

First in the World Grant, US Department of Education,
← Fund for the Innovation of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) →
California Student Aid Commission Legislative Briefing

Project Overview

This four-year \$3.2 million federal grant enables the Pullias Center to implement an online, game-based college access intervention in 60 California schools and to conduct a random-control trial to assess the effects of game play on FAFSA and college application completion and college enrollment. Study partners include California Student Aid Commission, UC Merced's Center for Educational Partnerships, USC's Game Innovation Lab, the Get Schooled Foundation, and Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (outside evaluators).



As per the randomization, 30 schools were given initial access to the intervention; participation was incentivized through a variety of measures. Online tools were shared with the class of 2017 over the past two years and included a strategy game where students role-play a college applicant, an online platform with information and interactive activities, and an incentive structure where students earn prizes for themselves and their school. The intervention is designed to increase college-going efficacy, build college knowledge, foster college-related dialogue on campuses, and incentive students to apply to college and for financial aid. We are tracking these interim outcomes through quantitative, qualitative, and backend, server-level data collection. Final study outcomes include: (1) FAFSA and Dream Act submissions, (2) college application submission, and (3) college enrollment by school. Findings related to these outcomes will be available in fall of 2017. The entire sample of 60 schools will have access to the intervention during the 2017-2018 academic school year.

Study Locations

Participating CA Assembly districts include:

3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 21, 34, 35, 39, 42, 46, 49,
50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 47, 58, 59, 63, 77, 78, 79

Participating CA Senate districts include:

3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 16, 18, 19, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32,
33, 39, 40

Emerging Findings

"I learned not to get scared in the future for college. I learned what to expect in college, what the requirements for each college would be."

Junior level student,
Assembly district 14,
Senate district 3.

Research is underway to assess the utility of the game intervention as well as to better understand schools' college cultures and digital infrastructures. Implementation of the intervention varied widely.



Schools with successful implementation exhibited the following:

- strong communication among administrators, faculty and students
- a willingness to innovate
- a clearly articulated college vision
- a school champion for the project

Factors inhibiting successful implementation included:

- institutional agents as gatekeepers
- poor technology access
- low teacher buy-in
- disconnect between school and district policies



Baseline measures of second-semester juniors' interest in going to college and college-going efficacy prior to the intervention indicated that while most students are very interested in going to college, many are unsure of whether they can get into college. Additionally, in a baseline measure of college-related knowledge, on average, these same students answered around 65% of the questions correctly. Taken together, many students lack the knowledge and confidence to pursue post-secondary education options, despite their strong interest.

Recommendations

1. Ensure schools are held accountable for ensuring access to technology. Simply having computers on site does not translate to viable computer access. Appropriate access entails updated and function computers and operating systems, reliable connectivity, and ease of scheduling time in front of computers.
2. Provide educators with ample and effective professional development related to technology and social media.
3. Fund technology liaison positions to vet new technologies and support teachers in using technology tools in their classrooms. While IT technicians can assist teachers in making sure computers are working, they do not tend to support teachers in using technology within the classroom or curriculum.
4. Expand programs such as the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) that facilitate regional college pathways collaboratives and hold schools accountable for articulating and carrying out a college mission.

For more information, contact Dr. Zoe Corwin via zcorwin@usc.edu or 213-740-7218