OACC   **SUCCESS CENTER** FOR
OHIO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

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RE: Team 7: Sealing the cracks in the pipeline
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

Obtaining a college degree has become a contributing factor in achieving the coveted American Dream. It has become society's chief mechanism for individual advancement, upward mobility, economic growth, and social equity. How, we might ask, can we bring many more young adults to a bright future? Institutions of higher education must enroll and retain larger numbers of students from underrepresented groups (Mintz, S., 2017).

How do we motivate and prepare underrepresented students to enter college? Strengthening relationships between high school partners, student influencers, and the college campus community is critical for success. Furthermore, high school students must have confidence and assurance that they belong on the college campus.

To that end, our project will offer a plan which focuses on career exploration which will aspire and motivate students to enroll in college with an established major.
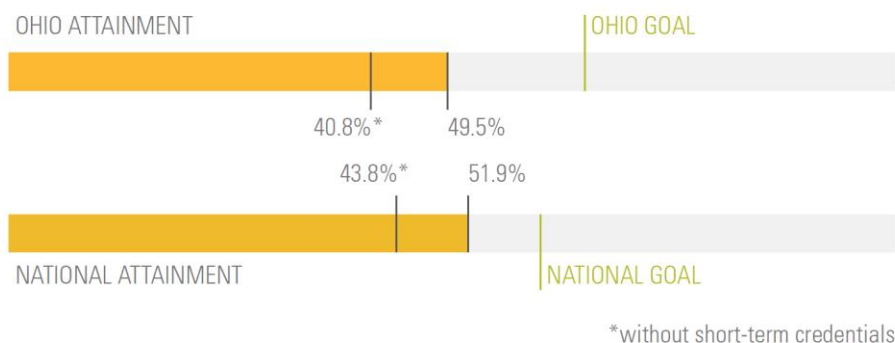
RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEWED

In researching the most effective techniques for motivating students to enroll in college in a program of study, we found data to support the idea that outreach is most impactful if it begins at the Middle School level. Evidence suggests that 40 percent of eventual dropouts could be identified in the 6th grade. (Walter J. 2014) Identifying at risk students as early as possible is essential to intervention and increasing the population of eligible college students. If more students are high school graduates, we should have more students entering college.

In addition to ensuring students graduate and can attend college, it is imperative they enter college with an idea of their career path. Data indicates that the best practices to motivate students are to use both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to that which comes from within each person. If a person enjoys an activity, they are more likely to do it as opposed to something that they do not enjoy.

This data gives way to the thought that outreach needs to happen sooner while encouraging students to assess their interests and strengths. Career coaching can then help to guide young students in the formative years leading up to college. If students' intrinsic motivators are aligned with programs of study, there is a higher likelihood that they will complete their degree.

DATA EXAMINED

There is a tremendous amount of data that shows the workforce gap in Ohio and across the country. According to the Lumina Foundation, only 49.5% of Ohioans had earned a high-value credential or postsecondary degree, putting Ohio two points below the national average and ranking us 31 out of 50 states. This data emphasizes the need for more skilled workers to enter the workforce.

OHIO ATTAINMENT | OHIO GOAL

40.8%*   49.5%

43.8%*   51.9%

NATIONAL ATTAINMENT | NATIONAL GOAL

*without short-term credentials

As we look toward narrowing that gap, we found that there are several risk factors that have a strong correlation to high school dropouts. As outlined in the data below, many of those risk factors are identifiable in middle school years. Four 6th grade risk factors proved to be powerful predictors of falling off the track to graduation — low attendance (80 percent or lower), a failing mark for classroom behavior, a failing grade in math, and a failing grade in English (Jerald, C 2006)

Table 1. Examples of Risk Factors that Significantly Increased the Odds of Dropping Out of High School from District-Level Studies

Type of Risk Factor	Chicago	Philadelphia	Fall River
Academic Performance	☐ Receiving more than one grade of F in core academic courses or not earning enough credits to be promoted during 9th grade	☐ Earning an F in English or mathematics during 6th grade ☐ Failing one or more courses during 8th grade ☐ Entering 9th grade with math or reading scores below 8th grade level ☐ Being retained in 9th grade	☐ Significant drop in grade point average from 8th to 9th grade ☐ Being retained in any grade during K–8 or in high school
Educational Engagement	(n/a)	☐ Low attendance (80 percent or lower) during 6th grade ☐ Receiving a failing classroom behavior mark during 6th grade* ☐ Low attendance during 8th grade ☐ Low attendance during the first 30 days of 9th grade	☐ Significant drop in attendance beginning in 6th grade and worsening in subsequent years

* Recent longitudinal studies typically have not had good access to other measures of behavior, such as number of office referrals, that might prove predictive in addition to or in place of teacher reports.

If these students can be identified as early as sixth grade, a program targeting these at-risk students should be in place to get them on a path to post-secondary education.

Research also shows middle school as a time when students benefit the most from career exploration, building self-awareness, learning their career choices, and developing their personal plan for achieving future goals. Career exploration is key when provided to students in middle school through CTE courses, Career and Technical Student Organizations as well as work-based learning experiences with career and academic planning through scalable technology. (ACTE, April 2017)

An example of a successful program is the Career Coach program in Arkansas. In schools that have a Career Coach, there has been a 22% increase in the college going rate between 2009 and 2015 (Advance CTE, 2016). And applications for financial aid in these schools have increased 32% (Advance CTE, 2016).

Exploratory programs can play a key role in engaging middle school students. Anfara & Brown (2000) state that middle-level students need an extended curriculum that allows them to explore new areas of interest early in their educational careers. Supplemental to the basic curriculum, exploratory courses expose students to areas of learning that are usually not covered in the traditional curriculum, such as speech, drama, business, industrial arts, and career education. Community colleges have the resources to assist with exploratory programs. The hands-on nature of technical programs offered at community colleges may be a great catalyst for the imagination of this age group.

PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED

There are various cracks in the current pipeline, how do we seal those cracks? We know career-based activities engage middle school students and engage them for longer periods of time. The challenge is ensuring the students are matched with the appropriate activities.

Research by Caskey & Anfara (2014) verifies that middle school students are more interested in authentic learning experiences and real-life experiences than traditional academic subjects. At this age they are also developing the ability to think about the future and develop personal goals. By capturing the imagination of middle school students at an age when they are forming future goals it is believed to better prepare and propel them into high school and a post-secondary future.

Our plan would start in sixth grade when students at risk are identifiable. An in-depth online course would be developed to assess student's strengths, like Gallups CliftonStrengths for Students. This assessment will allow students to recognize their strengths, which is key to helping students find their intrinsic motivation.

Our program would require the development of an online network for all Community Colleges in the state where students' strengths would then be aligned with specific programs at each institution. This would allow students to see what potential programs align best with their strengths not just at the closest or most familiar institution, but across all institutions in Ohio. The online network would then outline potential careers that are available in that region based on the degree or certificate program they were matched with.

During the remaining middle school years, the program would allow for community introductions to careers. This helps younger students see beyond general education.

The program would utilize community resources such as volunteers and retirees from established groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis and would include additional programs such as a lunch buddy system.

In addition to community partnerships, it will be important to strengthen partnerships with Ohio's 13 TRIO Talent Search programs hosted within Ohio colleges. These programs currently serve the population we are seeking to help and complete the bridge from career exploration to college enrollment.

As career paths are narrowed and understood the next step would be to develop career coaching as they enter high school. Once students' strengths are matched to career paths, they can be assigned a genre of careers to explore within those strengths. This is where local businesses would become a part of the process. Local businesses can present how the student's skills and training will be used in the workforce. They can share their desire for a highly trained workforce and the financial reward available for such skills. This demonstrates a complete path from middle school to employment and the role of both high school and college completion.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

As with most programs, human and financial capital may be an issue at the front end of the project. (ACTE, April 2017) Whether an established in-depth strengths assessment was used, or one was developed for these purposes, funding would need to be identified. Student assessment takes a commitment of time and personnel by a school district.

Another challenge would be defining the boundaries of participation. Would this program focus on all 6th grade students, or would time and resources be focused on students that were identified as at-risk of dropping out of school?

The online network of Community College programs would be a challenge to develop. The data is out there and available, but each College would be responsible for ensuring their data is up to date. The success of the program would rely on having accurate data supplied by each institution.

Some Colleges already have a program, like Emsi, that allows their students to align their degree and certificate programs with available job openings. There may be resistance to abandoning individual data and pooling it into one system but the savings and potential student enrollment to each institution may be a draw for them to participate in this.

To build upon recognized strengths and identified programs of study, the community resources would play an important part for the program to be successful. Various community groups would have to dedicate time and energy to meet and work with students to secure a trained workforce for the community's future.

With few available resources within school districts, the time available for Guidance Counselors to assist with the program could also be a challenge. Parents may also push back on their child spending time on this program, which could be seen as taking away from time spent in the classroom. It is important that our program enhances the current work of the school districts and does not detract from its resources.

CONCLUSION

Some things have been clear in our exploration of this program. First, identifying students at risk of leaving high school can be identified at a critical age. Second, Career Coach program models are available and have proven to be successful in increasing college enrollment and use of federal financial aid. Third, tools and grant funded programs already exist that simply need to be employed in a cohesive plan that leaves a small footprint on the host middle and high schools.

Community colleges may be able to provide the coordination that is needed to connect each resource into a viable program. A program of this type fits squarely into the mission of community colleges; building a strong workforce for their community. Evidence is there to indicate that intervention begins at the 6th grade level and that there are ways to effectively seal the cracks of the college bound pipeline.

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