THE IMPACT OF BREAKTHROUGH SACRAMENTO ON ITS ALUMNI’S ASPIRATIONS TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

Marianne Ceballos
B. A., University of California, Davis, 2007

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

EDUCATION
(Educational Leadership)

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

SPRING
2010
THE IMPACT OF BREAKTHROUGH SACRAMENTO ON ITS ALUMNI’S 
ASPIRATIONS TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis

by

Marianne Ceballos

Approved by:

________________________________________, Committee Chair
Carlos Nevarez, Ph. D.

________________________________________, Second Reader
Edmund W. Lee, Ed. D.

________________________________________
Date
Student: Marianne Ceballos

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

___________________________, Graduate Coordinator  ________________________
Geni Cowan, Ph. D.  

Date

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Abstract

of

THE IMPACT OF BREAKTHROUGH SACRAMENTO ON ITS ALUMNI’S ASPIRATIONS TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Marianne Ceballos

Statement of Problem

Students from low-income households attend four-year colleges at a significantly lower rate than their counterparts from high-income households (Pathways to College Network, 2004). It is imperative that the United States increases its college-going rates and college completion rates in order to remain a leader in the world’s economy (Fountain, Cosgrove & Laptalo, 2006). In this study, the researcher explored the influential role Breakthrough Sacramento (BSAC) had on its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. In doing so, various program elements were evaluated.

Sources of Data

The researcher conducted a thorough review of the literature and used a customized web-based survey to collect data. The survey consisted of 30 questions and included a combination of open-ended, closed-ended, and questions on a Likert scale. The survey questions were informed by current research related to best practices of college access programs as well as BSAC programming.
Conclusions Reached

Findings from the study revealed that BSAC had a very influential role in its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. Many participants noted that BSAC helped them recognize the importance of education, exposed them to different opportunities and provided college awareness and information. However, participants also noted that the middle school programming during the school year was not meeting the needs of the students and that more support should be given to high school students. One main recommendation of this study is that BSAC strengthen its school year program in middle school by focusing on students’ academic needs.

________________________, Committee Chair
Carlos Nevarez, Ph.D.

________________________
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First off, I would like to thank God for all the wonderful blessings in my life. I would also like to thank my family for providing me with the foundation to be a successful, caring and loving woman. *Ama y Apa, gracias por todo su apoyo y esfuerzos,* you have shown me what it is to be a hard-worker and without that I would not be who I am today. I would like to thank my sister for always believing in me, encouraging me, and for always being there for me no matter what! You are truly a great sister and friend. To my friends, especially Callie and Ceci; please know that your support and friendship has helped me endure this very long process.

I would also like to thank Dr. Nevarez, for his unyielding support throughout this process and for pushing me to finish. Thank you. To my fellow graduate cohort members, thank you for allowing me to learn and grow from you all throughout our program. Lastly, to all the wonderful students, parents, families, alumni and supporters of Breakthrough Sacramento who have inspired me to do this work. Thank you.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements......................................................................................................................... vi
List of tables..................................................................................................................................... ix

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................... 1
   Background ..................................................................................................................................... 1
   Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................................. 4
   Significance of the Study ............................................................................................................. 5
   Definition of Terms ...................................................................................................................... 6
   Limitations ................................................................................................................................... 7
   Organization of the Remainder of the Study ............................................................................. 8

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE .............................................................................. 9
   Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 9
   Low-Income Students’ Experiences ............................................................................................. 9
      Low College-Going Culture ....................................................................................................... 11
      Peer Influence ............................................................................................................................ 13
      Lack of Information .................................................................................................................... 16
      Lack of Academic Preparation .................................................................................................. 18
   College Access Programs ........................................................................................................... 20
      Definition of College Access Programs ................................................................................... 21
      Best Practices ............................................................................................................................ 22
      Temporal Framework for College Access Programs ............................................................... 24
      Academic Support ..................................................................................................................... 25
      Mentoring ................................................................................................................................. 27
      College Advising ....................................................................................................................... 28
      Social and Cultural Capital ....................................................................................................... 29
      Parental Involvement ............................................................................................................... 32
   vii
Critiques of College Access Programs .......................................................... 34
Rationale for the Study .................................................................................. 38
Summary ........................................................................................................... 39

3. METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................... 40
   Introduction ................................................................................................ 40
   Sample Procedures ..................................................................................... 40
      Population ................................................................................................ 40
      Sample .................................................................................................... 41
      Setting .................................................................................................... 42
   Research Design .......................................................................................... 43
   Data Collection ............................................................................................ 44
   Instrumentation ........................................................................................... 45
   Data Analysis ............................................................................................... 46

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS ............................................................... 47
   Presentation of the Data .............................................................................. 47
   Demographics ............................................................................................. 48
   Findings ....................................................................................................... 56
      Middle School Programming .................................................................. 61
      High School Programming ..................................................................... 67
   Summary ...................................................................................................... 79

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ........................... 82
   Summary ...................................................................................................... 82
   Conclusions ................................................................................................. 83
   Recommendations ....................................................................................... 86

Appendix A ...................................................................................................... 91
Appendix B ....................................................................................................... 101
References ...................................................................................................... 103
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>High School Graduation Year</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Participants’ Self-Identified Ethnicity</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Parents’ Highest Level of Education</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Parents’ Income Level in High School</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Which Secondary Programs did you apply to? Check all that Apply</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Which Post-Secondary Programs were you accepted into?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Within Six-Months of High School Graduation, what was your Post-Secondary Decision?</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>How did BSAC Influence your Aspirations to Pursue Higher Education?</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Read and Respond to the Following Statements with your Level of Agreement</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>How did BSAC influence your aspirations to Pursue Higher Education?</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>How did each of the following BSAC Middle School Program Elements Influence your Aspirations to Pursue Education?</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>What was your Involvement with the Summer Program?</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>What was your Involvement with Weekly Breakthrough (WB)?</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>What was your Involvement with Breakthrough Saturdays?</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>In Eighth Grade, did you attend a High School Options Counseling Session with a Breakthrough Staff Member?</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>How did each of the Following BSAC High School Program Elements Influence your Aspirations to Pursue Higher Education?</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>What was your Involvement with the Programming for High School, as it pertains to High School Visits</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 18</td>
<td>What was your Involvement with BSAC’s Test Preparations Workshop?</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 19</td>
<td>In Senior Year, what was your Involvement with BSAC’s College Applications Workshops?</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 20</td>
<td>In Senior Year, what was your Involvement with BSAC’s Financial Aid Workshop?</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 21</td>
<td>Considering Post-Secondary Experiences, what would you consider to be BSAC’s Strengths and Weaknesses pertaining to College Aspirations?</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 22</td>
<td>When thinking of your Experiences with BSAC as it Pertains to College Preparation, How Satisfied were you with the Following?</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 23</td>
<td>How well did BSAC meet your Needs in the Following Areas?</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 24</td>
<td>Would you Recommend BSAC to a Younger Sibling/Relative?</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 25</td>
<td>If you were to do it again, would you Apply to BSAC?</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Presently, the United States is facing many challenges, one of which is the crisis in higher education. This crisis can be attributed to the crumbling of the K-12 pipeline infrastructure, which is failing to graduate students, especially those from low-income households, from high school (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). If students do not graduate from high school, then they cannot attend a four year college/university and most likely will not complete a bachelor’s degree. Of those low-income students who do graduate from high school, more than 70% do not meet the minimum requirements to apply to a four-year college. Moreover, of those students who do meet the minimum eligibility requirements to apply to a four-year college, only 65% of them actually do enroll and attend a four-year college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). This phenomenon is referred to by many educational practitioners as the college access problem. Students in high school, namely those from low-income households, are attending four-year colleges at a significantly lower rate than their counterparts from high-income households (Pathways to College Network, 2004). The following paragraphs will address how the college access problem is detrimental for institutions of higher education, students, the economy, and society as a whole.

In today’s economy, the importance of a college education is becoming more and more imperative. According to the US Census Bureau in the 2002 Current Population
Reports, individuals with a bachelor’s degree earn nearly twice as much more in lifetime earnings than that of a high school graduate (as cited in Day & Newburger, 2002). The benefits of a college degree are not solely limited to income but have also been linked to a better quality of life and also better health. College graduates enjoy healthier lifestyles than those with less than a bachelor’s degree, including lower rates of smoking, higher rates of exercise, and longer life expectancies on average (The Pell Institute, 2005).

In addition to the benefits a college degree brings to an individual, the economy also benefits immensely. Having a college educated workforce is the key to having a prosperous and leading economy (Fountain, Cosgrove & Laptalo, 2006). As such, it is imperative that the US increases its college-going rates and college completion rates in order to remain a leader in the world’s economy. Studies show that for each student that can be turned around from a potential failure or drop-out to a college graduate, a state’s economic benefit is around $400,000 (Finn, 2006).

Lastly, a college educated workforce not only benefits individuals and the economy but ultimately, society as a whole. College graduates are less likely to commit a crime, as indicated by a report conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, stating that 68% of people in prison did not receive a high school diploma (as cited in Harlow, 2003). College graduates are also more likely to vote. Seventy-five percent of those with bachelor’s degrees voted in the 2000 election, compared to 53% of high school graduates (Mortenson, 2002). In addition, college graduates more frequently perform volunteer work; 44%, compared to 21% of high school graduates (Mortenson, 2003a). Education is
the gateway for individuals to become productive members of society. Failure to address the college access problem is a tremendous loss to society.

Education has and always will be the great equalizer. It provides individuals with the opportunity to end the cycle of poverty in their family (Graham, 2005). However, that opportunity to access higher education is not available to all. As mentioned previously, research shows that students from low-income households are much less likely to attend a four-year college than students from high-income households. Much has been written about equal access for higher education and despite efforts to increase access; looking at the trends in higher education one can see that equal access has not been achieved. This study will look intensively at one college access program and its role in making access to higher education a reality.

Breakthrough Sacramento (BSAC) is a non-profit, tuition-free, six-year college preparation program for academically motivated students from under-resourced schools. It is also a teacher preparation program for talented high school and college students throughout the United States. This study will explore how BSAC influenced its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. While the program has a high college-going rate, the researcher of this study wants to determine whether or not BSAC plays a factor in influencing its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education or if the program had no effect. Also, this study will analyze if the various elements of the program are effective in influencing the alumni’s aspirations to attend higher education and if so, which program elements are most effective.
In order to see the influence the program has on shaping its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education, BSAC alumni starting with the graduating high school class of 2005 to the class of 2009 will be surveyed. This survey will determine the extent to which BSAC influenced and assisted them in their pursuit to higher education. Alumni will be surveyed on their middle school and high school experiences, demographic information and post-secondary information. Alumni will be asked how BSAC influenced their decision to pursue higher education. It will also show how each of the elements of the program shaped and influenced their aspirations to pursue higher education. Past and current research on college preparation programs will be used in collaboration with the knowledge gained from the study.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine how BSAC influenced its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. This researcher intends to analyze the extent to which specific program elements affected the alumni’s aspirations to attend higher education. This study explores the following three research questions:

1) What influential role did BSAC play in its alumni’s aspirations to pursue or not pursue higher education?

2) Which BSAC program elements were most influential in alumni’s decisions to pursue higher education?

3) How satisfied are alumni of BSAC programming, specifically as it relates to college preparation?
Significance of the Study

BSAC, along with other college access programs throughout the United States, is working to combat the college access problem which students from low-income households encounter. Various college access programs, such as BSAC, operate on the basis of getting students to college yet few programs conduct thorough evaluations on the actual effectiveness of their program. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role BSAC has in influencing its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. This study will also assess which BSAC program elements have been most effective. This study will help BSAC by providing it with concrete data evaluating the program’s success rather than just relying on its anecdotal successes.

The findings revealed in this study will not only benefit BSAC, but it will also contribute to the literature of college access programs. Although college access programs are being researched more in recent years, there is still a need to provide quality research on their effectiveness. In addition to the dearth of literature on college access programs, past research of college access programs have focused on the participant point of view. This study will have alumni as the focal point. There is significant value in studying the effectiveness of college access programs from the focal point of alumni because they have gone through the program and can evaluate the program. Alumni have valuable insights, experiences and may offer recommendations that can add to the knowledge of college access programs. Studying the alumni perspective can also help college access programs identify which program elements are most effective in influencing a students’ aspiration to pursue higher education.
Ultimately, the research conducted in this study will help identify best practices for college access programs, which will be valuable to the profession of educational leadership by informing educators, student affairs practitioners, and administrators of these best practices.

Definition of Terms

**At-Risk Students**: Students who meet any of the following criteria: low-income, first-generation, have an older brother or sister who did not complete high school, comes from a single parent household, poorly financed school district, etc.

**College Access Programs**: Enhancement programs aimed at increasing access to college for low-income youths who attend public schools (Tierney & Jun, 2001).

**Cultural Capital**: The knowledge of how the educational system works (Gandara, 2001).

**First-Generation**: A student is considered to be first generation if neither parent has earned a bachelor’s degree from a postsecondary education institution in the United States.

**Low-Income**: People who come from households with a family income less than twice the federal poverty threshold. The federal poverty level for a family of four with two children was $21,000 in 2008, $20,650 in 2007, and $20,000 in 2006 (National Center for Children in Poverty [NCCP], 2009).

**Social Capital**: Information-sharing channels and networks as well as social norms, values, and expected behaviors (Coleman, 1988). Social capital deals specifically
with the way information is disseminated and the social networks available to students. This includes social norms, values, and expected behaviors which exist for a student and this is often based on their socioeconomic status and race (Gandara, 2001).

**Under-Resourced:** Schools that lack the minimal resources to prepare students for the college admissions process.

**Limitations**

This study examines the role of college access programs in influencing students’ aspirations to pursue higher education. More specifically it focuses on the perspective of alumni of one particular college access program, BSAC. Since the study is limited to BSAC alumni for the past five years, some of the findings may not be applicable to all college access programs. For example, some of the programs and services offered at BSAC may not be offered at other college access programs. Also, BSAC operates with a very specific model offering a six-week summer academic program for students prior to their seventh and eighth grade years. It also consists of school-year support at weekly tutorial sessions, monthly enrichment activities, and also grade monitoring. The program also offers high school options counseling, high school counseling, SAT/ACT test prep workshops, college application assistance, financial aid counseling and much more. Consequently, not all programs may operate on the same structure. So, information provided here is based upon BSAC’s programming model but other programs with similar program elements may use this research to help guide their program.
One other limitation of the study lies in the nature in which information was collected. This study was conducted using a web-based survey. Thus, only alumni for whom a current and valid email address was available had an opportunity to complete the survey. Furthermore, given the fact that the alumni database is updated by alumni’s own initiative can arguably signify that these alumni were more active as participants in the program and are currently more active in the Breakthrough community.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of the study focuses on developing the following remaining chapters. Chapter 2 consists of a thorough review of the literature surrounding college access, specifically as it pertains to students from low-income households. In exploring the area of college access, literature documenting the barriers and challenges low-income student face in pursuing higher education will be reviewed. After reviewing college access for low-income students, the researcher explores the realm of college access programs, including a brief history, best practices, and also critiques. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and approach utilized for the study. Chapter 4 will review the analysis of the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 will offer recommendations, conclusions, and suggested areas for future research.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The chapter begins by reviewing the experiences of low-income students in America’s educational system. A summary of the existing barriers low-income students encounter in their pursuit of post-secondary education is presented. Following the section on low-income students’ experiences, the field of college access programs is presented including historical elements of how they came into place, their purpose, and more specifically best practices for college access programs. Critiques against college access programs are also presented specifically as it relates to efficacy. The need for better evaluation of college preparation programs is one of the major critiques presented.

Low-Income Students’ Experiences

The statistics are staggering – according to the National Center for Education Statistics, “In 2000, young adults from families with incomes in the lowest 20% of all family incomes were six times more likely than those from families in the top 20% of income to have dropped out of high school” (as cited in Kaufman, Alt & Chapman, 2001). Ten percent of students from families in the lowest one-fifth of the income distribution dropped out of high school compared with five percent in the middle of the income distribution and 1.6% of students from families in the top two-fifths. These findings are corroborated by statistics from communities with dropout rates above the
national average (Finn, 2006). Furthermore, the data revealed that for low-income students who do complete high school, more than 70% of low-income students did not meet the minimum requirements to be eligible for a four-year college. Low-income students are 24% less likely to be college qualified than the national average and comparing these statistics to those of upper-income students reveal a huge discrepancy in access. Only 30% of students from upper-income households did not meet the minimum requirements for four-year college eligibility (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Of those low-income students who did graduate from high school and who did meet the minimum college eligibility requirements, only 65% of students actually applied to a four-year institution (Cabrera & La Nasa). So, the statistics are certainly staggering – not only are low-income students less likely to graduate from high school, they are also less likely to be college eligible, and less likely to enroll in college even if they do meet the minimum college eligibility.

It is no surprise that after years of this troubling trend – America is becoming increasingly aware of this huge national crisis. As such, much has been said regarding the experiences of low-income students in the America’s educational system. Despite increased efforts to rectify the nation’s current crisis, more than 30 years later, many of the same barriers for low-income students to access post-secondary education still exist today (Perna & Swail, 2001). What then is needed to reverse this destructive trend? Legislators, policy makers, administrators, counselors, teachers, and institutions of higher education must carefully evaluate each of the barriers low-income students face and must
work together to better prepare students for success and not failure and make access to higher education a reality for them.

According to national statistics, 61% of students who come from low-income households are Latino/Hispanic. Sixty percent are African-American, 30% are Asian, and 26% are White/Non-Hispanic. Furthermore, 83% of low-income students have parents with less than a high school education and 58% were from families who had completed high school but no more (NCCP, 2009). These students are considered to be first-generation students, meaning that neither parent has attained a four-year college degree. Consequently, the term “low-income” encompasses minority students, students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, and those who considered “at-risk” for dropping out of high school and not persisting to any post-secondary education. Now that one has a better understanding of low-income students, one can look at the challenges and barriers they face. Although many barriers exist, researchers have identified four main barriers low-income students are confronted with as they ascend the educational pipeline.

*Low-College Going Culture*

One barrier low-income students encounter is the low-college going culture which exists in their communities. Low-income students enter the educational pipeline and are confronted with low-expectations from their teachers, administrators, and ultimately, the entire educational system. Sadly, many of them come to believe it themselves. Students with hopes to pursue higher education are consistently presented with opposing forces such as the statistics of an average of nine percent of low-income students nationally who
drop out of high school (US Department of Education, 2009). Not only are the odds against them but also their daily interactions in the nation’s schools do not reflect high college going rates for low-income populations. With nearly 85% of teachers still being of White/Caucasian descent, minority students do not see themselves as capable of excelling in the academic world (US Department of Education, 2003). This subtle message reinforced the notion that college is not for students like them but for their white, more affluent peers.

In addition to the subconscious messages low-income students encounter in their daily lives, they are also subject to the stereotypes and societal expectations for low-income students. Unfortunately, teachers are not exempt from these biases. Low-income students are given less encouragement by teachers who may harbor doubts about their abilities and hence contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement (Gandara, 2001). Teachers have the ability to consciously or more often subconsciously, send messages to students about the level of confidence they have in a student’s ability. One great example is the tendency for teachers to call on favorite students more often and are more patient with students they have more confidence in than those in whom they have little confidence. For the latter students, teachers often provide the answer for the student or move onto another student (Brophy & Good, as cited in Gandara, 2001). According to Weinstein (1989), students could read their teachers attitudes pretty accurately and had been shown to be sensitive to these subtle behaviors (as cited in Gandara, 2001). Furthermore, psychologist Robert Rosenthal conducted a series of studies which showed that teachers’ attitudes toward their students had a significant impact on their academic
performance. This lead to the “Rosenthal Effect” which asserted that 1) students who are expected to do well have greater likelihood to do well; 2) students who are not expected to do well are less likely to do so; and 3) students who do well despite expectations to the contrary are regarded unfavorably by the teacher (Sprinthall & Oja, as cited in Gandara, 2001).

**Peer Influence**

Going along with the notion of low-college going culture, the role of peer influence becomes even more critical as students ascend the educational pipeline. The importance of peer support has been attributed as one of the key factors in students’ academic success and for many low-income students it can often be their pitfall. The influences of peer groups tend to be associated with negative influences on the values and behaviors of youth. This is no surprise since drug and alcohol use, gang membership, and a culture of underachieving are viewed as risks associated with peer influence, since such behaviors generally occur in peer groups, not individually (Henderson, 1997).

However, peer groups can positively influence each other as well. Peer groups can support academic goals and serve as important sources of information for academic success and college aspirations (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). So, students who join a group of friends with higher academic achievement than their own, tend to raise their level of achievement to match that of their peers. Conversely, students who hang out with low-performing friends, tend to perform lower as well, and those whose friends are dropouts are more likely to drop-out themselves (Epstein & Karweit, 1983). A study conducted in 1992, compared low-income students who make it to college and low-income students
who do not, and found that the variable that most increased the odds of a student enrolling in a four-year college was the number of friends with college plans (Horn & Chen, 1998). This finding had huge implications on the role of peer influence on college aspirations.

For low-income students, the friendships they develop are often with those of similar socio-economic status, same ethnicity, and similar interests. As such, the neighborhoods they live in, the schools they attend, and familial acquaintances are often the source from which these friendships occur. In the formation of friendships, theories of personal attraction assert:

Students may assume that peers who are similar to them in gender or race are also similar in values and attitudes. They may take gender and race into account when drawing conclusions about the status position of their peers in the social network of the classroom or they may assume that persons with similar characteristics are more likely to respond to an offer of friendship. To the extent that being the same gender or same race as a friends increases the strength of a friendship, these factors are expected to increase the likelihood of influence by the friend. (Hallinan & Williams, 1990, p. 124)

The institutional characteristics of a school have a pivotal role in the formation of friendships and ultimately the role of peer influence. One way schools impact the formation of friendships is through the organization of school curriculum. As mentioned previously, most high schools track or group students by their ability. This system of tracking not only impacts the classes students will take, but also students’ relationships.
Students in the same track will often have similar schedules and oftentimes, even the same classes. These students have more opportunities to interact and this frequent interaction gives them similar academic goals and experiences. Students who are not in the same track are therefore less likely to interact with students outside of their track and form different academic goals (Hallinan & Williams, 1990). Students who are in the same track and share similar academic goals and experiences increase their likelihood to become friends (Hallinan & Sorensen, as cited in Hallinan & Williams, 1990). Also, being in the same track and sharing academic goals and experiences is expected to increase the strength of these friendships. Stronger friendships also imply greater likelihood of peer influence and so students in similar tracks are more influenced by friends within that track than those in different tracks (Hallinan & Williams).

For many low-income students, particularly among ethnic minorities, the role of peer influence and academic achievement can be more complex. For many Black and Latino students, there is a tendency to make fun of students who do well in school, and hence, create a culture undervaluing high academic achievement (Steinburg, 1996). Students who are doing well academically often fall prey to the teasing from their peers since doing well in school is often deemed as being a nerd, geek, or also “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). According to Gandara (2001), a leading researcher on peer relations in academia,

Black and Latino students are more likely than others to have peers who interpret being a good student as “acting white” and therefore ostracizing these high performers from important social supports. Peers who shun academic
achievement are common in inner-city and rural schools, where students of color feel systematically excluded from white, middle class society. (p. 24)

The role of peer influence, especially as it pertains to an individual’s academic achievement, can be a very beneficial or detrimental for many low-income students.

*Lack of Information*

The lack of information available to low-income students’ and their families is a huge barrier to their post-secondary attainment. Many low-income students are not aware of the higher educational system, much less the requirements to get there. Families are also not aware of necessary requirements for their child to attain higher education. This is often attributed to what some researchers are now calling social capital: knowledge of how to navigate through the educational system. The lack of social capital for many low-income students is a constant reality and a barrier to their educational aspirations. Furthermore, students and families who are also strained by language barriers, the lack of information is even more prevalent.

For many low-income students, since they themselves do not have the knowledge to navigate through the educational system – nor do their families, they often rely on high school counselors as the single most likely source of information about college. In contrast, students from high-income households, get their information from a variety of sources including parents, students, catalogues, college representatives, and private guidance counselors (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). For low-income students who rely on their high-school counselors for college information, often times they do not receive the information they need. Due to budget cuts in education, schools budgets have been
stretched thin and in high-growth states like California, school counselors have often been targets of these cut backs (Gandara, 2001). According to the California Department of Education, the average high school counselor in California serves almost 450 students (as cited in Gandara, 2001). An abundance of literature revealed that most public school students rarely, if ever, see their counselors, and if they do, it is usually to do routine class scheduling (Hutchinson & Reagan, 1989). One report stated that the achievement gap is exacerbated by the constraints of high school counselors. With limited counseling staff, counselors spend the majority of their time on other issues (disciplinary problems, emotional needs of students, course scheduling, etc.) and simply do not have the time to devote to students who are traditionally underrepresented (McDonough, Korn & Yamaski, as cited in Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Given the lack of support from high school counselors, students see their counselors not as allies but as gatekeepers who often refuse them admission to the classes which would prepare them for college (Gandara, 2001).

Perhaps one of the biggest areas in which information is not available to low-income students and families is in that of financial aid information (Bailis, Hahn, Aaron, Nahas & Leavitt, 1995). The dearth of financial information available to low-income households’ results in many of them failing to pursue higher education based on false perceptions. These false perceptions are solidified in research which shows that many students are unclear about the costs of a college education and about the options available to them to pay for college (Akerheilm, Berger, Hooker & Wise, 1998).
Lack of Academic Preparation

Academic preparation is another key barrier to the educational attainment for low-income students. The lack of quality pre-school education for many low-income students is where many are first put at a disadvantage – one that many of them fail to overcome. In recent years, more research highlights the many benefits of a quality pre-school education on long-term academic achievement, unfortunately this is something which is not available to many low-income families.

In addition to that initial disadvantage, low-income students usually attend schools which are characterized by overcrowded classes, inadequate counseling resources, teachers with fewer advanced degrees, and teachers with degrees from less-selective colleges (Rendon, 1989). Furthermore, “the news we hear is that inner city schools are decayed – infected with drugs, violence, crime, and teachers, who kill the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of minority students” (Rendon, 1989, p. 4). It is no surprise then those differences in college attendance rates among varied socio-economic status groups can be explained in part by the quality of the high school they attended. (McDonough, as cited in Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Research has shown that learning environments and resources differ substantially among high-poverty and low-poverty schools. Teachers in high-poverty schools report greater numbers of student misbehavior, absenteeism, and lower levels of parental involvement than low-poverty schools. Furthermore, teachers’ salaries and better training are lower in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools (Darling-Hammond & Green, 1994). Also, schools in more affluent communities also tend to provide more
rigorous college preparatory and honors classes than schools in lower income
neighborhoods (Orfield, 1996).

For many of these high poverty schools, which are subject to overcrowding, students often fall prey to tracking. Tracking is a system utilized by many high poverty schools, which looks at students academic records as they enter high school and pending their grades, place them into certain types of classes (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). For many low-income students, they are placed into classrooms of less academic rigor and oftentimes also into many vocational classes. The tracking system limits a student’s ability to take college-prep classes in high school. Not taking college-prep classes as they matriculate into high school puts them at an extreme disadvantage in terms of being eligible for four-year institutions. The overall lack of academic preparedness is a striking figure for many low-income students with 70% not fulfilling the a-g requirements necessary for a four year college/university (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

Not only are the high-poverty schools less equipped to prepare students for college and offer them more rigorous curriculum, teachers from high-poverty schools are too. High-poverty schools report higher number of teachers with lower test scores and less academic preparation. They also have fewer teachers who attend more selective colleges. A number of studies showed that the quality of the teacher, measured by certification, quality of instruction from which the teacher received his or her degree, and test scores, have a significant impact on student performance (Haycock, 1998).
College Access Programs

In 1965, the Higher Education Act was signed into law as a response to a nation’s inequity of college access for many low-income students. The law intended to bring educational opportunity to those who did not yet have access or the resources necessary to pursue higher education. Soon after the higher education act was signed into law, affirmative action policies also quickly came into place. This allowed more low-income students to enter postsecondary education. After years of higher education being only for those from elite backgrounds or upper income households, the opportunity was now opening up to students from all backgrounds. While the Higher Education Act and Affirmative Action certainly paved the way for low-income students to have this opportunity, access and success for these students was by no means ensured. Still today, there is a lot of work to be done in order to make this opportunity a reality for these students. One way states and policymakers have sought to make higher education a reality for all students is through the creation of college access programs. Research shows that low-income students who participate in college access programs are twice more likely to enroll in a four-year college than their peers who do not participate in such programs (Horn & Chen, 1998). Although the field of college access programs is relatively new, much has been written about such programs and this researcher provides a synthesis of information regarding the field. Now the field of college access programs will be presented and one can develop an understanding of what they are, why they exist, how they function, best practices and critiques.
Definition of College Access Programs

While college access programs may differ in design and may have different goals, objectives, services, and program elements they all aim to increase post-secondary options to low-income, low-income students who are typically underrepresented in higher education. The researcher defined college access programs as “enhancement programs aimed at increasing access to college for low-income youths who attend public schools” (Tierney & Jun, 2001, p. 206). College access programs typically take place in middle school and/or high school and offer classes and/or activities which go beyond their school requirements. Most programs work in collaboration or maintain some relationship with schools and institutions of higher education (Tierney & Jun). Furthermore, research has shown that while some programs may have different goals, virtually all college access programs have one of six purposes. These purposes include: college admission information, assistance to students and families, motivational activities, academic enrichment and support, as well as counseling and advising programs (Tierney, Hallett & Venegas, 2006).

College access programs are generally aimed at achieving at least one of three areas: a) academic enrichment; b) college knowledge; c) cultural/social enrichment. Programs focusing on the first category seek to increase learning outputs; programs in the second category seek to provide social capital to students who lack information about college; and lastly programs in the third category seek to provide their students the opportunities to have the same experiences that many of their more affluent peers receive. These experiences include visits to museums, art exhibitions, college visits, etc (Tierney
et al., 2006). In all, college access programs were designed to respond to a need in our society to educate more of the nation’s population, specifically those who are typically underrepresented in higher education, and prepare them for entry to institutions of higher education. The ultimate goal of these programs is to help students, particularly low-income students, to enroll and succeed in college (University of Southern California [USC], 2007).

*Best Practices*

In this section the researcher will explore the best practices for college-access programs. Each of these best practices and the literature conducted on each will be reviewed. However, it is important to note that while the following program elements are considered best practices for college access programs, they are in no way prescriptive in how a college access program should be designed and/or implemented. According to *A New Field Emerges: College Access Programs:*

In order to be successful, a college access program must reflect the existing realities and relationships with school systems and between school systems and communities. It is therefore inappropriate and misleading to look for ‘one best way’ to design and carry out college access activities or to ‘rank order’ programs according to their models. Rather, it is important for the college access field to be aware of the range of approaches, to learn from one another through professional networks, and to support rigorous research on local programs. (Bailis et al., 1995, p. 1)
In general, college access programs are designed to offer its participants with an array of college-related tasks. These include test preparation, academic tutoring, admission essay writing, and assistance with college and financial aid applications (Tierney et al., 2006). When looking at college access programs, although there can be an array of program elements, there are best practices for college access programs. The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative conducted a massive report on K-12 intervention programs for underrepresented youth and analyzed the effective program elements of college access programs (as cited in Gandara, 2001).

The report titled, *Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K-12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth*, summarized the findings of an extensive evaluation of 33 college access programs (as cited in Gandara, 2001). In evaluating the best practices of the programs, the report found that there are six program components which are most successful: counseling, academic enrichment, parental involvement, personal enrichment and social integration, mentoring, and scholarships. Of the 33 programs reviewed, all programs utilized at least one of six program components. In all, the majority of programs involve counseling and academic enrichment at 28 and 26 respectively. Some form of parental involvement is found in 18 of the 33 programs as were personal integration and social enrichment components. Only thirteen programs include some form of mentoring, and ten offer a scholarship component (Gandara, 2001). Although each program may differ in size, scope, and services offered, research has identified six best practices for college access programs: temporal framework of college
access programs, academic support, mentoring, college advising, social and cultural
capital, and parent involvement.

Temporal Framework of College Access Programs

With college access programs, research has consistently shown that the timing and implementation of services is one of the most critical components of a college access program. In other words, the age/grade when students are eligible to participate in the program is critical, and dramatically increased the students’ success in the program and ultimately in pursuing higher education. The vast majority of research recommended college access programs should be in junior high school or even earlier (National Association for College Admission Counseling [NACAC], 1996). The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative found that “making long-term investments in students rather than short-term interventions were most successful. The longer students were in the program, the more likely they were reported to benefit from it” (as cited in Gandara, 2001, p. viii).

Despite the research, most college access programs being in ninth grade, with juniors and senior being most intensively served (Tierney et al., 2006). There are also a substantial number of programs which do not begin until the eleventh grade (USC, 2007). While junior and senior years are critical in the college admission process with the admission test requirements, application process and financial aid process, programs which begin in the junior and senior years are leaving out many students who had great academic potential. But due to lack of earlier intervention, the students failed to continue on that college preparatory path. The course requirements for a student to attend four-
year colleges are so specific that one can identify if a high school senior will be eligible to even apply to a institution in the California State University (CSU) system or in the University of California (UC) system. As such, by sophomore year if a high school student has not begun to take the necessary course requirements to attend a four-year college, then they most likely will not meet the admissions criteria for a CSU or UC. So, a college access program which seeks to increase access to college for all high school students but begins in the twelfth grade will not provide the necessary support needed to affect the largest body of students (Tierney et al., 2006). As such, programs that begin in high school, especially the latter years of high school, do not meet the needs of the students and supporting them to pursue higher education. As such low-income students need intensive support from junior high school through graduation (Tierney et al., 2006).

**Academic Support**

The first component which significantly improves students academic success and hence their likelihood to graduate from high school and pursue higher education is academic support. Without a doubt, academic preparation is the most vital component of becoming college ready. If students lack the necessary academic preparation, they will be unable to apply to four-year colleges after high school or struggle to continue once they are there (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). As such, the need for college access programs to assist their students by providing them academic support is a necessity for the success of the program.

There are many ways in which academic support can be provided to students in college access programs. Some programs make the academic component the main focus
of their program, while others offer tutoring to strengthen the students’ academic preparation. Programs that focus on academia offer intensive programming—often in the form of a multi-week summer program—to teach the students in core academic subjects. The summer program is a heavy dose of academics including daily quizzes, daily homework, and other academic assessments. The main focus of the programs focusing on academia is to strengthen students’ academic skills (Gandara, 2001).

The other way in which college access programs offer academic support is by providing tutoring. Tutoring can be provided after-school and is meant to supplement the students’ learning during the school year. Tutoring is meant to ensure that students’ understand the material covered in their academic classes and they receive homework assistance and test preparation. Tutoring has been shown to be an effective means of strengthening students’ academic skills and improve their grades (Slavin & Braddock, 1994).

Aside from summer academic programs and tutoring sessions, another academic support mechanism utilized by college access programs is offering SAT and ACT test preparation workshops to students. In order to prepare students for access to four-year colleges, a critical component is to prepare them for the college admission tests. Many college access programs recognize this need for their students to be able to gain admission into competitive colleges and so they offer workshops to prepare students for these tests (Gandara, 2001).
Mentoring

Along with tutoring, mentoring is another strong component of college access programs for various reasons. Mentoring enables young students to partner with another person who can serve as an educational advocate for the student, and for many students, this may be the only educational advocate they have. Much has been written about the effects of mentoring on adolescents, and while there is very little evidence to support the notion that mentoring is effective in improving academic performance, many college access programs consider mentoring, either formally or informally, as a critical component in increasing students’ success (Gandara, 2001).

While very little research is available to validate the effectiveness of mentoring on student academic success, much has been written about the importance of having positive role models. Rendon (1994) defined validation as “the integration of the student into the life of the college through supportive, personal, human connections that send the message ‘you belong here’” (p. 19). Rendon stated that validation is of critical importance to many low-income students. Furthermore, supporting this notion of validation, a study conducted by the RAND Corporation interviewed 113 students from seven high schools in California. Specifically, those students who were eligible to attend the University of California system, but chose to attend state universities or community colleges instead (Sorenson, Brewer, & Brighton, as cited in Gandara, 2001). The primary finding of the study is that students stated that the university was not for people like them. As such, the key role of mentoring in validating students’ perception that college can be for them and
it is for them a critical component in ensuring students pursue higher education (Gandara, 2001).

*College Advising*

While tutoring and mentoring are critical components of college access programs, college advising is an integral part in student’s persistence to higher education. The lack of counseling available to low-income students has been identified as a major obstacle to college (Oakes, 1995; Romo & Falbo, 1996; McDonough, 1997). For students whose parents have no more than a high school education, navigating through the application process is often a very difficult task since they have receive less family guidance and experience than their peers with college-educated parents (Horn & Chen, 1998). The college application process is very complex and most students need strong individualized support to get them through. This assistance is especially important to low-income students, who mainly rely on program and school staff for college support. Consequently, college access programs must provide strong encouragement and guidance to help students understand the application and financial aid process (Field, 2007).

The majority of the students in college access programs came from backgrounds that lack any to very little experience in the higher education realm. Also, “college discussions may not be part of a student’s regular school day experiences, especially in schools with a history of low college going” (Tierney et al., 2006, p. 2). Since students do not receive this information at home or in their schools, college advising is a fundamental aspect of any college access program. Students need to be advised on the overall structure of the higher education system including the necessary requirements for college at all
levels, the various options in terms of colleges, the varying levels of degrees and so forth. According to the University of Southern California (USC) Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, information and resources are best tailored to specific grades and should be consistently available throughout high school (as cited in Field, 2007).

Given the lack of college counseling available to low-income students, it is no surprise that college access programs which provide this vital information to its students, is sure to have an impact on student’s persistence to college. While there are many ways to disseminate the information to students, the overarching goal of college advising is to provide students with the information necessary so that they may attend college. Some programs offer individual counseling appointments with program participants, others facilitate group presentations, and still others offer workshops to help build an understanding of the college and financial aid processes. College advising specifically as it pertains to financial aid information is one of the most significant predictors of enrollment to four-year colleges among the college access activities (Horn & Chen, 1998).

One area of college advising pertains to informing students and their families on the many financial aid resources available to them. For the students and families in college access programs, the concern for financial ability to pay for college is a barrier for them to pursue higher education. For many, the lack of information regarding financial aid has often deterred many students from persisting to higher education.

Social and Cultural Capital

In addition to college advising, students from low-income households also need advising in a different sense. For many low-income students, their backgrounds put them
at an extreme disadvantage in terms of social and cultural capital. That is, they are much less likely to have familiarity with the social and educational systems, to have access to important information and resources and to gain exposure to a variety of social and cultural activities. Similarly, students from these backgrounds also have fewer opportunities to partake in activities locally such as libraries, parks, and museums (Gandara, 2001). Qualitative researchers noted that “human capital and physical capital, social and cultural capital are resources that may be invested to enhance profitability (Bourdieu & Passeron, as cited in Perna, 2000) and productivity (Coleman, as cited in Perna, 2000) and facilitate upward mobility” (DiMaggio & Mohr, as cited in Perna, 2000, p. 73). Social capital is defined as information-sharing channels and networks as well as social norms, values, and expected behaviors (Coleman, 1988). Cultural capital refers to the knowledge of how the system works (Gandara, 2001). Many college access programs have identified these limitations in their students and that is why so many focus on programming which seeks to increase students’ social and cultural capital. While social capital and cultural capital are similarly related, they each have different components which are both important to a student’s overall success.

Social capital deals specifically with the way information is disseminated and the social networks available to students. This includes social norms, values, and expected behaviors which exist for a student and this is often based on their socioeconomic status and race (Gandara, 2001). In reference to social capital one author stated, “Social capital helps affluent Americans to use the system to achieve their goals; lacking such an edge,
the economically disadvantaged can barely get a toehold as they attempt to climb out of poverty” (Maeroff, 1998, p. 2).

One way college access programs can increase the social capital for the students in their programs is by creating a solid college-going culture within their program. This notion of college-going culture has been studied and examined by many researchers and it is believed to be one of the most powerful components in a student’s decision to attend college. In the article, *The Impact of Peers on College Preparation: A Review of the Literature* (2006), it is noted, “by gathering college-bound students together, they create a peer group in which students can support one another and motivate each other to succeed” (p. i). It also went on to state that college access programs which create environments that unite students based on a common academic identity are more successful in that their students fulfill the ultimate goal of attending college (“The Impact of Peers,” 2006).

Looking at the research on the impact of peers on the college decision process, college access programs can capitalize on the influence peers have on each other by: establishing cohort of students, identifying as a members of a program, meeting with students on a regular basis, and focus on academic preparation over socializing. When a college access program creates a cohort of students, research shows that they will perform at higher levels when they have sustained interaction with a group of peers. Creating a solid identity as a member of the program can be done by giving students t-shirts, backpacks, folders, pens/pencils, etc. displaying the program’s logo. This will identify the students as members of a discrete peer group. Students who meet on a regular
basis over a long period of time will begin to identify themselves as college-bound. Lastly, by focusing on academic preparation over socializing, students solidify their identities as college-bound students and also view their peers as friends who are college bound. The students then become a part of a social network in which all are committed to academic success and ultimately college (“The Impact of Peers,” 2006).

Cultural capital is defined as the knowledge of how the system works (Gandara, 2001). In effort to expose students to various academic, social and cultural activities, college access programs often offer students the opportunity to expand their knowledge of various other circles. The most popular forms are by offering cross-cultural workshops, community service, connection to the arts, outdoor activities and field trips to museums, colleges, and historical buildings/monuments. These educational trips expose students to different academic and cultural experiences they probably would not experience in their own daily lives.

Parent Involvement

Another key component of college access programs is the ability to involve parents in the program. At-risk students whose parents and families frequently discuss school-related matters with them in high school have much higher college-going rates at four-year colleges or any post-secondary education (Horn & Chen, 1998). In a 1992 study conducted by Horn and Chen, they found that “students whose parents had expectations of even ‘some college’ had nearly three times greater odds of attending some form of postsecondary education than those whose parents had expectations for no more than high school education” (as cited in Horn & Chen, 1998, p. 26). As such, the
importance of parent involvement is important to a student’s educations aspirations and college access programs should incorporate parents and families into their programs. According to USC’s Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (2007), in their study of college access programs from 17 sites in five cities over the course of seven years, one of their main recommendations for improving program performances was to incorporate families into the learning environment. The recommendation was based on the fact that families have a direct impact on student learning. Their recommendation was that one person from the student’s family should be involved in a consistent manner (University of Southern California, 2007).

There are many ways in which programs can involve parents into the college access programs. The amount of programming developed to parent participation varies among programs but at the very least many programs begin by offering an orientation session to parents so that they better understand the program in which their children are involved (Gandara, 2001). Beyond that, some college access programs also require that parents sign a contract stating that they will support the child’s participation in the program and will attend parent information sessions. Some programs offer counseling or informational sessions to inform parents on how to help their children excel in school so they can better understand the academic options for their children in high school, as well as the many requirements necessary to attend college. Some even offer training sessions on how to monitor homework, maintain communication and discipline with adolescents, and issues with adolescent development. These counseling or training sessions are often held in the parents’ primary language to overcome the language barrier (Gandara, 2001).
Other programs go beyond these sessions and engage parents as volunteers for the program. Some programs even involve parents as designers, developers, and in some cases, even staff (Gandara, 2001). While parent participation varies, it is definitely a best practice to maintain communication lines between the program staff and parents, furthermore, to encourage networking among parents themselves (Gandara, 2001).

*Critiques of College Access Programs*

The field of college access programs is relatively new. One of the main critiques of the field is the lack of quality evaluation of the programs. Although the college access field has grown significantly over the years, most of the information and research about the field is mainly descriptive and anecdotal accounts of success (USC, 2007). According to Gandara (2001), a leading researcher in the field of college access programs, the most troubling finding is that few college access programs have engaged in thorough evaluation of their services. These programs often operate on the assumption that they are effective, but no data exists to support that belief. According to USC’s Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, because of the lack of consistent funding, most programs have not invested in significant and sustained evaluations (USC, 2007). Many of these programs rely on anecdotal evidence to determine whether their students actually go on to earn college degrees and while most make claims of 80 to 90% success rates, these numbers are not backed up by concrete data and evaluation. Furthermore, there are virtually no data gathered on the successes of graduated of college access programs after they are in college (USC). In a data-driven society, the dearth of sophisticated social
science research, which tests the assumptions about college access and the effectiveness of programs in promoting college access, leaves the field vulnerable (Bailis et al., 1995).

One of the major challenges college access programs face in producing quality research on program impacts lies in the inability for studies to conduct research using comparison groups. While studies often produce a solid account of how many students in the program went on to pursue higher education, there is no way in distinguishing how much of an influence the college access program had on the students’ persistence to higher education (Bailis et al., 1995).

Another barrier researchers studying college programs often face, lies in the fact that many college access programs are highly qualitative in nature. This quantitative nature makes it very hard to measure the entire impact of a program. As one college access staff person stated, “I think it’s the softer stuff, the nebulous stuff, which is harder to convey, but which is sometimes the heart and soul of what we do and the difference we make” (Bailis et al., 1995, p. 11). As such, it is often very difficult to capture the entire impact of college access programs in quantitative data because often times the two are not compatible in nature (Bailis et al.).

Another critique of many college access programs is they often lack clear, concise goals. Too often, many programs have generic goals that defy evaluation and do not lead towards a specific outcome. While “love of learning” or “to increase access” are admirable mission statements, they do not explain by which methods success of these goals will be assessed.
Lastly, another critique of college access programs is program attrition. Many college access programs are subject to high rates of program attrition for various reasons. Since data is not often collected to report attrition, few programs report or know the exact numbers of students who begin the program and actually complete it. Research estimated that about one-third to half of students who begin college access programs leave before they complete the program (Gandara, 2001). Despite these numbers, programs still report high rates of persistence to college but the numbers often do not account for those who disenrolled from the program prior to completion.

After reviewing the literature on college access programs, one can see there is a strong need for program evaluation. One example of a college access program which is being evaluated very carefully is the Upward Bound program. The researcher presents the controversy surrounding the efficacy of the Upward Bound program as an example of how college access programs which lack quality assessment are at-risk of being discredited and deemed ineffective. Upward Bound, a college access program for low-income students that has been around since the 1964, has been under harsh scrutiny from the Bush administration (Field, 2007). As one of the nations’ federally funded TRIO programs, this scrutiny from the administration came in response to a study conducted in 1999 which found Upward Bound had virtually no effect on the college-going rates of its 57,000 participants from over 600 sites. The study’s main criticism of Upward Bound was focused on a theory that had been part of the program since the 1960s: “if you improve self-esteem first, academic performance will follow” (Morgan, 2002, p. 4). Critics of the theory stated the program relied on a “feel-good” approach rather than real
measures of achievement. The 1999 study was the first large-scale evaluation of the program since the 1970s, and was conducted by an independent group which focused on analyzing public policy. The study randomly selected 67 Upward Bound sites and compared educational outcomes (high school graduation and persistence to an institution of higher education) for Upward Bound students and for a control group with similar socioeconomic circumstances but did not have access to the program. The findings revealed that the program rarely succeeded in fulfilling one of its goals, working with students throughout their high school years from freshman to senior year. On average, Upward Bound students participated for 19 months in the program, and of these 19 months, their participation was often sporadic (Morgan, 2002).

In a 2002 draft report, the third report in a series from a longitudinal study of Upward Bound found that most participants in the program were no more likely to attend college than students who did not participate in the program. While these findings are definitely shocking, Larry Oxendine, director of the federal TRIO programs, responded to the reports by sharing his hypothesis on the results, “The reason Upward Bound failed to increase college-going rates for the rest of the participants was because those students would have gone to college anyway. If Upward Bound were refocused on higher-risk students, its impact on college-going rates would be greater…” (as cited in Field, 2007, p. 1).

Oxendine further stated that the results show that Upward Bound programs were serving students who would succeed without the program and that many programs set unrealistic expectations for college-attendance and then were forced to select high-
performing students to meet those targets (as cited in Field, 2007). Given that Upward Bound is a federally funded program, it is always fighting to keep its funding and the fear of not having high-enough numbers, drive this skewed admission selection. Oxendine proposed to test his hypothesis by launching a second study to compare high-risk Upward Bound participants with a control group of non-participants and with lower-risk Upward Bound participants (as cited in Field). The study, while it intended to assess the impact of the program on high-risk students, received much criticism from the Council for Opportunity in Education, which is Upward Bounds’ main lobbying group. The council believed that such research is unethical, and even immoral, since it requires programs to actively recruit students then deny them admission to the program for the sake of research. The council is currently fighting to stop the progress of the study by going to Congress to declare the study unethical. As his main argument against the study, Arnold Mitchem, president of the Council for Opportunity in Education, stated “to take a kid who is vulnerable and say, ‘You’ve got a shot at college,’ and then take it away…What is it that you were so desperate to find out that you had to abuse people” (Field, 2007, p. 2). While the study is currently underway, Congress has agreed to include language in a pending higher education bill that would halt evaluation of the study (Field).

Rationale for the Study

This chapter has presented a wealth of information concerning the experiences of low-income students’ in the nation’s educational system, a look at the experiences of high-achieving low-income students in America, as well as a summary of college
preparations programs, their purpose, their best practices, as well as their critiques. This study looked at the effectiveness of one college preparation program, specifically as it relates to low-income students and their aspirations to pursue higher education.

Summary

After reviewing the experiences of low-income students in education, the reality for these students is that there are many barriers and challenges they need to overcome in order to pursue higher education. After exploring this reality, an exploration of the field of college-preparation programs and the best practices which have become the core elements for many programs is explored. Lastly, while college preparation programs strive to increase access to higher education for underrepresented students, the lack of quality assessment for the efficacy of these programs make it hard for them to continue to serve their students and best serve them as well.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Low-income students attend four-year colleges at a significantly lower rate than students from higher income households (“A Shared Agenda,” 2004). College access programs seek to address this problem; however, research reveals that there is a need for college access programs to assess and evaluate their practices. The purpose of this research study is to determine how BSAC influenced its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. The following three research questions are investigated in the study:

1) What influential role did BSAC play in its alumni’s aspirations to pursue or not pursue higher education?

2) Which BSAC program elements were most influential in alumni’s decisions to pursue higher education?

3) How satisfied are alumni of BSAC programming, specifically as it relates to college preparation?

Sampling Procedures

Population

This study is from the focal point of alumni. BSAC began in 1993 as a two-year college access program and students were considered to be alumni after their eighth grade year. However, the program has since evolved into a six-year college access program and
students are not considered alumni until they graduate from high school. As such, using
this alumni definition, the program’s first alumni class was with the high school
graduating class of 1999. Since 1999, there have been ten BSAC alumni classes, with the
most recent class in 2009.

Although each BSAC alumni class is not exactly the same, similar demographics
do exist for each class. For example, each class consists of a majority of students who
attend under-resourced schools, qualify for free and reduced lunch and are first-
generation students. However, records, data information and contact information have not
been tracked for each alumni class. Information for the most recent alumni classes
contains more accurate information. As such, this study will survey the five most recent
alumni classes starting with the class of 2005 and ending with the class of 2009.

Sample

As mentioned previously, the sample for this study is BSAC alumni starting with
the graduating high school class of 2005 to class of 2009. BSAC alumni are identified as
having successfully completed the six-week summer program for the summers before
entering seventh and eighth grades and have graduated from high school. The target
sample size for the study was approximately 130 BSAC alumni. The student ethnic/racial
breakdown of these five alumni cohorts is 49% Asian, 40% Latino, five percent African
American, two percent White, and four percent other. Eighty-two percent of these
students were first-generation, 87% low-income, and twelve percent came from a single
parent household. The target population was alumni for whom a valid email address was
on record. These alumni were invited to complete the online survey.
Setting

BSAC is based out of Sacramento Country Day School (SCDS), an independent school. However, the majority of BSAC students attend elementary, middle, and high schools in the Sacramento City (SCUSD) and Twin Rivers (TRUSD) Unified School Districts. A few students do attend schools in the San Juan (SJUSD), Natomas (NUSD) and Elk Grove Unified School Districts (EGUSD). BSAC works with these five separate school districts, in varying capacities, and at each level: elementary, middle, and secondary.

At the elementary level, BSAC students are recruited from about a dozen separate elementary schools in the SCUSD, TRUSD, and one from SJUSD. These elementary schools feed into five main middle schools in the SCUSD and TRUSD. The majority of BSAC students then attend high schools within SCUSD and TRUSD, with a few in the SJUSD, NUSD and EGUSD. Some students also attend some of the private/independent high schools in the Sacramento Area.


The EDI is intended to measure how much "diversity" or "variety" a school or district has among the ethnic groups in its student population. More specifically, the Index reflects how evenly distributed these students are among the seven ethnic categories reported to the California Department of Education. The more
evenly distributed the student body, the higher the number…currently the highest index for a school is 78. (www.ed-data.k12.ca.us)

The other main district BSAC works with, TRUSD, received an EDI score of 60 in 2008-2009 (EDP, 2009). As for indicators of socio-economic status, the California Department of Education reports on the percentage of students who qualify for the federally funded free and reduced lunch program. For the 2008-2009 school year, the percentage of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch for SCUSD was 65% and 68.7% for TRUSD (EDP, 2009). Looking at these statistics, one can see that Sacramento is indeed a very diverse city with a great population of low-income students. Since college attainment is much lower for students from low-income households, the need for college access programs, such as BSAC, is also present. BSAC aims to serve students who are motivated in school and want to go to college, but because of a lack of resources, they need extra support in getting there.

Research Design

The researcher utilized a mixed-methodology approach for this study. Johnson and Christensen (2004) described mixed model research as using both qualitative and quantitative research within a study. In qualitative research, the primary objectives are to explore and describe, whereas in quantitative research the objectives are to explain and describe.

By utilizing a mixed-method approach, the researcher is able to use one method to help develop or inform the other method (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). Also, by
employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the researcher is able to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the data and is not limited to one method alone. However, using a mixed-methods approach does provide some disadvantages as well. For example, utilizing this approach requires a need of extensive data collection. It is also very time-intensive to analyze both text and numeric data (Creswell, 2003). Given the demanding nature of a mixed-method approach, generally studies using the mixed-method approach tend to give priority or weight to quantitative or qualitative data.

In this study, the researcher utilized the concurrent procedures strategy of the mixed-method approach. Concurrent procedure is defined as bringing together quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. In this design, both forms of data are collected at the same time during a study and then the information is integrated and there is an interpretation of the overall results (Creswell, 2003). However, as mentioned above, with the mixed-method approach, priority or weight is given to quantitative or qualitative data. In this study, the quantitative data is given more weight since there is more information provided by the quantitative data than from the qualitative data.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was a web-based survey using a questionnaire format. The questionnaire included demographic information, students’ school background, BSAC involvement, a rating scale of program elements influencing their aspirations to pursue higher education, post-secondary information and open-ended
questions of how the program influenced their aspirations. The Request for Review by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects was submitted and approved by California State University, Sacramento, as no risk.

The researcher sent a mass email to approximately 130 BSAC alumni. The email, which included a statement of voluntary consent to participate, outlined the purpose of the study and requested voluntary participation in the web-based survey. Individuals who consented to participate were instructed to click on the link included in the email which directed them to the survey. Those who decided not to participate in the study did not follow the link and were asked to delete the email. All of the surveys were administered and collected between November 1, 2009 and November 15, 2009.

Instrumentation

The primary method used for data collection was a customized web-based survey (Appendix A). The researcher developed the web-based survey through Survey Monkey, a tool for the creation and collection of online surveys (www.surveymonkey.com). The survey consisted of 30 questions and included a combination of open-ended, closed-ended, and questions on a Likert scale. The survey questions were informed by the current research related to college access programs, and knowledge of BSAC programming. The researcher asked BSAC alumni to volunteer to complete and return the survey within a given time period.

The survey is divided into six separate sections. Section A asks basic student demographic information such as high school graduation year, gender, race/ethnicities,
etc. Section B provides a general evaluation of BSAC and how satisfied they were with specific program elements as well as their experience in the program. Section C pertains to evaluating middle school program elements and Section D evaluates high school program elements. Section E provides post-secondary information such as current educational status. Lastly, Section F presents open-ended questions allowing participants to reflect and include information based on their experiences in the program.

Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher included open-ended questions and conducted a thematic analysis of the responses. With the collected surveys, the researcher conducted a thorough analysis of the data consisting of both a numerical and thematic analysis of the data. For the quantitative data collected from the survey, the researcher used descriptive statistics to summarize and explain the results. For the qualitative data, these responses were grouped by common themes and patterns. The researcher also included questions based on a Likert scale which was then analyzed.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

College enrollment rates for students from low-income households are significantly lower than those from higher incomes ("A Shared Agenda," 2004). Better understanding of the college access problem for low-income students is of critical importance for higher education. Furthermore, identifying best practices which are effective in combatting this college access problem is even more important. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role BSAC has in influencing its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. This researcher intends to analyze the extent to which specific program elements affected alumni’s aspirations to attend higher education. The findings from this study will not only contribute to the available literature on college access programs, but will also provide understanding of the services and programming that are most influential in a student’s decision to pursue higher education.

Presentation of the Data

The presentation of the data from this study is divided into three parts. Part one includes a presentation of the demographical and background information on the population sample used for this study. It includes participants’ high school graduation year, gender, ethnicity, level of parental education, and high school parental income level. Students are also asked about their post-secondary decisions such as which post-secondary programs they applied to, were accepted into and their post-secondary decision
after high school. This basic demographic information of the sample population helps to provide a context for the study.

Part two includes a presentation of key findings and analysis based on the questions asked in the survey. The three research questions proposed also guided the findings and analysis:

1) What influential role did Breakthrough Sacramento play in its alumni’s aspirations to pursue or not pursue higher education?

2) Which BSAC program elements were most influential in alumni’s decisions to pursue higher education?

3) How satisfied are alumni of BSAC programming, specifically as it relates to college preparation?

The last part of the presentation of data provides a summary of the chapter and of the study’s findings and observations. This part reviews and answers the three research questions presented in this study and provides the information needed for the recommendations in Chapter 5. This chapter incorporates several quotes from the survey which represent the alumni voices and experiences, but also supports the research and findings of the study.

Demographics

Twenty-nine total BSAC alumni participated in the study by completing a web-based survey, giving a response rate of 22.3%. Of the total participants, 22 (71%) were female and nine (29%) were male. Table 1 presents the high school graduation year for
the participants in the study. The majority of the participants graduated in high school in 2009 (27.6%), followed by the class of 2008 with 24.1%. The classes of 2007, 2006, and 2005 had participation rates of 17.2%, 17.2% and 13.8%, respectively. It is interesting to note that the participation levels by class are in order of graduation year, with the most recent graduating class having the highest participation. This may be that more recent alumni feel more connected to the program or that there is more up-to-date contact information for more recent alumni.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School Graduation Year</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The target population for this study was BSAC alumni from the high school graduating classes of 2005 to 2009. Table 2 presents the participant’s self-identified ethnicities. The majority of respondents were identified as Asian (60.7%), followed by Latino/Hispanic with 28.6%. Only 14.3% were identified as Black/African American and 14.3% White. Four participants (14.3%) did select “Other” specifying Hmong and none
of the participants identified as American Indian. Since each BSAC class is very diverse, the respondents in this study are also expected to be a diverse ethnic group. However, it must be noted that an overwhelmingly majority of participants are Asian. Also, there is one participant who did not respond to this question.

Table 2

Participants’ Self-Identified Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Asian American</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Respondents</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority of participants were first-generation college students, as indicated by Table 3. Participants were asked to select the parent with the highest level of education, meaning that the other parent must have equal or less education than what was indicated. A combined percentage of 69% indicated participant’s parental education was no more than a high school education (34.5% elementary and 34.5% high school), which affirms their first-generation status. Twenty-four percent indicated that their parents had attended some college, which is still considered to be first-generation, and only one
participant (3.4%) indicated their parent had achieved a four-year college degree. This table shows that 28 of the 29 participants were first-generation students.

Table 3

Parents’ Highest Level of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Year College</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or Higher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows parental income levels while the participant was in high school. Participants were asked to approximate to the best of their knowledge if they did not know the exact income level. The majority of participants (63.3%) identified the lowest income bracket as their parental income level in high school. The next highest income level was that of the second income level bracket. These findings are especially important, since the federal poverty level for a family of four with two children was $21,000 in 2008, $20,650 in 2007, and $20,000 in 2006. (www.nccp.org, 2009). Three participants indicated the third and fourth income level bracket and one participant indicated the second highest income level bracket. No participants selected the highest income level bracket. The vast majority are in the lowest income bracket, indicating their low-income status.
Table 4

Parents’ Income Level in High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 – 30,000</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,001 – 45,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,001 – 60,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,001 – 75,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,001 – 90,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,001 and Above</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To complete the demographic section, participants were asked a series of questions about their post-secondary information. First, Table 5 presents which post-secondary programs participants applied to while in high school. A vast majority of participants (87.5%) said they had applied to a four-year college/university during their senior year of high school. Seven participants (29.2%) said they had also applied to a two-year community college. No participants said they had applied to a vocational/trade school and only one participant said they had applied to the military. This table shows a strong interest in attending a four-year college after high school.
Table 5

Which post-secondary programs did you apply to? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Community College</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College/University</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/Trade School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following up with the previous question, Table 6 shows which programs participants were granted admission. Of those who had applied to a four-year college, again, 87.5% said they had been admitted, indicating a 100% admission rate. This 100% admission rate is also true for the other two sections participants had applied to. Of the seven which had applied to a two-year community college, all had been admitted. Similarly, the one participant who had applied to the military was also admitted. Since two-year colleges do not have an admission standard, it is not surprising that all of those who applied to a two-year college were admitted. However, four-year colleges do have strict admission standards. So, the 100% admission rate of participants is definitely noteworthy. These participants not only succeeded in applying to a four-year college, but also were granted admission to at least one four-year college.
Table 6

Which post-secondary programs were you accepted into? Check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Community College</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College/University</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/Trade School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To complete the series of post-secondary questions, participants were also asked about their post-secondary decision six-months after high school graduation. Table 7 presents this data. Seventy-five percent of participants said they decided to attend a four-year college/university while 20.8% decided to attend a two-year community college. It must be noted only 23 of the 29 participants responded to this question.
Table 7

Within six-months of high school graduation, what was your post-secondary decision?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Community College</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year College/University</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/Trade School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, this demographic section reveals that the most recent BSAC alumni classes had the greatest participation levels in this study. Of those who did participate, the majority was female participants and for race/ethnicity, most of the participants were of Asian descent. Also, the section concluded the majority of participants were first-generation college students and came from low-income households. Lastly, a majority of participants applied to, were accepted into, and chose to attend a four-year college within six-months of high school graduation. With the purpose statement in mind, the demographic section revealed that BSAC alumni have strong aspirations to pursue higher education, as indicated by the majority of the participants in this study choosing to pursue higher education after high school.
Findings

The first research question guiding this study was what role BSAC played in influencing aspirations of its alumni to pursue higher education. Questions six through nine of the survey directly asked participants about the influential role BSAC had on their aspirations to pursue higher education. Participants were asked to read and then respond to a statement with the appropriate level of agreement.

Table 8 presents the participants’ responses when asked how BSAC influenced their aspirations to pursue higher education. An overwhelming majority (84%) selected that it “Very Positively” influenced their aspirations to pursue higher education. Only four percent selected that it “Positively” influenced them, and none of the participants selected “Not at All”, “Negatively” or “Very Negatively”. This revealed the positive overall influence BSAC had on these participants’ aspirations to pursue higher education. However, 25 of the 29 participants in the survey chose to respond to this question.

Table 8

How did BSAC influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Positively</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not At All</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Negatively</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 asks participants to read a few statements related to the influential role BSAC played in their life and then respond with the appropriate level of agreement. The findings reveal the majority of participants (84%), “Strongly Agreed” that their participation in Breakthrough was beneficial to their college aspirations. Twelve percent had “Agreed” and one participant did “Strongly Disagree” to the statement. Sixty percent of participants “Strongly Agree” that BSAC played a vital role in their post-secondary aspirations and 36% selected “Agree”. Again, one participant (4%) “Strongly Disagreed” to the statement. Lastly, 64% “Strongly Agreed” that BSAC was one of the most influential factors in their aspirations to pursue high education and 28% selected “Agree”.

Looking at each of the three statements, one can see that the majority of participants either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to each statement, which does indicate a positive influential role. However, the last two statements did not receive the same “Strongly Agree” level of response as the first statement. Also, it must be noted that for the first two statements, one participant “Strongly Disagrees” and for the last statement, two participants select the “Neutral” response.
Table 9

Read and respond to the following statements with your level of agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe my participation as a Breakthrough student was beneficial to my college aspirations</td>
<td>84% (19)</td>
<td>12% (3)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that BSAC played a vital role in my post-secondary education</td>
<td>60% (15)</td>
<td>36% (9)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that BSAC was one of the most influential factors in my aspirations to pursue higher education.</td>
<td>64% (16)</td>
<td>28% (7)</td>
<td>8% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 29 asks participants, through an open-ended question, to explain how BSAC influenced their aspiration to pursue higher education. While the responses varied, the researcher carefully studied and bracketed the responses into common themes or categories. Twenty-six of the 29 participants answered the question. Data revealed that BSAC influenced the participants’ aspirations to attend high education by highlighting the importance of school, providing exposure to different opportunities, and providing information about the college process. The following three themes emerged as how BSAC influenced participants to pursue higher education:
Table 10

How did BSAC influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highlighting the Importance of Education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Different Opportunities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Awareness and Information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 reveals the positive influence BSAC had on these participants. Twelve participants (46.2%) indicated that BSAC influence their aspirations to pursue higher education by highlighting the importance of education. The following responses capture some of the participant’s responses around how BSAC highlights the importance of education:

- BSAC let me know how important a college education was and that if I worked hard it would be easy to achieve. It also let me know that it was possible and gave me the discipline that I carried with me through high school and college.
- Breakthrough helped me get ready for college. We always talked about college and how important school was.
- Breakthrough helped me stay focused in school and recognize the importance of education.
In addition to the importance of education, 30.7% of participants also reported that their experience in BSAC exposed them to different opportunities which ultimately helped them prepare for college. Following are three participants’ responses:

- Breakthrough showed me options outside of my familial exposure (community college, trade schools, and work right out of high school). BSAC made higher education extremely desirable if not a complete necessity for the achievement of certain life goals.
- Breakthrough allowed me to cultivate my interest in the sciences by taking chemistry, biology, etc. during the summer program.
- I was exposed to different life experiences because of all of the opportunities and resources that Breakthrough offered.

The last theme emerging from the responses is that BSAC provided college awareness and information. College awareness was crucial in that students began thinking about college at a very early age and how to prepare for college starting in middle school. BSAC, by providing college information, demystified the college matriculation process. Six participants (23.1% of participants), indicated this in their responses and the following participants further elaborate on this:

- As a child of immigrant parents, BSAC provided me with support; I had a place to turn to for information about college when I could not turn to my parents. It was also encouraging to be around people who really believed in me and around people who really believed in the benefits of attending college.
- BSAC introduced me to a variety of people who were either in the college application process or currently in their first years of college. They were able to answer any questions that I had regarding college.

- BSAC opened my mind to college at an early age. I didn't even think about college before Breakthrough. Then after my first summer at Breakthrough, I noticed that most of my friends weren't thinking about college yet.

Looking at each of the three themes emerging from the participants’ responses, one can see that BSAC excels in the area of highlighting the importance of education since over 46% of participants mention this. Almost 31% of participants indicated that BSAC provides exposure to different opportunities. However, an area of improvement would be in providing college awareness and information, since only 23.1% of participants indicated this in their responses.

Questions 15 through 24 of the survey addressed the second research question, “Which BSAC program elements are most influential in a students’ decision to pursue higher education”? Questions were divided into separate sections by middle and high school programming.

**Middle School Programming**

Table 11 asks participants how each BSAC middle school program element influenced their aspiration to pursue higher education. Nineteen participants (79%) selected that the two six-week summer sessions before their seventh and eighth grade years, had “Very Positively” influenced their aspirations to pursue higher education. The remaining 20.8% indicated a “Positive” influence. A majority of participants (70.8%)
selected that Weekly Breakthroughs (WBs) and BSAC’s school year tutoring, had “Positively” influenced their aspirations to pursue higher education with 12.5% indicating a “Very Positive” influence. While no participants selected a “Very Negative” or “Negative” response, 16.7% did indicate that WB did not influence their aspirations to pursue higher education at all.

Responses for the other three categories: Breakthrough Saturdays, Monthly Breakthrough Newsletter, and High School Options in eighth grade, received a more varied response rate. Interestingly, 26.1% selected “Very Positively” for Breakthrough Saturdays, 56.5% selected “Positively,” and 17.4% selected “Not at All”. In regards to the monthly newsletter, 39.1% said it had very positively influenced them, 56.5% selected “Positively” and 13% said it had no influence at all. Lastly, in the area of eighth grade high school options, 20.8% selected a “Very Positive” response, 58.3% selected “Positively” and 20.8% chose “Not at All”.

Looking at each of the middle school program elements, although each program element received positive responses overall, there were areas of strengths and weaknesses in the middle school program. The two six-week summer sessions were definitely an area of strength for the middle school program since the majority of participants indicated it had “Very Positively” influenced them. However, the other program elements did not receive the same response. In fact, for each of these program elements, there were a few participants who selected they had not influenced them at all. High School Options received the most “Not at All” responses with 20.8%, indicating an area in need of
improvement. Still, no participants selected a “Negatively” or “Very Negatively” response.

Table 11

How did each of the following BSAC middle school program elements influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Very Positively</th>
<th>Positively</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Negatively</th>
<th>Very Negatively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The two 6-week summer sessions at Sacramento Day School</td>
<td>79.2% (19)</td>
<td>20.8% (5)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Breakthroughs</td>
<td>12.5% (3)</td>
<td>70.8% (17)</td>
<td>16.7% (4)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakthrough Saturdays</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>56.5% (13)</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Breakthrough Newsletter</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>47.8% (11)</td>
<td>13% (3)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school options in 8th Grade</td>
<td>20.8% (5)</td>
<td>58.3% (14)</td>
<td>20.8% (5)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also asked their participation in each of these program elements. Tables 12, 13 and 14 show the participation levels for each of the middle school program elements. The researcher chose to include these questions to provide a background for the evaluation of each of the elements, as shown in Table 9 above. In Table 12, 95.8% of participants attended both summer sessions. Knowing that among participants answering the survey there was a very high summer participation rate for the summer program, the 79.2% “Very Positive” influence can be given much more weight.
Table 12

What was your involvement with the summer program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attended both summer sessions</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I attended the summer prior to my 7th grade year only</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I attended the summer prior to my 8th grade year only</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for WBs, Breakthrough Saturdays, and High School Options, the participation rates vary. For WBs, 45.8% attended all or most WB sessions. Almost 42% said they had attended only a few WB sessions, and although none said they had not attended any WB sessions, 8.3% responded that WB was not available to them and 4.2% were unsure. Now that one can see the participation rates for WBs, the influence WBs had on participants can be better understood. With less than half of participants attending WBs, the 12.5% “Very Positive” response given above provides more contexts. Since not all participants attended WBs regularly, a “Very Positive” influence would be unlikely. However, for the sessions they did attend, they still had a “Positive” influence (70.8%) and for some (17.4%), it did not influence them at all.
Table 13

What was your involvement with Weekly Breakthroughs (WB)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attended all or most WB sessions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I attended only a few WB sessions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not attend WB sessions at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service was not available to me during middle school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar is the participation for Breakthrough Saturdays. Fifty percent indicated attending all or most Breakthrough Saturdays. Almost 46% had attended a few Breakthrough Saturdays and no participants indicated that they had not attended any Breakthrough Saturdays nor that it was unavailable to them. The level of participation in this criterion also impacted the level of influence it had on the participants. Half of participants said they had attended Breakthrough Saturday, and yet only 26.1% said it had “Very Positively” influenced their decision to pursue higher education. Over 56% did say it had “Positively” influenced them and 17.4% said it did not influence them at all.
Table 14

What was your involvement with Breakthrough Saturdays?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attended all or most Breakthrough Saturdays</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I attended only a few Breakthrough Saturdays</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not attend Breakthrough Saturdays at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service was not available to me during middle school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, the participation for High School Options reveals that only 26.1% participated in a High School Options counseling session with a BSAC staff member. Nearly 22% said they did not participate in any High School Options session, and 4.3% said that this service was not available to them in eighth grade. Interestingly, a majority of participants (47.8%) indicated that they were unsure if they had participated in a High School Options Session. With this information, a context is provided for the influence level of High School Options. Of the 26.1% of participants who had a High School Options session, 20.8% of them felt it had “Very Positively” influenced them, and 58.3% said it had “Positively” influenced them. Just over 20% said High School Options “Not at
All” influenced them. This could be those participants who did not participate in a High School Options session or who were unsure of their participation.

Table 15

In Eighth Grade, did you attend a High School Options Counseling Session with a Breakthrough Staff Member?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, my family and I met with a Breakthrough staff member</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, my family and I did not meet with a Breakthrough staff member</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service was not available to me during middle school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participation rates for each of these middle school program elements differed. There seems to be greater participation in the summer program, but the school year programming (WBs, Breakthrough Saturdays, High School Options) was not as consistent, as the participation levels vary.

High School Programming

Table 16 reflects the participants’ responses regarding how each BSAC high school program element influenced their aspiration to pursue higher education. In regards to high school programming, the same numbers are not seen as with the middle school, as
it is much more varied. Fifty percent of the participants selected that the high school visits had “Very Positively” influenced their aspirations to pursue higher education, 22.7% indicating a “Positive” influence and 27.3% selected “Not at All”. The response for test preparation workshops show only 27.3% of participants selected “Very Positively,” 40.9% selected “Positively” and 31.8% selected “Not at All”. Similar results were for the college application and financial aid workshops. For the college application workshop, 36.4% selected “Very Positively,” 22.7% selected “Positively” and 40.9% selected “Not at All”. This is the largest response to the “Not at All” option. Lastly, for the financial aid workshop, similar to the college application workshop, 38.1% selected “Very Positively,” 23.8% selected “Positively” and 38.1% selected “Not at All”. Interestingly, none of the participants ever selected the “Negatively” or “Very Negatively” responses for any of the high school program elements.

Again, as with the middle school program, while each BSAC high school program element received a majority of “Very Positively” or “Positive” responses, there were still areas of strengths and weaknesses. Reviewing the table, the High School Visits with a Breakthrough Staff member received the highest “Very Positively” response. It seems this direct student contact in high school was most valuable to participants. However, the financial aid workshop received the most “Very Positive” and “Positive” response of any of the program elements which also indicates an area of strength. The program element that received the most “Not at All” responses, was the College Application Workshop which would definitely highlight an area of weakness. Even though none of the participants selected the “Negatively” or “Very Negatively” responses, looking at the
varied response levels and the increase of “Not at All” responses, each of the high school program elements were areas in need of improvement.

Table 16

How did each of the following BSAC high school program elements influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Very Positively</th>
<th>Positively</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Negatively</th>
<th>Very Negatively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Visits with Breakthrough Staff</td>
<td>50% (11)</td>
<td>22.7% (5)</td>
<td>27.3% (6)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Preparation Workshops</td>
<td>27.3% (6)</td>
<td>40.9% (9)</td>
<td>31.8% (7)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Application Workshop</td>
<td>36.4% (8)</td>
<td>22.7% (5)</td>
<td>40.9% (9)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Workshop</td>
<td>38.1% (5)</td>
<td>23.8% (14)</td>
<td>38.1% (5)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also asked their participation in each of these high school program elements. Tables 17, 18 and 19 show the participation levels for each of the middle school program elements. The researcher chose to include these questions to provide a background for the evaluation of each of the elements, as shown in Table 16 above. In Table 17 below, only 33% of participants attended all or most high school visits with a Breakthrough staff member. Further, 12.5% of participants selected that they had attended a few high school visits and 20.8% said they had not attended any high school visits. Over 16% of participants said high school visits were not available to them and another 16.7% said they were unsure if they had attended any high school visits. As such, the evaluation for the high school program element is based off a 33% attendance rate.
Table 17

What was your involvement with programming for high school, pertaining to high school visits?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attended all or most test preparation workshops</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I attended a few test preparation workshops</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not attend any test preparation workshops</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service was not available to me during high school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for Breakthrough test preparation, college and financial aid workshops, the participation rates varied. For test preparation, only 12.5% attended all or most test preparation workshops. About 30% of participants said they had attended a few test preparation workshops, 41.7% did not attend any and 8.3% were unsure of their attendance. Similar participation rates exist for the college and financial aid application workshops, as presented in Tables 17 and 18.
Table 18
What was your involvement with BSAC’s test preparation workshops?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attended all or most test preparation workshops</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I attended a few test preparation workshops</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not attend any test preparation workshops</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service was not available to me during high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar is the participation for Breakthrough Saturdays. Fifty percent indicated attending all or most Breakthrough Saturdays. Almost 46% had attended a few Breakthrough Saturdays and no participants indicated that they had not attended any Breakthrough Saturdays nor that it was unavailable to them. The level of participation in this criterion also impacts the level of influence it had on the participants. Half of the participants said they had attended Breakthrough Saturday, and yet only 26.1% said it had “Very Positively” influenced their decision to pursue higher education. Over 56% did say it had “Positively” influenced them and 17.4% said it did not influence them at all.
Table 19

In senior year, what was your involvement with BSAC’s college application workshop?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attended the college</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preparation my senior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not attend the</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college application</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workshop my senior year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service was not</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>available to me during</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20

In senior year, what was your involvement with BSAC’s financial aid workshop?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attended the financial</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aid workshop during my</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senior year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not attend the</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial aid workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during my senior year.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This service was not</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>available to me during</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participation rates for each of these high school program elements differ greatly. Overall, high school participation rates are much lower than those in middle school. The discrepancy in middle and high school participant rates suggest there is a different level of programming in each level and the high school program is definitely an area in need of improvement.

Question 30 asks participants, through an open-ended question, what they considered to be BSAC’s strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to promoting college aspirations. A total of 24 participants responded to this question and of these 28 responses, there were two themes (below), which emerged for BSAC’s strengths and weaknesses.

Table 21

Considering your post-secondary experiences, what would you consider to be BSAC’s strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to promoting college aspirations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on college</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weaknesses:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for more support in high school</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other participants, who did not write about these two themes, addressed other areas, but none were as commonly presented as the two themes above. These themes emerged in many participants’ responses. The following responses capture some of the participants’ sentiments regarding the strengths of BSAC:
• It's all about helping you get ready for college. BSAC makes college an expectation for students.

• Great college-going environment and support for college. Great teachers, staff, and students.

• Focusing on college preparation and college awareness is the most important aspect of BSAC.

The following responses capture some of the participants’ sentiments regarding the weaknesses of BSAC:

• I see that high school students don't feel as attached to Breakthrough once the two summer sessions end. Also, I feel like the high school visits should be more frequent, at least three times a year, so that they can be put on a college-bound track if they are not taking the right classes, joining clubs, etc.

• There should be more involvement with high school students and ways for high school students to stay involved with BSAC.

• There needs to be more ways to connect with high school students.

Finally, participants were asked about their satisfaction level of BSAC programming, specifically as it relates to college preparation which addresses the third research question, “How satisfied are alumni of BSAC programming, specifically as it relates to college preparation”? Table 22 shows participant responses when asked to rank their satisfaction level in each of the specific areas. Almost 70% of participants said they were “Very Satisfied” with their summer experience. Just over 30% said they were “Satisfied”. This means a stunning 100% of participants said they were either “Very
Satisfied” or “Satisfied” with their summer experience at BSAC and the college preparation it provided. No participants selected a “Neutral,” “Dissatisfied,” or “Very Dissatisfied” response.

The results in each of the other areas are much more varied. In response to the school year program, a majority of participants were still satisfied with their school year experience. However, the same response is not seen for the school year as with the summer program. Only 29.2% said they were “Very Satisfied,” 63.5% said they were “Satisfied” and 8.2% said they felt “Neutral” about the school year program and its level of college preparation. Still, no participants said there were “Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied”.

In the area of academic support, participants were equally “Very Satisfied” and “Satisfied” with 43.5%. Close to eight percent said they felt “Neutral” about the academic support at BSAC and for the first time, one participant said they were “Dissatisfied”.

Most participants (65.2%) were “Very Satisfied” with the level of exposure to colleges/universities BSAC provided and 30.4% were also “Satisfied”. Only one person again selected a “Neutral” response and none selected “Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied”.

The participants’ responses highlight a great satisfaction with the summer program, exposure to colleges/universities, and also the overall Breakthrough experience. However, looking more closely at the data we can see that BSAC’s area of weakness is
academic support, which received the fewest “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied” responses, a few “Neutral” responses, and one “Dissatisfied” response.

Table 22

When thinking of your experiences with BSAC, as it pertains to college preparation, how satisfied were you with the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Very Positively</th>
<th>Positively</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Negatively</th>
<th>Very Negatively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer Experience</td>
<td>69.6% (16)</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Year Experience</td>
<td>29.2% (7)</td>
<td>63.5% (15)</td>
<td>8.3% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>43.5% (10)</td>
<td>43.5% (8)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Colleges/Universities</td>
<td>65.2% (15)</td>
<td>30.4% (8)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Experience</td>
<td>54.4% (12)</td>
<td>40.9% (9)</td>
<td>4.5% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Breakthrough Experience</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also asked how BSAC met their needs in specific areas. Table 23 shows participants’ responses. In the area of academic preparation, 60% of participants selected “Extremely Well” and the remaining 40% selected “Well”. In the area of academic assistance, 44% of participants selected “Extremely Well,” 53% selected “Well” and one participant (4%) selected “Neutral”. For High School Options, 32% selected “Extremely Well,” 52% selected well, and three participants (twelve percent) selected “Neutral”. In regards to the area of educational field trips, 52% selected “Extremely Well,” 43% and selected “Well”. Lastly, in the area of college information,
68% of participants felt that BSAC had met their needs extremely well and the remaining 32% felt that BSAC had met their need well.

Overall, it was apparent that BSAC met the participants’ needs well. The college information needs were met better than any other area, closely followed by academic preparation. However, area which least met participants’ needs was high school options counseling. This area received the least “Extremely Well” and “Well” responses, a few “Neutral” responses, and one “Not Well” response. This is definitely an area in need of improvement.

Table 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Extremely Well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Well</th>
<th>Extremely Not Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Preparation</td>
<td>60% (15)</td>
<td>40%  (10)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Assistance</td>
<td>44% (11)</td>
<td>52%  (13)</td>
<td>4% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Options/Counseling</td>
<td>32% (8)</td>
<td>52%  (13)</td>
<td>12% (3)</td>
<td>4% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Fieldtrips</td>
<td>52% (13)</td>
<td>48%  (12)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Information</td>
<td>68% (17)</td>
<td>32%  (8)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also addressing the third research question, participants were asked two simple questions. The first asked would they recommend BSAC to a younger sibling or relative. In Table 24 below, 76% percent of participants said they would “Strongly Recommend”
BSAC and the remaining 24% said they would “Recommend” BSAC to a younger sibling or relative.

Table 24

Would you recommend BSAC to a younger sibling/relative?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Recommend</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Recommended</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Not Recommended</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also related to satisfaction, participants were asked if they were to do it again, would they again choose to apply to BSAC. Table 25 shows that an overwhelming 96% of participants said they would apply again. However, one person did say that they would be unsure if they would apply again.

Table 25

If you were to do it again, would you choose to apply to BSAC?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This study examined three critical questions related to the influential role BSAC had on its alumni’s decision to pursue higher education. The study is from the focal point of over 29 alumni and it is their voices and experiences which provide insight to this research. Question one examined the influential role BSAC played in its alumni’s aspiration to pursue higher education. The researcher addressed the first research question by asking participants a series of questions related to how BSAC influenced their decision to pursue higher education.

Overall, BSAC had a very positive influence on participant’s decision to pursue higher education. The data shows that BSAC was indeed beneficial and vital to participants’ decisions to pursue higher education. For some, it was also the most important influence affecting their decision to pursue higher education. Furthermore, participants highlighted three areas in which BSAC had this very positive influence: it helped participants recognize the importance of education, exposed them to different opportunities and provided college awareness and information.

The second research question is related to which BSAC program elements were the most influential in alumni’s decisions to pursue higher education. For the middle school programming, results did vary but the summer program was by far, the most influential program element of BSAC. While the school year program did have a positive influence on participants overall, some program elements were more influential than others. For example, after the summer program, BSAC’s monthly newsletter was the next most influential program element closely followed by Breakthrough Saturdays and High
School Options. Interestingly, WBs was considered to be the least influential. However, as noted in the findings section, participant rates for each of these school year program elements differed and were much less than participation levels for the summer program.

As for the high school programming, despite varying levels of participation for each of the programming levels, high school visits were considered to be the most influential program element. The responses for test preparation, college, and financial aid application workshops did receive some positive influence, however, more participants selected that these had no influence on them at all.

Question three of the study explored alumni’s satisfaction of BSAC programming, specifically as it relates to college preparation. Overall, the majority of participants were indeed very satisfied with BSAC programming. However, BSAC did do better in some areas moreso than others. More specifically, BSAC’s strengths are in providing college information and academic preparation. BSAC did well in providing academic assistance and providing educational field trips. The area of most improvement would be in providing better High School Options Counseling and more high school support. Even though the overall response was positive, BSAC could improve in each of these areas to ensure greater satisfaction levels and greater college preparation for its students.

The purpose of this study was to determine how BSAC influenced its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education and to analyze the extent to which specific program elements affect students’ aspirations to attend higher education. The approach taken by the researcher was to capture the experiences and opinions of alumni. The researcher hoped that the findings from this study would not only contribute to the
literature of college access programs, but would also help to inform, guide and shape BSAC programming to be more influential in students’ decisions to pursue higher education. In the next chapter, the researcher uses past literature, and findings from this study to develop recommendations.
Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine how BSAC influenced its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. The three research questions guiding this study explore 1) BSAC’s influential role on alumni’s decisions to pursue higher education, 2) which BSAC program elements were most influential, and 3) their level of satisfaction of BSAC programming, specifically as it relates to college preparation.

In Chapter 2, the researcher conducted an extensive review of the literature on college-access programs. Research has shown that the main barriers include a low college-going culture for low-income students, negative peer influences, lack of information, and lack of academic preparation. Best practices for college access programs include early outreach, academic support, mentoring, college advising, and social and cultural capital. However, college access programs also have been critiqued for their lack of quality research, lack of clear and concise goals, and a high attrition rate. In order to enhance the research and provide a better perspective on the research questions posed, these topics were reviewed and helped guide the recommendations presented in this chapter.

Finally, in Chapter 4, using a customized web-based survey, the researcher collected data from 29 BSAC alumni. The focal point of the study was alumni because they have gone through the program and can offer valuable insights and
recommendations which could help improve the success of the program. Both closed and open-ended questions were asked to allow alumni the opportunity to share their perspectives and opinions about the program. Results from the survey were analyzed and recorded in order to answer the proposed research questions. This enabled the researcher to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Conclusions

As a result of the data collected in this study and the literature review conducted in Chapter 2, the researcher drew three conclusions. These conclusions also address the three research questions guiding this study. The first conclusion is that by providing college awareness and information at an early age, BSAC had a very influential role in its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. The second conclusion made is that the middle school programming during the school year is not meeting the needs of the students. The third and final conclusion is that BSAC students no longer feel as involved in the program once they enter high school.

The first conclusion is that BSAC had a very influential role in its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education. This conclusion was based on information taken from responses on the survey. In the survey, participants answered both closed and open-ended questions related to this issue. Alumni’s responses indicated that BSAC had a very positive influence on them and that it was one of the most influential factors in their decision to pursue higher education. Specifically, they highlighted that BSAC helped
them recognize the importance of education, exposed them to different opportunities and provided college awareness and information.

Looking at the very high number of alumni who applied to, were accepted, and enrolled into a four-year university, one can see that BSAC programming beginning in middle school, is indeed very successful in aspiring these students. In fact, during their middle school years, participants highlighted the great influence the summer program had on their aspirations to pursue higher education. This conclusion is consistent with research on college access programs. College access programs combat barriers to higher education by creating a college-going culture for students, providing essential college information, mentoring, and exposing them to different opportunities (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Field, 2007; Gandara, 2001; Tierney et al., 2006).

The second conclusion is that the middle school programming in the school year is not meeting the needs of the students. From the participants’ responses, one can see a strong need to improve the school year programming. Firstly, participation levels for the school year program are much lower and much more varied than the summer program. This is a huge problem to address because if students are not participating in the program, how can they benefit from it? Secondly, Weekly Breakthroughs, BSAC’s after school year tutoring program, is not providing enough academic support to the students. Many alumni stated that they needed more academic support from BSAC in order to have been better prepared for college. This should be addressed not only in the summer program, but also Weekly Breakthroughs. Lastly, many participants noted that they did not receive enough support in the area of High School Options counseling. In fact, many students did
not even receive this support while they were in the program. Again, if the program is to truly serve its students; all students must get the support they need while they are in the program. This conclusion also supports the research on college access programs and how essential it is to provide academic support (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Gandara, 2001; Slavin & Braddock, 1994). It also affirms one critique of college access programs which is program attrition. The lower school year participation rates are evidence of this.

The third and final conclusion is that BSAC students no longer feel as involved in the program once they enter high school. Many alumni mentioned this in their open-ended responses. Since there is not much programming at the high school level, this means that there are fewer opportunities for high school students to remain involved with BSAC. Furthermore, alumni also noted that not much support is given to high school students. Of the support they do receive, high school visits with a Breakthrough staff member were noted as the most influential. However, looking at the participation rates for high school visits, again one can see the discrepancy in student participation. This conclusion is also consistent with the literature on college access programs, which asserts the need for academic support, mentoring, and college advising throughout high school (Horn & Chen, 1998; Oakes, 1995; Romo & Falbo, 1996; McDonough, 1997). Also, for high school students who no longer feel connected to the program, this too deals with the critique of program attrition.
Recommendations

College access programs have increased throughout the country in order to address one main issue: helping low-income students to persist and graduate from institutions of higher education. Best practices of college access programs include the temporal framework of college access programs, academic support, mentoring, college advising, social and cultural capital and parent involvement. Critiques against college access programs which jeopardize their existence, reveal an urgent need for better data and evaluation of programs efficacy. From the extensive literature review, the data collection from surveys, the data analysis and interpretations, and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made:

First, BSAC must strengthen the school year programming in middle school. In order to meet the needs of its students and to ultimately best prepare students for success in middle school, high school, and then a four-year college, the school year programming must be more focused on student needs. Improving the school year program entails many different aspects. BSAC staff must address the discrepancy in participation levels in the school year program. Data reveals that the participation level for the summer program is almost 100%; however, the participation level for the school year program is nowhere near 100%. The different school year program elements vary in participation levels but average at about 45% for Weekly Breakthroughs and Breakthrough Saturdays. For High School Options counseling, participation is about 26%. Participation in each of these school year program elements must be made mandatory. Both student and parents should be made aware that BSAC is a six-year commitment, and in middle school it involves a
summer and school year commitment. Also, further evaluation of the school year programming must be conducted to see if there are any conflicts or obstacles which are preventing full student participation. If there are any conflicts or obstacles, BSAC must work to make these opportunities available to students by helping overcome any conflicts or obstacles.

Along with participation, the programming for Weekly Breakthroughs must address students’ need for academic support. Many alumni noted the need for more academic support while in middle school. In order to do this, further study and evaluation needs to be done to assess what areas of support students need most. Then, using this information, Weekly Breakthroughs should address these identified areas.

Another school year program element which needs improvement is High School Options. The data reveals that in regards to High School Options, participants did not receive the support they needed in this area. As such, assessment and evaluation must be conducted in order to determine how BSAC can best serve its participants. In regards to the other two school year program elements, Breakthrough Saturdays and the newsletter, further evaluation must also be conducted in order to determine their benefits to the students, or if they are not benefiting at all.

The second recommendation is that BSAC must strengthen its high school programming. Many alumni noted that they no longer felt connected to BSAC once they entered high school. Furthermore, they also noted that they wished they had received more support in high school. As such, BSAC should provide more opportunities for high school students to remain involved in the program. In order to do this, BSAC should
survey current high school students to determine what types of opportunities and services they would like to have and need while in high school.

Of all the high school programming available to BSAC students, alumni noted that high school visits were the most influential. However, when looking at the participation rates for high school visits, one can see that many did not partake in these high school visits. As such, BSAC should identify why there is a low participation rate and how it can work towards getting more students to participate. Also, further evaluation on high school visits should be conducted in order to determine whether the number of high school visits is providing enough support to high school students. If not, then more high school visits should be conducted.

Alumni also shared their evaluation of the test-preparation workshops, college application workshops, and financial aid workshop. In the responses from alumni these were not seen as influential; however, participation for each of these high school program elements was also very low. As such, BSAC should identify why there is a low participation rate and how it can work towards getting more students to participate in each of these workshops.

The third recommendation is that BSAC should use data to drive its programming and services. BSAC should continually assess each of its program elements in order to ensure that they are meeting students’ needs. This means there should be concrete ways of measuring the impact of the summer program, the school year program, and the high school program. This can be accomplished in several ways. Firstly, in the summer and school year academic programs, students should take a pre-assessment and post-
assessment test in each academic subject covered. Furthermore, in the school year program, it should also monitor students’ academic grades to see if all students are in good academic standing and if not, then they are not meeting students’ needs. For the high school program, tracking students’ A-G completion and four-year college eligibility is essential to determine whether it is meeting its college access goals. Furthermore, with each graduating class, data must be kept on how many BSAC seniors apply to, get accepted into, and enroll into a four-year college.

The fourth and final recommendation is a long term goal which entails that BSAC must keep track of alumni, especially in regards to how many alumni successfully complete a Bachelor’s Degree. This long-term evaluation and tracking is essential in order to highlight the success of the program in not only getting students into a four-year college, but also in completing college. Having the data to show its success as a college access program is what will ensure its long term success and that of all college access programs.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Survey
Survey

Part I: Student Demographic Information

1. What is your high school graduation year?
   - 2005
   - 2006
   - 2007
   - 2008
   - 2009

2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

3. What is your race/ethnicity?
   - American Indian
   - Asian/Asian American
   - Black/ African American
   - Hispanic/ Latino
   - White
   - Other ______________

4. What is your parent’s highest level of education? (Please select the parent with the highest level of education)
   - Elementary
   - High School
   - Some College
   - Four year College graduate or higher

5. While in high school, at which income level did your family fall under?
   - 15,000 to 30,000
   - 30,001 to 45,000
   - 45,001 to 60,000
   - 60,001 to 75,000
   - 75,001 to 90,000
   - 90,001 and above
Part II: General Evaluation of Breakthrough Sacramento (BSAC)

6. How did BSAC influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?
   - Very positively
   - Positively
   - Not at all
   - Negatively
   - Very Negatively

7. I believe my participation as a Breakthrough student was beneficial to my college aspirations.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

8. I believe that BSAC played a vital role in my post-secondary aspirations.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

9. I believe that BSAC was one of the most influential factors in my aspirations to pursue higher education.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
10. When thinking of your experiences with BSAC, as it pertains to college preparation, how satisfied were you with the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Year Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Colleges/Universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Breakthrough Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. How well did BSAC meet your needs in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely Well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Well</th>
<th>Extremely Not Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Options Counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Field Trips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Would you recommend BSAC to a younger sibling/relative?
- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] Unsure

13. Would you have any reservation/concern about your recommendation?
- [ ] No
- [ ] Yes, some
- [ ] Yes, strong
14. If you were to do it again, would you choose to apply to BSAC?
☐ No  ☐ Yes  ☐ Unsure

Part III: Evaluation of Middle School Programming

15. What was your involvement with the summer program?
☐ I attended both summer sessions
☐ I attended the summer prior to my 7th grade only
☐ I attended the summer prior to my 8th grade only

16. What was your involvement with the programming for middle school, as it pertains to Weekly Breakthroughs?
☐ I attended all or most Weekly Breakthrough sessions
☐ I attended a few Weekly Breakthrough sessions
☐ I did not attend Weekly Breakthroughs at all
☐ This service was not available to me during middle school

17. What was your involvement with the programming for middle school, as it pertains to Breakthrough Saturdays?
☐ I attended all or most Breakthrough Saturdays
☐ I attended a few Breakthrough Saturdays
☐ I did not attend any Breakthrough Saturdays
☐ This service was not available to me during middle school

18. In 8th grade, did you attend a high school options counseling with a Breakthrough staff member?
☐ Yes, my family and I met with a Breakthrough staff member
☐ No, my family and I did not meet with a Breakthrough staff member
☐ This service was not available to me in 8th grade
19. How did each of the following BSAC’s middle school program elements influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Element</th>
<th>Very Positively</th>
<th>Positively</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Negatively</th>
<th>Very Negatively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The two 6-week summer sessions at SCDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Breakthroughs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakthrough Saturdays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Breakthrough Newsletter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Options Counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part IV: Evaluation of High School Programming

20. What was your involvement with the programming for high school, as it pertains to Breakthrough Saturdays?
   - [ ] I attended all or most Breakthrough Saturdays
   - [ ] I attended a few Breakthrough Saturdays
   - [ ] I did not attend any Breakthrough Saturdays
   - [ ] This service was not available to me during high school

21. What was your involvement with the programming for high school, as it pertains to high school visits?
   - [ ] I attended all or most high school visits with the program coordinator
   - [ ] I attended a few high school visits with the program coordinator
   - [ ] I did not attend any high school visits with the program coordinator
   - [ ] This service was not available to me during high school

22. What was your involvement with BSAC’s test preparation workshops?
   - [ ] I attended all or most test preparation workshops
   - [ ] I attended a few test preparation workshops
   - [ ] I did not attend any test preparation workshops
   - [ ] This service was not available to me during high school

23. In senior year, what was your involvement with BSAC’s college application workshops?
   - [ ] I attended the college application workshop my senior year
   - [ ] I did not attend the college application workshop my senior year
   - [ ] This service was not available to me during high school
24. How did each of the following BSAC’s high school program elements influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Very Positively</th>
<th>Positively</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Negatively</th>
<th>Very Negatively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Visits with Breakthrough Staff Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Preparation Workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Application Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part V:  Post-Breakthrough Sacramento Information

25. Which post-secondary programs did you apply to? Check all that apply.
   □ 2-year community college
   □ 4-year college/university
   □ Vocational/trade school
   □ Military
   □ Workforce

26. Which post-secondary programs were you accepted into? Check all that apply.
   □ 2-year community college
   □ 4-year college/university
   □ Vocational/trade school
   □ Military
   □ Workforce

27. Within six-months of high school graduation, what was your post-secondary decision?
   □ 2-year community college
   □ 4-year college/university
   □ Vocational/trade school
   □ Military
   □ Workforce

28. What is your current educational status?
   □ 2-year community college
   □ 4-year college/university
   □ Vocational/trade school
   □ Military
   □ Workforce

Part VI:  Open-Ended Questions

29. How did BSAC influence your aspirations to pursue higher education?

30. Taking into consideration your post-secondary experiences, what would you consider to be BSAC’s strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to promoting college aspirations?
   □ Strengths:
   □ Weaknesses:

Thank you.
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate
Consent to Participate

Dear Breakthrough Alumni:

As you may know, my name is Marianne Ceballos and I am completing a Master’s Thesis in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University, Sacramento. I am also the program director for Breakthrough Sacramento and as such I am conducting a study to explore the impact of Breakthrough Sacramento on its alumni’s aspirations to pursue higher education.

This survey will identity the role Breakthrough Sacramento has on its participants’ aspirations to pursue or not pursue higher education. It will also help identify which program elements influence participants’ post-secondary aspirations. As Breakthrough alumni, your direct experiences as a participant in the program enable you to provide critical feedback on the program. As such you are invited to participate in this research study and share your experience as a Breakthrough student.

If you decide to participate, I will ask you to please respond to an online survey, which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Please note: your participation in this study is voluntary and will be kept completely anonymous. However, your reflections about your experiences as a Breakthrough participant will assist in examining the role Breakthrough Sacramento plays in its participants’ aspirations to pursue higher education and in identifying effective program elements.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact me at (916) 214-0570 or via e-mail at mceballos@saccds.org.

Please visit the following website to complete the online survey for this research at http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=OJhMEtiBCAXb52AiOs0Q_3d_3d. In an effort to gather data quickly and begin evaluating the data, please complete the survey no later than November 15, 2009.

Thank you very much for your cooperation in this effort.

Regards,

Marianne Ceballos
REFERENCES


