

Career & College ClubsSM

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Promising Results:

Evaluating Effectiveness of Career & College ClubsSM

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ACT[®]

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Report Highlights

Career & College Clubs targets at-risk students.

- 91% of students at Career & College Clubs sites are from racial/ethnic minorities; 71% are Hispanic.
- 63% of students' mothers at Career & College Clubs sites, and 62% of fathers, have no postsecondary education experience.

Students who participate directly in Career & College Clubs have higher aspirations than their peers.

- They are more likely to plan on taking a core curriculum in high school that consists of four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of social science, and three years of natural science.
- They are more likely to aspire to a four year postsecondary degree, or higher.
- They are more likely to aspire to careers in science and technology.

Career & College Clubs has a school-wide impact.

- For schools that participated in the program for more than one year, there are statistically significant, school-wide increases in the percentage of students planning to take a core curriculum in high school, as well as the percentage of students planning to go college.

Overview

The Career & College Clubs program is designed to assist middle and high school youth in becoming, as the name suggests, college and career ready. The program is primarily designed for at-risk middle school students, and works through a distributed system. A coach (typically a counselor or a teacher) works with a subset of students at a school. The students, called mentors, are provided with help in the form of a defined curriculum that is designed to increase awareness of the antecedents of career, college, and life success. These mentors are then encouraged to take these lessons back to their school, and share them more widely with their peers. In this way, the lessons are infused throughout the school system to all students, and this, in turn, will lead to greater success for the student body as a whole.

Career & College Clubs was started five years ago by ALL Management Corporation, a nonprofit organization, in response to the need for a pre-high school intervention program that would directly impact student postsecondary success. In 2008, the model was tested at 18 school and nonprofit sites. By the 2012-2013 academic year, the program had expanded to 160+ plus schools and had cumulatively reached more than 15,000 California middle school students. Going forward, the program is focused on sustainable growth so that more students have access to Career & College Clubs' curriculum and peer-to-peer learning model.

*Schools should provide the tools, information, and resources to guide students and their parents through the postsecondary planning process and make successful educational transitions. **And it is important for schools to initiate this planning process by the middle school years.** (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005).*

This report looks at some preliminary results for the schools that have adopted Career & College Clubs. The desired long term outcome is, of course, college and career success, but, given the short time since the inception of the program, it is too early to look at outcomes such as that. In the shorter term, all that can be measured is if students are taking the steps that are known to be related to success in college and career. This report looks at data from the ACT Explore™ program. ACT Explore is an achievement test given primarily to grade 8 students. As part of the assessment process, students are asked about their educational plans. It is these plans that will be the subject of the analysis.

The Challenge

The Career & College Clubs program is specifically designed to be used with at-risk middle school students. While any kind of student could be considered as at-risk, it is generally underrepresented minority students and students at schools where a large percentage are classified as low socioeconomic status (“SES”) who comprise this group. The educational and economic difficulties of these groups is well known and well documented. They graduate from high school at lower rates, their college graduation rates are lower, and their unemployment rates are higher (NCES, 2012, BLS, 2012).

Figure 1 below shows the percentage of students who met the ACT Explore benchmark value in each subject area for both the group of all test takers, and a group of at-risk students. In this instance, at-risk is defined to be students who identify themselves as Hispanic, Black Non-Hispanic or Native American, or for whom neither parent has any education beyond high school. The ACT Explore benchmarks are scores that indicate a student is on track to be ready to take a first year credit bearing course in college (Allen & Scoring, 2005). ACT research shows that students who are not ready for first-year college level courses are less likely to enroll in college, less likely to return in the second year, and less likely to graduate in 6 years (ACT, 2013).

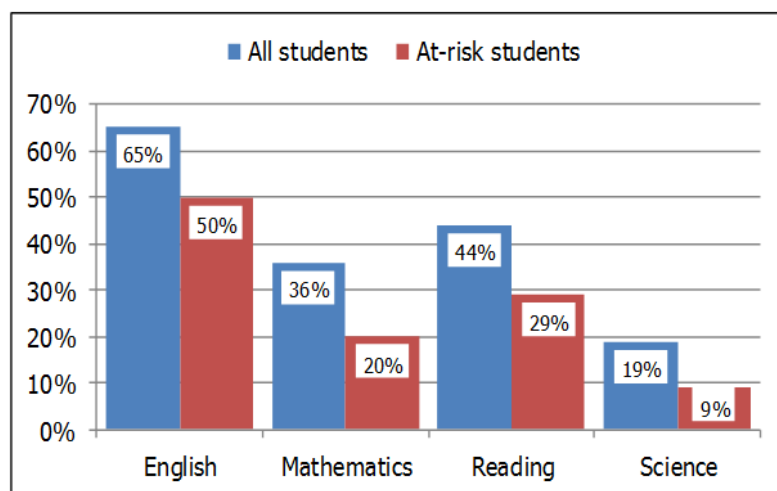


Figure 1. Percent of 8th graders on target for college readiness

No SES data is collected on ACT Explore, but data from the ACT shows a similar pattern, with students in the lowest SES groups (Family income of \$36,000 or less) being approximately 20% less likely to be college ready than a typical student in each subject area (ACT, 2013)

The problem of lack of preparation/lack of success is becoming a greater issue, as the number of students in these impacted groups increases. According to some estimates, the percentage of white non-Hispanic students in U.S. public high schools (grades 9-12) will be less than 50% in less than 10 years (Prescott & Bransberger, 2012). If the United States is to meet President Obama’s goal of being the world leader in college completion, there must be a concerted effort to increase both the college going rates and the college completion rates of underrepresented groups.

One of the purposes of Career & College Clubs is to make sure students are aware of and are taking the steps necessary for college and career success. These include such things as academic preparation, the importance of noncognitive skills (e.g. motivation or communication skills), applying to a college, creating a resume, and filling out the FAFSA form. For most of these, it is too soon in the life of the program to track them.

The approach taken here is to study variables over which the student has some control. As mentioned above, the two variables considered here are college plans and planned course taking. Specifically, students should be thinking about a post high school plan, and should be planning on taking a rigorous curriculum. On the ACT Explore assessment, students are asked about their education plans. The questions of interest here are the ones on education plans.

*Although students have ambitious educational and career aspirations, many lack basic information about how to fulfill their postsecondary goals.
(Wimberly & Noeth, 2005).*

The first question asks: “What are your education plans?” with possible options:

- A. Not planning to complete high school
- B. No plans after high school
- C. Military training
- D. Apprenticeship or other on-the-job training
- E. Career/technical school
- F. 2-year community or junior college
- G. 4-year college or university
- H. Graduate or professional study after 4-year degree
- I. Undecided about future educational plans
- J. Other

While any plans are good ones, options G and H are considered the most desirable. Thus, one of the variables considered is the percentage of students who give responses G and H. On the other end of the spectrum, option A is clearly undesirable, and options B and I indicate that students have not seriously thought of their career paths following high school. These will be referred to as the “no plans” options.

The second variable considered deals with course taking. The question of interest asks students how many years of a subject they are planning on taking in high school in each of the subject areas of English, mathematics and computer science, social science, and natural science. (number of years of foreign languages are also included, but are not included in this analysis.) The options range from none to four or more years. ACT defines a core curriculum as 4 years of English, 3 years each of mathematics, social science, and natural science. ACT has documented the value of taking a core curriculum in terms of higher academic achievement, increased college enrollment rates, in-

creased success in career training programs, lower college remediation rates, and higher retention rates (ACT, 2004).

Figure 2 below shows the college plans, and no-plan percentages for both the entire ACT Explore tested population, and the at-risk students. The at-risk group is slightly less likely to have college plans, but the percent with no plans is identical to that for the total group. Figure 3 shows the percent planning to meet the core requirements in each subject area. For each subject area, the percent planning to take core for the at-risk group is 5 to 8 percent lower than for the total group.

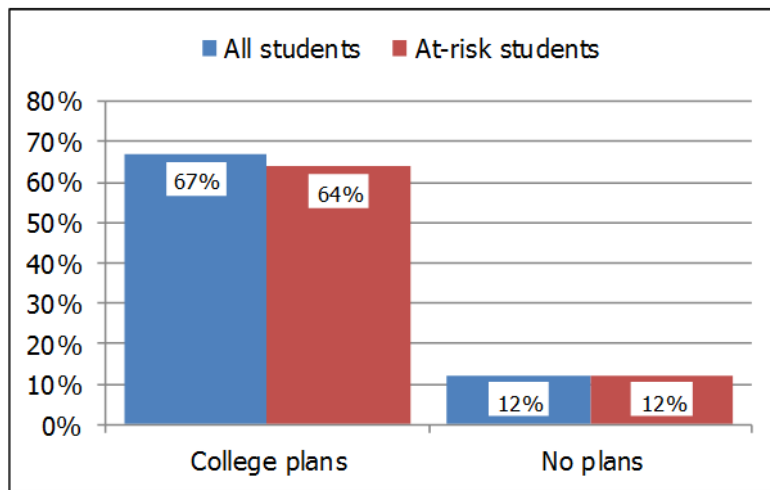


Figure 2. Educational plans

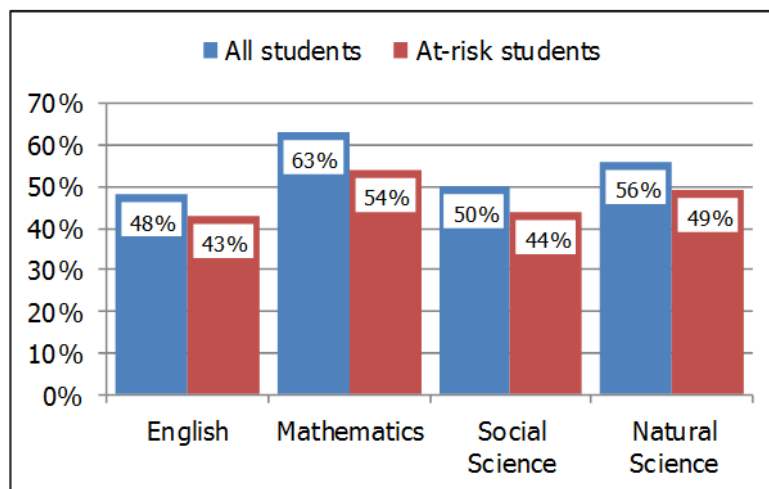


Figure 3. Percent planning to take core, by subject area.

Career & College Clubs Schools

For the purposes of this analysis, the list of schools that are part of College & Career Clubs were matched to a list of schools that use ACT Explore. There were 47 schools that participated in at least one of the school years from 2009-2010 to 2011-2012, and were also ACT Explore users. Figure 4 shows the ethnic breakdown for students from these schools. It should be noted that fewer than 50% of students responded to the question on race/ethnicity, but it is unlikely that this changes the overall picture.

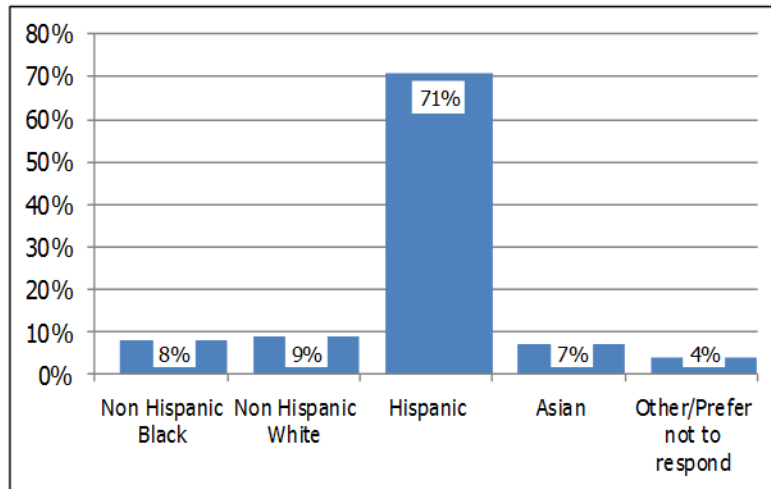


Figure 4. Race/ethnicity percentages for CCC schools

Figure 5 shows the parent’s education for both mother and father. The responses have been combined into three general categories, no high school degree, high school degree only, and at least some postsecondary experience. The latter category includes those who have career/technical degrees all the way to post graduate work. The percentages listed are for those who did not respond that they did not know. Again, this is more than 50% of all testers. It is more likely that those who did not respond would have lower levels of education than higher levels. As a comparison, among all ACT Explore test takers, the percentage reporting at least some college education for their mother and their father were 64% and 62% respectively. Among all test takers, the percent reporting no high school degree was 13% and 15% for mothers and fathers respectively.

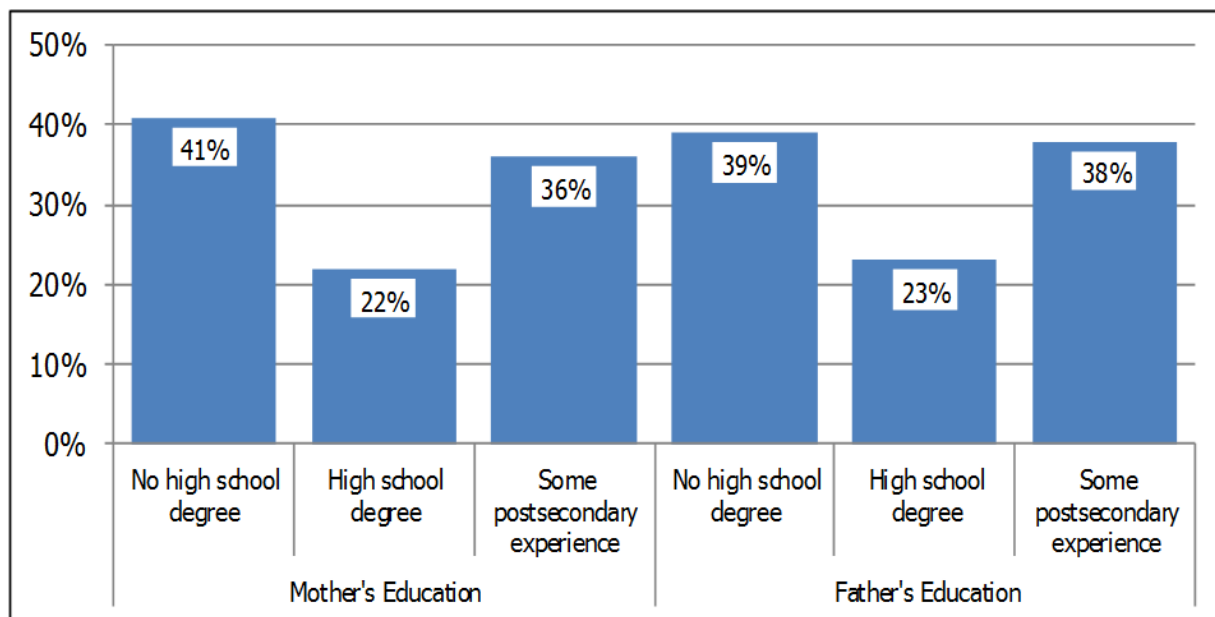


Figure 5. Parent’s education levels for CCC schools

It is apparent from Figures 4 and 5 that a majority of students who attend the schools that are currently part of the Career & College Clubs program are in categories that would typically be considered at-risk in terms of lack of knowledge of and preparation for college and career. In particular, the percentage who would be the first generation to attend a postsecondary institution is very high, and these students will typically lack the social networks of family and friends who could provide the knowledge of the steps required for postsecondary success.

Figure 6 below shows a measure of academic achievement for the students at the schools in the program, specifically the percent of students on target to meet the college readiness benchmarks. Comparing this to Figure 1, we see that students at these schools have lower achievement rates than even the typical at-risk students, and are far below the population of all students on this measure. The single most important indicator of college success is academic readiness. While it is not necessary that all students go to college, it is important that everyone have the opportunity to go to, and to succeed in college, if they so choose.

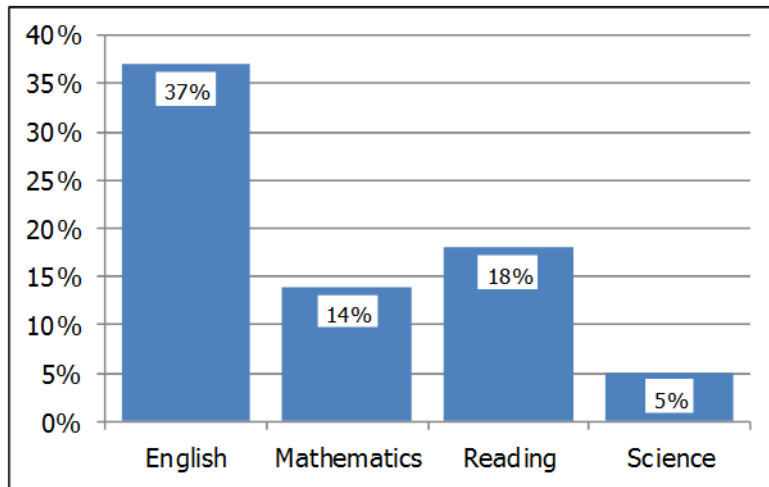


Figure 6. Percent meeting ACT Explore readiness targets for CCC schools

As far as the variables of interest, these are shown in Figures 7 and 8. Figure 7 has the educational plans for the schools. The percentage of students with no plans is higher than the percentage for the typical at risk population as given in Figure 2. Similarly, the percentage planning on going to college is smaller for the Career & College Clubs schools. Figure 8 gives the percentage of students planning to take core in each of the subject areas. In every subject, the percentage planning on taking core is lower than for a typical at-risk population, and is much lower than for the population of all students as seen in Figure 3. It is clear that there is work to be done at these schools.

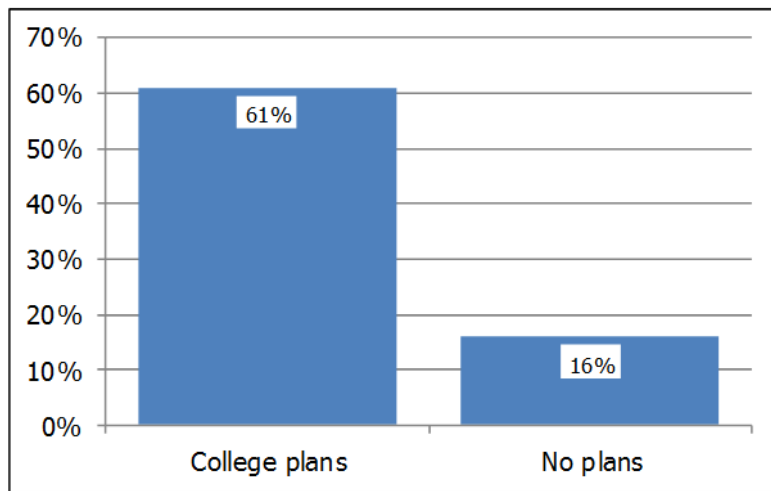


Figure 7. Educational plans for CCC schools

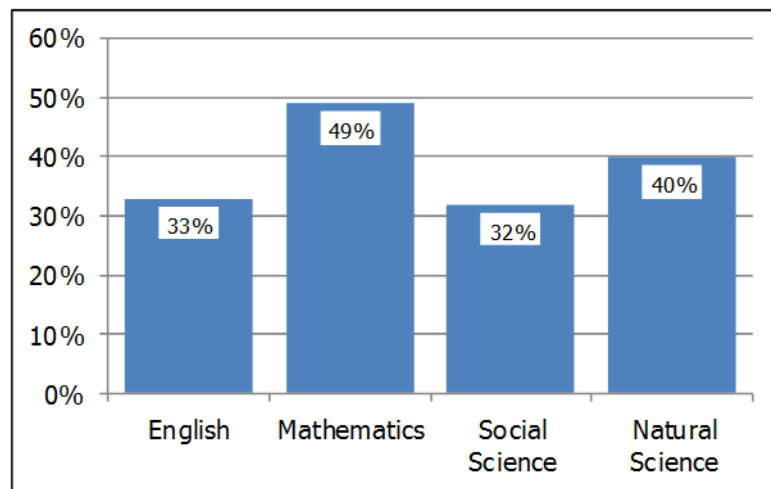


Figure 8. Percent planning to take core, by subject area, for CCC schools

Career & College Clubs Students

As previously stated, only a very small percentage of students at schools that participate in Career & College Clubs actually go through the program itself. These students, known as mentors, have the greatest access to the program's lessons and guidance, and so, in theory, should be the ones best placed to take advantage of them. Of course, the students who participate are not randomly selected from the school population. It is possible that the effects of the program are confounded with the ways that students are identified for a club.

Names of students who participated in the Career & College Clubs program at schools that use ACT Explore were provided to ACT. These names were matched to ACT Explore records using first and last name. Not every student could be matched. Some of this is due to differences in the students that schools choose to test with ACT Explore. Some is due to the mismatch between the names students provided when they took ACT Explore, and the names provided by the schools (e.g. Thomas versus Tom). Slightly more than 1,000 students were matched and are included in the analysis.

Figures 9 and 10 show the demographic breakdown of the matched group. As can be seen in Figure 9, the racial/ethnic breakdown is quite close to that for the schools as a whole, with the Career & College Clubs students being very slightly more diverse. Figure 10 shows parent's education. The education for the mothers of those in the Career & College Clubs group is at a higher level, although the difference is small. The differences in father's education are smaller, and are, in general, very close to the value for all students at Career & College Clubs schools.

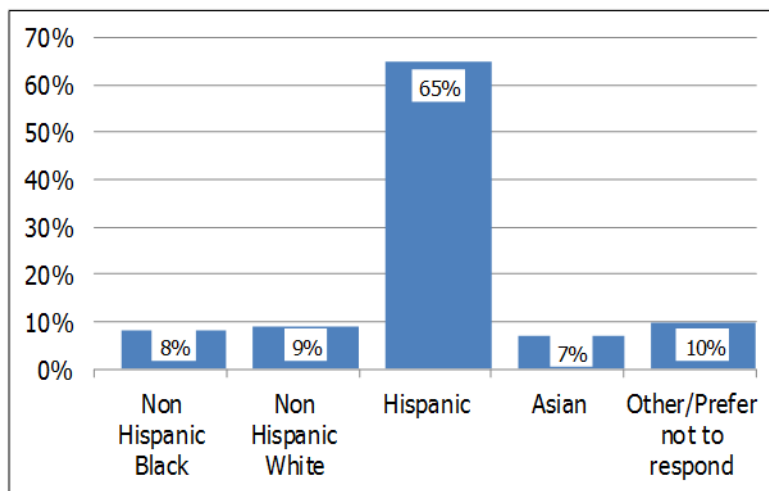


Figure 9. Race/ethnicity percentages for CCC students

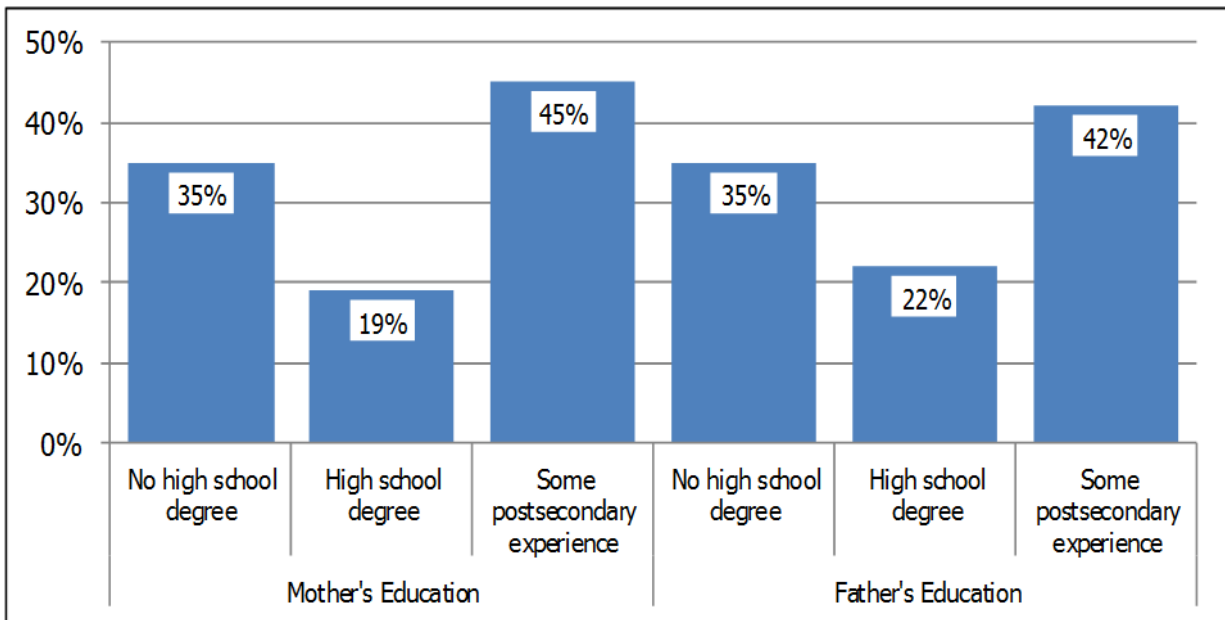


Figure 10. Parent's education for CCC students

In terms of academic preparedness, the students in the Career & College Club program are a bit more prepared than their peers at the schools. Overall, their preparation is very similar to that of the at-risk population, with slightly higher values in mathematics and reading (23% versus 20% and 32% versus 29%) and slightly lower in English and science (one percentage point lower in each of the two subjects). How much of this improvement is due to the program, and how much is due to the selection process is difficult to judge.

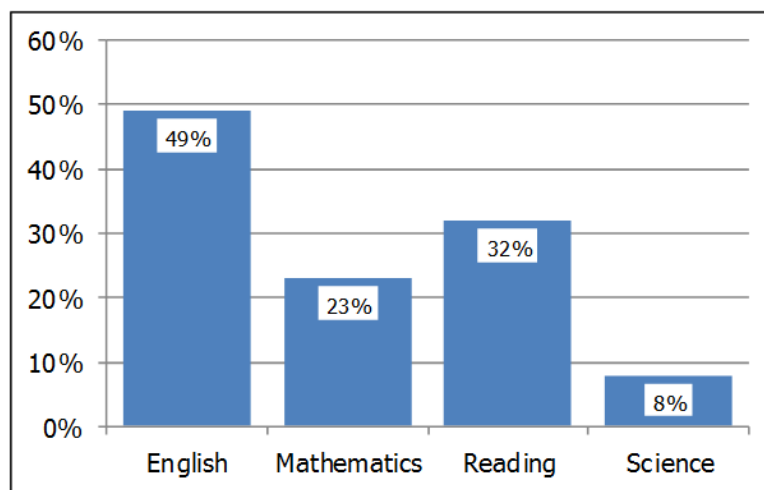


Figure 11. Percent meeting ACT Explore readiness targets for CCC students

In terms of the variables of interest, students who participate directly in Career & College Clubs far exceed the typical student in both career plans and course-taking plans. Figure 12 shows the educational plans for the group. Just over 80% reported that they planned to go to college. This is a higher figure than for the population of all ACT Explore testers, and is consistent with the plans of the highest scoring groups. Also worth noting is that the percentage of students who plan to stop their education after high school is zero for the Career & College Clubs group (3 students out of more than 1,200 total). This can certainly count as a success for the program.

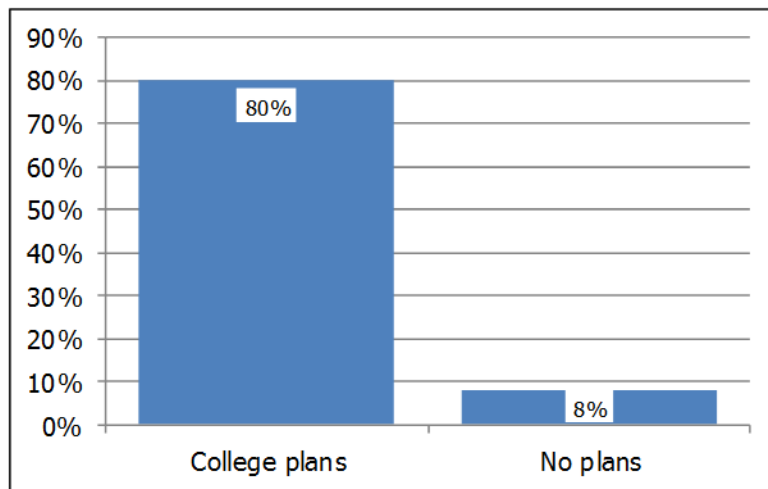


Figure 12. Educational plans for CCC students

Figure 13 shows values for the course taking plans. The percentage of the mentor group who are planning on taking a core curriculum in high school exceeds the value for the school as a whole by from 24 to 29 percentage points. Again, the values for this group exceed even the values for the ACT Explore tested population. This is consistent with the view that the program is very successful in terms of getting students to know and act on the behaviors necessary for college and career success.

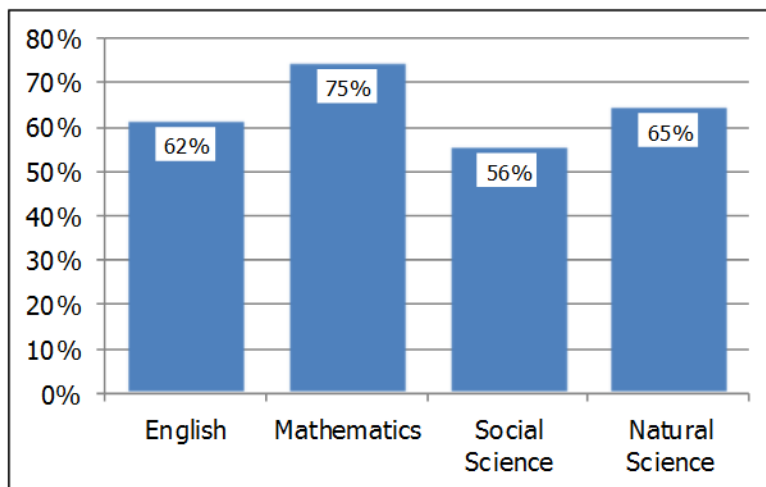


Figure 13. Percent planning to take core, by subject area, for CCC students

A final piece of data that is worth looking at is the career goals of students. One of the keys to success post high school is career planning. Figure 14 shows the career plans of students broken into six broad categories; Administration and Sales, Business Operations, Technical, Science and Technology, Arts, and Social Services. While a student's career goals in grade 8 are still fairly undeveloped, this does show what general area is of interest to them. From Figure 14, we see that Career & College Clubs students are generally like all students. One difference that is worthy of note is the percentage who want to pursue a career in the Science and Technology fields is quite a bit higher than for the 8th grade students. Given the lack of minority and first-generation students in these fields, this is very good news.

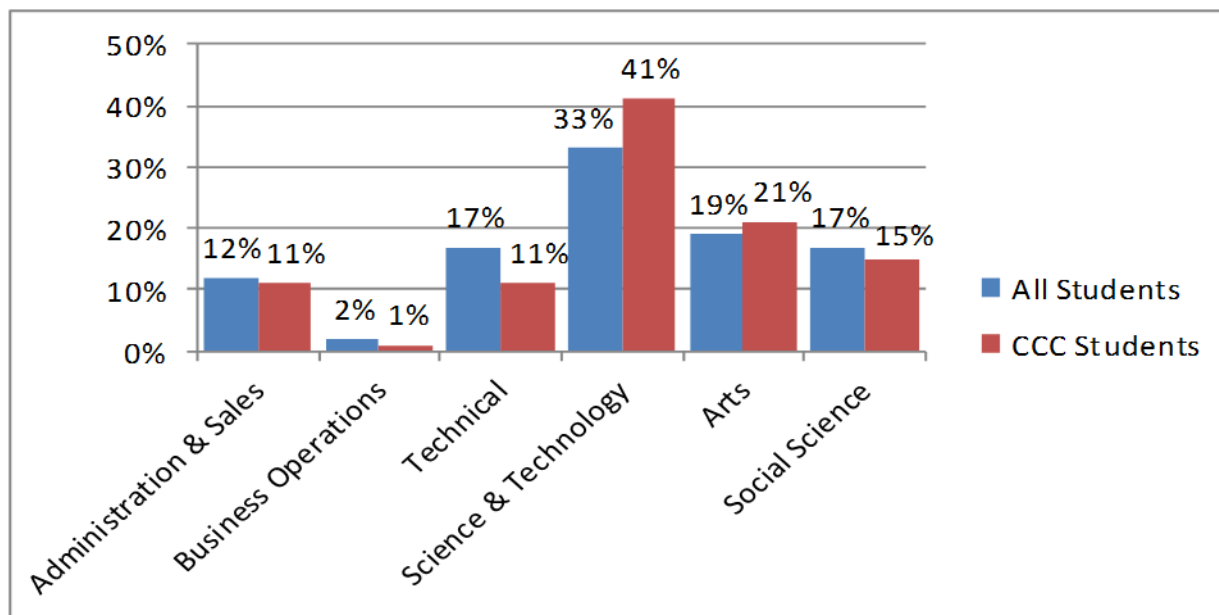


Figure 14. Career plans

Measuring Improvement at the School Level

One of the goals of the Career & College Clubs program is to get mentors to carry back the messages and awareness of the steps needed for college and career readiness to their peers at their school. If this is the case, there should be some improvement in the measures used here across time.

At this point, the evidence will be limited. Many schools have implemented the program for a single year, and there would not yet be evidence of any change. For schools that have been in the program for more than one year, the initial year of participation was used, and data from the initial year was compared to the most recent year for both the variables of interest. The results are shown in Figure 15. In each case, the variable moved in the desired direction, although in each case, the change was small. The percentage of students who planned to go to college increased by 4.6 percent, while the percentage having no plans decreased by almost 3 percent. For course taking plans, the change in the percentage planning to take core in all 4 subject areas was almost 5 percent with each the percentage planning to take core in each of the four subject areas increasing by between 2 and almost 7 percentage points. Thus, the program does seem to be having a positive impact with respect to these measures, and while the differences are small, they are statistically significant. Note that while a gain of 5 percent of students planning to go to college may seem small, if the percentage of these students who actually go to college increases by 5 percent, this will be a very successful effort. The program may have loftier goals, but there are few interventions that have proved successful at this level.

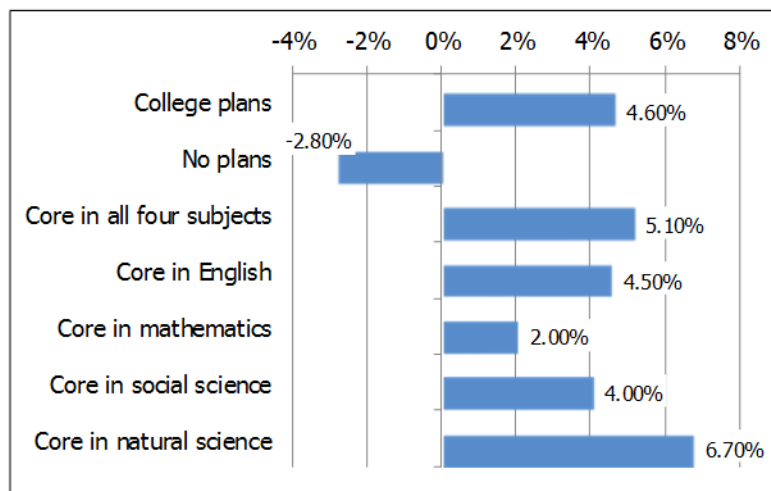


Figure 15. Changes in percentages for college and course taking plans

Future Research

While the results for the College & Career Clubs program have been positive so far, it is probably too soon to declare it a success. The current students need to continue to make academic progress, and take the appropriate steps if they are eventually to go to and succeed in some sort of postsecondary experience. The gains for the lower levels of the program need to be maintained, which is no easy thing. As the program matures, additional variables can be collected that indicate progress towards the ultimate goal of college and career success. These can include such intermediate steps as continuous enrollment through high school, getting a high school degree, college search, career investigation, college application, and taking appropriate assessments (not all postsecondary institutions require a test).

Ultimately, the goal is postsecondary enrollment, and the standards for this can be set up now. Based on current enrollment and test scores, an estimate can be created for the number of students who enroll in a postsecondary institution within, say, two years of high school graduation. The extent to which the current cohorts exceed that goal will say a lot about the success of this program. Of course, that data will not be available for a number of years. In the meantime, the measures considered here do seem to show that the program has had some success in terms of getting students to take actions that would increase their chance of college and career success.

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