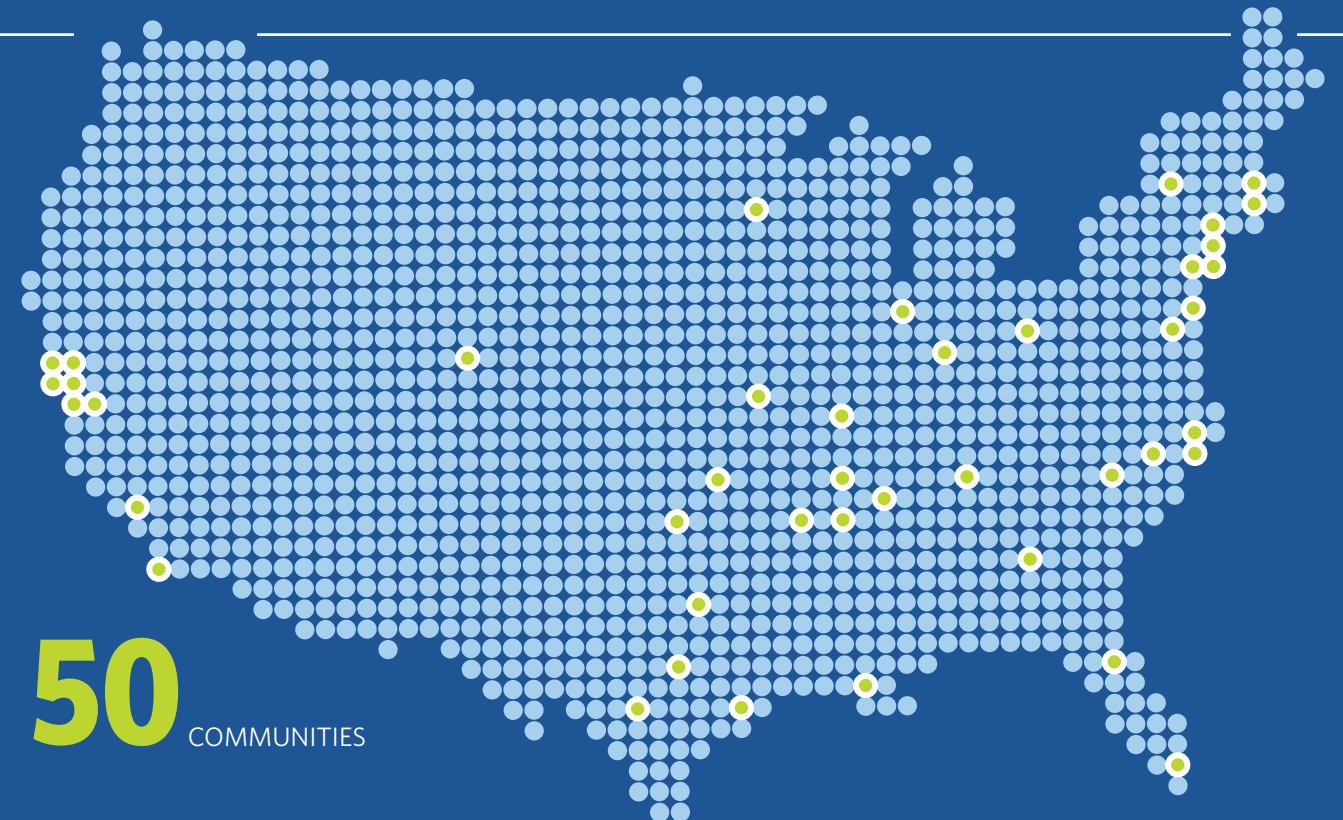
95%
BLACK OR LATINX

28,000+
KIPP ALUMNI
COLLEGE AGE AND OLDER
80,000 EXPECTED BY 2025

224
SCHOOLS
94 ELEMENTARY • 99 MIDDLE • 31 HIGH SCHOOLS

50 COMMUNITIES

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER PROGRAM

KIPP, the Knowledge Is Power Program, began in 1994 with 47 fifth-graders in a public middle school in Houston, Texas. It is now a national network of free, public, open-enrollment PreK–12 charter schools that provides children and teenagers with a world-class education. Our schools help students develop the knowledge, skills, and character strengths that they need to succeed in college and thrive in choice-filled lives.

We are proud that our alumni enroll in college at rates above the national average. They graduate from college at a rate comparable to the U.S. average for all students and at three times the rate of their peers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Those who graduate from KIPP high schools do even better.

Students with a Bachelor's Degree

45% — KIPP HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
35% — KIPP ALUMNI
11% — NATIONAL LOW-INCOME
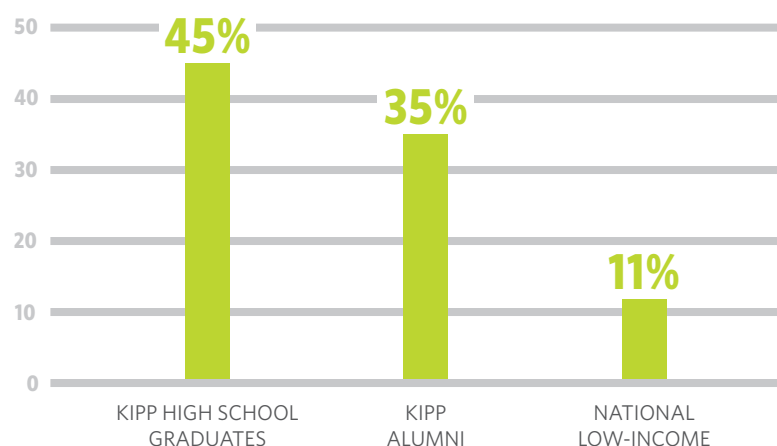
As of fall 2018, 5% of KIPP students earned an associate's degree.

KIPP high school graduates only includes those who graduated from a KIPP high school. KIPP alumni includes both students who completed 8th grade at a KIPP middle school and new-to-KIPP-in-high-school students who attended KIPP for one or more years. Only KIPP alumni who are six or more years out of high school are included in this figure. For national low-income we use the Pell Institute definition for low-income and the U.S. Census for U.S. average figures.

As we approach our 25th anniversary and celebrate the achievements of our KIPPsters, far too many are still being left behind. We know we can do better.

KIPP Texas Public Schools – Houston, Photo by Ethan Pines Photography

EXPERIENCES OF KIPP ALUMNI IN COLLEGE

Every year, KIPP surveys its alumni to better understand their experiences and outcomes.[5] Their responses yield a constant reminder that inequities do not only infiltrate the process of getting into and enrolling in college, they often define their college experience. Decades of systemic racism, low expectations, lack of resources, implicit biases, and blocked access have created an education system that too often fails students of color and students from low-income families.

Of the thousands of college-enrolled KIPP alumni surveyed in 2016 and 2017:
- **72%** of respondents did not have career-aligned summer jobs or internships
- **58%** of respondents reported feeling negatively judged by others based on their race
- **57%** of respondents worried about running out of food
- **43%** of respondents missed meals to pay for school-related expenses
- **24%** of respondents sent money home to support a family member

These inequities represent barriers to KIPP graduates' postsecondary success. Eliminating these barriers will require a collective effort from leaders and policymakers in PreK–12, higher education, business, and financial institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REDESIGN

Based on the experiences of KIPP alumni, with insights from experts across the education landscape, we've developed five recommendations for how American higher education needs to change to ensure more students have opportunities to thrive in choice-filled lives and flourish in their careers. Now is the time to act. Through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), America has an opportunity to make meaningful change. KIPP is calling on education leaders from PreK through postsecondary, the business community, policymakers, and advocates to collectively support efforts that students' experiences have shown will make a difference.

1. Create a federal funding stream to support highly-effective college counseling. Turbocharge America's investment in high-quality, evidence-based college counseling across the nation's high schools. Through the HEA reauthorization, create a federal grant program that significantly reduces the student-to-counselor ratios, incentivizes adoption of evidence-informed counseling practices, and holds grantees accountable for results.

2. Reduce the financial barriers to a college degree. Incentivize state spending on higher education through a robust federal-state partnership that prioritizes first-dollar, need-based aid programs and creates a college affordability guarantee for students from low- and middle-income families. Policymakers need to consider more nimble ways of delivering aid, like microgrants, and demand a return on their investment cost, requiring institutions that receive federal funding to report disaggregated cost, earnings, and debt data to their students.

3. Invest in replicating and expanding policies, programs, and practices that increase higher education graduation rates of students from low-income families, students of color, and first-generation students. Create a tiered-evidence innovation fund that supports the piloting, replication, and expansion of successful approaches to improving access and completion in higher education for students of color, those from low-income families, those from families who immigrated to the United States, and those who are first-generation college-goers. The fund should incentivize partnerships among states, nonprofits, PreK–12 institutions, and institutions of higher education. Maintain policies, such as affirmative action, to diversify the population among both students and faculty at institutions of higher education.

4. Support Minority Serving Institutions and expand opportunities for undocumented students. Invest in colleges and universities that best serve traditionally underrepresented students by fully funding HEA's Title III discretionary programs, extending the Title III mandatory programs, increasing Title V Part A and Part B funds, and supporting the infrastructure of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Federal policymakers need to make federal financial aid available to undocumented students and pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes a permanent solution for DREAMers.

5. Prepare students to land a strong first job, regardless of their background or chosen pathway. Improve career integration throughout the pipeline from PreK to career and modernize the federal work-study program to offer opportunities relevant to students' majors and career interests. Expand the program to include summer employment and private employers in order to enhance students' experiences, increase participation, and prepare students for the workforce.

At KIPP, we know we can do more to strengthen and improve the full PreK-through-postsecondary pipeline, and we know it needs to be in partnership with others. To that end, we are eager to share what we learned and partner with others also seeking to bring about change and greater equity.

The problems are too big for anyone to tackle on their own, but they are not so big that we cannot solve them if we tackle them together.

Addressing the Challenge within PreK–12

KIPP's work to drive college success provides important insights into its students and their needs. We have seen that increasing college completion rates for students from low-income communities and students of color requires a collective effort. Nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, academia, PreK–12 institutions, business, government, and other stakeholders all have a role to play. Through this report, we'll share what we believe is required to provide all students with an equitable shot at success.

We recognize that while achievement gaps have narrowed for certain students fortunate enough to have access to excellent public schools, there still is much to do within the PreK–12 space, especially for the most underserved students. KIPP, along with other educators and leaders, must:

Strengthen academic offerings.
All students can achieve, and educators must maintain high expectations and rigorous academic preparation, beyond traditional academic requirements, for all students. This includes building 21st-Century skills, independence, and on-ramps to postsecondary success. Students are ready for the challenge; it falls on educators to believe in them and hold standards high enough to prepare them for the future.

Enhance the student experience.
Students deserve more than rigorous academics; they deserve a safe and welcoming learning environment that values diversity and recognizes the individual strengths that every student brings to the classroom. This requires educators to both identify and address the systemic racism and implicit biases that continue to permeate classrooms. Creating this environment also requires educators to couple academics with opportunities for joy, play, athletics, and the arts. This includes diversifying the teacher workforce to reflect better the student body they serve. Studies report that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color and have an impact on other social-emotional and nonacademic benefits of all students.[6] Students of color and white students report feeling cared for and academically challenged by their teachers of color.

Ensure students are ready for what comes next. All students should graduate from high school ready for their next step, whether that is college, a career, the military, or another pathway of their choosing. Many students, including KIPP students, do not choose a pathway that goes directly from high school to a four-year college. There must be greater emphasis on supporting students in developing their purpose, passion, and postsecondary plan, regardless of the pathway a student chooses. Our experience has taught us that students need to be equipped with the data and tools to prepare them for not only the next immediate step but also a strong first job and a life of learning. Educators can do better by arming students with the information, network, and skill set to pursue their dream career.

After nearly 25 years of supporting students on their educational journeys, we know that the higher education sector has much work to do as well. KIPP alumni report that too many colleges have impenetrable barriers that make it unnecessarily difficult for students to persist and succeed. The nation's education system owes it to them—and the country—to do better. The road will not be easy, but the experiences of our alumni suggest high-impact places to start.

KIPP Metro Atlanta Schools,
Photo by Annie Smith

KIPP's Higher Education Recommendations
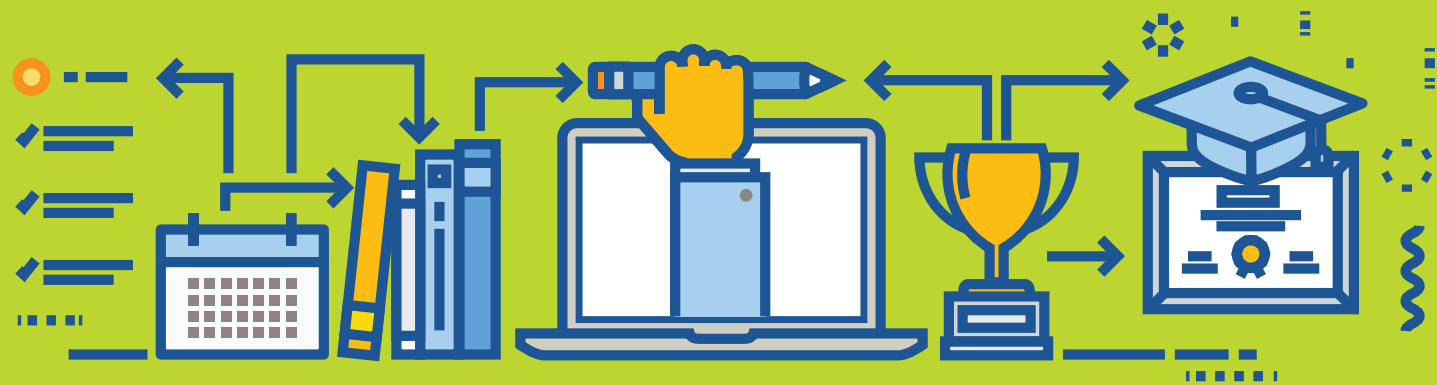
1. Create a federal funding stream to support highly-effective college counseling.

Hight-quality college counseling—specifically, helping students select the college that will maximize their chances of completion—is a catalytic part of the educational journey, especially for students from low-income families. We've seen that firsthand. Throughout the nation, high-quality counseling is utterly lacking for so many, either because school systems do not prioritize it, or they do not have the funding. **Unacceptably high student-counselor ratios (482 to 1 nationwide and higher in many urban, comprehensive high schools) handcuff the ability of many high schools to properly launch students towards post-secondary outcomes.**

Too few counselors with too-heavy workloads make it impossible to utilize the most effective practices. High schools that fail to teach basic math or writing should not be tolerated, nor should the current state of funding for college counseling be considered acceptable.

COLLEGE COUNSELING MATTERS

KIPP's average high school student-counselor ratio is 100 to 1. Counselors work with KIPP high schoolers and with KIPP middle school graduates who attend non-KIPP high schools. They outline detailed steps students should take to explore their passions and aspirations, better understand the competitiveness of their scores and grades and how to improve them, prepare for the cost of college, and begin the college application process. It is a significant resource commitment and it pays off.

Through KIPP's **College Match Program**, counselors help students identify colleges that are the strongest matches based on their individual academic profiles and where they are most likely to persist and thrive. The process considers factors like a college's historic graduation rate, the net price for low-income families, campus supports, and more. From 2014 (when the initiative launched) to 2018, the percentage of KIPP high school students applying to six or more target or reach schools (based on their individual academic profiles) increased from 15 percent to 74 percent. Our analysis, consistent with national research, suggests that students applying to more target and reach schools matriculate, on average, to colleges where they are more likely to graduate.

Visit www.kipp.org/match to view the College Match Strategies Framework.

> *For a lot of first-generation students, you don't have your parents or anyone to tell you: This is what you should factor into choosing a college, this is how you find money to go to school, this is how you sign up for classes, etc. So, I definitely think just having a community of people around is definitely important for first-generation students or just students who don't have a good support system at home or don't have family members that have already been through the college experience.*
>
> **TEISHA KING**
> University of Maryland Baltimore County '16,
> KIPP Baltimore

> *"When my mom passed away, I basically gave up on the college application process, even after working so hard for the past few years. At the time, it felt like too much to overcome, and I didn't want to be far away from my 11-year-old brother. Our KIPP Through College director, Ms. Russ, essentially became my second mom throughout the college process. She became a lifeline, someone I could call or text any time of day, whether it was about school stuff or just because I needed someone to talk to. When I wanted to give up, Ms. Russ helped me revise my college list to apply to new options closer to home and made sure I completed the necessary financial aid paperwork."*
>
> — **Ryan Brown**, University of Tennessee at Knoxville '22, KIPP Nashville

UNDERMATCHING HURTS STUDENTS

One of the most important decisions affecting whether students will earn a degree is where to apply. A common phenomenon for students from low-income families and for students of color is college undermatching. Undermatching happens when a student enrolls in a college that is less selective than his or her qualifications would otherwise allow.[7] There may be good reasons for a student to attend a college with admissions criteria below the students' academic credentials; the school may have an academic program that is a good fit for the student's interests or it may offer a positive campus culture and create a strong sense of belonging for traditionally underserved students. However, the decision to undermatch is not always the result of such intentional considerations. Often, its causes are rooted in factors such as poor college counseling, low expectations, a lack of self-confidence, misinformation, cultural perceptions or expectations, and fears about costs.

The consequences are serious: **Students who are undermatched are less likely to graduate on time** than students who attend a college that matches their academic profile.[8] There is a positive relationship between the average six-year graduation rate for African American and Latinx students and the selectivity of the institution a student attends. This has cascading effects on opportunities moving forward. For example, when students from low-income families go to highly competitive schools, they succeed at rates very close to, and earn nearly as much, as their more-advantaged peers once they enter the workforce.[9]
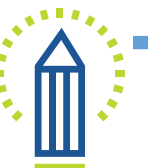
National Average Six-Year African American and Latinx Graduation Rate by Selectivity Category
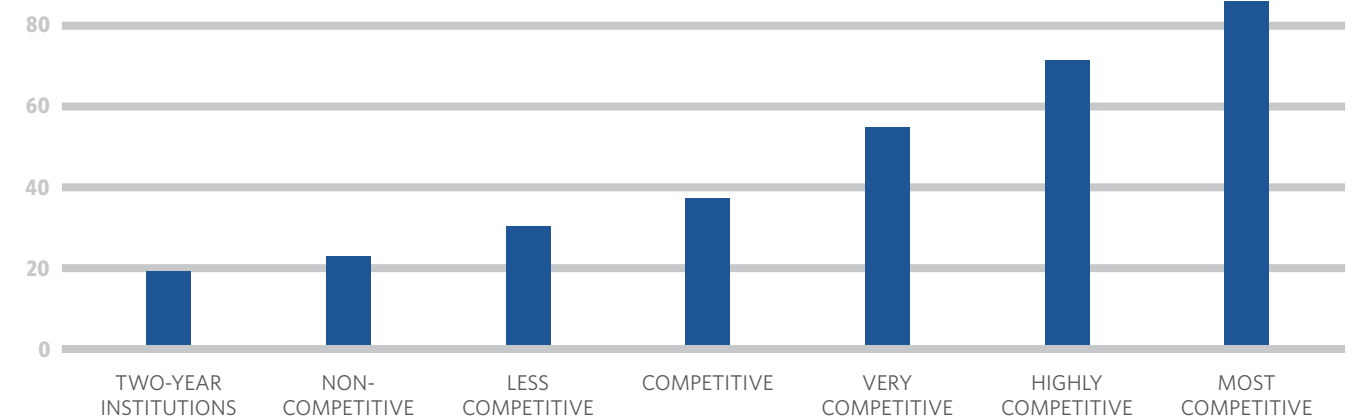
Calculation based on most recent three years of publicly reported graduation rates and Barron's Profiles of American Colleges, which factor test scores, class rank, grade point average, and percentage of applicants selected. Barron's Profiles of American Colleges cites that the typical median SAT (800-point scale)/ACT range for each category is as follows: Most Competitive: 655–800/29; Highly Competitive: 620–654/27–28; Very Competitive: 573–619/24–26; Competitive: 500–572/21–23; Less Competitive: <500/<21; Non-Competitive and Two-Year Institutions typically accept all applicants.

Because all students deserve opportunities to be truly challenged and grow, KIPP is establishing partnerships with other leaders interested in improving college counseling. The 2018 KIPP College Counseling Institute, for example, brought together leaders from public charters and large public school districts—including New York City, Newark, and Miami-Dade—to learn more about KIPP's college-match efforts. At KIPP, counseling begins in high school and continues into college, and we hope to make this more the norm than the exception.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Turbocharge America's investment in high-quality, evidence-based college counseling across the nation's high schools.

2. Through the HEA reauthorization, create a federal grant program that significantly reduces the student-to-counselor ratios, incentivizes adoption of evidence-informed counseling practices, and holds grantees accountable for results. Federal grants should serve as a catalyst for increased state and district investment in college counseling.

3. Counselors need to engage in practices that are strategic and effective and consider factors such as a university's track record in advancing social mobility.

2.

Reduce the financial barriers to a college degree.

> *When we talk about the cost of college, people only think of tuition. The problem is that it's much larger than just tuition, and the costs seem never-ending. There's a constant stress about how you and your family will pay for laptops, meal plans, health insurance, or even just the textbooks for your class. All of these things make it almost impossible to just focus on school.*
>
> **DE'JA WOOD**
> Duke University '21, KIPP St. Louis Public Schools

KIPP New Jersey,
Photo by Michael Alderman

One of the largest obstacles to postsecondary success is the soaring cost of college. From 1989 to 2016, the costs to attend a university increased nearly eight times the rate that wages did.[10] As a result of cost inflation and state disinvestment in higher education, the average low-income family contributes 72 percent of its income—after grants and scholarships are considered—to send one child through a four-year college.[11] Middle- and high-income families, on the other hand, pay 27 and 14 percent of their incomes, respectively.[12] It is time to control the skyrocketing costs of college.

Creating a college affordability guarantee for low-income families is essential to solving the problem. To start, low-income families should not pay a larger share of their income than high-income families to send a child to college. In other words, at a minimum, no family should pay more than 14 percent of their income. While there still is debate to be had to reach consensus on a single benchmark, it is a clear that there must be a defined affordability guarantee for low-income families so more students have access to higher education.

Reducing the cost burden of college can improve outcomes and opportunities for all students. Our alumni report that when costs are so high, it reduces the amount of funds they have to address critical parts of their learning experience, like books, housing, and supplies. These additional challenges increase the risk of stopping out and can often lead to the worst-case scenario: debt with no degree. While it is true that financial aid and loan repayment must also be reformed, such changes alone are insufficient for students without an honest effort to lower the net cost of college.

DECODING THE POTENTIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT: DATA QUALITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Beyond helping students navigate the financial maze of attending college, KIPP counselors also show students how and why to consider colleges' completion and default rates before deciding. Both their likelihood to graduate with a degree and secure work that will keep them out of loan default are two important indicators of the return on investment in college.

In both PreK–12 and higher education, clear and transparent outcomes data, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and first-generation college-goers, enable students, families, and educators to make informed decisions, and ensure that educational institutions are more accountable to the students and families they serve. The federal government, in partnership with states, must increase transparency and enhance market accountability in higher education by ensuring that critical data about college completion rates, post-college earnings, unemployment rates, and debt-repayment rates are readily available and accessible so students can make informed choices, and the public has a clear understanding of the return on investment of public dollars invested in higher education.

IMPROVING THE IMPACT OF AID DOLLARS FOR STUDENTS WITH THE MOST NEED

More than half of states have a program or proposed program to address college affordability. However, these new policies are uneven in their ability to reach those most in need and are often tone deaf to the needs of today's students. The money, in many instances, can only be used for tuition and not for other costs and fees. They are often last-dollar programs, i.e., the aid is offset by other grant funding, such as the federal Pell Grant. Many programs do not cover any tuition if a student opts to attend a four-year institution rather than a two-year institution, and they often have limits on eligibility that exclude older and working students.[13]

Some state programs are not based on need and do not benefit students from low-income families. A 2018 Education Trust report highlights how state policies differ. States like Oklahoma and Washington have policies focused on students from low-income families while states like Delaware end up providing the majority of aid to recipients from middle- and upper-income families.[14] Over the past two decades, merit-based aid has grown from 10 percent of state support to 24 percent.[15] Also, merit-based aid, which is tied to academic performance rather than financial need, often exacerbates the inequity of financing college for students of color.[16]

"When I first enrolled in college, my parents told me that they were going to pay for it, but within a few weeks, they found themselves going through a divorce and a foreclosure. I quickly realized they weren't going to be able to afford my school, so I was left with a $5,000 bill and I couldn't attend the next semester until I paid that off myself. So after that, I never went back to school full-time. I just enrolled in one class here and one class there. The cost was definitely a hardship."

—**Ana Curo**, Texas Tech University '18, KIPP Texas Public Schools – Houston

OFFERING PERSISTENCE GRANTS TO IMPROVE COLLEGE COMPLETION

Students from low-income families are more likely than their peers to be at risk of dropping out because they cannot pay a bill or are facing unexpected expenses. Some colleges and universities are helping students with these financial shortfalls through microgrants, also called persistence grants. They can be as small as a few hundred dollars—just enough to help students buy books or supplement their income so they can take a non-paying internship that aligns with their career goal. Georgia State University reports bringing thousands of students back into the classroom this way.[17]

Starting this year, five KIPP regions are offering persistence grant programs to alumni to assist them with overcoming acute financial burdens. This program began four years ago at KIPP DC, and since implementation, 95 percent of recipients either graduated or are still in college. Persistence grants are not the silver bullet to solving financial challenges but if used strategically, they can make a significant difference for students.

Receiving a persistence grant was ultimately life-changing. I come from a background of struggle, and it reassured me that I could pursue my dreams and make a better life from myself.

AARON FORD
Towson University '17,
KIPP DC

ADDRESSING LENDING AND DEBT

A conversation about college costs is not complete without a hard look at what is happening with lending and debt. Nationally, about 65 percent of college seniors who graduate from public and private nonprofit colleges leave school with student loan debt. They owe an average of just under $30,000 each.[18] Pell Grant recipients are more than twice as likely to borrow and leave school with higher debt than their peers.[19]

65%
of college seniors who graduate from public and private nonprofit colleges leave school with student loan debt.

We need a system of higher education finance that sets folks up to succeed in school and after it. Far too often, educational debt enhances pre-existing financial constraints. In those instances, the pursuit of higher education doesn't place students on their desired path to self-sufficiency. Instead, it anchors them in poverty or distress.

JOANNA DARCUS
Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation Racial Justice Fellow, National Consumer Law Center

Students of color also are much more likely than white students to be saddled with debt upon graduating from college. African American young adults are more likely than their peers to leave school without a degree or have degrees that are worth less in the labor market, meaning that educational debt is widening the racial wealth gap in America.[20] Default rates are highest for those who drop out of school with no degree, for all African American students, and for students who attend for-profit colleges.[21]

"When my parents dropped me off at Morehouse College, I did not tell them that I didn't have a permanent place to stay. After we unloaded the car and I fixed up my room, my parents drove down the road. When they were out of sight, I packed up my room and left because I didn't have the money to actually take the space. The financial aid office soon helped me and so did the credit cards I acquired. I graduated with student loans and $17,000 in credit card debt. I was able to live and survive through college on credit cards, but now I have the burden of a substantial amount of debt."

— **Calvon Jones**, Morehouse College '15,
KIPP ENC College Prep Public Schools

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Incentivize state spending on higher education through a robust federal-state partnership that prioritizes first-dollar, need-based aid programs and creates a college affordability guarantee for students from low- and middle-income families.

2. Policymakers need to consider more nimble ways of delivering aid, like microgrants, and demand a return on their investment by requiring institutions that receive federal funding to report disaggregated financial and debt data to their students.

3.

Invest in replicating and expanding policies, programs, and practices that increase higher education graduation rates of students from low-income families, students of color, and first-generation students.

Karis Stucker, Davidson College '18, KIPP Metro Atlanta Schools, Photo by Laura Mueller

Higher education can create social mobility, improve civic engagement, and promote healthier behaviors.[22] But those benefits are not extended to everyone. **Too few students from low-income families and students of color enroll in, persist through, and graduate from college because most institutions of higher education were never designed to support them.** Such students face inequitable barriers at every step of the college-going process. Exacerbating the problem is the lack of data—specifically, data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college-goers—that measure if colleges and universities truly are acting as engines of social mobility for the students they serve.

Today's students are older, more racially diverse, and more likely to be financially independent.

38% OF UNDERGRADUATES ARE OLDER THAN 25 YEARS

BLACK STUDENT ENROLLMENT GREW BY **72%**

4.8M POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS ARE PARENTS

SINCE THE MID-1990S, ENROLLMENT AMONG LATINX STUDENTS GREW **3X**

NEARLY **1/2** OF ALL STUDENTS ARE FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT

Data Provided by Lumina Foundation Today's Student[23]

Most colleges and universities are not designed to meet the needs of students from low-income families and students of color. Colleges and universities can better serve these students. There are models to turn to for ideas.

> To really improve higher education to serve us, there needs to be a larger discussion around the constructs of this country. There has to be a conversation about institutionalized racism; there has to be a conversation about the patriarchy; and we have to have a very candid and open listening session on how these oppressive systems hurt so many minority students in higher education and have forced us to essentially put on masks every day to just try to get through without crumbling. There has to be a conversation and openness to saying, 'We got this wrong,' and then starting over.

ERICA MARTINEZ-CLOSE
City College of New York '15,
KIPP NYC Public Schools

CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING ON CAMPUS

Research and experience show that a sense of belonging, or lack thereof, has a significant impact on college completion.[24] In KIPP's 2017 and 2018 alumni surveys, alumni who had a solid sense of belonging in college—who felt socially connected, supported, and respected—reported better mental health and had higher grade point averages than their peers.

"Belonging uncertainty is the persistent worrying and questioning about your belonging. And the reason that active state of questioning is so pernicious is because when you're questioning, you're looking for answers. That means kids are over-interpreting every difficult thing they encounter, like if someone is slow in getting back to you, or a professor is critical, or it's harder to make friends than you thought."

— **Dr. David Yeager**, Associate Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Texas at Austin

For underrepresented students, a sense of belonging is connected to the culture and climate on campus and a respect for diversity. A majority of KIPP alumni report feeling negatively judged by others on campus because of their racial and/or social class backgrounds. This is eye-opening and should prompt higher education leaders to act and ensure their schools are safe and welcoming environments for all students.

Greater diversity on campus is one way to improve a sense of belonging. Currently, African American and Latinx students are underrepresented at elite private colleges and public flagships.[25] But the need for greater diversity on campus is not limited to the student body. Most full-time faculty members at degree-granting institutions are white.[26] Since students do not see themselves reflected in the dorms, their classes, at lecterns, or in counseling offices, it is no wonder they succumb to belonging uncertainty.

Affirmative action remains a powerful tool to promote racial diversity and increase belonging. While Black and Latinx students are still underrepresented on college campuses across the country, that only worsens in the absence of affirmative action. When Michigan passed Proposition 2 in 2006, banning the use of affirmative action, Black enrollment at the University of Michigan dropped by nearly 10 percent in the following three years.[27] Despite continued attempts to roll back affirmative action admissions policies, the federal courts have upheld the legality of race-conscious policies to achieve diversity. It is a tool that institutions must keep.

> *I've had friends on campus who have been walking home late at night, and they'd been called monkeys, other expletives, racial slurs; and it's been reported, but nothing really came up at the university. It's disheartening for some students, you know, to experience something like that, to feel like nothing was done about it. But you kind of just have to trudge through and go to class tomorrow and act like nothing happened, you know?*
>
> **TY CHUNG**
> Bucknell University '17,
> KIPP DC

ALLEVIATING QUESTIONS ABOUT BELONGING

Belonging uncertainty can become self-fulfilling. Dr. David Yeager studied the effect of brief exercises that target students' beliefs and thoughts and whether they improve achievement levels. In some of these activities, students read surveys or hear from more experienced students, who describe their initial fears and belonging uncertainties; they explain that questioning whether they fit in during times of transition was normal and something a lot of people experienced. Yeager's studies show that brief programs like these can help alleviate student's worries about fit and belonging.[28]

LEVERAGING DATA AND INTRUSIVE ADVISING

Thankfully, many colleges and universities are looking for ways to be more student-centered and focused on equity. The America Talent Initiative is a group of public and private colleges with high graduation rates that are working to expand access to college for students from low- and moderate-income families. Members of the University Innovation Alliance—a network of 11 large, public universities—are committed to collaborating to drastically increase persistence among students from low-income families and first-generation students. So far, the alliance has increased the percentage of degrees awarded to students from low-income families by 29 percent.

Georgia State University (GSU) is among nearly a dozen schools in the alliance and has been celebrated for eliminating racial achievement gaps in college completion. Most notably, GSU overhauled college advising by hiring more advisers and revamping the use of data. GSU advisers now have access to a host of student data that signal when a student might be off the path to graduation, alerting and allowing them to intervene early in targeted ways.

GSU also is a leader in using new technology and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve college completion rates. The university pioneered the use of nudge apps, in which students receive texts with reminders and updates to reduce summer melt, the phenomenon of students being accepted and enrolling in college but not matriculating. The system merges student data with key matriculation steps, so if students have not completed a required task, the nudge system will let them know through a text. Students also can access the nudge system to get answers to questions about topics ranging from academics to housing and student resources. Excited by the promise of AI technology, KIPP counselors are piloting nudge apps with KIPP seniors and college-going alumni.

The City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) model, which assists students with earning degrees by providing intensive academic advisement, career counseling, tuition assistance, and subsidies for textbooks and transportation, is improving three-year associate's degree attainment rates. CUNY is now replicating that model to support students in earning a bachelor's degree within four years. It is this type of pilot, replicate, and expand approach that the federal government could play a role in funding in order to incentivize similar innovative programs.

A newer and larger effort announced at the end of 2018, called Powered by Publics, is an initiative to improve attainment and completion numbers and eliminate achievement gaps. The initiative is comprised of 130 public universities organized by the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities; they work in clusters to examine the student experience and how barriers to success can be eliminated. A big emphasis is on ensuring institutions have strong data systems to analyze what is working and where problems exist. We are eager to learn from this effort.

PHOTO ABOVE
Lycoming College Class of 2018:
Erica Booker, KIPP NYC Public Schools,
Kianna Pizarro, KIPP Philadelphia Public Schools,
Malik Lewis-Schooler, KIPP NYC Public Schools,
Kelsie Lozada, KIPP Philadelphia Public Schools,
Photo by Impressions Photographic Studio

RETHINKING COURSE ENROLLMENT PRACTICES

Across higher education, remedial education is getting a second look. Students who are deemed academically unprepared when they arrive on college campuses often get placed in noncredit-bearing remedial courses which can negatively impact student retention—a problem well-documented and explained by Complete College America.[29] The problem disproportionately affects African American and Latinx students.[30]

Fortunately, colleges around the country are changing their practices. In California, Long Beach City College used to place the majority of its incoming freshmen into remedial classes based on placement tests. Now that administrators switched from using placement tests to reviewing high school coursework and grades, most incoming students are placed in credit-bearing classes. Course pass rates have held steady, suggesting that the placement tests were an inefficient means of determining readiness.

Institutions also are looking at course-taking patterns. Arizona State University, GSU, and many community colleges are turning to guided pathways, which encourage students to choose a broad area of interest—sometimes called a meta major—to study and develop a degree plan. This helps students stay focused and on track and can support community college students' transition to four-year schools. Eliminated are the broad, discretionary course-taking patterns—often referred to as cafeteria-style approaches—that negatively impact on-time degree completion. Guided pathways and revisiting course placement practices are just two examples of how traditional practices can be redesigned to make college a more student-centered and equitable experience.

KIPP DC, Photo by Ethan Pines Photography

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a tiered-evidence innovation[b] fund that supports the piloting, replication, and expansion of successful approaches to improving access and completion in higher education for students of color, those from low-income families, those from families who immigrated to the United States, and those who are first-generation college-goers. The fund should incentivize partnerships among states, nonprofits, PreK–12 institutions, and institutions of higher education.

2. Maintain policies, such as affirmative action, to diversify the population among both students and faculty at institutions of higher education.

[b] *Tiered-evidence grantmaking allows federal agencies to award smaller amounts of grant funding to test promising ideas, and larger amounts to replicate practices with strong evidence of success. To help support innovation and reward results, agencies collect information on how health care, education, and social service projects are performing throughout the life of their grants.*

4.
Support Minority Serving Institutions and expand opportunities for undocumented students.

KIPP Bay Area Public Schools, Photo by Ethan Pines Photography

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) serve a critical role in higher education. The American Council on Education reports that MSIs—including HBCUs and HSIs—increase social mobility more quickly than Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) that fall into the same competitiveness category.[39]

MSIs achieve these results even while facing severe funding disadvantages as compared to PWIs. And while there is variety in the characteristics, student demographics, and institutional missions across MSIs, they share a common purpose of educating students of color. In School Year 2014–15, MSIs enrolled nearly 5 million students of color, amounting to more than one-quarter of all undergraduates enrolled in higher education.[31]

LEARNING FROM THE SUCCESS OF HBCUs AND HSIs

Many HBCUs started during the Reconstruction era as a way for African Americans to access higher education; they are typically close-knit campuses set up with the Black student experience in mind. They have strong student supports, encourage close student-faculty connections, and emphasize collaborative learning experiences. KIPP alumni attending HBCUs report a stronger sense of belonging than alumni at PWIs. African Americans have a higher likelihood of graduating within six years from HBCUs than from PWIs that enroll comparable percentages of students from low-income families.[32]

For many students, the benefit of attending an HBCU is clear.

HSIs began as a grassroots effort to recognize institutions serving a large concentration of Latinx students and received a formal federal designation in 1992.[34] In School Year 2017–18, there were more than 520 HSIs located in 27 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, and HSIs enroll nearly two-thirds of all Latinx students in post-secondary education.[35] HSIs are leading the way in accelerating the success of Latinx students across the country. The City College of Chicago–Harry S. Truman College's Transitional Bilingual Learning Community increases the enrollment of Latinx English language learners. As a result of the program, participants earn their associate's degree at four times the rate of nonparticipants. Enhancing Postbaccalaureate Opportunities at California State University, Fullerton for Hispanic Students (EPOCHS) addresses campus climate by providing cultural competency workshops to faculty and conducting outreach activities to the local community.[36]

Despite having dedicated funding streams such as Title III for HBCUs and Title V for HSIs in the Higher Education Act, inequitable funding practices continue to create challenges for these institutions and make it difficult for KIPP students and other students from low-income families and students of color to attend. Challenges include the reduced purchasing power of the Pell Grant, which 75 percent of HBCU attendees receive, declining federal and state funding, and small endowments.[37][38] The smaller endowments are likely a result of discriminatory pay practices in the workforce that lower the earnings of graduates and impact the level of discretionary income available to make donations to their alma maters.

Paradise Clark, Clark Atlanta University '15, Paris Clark, Spelman College '15, KIPP Chicago Public Schools, Photo by Jamie Hopper

Despite representing only 3 percent of the nation's colleges and universities, HBCUs:

ENROLL
10%
OF ALL AFRICAN AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES

AWARD
17%
OF ALL BACHELOR'S DEGREES RECEIVED BY AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

AWARD
24%
ALL BACHELOR'S DEGREES RECEIVED BY AFRICAN AMERICANS IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS FIELDS[33]

For minority students entering predominantly white college campuses for the first time, the transition to college life can be difficult. When you're in an environment where a majority of your peers neither look like you nor share your socioeconomic background, you may experience social, emotional, and academic roadblocks. When I transferred from a predominantly white university to Oakwood University, a historically-black college in Huntsville, Alabama, I immediately felt like I belonged. Based on the curriculum, faculty structure, and overall culture, it was clear that university was crafted with a student like me in mind.

— **Christopher Johnson**, Oakwood University '17, KIPP Philadelphia Public Schools

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Invest in colleges and universities that best serve traditionally underrepresented students by fully funding HEA's Title III discretionary programs, extending the Title III mandatory programs, increasing Title V part A and B funds, and supporting the infrastructure of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs).

2. Federal policymakers need to make federal financial aid available to undocumented students and pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes a permanent solution for DREAMers.

BETTER SUPPORT FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Every year, nearly 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school and immediately face the challenges of continuing their educational journeys. By some estimates, only 5 percent of undocumented students[39] are enrolling in college and the percentage who graduate is even lower. The structural barriers these students often face include a lack of mentoring, limited information on their eligibility to attend postsecondary institutions, soaring college costs, and ineligibility for in-state tuition or other financial aid to cover living costs.[40] Some state-specific DREAM Acts make in-state tuition available for undocumented students. Other states, like Arizona and Georgia, have taken steps to explicitly prohibit undocumented students from paying in-state resident tuition[41] or enrolling in some public colleges[42] and universities. Further exacerbating the affordability challenge is that undocumented students are prohibited from accessing all forms of federal financial aid and other education benefits.

"I have known that I was undocumented for years, of course but never understood what it really meant until I applied to college. I called admissions offices around the country. 'I'm sorry,' they told me on a number of occasions, 'We don't accept people like you here.' One by one, I crossed different colleges off my list. It took its toll. Since fifth grade, I had repeated the KIPP mantra of 'To and Through College.' Now, I didn't know if my status would stand between me and my dreams."

— **Noemi**, KIPP Texas Public Schools

Congress can, and should, make federal financial aid available for undocumented students, but that is not enough. It is estimated that 241,000 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)-eligible students are enrolled in college.[43] For young people, the lack of certainty about their future or their family's future creates stress and hardship that can limit their ability to succeed in higher education or in whatever path they choose. **It is time for Congress to pass a permanent solution for DREAMers so that students who have worked hard their entire lives have the opportunity to access and succeed in college and beyond.** Not only is it the morally right thing to do, doing so contributes to the prosperity of the country.

5.

Prepare students to land a strong first job, regardless of their background or chosen pathway.

*KIPP DC alumni networking event,
Photo by Ashley Lemley*

Career knowledge and experience are critical success factors for all students on the PreK–12 and postsecondary journey; they help students make smart decisions about the best college, the best major, and the best training program. These experiences fuel students' motivation to persist, and they help students identify and commit to post-graduation career pathways. To improve long-term outcomes, career integration must be central to the work of educational institutions.

Systemic inequities by race, income, immigration status, sexuality, gender, and disability continue to unfairly affect students' ability to secure strong first jobs. Overall, about two-thirds of young adults have trouble embarking on a career.[44] These troubles often are exacerbated for students from low-income families and students of color who do not have as much access to career-aligned internships, social capital, and professional networks as their peers. In fact, Black and Latinx young adults experience underemployment or unemployment at two times the rate that white young adults do.[45] Hiring bias is also a persistent problem; research shows employment discrimination against African Americans has not decreased in the past quarter of a century.[46]

While PreK–12 systems strive for college and career readiness, most students get very little hands-on exposure to career education. It used to be that many young people gained work experience before graduating from high school. But after the 1980 publication *A Nation at Risk* declared that vocational education was a dead-end track, particularly for students of color and those from low-income families, there has been a shift away from career and technical education (CTE).[47] Nobody wants to return to a two-tracked system, and the nation must gird against it in light of implicit biases and structural racism that persist in schools and the workforce. However, educational institutions can better connect academic learning to career options without returning to the detrimental two-track system.

> *There is almost no relationship between high school curricula and today's occupations. There is a huge disconnect that we've created in the process of trying to do a good thing. All of the career-related learning is being pushed on the postsecondary system, and there is a struggle there to get the postsecondary institutions to accept that mission.*

DR. ANTHONY CARNEVALE
Director, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

To improve career outcomes for all students, the PreK–12 system, including KIPP, must increase opportunities for career exploration and integration and support students on multiple pathways to success, including both college and high-quality CTE. And institutions of higher education must provide more career-related opportunities during a student's educational journey.

EVOLVING KIPP'S APPROACH BY SUPPORTING MULTIPLE PATHWAYS

KIPP is focused on college access and completion and we are continuing to develop strategies that improve both. At the same time, we are paying close attention to career success for both our college-going alumni and those pursuing other pathways. We are stepping up our efforts to guide students who are not going straight to college and, instead, who are pursuing CTE opportunities that match their passions and goals.

Regardless of students' chosen pathways, KIPP is using new tools and strategies to better assess students' interests, inform their postsecondary decisions, and launch meaningful and fulfilling careers.

Utilizing assessment tools
such as YouScience, aimed at helping students identify their strengths and interests and understand how those might be applied

Integrating labor-market information
into counseling practices to better understand labor-market opportunities and needs in KIPP regions

Identifying CTE partners and advising students
who want to pursue training programs in skilled trades, applied sciences, modern technologies, and more

KIPP DC alumni networking event,
Photo by Rob Lowe

Students should get strong career integration as early as middle school and throughout their postsecondary experience. KIPP is moving in this direction.

Many KIPP schools partner with workforce development experts, local nonprofits, and area employers to improve career integration. For example, some of KIPP's Washington, DC, high schools are partnering with the nonprofit National Academy Foundation to create immersive, career-themed experiences in finance as well as paid internships, field trips, and workshops for students.

KIPP is developing a College Knowledge and Career Success Seminar curriculum that focuses on building skills and mindsets essential for success in college and a career, including financial literacy, executive-functioning skills, and homing in on a passion, purpose, and plan. And we are looking for new ways to provide support and advice to KIPP alumni who may not be enrolled in college but are working toward labor-market credentials in in-demand fields or seeking meaningful work in other ways. All the while, it is imperative to remain vigilant in ensuring that CTE approaches never become a vehicle for tracking.

As we move toward greater career integration, we will continue to collect feedback from our students and alumni as well as seek new ideas and inspiration from others around the country.

> We felt ostracized from our peers because we deviated from the 'climb the mountain to and through college' path. Despite dropping out of school, we chose to embark on our entrepreneurial endeavors. What about the alum that chose the path of entrepreneurship? In my opinion, KIPP can do a much better job of preparing students for different careers paths. The organization needs to understand that college isn't for everyone and how to teach students to navigate the path of their choosing. Lastly, the landscape of business, school and life is constantly changing. You can learn just about anything on your own if you have the discipline and will power.

KHALIL IDRIS
Founder & Creative Director of Khalil Idris, KIPP New Jersey

FOCUSING ON CAREER INTEGRATION

For students who gain work experience during college, students from low-income families often work longer hours than their peers, and those longer hours often negatively impact academic performance and completion. In addition, students from low-income families are far less likely than their wealthier peers to have jobs connected to their interests and fields of study.[48] This is generally because jobs aligned with career paths are often unpaid; KIPP alumni typically cannot afford to work without pay. This further disadvantages students, since organizations often hire their interns full time.[49]

There is much to learn from colleges and universities that are doing their part to build a stronger connection between academics and careers.

The University of Massachusetts–Amherst, for example, is recognized for its Cooperative Education Experience program, where students earn wages and experience in a job related to their major for three to nine months. At the University of Cincinnati, students alternate semesters between taking courses and working full-time in their fields. At Franklin & Marshall College, administrators offer a Seniors Boot Camp to help graduating seniors secure a high-quality, first job and a Summer Experience Fair where students share information with their peers about internships and jobs they held over the summer.

"There has to be a re-envisioning of how to give students at large state schools—or other schools that aren't going to have the resources of our most elite four-year institutions—the skills, the career experiences, and the networking opportunities that they otherwise just won't get. We have to reimagine how it's done if this group of students is going to have a shot."

— **Aimée Eubanks Davis**, Founder and CEO, Braven

Additionally, the nonprofit organization Braven partners with large, public universities to integrate career education into the undergraduate experience for students from low-income families and first-generation students. Specifically, Braven provides a credit-bearing, career-education course in which students hone employment skills and partners with employers who provide students with coaching and networking help that ultimately leads to work experience. Students who participated in these experiences outpace their peers in quality career attainment.[50] The nation's education system needs more programs like this.

I was accepted into an honors program that required us to do certain things like work in an internship your first summer in college. I went to school in Washington, DC, where the cost of living is so high. I thought to myself, 'It's nearly impossible for somebody like me to intern in Washington DC, without being paid.' My peers that first summer were working for senators, and I couldn't do it—not because I couldn't get accepted or not smart enough, but because I couldn't afford it. And that shouldn't be the case. I have the same passion. I have the same drive. I have the same goals. That summer, I had to reject an opportunity, because my family couldn't send me money to live, and that was devastating.

ROQUEL CRUTCHER
American University '16,
KIPP Memphis Collegiate Schools

KIPP Columbus AP Computer Science Principles class visits Amazon fulfillment center, Photo by Amazon

MODERNIZING WORK-STUDY

Federal law is clear about the purpose of the work-study program: "stimulate and promote part-time employment of students who are enrolled as undergraduate, graduate, or professional students, and who are in need of earnings from employment to pursue courses of study at eligible institutions."[51]

Unfortunately, the federal work-study allocation formula is outdated and inefficient.

It gives unfair priority to selective, private institutions; as a result, students from higher-income families who go to private four-year colleges are more likely to get a work-study job than students from low-income families who attend four-year public schools. Institutions also have wide latitude on how they prioritize applicants and the opportunities do not always go to the neediest young people.[52]

Increased federal investment in the program will give more students with less financial means access to on- and off-campus internship opportunities. Additionally, work-study opportunities should be relevant to students' majors and career aspirations; they should also be available during the summer and allow for private employers to be reimbursed at the same level as on-campus and nonprofit employers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve career integration throughout the pipeline from PreK to career and modernize the federal work-study program to offer opportunities relevant to students' majors and career interests.

2. Expand the work-study program to include summer employment and private employers in order to enhance students' experiences, increase participation, and prepare students for the workforce.

Conclusion

Far too many students from low-income families, students of color, and first-generation students face unnecessary barriers to success in college and the workforce—barriers created by systems that were not designed with them in mind. Now is the time to act. Through the reauthorization of the HEA, there are opportunities to make meaningful change across the country. KIPP is calling on education leaders from PreK through postsecondary, the business community, policymakers, and advocates to collectively support efforts that students' experiences have shown will make a difference.

1. Create a federal funding stream to support highly-effective college counseling that targets evidence-based practices that improve completion rates for students of color, students from low-incomes families, and first-generation college goers.

2. Reduce the financial barriers to a college degree by creating a federal-state partnership that is a need-based, first-dollar program with an affordability guarantee for students from low- and middle-income families. Any efforts to reduce the net cost of college should be coupled with efforts to improve debt-lending and repayment, so that students from low- and middle-income families as well as students of color do not continue to suffer the inequities of the higher education finance system well into their career.

3. Invest in replicating and expanding policies, programs, and practices that increase higher education graduation rates of students from low-income families, students of color, and first-generation students by creating a tiered-evidence innovation fund. The federal government should also protect affirmative action as a tool to diversify campuses.

4. Support minority serving institutions and expand opportunities for undocumented students by fully funding Title III's discretionary programs, extending Title III's mandatory programs, increasing Title V Part A and Part B funding, and expanding infrastructure supports for HBCUs and HSIs. The federal government needs to pass a permanent solution for DREAMers so they have access to college, federal financial aid, and stronger career pathways.

5. Prepare students to land a strong first job, regardless of their background or chosen pathway by improving career integration from PreK to career, and modernize the federal work-study program to provide more meaningful career exposure to students during their educational journeys.

The availability of outcomes data—disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college-goers—better enables students, families, educators, and policymakers to make informed decisions.

To realize the benefits of each of these recommendations, data transparency is paramount. It ensures that educational institutions are accountable to the students and families they serve and the taxpayers from whom they benefit. And yet, despite these obvious and overwhelming benefits, transparency around college completion rates, post-college earnings, unemployment rates, and debt-repayment rates, among other data sets, is not what it could or should be. If education is a public good, then measuring educational outcomes is a public responsibility.

At KIPP, we strive to be part of the solution. We have evolved over time from focusing on getting our students through middle school to supporting them from PreK through high school and college. We are now looking more closely at what happens to our students once they are in the workforce. We are eager to share what we learn and form partnerships with others also seeking to bring about change and greater equity. **The problems at hand are too big for any of us to tackle on our own, but they are not so big that we cannot tackle them in partnership with others.**

*Ashlee Vargas,
City College of New York '18,
KIPP NYC Public Schools,
Photo by Steve Ciabattoni*

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