



Written Proposal for the Moonshot for Kids Competition

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from

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**Proposal: Every student receives
high-quality college and career advising by ninth grade**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017, a national survey done by Harris Interactive found that while 92 percent of seventh- and eighth-graders said they were likely to attend college, 68 percent said they had little or no information about which classes to take to prepare for it (Great Schools, 2017). According to a 2009 U.S. Department of Education survey, high school students attending public school receive an average of 38 minutes of college admissions advice from their guidance counselors (Zasloff and Steckel, 2014). During this limited time, counselors address emotional, academic, and disciplinary needs in addition to basic college and career planning. Moreover, students need access to this information early enough to make informed decisions throughout their high school career and beyond. Waiting until students get into high school – let alone junior and senior year – is too late. Experts and evaluators of effective college preparation programs have found that the most impactful programs start in middle school, not in high school. These successful programs include counseling, involve parents and peers, and provide *concrete information* about college (Gibbons & Borders 2010). To meet this need, students, beginning in middle school, need to be equipped with college and career knowledge. Additionally, this knowledge needs to be delivered in a school setting, by a teacher, embedded directly into actual classrooms.

Our solution to this problem is the Education Opens Doors Program. We provide schools with a comprehensive college and career program that raises self-expectations, increases confidence, and builds skills in students who lack access to this critical information. By primarily partnering with school districts and other educational institutions, our program is delivered directly in classrooms: something unique about our program and the most important factor in our scaling. Because of this model, **the amount of college guidance time of 38 minutes over four years becomes 900 minutes in just one year.** Our team trains, coaches, and supports teachers who integrate these vital lessons into their academic curriculum. This leads to **systems-level change**, cultivating a college-going culture in every school we serve. As we continue to show widespread success, proven by data, we look to scale our program as far and wide as possible.

PROPOSAL

Introduction to the Problem

The National Association of School Admissions Counseling calculates that most students get only an average of 38 minutes with their school counselor over the whole four years of high school—or less than 10 minutes a year (Fudge, Lammers & Lanza, 2018). Additionally, if you consider the fact that counselors spend less than 20 percent of their time with students on actual college preparation, college planning is further diminished, to about seven minutes per student (Fudge, Lammers & Lanza, 2018). This is seven minutes to discuss all elements of what we refer to as “college knowledge”: college options, financial considerations, high schools of choice, career paths, the application process, academic and testing qualifications, and more. Consider also that these 38 minutes of total counseling time is likely being used most effectively on those students that seek out the assistance, as opposed to those students who might not be as motivated or versed in how to seek help. All too often, students in low-income communities attend schools where teachers and counselors have even more limited time to share the critical information and resources about their college and career options. In these communities, where students are often the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education, the lack of college and career knowledge during the middle school years is an information gap that may be too significant to overcome as they move into high school. Research shows that the level of academic and social/emotional achievement that students reach by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school (The Forgotten Middle, 2008). The middle grades matter - immensely. Often ignored is the fact that “during the middle grades, students in high-poverty environments are either launched on the path to high school graduation or knocked off-track” (Balfanz, 2009, p.7). Improving the college and career knowledge and skills by eighth grade is proven to have the most dramatic and impactful improvements on the level of readiness of high school graduates (The Forgotten Middle, 2008). Ignoring the middle school years is setting our students up for failure and the persistence of academic and motivational gaps.

Too often when discussing college and career readiness, academic factors or benchmarks are the sole focus. What is regularly ignored is the importance of mindset and self-efficacy on the path towards future success for our students. Research shows that in low-income and low-education households, positive social self-efficacy is linked directly to more positive beliefs about future education and career outlook (Gibbons & Border 2010). Furthermore, a recent National Research Council report (2012) focused on 21st-century skills confirms these conclusions: skills “such as self-efficacy, striving, and locus of control all positively contribute to college and career readiness” (Gaertner & McCarty 2015). Our program recognizes this and solves for it: middle school students with intrinsic aspirations for college and career are more likely to meet academic standards for admission into college.

Review of Past Attempts to Solve the Problem

Historical and current attempts to resolve the gap in college and career knowledge have been less than effective for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons is the current over-emphasis on technological resources. The solution to the information gap we hope to solve cannot only be a tech play; there are far too many districts, schools, and students that lack the resources – financial and professional – to rely too heavily on the internet or computer-based programs to close this gap.

Nearly 3 million students around the country must attempt to navigate the college-going process without home internet (NBC 2019). The cost of internet service and disparities in availability create disadvantages in urban and rural communities, both at school and at home. The college and career readiness tech solution Naviance, for instance, is only proliferating the gaps. An estimated 18% of students do not have internet access at home (NBC 2019). Attempts to bolster wraparound services for students to improve access to these resources – but also for mentorship, access to expertise, and test prep – have been unable to close the gaps because of the nature of their model: most services are provided *outside* of the traditional school day. Students of color, students from low-income communities, and first-generation college students have been found to almost exclusively rely upon their schools, during the school day, to help prepare them for college (Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2009). Providing students with a website to go to while at home has not worked, nor ever will work, at creating the systems-level change in college and career knowledge that our proposal aims to accomplish.

One in-school program that garners a lot of funding and attention for its attempt to solve this problem is the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) college readiness program. But AVID’s exclusive focus on college preparedness leaves out the many pathways available to students that might not include attendance at a traditional university. Moreover, AVID programs have historically been built for students that are on the cusp of academic achievement, not the students that are in need of intervention and full exposure to *all* of the options that they are capable of grasping in their futures (Mathews 2013).

Introduction of our Idea and Implementation Description

Unlike past and current attempts to close the gap in college and career knowledge, our program is meant for *all* students, and has a flexible enough implementation model to make that possible. While other programs are meant for students at the top or students in the middle, the Education Opens Doors Program is founded on the belief that all students have limitless potential, and we ensure that our students are aware of the multitude of opportunities available to them.

Part of what makes us different is our founding story. In 2010, several teachers, led by Jayda Batchelder, identified a significant gap in college preparation knowledge and soft skills in the middle school classrooms where they taught. Their students, many of whom had the opportunity to go further in their education than other members of their families, lacked a roadmap that would help them navigate their journey to graduation day and beyond. To meet this need, Jayda and her fellow teachers developed the first Education Opens Doors Program student guidebook. After two years of guiding students through the program in her own classroom and seeing students’ self-expectations and college and career knowledge increase, Jayda founded Education Opens Doors in June 2012. Since then, the program has impacted over 45,000 students in over 100 schools.

The Education Opens Doors Program utilizes a train-the-trainer model to equip teachers with the tools they need to effectively increase expectations, motivation, and college and career knowledge in their classrooms. We offer two year-long program packages, implemented over two consecutive years. Each package includes the following student and teacher components:

- **Interactive Program Student Guidebook:** The cornerstone of our proposal is the student manual, which enables students, starting in middle school, to gain confidence and skills to

navigate the college-planning process. The close to 300-page guidebook, which is refreshed annually, addresses topics not traditionally taught during the school day in areas such as course selection, high school choice, SAT/ACT testing, college applications, choosing a major, and financial aid options. In addition to these concrete planning and preparation topics covered, students will explore career pathways and self-direction skills such as professionalism, time management, interviewing, resume development, and navigating the college transition process.

- **Teacher Curriculum and Supports:** Teachers implementing the program during the school year attend an orientation and training where they learn about the Education Opens Doors Program goals and receive a comprehensive curriculum. This curriculum provides instructional methods, student materials, and assessments to gauge change in student aspirations and college knowledge. All program resources are available through an online portal where teachers can communicate with each other and Education Opens Doors staff throughout the year. Every teacher has a dedicated Impact Manager (all of whom are former teachers) who conduct regular observations on-site during the scheduled program implementation time and remains a resource and support for teachers.

In Spring 2019, the Simmons School of Education at Southern Methodist University conducted an inferential study of the Education Opens Doors Program to analyze college and career preparation indicators of students enrolled in our program when compared to students who did not participate in the program. This study found that **students who participated in the Education Opens Doors Program performed better on the reading and social studies Texas state standardized tests (STAAR) than non-participating peers, suggesting a heightened focus and effort placed on academic performance. Participating students were more likely to take the ACT and AP exams as they progressed through school. Additionally, students that received our program received significantly less behavior referrals throughout high school than students who did not receive our program, indicating increased commitment to school.**

Our model lends itself to unlimited potential in scaling by leveraging major public or private R&D investments, primarily because of its flexible implementation. Partners are met where they are. The program can be delivered in core classes, electives, or advisory periods. It can be used in a homeschool environment, and would help limit disruption in college and career knowledge for consistently-moving military-connected students. The online learning platform allows schools that have available tech resources to diversify their delivery, and still have access to the student guidebook. Future funding will allow for the development of an app that students can use once they complete the program and during their high school years. This app will include a financial “roadmap,” allowing students to track their financial progress toward reaching a savings goal, as well as scholarship information and continued college and career knowledge support. Recent trends in student engagement in traditional schooling, absenteeism, and workforce development have created a situation in which students need the future-ready skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their forthcoming pathways. Our proposal emphasizes *multiple pathways*, not just college for all. Our program is grounded in one intricate idea: options. And knowledge about these options has historically been reserved for the most privileged students.

Our program is also rooted in equity: this fall we released Curriculum X, the culmination of years of research, curriculum development, teacher input, and equity work. Updates and shifts in our curriculum allow for our classrooms to be culturally conscious. By removing or highlighting systemic barriers and stereotypes for students of color, first-generation college students, and students from low-income communities, we more effectively equip students to overcome barriers and navigate towards the future of their dreams. Curriculum X includes special resource sections for: students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, teen parents, students with learning differences, undocumented students, students from economically disadvantaged families, students preparing for nontraditional training and employment, students with limited English proficiency, and LGBTQ+ students.

As stated previously, our train-the-trainer model allows for our program to be more scalable than most. A potential implementation model we are exploring is to leverage already in-place structures that exist on a state-by-state basis. We are firm believers that our model and its exact implementation method should be decided locally, by schools, districts, and states at the highest level.

Our Emphasis on Feedback and Evaluation

Since 2012, Education Opens Doors has accumulated countless hours of field research to refine our college and career resources. Authored by seasoned teachers, our curriculum, scheduling tool, implementation guide, fidelity of implementation rubric, and training resources have been tested and implemented in hundreds of 7th and 8th grade classrooms. Our organization has collected feedback from over 3,000 classroom observations, 250 principal interviews, 310 teacher surveys, and 15 teacher and student focus groups. We can further enrich our needs assessment by engaging counselors, gathering academic research on best practices for serving different locales, and strategically leveraging input from stakeholders at multiple levels. Significant financial investment would allow this scaling – all while improving our program based on local needs – to happen.

Our proposal is based on evidence of success. To measure the program’s impact, we have historically implemented two levels of evaluation. At the start and conclusion of the school-based program, Education Opens Doors works with teachers to implement pre- and post-assessments and surveys. The 40-question assessment measures student knowledge on topics relating to navigating high school, professionalism, exploring career paths, and financial aid. The 10-question survey measures student college aspirations, with specific questions relating to school culture as well as teacher, family, and peer support.

At the end of the program:

- 85% of students in our program will report that they expect to go to a two-year college, four-year college, or trade school at the end of the program.
- 80% of students in our program will understand the options available to help pay for college at the end of the program.

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