



Tips on Refugee Youth College Preparation

Importance of College Preparation

College preparation programs help refugee youth to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence, and aspirations they need to enroll in higher education. (1) It is important for refugee youth to understand the role of completing high school and continuing post-secondary education in order to increase self sufficiency, improve employment prospects and raise income potential. Completion of some college, even one semester at a community college, consistently leads to higher average lifetime earnings. (2)

Major Outcomes

College preparation programs have many positive outcomes for refugee youth, including:

- Higher college enrollment for refugee youth
- Lower school dropout rates
- Enhanced self-esteem and self-sufficiency
- Development of organizational and critical thinking skills
- Increased enrollment in mathematics and science courses
- More refugees in skilled employment positions

Components in Successful College Preparation Programs

In order to be most effective, college preparation programs should be of substantial duration and focus on readiness rather than remediation. (3) They should begin offering students information about college and financial aid as early as possible in order to influence education outcomes for students.

A successful college preparation program provides refugee youth with a range of support systems. There are three types of support:

Academic Support (4)

- *Course Selection.* The program should ensure that students take appropriate courses in school so that they have a competitive college application and develop the skills to succeed in college courses. Most colleges seek applicants who have successfully completed three or four math courses and three science courses at the high school level (5). A close monitoring of a student's course selection should begin as early as junior high.
- *Study Skills.* The program should support the development of study skills so that students learn the strategies to succeed in an academic





environment. For example, instructing students in the use of a divider system to organize, time management, and how to form and effectively use study groups.

- *Test Preparation.* Test preparation classes or workshops should focus on each of the required examinations for college entrance. This includes a review of test layout, scoring systems, and study strategies (i.e. making flashcards, practicing vocabulary).

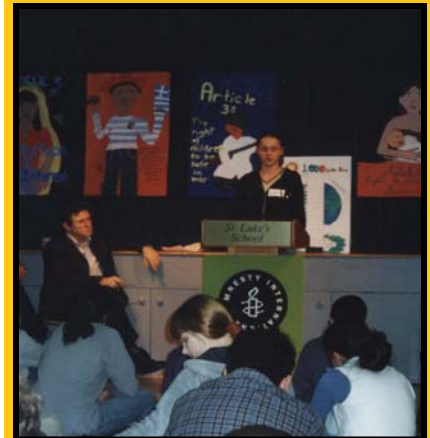
Social Support (6)

- *High Expectations.* Refugee youth planning for college should be encouraged to set high expectations, earn the best grades possible, and connect with mentors to support their goals.
- *Mentorship.* A mentor provides youth with a role model. (7) Mentors can help youth refugees raise their grades, increase their self-confidence and take pride in achievement while learning how to be more successful in class. In addition, mentors can play a critical role in maintaining a student's interest in school, fostering understanding of the link between current studies and the future, and guiding them through the postsecondary application process. (8)
- *Parental Involvement.* A program can support parental involvement by keeping parents informed about the college application process and services offered by the program. Strategies to boost parent involvement include program orientation programs, parent workshops on college admissions and financial aid and support with paperwork.



College Admissions Support (9)

- *Application Process Assistance.* The college application process can be daunting, particularly for refugee youth who may be unfamiliar with the U.S. higher education system. The program should instruct students on how to get into a college and how to assess whether a university is a good match financially and culturally. Students must learn how to fill out college applications and how to critically examine a university's student body, policies, retention rates and school environment.
- *Financial Aid Support.* Financial resources play a significant role in a young person's ability to attend college. The program should assist students in learning about college funding opportunities, filling out financial aid packets, and meeting deadlines for scholarships, loans, and grants. Simply making forms available and deadlines explicit is helpful, but the program should also help families negotiate the massive paperwork required for preparing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Pell Grants, and other scholarships.
- *College Visits.* If possible, the program should enable students' to visit colleges and learn more about a university's academic affairs and student life.





Key Partners

Effective usage of key partnerships involves :

- Keeping **school administrators** informed about the support offered by the IRC college preparation program.
- Communicating with students' **academic advisors** so that youth are supported with their course selection and college admissions.
- Collecting information about the school's college preparation activities (i.e. college fairs) from the **school guidance counselor**.
- Collaborate with **community partners** who also provide academic support to the refugee youth population so that the programs serve as complements.
- Bring in current **college students** to speak with refugee youth about college and the application process.



Key Indicators

Hard Indicators:

- Number of refugee youth participating in the program
- Number of students who complete and submit college and financial aid applications
- Number of college orientations attended
- College matriculation rates
- High school graduation rates
- SAT/PSAT/ACT scores
- Student course selection

Soft Indicators:

- Understanding of college application and financial aid process
- Collaboration with local schools
- Parental involvement



Data Collection

Basic data collection tools that can be used to monitor and evaluate the success of college preparation programs include:

- Site visits and observation of the program
- Focus group and individual interviews with participants
- Participant, school, and parent questionnaires
- Program attendance and graduation/matriculation records
- SAT/PSAT/ACT scores and transcripts (for course selection)
- Parent orientation attendance



Examples of a College Preparation Program

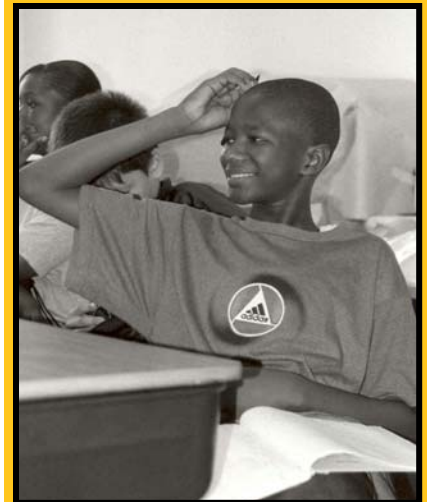
- Sponsor-A-Scholar (SAS) is a program with volunteer mentors that provide educational assistance while academic coordinators help with college applications and understanding financial aid systems. Youth that participated in the SAS program consistently had higher GPAs in 10th and 11th grade and 12th graders were more likely to attend college. (10)
- The precollegiate English-as-a-Second-Language summer program for Southeast Asian high school students at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point uses cultural storytelling to build a bridge between the self and the new academic setting. It also uses Southeast Asian college students as peer counselors to provide bilingual support. (11)



Resources

The following resources provide additional information on college preparation tools and refugee education:

- College Planning Guide and College and University Search. <http://www.offtocollege.com>.
- McBrien, Lynn J. " Educational Needs and Barriers for Refugee Students in the United States: A Review of the Literature" *Review of Educational Research* 75.3 (2005): 329-364.
- Peterson's Planner. <http://www.petersons.com/>
- Test Prep Review. <http://www.testprepreview.com/>
- Tierney, William G., Corwin, Zoë B. & Colyar, Julia E.. *Preparing For College: Nine Elements of Effective Outreach*. State University of New York Press, 2004.





References

1. Oesterreich, Heather. Characteristics of Effective Urban College Preparation Programs. ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. <http://www.ericdigests.org/2001-3/effective.htm>
2. Child Trends. *Division A. Educational Achievement*. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 5.
3. Oesterreich.
4. Oesterreich.
5. US Department of Education. *What is Think College Early*. Archived Information. <http://www.ed.gov/students/prep/college/thinkcollege/early/aboutus/edlite-whatistce.html>
6. Oesterreich.
7. U.S. Department of Education Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. *YES, YOU CAN: A Guide for Establishing Mentoring Programs to Prepare Youth for College*. October 1998, 4.
8. U.S. Department of Education Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 10.
9. Oesterreich.
10. Child Trends, 42
11. Werner-Smith, Anne M. & Smolkin, Laura B. "An ESL/Bilingual/Bicultural Pre-collegiate Program for Southeast Asian Refugee High School Students." *Bilingual Research Journal* 19.3-4 (1995):395-408.

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