



# High School Blugold Beginnings Program: An Investigation of Program Impact

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## Background

Over the past few years, mentoring programs have been growing in number. More than 5,000 programs currently serve approximately three million youth (National Mentoring Partnership, 2006). College access programs are one form of mentoring, and have been developed over the past 20 years to create an atmosphere in the classroom where students can become more familiar with what a college education entails (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 High School Program works with local schools to provide a comprehensive college connection for high school students. When a student enters the program, they are paired with a mentor who provides them with tutoring and mentoring services and walks them through the Blugold Beginnings college knowledge workbook that guides them, step-by-step, through the process involved in attaining a post-secondary education. Studies have shown that self-efficacy is linked to student motivation and achievement in school (Schunk, 1989). The program now assesses students' level of self-efficacy to determine whether students tend to increase in feelings of self-efficacy after participating in the Blugold Beginnings program.

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

- 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).
- Recent studies show that students that set specific goals tend to have more positive outcomes and success (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992).
- 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).
- Different aspiration levels may affect goal priorities such as the ability to "correctly" identify topics, jobs, and post-secondary education (Eckles & Wigfield, 2002).
- Acculturation, ethnic identity, and conscientiousness significantly predict career decision self-efficacy for girls (Ojeda et al., 2012).

The purpose of the current research is to investigate whether students in the Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness High School Program significantly increase their knowledge about post-secondary education and to assess whether this increased awareness coincides with an rise in students' feelings of self-efficacy and academic aspirations.

## Method

### Mentoring Sessions

Twice a week mentors met independently with students during study halls and resource hours. During this time, they discussed the Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness workbook for approximately one half-hour and assisted with homework. The mentor and mentee covered one of twenty-seven topics each week (including study skills, test taking tips, building a resume, organizational skills, requirements for post-secondary education, and standardized tests). At the end of the lesson, mentees completed a worksheet that encourages students to incorporate the skill for that week into their own lives.

### Instruments

The "college knowledge" survey consisted of 27 multiple choice questions to gauge students' retention of key concepts from the content of the workbook. Below is an example of the multiple choice questions from the survey:

- One source of funding that you don't have to pay back and can help pay for continuing your education is:
  - a) Asking for your tuition to be waived
  - b) Federal student loans
  - c) Local Scholarships
  - d) Private loans from a bank

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

- "I feel comfortable talking about higher education."
- "I will be successful in higher education (education programs after high school)."

Finally, students' aspirations regarding post-secondary education plans were assessed:

- Which post-secondary program would you like to attend after high school? (check one)
  - \_\_\_ No school
  - \_\_\_ Apprenticeship
  - \_\_\_ Military/Army
  - \_\_\_ 2-Year College
  - \_\_\_ 4-Year College

A supplemental survey containing 19 Likert scale questions was also administered to measure students' self-efficacy for academic achievement as well as their self-efficacy for self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Examples include:

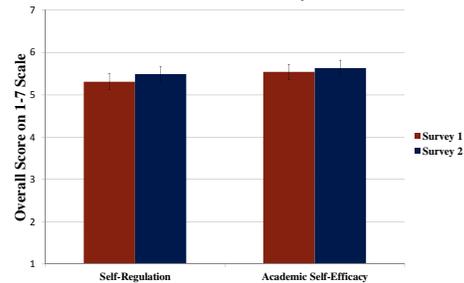
- "How well can you take notes of class instruction?"
- "How well can you learn algebra?"

### Blugold Beginnings Participants

The Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness High School Program serves a total of 103 students, 7 from Altona High School, 37 from Memorial High School, and 57 from North High School. All of the students in these schools were invited to participate in the program upon the completion of a parental consent form. Students who identified as low-income, first-generation, or minority were highly encouraged to join the program.

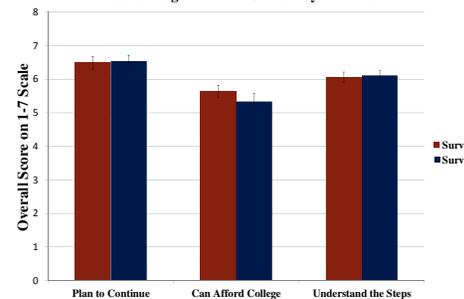
## Results

### Students' Scores on Self-Efficacy Subscales



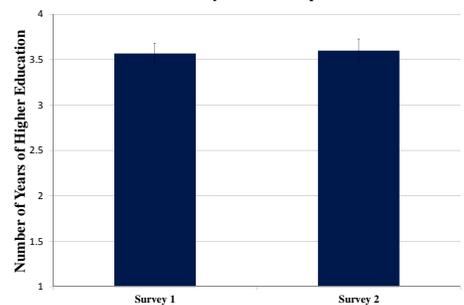
Students in the Blugold Beginnings High School Program (N=27) did not significantly increase in their level of self-efficacy for self-regulation from the first survey (M=5.31, SD=1.01) to the second survey (M=5.49, SD=.92),  $t(26) = -.84, p>.05$ . Additionally, students levels of academic self-efficacy did not significantly change from the first survey (M=5.54, SD=.93) to the second survey (M=5.63, SD=1.00),  $t(26) = -.43, p>.05$ .

### Continuing on to Post-Secondary Education



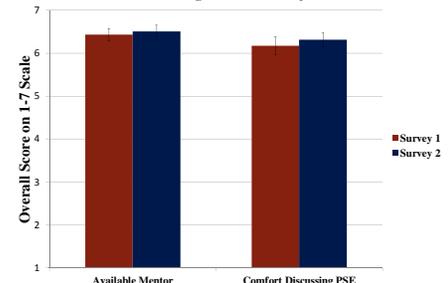
Students in the Blugold Beginnings High School Program (N=35) did not significantly increase in their self-reported belief of continuing their education after high school from the first survey (M=6.49, SD=1.12) to the second survey (M=6.54, SD=1.41),  $t(34) = 1.56, p>.05$ . Finally, students' self-reported confidence of knowing the steps necessary to get into an education program after high school did not significantly increase from the first survey (M=6.06, SD=.87) to the second survey (M=6.11, SD=.83),  $t(34) = -.36, p>.05$ .

### Post-Secondary Education Aspirations



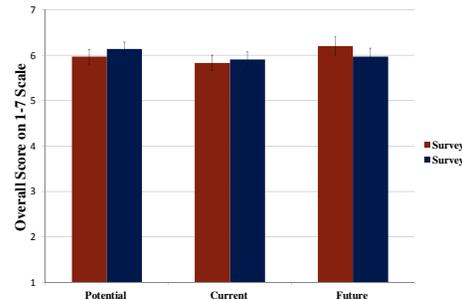
Students in the Blugold Beginnings High School Program were asked which post-secondary program and how long they planned to continue their education after high school. Students who participated in this study (N=35) did not significantly increase in the length of time they wished to pursue their education after high school from the first survey (M=3.57, SD=.68) to the second survey (M=3.60, SD=.78),  $t(34) = -.26, p>.05$ .

### Comfort Discussing Post-Secondary Education



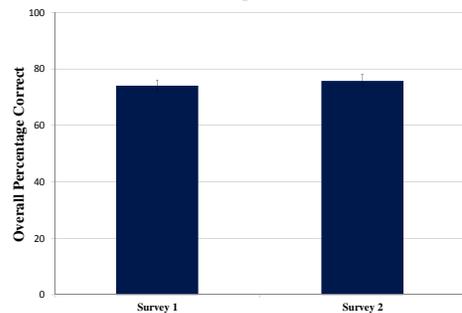
Students in the Blugold Beginnings High School Program (N=35) did not significantly increase in their self-reported feelings of whether they had a mentor in their lives to talk to about college from the first survey (M=6.43, SD=.85) to the second survey (M=6.51, SD=.82),  $t(34) = -.52, p>.05$ . Additionally, students' level of comfort talking about post-secondary education (PSE) did not significantly increase from the first survey (M=6.17, SD=1.27) to the second survey (M=6.31, SD=.96),  $t(34) = -.84, p>.05$ .

### Students' Perceived Levels of Academic Success



Students in the Blugold Beginnings High School Program (N=35) did not significantly increase on levels of their self-reported potential for being successful in post-secondary classes from the first survey (M=5.97, SD=.94) to the second survey (M=6.15, SD=.86),  $t(34) = -1.05, p>.05$ . Students' self-reported belief of currently being a successful student also did not significantly increase from the first survey (M=5.83, SD=.98) to the second survey (M=5.91, SD=.95),  $t(34) = -.72, p>.05$ . Finally, students' self-reported confidence of being successful in their future post-secondary education did not significantly increase from the first survey (M=6.20, SD=1.18) to the second survey (M=5.97, SD=1.15),  $t(33) = 1.31, p>.05$ .

### Retention of Program Information



Students in the Blugold Beginnings High School Program (N=36) did not significantly increase in their knowledge of post-secondary concepts from the first survey (M=74.09, SD=11.25) to the second survey (M=75.79, SD=12.90),  $t(35) = -.60, p>.05$ .

## Discussion

Overall, researchers found that students in the Blugold Beginnings College and Career Readiness High School Program did not significantly improve on the outcomes assessed in this study. On all but two of these measures (perceived potential of being successful in the future; ability to afford a post-secondary education) students showed increases in the anticipated direction, however these changes were all relatively small.

On the two measures that were not in the anticipated direction, previous research has investigated the link between future aspirations and students' perceptions of whether they are able to afford a post-secondary education. This research suggests that students' academic aspirations may be lower if they believe that post-secondary education is not financially obtainable (Destin & Oyserman, 2009). While the decreasing scores were not statistically significant, the program can work to continue to inform students about available funding options for pursuing higher education.

Two of the limitations to this study are that students self-selected into participating in the program and also the lack of a control comparison. This makes it difficult to determine whether the students participating in this program tend to have differences in their levels of motivation, however the results of this study were not statistically significant regardless. Because the second survey was administered halfway through the academic year, there may be a significant increase in students' scores from the first survey to the third survey which will be administered at the end of the academic year.

Another limitation to this research was that students started the program reporting relatively high levels of confidence on several of the measures, including whether they had a mentor they felt comfortable talking to, their level of comfort discussing post-secondary education, and their levels of aspiration for post-secondary education. This created a low ceiling for gauging changes in responses from the first survey to the second survey. A final limitation was that the number of students participating in this study was relatively small, therefore decreasing the ability to detect significant changes within the sample.

Researchers will assess student outcomes at the end of this academic year and plan to follow current seniors through next fall to determine whether students who participate in the Blugold Beginnings High School Program continue on to post-secondary education at a higher rate than other students who score similarly on high education entrance exams. The Blugold Beginnings Program will also continue to develop the program curriculum to ensure that the concepts covered during mentoring sessions are effective and engaging to the students who participate.

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