



# Middle School Blugold Beginnings Program: An Assessment of Growth and Outcomes of Students Enrolled in the Program

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## Background

Mentoring programs have grown steadily in number over the past few years, with more than 5,000 such programs currently serving approximately three million youth (National Mentoring Partnership, 2006). Over the past 20 years, college access programs have been developed with the intent of creating an atmosphere which allows students to become more familiar with what a college education entails. These programs also inform students on how to stay on track throughout high school in order to get accepted into college (Klopoff & Martinez, 2004; Krashen, 2005). College readiness is defined as possessing the skills to stay organized, understanding the course requirements needed to enter college, and maintaining a GPA above 3.0 to meet the requirements for being accepted (Conley, 2009).

The Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness Program works with local schools to provide a comprehensive college connection for 5th graders through high school seniors. When a student enters the middle school program, they are assigned a mentor who provides them with tutoring and mentoring services during resource time in the schools. The mentor works with students to complete the Blugold Beginnings college knowledge workbook that guides them through the processes involved in attaining a post-secondary education.

Some of the research used to develop the Middle School Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness Program includes:

- Parents of low-income, first generation, and minority students often lack a background in formal education, making it difficult for them to prepare their children for college within the home (Park, 2007).
- Youth from families with few assets are likely to see college as too expensive, potentially inhibiting current aspirations and effort (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004).
- Low-income families typically lack the economic resources necessary to pursue post-secondary education, a constraint that may impact students' expectations and behavior and cause low-income students to perform worse academically in middle and high school (Charles, Roseigno, & Torres, 2007).
- Several recent reports suggest that most adults, parents, and students are uninformed or poorly informed about the costs of attending college and the availability of financial aid. Even families who report that they expect college attendance after graduation lack awareness and understanding about college prices and financial aid (Perna, 2006).
- To help students overcome financial access barriers, schools have started adopting aspects of college culture within their daily functions (McClafferty et al., 2002).
- Achievement is maximized when students feel competent about their abilities, have personal goals to achieve, feel they have control over their success and failures, and are motivated intrinsically to learn (Eccles & Wigfield, 1985; Wentzel, 1991).

Since its inception, Blugold Beginnings Middle School Program has been preparing 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders for post-secondary education. The purpose of the current research is to investigate whether students in the program significantly increase their knowledge about post-secondary education and self-management skills over the course of being in the Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness Program. Researchers will also investigate whether this increased awareness coincides with increased feelings of comfort and confidence regarding higher education.

## Method

### Mentoring Sessions

Mentors met independently with students twice a week during study halls and resource hours; during this time, they assisted their mentees with homework and spent approximately one half-hour discussing the contents in the Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness workbook. The mentors and mentees covered one of twenty-seven topics per week (including study skills, test taking tips, building a resume, organizational skills, requirements for post-secondary education, etc.). Mentees then completed a worksheet that encouraged students to incorporate the skill for that week into their own lives.

### Instruments

Researchers assessed students' levels of homework self-management using the Homework Management Survey to determine if students who participate in the Blugold Beginnings Middle School Program tend to report better management skills after having participated in the program and working with a mentor (Xu & Corso, 2003). This 23-item survey utilizes a 5-point Likert scale (1=Rarely, 5=Never) to assess how successful students are at managing their time and attention. Example items on the attention subscale included how often students reported:

- "Playing around will affect things while doing my homework"
- "Slipping back on homework to play"

The "college knowledge" surveys consisted of twenty-seven multiple choice questions to gauge students' retention of key concepts from the content of the workbook. One example of one of the multiple choice questions on the survey used to assess college knowledge is:

- "The cost of filling out the FAFSA is usually form fee"
  - a) \$20
  - b) \$89
  - c) \$45
  - d) \$0

Students were also asked to respond to several Likert scale questions to assess changes in students' self-reported levels of comfort and confidence regarding post-secondary education. Examples of these items included:

- "I will continue my education after high school."
- "I can afford to continue my education after high school."

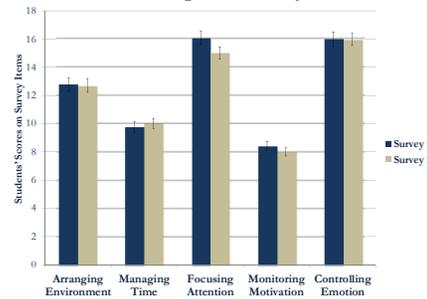
Finally, students reported their post-secondary aspirations by indicating the level of post-secondary education they wish to achieve after high school and the length of time they wished to pursue higher education.

### Blugold Beginnings Participants

A total of 104 middle school students currently enrolled in the Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness Program participated in this research. The inclusion criteria were students self-identifying as being from traditionally underrepresented populations and have completed the "college knowledge" pre (Survey 1) and midyear assessment (Survey 2).

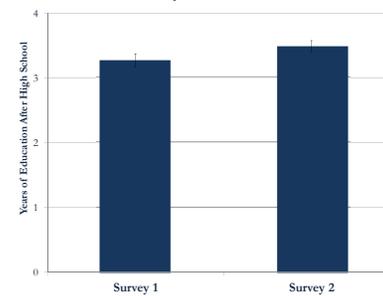
## Results

### Students' Change on Homework Management Survey



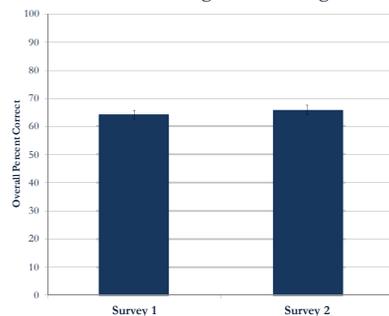
Students who participated in the Blugold Beginnings research (N=84) were assessed on their level of homework management using five subscales. Students did not show significant changes in their efforts to arrange their environment, manage their time, monitor their motivation, or control emotion (all  $p>.05$ ). However, students demonstrated significant changes in their efforts to focus their attention from the first survey ( $M=16.07, SD=4.17$ ) to the second survey ( $M=15.00, SD=4.04$ ),  $t(83)=2.47, p=.015$ .

### Aspirations for Level of Post-Secondary Education



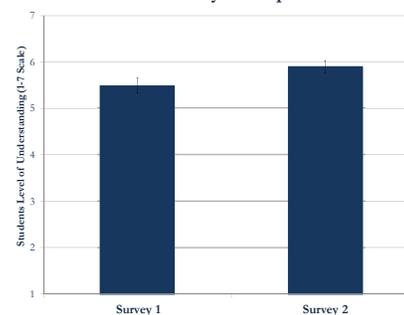
Students in the middle school sample (N=104) indicated significant increases in the level of education they wished to obtain after high school from the first survey ( $M=3.27, SD=0.94$ ) to the midyear survey ( $M=3.49, SD=0.82$ ),  $t(103)=-2.81, p=.006$ .

### Overall Change in Knowledge



Middle school students in this sample (N=104) did not show a significant increase in their retention of information regarding post-secondary concepts from the first survey ( $M=64.18, SD=15.56$ ) to the midyear survey ( $M=65.89, SD=17.79$ ),  $t(103)=-1.02, p=.311$ .

### Self-Reported Knowledge of Post-Secondary Concepts



Students in the middle school sample (N=104) demonstrated significant increases in their self-reported understanding of the steps needed to get into a post-secondary program of their choice from the first survey ( $M=5.48, SD=1.64$ ) to the midyear survey ( $M=5.90, SD=1.37$ ),  $t(103)=-2.46, p=.016$ .

## Discussion

The overall findings from the Middle School Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness Program suggest that participants tend to increase in the amount of post-secondary education they wish to obtain, their self-reported understanding of the steps necessary to attain a post-secondary education, and also a significant decrease in their self-reported rate of participating in distracting activities while working to complete homework assignments.

While participants reported an overall increase in knowledge from the first survey to the second survey, the results were not statistically significant. One reason for this might be that many students in the middle school program have had continuous involvement in the Blugold Beginnings program from previous years, however there is still room for improvement on this measure. On the Homework Management survey, students did not indicate significant changes in their behaviors on several subscales, including their abilities to arrange their environment, manage their time, monitor motivation, and control their emotion. While the Blugold Beginnings Middle School Program does not focus on students developing skills for controlling their emotions, time management is one measure on which there is a strong emphasis.

Some of the limitations to this study are that students self-selected into participating in the program and also that researchers were unable to establish a control comparison. This makes it difficult to determine whether the students who participate in this program tend to have differences in their levels of motivation prior to working with mentors.

Because the second survey was administered halfway through the academic year, students may further increase on survey measures through the end of the program. Researchers will again assess student outcomes in May to investigate whether further changes on these measures occur.

Investigators also plan to follow students in the eighth grade through next fall to determine whether students who participate in the Blugold Beginnings Middle School Program tend to enroll in college preparatory classes at a higher rate than other students who did not participate in this program.

The Blugold Beginnings Program will continue to develop the program curriculum and mentor workbooks to ensure that the concepts covered during mentoring sessions are taught effectively and also that the material is engaging to the students who participate.

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