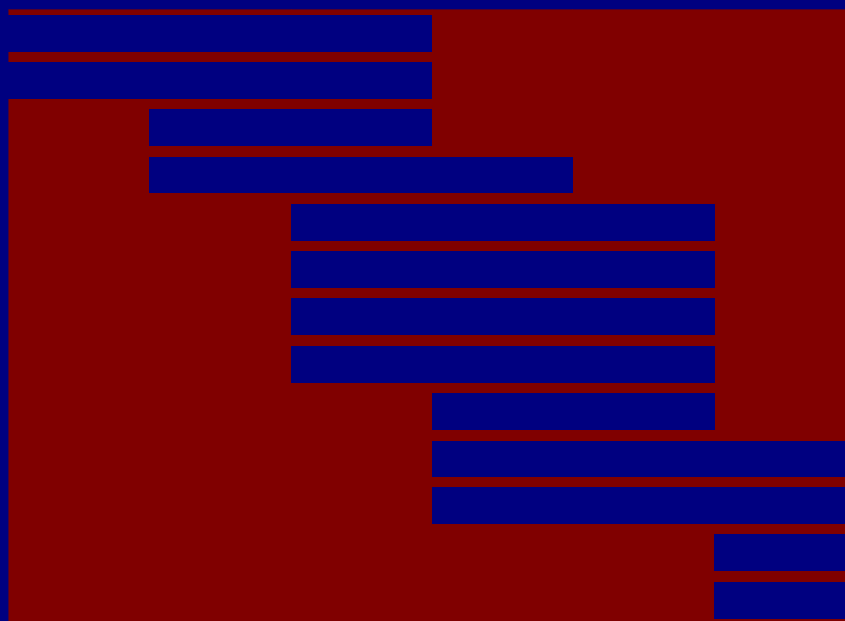# EARLY & OFTEN

DESIGNING A COMPREHENSIVE
SYSTEM OF FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION

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A REPORT OF

THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

APRIL 2008

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APRIL 2008

**ADVISING CONGRESS AND
THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS**

**Advisory Committee on
Student Financial Assistance**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Students and parents need ample time and accurate information to prepare for the financial burden of a college education—those who lack this knowledge base face a significant access barrier to higher education. This problem can be countered by the delivery of comprehensive, integrated financial aid information, an approach identified by the Advisory Committee in *The Student Aid Gauntlet: Making Access to College Simple and Certain* (2005).

At the heart of the report is a comprehensive framework that provides detailed subcategories of information students should know within four broad areas:

Benefits of Higher Education. Access to information about how college can positively impact a student's future in a variety of ways, both economic and non-economic, can influence preparation for college enrollment.

College Expenses. Misconceptions about sticker price and financial aid eligibility can skew a student's cost/benefit analysis by overestimating the actual amount the student must pay out of pocket to attend college.

Paying for College. Knowledge about appropriate types of grants and loans can make college affordable for even the lowest income students, but the absence of that information can prevent college-qualified students from financing a degree.

Forms and Processes. Walking through and explaining the FAFSA, decoding financial aid award letters, and discussing the aid disbursement process will improve the chances that students can afford and will attend higher education.

In addition, the report lays out a set of ten guidelines to help practitioners tailor delivery to a target population. Research and program implementation have shown each of the ten guidelines to be effective, and programs will find that a customized combination of the guidelines will help meet individual program objectives.

1. **Intervene by 6th Grade and Continue through High School**

2. **Involve Parents and Families in the College-Going Process**

3. **Mentor Each Student**

4. **Complete the FAFSA**

5. **Adapt the Program to the Individual School Community**

6. **Integrate Language and Cultural Differences**

7. **Partner with Community Organizations**

8. Encourage Peer Integration

9. Formulate Program Evaluation Standards

10. Discuss Financial Literacy alongside Financial Aid

Finally, a series of unit plans suggest a structure to ensure timely information delivery. Programs may find the unit plans helpful as a starting point for developing their own curriculum for financial aid information.

This report is a complete resource on early financial aid information and seeks a wide audience, including curriculum developers, policymakers, college advisors, and the early intervention community. By adapting the framework, guidelines, and unit plans to suit the needs of a program's target population, practitioners may use the resources in this report to develop an aid information system uniquely geared to the needs of their own students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACCESS, PERSISTENCE, & EARLY FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION

The Access and Persistence Problem

Our national competitiveness is currently in jeopardy as our leadership in intellectual talent and higher education wanes. Other countries have advanced their own educational opportunities to great success, and comparisons among developed nations often show the United States falling in the middle of the pack. For example, recent data from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show stagnating or declining trends in attainment of higher education for citizens aged 18 to 24, as well as high attrition rates in higher education, in comparison with other OECD countries (Douglass 2007; OECD 2006). In response to this growing crisis, a revitalized emphasis on improving our education system, focused specifically on achieving higher rates of college graduates in the workforce, is necessary. Nationally increasing bachelor's degree attainment rates provides the best opportunity to enhance our innovative and productive workforce to keep pace with growing competition abroad.

Increasing bachelor's degree attainment rates provides the best opportunity to enhance our innovative and productive workforce.

Our country's standing in the global marketplace relies on a robust, entrepreneurial economy supported by a highly skilled and educated workforce, and a consistent investment in human capital is required to maintain that workforce. The National Academies (2005) points out that retaining our leadership in science and technology requires the creation of more high technology jobs, which, in turn, requires the training of more high technology laborers. Employment projections for the next decade also estimate an increase in jobs requiring a college degree (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2007). To satisfy this growing need and remain internationally competitive, the country must ensure workforce development proceeds unhindered. As a nation, we rely on the diversity of the higher education system to provide broad access to fulfill a wide array of training needs, but that broad access is threatened by the lack of success many low- and moderate-income students have in obtaining bachelor's degrees.

As *Mortgaging Our Future* highlights, millions of college-qualified high school graduates are not enrolling in higher education and obtaining bachelor's degrees (ACSFA

Millions of qualified high school graduates are not enrolling in college and obtaining a bachelor's degree.

2006). Scholars have repeatedly pointed to three substantial factors hindering access and persistence: insufficient academic preparation, lack of financial resources, and poor information. Thankfully, many school reform efforts and early intervention programs are attempting to address the academic component of college preparation, but those efforts alone will not solve the college access dilemma. The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance continues to focus on the financial and informational barriers to student access and success for low- and moderate-income students, which remain substantial.

Students and families from the bottom half of the income distribution must overcome greater hurdles to financing a college education than others, and these obstacles are reflected in the fact that over 80 percent of low-income parents of college-qualified high school graduates are "very concerned" about college costs and financial aid (ACSFA 2006). These concerns in part likely reflect the media's focus on high-priced institutions and the rapid rate of tuition increases. Remarkably, this trend does not appear to be negatively affecting college expectations. Despite these concerns, 87 percent of middle school parents still expect their children to attend college (Cunningham et al. 2007).

Informational barriers, in addition to high net prices, prevent far too many students from pursuing higher education.

Unfortunately, those high expectations do not result in corresponding patterns of enrollment and persistence. Even fully qualified low- and moderate-income students neither enroll in college nor persist to a bachelor's degree at the rates of their middle- and high-income peers (ACSFA 2006). A large portion of the income gap in enrollment and attainment can be attributed to financial obstacles such as high net prices, but informational barriers to college-going and the receipt of aid also prevent far too many students from pursuing higher education.

The Need for an Integrated System

This information problem can only be countered by providing a comprehensive, integrated approach to disseminating early financial aid information. If access providers could develop a method to deliver accurate information about significant aspects of the financial decision to attend college and lead students step-by-step through the process over the course of several years, the informational barriers to college access could be overcome. Realizing the vital role that parents play in the college pipeline, this approach also seeks to inform parents and families about financial aid information. Current research shows that educational reform efforts have primarily focused on providing students and families with the academic and financial resources to prepare them for college without enough attention paid to providing high quality information about financial aid processes and college planning (Jager-Hyman 2006; ACSFA 2006).

The information problem can only be countered by providing a comprehensive, integrated approach to disseminating early financial aid information.

Without this information, financial resources and years of academic preparation may go to waste as students find they have not prepared in a timely fashion to secure federal student aid and aid from other sources. The recommendations made in this report encourage a shift to an integrated method of providing complete financial aid information to ensure its prominence and its effective delivery in college preparation.

The Advisory Committee recognized the need for a comprehensive system of early financial aid information in the *Student Aid Gauntlet*, which makes ten recommendations to policymakers to improve student financial aid at the federal level. The first

recommendation is to create a system of early financial aid information that would "provide students with high quality information about financial aid in the context of college costs, use multiple vehicles to disseminate financial aid information, and provide students with early estimates of their financial aid eligibility from various sources" (ACSFA 2005, 7). This recommendation continues by advising that financial aid information be age-appropriate and tailored to specific groups of students, thereby ensuring that information is provided within a timeframe useful to the student at various decision making points along the

Financial aid information should be age-appropriate and tailored to specific groups of students, thereby ensuring that information is provided within a useful timeframe.

financial aid process timeline. The *Gauntlet* recommendation concludes that a truly comprehensive system of financial aid information delivery would increase the effectiveness of outreach and early intervention programs.

Since the report was submitted to Congress, progress at the national level has been slow, and calls are still being heard from the early intervention community for a comprehensive, systematic method of delivering all of the age-appropriate financial aid information in a timely manner. Because the audience of the *Student Aid Gauntlet* is policymakers, it does not outline the specific financial aid information, timing, or delivery strategies that may be helpful to individual access organizations and practitioners when implementing an integrated approach for their service populations. This report seeks to provide college advisors and the early intervention community with the necessary components of that information delivery system. Before discussing the delivery system

This report seeks to provide college advisors and the early intervention community with the necessary components of an information delivery system.

design, it is important to examine the role that financial aid information plays in the college decision making process and current efforts to disseminate that information.

The Role of Financial Aid Information

The decision to undertake higher education is actually the culmination of multiple decisions at many intermediate steps starting in middle school and leading to college enrollment. Access to accurate information at each intermediate step will enable better decisions. Choosing whether to take college preparatory courses in high school or whether to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) are two examples of information-driven decisions that affect future opportunities. In particular, the financial decision to attend college is a process that requires navigating multiple financial aid options in which contextual situations (such as the family's background characteristics and school environment) and the quality of information available play essential roles (Tierney and Venegas 2007).

In addition to its general utility in making appropriate decisions about education, financial aid information combats the often baffling complexity of programs and

processes necessary to finance higher education. The complexity of the nation's financial aid system arises from the overlap of resources from federal, state, institutional, and private sources dedicated to postsecondary education. Programmatic complexity stems from the combination of various grant and loan programs offered in a financial aid package. Students and families must cope with an overwhelming number of different provisions for each different aid program. This process complexity stymies students further as they address complicated financial aid application and receipt processes that arise from multiple sources of aid.

Timely and accurate information alleviates complexity, informs students about financing options, and ensures students make sound decisions.

Having timely and accurate information at each juncture in a student's college preparation timeline alleviates complexity, informs students of financing options, and ensures that they make sound decisions. Financial aid information is often narrowly defined as information on scholarships, loans, and aid applications. While these issues are important, a broader perspective on the financial advantages and costs of college, along with details about the process of receiving aid, improves students' understanding of the complete financial decision to attend college. To this end, the Advisory Committee recognizes four broad areas of information students need: benefits to college, college expenses, paying for college, and the forms and processes required to obtain aid. A brief overview of why each is important follows, and all four components of information will be discussed in greater detail later in the report.

Benefits of Higher Education: Potential college graduates can be dissuaded from pursuing higher education if the appropriate messages about the benefits of a college degree are not relayed to them. Whether students and families undertake the college entrance decision in a systematic way or more informally, they do weigh the long-term outcomes of a college degree against the short-term sacrifices made to obtain one. Financial issues inherently shape that cost/benefit analysis, and information about the returns to a college education can be invaluable. It is also important to remember that income is not the sole factor in the decision to attend college. Non-economic returns to college are as vast as financial ones and should be incorporated into the decision to attend.

College Expenses: College expenses are the other side of the cost/benefit analysis. Misconceptions about sticker price and financial aid eligibility can skew a student's cost/benefit analysis of attending by overestimating the actual expense of college attendance. Zarate and Pachon (2006) found for a population of Latino students that their understanding of the opportunity costs of attending college was far greater than the benefit they understood

Misconceptions about sticker price and financial aid eligibility can skew a student's cost/benefit analysis of attending college.

would be derived from a degree. This information imbalance inhibited their ability to make a sound judgment as to whether attending college was right for them. Had they been properly informed about the direct expenses of different types of colleges, their

decision making process might have been different. Additionally, the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (2007) conducted focus groups to determine the importance of various components of information related to college enrollment and choice. For two groups, low-income first-generation students and low- to moderate-income older students, college expenses were the second greatest priority used for searching for an appropriate college, and it was the greatest priority for low-income parents of first-generation students.

Paying for College: Information about specific financial aid opportunities plays an important role in the college-going decision. The knowledge to apply for different sources of financial aid can yield enough assistance to make college affordable for even the lowest income student, but its absence can prevent a college-qualified student from financing a degree. Informed students will have a leg up in applying for grant aid and making appropriate choices about borrowing to finance postsecondary education. Explaining the details of various financial aid programs will also reduce student anxiety about the complexity of aid and the combination of sources used to finance an education.

Informed students will have a leg up in applying for grant aid and making appropriate choices about borrowing to finance postsecondary education.

Forms and Processes: Likewise, discussing the process of applying for and receiving aid will alleviate student apprehension about the process and increase the chances of receiving financial aid. Some scholars believe the FAFSA is too complex and does not provide immediate feedback on aid eligibility, thereby discouraging students from completing the application and denying them aid (Dynarski and Scott-Clayton 2007). Walking students and parents through the FAFSA, reading through financial aid award letters together, and explaining the aid disbursement process will ultimately improve the chances of students being able to afford higher education.

The State of Early Financial Aid Information

Although there appears to be wide-scale awareness of the importance of providing financial aid information early enough to have an impact on students' college-going choices, evidence points to a continued lack of knowledge among students and parents, especially at the lower levels of income. Knowledge gaps in financial aid and college expense information have been noticed for decades. A survey of 15,000 juniors in high school and their families conducted in the late 1980s established substantial gaps between perceptions about financing college and reality (McColloch 1990). Despite the efforts of guidance counselors, college financial aid officers, government agencies, and the early intervention community, these information gaps persist, indicating that families are not likely to have necessary information when decisions about academic and financial preparation must be

Evidence points to a continued lack of knowledge among students and parents, especially at lower levels of income, about financial aid information.

made. And existing research documents that students and families lack useful financial aid information to inform college-going decisions (Pathways to College Network 2004).

These informational concerns are not only documented at the high school level, but also in middle school where students who see college as a financial impossibility might not become college-qualified because they see little incentive to prepare academically for something out of their fiscal reach. A recent survey of parents of middle school students uncovered an alarming shortage of financial aid knowledge. Two-thirds had not started saving for college, and only 11 percent had conducted any research on financial aid (Cunningham et al. 2007). These findings demonstrate a need to target information efforts at middle school families in order to improve their knowledge.

Middle school students who see college as a financial impossibility might not become college-qualified because they see little incentive to prepare academically.

At all age levels, the most threatened students are those underprivileged students least likely to have any previous exposure to college education. Low-income and first-generation college students face the greatest information barriers as they are less likely to have experience with financial aid programs and assistance with completing the forms required to obtain aid (Rainwater and Venezia 2003). Additionally, low-income families already have much higher concerns about their ability to afford a college education than do middle- and high-income families (ACSFA 2006). A contributing factor for some low-income students may be difficulty accessing information online.

Although low-income students are most in need of assistance, even middle- and high-income families require more accurate information about financial aid. According to one survey of higher income parents, one-third had not yet started saving for their child's college education (AllianceBernstein n.d.). There is also a disconnect between parents and financial aid professionals. A survey of aid administrators finds that 92 percent believe parents overestimate the amount of grant aid their student will receive (AllianceBernstein n.d.). Clearly, better information must be delivered to all students and families.

Two problems must be overcome to improve student decision making: the complexity of the process and programs, and the delayed nature of aid eligibility.

Research indicates two problems must be overcome to improve the chances of students and families making fully informed decisions. As already discussed, the complexity of the process and the sheer number of financial aid programs makes the information that is available less comprehensible (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative 2007). The extended nature of the federal financial aid process results in the inability of students to determine a realistic estimate of the financial aid for which they are eligible before gaining admission to college late in their senior year of high school (Dynarski and Scott-Clayton 2007).

The current system inherently disadvantages those students with limited financial assets who need additional resources and time to solidify their financial plans. Some efforts have attempted to address these problems. For example, the Department of Education has made strides in providing an early estimate of financial aid eligibility for federal awards through the FAFSA4caster. Although students find this to be a useful tool, efficient methods of predicting what state, institutional, and private funding sources are also available have not yet been developed. The lack of these resources makes providing accurate information about various financing options even more essential; therefore, it is necessary to develop a highly integrated, comprehensive approach to delivering the information that is available.

The current system inherently disadvantages those students with limited financial assets who need additional resources and time to solidify their financial plans.

Another approach has been to provide an assurance of financial affordability. This theory underlies early commitment programs, such as Indiana's 21st Century Scholar Program (Heller 2006). These initiatives rely on the commitment of state or private funding to ensure college affordability in order to motivate students in middle school to challenge themselves with a college preparatory curriculum and to succeed with the intention of enrolling in college. States other than Indiana have emulated this plan, and while they have alleviated concerns about early estimates of aid, more remains to be done to help students see the benefits to a college education and promote enrollment.

Unfortunately, current efforts to provide financial aid and scholarship information, at both state and federal levels, are too often limited to a narrow definition of financial aid information. While many programs and initiatives are helping to reduce the information gap students still struggle to overcome, expanding the focus beyond aid application will encourage financial preparation. The Institute for Higher Education Policy's middle school parent report recommends that exposure to career exploration should be undertaken alongside a discussion of academic and financial planning for college (Cunningham et al. 2007). By discussing the link

It is important to design an integrated system of early financial aid information that ensures that a comprehensive set of information is delivered.

between jobs of interest and higher education as one of its benefits, students can be motivated to pursue a more advanced degree. If early information efforts were to provide a more complete set of information related to the financial decision to attend college, the positive impact on the service population would be greater. Again, it is important to design an integrated system of early financial aid information to be comprehensive.

Designing a System

In general, the design of any system must proceed through different stages in a logical manner to ensure that it is applicable, comprehensive, usable, and efficient. Software development traditionally follows a commonly used set of seven steps called the system development life cycle, which can be applied to any system design. The first stage is determining whether the idea is feasible. Although the *Student Aid Gauntlet* recommends establishing a system of early financial aid information, it does not closely examine whether such a system could be reasonably developed. The Advisory Committee has considered the feasibility issue and concluded the idea is practical and that the most appropriate system would have a flexible structure adaptable to a wide range of situations and interventions.

> **The Advisory Committee has concluded that an integrated system design for delivering financial aid information is feasible.**

The second stage in the cycle of system design is analysis. Research should inform all elements of the design taking into account what the system is intended to accomplish and the system's end users. This report is the culmination of extensive research and analysis undertaken by the Committee while considering the audience: financial aid and college access practitioners. The analysis has led to the third life cycle stage, design. The design stage typically involves a high-level model of the system, and the Committee presents that model for delivering early financial aid information in this report.

> **Suggestions in this report lay out a general method of providing early financial aid information; the implementation strategies are left to the practitioners.**

The final four stages of system development (implementation, testing, evaluation, and maintenance) are left to the individual college advisor or program. Each organization has its own best sense of how to fit these suggestions into its operational context, so, while the suggestions in this report lay out a general method of systematically providing early financial aid information to promote college access, the implementation strategies are left to the practitioners working directly with students. The high-level context provided should prove helpful in developing a more concrete curriculum to guarantee that students and families are adequately prepared.

The Purpose and Structure of the Report

The purpose of this current report is to fill the information gap in three ways: by outlining a comprehensive framework of financial aid information, discussing ten guidelines that serve to improve the effectiveness of information delivery, and suggesting one potential timeline for delivering that information. Due to resource constraints or the structure of a certain intervention, it may be impossible for a program to integrate all ten guidelines or deliver every component of information at the ideal time, but college advisors trying to improve their service can attempt to incorporate as much of this information as possible.

What is presented is not intended to be a single ideal method for effectively disseminating comprehensive aid information, but rather one potential plan, grounded in research, for how an effective delivery system might be established.

This document presents that integrated approach in three sections. The first is a framework of information that lays out all of the knowledge a student must have to make an informed decision about whether to prepare for, apply to, and enroll in higher education. The framework is divided into four broad categories of information, each of which is broken down into various subcomponents. The second section of the report identifies broad guidelines that have proven useful to practitioners for disseminating financial aid information to students and families, and research supports the effectiveness of their use. The guidelines are not specific directives about how to advise students; rather, they are intended to serve as general suggestions for effectively delivering essential information. Finally, the third section proposes a timeline defining a range of years in which each component of the information framework could be opportunely delivered. Throughout this report, the early financial aid information system remains at a high level. As mentioned when discussing the life cycle of system design, the Advisory Committee leaves the specific implementation of the system to expert practitioners in the field.

This document presents an integrated approach in three sections: a framework, guidelines, and a timeline.

The proposals promulgated by this report were developed through an extensive literature review, formal interviews with approximately 30 college access programs, informal discussions with numerous other programs, and three focus group conversations consisting of college access practitioners. Advice was drawn from varied sectors including higher education faculty and administrators, secondary school administrators and college advisors, state-level government officials, local nonprofit organization administrators, and agents of guaranty agencies. Although the focus on financial aid information varied dramatically across organizations and individuals, clear and consistent messages about the necessary components of information and their delivery appeared. This report attempts to convey those messages to a wide audience of practitioners with the goal of improving students' access to early and accurate financial aid information that informs their college-going choices.

The report advocates tailoring outreach and information dissemination efforts to the individual populations each organization targets.

The Committee also recognizes that populations differ dramatically in terms of levels of knowledge and the methods that can be employed to reach them. One of the greatest strengths of the early intervention community is the variety of programs reaching different target audiences. Keeping this positive trait in mind, the report advocates tailoring outreach and information dissemination efforts to the individual populations each organization targets. The suggestions laid out in this report are broad enough to be applicable to most populations of students. Although the timeline of information delivery is targeted specifically at the traditional-aged student

moving through middle school, high school, and directly to college enrollment, the framework of information and many of the guidelines for delivery can be applied to fit the circumstances of nontraditional students as well.

FRAMEWORK OF EARLY FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION

The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance has developed an early information framework that organizes financial aid information into four key interrelated topics: the benefits of higher education, college expenses, paying for college, and forms and processes. Each of the four key topics is divided into subsections that discuss the various areas of student financial assistance about which middle and high school students need information in order to make college-going decisions. The framework ensures that early information practitioners have the vocabulary and tools they need to provide students and families with essential information to answer basic questions on the benefits and expenses of attending various types of institutions, the structures currently in place to help students finance an education, and the various steps students would need to take to receive aid.

Many low-income students lack perspective on the financial benefits and costs of higher education and are not provided with information early enough to impact their decisions to plan, enroll, and persist in attaining a bachelor's degree.

The information framework is intended to be comprehensive because many low-income students lack perspective on the financial benefits and financial burdens of higher education and are not provided with information early enough to impact their decisions to plan, enroll, and persist in attaining a bachelor's degree (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006). Many current early information efforts focus on the provision of one or two of these four key topics, leaving out other core pieces of information (Tierney and Venegas 2004). The Advisory Committee—after reviewing the literature, convening several focus groups, and interviewing various college access groups—has ascertained that leaving out any one topic of the framework can present an incomplete picture of financial aid information for low-income students, who are often vulnerable to misinformation and gaps in understanding. However, this framework can be applied to a wide audience as well, as all students aspiring to earn a baccalaureate degree need to find a way to finance their education.

All of the framework's subcomponents, organized by the four key categories of information, are presented below. The first paragraph of each component briefly describes why students will benefit from receiving this information. A list of bullets follows, enumerating specific suggestions for what students need to know in order to fully comprehend the framework. For a visual representation of the entire framework including a proposed timeline for delivery, see page 84.

Benefits of Higher Education

Ensuring that low- and moderate-income students and families understand the variety of benefits of postsecondary education is imperative because access to such information can positively influence preparation for college enrollment (Venegas 2006). These benefits include economic and social mobility, access to a variety of professions, and the societal implications inherent in an educated population. While higher salaries and better working conditions are obvious private benefits of education, economists and researchers consider it a societal failure if an individual's private investment considerations ignore any positive spillover effects that education could provide for society. These include the relationship between education and reduction in crime rates (Long 2007). Providing students with this information at an early age can inspire them to envision a brighter future for themselves and to take the necessary steps to financially and academically prepare for college.

Choosing a Career

Low- and moderate-income students often do not receive information on future career options, a key factor driving educational goals and an understanding of the benefits to college (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). Exposure to various careers may foster student motivation to succeed academically and to find the financial resources to pursue the education needed for a preferred career. In many instances, the home lives of low-income students may not expose them to as wide an array of professions as students from wealthier backgrounds. Students are likely to make decisions based upon the information that is provided to them, and providing information on many professional choices will result in greater exploration and consideration of their options for higher education (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). Degree and job-related information can then be linked back to income to provide estimates of income by degree.

> **The home lives of low-income students may not expose them to as wide an array of professions as students from wealthier backgrounds.**

What students and families need to know:

- A wide variety of jobs are available, all with different incomes contingent upon the level of experience people have within their professions.
- Levels of job satisfaction vary by interests, work hours, location, colleagues, and other factors.
- The incomes people have are related to the professions they choose.
- Available job options often depend on the type of degree held by an individual.
- Switching careers is possible, but may require additional education.
- Yearly incomes translate to hourly, weekly, and monthly wages, which help to meet monthly expenses.

Having such information early in the college decision making years provides students with the motivation necessary to pursue courses related to desired professions, search for scholarship funds provided for such interests, and research an appropriate match of their interests with different colleges.

Degrees, Professions, and Earnings

A student may claim that he or she wants to be a teacher, a forensic investigator, or an oceanographer, but may not realize the level of education required for those professions.

Providing students with yearly and hourly earnings for various professions and degrees helps them understand income differences.

Having a conceptual understanding of the necessary levels of degree attainment required for various jobs is essential to promoting college access and persistence. In the same way, a student who has the sole goal of completing high school needs to know how that decision limits job options, and, furthermore, how it limits the income the student is likely to earn. Research has shown that Americans are more likely to surpass their parents' income if they earn a college degree (Isaacs et al. 2008). This type of information can be extremely motivating for students, especially first-generation students, who are driven by economic opportunity. It is also helpful to provide students with a concept of how income relates to career and education choice, specifically providing students an understanding of yearly and hourly earnings for various professions and degrees. They may better understand the implications of the wages they would receive to meet their daily and monthly expenses if more detailed information about budgeting is provided. Students can then relate to income level differences and understand how furthering their education can help them achieve economically comfortable lives. Furthermore, it may prove helpful to provide students with information on how income within the same career field varies depending on a student's degree attainment.

What students and families need to know:

- There exist different degree requirements for various job preferences and professions.
- Job options and professions available to an individual are related to the degree earned.
- There are a variety of undergraduate degrees available.
- There is a strong relationship between degree and income, and variations in average income exist within the same career field due to differences in degree attainment.
- For all age groups, the annual earnings of a college graduate are significantly higher than the earnings of a high school graduate.
- Income tends to increase with age, but income increases more dramatically for those with more advanced degrees.
- An associate's degree, bachelor's degree, and various graduate degrees have varying impacts on an individual's ability to compete with others for jobs and higher incomes.

By making the relationships between job choices, desired income levels, and education and degree attainment transparent, students might make very different decisions about how they choose to prepare academically and financially for college.

Lifetime Earnings

One fact often cited to high school students is that, over the course of a lifetime, those with a bachelor's degree or higher (depending on profession, experience, etc.) earn significantly more, on average, than high school graduates (College Board 2007b). Providing students with this statistic can incite interest in the various benefits associated with attaining a college degree. Depending on their age, students may neither be aware of such stark differences in their lifetime earnings, nor aware of the implications of this difference.

Knowledge of expected lifetime earnings is likely to motivate students to invest wisely in their education.

What students and families need to know:

- A college graduate earns a greater lifetime income than a high school graduate, which allows greater wealth accumulation and income for retirement.
- College graduates are promoted more often than those without a college degree.
- Bachelor's degree recipients experience reduced unemployment.
- Bachelor's degree recipients have increased access to retirement accounts.

Knowledge of expected lifetime earnings and growth of such earnings is likely to motivate students to invest wisely in education so that they can experience an increase in wealth over a lifetime.

Private Economic Benefits

Students also need to understand that economic benefits other than income level accompany completion of a college education. Understanding how level of degree attainment can affect private economic benefits, such as low unemployment, improved working conditions, and transferable skills, is essential for students and families so that they may fully realize the long-term impact of their decision to attend or not to attend college (College Board 2007b). Students may not have considered that amenities such as better-quality office buildings, computers, child care options, and consistent work hours accompany many jobs attainable with a bachelor's degree (IHEP 1998).

Students may not have considered other amenities that jobs requiring bachelor's degrees often afford.

What students and families need to know:

- A bachelor's degree is often used as a method to screen job applicants, with the degree being a prerequisite for obtaining a job interview.
- College graduates have lower unemployment rates.
- College graduates have higher savings levels, resulting in better preparation for unforeseen circumstances, life changes, and retirement.
- College graduates receive better job benefits, such as vacation time and healthcare.
- College graduates have more job mobility through the accumulation of transferable skills.

An emphasis needs to be placed early in a student's college decision making process on the private economic benefits that they will likely enjoy if they attain a bachelor's degree. Such information needs to be reinforced throughout the application process so that students keep their long-term economic goals in mind when investing their time and money in college.

Private Social Benefits

Information on private social benefits is also something to share with students so that they learn how educational opportunities can positively affect their lives beyond enjoying a higher level of earnings. A significant benefit enjoyed by college graduates is the potential to provide an improved quality of life for their families (IHEP 1998). Students whose parents work part-time, work in multiple jobs, or work in temporary jobs may not have consistent work hours, which can limit family and social time. Finally, students may be able to correlate private social benefits with college degrees if they are encouraged to think about the lifestyle of an admirable person in the community who is a college graduate.

> **A significant benefit enjoyed by college graduates is the potential to provide an improved quality of life for their families.**

What students and families need to know:

- College graduates have more leisure time.
- College graduates have better healthcare.
- College graduates have consistent work hours.
- College graduates often enjoy higher personal status.
- Children of college graduates have better health.

If such information is relayed to students and reinforced by information on the relationship among private social benefits, profession chosen, and degree earned, students can be encouraged to pursue a higher education that can provide them with such benefits.

Change in Benefits over Time

An historical perspective on the relationship between education and income may also prove useful, especially a focus on today's current economic environment. According to comments made in the Advisory Committee's focus groups, many students have the misconception that higher education is unnecessary because they know adults who do not have bachelor's degrees, but live comfortably. Additionally, economic projections may provide persuasive arguments that college is necessary. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007) estimates that over the next decade, the proportion of jobs requiring a college degree will increase.

Some students believe they do not need higher education because they know adults who do not have bachelor's degrees, but live comfortably.

What students and families need to know:

- The emergence of a global economy has increased the need for higher education over time.
- Statistics show that the number of jobs requiring a college degree is increasing.
- A college degree is essential to obtain the lifestyle and comfortable income enjoyed by past generations.

Information on how the benefits of college have changed over time can help to reverse the misconception many students and families may have about the usefulness of a bachelor's degree.

College Expenses

After students gain a thorough understanding of the benefits of college, they can be engaged in a discussion that accurately depicts the expenses of college. Whether consciously or not, each student weighs the benefits against the costs of college attendance, and accurate information is vital to making a sound assessment. College expenses can vary across institutions, so providing students with a depiction of differences by institutional type may improve access (Horn et al. 2003). Additionally, few students and families understand the significant difference between sticker price and the net price of college. Many more are uneducated about the individual expenses of attending college, such as tuition, fees, room, board, travel, and textbooks. A comprehensive system of financial aid must alleviate the confusion surrounding college expenses and reduce the negative impact a lack of information has on college enrollment and persistence.

There is confusion over the terms used when discussing the amount students pay to attend college. "Sticker price" is often used to refer to what an institution publishes as its charges and can include tuition, fees, room, board, personal expenses, transportation, books, and other supplies. If sticker price includes all of those charges, it is commonly referred to the "cost of attendance."

The term "net price" refers to sticker price or cost of attendance minus all grant and scholarship aid the student receives. In the case of low-income students whose families are unable to contribute to college expenses, net price also measures the "work and loan burden" a student must incur to meet college expenses.

Although specific terms such as net price, sticker price, and cost of attendance are used when necessary, this report generally relies on the term "expenses" because it broadly encompasses what students pay to attend college.

Expenses by Type of College

Many students take only the sticker price into consideration when deciding upon the types of colleges to which they will apply (Ikenberry and Hartle 1998; Archibold 1998). In fact, the public tends to overestimate the expenses of all colleges because of media attention on the most expensive elite schools. Therefore, it is imperative for students to understand the differences in expenses among various institutions, such as attending a public versus a private or a for-profit college. Clearing these misconceptions would help students and families judge whether the expense of a particular institution is affordable given its academic program and other merits.

The public tends to overestimate the expenses of all colleges because of media attention on the most expensive elite schools.

What students and families need to know:

- Stark differences in expenses exist between attending a two-year institution and a four-year institution.
- There exist differences in tuition among public, nonprofit private, and for-profit colleges.
- Attending a public college in-state versus out-of-state changes the cost of attendance for an individual.
- Expenses differ for an undergraduate education versus a graduate education.
- A concept of total expenses over the duration of time spent in education is advisable, depending on the degree type needed for various professional goals.
- An additional cost of college is the time to degree: the time spent and likelihood of graduating with a bachelor's degree varies depending on the type of institution attended.

Students and families can develop a concept of total expenses over the course of an education if information were provided to them on how expenses differ based on the type of college attended.

Net Price

College expenses should be put in the context of sticker price and net price. Students and families often have misconceptions about the amount they will be expected to pay because they consider sticker price without thinking about net price, defined as cost of attendance minus grant and scholarship aid. Newspapers and other media sources often mention the total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room, board, transportation, books, and other items) without taking into consideration financial aid that students may receive. It is often more difficult to provide an estimate of net price of attending an institution than it is of sticker price. The FAFSA4caster can provide an estimate of the federal aid for which students may qualify, but institutional and state financial aid requirements, as well as the expenses of various institutions, must be researched before an estimate of net price may be reached.

A critical piece of the decision making process among low-income students is the financial aid award received from each school. Providing only information on sticker price may deter low-income students considering higher education, and, therefore, it is advisable to provide them **Sticker price deters low-income students from college, so information on various aid opportunities must be provided.** with information on various college aid opportunities (Kane and Orzag 2003; Heller 1997). Failing to provide such information may frighten students into not applying to certain colleges, or not applying at all, as they may assume that all colleges have the same expenses. Some may even believe that college must be paid for all at once if aid options and the process are not explained. Other students may be overwhelmed at the prospect of applying to private institutions because the sticker price is significantly

more than that of a four-year public college—these students fail to understand the significant amount of institutional aid available through many private colleges.

What students and families need to know:

- The average sticker price for tuition, fees, room and board is higher than the net price.
- Net price is the total expenses that students and families pay after grant and scholarship aid is taken into consideration.
- The average net price differs by type of institution (public, private, in-state, out-of-state, two-year, four-year).
- Specific information about financing relevant to individual circumstances is needed.
- EFC (expected family contribution) plays a role in net price.
- An accurate depiction of the cost of attendance is necessary.
- Private institutions may have a greater ability to provide a significant amount of additional grant aid for a high-achieving low-income student thereby reducing the student's work-loan burden.
- Certain public and private institutions provide aid to low-income students that would meet 100 percent of their need with grants and scholarships if they apply and are admitted.

It is essential to share the average net price of each type of institution with students and to supplement such information with a discussion of how students and families can finance an education. This ensures that they are not making decisions to attend or not to attend based upon overwhelming sticker price information.

Time Costs

Economic modeling of the choice to attend college recognizes an investment in time as a major indirect expense of higher education (Ehrenberg and Smith 2000). Students must realize that the years spent in college as full-time students are years they will forego the income received by a full-time worker. Often, this is income that many students and families do not wish to give up, as they see the immediate benefits of full-time earnings. Despite these immediate benefits, informing students of the long-term benefits if they forego this short-term income may encourage preparation and college enrollment. If students and parents were provided with information on how the time spent in college relates directly to increased income they could experience upon graduation, they may alter decisions to work full-time. They may also be willing to seek financial aid in order to attend. Similarly, students may find it beneficial to avoid delaying college graduation, as the longer students take to complete a degree, the longer they forego any expected earnings after graduation. Colleges have different on-time graduation rates, which can affect the likelihood of completing quickly and reducing the time cost of attendance.

Time spent in college relates directly to increased income that can be experienced after graduation.

What students and families need to know:

- A connection must be drawn between making a short-term sacrifice (lost income) and long-term benefits realized upon completion of college.
- Differences in lifetime earnings enjoyed by college graduates versus those enjoyed by high school graduates need to be reinforced to provide reasons for students to forego immediate benefits.
- There is significant research showing that an excessive amount of time worked can undermine college persistence toward a bachelor's degree.
- Time worked can also impact academic achievement and the likelihood of graduation.
- Dual enrollment programs, the International Baccalaureate curriculum, and Advanced Placement classes and exams in high school can help to fulfill college course credit, which may help some students graduate from college earlier.
- Taking a long time to complete a bachelor's degree can result in opportunities missed, increased foregone earnings, and potential increases in the amount of loans students borrow.

It is important to emphasize how a student's or family's short-term actions to invest time in college can ensure the long-term private benefits that college graduates enjoy.

Tuition and Fees

Students and families need very basic information on how direct expenses, including tuition, fees, room, board, travel, etc. differ among various institutions (College Board 2007c). Preparing students for all college expenses early, specifically, tuition and fees, can provide them with enough time to start saving. Although it is difficult for low-income families to save, it remains beneficial to provide this information in the event that their financial circumstances change. A discussion on tuition and fees can also provide a sense of how much they may be expected to pay, and the net price of their institution of choice. Many students enroll in a two-year institution because of its lower sticker price but fail to realize the expenses needed to ultimately attain a bachelor's degree. Discussing all expenses is essential for the low-income student who may not have had others in his or her family apply to and enroll in college.

Many students enroll in a two-year institution because of its lower sticker price but fail to realize the additional expense needed to obtain a bachelor's degree.

What students and families need to know:

- Differences in tuition and fees are based on the institution attended.
- Tuition expenses are only a portion of the overall financial expense of college.

- Tuition is initially cheaper at a two-year institution, but upon transfer to a four-year institution, a student will be expected to pay a four-year institution's tuition.
- Cost of attendance differs if attending an institution in-state or out-of-state.
- Fees are typically used for healthcare, activity fees, Internet fees, etc.

Though information on tuition and fees may be overwhelming for low-income students and for information providers, it is essential to keep in mind that these students are competing with middle- and high-income peers who receive this information well in advance, allowing them adequate time to prepare.

Room, Board, and Travel

Describing the variation in expenses of room and board (along with the other components of college expenses) can help students differentiate among the types of colleges they may consider attending (College Board 2007c). Since college may be the first time many students consider living away from home, students need to be aware of their living options. For example, travel expenses may differ if students attend an in-state or an out-of-state school, and room and board may be less if students attend a community college and live at home. Many students decide to attend a two-year community college for the sole reason of reducing living expenses by staying at home. While this saves money initially, such short-term thinking can prevent students from considering transfer to a four-year college. They may also fail to realize the complete expenses they will incur when living away from home after transferring. For this reason, students need to be provided with information on the variety of options available to them and ways they can save when making decisions on room, board, and travel.

Transfer students may fail to realize the complete expenses of living away from home, making information on room, board, and travel essential.

What students and families need to know:

- Travel costs are associated with commuting to different types of colleges.
- Room and board varies based on a student's decision to live at home with parents, on campus, or off campus.
- Room and board varies by many factors such as location and amenities.

Room, board, and travel expenses can greatly impact a student's decision on where and whether to attend, as these components make up a tremendous portion of what students pay to attend two-year and four-year colleges, depending on a student's individual circumstances and decisions.

Books and Supplies

Textbook expenses can be a significant percentage of the overall college bill, and, if unplanned for, can overwhelm students when they begin their college education, presenting a significant barrier to access and persistence. For students attending

community college, textbook expenses are equal to a substantial portion of their overall cost of attendance. Textbook prices often affect students and parents the most because they are the last expenses students are confronted with before they start their semester, and there may not be enough grant aid to cover them (ACSFA 2007). Students then may resort to sharing textbooks, and some spend entire semesters trying to get by without buying books, jeopardizing success in coursework.

Textbook prices are the last expenses confronting students before the semester, and they may not have enough grant aid to cover them.

What students and families need to know:

- Average grant aid from all sources for low- and moderate-income families does not cover textbook expenses at two- or four-year public colleges.
- Book and supply costs vary greatly by subject matter.
- Book expenses can be minimized using a variety of strategies.

College textbook prices are soaring, making it essential for students and families to have an understanding of this expense in advance of their first semester of college in order to save the appropriate amount (GAO 2005).

Effort Costs

A cost that often goes unmentioned is the amount of effort that a student puts forth to complete a degree. Effort costs include the mental exertion and labor students pour into their studies, which can affect their attendance and persistence (Weiss 1995). Students need to understand these costs to have a better understanding of the effort expected in their studies. School work may leave them less time for other activities throughout their undergraduate experience such as work, leisure, family and friends, and pursuit of hobbies.

Effort costs include the mental exertion and labor students pour into their studies, which can affect attendance and persistence.

What students and families need to know:

- A college degree does not come without hard work.
- The effort put forth in studying will vary by institution, academic ability, and preparation.
- Effort costs are related to time spent on academics.

Students need to be well aware of the diligence and preparation required of them in order to succeed in college and experience the benefits that college graduates enjoy. Student awareness of effort required would help to prepare them for the changes experienced and the responsibilities expected of college graduates.

Paying for College

Early information on the availability, eligibility, and variety of financial aid is essential to promote access and persistence. Financial aid is a crucial part of the college-going process for low-income students, especially for those students who participate in college preparation programs (Levine and Nidiffer 1996; Macy 2000). Every student should learn that funding an education requires a reliance on many sources: federal and state governments, institutions, private grants and scholarships, and personal financial resources. Since students, in part, make college-related decisions based on perceptions of financial aid availability, they need to be informed about multiple sources of aid, such as grants, loans, and work-study opportunities (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006). Most importantly, they need to grasp the relationship of financial aid to the overall cost of college. Understanding the differences among and the intricacies of these options presumes a level of financial awareness that many students do not have; therefore, discussions should include not just saving for college, but also budgeting, interest rates, and other key financial terms.

Eligibility

Many low- and moderate-income students are not fully informed about eligibility requirements for financial aid. Additionally, students may think that they do not meet the income requirements to be eligible for aid, or that they must meet certain academic requirements to be considered. Eligibility requirements differ depending on a variety of factors such as whether the type of aid is need-based or merit-based or if the aid is a loan.. Misconceptions and confusion are expected when discussing eligibility requirements. However, inaccurate information on eligibility can lead to failure to submit appropriate forms and failure to qualify for aid. Knowing the eligibility requirements of various forms of aid would enable low-income students, who are most likely to be eligible for federal grants and other forms of aid, to estimate financial aid awards in a way that directly encourages college aspirations and academic preparation (ACSFA 2005).

> **Inaccurate eligibility information can lead to failure to submit appropriate forms and qualify for aid.**

What students and families need to know:

- Eligibility requirements exist for federal, state, and institutional grants and for full and part-time attendance.
- Eligibility for need-based aid depends on factors including family income, assets, size, and circumstances.
- There exist initial and continuing eligibility requirements for various loans and the work-study program.
- Documentation of citizenship or permanent residence needs be provided to obtain federal aid.
- Certain academic eligibility requirements need to be met for merit aid programs.

- Males need to be registered for selective service at age 18 to be eligible for federal aid.
- Student earnings from work can limit eligibility for need-based aid.

Providing information on eligibility requirements for federal, state, and institutional aid can help alleviate misconceptions many students and families have about their ability to obtain financial aid to finance a college education.

Savings

Delivering college savings information as early as possible maximizes the benefit to saving, as time is a critical factor. However, low- and moderate-income students and families find it extremely difficult to save for college while attempting to meet daily living expenses. While it may be overwhelming to attempt to meet the entire cost of attendance, it is a relief for students and parents when they have the ability to use savings to pay for smaller costs such as books, transportation, or parts of their tuition, fees, room, and board. Saving just a little money each month can be encouraged by talking with students and parents about college costs and higher education opportunities (Hossler and Vesper 1993).

Delivering college savings information as early as possible maximizes the benefit to saving.

What students and families need to know:

- There are benefits to saving for college, specifically through various college savings plans, such as 529 plans.
- The fundamental aspects of savings, such as how compound interest can allow money to grow, should be applied to saving for college, and opportunities to invest in certain plans should be highlighted.
- Savings will reduce the amount students need to borrow to pay for college.
- Timing plays a significant role in how much is saved for a student's college expenses.
- Savings may have a modest impact on a family's ability to receive financial aid.
- Certain states provide matching grants for saving through individual development accounts (IDAs) for low-income families.
- Even if students and parents start late, goals can be created to save for smaller expenses such as textbooks and travel expenses.
- 529 savings plans and other such plans can help save for college at any age.

Students and families need to know that time is the critical factor in saving for college. The sooner saving begins, the more time money has to grow, and this may provide students and families with appropriate funds to pay for smaller college costs, such as textbooks and transportation.

Grants and Scholarships versus Loans

The average loan burden for a student who has borrowed money to attend a four-year public institution in the United States is $19,300 (Project on Student Debt 2007). This has significant implications for persistence rates for low-income students, who have low rates of bachelor's degree completion. The long-term consequences of loan and grant or scholarship options are not often relayed to low-income students. Having such information may impact students' financial circumstances tremendously over time. For example, students who do not understand the benefits of utilizing grants and scholarships before loans may make poor choices when attempting to finance their college education. A comprehensive understanding of loans and grants and scholarships is required in making these decisions, necessitating more in-depth information than simply the types of aid to which students and parents have access. Concerning loans, both the positive and negative aspects of loan debt can be presented. For example, some loan debt may represent an investment in education allowing for expanded degree and career choice, but incurring large sums of debt may lead to future financial difficulty.

> **Some loan debt may represent an investment in education allowing for expanding degree and career choice, but large sums of debt may lead to future financial stress.**

What students and families need to know:

- Grants and scholarships are free money that do not need to be paid back.
- Grants and scholarships come in three forms: need-based, merit-based, and combined need- and merit-based.
- Federal, state, and/or institutional grants and scholarships are more beneficial than any loan, because grants and scholarships need not be repaid.
- Understanding why and how grants and scholarships are awarded can be helpful in obtaining them.
- There exist certain circumstances under which it may be necessary to take out loans as an investment in an education.
- A discussion of repayment is relevant, as well as how it relates to the grants and scholarships, private loans, and federal loans received.

Knowing the difference between grants and scholarships and loans and the implications of using either would push students and families to seek out more grant aid and to make informed decisions on financing a college education.

Preparing for Merit-Based Awards

Knowledge about merit grants and scholarships available at the federal, state, and institutional levels can increase academic persistence on the part of students. This information is essential for students as they plan high school coursework, obtain the necessary grades, and establish an interest in coursework that could carve a path toward specific college majors that may be fully funded (Dynarski 2005; Creech 1998). Many

states have statewide merit grant or scholarship programs that require specific grades or a particular course of study, and simply knowing about these monies could inspire students to change their academic habits earlier. In addition, both merit- and need-based grants and scholarships are available over multiple years. Understanding the requirements involved for sustaining the grant or scholarship will predict the amount of aid a student can count on throughout college.

Many states have merit grant programs requiring specific grades or courses, and knowing about these monies could inspire students to prepare academically.

What students and families need to know:

- Academic preparation in middle and high school can impact the amount of merit aid available to an individual student.
- There is a difference between merit- and need-based grant and scholarship aid.
- Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACG) and National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grants offer significant sources of aid; however, the levels and amounts vary according to criteria related to year of enrollment, financial need, satisfactory academic progress, and field of study.
- Merit-based grants or scholarships can be locally provided (by businesses and rotary clubs, for example) or nationally provided (by groups such as the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation).
- Certain states provide lottery grants or scholarships to students who attain some level of academic merit (i.e. meet a GPA or SAT score requirement).

Being aware of the types of grants and scholarships available and how they differ from each other can encourage students to academically prepare and apply for merit aid.

Applying for Grants and Scholarships

There are a wide variety of public and private entities that offer financial assistance through grants and scholarships to low-income students. Grants and scholarships are a method by which students and families can obtain funds to pay for college well before a student's senior year. A few states offer early financial aid commitment programs for middle school students, and some private grants and scholarships are available to middle school and early high school students. If students are taught about the processes involved in applying for this aid, they can rely on such sources before applying for federal financial aid. Obtaining grant and scholarship funds can help students and families borrow less for college. And for low-income families, who tend to be loan-averse, obtaining grant and scholarship money can be an advantage (Burdman 2005). It can also cause students and families to start considering how they plan to pay for college.

Obtaining grant and scholarship funds can help students and families to borrow less for college.

What students and families need to know:

- Grants and scholarships can be made available based on a variety of criteria (i.e., interest in a particular major, student's home community, activities, academics).
- Sources for grants and scholarships include colleges, community organizations, governments, and businesses.
- Grants and scholarships do not have to be repaid.
- Grants and scholarships can be need-based, merit-based, or a combination of both.
- Grants and scholarship opportunities can be discovered using books and online search engines.
- Time needs to be invested into looking into and applying for grants and scholarships.
- Preparation is needed to undergo the process of writing essays and asking for recommendations, often required for grant and scholarship applications.
- Grants and scholarships can be made available in a variety of forms: as a lump sum of money (i.e., $500), as a promise to pay for one cost component (i.e. college textbooks), or as payment for the majority of college costs (i.e., full tuition and fees).
- Grant and scholarship scams do exist, so students and families must be aware of them.

Information on grants and scholarships and their application processes can significantly help low-income students and families investigate the various ways by which they plan to pay for the costs of college, thereby decreasing the amount they may have to borrow.

Need-Based Grants and Scholarships

Low- and moderate-income students also benefit from information defining need-based grants and scholarships, particularly the amount, because that builds motivation and alleviates fears associated with college expenses. Information about need-based grant and scholarship aid can be a useful alternative for low-income families, considering their

Information about need-based grant and scholarship aid can be a useful alternative for low-income families, considering their tendency to be loan-averse.

tendency to be loan-averse (Burdman 2005). As mentioned, information on grant and scholarship aid helps parents and students establish a context for the net price of attending college. State and institutional need-based grants and scholarships can also assist students in meeting the cost of attendance and may impact decisions to attend particular types of institutions. Emphasizing the benefits of need-based grant and scholarship aid (and merit-based grants and scholarships that are need-based, such as the ACG) can impact decisions on where to

attend college and provide students and parents with a sense of the amount needed in loans or the amount expected from family finances. Such knowledge of grant and scholarship aid can also ensure that loan burden does not negatively impact a low-income student's persistence.

What students and families need to know:

- The Pell, state, institutional, and private grants and scholarships focus on financial need and have varying family income eligibility requirements.
- Individual student earnings can also impact the amount of need-based grant and scholarship aid.
- Many dependent students automatically qualify for a full Pell Grant if the student's family income is less than $30,000.
- At some institutions, need-based grant and scholarship aid can extend into upper-middle class families.
- Some forms of need-based grants and scholarships have a merit component.
- For example, students can qualify for the ACG or SMART Grant, both of which are a combination of merit- and need-based grants.
- Students who may not qualify for the ACG or SMART Grant should understand that they can still qualify for Pell, the federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG), and other state and institutional need-based aid.
- The FAFSA4caster exists to provide estimates of need-based aid.
- Students and parents should be introduced to other such tools as the FAFSA4caster that can provide them with Pell Grant eligibility estimates and a review of how this amount varies according to family income.

A large population of students do not apply for need-based financial aid despite their eligibility to receive funds (ACE 2004; ACE 2006). Providing these students with information on the existence of need-based aid, eligibility requirements, and the proper application supports could help to increase the number of students who decide to enroll and persist through college.

Federal Loans

Low-income students are often hesitant about loans for a variety of reasons. Some of their hesitation stems from eligibility requirements, concerns about repayment, or the stigma attached to borrowing (Burdman 2005). If they knew how commonly students experience the need to borrow, they might perceive less of a stigma (Gaylord 2006). Information about the variety of loans available, and, more specifically, repayment, can alleviate a low-income student's hesitation about the ability to repay after college graduation. A discussion about loans with students and families can often be connected with the financial benefits that students are likely to receive in the long term with a college education and better career choices. For example, low-income students need to have information about taking out Subsidized Stafford Loans, in which the federal government pays the interest while the student is in school. The type of loan students incur can have enormous implications on the ability to repay after graduation.

Information about the repayment options of loans can alleviate a low-income student's hesitation about the ability to repay them.

What students and families need to know:

- It is common for most students to borrow money to pay for their education.
- Borrowing is an investment in their future.
- Federal loans do not require students to begin repayment while in college.
- Information needs to be provided on the differences that exist among federal loans: federal subsidized and unsubsidized loans, federal Direct and FFELP programs, student (Stafford and Perkins) and parent (PLUS) loans.
- Interest does not accumulate on subsidized federal Stafford and Perkins loans while a student is in school (interest does accumulate on unsubsidized federal student loans, so either the interest must be paid while in school or the amount that must be repaid after school increases).
- Federal PLUS loans are available for independent students or dependent students' guardians, and PLUS loan eligibility requires a credit check.
- Differences exist between federal loans and private loans.
- Differences in interest rates and borrowing limits exist among the varying lending programs.
- A discussion is necessary on repayment plans, including federal loan-forgiveness that exists for Stafford and Perkins Loans through service programs, forbearance, deferment, and default.

Many students jump to apply for private loans before realizing that they are eligible for federal loans that may have lower interest rates and interest subsidized by the government during school. Imparting knowledge about such loans may increase the number of students who find it possible to pay for college.

Private Loans

Students and parents who are ineligible for federal aid or do not receive enough federal support to meet the cost of attendance often apply for private loans, which has resulted in an unprecedented increase in loan volume in recent years (College Board 2007d; IHEP 2006). For students who took out private loans, the average amount in 2003-04 was $5,918 (IHEP 2006). Many who borrow privately may be unaware of the differences between federal and private loans and the differences among the various private loans available (IHEP 2006). There is a strong need for guidance from admissions officers, financial aid counselors, and others who have the knowledge and expertise to explain the differences to prospective borrowers. It is imperative that students and families understand these concepts as the differences among loan programs can have a large impact on their long-term ability to pay.

> **It is imperative that students and families understand differences among loan programs because that can have a large impact on the ability to repay.**

What students and families need to know:

- It is uncommon for students to take out private loans to pay for college.
- Some private loans allow students to defer interest payments until after graduation, but the interest accrues, while other loans may require students to pay interest as soon as the loan is disbursed.
- Interest rates have an effect on monthly payments.
- There are key differences between private loans and federal subsidized loans (subsidized loans have lower interest rates and are administered by the U.S. Department of Education).
- Variable and fixed rates have an impact on a student's long-term ability to pay off a private loan.
- Credit scores have an effect on private loan payments and eligibility.
- Borrowing limits, repayment plans, and the consequences of defaulting on private loans need to be described.
- Options exist for consolidating private loans after completing a degree.
- Consolidating student loans into a private consolidation loan may have implications for future plans to pay for college or graduate school.

Although much of this information will be delivered upon entrance to and exit from higher education, building a foundation of loan knowledge well before college enrollment will encourage more students to enroll and better manage their finances throughout college.

Work-Study

Many students are unaware of how the federal work-study program supplements other aid that they receive and can help meet day-to-day costs while attending college. The components of information about work-study enable students to understand that working while enrolled is a viable option for earning money. It is especially important for students to be informed about the work-study program because work-study, along with grants and scholarships, has been associated with higher persistence (Somers 1995). Work-study also offers more positive effects than other types of aid because it provides students with the opportunity to become more involved with and attached to the campus and the staff (Desjardins et al. 1999). Some students may be unaware that work-study is available for students demonstrating financial need and can be a part of their financial aid package.

Work-study programs have been associated with higher persistence.

What students and families need to know:

- Both full-time and part-time students are eligible.
- Hourly wages are paid.
- Restrictions are placed on the location of employment (usually at the school or at a local service organization) and number of hours worked.

- Usually, non-work study opportunities for employment also exist on or nearby college campuses.

Knowledge about the federal work-study program can help steer more students toward college, especially those low-income students who need to earn some income while attending college.

Tax Benefits

Tax deduction and credit information is important to provide to low-, moderate-, and middle-income students and families because often they are overwhelmed by the initial expense of college. However, the programs available can, over time, help to decrease their overall costs (ACE 2005). Not claiming the tuition tax deduction or the HOPE or Lifetime Learning tax credits leaves federal money on the table that should provide reimbursement for college expenses.

Tax deductions and credits can decrease the overall costs of college for low- and middle-income students and families.

What students and families need to know:

- Tax credit program specifics such as the amount available, income limits, years of eligibility, and the eligible expenses allowed should be explained so that families can plan for the credit during the next tax cycle.
- Tax deductions exist in two forms: an above the line deduction for interest paid on qualified student loans, and a tuition deduction for those who forgo the tax credits and itemize deductions.
- Additional tax benefits are available for saving for college through a 529 college savings plan or a prepaid tuition plan.
- Tax benefits are delivered well after payment for college is due.

Tax benefits provided by the federal government exist to make paying for college easier, and it is extremely helpful for parents and families to have this information beforehand, so that they know to expect a tax benefit for each year a student attends college.

<center>**Forms and Processes**</center>

Ensuring that a low-income student receives funds to pay for college requires a firm grasp of the steps necessary to receive financial aid. The process of applying for aid, while simpler than it was 20 years ago, still requires an understanding of forms and timelines. In addition, legislative and regulatory changes frequently alter the aid system. It cannot be assumed that even the most prepared students automatically understand the process because issues such as receiving an early estimate of financial need, applying for a personal identification number (PIN) from the U.S. Department of Education, and reading a financial aid award letter all cause consternation among many college applicants. Students receive some help with application forms and

Even the most prepared students can struggle with complicated financial aid topics such as applying for a PIN and reading an award letter.

processes from high school guidance staff and college financial aid officers; however, a more comprehensive approach that links information provided from multiple sources would positively impact student enrollment.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

Students and families are often overwhelmed by what they will be expected to pay for college when confronted with it during their final year in high school. Still, many low-

Students and families are often overwhelmed by what they will be expected to pay, and early awareness can help them plan.

and moderate-income students and families are curious to know what they will be expected to pay after their income and the cost of attendance are taken into consideration. It is important to come to terms with this information in advance of a student's senior year so that decisions can be made on where to attend and how to prepare to meet college expenses (ACSFA 2005). Understanding the basics of how aid is calculated, and how to receive the financial aid necessary to meet existing need contributes to those decisions and can help motivate students to apply and enroll.

What students and families need to know:

- Online EFC (expected family contribution) calculators and the FAFSA4caster can be used to help families determine a rough estimate of EFC.
- A comprehensive financial aid information plan should connect any remaining unmet need after EFC with appropriate financial aid sources.
- EFC is an estimate of how much a family can be expected to pay for college, which affects how much need-based aid a student receives.
- EFC does not necessarily entail what a family pays out of pocket each year for college, nor what it must immediately pay the government or institution.

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Having access to such information earlier, when students and families begin the college search and college decision making processes, can help to prepare for this contribution.

Registration and Application Fee Waivers

While advisors often discuss the aid process for direct college expenses, educating students and families about ancillary costs is often forgotten. Such costs include college application fees, and SAT and ACT registration fees that must be taken before students can even be considered in the admissions and financial aid processes. Low-income students often limit the number of schools to which they apply or fail to take key college entrance exams because of their initial costs (Sanoff 2005). Students and parents need information on these costs well ahead of time so that they apply to schools and take such exams. In addition, understanding the expense of applying and taking entrance exams can also persuade many students and parents to prepare for fees by saving for them, if they are not waived.

Low-income students often limit the number of schools to which they apply or fail to take key college entrance exams because of the initial costs.

What students and families need to know:

- Students need initial information on the costs of college application fees and SAT and ACT registration fees.
- Necessary pieces of information for low-income students paying for college preparatory exams include where to obtain fee waivers, how to complete the waiver, eligibility requirements, and deadlines.

Information on fee waivers may greatly enhance student chances to take college preparatory exams as such fees incrementally create barriers for low-income students who are not be able to afford the exams required.

FAFSA

In addition to early awareness of the expected family contribution, students and families need to be informed of the process by which they need to apply for federal financial aid. Although 96 percent of students already complete the FAFSA online because of its convenience, expediency, and ease, a system of financial aid information delivery should ensure that each family receives individual assistance in navigating the completion of the form, whether on paper or online. Outreach advisors can provide tips such as keeping in constant contact with their institutions' financial aid offices to ensure that all necessary forms have been submitted (U.S. Department of Education 2007b). Such clarification on the process can help to ease anxiety over college applications and prevent students and families from

Outreach advisors can provide tips such as keeping in constant contact with their institutions' financial aid offices to ensure everything has been submitted.

stopping midway through the process and denying themselves aid (Moore 2007). It is important to discuss more than the form. Discussions about the process prior to completing the FAFSA and follow-up afterward are imperative.

What students and families need to know:

- The FAFSA is a free application that helps to determine federal, state, and certain forms of institutional aid.
- There is a web-based and a paper version of the FAFSA available.
- Information on where and how the FAFSA can be obtained.
- Scams and solicitations to use paid FAFSA preparers exist and should be avoided.
- The PIN process begins with obtaining one from www.pin.ed.gov prior to completing the FAFSA.
- It is important to have all tax documents and W-2 forms at hand for one year prior to the year the student will enroll in college.
- The FAFSA should be completed regardless of whether families think they are eligible for Pell because the form also determines eligibility for other types of aid, including federal loans and campus-based aid.
- Specific deadlines for submitting the FAFSA for state aid vary by state.
- Students will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) that lists the Expected Family Contribution.
- The SAR can be used to make necessary changes to information submitted on the FAFSA and can be resubmitted to ensure that the financial information is accurate.
- Verification is an additional process that certain students must undergo, in which they provide copies of W-2s and other forms to verify that the information submitted was accurate.

Emphasis on completing the FAFSA, clarity about the information to have available to complete it, steps required to complete it, and proper support in doing so can enhance the chances that a student will enroll in and persist through college because he or she will have financial aid available to pay for it.

State and Institutional Forms

While most institutions require only the FAFSA form to be completed for students to be eligible for institutional aid, some institutions require the CSS PROFILE form or another institutional or state form before awarding their own funds (ACE 2005). The purpose of these forms and questions is to reach a deeper level of financial evaluation of a family's ability to pay for college in order to package aid or check for eligibility requirements for institutional scholarships, grants, and loans. Many states offer their own scholarship and grant programs, but require an extra form to be filled out to be eligible for such aid. Knowing what to expect is key to the financial aid process, as missing one deadline for a

The purpose of state and institutional forms is to reach a deeper level of financial evaluation of a family's ability to pay for college.

specific form, failing to fill out the answer to an important question on a form, or failing to fill out forms correctly could result in tremendous cost to students and families.

What students and families need to know:

- States have different deadlines for submitting the FAFSA and any additional state forms.
- As for the FAFSA, students need to know where to obtain the CSS PROFILE or institutional form, the deadline for completing these forms, and information required to complete the form.
- A list of schools that require students to fill out the CSS PROFILE can be found at: https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet.srv.
- Unlike the FAFSA, students need to know the charge for completing the CSS Profile, how they can pay for it, and how they can obtain a fee waiver.
- Confirmation of financial information may be required by institutions, and students should become familiar with any follow-up requirements that might be necessary.

State and institutional aid greatly supplements federal financial aid, especially in states and at colleges where low-income students are guaranteed the remaining cost of attendance will be covered. It is, therefore, beneficial to provide students with information on how and where to obtain such aid.

Financial Aid Award Letter

Students and families are often overwhelmed by the financial aid award letter that they receive. The letter can be confusing when trying to determine the total financial aid received and in distinguishing which aid components are grants and which are loans or work-study. Students and families are often left wondering about the total aid they have received and how much of the financial burden they must shoulder (Kantrowitz 2007). It is essential that students and families be able to comprehend their award letters because college choice often depends on differences in aid packages laid out in the award letter.

> **Students and families are often left wondering about the total aid they have received and how much of the financial burden they must shoulder.**

What students and families need to know:

- Financial aid award letters come in different formats.
- There is specific information students and families must heed, such as grant and loan amounts and terms, which are often in the fine print of the award letters.
- Award letters contain a great deal of fine print that must be fully comprehended.
- Negotiating for more financial aid is sometimes an option.

- Comparing financial aid offers among institutions helps to narrow choices to the institution providing the best aid offer.
- The financial aid award lasts for only one year; it changes year to year.

Providing students with help in understanding the financial aid award letter can reduce misconceptions they may have after reading it. Such understanding can have an impact on where a student attends college and how much grant aid he or she receives.

Disbursement

Many low- and moderate-income families, especially those who have not previously sent family members to college, are left in the dark as to how to obtain aid after they fill out the FAFSA and receive the award letter. Sometimes they assume that the money will automatically be received in conjunction with the financial aid award letter, or when the institution's offer to enroll is accepted. Families could benefit from learning how aid is disbursed and how the college and loan agencies are responsible for providing students and parents with the appropriate promissory notes and other forms to sign. Disbursement rules vary by program (i.e. Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, etc.), but they should expect to receive notification from their institution when the monies are distributed (U.S. Department of Education 2007a). High school and college access advisors and counselors often believe a discussion on disbursement to be the job of the college financial aid office; however, students need to be made aware of any forms they should expect in the mail or anything they must sign before that time. Obscurity in this area can prevent students from receiving their college aid in a timely manner.

Many low- and middle - income families are left in the dark as to how to actually obtain their aid after they receive the award letter.

What students and families need to know:

- A promissory note needs to be signed, and students need to attend an entrance interview upon college matriculation to discuss the regulations of the student loan.
- The promissory note is a binding contract requiring repayment within a certain amount of time after graduation or other departure from a postsecondary institution.
- An understanding of what is included in the promissory note is necessary.
- Refund checks often need to be picked up by the student at his or her financial aid or bursar's office each semester.
- Loans are usually disbursed directly to the institution each semester or year, depending on the loan type.
- Institutions often send out information electronically to their students about aid disbursement.

Aid disbursement is not generally thought of as an integral part of the financial aid process because many students and parents believe their search and struggle may be over

after receiving a financial aid award letter. However, confusion in this area can determine whether a student receives aid on time or at all.

Reapplication

Many students and families have the misconception that the amount of aid they receive when they first enroll will be the same throughout their attendance at the college. The U.S. Department of Education requires students to reapply for financial aid annually, and updated data can be used to determine federal, state, and institutional financial aid every year (U.S. Department of Education 2007b). Additionally, if a student transfers between institutions, the new college may require an additional application, and the aid package will likely change.

What students and families need to know:

- Students must reapply for aid each year and report current income to be considered for financial aid.
- Reapplication must be completed online.
- The amount of aid can change according to income and academic circumstances.
- Eligibility for certain types of aid, such as the ACG and SMART Grants, changes during their college education.

Students need to understand the reapplication process so that they are able to fund each year and persist through college successfully.

GUIDELINES FOR DELIVERING
EARLY FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION

Identifying what information to deliver is merely the first challenge in ensuring that students are well informed to make college choices. Determining how that information should be delivered is the second challenge. Before specific delivery strategies for an individual program can be developed and implemented, general guidelines for reaching the target audience and effectively disseminating the information framework must be outlined. This section of the report focuses on ten general guidelines illustrated in Exhibit 1. Each has been identified through research and evidence of positive implementation in effective programs. Some programs will apply these guidelines, along with other lists of best practices, to multiple aspects of early intervention such as improving academic preparation, raising aspirations, and increasing knowledge about the college going process (Chartwell Education Group 2007). While recognizing the wider role these guidelines can play, this report specifically applies each guideline to financial aid information delivery.

These guidelines can be used in two ways:

- **To create a new program**, the purpose of which is to deliver comprehensive information about the financial decision to attend college. From its administrative structure to its target audience, all aspects of a new program can be designed with the guidelines in mind. Experience from current programs can be used to apply these characteristics to an organized approach integrating all of the guidelines. This process should produce great success with delivering the information framework in a time-appropriate manner.

- **To augment an existing program** intending to expand its delivery of financial aid related information. It is quite likely that a well-constructed college outreach program already relies on several of these guidelines to meet its objectives, and by integrating others, programs could improve their success with information delivery as well as increase the impact of their interventions.

The ideal system of financial aid information delivery would incorporate all ten of these guidelines, but they are not intended to be a prescriptive formula for success. Some programs may be able to effectively deliver the information framework in a timely fashion by relying on a subset of these guidelines, but each program must determine which work best given varying program objectives. Design details will depend upon the program's service population, operational strengths, mission, and resource constraints. The purpose of this section is not to dictate how to administer a program, but rather highlight effective ideas that can be adapted to individual situations.

Each guideline is discussed in the pages that follow. The analysis of each presents the supporting literature and examples of outreach programs that have implemented it. The examples seek to provide cases of implementation strategies across a wide range of programs. A summary of best practices concludes each subsection.

EXHIBIT 1: GUIDELINES FOR DELIVERING EARLY FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION

1. Intervene by 6th Grade and Continue through High School

2. Involve Parents and Families in the College-Going Process

3. Mentor Each Student

4. Complete the FAFSA

5. Adapt the Program to the Individual School Community

6. Integrate Language and Cultural Differences

7. Partner with Community Organizations

8. Encourage Peer Integration

9. Formulate Program Evaluation Standards

10. Discuss Financial Literacy alongside Financial Aid

Intervene by 6th Grade and Continue through High School

While assisting high school seniors with the FAFSA and discussing award letters is vital, starting much earlier and providing comprehensive information over many years on the financial decision to attend college will provide better service and, ultimately, lead more students to attend. These conversations can begin to occur in 6th grade with students of all ability and socioeconomic levels. Low-income students, in particular, are unlikely to prepare academically for college if they believe affordability will be a major barrier to enrollment, and this lack of preparation could negatively impact their eligibility for some forms of financial aid.

There are numerous reasons to begin providing financial aid information in middle school and continuing to work with students through high school graduation and college enrollment. By starting in 6th grade, valuable information can be provided early enough to affect behavior on financial planning for college, information can be built cumulatively and systematically, trust can be gained between outreach providers and families, repetition can be incorporated to ensure adequate understanding of concepts, and evolving family financial circumstances can be discussed at different points in time. The two programs discussed below demonstrate how to intervene early in order to motivate underprivileged students and how to continue over a long time period to foster trust and reinforce information.

> **By starting in 6th grade, valuable information can be provided early enough to affect behavior on financial planning for college.**

What the Experts Say

Middle school students face decisions that have major impacts on college enrollment (Cabera and La Nasa 2000). Most are not equipped with an appropriate bank of knowledge to assess options and navigate the decision making process. The cost/benefit analysis of preparing for college academically and financially that young students undertake at this juncture will affect whether they attend college at all, which institution they attend, and whether they save for college (Cabera and La Nasa 2000). Accurately knowing costs and benefits is difficult for low-income students and, especially, first-generation college students, who have little experience in their home lives to inform them of college opportunities (Wimberly and Noeth 2005).

> **Comprehensive information about the financial decision to attend college must be provided before high school.**

Because mistakes can be made at critical junctures in middle school, it is important that comprehensive information about the financial decision to attend college be provided before high school. Students make college-related decisions based on their perceptions about their own eligibility for and availability of financial aid, so it is essential to instill a sense that aid is available (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006). To accomplish this, teaching families about eligibility criteria for the large quantity of aid that exists from multiple sources is necessary.

Surprisingly, many students are completely unaware that aid exists. Macy (2000) interviewed first-generation, low-income college students who received a Pell Grant and found that half of these students were not aware that the Pell Grant program existed before receiving the aid. She also provides six factors that enable Pell recipients' success in college enrollment and persistence, citing the early awareness of financial aid as a critical factor (Macy 2000). While providing detailed information about financial aid programs in middle school may be confusing and uninteresting to most students, students and families will be able to digest basic information about grants and loans at this early stage. The key is to begin with basic information and build on that knowledge to slowly deliver very complex information. In a different study, high school students supported this idea by claiming to want general information in early high school with more specific information about programs and their special circumstances in 11th grade (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006). When students understand the basic message that financial aid is available to assist in covering college expenses, their altered perceptions can lead to an increased likelihood of preparing and enrolling.

Early awareness of financial aid is one of six critical factors that enable Pell recipients to succeed in college enrollment and persistence.

College choice theory also explains the importance of providing early financial aid information. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed a three-phase college enrollment model that indicates that the first phase, a predisposition to enrolling in college versus choosing another option, occurs early in a student's education. Cabera and La Nasa (2000) support the theory, stating that 9th grade students already have developed occupational and educational aspirations. Their finding supports the early delivery of information on profession, income, and degrees. Information linking college with professions of interest can positively impact college enrollment by adjusting predispositions. Most college outreach programs realize that successfully improving a student's predisposition to college is essential, but only one-third of programs targeting low-income students understand the importance of beginning early and starting outreach efforts prior to 9th grade (Perna 2002).

Only one-third of college outreach programs begin providing low-income students with information prior to 9th grade.

Clearly, early outreach to provide financial aid information is vital, but so is continued intervention throughout the college decision process. As already mentioned, students expect the information and resources with which they are provided to become more specific as time progresses (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006). According to Choy et al. (2000), the greatest loss of potential college graduates occurs in 10th grade with students who do not have aspirations to enroll in college and earn a bachelor's degree. Early and continued intervention to affect students' predispositions toward college can stem this loss. Additional research suggests the success of Upward Bound stems from its focus on financial aid and long-term investment in students over the course of many years (Gullatt and Jan 2003). The repetition of information through continued intervention as well as

trust built among outreach staff, students, and families promotes positive college enrollment outcomes.

What Other Programs Are Doing

Kids2College (K2C)

The Sallie Mae Fund's Kids2College program provides an intensive, six-session college awareness program for 6th grade students that serves as an introduction to college preparation. It operates in multiple states and regions including Massachusetts, Washington DC, California, North Carolina, Florida, and Texas. The target audience consists of low-income and first-generation students who are predominately Latino and African American. **Kids2College's curriculum is specifically designed for 6th grade students and fosters conversations about college expenses.** Most Kids2College programs are presented in the classroom by specially trained classroom teachers with the support of local colleges and universities. Kids2College program locations have developed partnerships with institutions of higher education that provide 6th grade student participants with a window into higher education and exposure to collegiate life through a tailored trip to a college campus. The program recently designed a full curriculum, and a large percentage of time is spent on financial aid information. The curriculum is specially designed to be kid-friendly and fosters conversations about college academic requirements, college choices, and college expenses, simultaneously debunking many myths. It serves as an excellent example of how aid information can be geared toward a specific age group.

The program has an excellent grasp of the importance of starting young and affecting the predisposition of underprivileged students' desire to attend college. Its age-appropriate curriculum delivers useful information about college benefits and costs, careers associated with a college education, the availability of financial aid, and efforts to begin saving to finance higher education. It also focuses on steps to be taken while in middle school that will lead to better preparation for college financially and academically. The program is an eminent model of directing early financial aid information to middle school students, but a drawback of the program is that the design does not accommodate following students throughout high school.

Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI)

The NAI recruits and works with students from four middle schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Students are selected using teacher recommendations and interviews. If students complete the six-year program and are accepted into the University of Southern California, they receive a full financial aid package. Although most NAI programs take place at the university, the teachers involved with the program are from the middle and high schools that the students attend. Participating students and teachers leave school grounds each day to take part in program activities.

NAI provides an ideal model for working continuously with a cohort of students from 6th grade through high school graduation, which allows trust to be built and individual

NAI's model allows trust to be built and individual circumstances affecting aid eligibility to be considered.

circumstances affecting aid eligibility to be considered. Although the program's focus is on academic preparation, financial aid is addressed at several points throughout each year. When the time to complete the FAFSA arrives, administrative staff assist students and families with additional support from financial aid officers from the University of Southern California. This combination of information from a familiar and trusted source and expert wisdom from financial aid professionals results in a smooth aid application process.

Key Considerations

Beginning to deliver information early and continuing throughout high school is the most important step a college access program can undertake in the realm of financial aid information because information increases students' dispositions to prepare for and attend higher education. Kids2College's early intervention focusing on financial aid information provides an excellent example of improving middle school students' disposition to prepare for and attend college. The method of delivering early financial aid information, whether in school classrooms, local community centers after school, or through some other mechanism, is important, but not as crucial as the timing of the information delivered.

Beginning to deliver information early and continuing throughout high school is the most important step a college access program can undertake in the realm of financial aid information.

Extending the information delivery throughout high school builds trusting relationships that encourage students to rely on a program's services in the future, furthering their chance of successfully enrolling in college. Neighborhood Academic Initiative models the connection and trust that can be built when aid information is provided by the same program over many years. Students do not benefit as much from a disjointed approach to learning about financial aid information; therefore, it is essential to either work with students over a long period or partner with other organizations targeting different age groups. Kids2College, for example, could rely on its university partnerships or foster other partnerships with programs targeting high school students to ensure that the entire information framework is delivered throughout high school.

Involve Parents and Families in the College-Going Process

Parental expectations and involvement are strong influences on students' decisions to attend college (Horn et al. 1998). As a motivating influence, parents, therefore, require just as much information as students do to learn that aid is available and that college is a financial possibility. Research suggests that financial information is best learned through personal modeling. Although such modeling could greatly influence the financial habits and decision making patterns of children, there is currently a lack of parental involvement within both financial management and college preparation programs (Clarke et al. 2005; Tierney 2002). Institutions often expect families to bear the burden of paying for college, so early information initiatives should seek to involve parents to inform them of what those expectations might be. For example, parent information is needed to fill out the FAFSA for dependent students, and when parents are disengaged from or uninformed about the process, filling out this lengthy application can be even more daunting and discouraging for students. Families can also be a good source of financial literacy information, which will be discussed more thoroughly under a later guideline. Armed with information about financial options and college pricing early on, parents and families are then likely to plan financially and encourage their children to prepare for and enroll in college.

> **Parents require just as much information as students do to learn that aid is available and that college is a financial possibility.**

Although involving parents and families occasionally in one-time activities such as financial aid nights, one-on-one FAFSA preparation, or workshops is useful, greater success can occur if families have sustained participation in program activities. The programs highlighted take the extra step, beyond simple information, to meet parents where they are and engage them in the process. These programs require continuous involvement from parents and families to reinforce program messages and efforts.

What the Experts Say

A body of research exists that highlights the importance of parent and family involvement in the K-12 arena (U.S. Department of Education 1994; Henderson and Mapp 2004). Research has also found that parent support for higher education, in general, is a predictor of future college enrollment (Hossler et al. 1999). Therefore, to the extent that parents encourage and support the goal of college enrollment, students are more likely to attend. Certainly these findings are useful for those interested in increasing access to college for all students. However, parents have an even larger role to play in the financial aid information process. Most parents do expect their children to attend college (Horn et al. 2003). Unfortunately, according to a survey conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, only 11 percent of middle school parents have begun to research financial aid (Cunningham et al. 2007). Additionally, over 25 percent of middle school parents had taken no actions at all toward

> **Only 11 percent of middle school parents have begun to research financial aid.**

paying for college (Cunningham et al. 2007). Despite this inaction, research shows that parents of 6th grade students of all races and income levels are particularly interested in receiving information about financial aid options, more so than on any other college access topic (ISAC 2000).

Often students and families overestimate the expense of college, causing concerns about family income to overshadow the potential benefits of a college education (Kane 2003).

Eliminating misperceptions and informational barriers requires reaching out to parents, informing them, and engaging them in their children's quest for higher education.

Furthermore, many parents are not aware of the necessity of a college education in the new global workforce (Murnane and Levy 2004). In addition, parents are not receiving information early enough to change patterns and make decisions. Only six percent of Latino parents with incomes below $25,000 report receiving information about financial aid before their child is 15 years old, compared with 25 percent of parents with incomes above $75,000 (Sallie Mae Fund 2003). In fact, information-gathering activities are reportedly low even among students and parents of older students who have college plans. A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that 47 percent of parents of 9th and 10th grade students had neither obtained expense information nor even estimated the cost of attending college (Horn et al. 2003). Again, these gaps in information were more severe among lower income parents. This information divide means that the parents who would most benefit from having early financial aid information are the most uninformed (Cunningham et al. 2007; Horn et al. 2003). Eliminating the misperceptions and informational barriers that exist requires reaching out to parents, informing them, and engaging them in their children's quest for higher education.

Low-income families are often put at a disadvantage in the aid process due to a lack of cultural understanding about college preparation and financial aid processes, as well as real structural barriers such as language issues and work schedules, which inhibit their participation. Those parents who have been to college themselves or who have older children who have gone to college, are better able to understand the college application and admissions processes and can use this prior knowledge to aid their children (Tierney 2002). Ostensibly, if parents have not attended college, a reason for parental non-involvement may be that they do not know what to tell their children (Wimberly and Noeth 2005). Even if a parent did attend college, it may have been so long ago that the current financial aid forms are a mystery to them.

Programs can fill knowledge gaps by introducing activities that both inform and engage parents.

Additionally, parent involvement has a tendency to decline as students reach middle and high school (Wimberly and Noeth 2005). This is an area where programs can fill in gaps by introducing activities that both inform and engage parents. However, just because parents have not gone to college themselves does not mean that they will not be a great resource in helping their children attend college. It is up to

programs to successfully use the assets that parents are able to provide in order to better integrate parents into the fabric of the intervention (Tierney 2002).

What Other Programs Are Doing

Access ASU Initiatives- Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program (HMDP)

Arizona State University, as part of its Access ASU University Initiatives, offers the Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program that aims to increase the number of first-generation Hispanic women who complete a bachelor's degree. Families are recruited for this program while students are in the 7th grade, and program activities begin in the 8th grade and continue throughout high school and college. To enroll in the program, participants must be first-generation students with at least a 2.75 GPA, attend school within a participating district, and be performing at the 7th grade level in English and Math. Mothers and daughters attend college preparation workshops and other ASU events together, and students are visited by program counselors for one-on-one sessions at their school sites. Students receive continuing support while in college if they decide to enroll at Arizona State University.

This program begins investing in parents early. Whereas some other programs wait until students are in the upper secondary school years to begin parental involvement, the Mother-Daughter initiative fosters co-active learning starting in the 8th grade—the first year of the program. In this way, mothers have some time to help their daughters plan for college both financially and academically, and are given the tools to do so. Workshops are diverse in nature, ranging from information on Latina culture, community service, career exploration, to academic preparation. Beginning in the 8th grade, students create a four-year high school plan to guide their actions and coursework. During one of the high school workshops, mothers and daughters attend a joint financial aid and scholarship session, where they are given information about how to apply for both need-based aid and merit awards. The level of commitment to the program is significant, requiring meeting at least once a month for nine years through college graduation. But the demand is high because of the program's format that focuses on individuals – both mother and daughter.

Mothers are given tools in workshops to help their 8th grade daughters prepare academically and financially for college.

The Puente Project

The Puente Project serves 58 community colleges and 34 high schools throughout California. It is an academic preparation program that works to increase the number of low-income and first-generation students in four-year colleges and universities. It also trains and prepares students for the educational pathway of graduating from high school, attending a community college if necessary, and graduating from a four-year institution. Puente works with school and college staff and faculty to implement the program at their sites. These staff members, in turn, provide extensive writing instruction, academic, personal and financial aid counseling, community mentors, and parent workshops. At the

same time, a Puente counselor located at each school works closely with students and their parents to ensure that the student enrolls in the appropriate college preparation classes and that the parent supports the student in his or her academic progress. The counselor also provides encouragement and support for the student to apply for financial aid and pursue other financial opportunities. In addition, a community leadership/mentoring coordinator at the state office works to provide community leadership, mentoring, and volunteer opportunities, as well as to seek resources from local business and professional communities that help support the program. In this way, Puente employs an integrated approach combining best practices and strategies proven effective in achieving student success. The Puente Project is co-sponsored by the University of California, Office of the President, and the Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges.

Parental and familial engagement is a central part of the Puente Project, and remains an explicitly stated goal in its mission. The program uses several strategies to include and engage parents, including counselor training to create a better understanding of the parent perspective, a parent contract, and parent workshops. Puente counselors are trained to build relationships and elicit an ongoing dialogue to increase parental comfort level. All parents of students involved in the program are required to sign a contract stating their mutual role in the college preparation process. Workshops are frequently held by program counselors and address topics such as applying for financial aid and how to support children academically. Counselors understand that parents often feel intimidated about participating in their children's academic progress because they do not have the technical knowledge about applying for college. To help ease this tension, counselors stress to parents that the program provides opportunities to be involved in a variety of ways—through college visits, parent advisory councils, and volunteer opportunities. Furthermore, the program actively promotes the integration of the students' cultural heritage and families into the program structure in order to help students feel validated such that they feel comfortable with program staff and program goals (Puente Project 2003).

College counselors are trained to build relationships with parents, and parents must sign a contract affirming their role in the college process.

Key Considerations

Programs should utilize the influential nature of parents by ensuring consistent parental engagement. Not only can parents help their children internalize financial aid information, but they also could use more accurate information about the benefits and costs of college. Different approaches to engaging parents will be suitable to different populations. The Puente Project requires parents to remain involved contractually throughout the intervention, ensuring consistent attendance at financial aid programming by counselors trained to interact with

Programs should utilize the influential nature of parents by ensuring consistent parental engagement.

parents. Making this a focal point allows all staff to understand the importance of communicating effectively with parents and to initiate parental involvement often.

Access ASU highlights another significant point: the motivating influence parents have on the college choices of their children, which experts agree is an important factor. Access ASU encourages cooperation between students and parents in planning for college academically and financially through a litany of activities. By involving parents in middle school, the progression of delivering financial aid information will incorporate both parties throughout the entire framework.

Mentor Each Student

Developing one-on-one relationships with students is essential to provide the type of in-depth financial aid information students need to apply for it. Access to a specific person who has worked extensively with the student over time creates a sense of ease when guiding the family through the detailed elements of the financial aid application. It also ensures that each student receives the support necessary to successfully complete an application. The trust built between students and mentors creates effective communication of the benefits to college and an understanding of the implications of various financial decisions. Mentors also help overcome complexity issues within the financial aid process. For instance, they can provide students and families with assistance on the verification process if selected, translate complex financial aid award letters, or help compare various financial aid offers.

Developing one-on-one relationships with students is essential to provide the type of in-depth financial aid information needed.

Many intervention programs provide large groups with information on financial aid and the FAFSA to reach the greatest number of low-income students, but many disadvantaged students need individual follow-up assistance that cannot be addressed in larger settings. Although reaching large numbers of students simultaneously may be efficient, outreach efforts relying solely on large group information sessions could improve their level of service by providing a mentorship component. The programs highlighted offer several methods of delivering that individualized assistance within three urban settings.

What the Experts Say

Mentorship is defined as a relationship between a young person and an adult in which the adult provides the younger person with support, guidance, and assistance that is sustained over a certain period of time (Jekielek et al. 2002). This is supported by the notion that a younger person will likely be more successful as an adult if a caring adult is available to the younger one. Mentoring can be extremely beneficial for students from poor, struggling, and single-parent families who live in areas that offer limited resources and positive role models (Jekielek et al. 2002). Mentoring programs often emphasize improving the academic performance and success of students, and youth participating in such mentoring relationships tend to experience academic improvement (Jekielek et al. 2002). In addition to academic improvement, mentoring can also assist with the financial decision to attend college. The financial aid process can be so complex as to confuse even experienced families, so students without a knowledgeable mentor are at a critical disadvantage in learning the terms and navigating the system

Mentoring can be beneficial for young people from poor, struggling, and single-parent families who live in areas offering limited resources.

(College Board 2007a). Therefore, it is no surprise that access programs adopt a mentoring feature, whether it is one-on-one assistance, counseling, or another method.

Patricia McDonough has reviewed numerous studies on the ability of school counselors to have an important and positive influence on students' motivations and expectations by providing information on college preparation (McDonough 2005). Many students start out in middle school (6th grade) with high aspirations to attend college, but are not aware

Counseling services are one of the two strongest predictors in improving access to college.

of the steps needed to prepare themselves for college and do not receive the proper guidance to do so (Cunningham et al. 2007). Further research has shown that students' aspirations tend to decline when they reach high school (ACSFA 2006). Mentorship is a key strategy that can combat this problem by structuring information activities to foster and support college aspirations by discussing academic preparation along with the financial benefits, costs, and processes associated with college. Mentors are also able to encourage and assist parents in understanding their important role in fostering college aspirations (Hossler et al. 1999). Furthermore, the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA) has identified counseling services to be one of the two strongest predictors in improving access to college (2002).

Numerous college access groups use a one-on-one strategy to foster relationships between mentors and students. Research points to students needing a trusting, one-on-one relationship with mentors to feel confident in communicating sensitive financial information. Many successful college access groups that focus on economically disadvantaged students establish strategies and systems to enable program staff to understand each of the participating students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses (Johnson 1999). These programs have the ability to recruit appropriate mentors, train, and occasionally supervise them. Gullatt and Jan found, in various bodies of research, that consistent among many effective programs were close, caring relations with knowledgeable adults who monitored a student's progress (2003). These mentors tend to place emphasis on students' cultural backgrounds and attempt to include culturally relevant information into the structure and the content of the program (Gullatt and Jan 2003), creating a sense of validation as well as building trust with students. Moreover, analyses of programs has led to the conclusion that the longer the mentoring relationship, the better the outcome, also noting that students who had brief interactions felt less confident about their goals and had a lower sense of self-worth (Jekielek et al. 2002).

Furthermore, although group seminars and group discussions on financial aid information may be helpful in various early information efforts, they cannot replace one-on-one interactions (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006). Group seminars, workshops, and college visits tend to have limited effectiveness without the individual assistance that would provide students with follow-up guidance. De La Rosa and Tierney found that less than ten percent of seniors

Group seminars and workshops tend to be less effective then individual assistance.

or their families attended the workshops, and many students claimed that their financial situations were too complex to be dealt with by group session presenters. Students who

attend large group seminars leave with many unanswered questions about the FAFSA (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006). In addition, the family income section of the FAFSA may be particularly difficult for students in nontraditional families who require additional assistance to complete the form. Many nontraditional and first-generation students have family members with limited experience in applying to college and for financial aid. Therefore, they may find it necessary to have guidance from a mentor or counselor to ensure appropriate completion of the financial aid application. Having such a relationship with someone can help students and parents make sound financial decisions regarding the various types of aid available to finance their college educations.

What Other Programs Are Doing

Sponsor-A-Scholar (SAS)

Sponsor-A-Scholar serves approximately 450 low-income students who are attending or who have attended Philadelphia's public comprehensive ("neighborhood") high schools – approximately 200 students are in the high school portion of the program and 250 are in the college portion. The program recruits students in the 9th grade who demonstrate average-to-strong academic achievement (A/B/C grades), have good attendance and behavior, and have the desire and potential to succeed in college. SAS offers each participating student long-term, one-on-one mentoring; a year-round curriculum planned to increase each student's ability to succeed in college, which includes mandatory after-school classes, summer academic programming, tutoring, and SAT prep classes; college guidance activities, including college trips, individual college counseling, and personal assistance through the financial aid process; funds for college-related expenses; and ongoing staff support throughout high school and college. All program activities are developed to help students complete high school successfully, find and gain acceptance to an appropriate college with a viable financial aid package, and stay in school to earn their degrees.

One of the most impressive characteristics of Sponsor-A-Scholar is its mentoring component. The program matches students with volunteer mentors who are asked to stay with the student for at least five years: from the 9th grade through the freshman year of college. However, many relationships last a lifetime. Mentors and students meet and talk regularly about school and other interests. Together they attend program activities,

Constant communication and familiarity with the student's family positively affect student performance in SAS.

visit the mentor's worksite, take trips to colleges, and go on social and educational outings. Mentors play a critical role in helping students set goals and understand what it takes to meet those goals. The student's mentor plays a significant – and often key – role in the student's college selection and application processes. All of the mentors are college graduates from the Philadelphia area who have been matched with students by gender and areas of interest. The belief is that a consistent, caring adult can provide a student with support needed to succeed in high school and achieve access to college. Research done by Mathematica indicates that SAS students have higher rates of college

attendance in each of the first two years after high school than students who attend the same high schools but are not SAS participants (Johnson 1999). They conclude that mentoring efforts by the program, specifically the constant communication and familiarity with the student's family, affect student performance greatly. Students whose mentors contact them most often have higher rates of first-year college attendance and college retention (Gullatt and Jan 2003).

Cleveland Scholarship Program (CSP)

The Cleveland Scholarship Program provides college access services to residents of Greater Cleveland who are interested in enrolling in a postsecondary institution. It provides assistance with academic planning, scholarships, advising, and resources on financial aid, college, and career planning. As part of its services, CSP also provides individualized financial advising to students preparing for college.

CSP provides students individualized assistance with the FAFSA, scholarship applications, and award letter interpretations.

CSP has developed an Advisory Services Program in which high school seniors who participate in the CSP receive intensive financial advising and grade-appropriate information, usually in a one-on-one setting. They tend to receive individualized assistance with the FAFSA, scholarship applications, financial aid award letter interpretation, and financial aid offer comparisons. Students who take part in CSP are also required to complete the FAFSA. In addition to this financial aid advising, they are also assigned a trained mentor who keeps the student focused on academic goals, grades, and attendance, as well as makes available additional resources to the student, such as tutoring or community agencies (Jager-Hyman 2006).

Baltimore CollegeBound Foundation

Baltimore CollegeBound Foundation provides low-income and minority students with financial aid and college awareness information, along with appropriate advising on both topics. In-class presentations to 9th and 10th grade students developed by Baltimore CollegeBound serve to provide early information on college preparation, college entrance exams, test preparation, and financial aid. Students who are interested in the services

The program works with students individually to provide them with college application and financial aid assistance.

offered by Baltimore CollegeBound seek out the help of the program's College Access Program Specialists (CAPS) located in the school. The program then works with students individually to provide them with college application and financial aid assistance. In the junior year at a Baltimore City public high school, 11th and 12th grade students receive individual assistance from CAPS to complete applications for college and financial aid, take the SAT and other college entrance examinations, and fill out fee waivers for those exams. The CAPS also hosts fall and spring college fairs and workshops on financial literacy. CollegeBound CAPS help 11th graders complete the FAFSA4caster in the

spring of their junior year, collaborate with teachers to work on essay writing and revising with students, aid seniors with the FAFSA, and connect students with colleges and universities that attend the program's college fairs. As part of its college retention effort, CollegeBound also holds the first of a series of retention workshops over the summer for their seniors who have been admitted to college and have received the program's need-based grant.

The interventions work collectively to improve early awareness of financial aid information, and the in-depth advising component ensures personalized assistance. The retention workshops remind students about financing and money management relevant to their postsecondary experience and extend the mentoring and advising component beyond high school graduation. Baltimore CollegeBound has demonstrated great success as measured by qualitative data collected on the program. College application and enrollment patterns for program participants were analyzed, and the findings indicated that students in the Baltimore CollegeBound program who had received advising were more likely than non-participants to attend college and complete their freshman year (Gullatt and Jan 2003). The students also had a lower drop-out rate, indicating that mentorship's positive impact persists for many years. This suggests that the program's strong emphasis on timed interventions, personalized assistance, and scholarship opportunities was effective in positively impacting student behavior in college enrollment and persistence.

Students in the Baltimore CollegeBound program who received counseling were more likely than non-participants to attend college and complete their freshman year.

Key Considerations

All three programs abide by the research asserting that, when dealing with financial aid information, individual attention produces better results than group instruction. One-on-one advising is critical because complex, individual problems cannot be resolved in group settings. Both the Cleveland Scholars Program and Baltimore College Bound rely on advisors to walk students individually through the process of applying for aid, and Sponsor-A-Scholar employs its five-year mentors to assist families with the financial aid process.

The long-term investment Sponsor-A-Scholar mentors undertake creates a programmatic link with the student and family and builds trust over a number of years. Research has indicated that it has been very helpful for early intervention groups to use students' cultural backgrounds to develop the one-on-one relationships necessary to accomplish such goals. This level of familiarity assists with financial communication and promotes higher aspirations. The framework of information should be delivered over the course of many years, and the mentorship relationship enables the communication of the benefits of college and financial aid available over the course of a student's high school years.

Complete the FAFSA

Delivering effective early financial aid information rests on the premise that this information will be useful to students and families in making college decisions, and that it will affect the decision to enroll. In addition, the point of giving students and families this information is to equip them with the tools necessary to apply for and receive aid when the time comes. Since the FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, is the most critical step in the application process, any additional barriers that students and families may have in completing this step should be eliminated to the extent possible.

Many researchers have hypothesized that students do not fill out the FAFSA because the form is too complex; its length and intrusiveness can be intimidating. Other students and families believe they are ineligible, so they do not even bother completing the application. Regardless of the reason, the FAFSA is the key to securing federal dollars that greatly benefit low-income students pursuing college, and the form should be completed. Also, many states and institutions use the information provided on the FAFSA to distribute other sources of financial aid; therefore, even if students are not eligible for federal grants, they may be eligible for institutional or state-based awards. Programs that mandate every student complete the application ensure that they each receive the maximum aid for which each is eligible. All three programs discussed in this guideline have effective methods of assisting students with the completion of the FAFSA.

Programs that mandate every student complete the FAFSA ensure they each receive the maximum aid for which they are eligible.

What the Experts Say

The FAFSA is the key to gaining access to a significant portion of federal, state, and institutional financial aid monies. However, reports published by the American Council on Education (ACE) suggest that possibly over a million students who are eligible for aid are missing out because they do not file a FAFSA (ACE 2004; ACE 2006). Twenty-two percent of low-income dependent students and twenty-eight percent of low-income independent students did not complete a FAFSA in 2003-04 (ACE 2006). These alarming numbers, coupled with the fact that an increased number of students will indeed be eligible due to recent changes in legislation (College Cost Reduction and Access Act 2007), make an even more pressing case for programs to take the time with students to ensure that this form is filled out. There remain a variety of possible reasons that students do not fill out the form, including complexity of the form, discomfort with providing sensitive financial information, and misinformation about eligibility (Mercer 2005). Unfortunately, at least some students who do not apply because they believe themselves ineligible are actually eligible (Choy 2000).

An increased number of students will be eligible for federal aid due to recent changes in legislation.

In addition to students who do not complete the form, many students complete it too late, missing important state and institutional aid deadlines, and causing them to forgo grant aid for which they might have otherwise been eligible. With appropriate information and guidance, students and families can complete the form in a timely fashion, maximizing their eligibility for aid. If students do miss their state or institutional deadline, they can still qualify for federal aid if they complete the FAFSA. Unfortunately, many students are unaware that they can qualify for federal aid at any time during the year. Nearly 25 percent of the lowest income dependent students who did not apply for aid stated missing the application deadline as the reason for not doing so (ACE 2004). If these students had known that they were still eligible for Pell grants, student loans, and work-study to help them pay for college, they might have been more likely to complete the FAFSA.

Many students fill out the form too late, missing important state and institutional deadlines, causing them to forgo grant aid.

Due to a widespread recognition that the FAFSA can be difficult for students to complete on their own, there are several initiatives to reduce this barrier for students. Researchers, practitioners, and even the U.S. Secretary of Education have noted that the FAFSA is more complex in nature than federal income tax forms and have, therefore, suggested methods of simplifying the form (Asher 2007; Dynarski and Scott-Clayton 2006). As each of these options brings its own set of concerns, federal officials are working to make the form as clear and accessible as possible while maintaining the integrity of the aid programs. However, until any of these initiatives takes hold, students must continue to complete the FAFSA in its current form, and will require help doing so. The programs mentioned below provide needed assistance for students who would like help.

What Other Programs Are Doing

College Goal Sunday

The main purpose of College Goal Sunday (CGS) is to assist students and their parents in filling out the FAFSA. This nationwide effort uses a workshop format to go through the application line-by-line with students. The program uses volunteers from the financial aid community and other college access programs to assist students. In some instances, College Goal Sunday, which is funded by Lumina Foundation and managed by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, also provides students and families generalized information about financial aid, such as the difference between grants and loans, and among state eligibility criteria. College Goal Sunday programs are organized by states in a one-day session format at multiple locations.

Through College Goal Sunday's work, which focuses primarily on helping students in their senior year and adults pursuing education beyond high school, the program has become very adept at providing professional assistance in accessing financial aid. College Goal Sunday provides detailed training to its volunteers and has developed a variety of PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, and fact sheets to help students navigate the FAFSA. State programs are also able to offer professional assistance to populations

with special needs such as foster care and homeless youth. To this end, many college access programs partner with College Goal Sunday in order to maximize its services for FAFSA assistance.

Cash for College

Cash for College is a California-based program that is affiliated with the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and provides financial aid workshops for low-income students and parents. It is comprised of two main phases—one large college fair in the fall and FAFSA assistance through hundreds of workshops in the winter – leading up to the March 2nd Cal Grant deadline. During these workshops, which occur across California, students and families receive one-on-one help in filling out the FAFSA as well as necessary California-specific financial aid documentation.

Cash for College is a large-scale effort that attempts to reach many students at one time and provide large groups of students with individual assistance. The Cash for College program emphasizes the importance of going to college in its messaging and promotes the idea that college is not out of students' reach with the help of federal and state financial aid. In addition to financial aid help, the program provides scholarships to students who attend both events, have college plans, and have completed the required FAFSA and Cal Grant financial aid forms. Providing line-by-line FAFSA assistance to large groups of students is always an option for programs that do not have the capacity to work with all students on an individual basis. For instance, this model might work well for a large high school group with only one coordinator.

Providing line-by-line FAFSA assistance to large groups of students is always an option for programs that do not have the capacity to work individually with each student and family.

College Match

College Match focuses on a small, select cohort of high-achieving, low-income, and minority students in seven different California public high schools and assists them in applying to and attending highly-ranked colleges. The program works with Los Angeles area public schools to identify low-income students with strong academic records at the end of the 10th grade. Among other services, the program provides intensive SAT preparation classes and individual assistance in filling out application forms. College Match also assists students with financial aid forms, raises funds for scholarships, and makes it possible for students to visit colleges throughout the country. Program staff assist students with the college admission and financial aid processes and work with students—once enrolled—to ensure retention. In 2008, College Match will provide comprehensive college access services to approximately 140 low-income students.

In order to help students obtain financial aid, College Match counselors must ensure that students have completed the FAFSA. Program staff not only help students complete the form, but they also serve as advocates for students in discussions with financial aid

officers at various colleges. The goals of College Match are to raise students' SAT scores and get students into top colleges with strong financial aid packages. College Match counselors meet with students at least twice a month to discuss student progress with college plans. Students and families are informed about financial aid earlier than 12th grade, often beginning in the sophomore year, so that they are prepared to complete financial aid paperwork during the senior year. The College Match program exemplifies the type of one-on-one connection, working with the same person over a long-term basis, that is useful to students in understanding financial aid and completing the FAFSA.

Key Considerations

The FAFSA is the portal to getting any federal student aid, including both grants and loans, as well as need-based and merit-based aid. By failing to fill out this form, students may also make themselves ineligible for state and institutional aid. Researchers and practitioners alike have noted that the form is difficult for students to fill out, and that misperceptions about eligibility may further preclude students from receiving aid. It is precisely because of barriers to completing the FAFSA that programs working with students on it will be more successful in helping them to complete it. College Match relies on well-trained staff who understand the process and work with students individually to complete the federal form. Cash for College and College Goal Sunday are able to provide one-on-one assistance to a wider audience across one or more states by relying on trained volunteers to reach a larger number of students and parents.

Providing adequate training to staff is important in ensuring that students have correct information to complete the FAFSA.

Adapt the Program to the Individual School Community

Because schools and external outreach programs have a vested interest in student success beyond secondary school, collaboration makes sense for all parties involved. To the extent possible, programs can work to blend the intervention into a traditional school setting. This can mean having program activities occur within the school building, having program counselors available at the school site, equipping school personnel with the knowledge and resources to deliver program content themselves, or incorporating financial aid information into the regular curriculum at the school. The advantages of integrating early financial aid information delivery within the school environment include having an easily accessible audience, employing teachers who have a familiarity with the students and their learning styles, and providing a convenient setting and known environment alleviating transportation challenges. The added convenience and trust afforded by these conditions helps when students are faced with impending financial aid deadlines and are asked to provide information about sensitive home financial matters on short notice.

Programs can work to blend the intervention into the traditional school setting to improve their services.

The school also benefits through this type of collaboration. Schools, especially those that serve low-income students, may be short of staff who can provide the technical knowledge of financial aid necessary for an adequate understanding of it. Fortunately, there are a growing number of early information interventions that exist primarily to fill these gaps and provide students with the tools and information necessary to secure aid to attend college. Examples of two programs are below.

What the Experts Say

Researchers have documented the ways in which the disconnect between the K-12 and higher education communities is problematic in ensuring access for low-income students (Venezia et al. 2003). Efforts to bridge this gap through outreach programs that work with school districts or counties are being encouraged (Cunningham et al. 2007). Given that so many students and parents do not currently receive information on financial aid (Sallie Mae Fund 2003), the most direct method of delivery is to present students with information where they already are. In fact, integrating intervention programs into the K-12 environment speaks to the very essence of emerging P-16 work. Furthermore, many researchers have mentioned this sort of K-12 integration as one of the important features of successful early intervention programs (Gullat and Jan 2003; Heyward et al. 1997).

Integrating intervention programs into the K-12 environment speaks to the very essence of emerging P-16 initiatives.

Integrating a program within the K-12 environment allows the program to be able to use resources that the school already has. In return, schools are provided a service for their students, and technical knowledge about financial preparedness that program administrators have can be shared with school faculty and staff (Heyward et al. 1997).

Often programs are limited in terms of the number of students they can serve due to resource constraints. A school has the benefit of working with economies of scale, allowing more students to be served without requiring a great increase in resources.

Coordinating efforts with the K-12 community combines the array of services and information that students need in one place.

Coordinating efforts in this way combines the array of services and information that students need to be successful in one place. This eases the burden on families who are searching across a scattered landscape of programs to find help with applying for college and applying for aid. For instance, many students who live in poorer, rural communities or who otherwise lack transportation may be better served by a program that does not require travel away from the neighborhood school to participate. They can also recruit individuals who work to offer individualized college advising support or financial aid support (De La Rosa and Tierney 2006).

What Other Programs Are Doing

National College Advising Corps

The National College Advising Corps, which began at the University of Virginia, is a consortium of eleven institutions of higher education that deliver access services to high school students in ten states. With funding from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and headquartered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Corps is comprised of recent college graduates who serve as full-time college advisors in public secondary schools in an effort to raise college-going rates in participating states. The Corps members receive training about college application and financial aid processes, so that they are able to relay this information to high school students. Corps members are assigned to a particular school and work with the entire 11th and 12th grade classes at that school, providing information and helping them through the entire college application process. At some smaller schools, 9th and 10th graders also receive information.

Advising Corps members work in a particular school, and students have access to them during school hours.

Though Corps members have offices within the school building, and generally work in collaboration with school staff, they are not employees of the school system, allowing them to focus solely on increasing awareness of college access. In addition to offering one-on-one FAFSA assistance, advisors conduct financial aid workshops and individual advising sessions that provide information about financial aid, such as differences between grants and loans, college expenses, returns on educational investments, and how to read an offer letter. Even though this information is not woven into the school's curriculum, students have access to the Corps member during school hours and on evenings when Corps members provide additional services to students and families. This integration of effort into the high school community ensures easy access to the advisors' resources.

GEAR UP Massachusetts

GEAR UP is an early intervention program sponsored by the federal government, with grants given to partnerships among middle schools, secondary schools, outside organizations, and colleges or universities across the state. Programs provide students with academic enrichment as well as information about college planning and financial aid. Participation in GEAR UP-Massachusetts generally begins in middle school, although programs may see new students enter in later years, and students are encouraged to remain in the pipeline until graduation. Pell-eligible students receive a matching GEAR UP grant if they stay with the program and graduate from high school. Program activities vary by school but include in-class workshops, parent nights, college visits, tutoring help, one-on-one counseling, and FAFSA assistance.

GEAR UP programs provide a good example of how adapting an intervention to the needs of an individual school can be helpful. GEAR UP programs house staff directly in the school building and conduct program activities at the school as well. Given that transportation may be an issue, especially for low-income students and/or those in rural areas, having daily access to program staff and resources can enhance program effectiveness and ensure that students are receiving and responding to the information in a timely manner. Students can come to the office for additional assistance or information during study halls, other breaks, and before and after school. Staff are trained and able to provide FAFSA assistance and often help students to decipher financial aid packages. Students are also equipped with information about the different types of financial aid that are available on the federal and state levels. Program coordinators work in conjunction with guidance counselors to help students plan financially for college. Additionally, many students that programs serve may not have reliable computers with high-speed Internet access at home; therefore, students benefit from the added convenience of having computers available at the school to complete and transmit financial aid forms prior to deadlines.

> **GEAR UP programs house staff directly in the school building and conduct program activities at the school.**

Key Considerations

Integrating programs within the school environment can create a partnership whereby students, the program, and the school all benefit. Programs that can deliver financial aid information directly within the school, such as GEAR UP, will provide information in the same environment where students receive other information about college from counselors, teachers, and peers. This helps to ensure that information regarding financial aid is given the same platform as other relevant curricular and college access information. The cooperation also makes school resources available to college access providers, enabling them to access computers, books, and meeting space that would otherwise not

> **By incorporating programs at school, a wider audience is reached, and students have greater access to resources.**

be available. Furthermore, reaching students at school alleviates accessibility problems. From the point of view of the program, a wider audience is available, and from the student and family perspective, no extra effort needs to be made to access resources.

Integrate Language and Cultural Differences

Regardless of the mix of cultural influences students face, early information programs can be more successful if the information presented is delivered in a way that is easily accessible and understandable to the demographic group with which the program works. Culture is often tied to, but not defined by, economic class. Therefore, economic situations should be considered as but one part of the equation when considering how to make programs culturally relevant to students. In order to make early financial aid information relevant to students and parents, program staff should be aware of income differences such as ability to save, cultural differences such as the desire to stay near family, and the different languages spoken at home.

Early information will be more successful if delivered in a way that is easily accessible and understandable to the audience.

The varied cultural views of college-going and financial aid present many challenges to the delivery of the information framework. The value of a college education, averseness to debt burden, and the desire to remain near home are all common examples of valid concerns that programs can address in an understanding and sensitive manner. For instance, some families prefer that children stay near parents to help with family responsibilities. Discussing ways that those needs can still be met, along with the costs and benefits of different options, may help to alleviate such concerns. Additionally, effective delivery of the information presented earlier in this report could also address the anxieties parents and students experience. The programs below offer several ideas for approaching information delivery from a culturally sensitive perspective.

What the Experts Say

Villalpando and Solorzano (2005) have provided a scaffold for understanding the role that culture plays in college preparation programs**,** emphasizing that the way in which a program becomes "culturally sensitive" will depend on the makeup of the students the program serves. Issues related to class status, while often tied to race, are not the same as cultural issues related to race or ethnicity. Furthermore, there may be language issues that are not relevant across racial lines, or socioeconomic issues that are not pertinent to all students of a particular race. Understanding the student demographic that a program serves is an essential first step in determining what conditions need to be met in order to maximize a program's effectiveness by relating to students' cultural needs.

The way in which a program becomes culturally sensitive will depend on the makeup of the service population.

Tierney and Venegas (2007) note that there are clear cultural implications involved in how families and students make decisions regarding financial aid. The authors define culture as "an interpretive approach to understanding the environments in which people live and work." Because decisions about college are often rooted in financial

Understanding the ways in which families make financial decisions is important in targeting messages related to college access.

considerations, especially for low-income students, understanding the ways in which these families make financial decisions is important in targeting messages related to college access. The authors mention, for instance, that the willingness to take out student loans to finance college hinges on whether the family has taken out a loan in the past. This is but one example of how outside factors may influence financial aid decision making, but others abound. It is up to program coordinators to know the program's students and families well enough to parse out culturally relevant information that may influence choices that families make regarding college and financial aid.

What Other Programs Are Doing

Cash for College

A brief description of the program activities of Cash for College can be found on page 57.

Cash for College keeps its financial aid messages current and clear by communicating often with financial aid stakeholders, especially in Spanish, the language most common among the families it serves. The program excels at going beyond the standard practice of simply translating documents and services. For example, Cash for College collaborates with a Spanish language television show to offer financial aid information as part of a regularly scheduled call-in show. Apparently, this topic in particular was one of the most popular of those featured by the show, as measured by the volume of callers (Venegas 2007). By keeping in touch with the local community and staying aware of the needs of its constituencies, Cash for College is able to remain helpful and relevant.

California Student Opportunity and Access Program (CAL-SOAP), Central California

The California Student Opportunity and Access Program operates in seventeen different locations around the state, all of which use different methods of providing services to students. The main premise of the program, however, is to "improve the flow of information about postsecondary education and financial aid while raising the achievement levels of low-income, elementary or secondary school students in geographic regions with documented low-eligibility or college-participation rates, and who are the first in their families to attend college" (CAL-SOAP 2007).

Programs are given the flexibility to be sensitive to the needs of students in their particular region. The Central California programs, in particular, have staff who are representative of the community in which they serve and who are, therefore, better able to

understand the issues with which the community is dealing. This also helps in relating firsthand to participants and their parents. When students and families feel that the program staff is culturally sensitive and they work with the same staff for an ongoing period, they are more likely to listen to staff advice and provide necessary information for financial aid forms.

Key Considerations

Because perception of college expenses is so influenced by cultural nuances, program staff should consider those intricacies when structuring their program design and tailor programs to the specific group that makes up the target population. However, addressing students' home culture as problematic rather than as an asset (the cultural deficit approach) may harm rather than help when delivering services (Villalpando and Solorzano 2005). The literature shows there are two ways of positively integrating cultural awareness within a program's structure. The first is to address culture as it relates to college decision making, which is helpful to program administrators as they organize, compile, and deliver information. With sensitive issues related to documentation status, having staff members who understand how students and families feel and the pressures they face is important in gaining trust. By recruiting staff from the local community representative of the target population, CAL-SOAP successfully plans and delivers the framework of financial aid information in ways that local residents understand.

Considering how college expense perceptions vary by culture can assist with the structure of a program's intervention.

Translated documents alone are insufficient; there must also be education in financial aid and financial literacy in the native language.

The second method is to approach culture as a matter of making families and students more comfortable with the entire college-going process, which may be helpful to program administrators as they plan events. Programs, such as Cash for College, that utilize this approach offer services in other languages. Doing so makes families comfortable by disseminating information through familiar and trusted media outlets. By employing both approaches to the extent possible, programs will be tailored to meet students' needs and have a greater impact on information delivery.

Partner with Community Organizations

Gaining the trust of the constituency with which the program works is an important factor in the success of any early information program. To that end, combining forces with community organizations could foster longstanding relationships that allow the program continued support through the years. Organizational partnerships can work to invest the community in the student outcomes of a particular program, making that program a staple of the community itself. Furthermore, establishment in the local environment could provide access to students whom an outreach program might not otherwise be able to reach. Finally, community organizations can "fill in the gaps," providing services and information that the outreach program may not have the resources to provide.

> **Combining forces with community organizations could foster longstanding relationships within the community that allow for continued support in future years.**

The benefits of community partnerships need not only be social, but also financial. Finding organizations within the community willing to provide in-kind resources to support program activities is a strategy that could save effort and money. Given that programs are often running on tight budgets, partnering with community organizations able to provide financial or in-kind support can help with the costs of running a comprehensive program. The programs highlighted below are able to offer a wide variety of services due to collaboration. For example, Reach4Success is able to use connections with community organizations to spread throughout a region, offering students and families convenient access to services. Take Stock in Children uses community partnerships to create a shared sense of investment in local students' futures.

What the Experts Say

School-community partnerships have long been lauded for their ability to enhance the school experience for students, academically and otherwise. Community involvement and investment in the school is often recognized as a way for struggling schools to utilize local resources to improve (Henderson and Mapp 2002; Berg et al. 2006). Successful school reform efforts have shown that partnerships with community organizations play an important role (Mediratta 2004). The investment of key stakeholders is a critical leveraging point to build momentum necessary to sustain initiatives.

> **The investment of key stakeholders in the community is a critical leveraging point for building momentum.**

This same involvement model of K-12 institutions applies to early information and outreach programs. Gándara (2002) notes the importance of working to use neighborhood resources to the student's advantage, especially for low-income students. This model aligns with the theory of "meeting students where they are" and having them take pride in their community, rather than feel ashamed of it. In fact, certain early information programs might be considered "community-based" programs, as the Gándara

and Bial (2001) taxonomy of college access programs reflects. While this grouping implies that these interventions are rooted in the community as opposed to the school, this model can provide useful insights into the utilization of resources of the larger community in delivery of services by programs without an explicit community connection.

Tierney et al. (2005) list partnering with individuals and groups within the community as an important strategy in enhancing 'co-curricular' activities that might be provided by an intervention program. Furthermore, the authors note that co-curricular activities can complement academic content and aid in preparing students for college. Such co-curricular activities might include things outside the scope of a particular program, but helpful to students in life in general. These activities might be things a program would do were there more resources, but can be, in effect, outsourced to community groups in order to save money.

Co-curricular activities can complement academic content and aid in preparing students for college.

Naturally, funding and program sustainability are often cited as important issues for college access programs; seeking community partnerships may be also be a way to alleviate some of these financial concerns (Swail and Perna 2000). Though the financial support of community organizations will not likely fully support programs and should not be the main reason to seek partnerships, these monies can supplement other sources of funding, such as federal government funds, according to a national survey of outreach programs (Swail and Perna 2002).

What Other Programs Are Doing

Reach4Success

Reach4Success is a multi-dimensional college access program that connects students of all ages with opportunities in higher education. It offers a combination of components that help students and families prepare for college. Several program components focus specifically on preparing financially for college: Get Financially Fit, a six-week series of financial literacy and college planning workshops; the Financial Aid Roadmap, information on the federal financial aid programs; individual FAFSA assistance; and financial aid training for school and community staff who work directly with students. The Consortium of Universities in the Washington DC metro area sponsors the information and advising services of Reach4Success, enabling the program to build many partnerships across the region.

Community organizations are used as a way to find and recruit students to take part in the programs.

By partnering with universities, government agencies, public schools, libraries, foundations, and other philanthropic organizations, Reach4Success is able to offer a variety of programs that reach a diverse constituency. Program activities take place at five local middle and high schools through collaboration with the

federally funded TRIO program, Talent Search, designed to serve low-income and first-generation college students. In addition, many services are offered at the College Info Center (CIC). CIC is housed at a local library in the downtown area that provides safe, convenient access for students. Other partnerships with community organizations provide a mutually beneficial relationship. Reach4Success receives advertising and increased program participation while the community organizations' members benefit from the program services.

Take Stock in Children

Take Stock in Children approaches college success through a comprehensive model in which participants in the program receive a college scholarship, college and career guidance, and a mentor who also provides academic guidance. Local and community leaders select students to participate. Chosen students must sign a contract agreeing to stay out of trouble, earn good grades, and meet weekly with their mentor. Parental involvement is also strongly encouraged as part of the program. The resources needed for this comprehensive program are provided by the array of sponsors. Officially, this program is a public-private partnership including a variety of religious, civic, and for-profit organizations.

Because the Take Stock in Children scholarship does not pay for all the costs of college, the program also offers guidance to students to find other financial aid resources. They have a step-by-step resource that guides students through applying for state and local aid, as well as a financial aid calendar that students can access online. In addition, this program has utilized the financial and in-kind benefits that partnering with community organizations can provide. By connecting with so many different types of organizations, Take Stock in Children is able to capitalize on the many different types of resources available within the community. Furthermore, this sort of support from multiple sources shows students that the community does support them, and may provide the type of emotional encouragement that students need to be successful in college and in life. Businesses and organizations should see such donations as an opportunity to invest in students, and, ultimately, as an investment in the future of a community.

Support from sources in the community may provide the type of emotional encouragement students need for success.

Key Considerations

Deciding to partner with community organizations usually enhances the other aspects of a program by providing additional resources and support that might otherwise be unobtainable. It is likely that programs may increase their staying power by partnering with key community stakeholders. Both Take Stock in Children and Reach4Success have found ways to plant themselves firmly in their communities by working with a variety of local groups. Both programs have made collaboration a mutually beneficial endeavor.

Finally, partnerships are a useful way for programs to incorporate other aspects of these ten guidelines. Another entity may do a better job at providing financial literacy information or working with parents. For example, Reach4Success partners with financial institutions that may have the resources necessary to provide that sort of information. It also partners with middle and high schools, thereby adapting its services to the needs of individual school communities. Take Stock in Children features partners located throughout the state, thereby expanding the reach of the program while maintaining a community investment model. All of these partnerships are examples of programs that work together to actualize other guidelines listed in this report in order to enhance or create a successful early information system.

Encourage Peer Integration

Peer influence can impact how students think about themselves, their willingness to apply to and enroll in college, and their decisions on which college to attend. Students are likely to listen to their peers, who are experiencing the same set of obstacles related to applying to and paying for college. They are more likely to apply for scholarships heard about through peer networks and are likely to remember and abide by application and financial aid deadlines when mentioned repeatedly by their peers.

Students are likely to listen to their peers, who are experiencing the same set of obstacles centered on applying to and affording college.

When peer influence is incorporated into an early intervention program, students receive encouragement from mentors, counselors, parents, and other fellow students that positively influences their behavior. Programs that can take advantage of naturally occurring peer-to-peer relationships can concentrate on providing information through peer channels instead of seeking to build new relationships with external influences. Both programs highlighted in this guideline rely on peers to deliver quality information and promote success.

What the Experts Say

Education is largely a social activity, and the role of peers in learning about information pertaining to college and financial aid information is key (Tierney et al. 2005). Peers tend to have a strong impact on identity formation and college-going aspirations by modeling particular behaviors for each other. This "identity formation" has been shown to take place in college preparation programs in which peer group activities have allowed students to envision attending college while acknowledging their various cultural backgrounds (Tierney et al. 2005). As social identity forms, peers can influence each other by modeling specific behaviors (Tatum 1997). These behaviors, and subsequently, the identity formed, can lead to better college aspirations. Researchers have found that students who have friends with college aspirations are more likely to attend college, while students who become friends with those who do not have college-going aspirations are less likely to attend college (Rumberger 1991). Such behaviors can include college preparation through coursework, financial preparation, attending financial aid and scholarship seminars, filling out fee waivers to take key college entrance examinations, and filling out financial aid and admissions applications. The effects of peer groups have also been examined at the college level. These studies have found that peer groups even work to encourage students to pursue graduate studies, while also providing academic and personal support (Astin 1993).

As identity forms, peers can influence each other by modeling behaviors that can lead to better college aspirations, such as financial planning.

Correlations between peer influence and positive educational outcomes have also been shown to exist. One such study found that students who have friends who enjoy school and earn good grades are more likely to graduate high school (Ekstrom et al. 1986). Another study by Berndt et al. (1990) found that members of a group become similar to one another over time, so something such as guided student discussions among a group as small as two students led to changes in their attitudes. And in low-income, urban environments, findings suggest that as students progress through high school, peer networks become stronger as students interact with other high-achieving peers in extra-curricular activities (Hebert and Reis 1999).

In low-income, urban environments, peer networks become stronger as students interact with other high-achieving peers in extracurricular activities.

Therefore, it is no surprise to find that structured peer mentoring programs have created opportunities for students to develop healthy and positive peer relationships and interactions (Tierney et al. 2005). Programs have incorporated peer influence into each of their program components, such as reminding students of application deadlines, motivating students, and reinforcing key college concepts emphasized by the program. Research reinforces the necessity to use peer group interaction effectively in early intervention programs so that students are provided with even more support as they learn about the financing and college options available to them and apply for financial aid.

What Other Programs Are Doing

The Posse Foundation

The Posse Foundation works to identify, recruit, and train students who are leaders within high schools located in urban areas and assigns them to form multicultural teams called "posses." These teams undergo an eight-month training program, which prepares them to enroll in highly ranked colleges and universities throughout the country. It is during the eight-month program that peers learn from each other and reinforce the messages of the program to each other. Once enrolled in college, students are responsible for promoting cross-cultural communication throughout their campus. Students in the posse persist and graduate from college at the rate of 90 percent, which is higher than the typical college graduation rate in the United States. This illustrates that Posse's efforts may have implications for student persistence in college.

The program emphasizes the importance of peers in helping each individual cope with the transition to college. The name "posse" is a word once used in youth culture to represent a group of friends who look out for one another. Peer influence is a major factor in the program, one that strongly impacts the success of the Posse Foundation in ensuring that students persist in their studies and graduate to become leaders in the workforce. Although the peer and group influence present in the Posse program begins with students in the 12th grade, the peer strategy can be highly beneficial for students in the middle and early high school years as these students learn about financial aid basics. During their senior year, students selected for the Posse program are provided with a full

tuition scholarship along with extensive support in completing the FAFSA to ensure that such costs as room, board, and other expenses are covered. Posse students attend an eight-month training program to prepare them for college, and the program consists of

Posse also utilizes peer interaction to positively impact student decisions on enrollment and to encourage peer support throughout the college years.

workshops in which students are trained in team-building, group support, cross-cultural communication, leadership, and academic excellence. The training program also helps students address challenges they will face in college, such as time and financial management. Posse also utilizes peer interaction both before college enrollment, to positively impact student decisions on enrollment, and after the student has enrolled, to encourage peer support throughout the college years.

Posse students establish and run new student organizations and help to increase the number of students of color on their campuses. By becoming more involved in their campus community, they increase their chances of persisting despite any barriers they may face. This emphasis on peer and group influence can be adapted at the middle and high school levels as a way to disseminate key financial aid information and to support younger students in their college aspirations.

The Puente Project

See page 47 for a program description.

The Puente Program has greatly incorporated group socialization, and peer-to-peer involvement has been heavily woven into the program. At the high school level, counselors have group sessions with their students to discuss college entrance requirements, develop four-year plans, prepare for standardized tests, and provide them with financial aid information. Some counselors have used peer groups to focus students, finding the strategy beneficial for at-risk students (Grubb et al. 2002). This type of "positive peer pressure" encourages students to motivate each other to achieve and apply for scholarships, college, and financial aid.

Key Considerations

Making peer relationships integral to a program helps establish a framework in which such relationships can be developed and nurtured (Gándara et al. 1998). Peer relationships can be extremely important when delivering information about financial aid, as students are more likely to be encouraged by "positive peer pressure" when applying for scholarships and financial aid. Students may remember deadlines as they are reinforced when peers discuss the processes for admission and financial aid.

Students are more likely to respond to positive peer pressure when applying for scholarships and financial aid.

Programs such as Posse and the Puente Program successfully utilize the peer component to encourage students to apply for financial aid and college. Both programs provide

support and rely on peer influence to guide students in identity formation, influence likely to be maintained throughout high school and college. Identity formation helps students establish college aspirations; therefore, it is through the peer component that the early intervention program can ensure that students meet the goals of the program to persist and graduate with a bachelor's degree. It is no surprise that peer influence is incorporated into early intervention programs to ensure a positive, long-lasting impact on students' education and their lives.

Formulate Program Evaluation Standards

Program evaluation is critical to the success of early information efforts. Many early information efforts have limited resources, and program evaluation can assess which program goals are being met and how. Thus, evaluation can enable programs to determine how best to allocate resources. Programs can then amend their methods to ensure that results are positive and goals are being met. If the results of program evaluation confirm that programs are succeeding, they can leverage their demonstrated success to solicit more funding and resources from federal, state, and private entities. This funding would place programs in a position to draw on more staff to better provide a greater number of students with academic and financial information.

Measuring the performance of individual students in terms of how each meets program goals helps provide insights critical to the long-term success of the intervention. Program evaluation can greatly enhance the ability of the early information program to successfully provide financial aid information by forcing reflection on current practices. By varying the delivery of financial aid information and examining the effectiveness of each on the target audience, evaluators can determine the best approaches for each group of students and families. Additionally, when a program adapts best practices from another source, it is wise to discern if the new practice

Program evaluation can enhance the ability of programs to successfully provide financial aid information by forcing reflection on current practices.

helps the target population under the structure of the program's intervention. The scale and techniques of evaluation can differ tremendously, and programs are able to select an evaluation format based on what needs to be measured and the amount of resources that can be devoted to evaluation. Each of the three programs discussed below is of a different size and offers varying approaches to evaluation.

What the Experts Say

When attempting to determine which program components have positive effects on student success, it is necessary to go beyond calculating a simple tally of students participating in certain activities (Swail and Perna 2002). When determining the effectiveness of early intervention programs, research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of individual components and combination of services that each program offers. Very little is known about the specific elements of college preparation programs that could help to boost college enrollment and attendance, particularly strategies on delivery of financial aid information (Gándara and Moreno 2002).

One barrier programs face is that evaluations often cost money. However, the expenditure may be worthwhile as programs might be more likely to receive additional financial and community support if evaluations are conducted. A second challenge researchers often face in evaluating programs is the lack of a control group, so it is often difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of a specific reform effort (Jager-Hyman 2006). Yet a third challenge is that a lack of resources can debilitate any effort to

improve a program based on evaluation. A fourth barrier programs face is implementing an evaluation over a long period of time. For example, conducting an evaluation on efforts to increase the level of financial aid information middle school students receive

Developing and measuring both short-term and long-term goals can allow the program to improve while waiting for longitudinal results.

may advance the goals of the program and enable more students to apply for financial aid, but that may take years. In addition, longitudinal data are not available to study the impact of early awareness programs because these initiatives are still relatively new. Therefore, it may be wise for programs to develop some short-term goals that can be measured alongside long-term goals so that the program can demonstrate improvement while waiting for longitudinal results.

But despite these challenges, many programs have developed methods to evaluate success in providing students with financial aid information. Program evaluations can be expensive, and many programs cannot afford to have an external evaluator assess the success of the program. Instituting internal evaluations can be more cost efficient. For internal evaluations, practitioners choose criteria coupled with the goals of the program and develop a method to measure those criteria (Venegas 2007).

What Other Programs Are Doing

Access ASU

Access ASU focuses on helping first-generation students understand that attending Arizona State University (ASU) is a possibility. In a state where 47 percent of children are low-income and the population growth is one of the highest in the nation, the need is significant. The program provides general college access information, and making available financial aid information and assistance is a key aspect. The intervention covers the costs of college, return on investment, and how to fill out scholarship forms and the FAFSA. Students engage in various program activities throughout the K-12 experience. Executive coordinators work on-site at elementary and high schools throughout the region, and a volunteer group of ASU students join to help lead various activities.

The primary goal of Access ASU is to increase college-going from particular Arizona school districts by 25 percent. The program measures its effectiveness internally by examining the number of students who meet academic requirements for ASU, the number of students who complete the financial aid process and select ASU as an option on the FAFSA, and the number of students from each participating district that actually enroll and attend classes at ASU. Using these three measurements, which are directly related to its goals, the program focuses its efforts on one of these components to boost the possibility that its students will attend the state university. The program is better able to see which of their many efforts are particularly helpful in providing students with assistance.

College Match

A brief description of the program activities of College Match can be found on page 57.

When completing an internal program evaluation, College Match realized the importance of developing criteria to match program goals (Venegas 2007). The goals of the program entail ensuring that students are accepted at the college or university of their choice, obtain enough financial aid, and attend top-ranked institutions in a good position to provide such aid. Such clear goals have made it easier for College Match to develop a method of evaluating its efforts. The measurement criteria used are the number of students **Clear goals have made it easier for College Match to develop a method of evaluating efforts.** accepted by a top-ranked college or university and the adequacy of the financial aid offers the student receives. These criteria allow College Match to know which colleges offer the best aid packages so that the program can inform students more successfully the following year. These measurement criteria help to gather data that are particularly meaningful in assessing whether specific components of the program help to meet its original goals.

Admission Possible

Admission Possible is a nonprofit organization headquartered in the Twin Cities of Minnesota with the mission of helping promising, low-income students earn admission to college through free weekly after-school sessions providing ACT/SAT preparation, consulting on college admission and financial aid applications, and guidance on the transition to college. The program uses AmeriCorps members to deliver its services to over 1,200 juniors and seniors in the Twin Cities metro area. Admission Possible requires that students apply to the two-year program at the end of their sophomore year using guidelines to ascertain a student's determination and motivation for participation in such an intensive mentoring program. The program has 1,175 student alumni and has helped 98 percent of their students gain admission to higher education.

Admission Possible measures the number of students who fill out a FAFSA, the amount of scholarship offers, and changes in student knowledge about aid. The program measures its success in terms of college placements at four-year institutions, retention, and college graduation. Wilder Foundation Research, an external evaluator, has helped to record these numbers and developed various reports providing evidence that the organization is successful in reaching its goals on these three measures. It also measures aspects such as the number of students who fill out the FAFSA, the amount of scholarship offers, ACT score increases, and changes in student knowledge about the college and financial aid application processes. Admission Possible uses these results to guide programmatic decision making. In addition, the evaluation compares the college enrollment outcome of students in the program with college enrollment outcomes of other programs that have similar goals

(Wilder Foundation 2006). Such a comparison can help Admission Possible modify its current methods of delivering college access information as needed.

Key Considerations

Programs such as these have shown a commitment to improving services using program evaluation to guide efforts. Evaluations are necessary for programs to observe how closely goals are met, and in turn, to modify strategies and interventions so that efforts are more fruitful. Evaluating specific components of programs can also help to measure how effectively the program reaches appropriate target audiences. College Match uses the types of financial aid offers the student receives as one of its criteria to measure how successful the program is in delivering financial aid information. Access ASU uses the number of students who select Arizona State University as an option on the FAFSA as a measurement of success. Admission Possible's evaluator, Wilder Foundation Research, measures aspects such as the number of students who fill out the FAFSA and the amount of scholarship offers received to determine success.

Evaluations help programs modify their strategies and interventions to ensure that their efforts are fruitful.

Evaluations that are either external or internal (for programs that cannot afford extensive services) have been helpful in assuring that a program is meeting its goals. Because measurement criteria are tied directly to goals, programs such as Access ASU, College Match, and Admission Possible have established clear and measurable goals that can be evaluated easily, internally or externally. To further a commitment to improving efforts, programs can enhance services and become more successful when they can confidently provide information to potential funding organizations about progression toward some of their service goals related to financial aid information.

Discuss Financial Literacy Alongside Financial Aid

A background in basic financial literacy concepts is essential in order to comprehend many elements of financial aid. Typically, workshops and materials providing financial aid information presume a level of knowledge of financial literacy that much of the audience may not have. To improve the effectiveness of providing financial aid information to students and families, relevant financial literacy topics should be taught in conjunction with financial aid information.

The scope of general financial literacy is vast, comprising budgeting, savings, investments, and credit and debt management. These various aspects interact with financial aid in different ways. Although a broad education in financial literacy may be appropriate and necessary to deliver in middle school or high school, it is most pertinent to teach financial literacy topics as they relate to the information framework. For example, an explanation of interest rates and debt payments can improve the decision making process involved in financing college with loans. Informing students of key financial literacy terms and concepts and applying those topics to financial aid information will enhance comprehension and ensure the information is effective.

It is pertinent to teach financial literacy topics as they relate to the framework of financial aid information.

What the Experts Say

The lack of financial literacy is nationally recognized as a problem and one that will continue to grow unless steps are taken to resolve the lack of financial education students receive. Gross et al. (2005) found that there is a dearth of knowledge about personal financial management, with even a large number of highly educated consumers failing to understand personal finance. This lack of knowledge in adults translates into poor financial literacy preparation among youth. According to Jump$tart's national financial literacy survey of high school students, the mean score in 2006 was 52.4 percent, a failing grade (The Jump$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy 2006). High school seniors are in even worse trouble; on average, they are only able to answer 35 percent of financial literacy questions correctly (Americans for Consumer Education and Competition 2001). Sadly, the current state of financial education of youth is inadequate.

Research has discovered that education can improve financial literacy.

This problem is disconcerting, especially among younger students who are facing enormous financial decisions related to college-going. With increasing college expenses and an increasing reliance on loans to fund higher education, financial literacy becomes a more pertinent issue in college financing discussions. Some students have decided to finance part of their education with credit cards, but few understand the full implications and risks associated with credit card use. The good news is that research has discovered education can improve financial literacy, and the combined efforts of the federal and state governments, guarantee agencies, banks,

schools, and private organizations are having an ameliorating effect. Programs targeted to different groups including students in middle school, high school, college, and graduate school have produced a wide range of curricula and courses, and research on the effectiveness of improving financial literacy education has shown promise. Additionally, high school programs focused on financial literacy also boost confidence with monetary issues, increase knowledge of personal finance, and improve saving rates (Greenspan 2003).

These efforts employ various methods of delivering financial literacy information. Mailing informational brochures home to students, publishing articles in magazines, disseminating DVDs, producing online courses, and integrating concepts into school curricula

Students prefer learning about financial literacy in school over any other source.

have all been tried. Students seem to prefer learning about financial information in school over any other source (Varcoe et al. 2002). Financially at-risk students attending four-year colleges, however, prefer more impersonal methods such as Internet-based education (Lyons 2004).

One experiential curriculum, developed by the National 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System, called Financial Champions, is targeted at middle school and early high school students. Results indicate that students learn financial knowledge but, more importantly, also apply that knowledge to make financial decisions (Mincemoyer and Furry 2003). This study demonstrates that financial literacy education can successfully be delivered to middle school students and suggests that the knowledge will have a positive impact on their decision making behavior concerning college finances and financial aid.

The National Strategy for Financial Literacy advises schools to integrate financial literacy concepts into the existing curriculum (Financial Literacy and Education Commission 2006). However, college access programs are not off the hook. In fact, larger gains in financial literacy are made by high school seniors who engage in real-life

Large gains in financial literacy are made by students who engage in real-life simulations, games, and research projects.

simulations, games, and research projects than simply sitting in class learning about these concepts (The Jump$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy 2006). This level of engagement can be better achieved in a stand-alone financial literacy program that could be offered by a college access program. Early information practitioners enhance these efforts by encouraging the school systems with which they work to incorporate

financial literacy concepts into the curriculum by integrating financial literacy discussions and projects when delivering aid information. The Jump$tart Coalition provides a set of national standards in personal finance that can be used as a foundation at http://www.jumpstart.org/guide.html.

What Other Programs Are Doing

Aggie Summer Institute

Texas A&M University sponsors a week-long summer program for high school students focusing on financial aid information. Seven centers across the state take approximately 150 students each and divide them into grade level cohorts to provide smaller groups and grade-appropriate information. The program has recently begun to reach out to middle school students.

In addition to integrating other key Advisory Committee guidelines such as educating parents and collaborating with business leaders and other community members, the program spends time focusing on financial literacy and concrete skills to prepare students for a full understanding of financial aid programs and processes. The philosophy of the program is that self knowledge combined with skills yields success, so there is great focus on skill development. This development occurs through discussions and games related to budgeting, money, and other financial literacy topics related to careers and financial aid. One example is teaching students how to balance a checkbook. Although the intervention is conducted outside the K-12 system, the highly integrated approach combining financial aid information with financial literacy skills immediately demonstrates the importance of individual financial knowledge, which research suggests leads to great success.

> **Combining financial aid information with financial literacy skills immediately demonstrates the importance to students of financial knowledge.**

Virginia Tech Financial Literacy Program

Virginia Tech's office of financial aid has developed and currently administers an online financial literacy course directed toward all new undergraduate students. The course is broken down into seven modules (budgets, account management, credit cards, debt management, other benefits, loan management, and consumer rights) which run like a PowerPoint presentation with a voiceover explaining the material. After the presentation, students can work on related activities such as Excel spreadsheets, and the program also provides online links to additional information in other resources. Each module concludes with a quiz so that students can assess their knowledge.

Although this effort is targeted toward older students, the program could easily be adapted to work at the high school level. Each module presents information relevant to a college student's needs. Because the program is run through the financial aid office, the link between financial literacy and financial aid information is easily made. Two of the seven modules relate directly to financial aid, debt management, and loan management, and the loan management module specifically addresses terms and conditions of student loan contracts.

Key Considerations

Supported by research that financial literacy can be improved with educational efforts, both of the programs highlighted attempt to resolve their service population's lack of financial knowledge. They also demonstrate that there are many available routes to delivering financial literacy information to students. A charter school with great autonomy in its curriculum could establish a full-length course, while other schools can integrate financial literacy into the existing curriculum. The Aggie Summer Institute relies upon an intensive summertime intervention, while Virginia Tech's online course allows students to learn at their convenience and delivers information in a format that students find appealing. Other ideas for early intervention programs include conducting activities in workshops, tutoring sessions, and after school programs to teach financial literacy concepts. These efforts can enhance the impact of financial aid information.

> **A charter school could establish a full-length course, while other schools could integrate financial literacy into the existing curriculum.**

Regardless of the method of information delivery, the key is to link personal finance and other financial literacy information with pertinent topics in financial aid so that students and families can see the immediate benefit of that knowledge. Identifying the financial concepts related to each component of the framework and teaching those concepts in an age-appropriate manner is the challenge of this guideline. Many resources and programs, like those listed above, exist to assist in those efforts.

TIMING INFORMATION DELIVERY AND USING UNIT PLANS

Introduction

Information students and families should know to make good decisions about college-going was presented in the first two sections of this report. But a question arises: when is the best time to deliver each of the different messages about financial aid? The information framework cannot be absorbed within a short period of time; therefore, this section of the report suggests an outline for the delivery of age-appropriate information in each of the four framework categories.

The proposed timeline is one approach to delivering framework information at points in time most useful to middle and high school students making college preparation and enrollment decisions. Many of the components will serve to motivate students to pursue and prepare for higher education, especially if absorbed by students at developmentally appropriate times. Although the timing is student-centric, parents should be involved, and they need this information at the same time or earlier than their children, as discussed in guideline two.
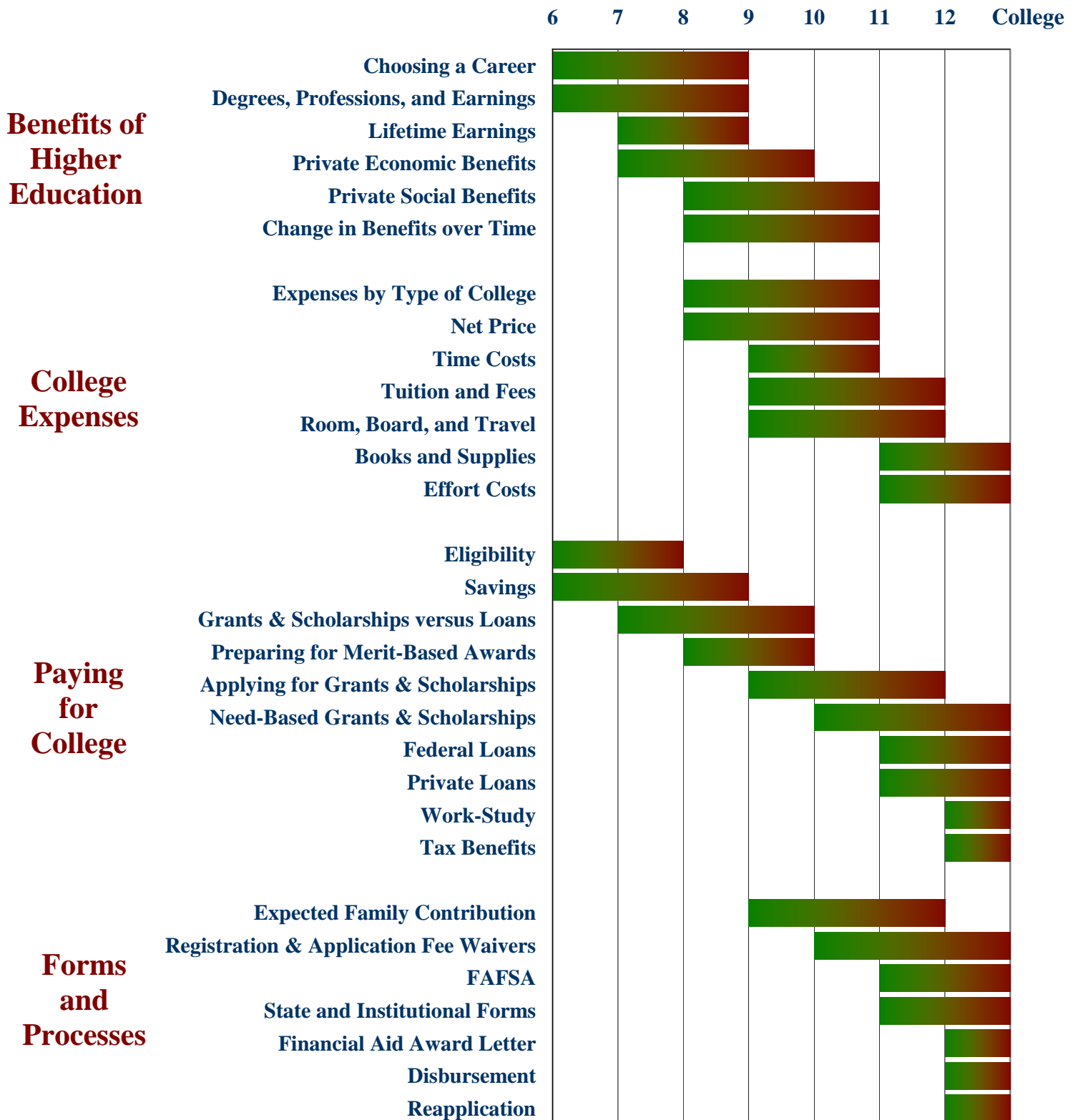
This timeline is not the sole strategy for delivering the needed information to every population. Programs can adapt this one example to fit their different service populations. A program working with a large number of academically gifted 6th grade students might focus on merit-based scholarships long before the suggested grade level in the timeline to ensure eligibility of these students for high school scholarships. Interventions can also adjust the timeline to work within a program's existing structure. For example, a program that begins its work with students in 9th grade could

Programs can adapt this timeline example to fit different service populations.

modify the proposed timeline to deliver the information within a shorter period. Or, for example, that same program working with 9th grade students could partner with a different program with a focus on middle school students, ensuring the population is prepared by the time 9th grade is reached. This partnership would create an information delivery plan over the course of many years covering all of the material. Stronger coordination between programs leads to better preparation, so students can have all of the information needed at the appropriate time.

Timeline of Delivery

The timeline is presented visually as a Gantt chart (Exhibit 2) to communicate which components of information can be delivered during each grade level. For example, providing information on the benefits of saving for college is more practical at the beginning of middle school (or even earlier) than it is during the senior year because earlier timing allows families to save and accumulate interest. Practitioners can observe how the information framework builds upon itself over time by looking across the Gantt chart. Learning about the basic differences between grants and loans in 7th grade lays the

EXHIBIT 2: TIMELINE OF INFORMATION FRAMEWORK DELIVERY

Category	Topic	Grade/Time Span
Benefits of Higher Education	Choosing a Career	6–9
	Degrees, Professions, and Earnings	6–9
	Lifetime Earnings	7–9
	Private Economic Benefits	7–10
	Private Social Benefits	8–11
	Change in Benefits over Time	8–11
College Expenses	Expenses by Type of College	8–11
	Net Price	8–11
	Time Costs	9–11
	Tuition and Fees	9–12
	Room, Board, and Travel	9–12
	Books and Supplies	11–College
	Effort Costs	12–College
Paying for College	Eligibility	6–8
	Savings	6–9
	Grants & Scholarships versus Loans	7–10
	Preparing for Merit-Based Awards	8–10
	Applying for Grants & Scholarships	9–12
	Need-Based Grants & Scholarships	10–College
	Federal Loans	11–College
	Private Loans	11–College
	Work-Study	12–College
	Tax Benefits	12–College
Forms and Processes	Expected Family Contribution	9–12
	Registration & Application Fee Waivers	10–College
	FAFSA	11–College
	State and Institutional Forms	11–College
	Financial Aid Award Letter	12–College
	Disbursement	12–College
	Reapplication	12–College

Timeline columns: 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, College

This serves as only one example of the ways in which the information framework could be delivered.

foundation for a more detailed exploration of the topic in 10th and 11th grades. The information's cumulative nature lends itself to delivery in a logical structure over time.

Color is employed in the timeline to denote an appropriate beginning and end to the delivery of that piece of information. Green indicates a suggested beginning to the delivery of specific components, and as it becomes more critical to deliver, the color changes to red. The red bars stop when the student faces a major decision related to college preparation dependent upon having the information in that category. For example, understanding that a college degree is necessary to pursue a career as an architect is essential prior to beginning high school so that the student can select to enroll in a college preparatory curriculum. While delivering that information throughout high school may continue to be important, its greatest value is in affecting important decisions during the middle to high school transition period. An underlying assumption of the Gantt chart is that information is delivered, understood, and retained throughout the course of the college preparation process. As practitioners know, students forget important, basic information, so reminding them of previous lessons is a good idea, even though these reviews are not reflected in the timeline.

Students forget important, basic information, so reminding them of previous lessons is a good idea.

The chart can also be useful for a program that only targets students at a certain age or point in time. By looking down vertically at a certain year, a program can quickly determine what information should already have been delivered (all pieces of information that are red to the left of that vertical line) and see the specific components of information it should provide during its intervention. Because the information is cumulative, if students have not been exposed to the information to the left of their grade level, they will need that information before moving ahead. Again, programs should view this template only as a guide and can adjust it depending upon the program's intervention and service population.

Developing an Individual Design

As mentioned in the introduction, this report addresses the first stages of the lifecycle of a system design. The information framework, delivery guidelines, and timeline consist of a high-level model of a design for an early financial aid delivery system. In order for such a system to be implemented by a school or early intervention program, a more detailed design must be mapped out. The timeline serves as a basis for the beginning of that detailed design.

The timeline provides the broad structure for the development of a curriculum centered on delivering early financial aid information to students. By looking vertically down the timeline chart, a high-level syllabus emerges for each grade level. Assuming all of the appropriate information had been previously delivered, the syllabus for 10th grade would consist of instructing students about need-based grants and fee waivers, but any information that was delivered before 10th grade could also be reviewed. The Advisory

Committee has taken the first step in the creation of that syllabus by developing a unit plan for each grade level. The end user's role is to further develop these unit plans into a curriculum incorporating age-appropriate activities to effectively disseminate these topics.

Unit Plans

Teachers often use an organization document, or unit plan, to map out what material should be covered over a long period of time in a course. It typically includes the purpose of the unit, the components of information to be shared, and additional resources. Because practitioners are best suited to determine what the most age-appropriate activities and methods of teaching are for their individual service populations, this report presents unit plans instead of more specific lesson plans.

Each unit plan briefly describes a component of the information framework at the grade level when that information could begin to be delivered according to the timeline. Referring to the framework section in tandem with the unit plans would help when preparing to deliver the information. These plans are not intended to be exhaustive, but they can serve as a starting point.

The list of resources in each unit provides a sample of available websites, books, brochures, and other publications that can be incorporated into the financial aid information delivery system.   Several of these resources can be given directly to students while others are more advanced and may require interpretation for certain age groups.   There exists a bevy of additional resources on each of these topics that is constantly growing.   The Pathways to College Network has an extensive, searchable library of resources compiled for use by practitioners that can be found at http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/collegeplanningresources/.   Undoubtedly, programs know details about state and local resources better than any federal committee. Again, the inclusion of a particular resource does not indicate an endorsement of that document over another; the list is simply meant to serve as a starting point.   The Advisory Committee hopes that this information will be widely useful and that, as the community of practitioners engaged in early financial aid information expands, a common set of exceptional resources will emerge.

A common set of exceptional resources will emerge as the community of practitioners engaged in early financial aid information expands.

Unit Plan – 6th Grade

Benefits of Higher Education

Purpose: Students need this information early so that they can take the steps necessary in middle and high school to become college-qualified. If students are unaware of the extent of these benefits, then they may underestimate the importance of academic preparation for college. Therefore, this is one of the first messages that needs to be relayed to students in the 6th grade.

Target Information

Choosing a Career: Expose students to various occupations and the reasons people pursue different careers. Underscore the variation in average incomes by career.

Degrees, Professions, and Earnings: Provide a breakdown of different degree options along with typical educational requirements and average incomes for different professions.

Sample Resources

Choosing a Career:

- **Exploring Career Information.** This student-friendly site from the Bureau of Labor Statistics arranges careers by interest. It asks the question, "What do you like?", and directs students to possible careers depending on an affinity for managing money, fixing things, helping people, etc. For the jobs listed, it answers the questions: "What is this job like?", "How do you get ready?", "How much does this job pay?", "How many jobs are there?", "What about the future?", and, "Are there other jobs like this?"
  http://www.bls.gov/k12/

- **Know How 2 Go.** This resource guides students through the college preparation process from middle school through high school. It lists a seven step process for exploring career options.
  http://www.knowhow2go.org/middle_explore.php

- **U.S. News and World Report Best Careers.** This site provides information on what are considered to be the top 25 professions in demand in upcoming years. The site also provides salary information, sorted by metropolitan region, for these 25 careers.
  http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/best_careers_2007/

- **Career One Stop.** This is a website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor that has a section for students enabling them to explore career options and educational requirements for different jobs. It also includes a salary tool, allowing students to search for median salaries for potential careers. http://www.careeronestop.org/

- **Show Me the Future, Mapping Your Future**. This interactive computer game gives students an idea in very real terms of the long-term benefits of achieving a college education. Students are assigned a character based on information they input about their highest degree level earned. The character is then given a job and asked to make financial decisions about paying for housing, childcare, clothing, food, taxes, and other investments with the money given. This game gives students a broader understanding of the necessity of a college education in the real world. http://showmethefuture.org/game/index.cfm

- **Alan Bernstein. 2006.** *Guide to Your Career: Comprehensive Profiles of 240 of Today's Hottest Careers*, **6th Ed. Princeton Review/Random House.** This career guide provides comprehensive information about expected salary levels at different phases in a particular career—it provides one estimate for entry level salary, another for mid-career salary, and a final 10-15 year salary estimate.

- **Jodi Weiss and Russel Kahn. 2004.** *145 Things to be When You Grow Up*. **The Princeton Review.** Written for teens, this guide provides examples of what different jobs are like for those students still exploring career options. It also provides information about how to plan for a career while in high school, college majors to consider, and how much money can be expected in earnings for various jobs.

Degrees, Professions, and Earnings:

- **Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Handbook.** This handbook gives not only the amount of training, education, and earnings associated with hundreds of different jobs, but also provides information on expected job prospects, what workers do on the job, and working conditions. http://www.bls.gov/oco/

- **The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings.** This Census Bureau report discusses the relationship between education and earnings, and provides useful graphs that visually show the average income gaps by degree. http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-210.pdf

- **Projected Salary Calculator.** This calculator allows users to choose a profession by name and gives the mean projected salary for that profession in the year 2023.

This is a tool that could be used by 6th graders to estimate what their salary might be when in their mid 20s.
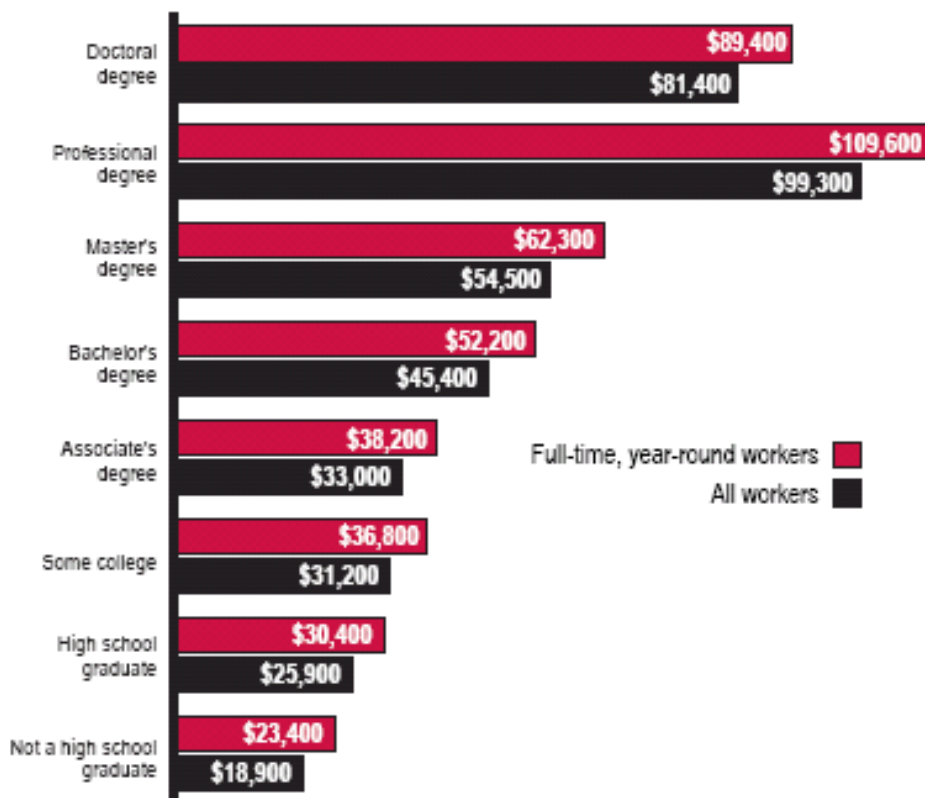http://www.erieri.com/index.cfm?FuseAction=CareerPlanning.SalaryPotential

- **Salary Wizard.** This site gives the average salary for particular jobs in different regions by job title and zip code.
www.salary.com

- **The College Board. 2006.** *The College Board Book of Majors, 2nd Ed.* This resource provides information on different career options for various majors, courses to take while in high school to prepare for them, and a listing of which colleges offer each major.

Sample Figure

This chart combines the concepts of income profession and degree, to provide students with an idea of their likely earnings if they pursue a bachelor's degree. This chart would need to be explained at a more basic level with connections to how salaries relate to lifestyle, transportation, housing, and other living expenses.

Average Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment: 1997-1999
Workers Age 25 to 64 (in 1999 dollars)

Educational Attainment	Full-time, year-round workers	All workers
Doctoral degree	$89,400	$81,400
Professional degree	$109,600	$99,300
Master's degree	$62,300	$54,500
Bachelor's degree	$52,200	$45,400
Associate's degree	$38,200	$33,000
Some college	$36,800	$31,200
High school graduate	$30,400	$25,900
Not a high school graduate	$23,400	$18,900

Source: Rogers, C. 2002. Learn more, earn more. *Indiana Business Review* 77 (2).

Unit Plan – 6th Grade

Paying for College

Purpose: A lack of information about how to pay for college may cause students to forgo the necessary steps to prepare for postsecondary education. In addition, there are certain financial steps that families should try to take as early as possible to ensure that aid will be available and to prepare to finance college in the future.

Target Information

<u>Eligibility</u>: Ensure students and parents are aware of eligibility requirements to receive different sources of financial aid.

<u>Savings</u>: Teach the value of money earning interest over time, as well as investment principles including financial literacy concepts such as interest rates and compound interest so that families can begin to save for college bills.

Sample Resources

<u>Eligibility</u>:

- **Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid (2008-2009).** This federal publication provides a comprehensive explanation of the three forms of aid available through the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office: grants, loans, and work-study. It also explains eligibility requirements and how to apply for programs. The information goes well beyond eligibility, but the topic is addressed on pages four and five. http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/FundingEduBeyondHighSchool_0809.pdf

- **What Every Student Should Know about Federal Aid.** This brief was created by the American Council on Education to provide an overview of the federal student aid programs and details eligibility requirements on page three. http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2005paying4college.pdf

- **Can I Apply to Become a Permanent Resident in the United States?** Because the federal aid process is only available to students with proper documentation, begin working on any immigration status issues early, as the process can take years. This website lists the eligibility requirements for obtaining permanent resident status and, thereby, becoming eligible for federal financial aid. http://www.foreignborn.com/visas_imm/immigrant_visas/change_of_status/3-eligibility4pr.htm

- **Financial Aid for International Students.** Most international students are not eligible for federal financial aid, but this eduPass website has information on financing college for international students.
  http://www.edupass.org/finaid/

- **FAFSA4caster.** This U.S. Department of Education website helps students determine their financial eligibility for Pell Grants based on income information that the user inputs. It will provide an estimate of the amount of Pell Grant the student will likely receive.
  http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/

- **State Merit Scholarships.** Information about any state merit scholarship program can be found on specific websites of the state higher education organizations. A directory of all of the state boards of higher education can be found at the following website.
  http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_ID=SHE

Savings:

- **SavingForCollege.com.** This site contains information about Section 529 college savings plans and also has a compilation of information on other ways to save and pay for college.
  http://www.savingforcollege.com/

- **Saving For College, FinAid.** This resource includes a detailed explanation from Finaid.org on how savings add up to help accumulate the funds to pay for college. The site also contains links to websites that provide more tips and details on savings and education tax benefits, as well as links to several savings plans.
  http://www.finaid.org/savings/

- **Savings Plan Designer Flat Contribution.** This website shows how much money one must contribute each month to an interest-bearing bank account or investment fund to reach savings goals.
  http://www.collegegold.com/calculatecost/savingsplandesigner

- **Suggested books by FinAid.** This website highlights 11 books on saving and investing, many of them focused on parents who are planning to invest in their children's educations.
  http://www.finaid.org/questions/investing.phtml

- **National Standards in K-12 Personal Finance Education, Third Edition, 2007, Jump$tart Coalition.** This resource provides a curriculum of financial information, including saving and investing, that should be provided to students over a series of grade levels.
  http://www.jumpstart.org/national_standersK12.html

- **Saving for College: What You Can Do Today to Cover Your College Costs**. A printable brochure that includes strategies to help families save and a comparison chart of various savings tools.
  http://www.thesalliemaefund.org/smfnew/pdf/Saving_for_College.pdf

- **Kantrowitz, Mark. 2006.** *Fast Web! College Gold: The Step-by-Step Guide to Paying for College*. **New York NY: HarperCollins.** This book has information on financing a college education along with specific ways to save for college.

Sample Figure

This bulleted list of eligibility requirements only applies to federal sources of aid. It is also important to point out that other sources of aid have different eligibility requirements. Families need this information alongside their applications in order to make plans and resolve any difficulties.

Determining Student Eligibility

To receive federal student aid, a student must:

- Have a high school diploma or its equivalent (such as the GED); have passed a test demonstrating his or her "ability to benefit"; or have been home-schooled (self-certified) and possess either a completion credential or an exemption from state compulsory attendance law.

- Be admitted to or enrolled in a degree or certificate program at an institution that participates in the federal programs.

- Meet "satisfactory academic progress" standards established by the college or university.

- Must not be in default on a student loan or owe a refund on a federal student grant.

- Be registered for the Selective Service (men only).

- Not have been convicted of a drug-related offense or, if convicted, have been "rehabilitated" in a federally approved program.

- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.

- Have financial need.

Source: American Council on Education. 2005. *What Every Student Should Know about Federal Aid*. Washington DC.

Unit Plan – 7th Grade

Benefits of Higher Education

Purpose: Students need this information in their middle school years to motivate them to take the steps through middle school and high school to become college-qualified and enroll. If students are unaware of the differences in lifetime earnings and the private economic benefits between those who earn a bachelor's degree and those who do not, then they are likely to underestimate the importance of academic preparation for college as they continue through 7th grade and on to high school.

Target Information

<u>Lifetime Earnings</u>: Contrast the average lifetime earnings of various levels of degrees, with emphasis on bachelor's degree earnings versus those of a high school graduate.

<u>Private Economic Benefits</u>: Describe the various economic benefits that a bachelor's degree recipient is likely to enjoy such as salary, retirement benefits, healthcare, and general lifestyle.

### Sample Resources

<u>Lifetime Earnings</u>:

- **Learn More, Earn More.** This brief from the University of Wisconsin details the earnings differential between various degree holders. It also details the additional dollars a student is likely to earn over a lifetime for a variety of careers when compared to someone with only a high school diploma.
  http://www.uwrf.edu/admissions/Degree_to_Income.pdf

- **Education Pays 2007.** This publication by the College Board depicts in its figure 1.2 the differences (by percentage) in earnings among various degree holders and in comparison with a high school graduate.
  http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/ed_pays_2007.pdf

<u>Private Economic Benefits</u>:

- **The Investment Payoff: A 50-State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education.** This report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy provides a description of each type of benefit enjoyed by those who complete their postsecondary education.
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/a3/eb.pdf

- **Education Pays 2007.** This publication by the College Board provides detailed evidence of higher education benefits to society, such as lower unemployment and poverty rates, as well as benefits to individuals. It also includes information on pension plans and health insurance.
http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/ed_pays_2007.pdf

- **Midwestern Higher Education Compact.** This MHEC presentation includes charts that present information on such economic benefits as personal income and employment likelihood for the Midwestern states.
http://www.mhec.org/mhecwww/pdfs/1105invpayoffrev.ppt

Sample Figure

A variety of guides and charts exists that can give students an idea of the lifetime earnings to be expected if they graduate from college. This example clearly and simply demonstrates the payoff to bachelor's and advanced degrees.
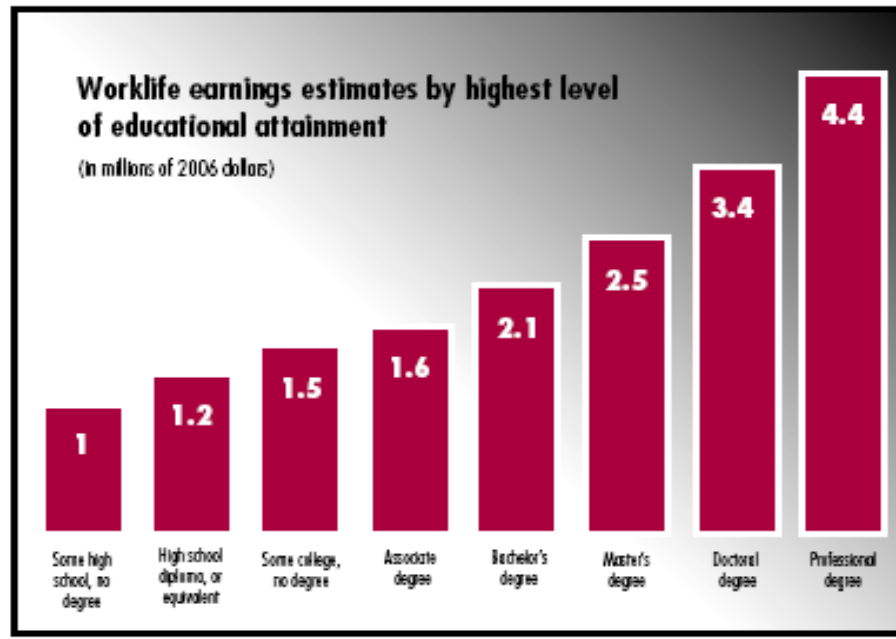
Source: University of Wisconsin – River Falls. 2006. *Learn More, Earn More*. http://www.uwrf.edu/admissions/Degree_to_Income.pdf

Unit Plan – 7th Grade

Paying for College

Purpose: By 7th grade, students should have already received information about savings and eligibility criteria for federal financial aid, as well as eligibility criteria for other types of state and institutional aid that may be available. The question that follows is, "For what types of financial aid am I eligible?" Hence, a discussion of the various grants and loans becomes necessary.

Target Information

Grants and Scholarships versus Loans: Describe the various types of grants and loans that exist, including the differences between federal and private loans and the differences between subsidized and unsubsidized loans.

Sample Resources

Grants and Scholarships versus Loans:

- **Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid (2008-2009).** This federal publication provides a comprehensive explanation of the three forms of aid available through the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office: grants, loans, and work-study. It explains the differences between and among each of these three components of aid. http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/FundingEduBeyondHighSchool_0809.pdf

- **What Every Student Should Know about Federal Aid.** This brief was created by the American Council on Education to provide an overview of the federal student aid programs. It details aid programs on page seven. http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2005paying4college.pdf

- **National College Access Network: Advisor Training Module.** This lengthy training module describes the different types of financial aid available, providing very basic descriptions that could be considered sufficient for a student in 7th grade. It also describes the new federal merit programs: the ACG and SMART Grants and the requirements and processes for each. http://www.collegeaccess.org/ncan/uploads/advisortrainingmodule.pdf

- **Financial Aid Night Presentation Tools, Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation**. Great Lakes provides a variety of free resources for counselors and other college access professionals to use in providing information to students. The Financial Aid 101 PowerPoint, in particular, includes information detailing the differences between grants and loans.
http://www.mygreatlakes.org/ind/caccontent/guaranty/leaf/toolkit_finaid_night.html

- **Other Types of Aid, FinAid.** This webpage includes a detailed explanation on each of the different types of aid available to students, including scholarships, federal and state aid, institutional aid, and student profile-based aid. The site also contains links to websites that provide further information, as well as lists of specific types of aid and other resources available.
http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/

Sample Figure

This is a chart of the various federal financial aid components available to students, such as the Pell Grant and the Stafford Loan, with program details listed in brief.

Federal Student Aid Summary Chart

Federal Student Aid Program	Type of Aid	Program Details	Annual Award Limits
Federal Pell Grant	Grant: does not have to be repaid	Available almost exclusively to undergraduates; all eligible students will receive the Federal Pell Grant amount they qualify for.	$400 to $4,310 for 2007–08
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)	Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates with exceptional financial need; priority is given to Federal Pell Grant recipients; funds depend on availability at school.	$100 to $4,000
Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG)	Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates receiving Pell Grants who are U.S. citizens enrolled full-time in their first or second academic year* of study. For first academic year* students who have completed a rigorous secondary school program of study, graduated from high school after Jan. 1, 2006, and have not been previously enrolled in an undergraduate program. For second academic year* students who have completed a rigorous secondary school program of study, graduated from high school after Jan. 1, 2005, and have at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA at the completion of their first year of postsecondary study.	First academic year* students: up to $750 Second academic year* students: up to $1,300
National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent Grant (National SMART Grant)	Grant: does not have to be repaid	For undergraduates receiving Pell Grants, who are U.S. citizens enrolled full-time in their third or fourth academic year* of an eligible degree program majoring in physical, life, or computer sciences; engineering, technology, mathematics or a critical-need foreign language and have at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA.	Up to $4,000 for each of the third and fourth academic years*
Federal Work-Study (FWS)	Money is earned while attending school; does not have to be repaid	For undergraduate and graduate students; jobs can be on campus or off campus; students are paid at least federal minimum wage.	No annual minimum or maximum award amounts
Federal Perkins Loan	Loan: must be repaid	Interest charged on this loan is 5 percent for both undergraduate and graduate students; payment is owed to the school that made the loan.	$4,000 maximum for undergraduate students; $6,000 maximum for graduate and professional degree students; no minimum award amount
Subsidized Direct or FFEL Stafford Loan	Loan: must be repaid	**Subsidized:** U.S. Department of Education pays interest while borrower is in school and during grace and deferment periods; you must be at least a half-time* student and have financial need.	$3,500 to $8,500, depending on grade level
Unsubsidized Direct or FFEL Stafford Loan	Loan: must be repaid	**Unsubsidized:** Borrower is responsible for interest during life of the loan; you must be at least a half-time* student; financial need is not a requirement.	$3,500 to $20,500 (less any subsidized amounts received for the same period), depending on grade level and dependency status
Direct or FFEL PLUS Loan	Loan: must be repaid	Available to parents of dependent undergraduate students and graduate and professional students enrolled at least half-time.* Financial need is not a requirement. PLUS Loans are unsubsidized: Borrower is responsible for interest during the life of the loan.	Maximum amount is cost of attendance* minus any other financial aid the student receives; no minimum award amount

The information in this guide was compiled in summer 2007. For any changes to the federal student aid programs since then, visit www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov and click on "Students, Parents and Counselors." Any new information will appear in the "Announcements" section.

Source: Federal Student Aid. 2006. *The Guide to Federal Student Aid 2007-08*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Unit Plan – 8th Grade

Benefits of Higher Education

Purpose: As students grow older and become savvier, they may begin to question the initial economic reasons for obtaining a college degree. At this age, during the pre-teen years, students are beginning to develop critical thinking skills and emphasis can be placed on broader reasons to obtain a college education. Even if students are on the path to becoming college-qualified, the 8th grade is a critical juncture at which school work becomes more difficult, and students may give in to negative peer pressure. Reinforcing the necessity of a college education is important to keep students in the pipeline.

Target Information

<u>Private Social Benefits</u>: Inform students about the non-economic, quality-of-life benefits that college graduates enjoy.

<u>Change in Benefits over Time</u>: Explain how the economic conditions of the United States have changed, requiring a more educated workforce with different skills than in the past.

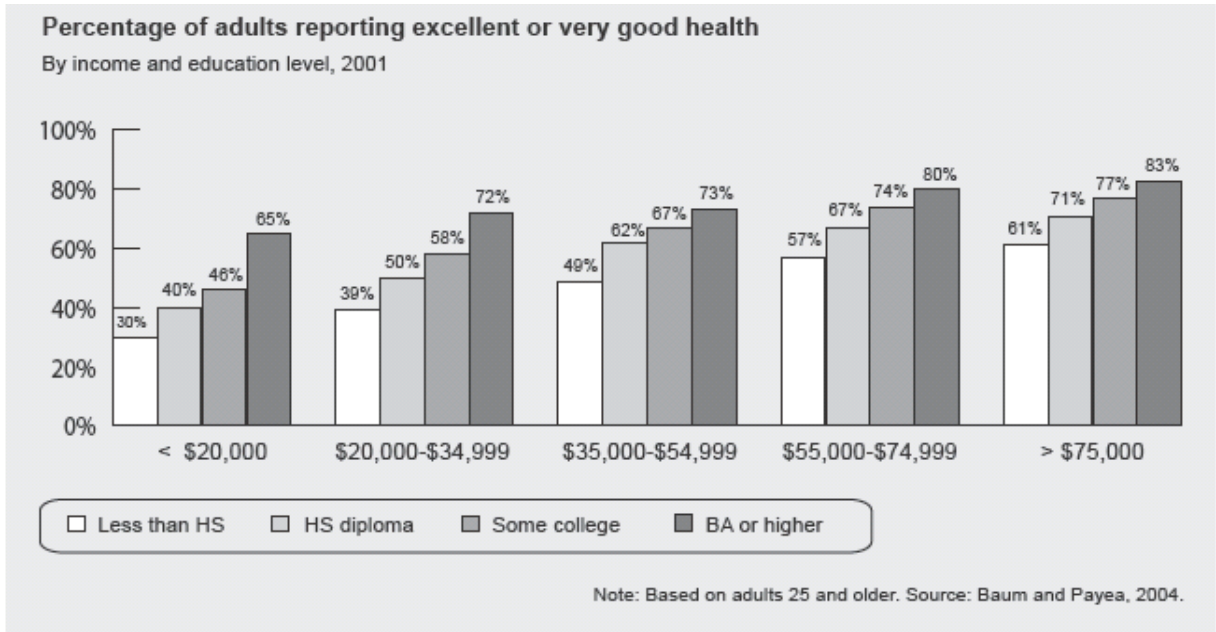
Sample Resources

<u>Private Social Benefits</u>:

- **The Investment Payoff: A 50-State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education.** This report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy provides a description of each type of benefit enjoyed by those who complete a postsecondary education.
  http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/a3/eb.pdf

- **Education Pays 2007.** This publication by the College Board discusses a multitude of benefits that accrue to college graduates.
  http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/ed_pays_2007.pdf

Change in Benefits over Time:

- **Solutions for Our Future. "**An effort to raise awareness about higher education as one of America's greatest resources." The website has information explaining the way in which global competition has increased the need for higher education and how new workforce demands are altering skills requirements, among other topics. It includes a Campaign Toolkit with YouTube commercials, talking points, op-eds and print ads that share the same message about an increased need for higher education due to changes that have occurred over time. http://www.solutionsforourfuture.org

- **The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings.** This Census Bureau report discusses the relationship among education, earnings, and trends that have emerged over the past 25 years. http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-210.pdf

- **America in the Global Economy.** This is a background paper created for the National Center on Education and the Economy's New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. This report may be too technical to give to students to read themselves, but it is a good place to look for facts, figures, and graphs that show how America's economy now requires a more educated workforce. http://www.ncee.org/pdf/wfd/AmericaInGlobalEconomy.pdf


Sample Figures

This graph shows that at every income level, improved health is related to education level.

Percentage of adults reporting excellent or very good health
By income and education level, 2001

Note: Based on adults 25 and older. Source: Baum and Payea, 2004.

Source: Solutions for Our Future Project. n.d. *The Broader Societal Benefits of Higher Education*. Institute for Higher Education Policy. Washington DC.

The following graph shows students that people with higher levels of education are less likely to require public assistance programs, such as Medicaid or Food Stamps.

Figure 1.12: Percentage of Individuals Ages 25 and Older Living in Households That Participated in Public Assistance Programs, by Education Level, 2005
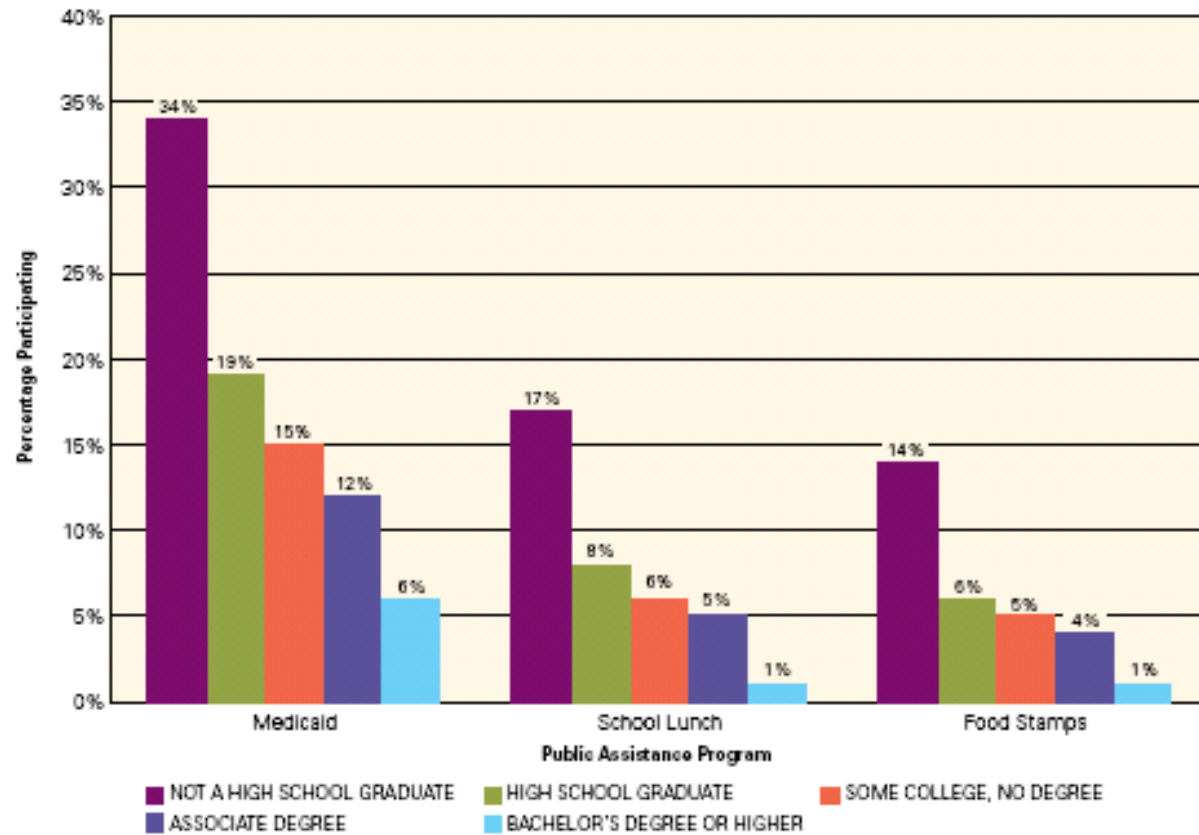

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2006 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, calculations by the authors.

Source: The College Board. 2007. *Education Pays 2007*. Washington DC.

This basic chart, easily understood by middle school students, demonstrates that most jobs require higher levels of education. The majority of new jobs will require at least some postsecondary education.

## Skills Requirements are Increasing
Percentage of new jobs by skill level
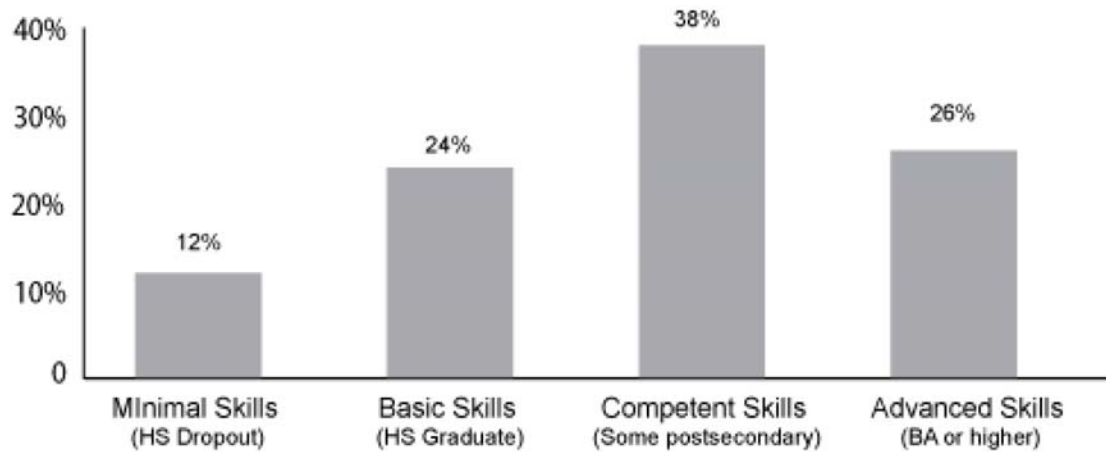
Source: American Council on Education. 2006. *Solutions for Our Future Project*. Website initiative of ACE. Washington DC.

This graph can help explain to students that the value of having only a high school degree is decreasing over the years. There is a much wider gap in earnings now than there was 30 years ago between having a college degree and not having one.

Average Earnings of Prime Age Adults 25-54 By Education

1975-2003

(2004 dollars)
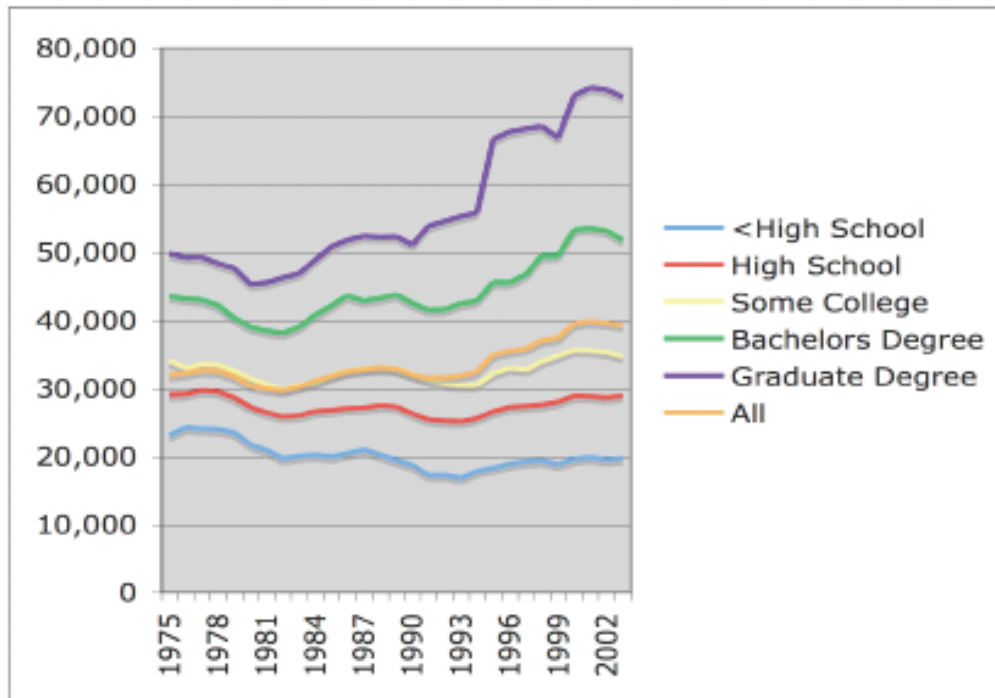
Source: Tabulations of the Current Population Survey, Annual March Social and Economic Supplements

Source: Uhalde, R. and J. Strohl. 2006. *America in the Global Economy: A Background Paper for the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*. Washington DC: National Center on Education and the Economy. http://www.skillscommission.org/pdf/Staff%20Papers/America_Global_Economy.pdf (accessed February 6, 2008).

Unit Plan – 8th Grade

College Expenses

Purpose: Because they are increasing at a rate faster than inflation, total college expenses are generally overestimated by students of all ages and backgrounds and their parents. Informing families of the real expenses related to college will arm them with the information necessary to make preparations for financing higher education.

Target Information

Expenses by Type of College: Show students and parents that wide variances in college expenses exist depending on whether a school is two-year, four-year, public, or private. Point them to the websites of the individual schools in which they are interested to obtain the most accurate information.

Net Price: Teach families that the sticker price that colleges advertise is often not what they are actually expected to pay. Equip them with the skills and tools needed to find this information on their own from each college of interest.

Sample Resources

Expenses by Type of College:

- **CNN Money, What Will College Run You?** This site allows students to search for the annual expenses of any college in the United States. http://cgi.money.cnn.com/tools/collegecost/collegecost.html?submit.x=29&submit.y=12

- **FinAid College Cost Projector.** This projector estimates how much college will cost in the year the student is likely to enroll. http://www.finaid.org/calculators/costprojector.phtml

- **Trends in College Pricing 2007.** This College Board report provides the average expenses of different types of colleges—two-year, four-year, private, and public. http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/trends_pricing_07.pdf

Net Price:

- **University and College Accountability Network (UCAN).** This website includes information about what students actually pay at each college with a profile in the UCAN directory.
  http://www.ucan-network.org/

- **Trends in College Pricing 2007.** This College Board report provides the average net price for different types of colleges—two-year, four-year, private, and public.
  http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/trends_pricing_07.pdf

- **Bellia, A. 2007. *Financial Aid for the Utterly Confused*. New York: McGraw-Hill.** This book contains a section on the difference between sticker price and net price on pages 46-48. It also provides a college cost comparison worksheet which students may find useful.

Sample Figures

Information such as this table can be used to help students understand the difference in tuition levels among the different types of colleges: public, private, for-profit, two-year, and four-year. It also gives them a sense of increases that may occur each year.

Table 1: Average Published Charges for Undergraduates, 2007-08 (Enrollment-Weighted)

Sector	Tuition and Fees				Room and Board				Total Charges			
	2007-08	2006-07	$ Change	% Change	2007-08	2006-07	$ Change	% Change	2007-08	2006-07	$ Change	% Change
Public Two-Year	$2,361	$2,266	$95	4.2%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Public Four-Year In-State	$6,185	$5,804	$361	6.6%	$7,404	$7,033	$371	5.3%	$13,589	$12,837	$752	5.9%
Public Four-Year Out-of-State	$16,640	$15,778	$862	5.5%	$7,404	$7,033	$371	5.3%	$24,044	$22,811	$1,233	5.4%
Private Four-Year Nonprofit	$23,712	$22,308	$1,404	6.3%	$8,595	$8,189	$406	5.0%	$32,307	$30,497	$1,810	5.9%
For-Profit	$12,089	$11,386	$703	6.2%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Source: The College Board. 2007. *Trends in College Pricing*. Washington DC.

This graph helps students notice the difference between the "net" tuition, fees, room and board, and the published sticker price of those expenses. Emphasis should be placed on what the "true" expenses of college are, on average, after taking financial aid into account.

Figure 8a: Published Tuition and Fees and Room and Board (TFRB) Compared to TFRB Net of Average Grant and Education Tax Benefits per Full-Time Undergraduate Student at Public Colleges and Universities, in Constant (2007) Dollars, 1992-93 to 2007-08
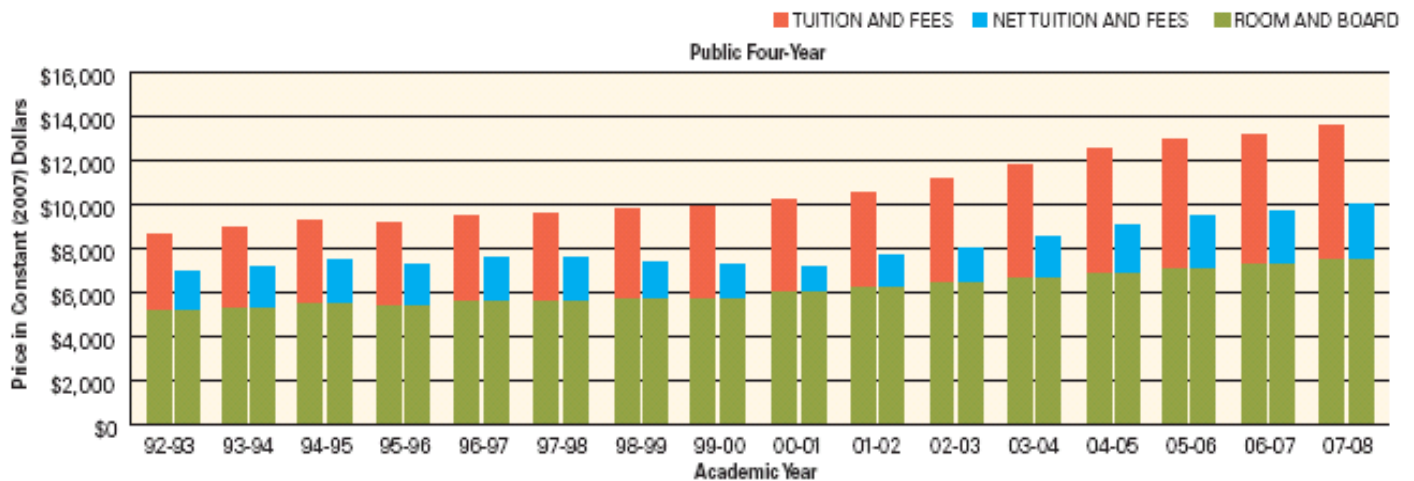
Note: Grant aid and tax benefits for 2007-08 are estimated based on 2006-07 and earlier data.

Sources: Aid data are from *Trends in Student Aid 2007*; breakdown of aid by sector is based on *NPSAS*: 1993, 1996, 2000 and 2004; calculations by authors.

Average net price is calculated by subtracting average grant aid and tax benefits per full-time student from the published price. Average aid is calculated by dividing total grants and tax benefits received by full-time students in the sector by the number of full-time students.

Source: The College Board. 2007. *Trends in College Pricing*. Washington DC.

Unit Plan – 8th Grade

Paying for College

Purpose: Students and parents need to know and become inspired by the fact that there is additional money available on the basis of merit from the federal government, states, and private organizations. This merit aid sometimes supplements need-based aid. Some families may not have the opportunity to save for college, and/or may be unsure of their eligibility for need-based aid. Regardless of those eligibility issues, students and families should, at this stage, continue to take steps to ensure that students receive the maximum amount of aid for which they might qualify.

Target Information

Preparing for Merit-Based Awards: Ensure that students and parents are aware of eligibility requirements to receive state merit aid. Explore the grants and scholarships that may also be available through national philanthropic organizations and smaller, local organizations. Inform students that many colleges also offer their own merit-based aid to applicants.

Sample Resources

Preparing for Merit-Based Awards:

- **Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG) and the National SMART Grant.** These two merit- and need-based grant programs are offered by the U.S. Department of Education. Though they are need-based programs, each has a merit component that requires adequate high school preparation. Information about eligibility can be found at this website.
  http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/NewPrograms.jsp

- **State Higher Education Websites.** Information about any state merit scholarship program can be found on the specific websites of state higher education organizations. A directory of all state boards of higher education can be found at the following website.
  http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_ID=SHE

Sample Figure

This student- and family-friendly website answers questions about who is eligible for Tennessee grant and scholarship programs and how to apply for them. There should be similar websites for other states with merit-based aid programs. Program officials or counselors should direct students and families to the section of the website that mentions the academic requirements necessary to receive the scholarships. This ensures that students know to begin appropriate academic preparation in order to become eligible.

Source: http://www.collegepaystn.com/index.html

College Expenses

Purpose: Students and parents weigh the costs of college against the benefits associated with earning a bachelor's degree. They need accurate information about such components to make an informed decision about their futures. Providing students with information on expenses by type of institution, the individual costs associated with attending college, and an education on obtaining financial aid to minimize out of pocket expenses can greatly encourage academic and financial preparation in order to apply to and enroll in a postsecondary institution.

Target Information

Time Costs: Provide students with information on how the years spent in college are years they will forego full-time income, and how this relates to the benefits they will receive when they attain the bachelor's degree. Explain to students and parents that while students may be reluctant to give up earnings from full-time work while attending college, the payoff from a college degree is higher and the likelihood of attaining a degree is greater when students do not work full-time while in school.

Tuition and Fees: Describe how the direct costs of attendance, such as tuition, fees, room, board, and travel would differ depending on the institution the student attends.

Room, Board, and Travel: Expose students to estimates of these expenses and describe how these might differ depending on student choices such as an institution located far from home or the decision to live on- or off-campus.

Sample Resources

Time Costs:

- **College Degrees: Time is of the Essence.** Though this article speaks directly to students at a particular school (University of California, Riverside), the theme of reducing work to devote time to study is one of which students should be reminded. It conveys, in clear terms, the necessary trade-offs.
  http://www.cs.ucr.edu/~vahid/college_time.html

- **Opportunity Costs.** This site includes a brief explanation of the 'opportunity cost' of college, including a link to an explanation of the concept of forgone earnings.
  http://www.investopedia.com/terms/o/opportunitycost.asp

- **N. Fogg, T. Harrington, and P. Harrington. 2004.** *College Majors Handbook with Real Career Paths and Payoffs: The Actual Jobs, Earnings, and Trends for Graduates of 60 College Majors*. **St. Paul MN: JIST Publishing.** This book serves as a general reference guide on the career outcomes of various majors with a particularly good section on the economic decision to attend college in Chapter 3. A sample with a good description of the forgone earnings and time costs can be found online.
  http://www.emcp.com/product_catalog/resourcefile.php?ID=2006

Tuition and Fees:

- **Tuition and Fees, 2007-08, The Chronicle of Higher Education.** This website holds information on more than 3,200 colleges and universities for the 2006-07 and the 2007-08 years. The database helps locate the tuition and fees for each of the different types of institutions (i.e. in-state vs. out-of-state). This site may require a subscription, but many libraries have the paper version available.
  http://chronicle.com/stats/tuition/

- **College Cost Predictor, FinAid.** This website helps to calculate how much college will cost at the time of enrollment and breaks expenses down by two-year and four-year schools.
  http://www.finaid.org/calculators/costprojector.phtml

- **College Navigator.** This website, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, provides information on each component of college costs (i.e. tuition, room, board, etc.). It contains data for each of the past three years on every college in the country. The website contains a host of other information related to enrollment and financial aid.
  http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/

- **Trends in College Pricing 2007.** This College Board report shows how the various expenses associated with attending college, including tuition and fees, have been increasing. See pages six and seven for a breakdown of 2007-08 expenses by type of institution and by resident and commuter status.
  http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/trends_pricing_07.pdf

Room, Board, and Travel:

- **Paying for College: Room-and-Board Options.** This article summarizes various room-and-board arrangements, discussing the pros and cons of each housing option available to students. It accounts for price and convenience to provide a balanced perspective.
  http://money.aol.com/banking/loans/fct1/_a/paying-for-college-room-and-board/20050225133709990003

- **Trends in College Pricing 2007.** This College Board report shows the various expenses associated with attending college, including room and board. See pages six and seven for a breakdown of 2007-08 expenses for room and board by type of institution and by resident and commuter status.
http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/trends_pricing_07.pdf

Sample Figure

This figure depicts the various expenses students and families can expect (without considering any financial aid they may receive). Although this chart includes "other expenses," other costs such as healthcare, childcare, insurance, etc., need to be considered.

Total Student Budgets, 2007-08

Table 2: Average Estimated Undergraduate Budgets, 2007-08 (Enrollment-Weighted)

Sector	Tuition and Fees	Books and Supplies	Room and Board	Transportation	Other Expenses	Total Expenses*
Public Two-Year						
Resident	$2,361	$921	—	—	—	—
Commuter	$2,361	$921	$6,975	$1,270	$1,699	$13,126
Public Four-Year						
Resident	$6,185	$988	$7,404	$911	$1,848	$17,336
Commuter	$6,185	$988	$7,419	$1,284	$2,138	$18,014
Out-of-State	$16,640	$988	$7,404	$911	$1,848	$27,791
Private Four-Year						
Resident	$23,712	$988	$9,595	$769	$1,311	$35,374
Commuter	$23,712	$988	$7,499	$1,139	$1,664	$35,001

— Sample too small to provide meaningful information.
* Average total expenses include room and board costs for commuter students, which are average estimated living expenses for students living off campus but not with parents.
Note: Estimates of individual budget items are based on reporting by institutional financial aid offices.
Source: *Annual Survey of Colleges*, The College Board, New York, NY.

Enrollment-weighted tuition and fees are derived by weighting the price charged by each institution in 2007-08 by the number of full-time students enrolled in 2006-07. Room and board charges are weighted by the number of students residing on campus. Out-of-state tuition and fees are computed by adding the average in-state price to the out-of-state premium weighted by the number of full-time out-of-state students enrolled at each institution.

Source: The College Board. 2007. *Trends in College Pricing*. Washington DC.

Unit Plan – 9th Grade

Paying for College

Purpose: Students in 9th grade should already have a basic understanding of the different forms of aid available to them. Students should know by the first year of high school about the Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG) and the SMART Grant, and should have enrolled in the appropriate courses that ensure eligibility. Though they will probably wait until 12th grade to apply for financial aid, 9th grade may be the appropriate time to discuss with students how to search and apply for scholarships.

Target Information

Applying for Grants and Scholarships: Guide students through the steps of searching for grants and scholarships and compile lists of them, building upon those that the program's students received in previous years. Explain selection criteria and how students can determine their own eligibility.

Sample Resources

Applying for Grants and Scholarships:

- **Scholarships, FinAid.** This page includes an extensive description of the various types of scholarships available, such as those for students who excel academically or those offered to students involved in extracurricular activities. The site also provides a way to search for scholarships using FastWeb. There are grants and scholarships for which students are eligible to apply while still in the early years of high school.
  http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/

- **National College Access Network: Advisor Training Module.** This training module includes in-depth descriptions of how grants and scholarships can be located, whether through a high school, local agency, foundation resources, or the Internet. It also discusses how to report scholarships to colleges as well as provides information on scholarship scams.
  http://www.collegeaccess.org/ncan/uploads/advisortrainingmodule.pdf

- **Scholarship Scams, Federal Trade Commission**. Advice on tips to be mindful of when searching for scholarships.
  http://www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams

- **A. St. Pierre and D.M. Printz. 2005. *The Simple Guide to College Admission and Financial Aid*. The Simple Guide Company, Inc.** This book provides extensive information on financial aid, with advice on starting to apply for grants and scholarships early. It also highlights websites where students can consider searching for scholarships.

Sample Figure

This grid allows a student to easily track scholarship applications by recording the vital information for each application. It can be adapted as needed.

KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR SCHOLARSHIPS

Put time and energy into applying for scholarships available from local sources (see your School Counselor), colleges to which you are applying, and through the internet – it can really pay off. Local scholarships are always your best bet! All scholarships have deadlines and some may have additional requirements. If you miss a deadline or forget to send the requirements, your scholarship application will be denied. Keep track of these important details by using this form. Good Luck!

Scholarship	Amount	Application	Deadline	Essay	Transcript	Letter of Recomm.	Portfolio Other
The Robinson Foundation Scholarship Award	$500	done	10/21/05	done	sent 10/15	yes	n/a
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							

Source: St. Pierre, A. and D.M. Printz. 2005. *The Simple Guide to College Admission and Financial Aid*. Portland ME: The Simple Guide Company, Inc.

Unit Plan – 9th Grade

Forms and Processes

Purpose: The process of applying for financial aid requires an understanding of forms and timelines. Although many students receive some help with completing application forms from high school guidance staff in the 11th and 12th grades, an approach that would provide students with information on the financial aid process before that would be beneficial. Students could prepare themselves for the application process by collecting any necessary forms, applying for scholarships, and even saving money for various costs before they enroll.

Target Information

Expected Family Contribution: Provide students and families with an estimate of how much money they may be expected to contribute to a child's education after income and cost of attendance are taken into consideration.

Sample Resources

Expected Family Contribution:

- **Calculators, FinAid.** This site has multiple links under "Needs Analysis" that calculate an estimate of what a family may be expected to pay for college. It also contains other calculators that determine loan repayment and savings, as well a budget calculator to help students prepare for the costs of college.
  http://www.finaid.org/calculators/finaidestimate.phtml

- **FAFSA4caster.** This U.S. Department of Education website provides an early estimate of eligibility for federal student aid and helps students and families familiarize themselves with the various forms of aid as well as application processes. The FAFSA4caster pre-populates the *FAFSA on the Web* application so that students do not have to fill out the same questions again when completing a final FAFSA. The site also contains an explanation of the FAFSA process.
  http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/

- **College Board EFC Calculator.** This College Board site is similar to other EFC calculators mentioned above in that it also provides an estimate of what students and families may be expected to pay for college.
  http://apps.collegeboard.com/fincalc/efc_welcome.jsp

- **A. St. Pierre and D.M. Printz. 2005. *The Simple Guide to College Admission and Financial Aid*. The Simple Guide Company, Inc.** This book provides extensive advice on financial aid. It also provides a detailed description of the expected family contribution on pages 53 and 54, detailing how it is an estimate that can be tailored to fit special circumstances.

Sample Figure

This chart shows how financial need is calculated. The EFC is calculated using a federal formula that processes the numbers a student inputs on the FAFSA. A student's institution subtracts the expected family contribution (EFC) from the institution's cost of attendance to determine what the student's financial need will be to attend. The school will then use a mix of grants and loans to meet a student's financial need.

Determining Your Financial Need
We use your Expected Family Contribution*
(EFC) to determine your financial need:

Cost of Attendance*
− Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
_____

= Financial Need

Source: Federal Student Aid. 2007. *The Guide to Federal Student Aid | 2008-09.* Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Paying for College

Purpose: Students and families should be actively thinking about college plans by 10th grade. Information about need-based grants is important, especially for low-income students. They can be reminded that not all aid is based on merit and that not all aid must be repaid. Also, more general information about the resources available to assist in planning for college expenses could be helpful in informing college planning and decision making.

Target Information

Need-Based Grants and Scholarships: Deliver information about need-based grants and scholarships from a variety of sources, including the federal government, state governments, institutions, and philanthropic organizations. Indicate that some need-based aid will also have a merit component. Compile all of the local sources of need-based aid for students because the options vary by geographic location.

Sample Resources

Need-Based Grants and Scholarships:

- **Gates Millennium Scholarship.** This scholarship has a need-based component as well as a merit component. Scholarship recipients have all of their postsecondary education expenses covered, even graduate and professional degrees. Students must be Pell Grant-eligible and nominated by a teacher or other school official. http://www.gmsp.org/

- **FAFSA4caster.** This resource calculates an estimate of the amount of federal aid available to students provided their financial information is the same when they actually apply. http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/

- **Federal Pell Grant, Student Aid on the Web.** Basic information about the Pell Grant program, the major federal grant program for students, is provided on this website. http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/PellGrants.jsp

- **Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid (2008-2009).** This is a general guide from the U.S. Department of Education that

serves as a comprehensive resource to all federal student aid, including need-based programs.
http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/FundingEduBeyondHighSchool_0809.pdf

- **State Grants.** Most states have their own need-based grants in addition to the federal grants available. More information should be available through the individual state board of higher education. A directory of all state boards of higher education can be found at this website.
http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_ID=SHE

Sample Figure

The FAFSA4caster website allows students and parents to receive an estimate of how much college aid they may be eligible to receive. Students encouraged to explore this site will learn a great deal about their financing options.

Source: http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/

Unit Plan – 10th Grade

Forms and Processes

Purpose: In the 10th grade, when students are beginning to register for tests as part of the college admissions process, many may be faced with what are often unexpected fees associated with college preparation. These fees, along with complicated forms and procedures, may act as a barrier to completing necessary documents and meeting important deadlines. Ensuring familiarity with resources that could make this process less complicated can ease tensions about impending smaller expenses, such as testing and application fees, which may arise in the application and preparation processes as early as the 10th grade.

Target Information

Registration and Application Fee Waivers: Expose students and families to the dollar amounts of college testing fees such as the ACT and SAT, as well as college application fees, which can be costly when compounded. Inform low-income students about alternate financing options to help defray these costs.

Sample Resources

Registration and Application Fee Waivers:

- **Directory of Colleges Participating with the SAT Fee Waiver Program**. Some colleges will waive a student's application fee if the student has also received a fee waiver from the SAT. A directory of participating colleges can be found here: http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/highered/ra/2007-08_directory_colleges_cooperating_sat_program_fee_waiver_serv.pdf

- **SAT Program Fee Waiver Service.** Though students need to contact their counselor to obtain a fee waiver, information about the SAT fee waiver service can be found on this website. http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees/feewaivers.html

- **The ACT Frequently Asked Questions: Fee Waivers.** This site provides information about student eligibility requirements for ACT fee waivers, although students still need to contact their guidance counselors for the actual form. http://www.actstudent.org/faq/answers/feewaiver.html

- **National Association for College Admission Counseling, Request for Fee Waiver.** This organization offers a National College Fairs Institutional Fee Waiver program as well as a standard fee waiver request form that can be sent to colleges on students' behalf. While there is no guarantee that the college will grant a waiver for fees because of the form, it may be helpful for students to be familiar with it. The form can be found online at the following address. http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/Events/CollegeFairs/NCF/ncffeewaiver.htm

- **College Application Fee Waivers.** This resource includes information from the College Board for use by professionals such as guidance counselors in discussing college application with students and parents. It includes information about student eligibility, as well as policies and procedures to obtain a fee waiver form. There is a link to a common college application fee waiver request form for college advising professionals. http://professionals.collegeboard.com/guidance/applications/fee-waivers

Sample Figure

The National Association for College Admissions Counseling offers this standard fee waiver request form that can be sent to colleges. While there is no guarantee that the college will grant a waiver for fees because of this form, it may be helpful for students to be familiar with the form.

Source: National Association for College Admission Counseling. 2007.
http://www.nacacnet.org/NR/rdonlyres/E4854E2B-0B9A-4244-90E5-14058FC3798E/0/form_feewaiver.pdf

Unit Plan – 11th Grade

College Expenses

Purpose: Certain costs are often overlooked in the initial discussion of college expenses, but overwhelm students and families when they begin their postsecondary education. Books and supply costs are often the last to confront students and parents, and are, therefore, forgotten and may not be fully covered by all aid sources. Although not directly related to finances, effort costs may also be forgotten, or not even mentioned, as students and families may not realize the extent to which attainment of a bachelor's degree requires mental exertion and labor, ultimately affecting their persistence. Preparing students for these hidden costs in advance can better prepare them to succeed.

Target Information

Books and Supplies: Describe what students can expect to pay for textbooks for each course, semester, and year, along with the various strategies they can use to make affordable purchases.

Effort Costs: Provide students with a realistic representation of the academic expectations that exist when they reach college, and guidance on how to make valuable lifestyle choices that may impact their persistence and likelihood of attaining a bachelor's degree.

Sample Resources

Books and Supplies:

- **Trends in College Pricing 2007.** This report shows the various costs associated with attending college in the 2007-08 academic year, including the estimated cost for books and supplies on page seven.
  http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/trends_pricing_07.pdf

- **Turn the Page: Making College Textbooks More Affordable.** This report includes a chart on page 22 that shows how grant aid may not be sufficient to cover textbook expenses for students, on top of all of the other college costs a student is expected to meet.
  http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/turnthepage.pdf

- **Make Textbooks Affordable Campaign.** The website for this national campaign includes a list of five ways to save on college textbooks, and three ways to lower textbook prices in the long term.
  http://www.maketextbooksaffordable.org/newsroom.asp?id2=35143

Effort Costs:

- **Managing Your Time.** Information about time management is available on many college websites or in the student services office. This information can help students understand the new time demands that college requires and provide insight into lifestyle changes that may be necessary to keep up with the rigors of collegiate level work.
  http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/time.html

- **How-to-Study.com.** This website provides numerous tips on succeeding in college, including study tips, managing money, working with an advisor, and effective time management.
  http://www.how-to-study.com/collegesuccess.htm

Sample Figure

The following tables and text are an example of a student budget at Northern Arizona University. These are the expenses that a student might face at the university coming from either in-state or out-of-state, and Northern Arizona would take this into account when developing a financial aid package.

2007-2008 Financial Aid Budgets

Financial assistance awards take more than just your actual costs into consideration. Transportation, personal expenses, and more are added to the equation, and when they are put together in a budget, you get a more complete picture of what you will need to pay. While budgets will vary according to each student's circumstances, the estimated budgets below will give you a general idea of the full cost of attending Northern Arizona University.

EXPENSES: IN-STATE	ON-CAMPUS	OFF-CAMPUS	COMMUTER
Undergraduate Tuition/Fees	$4,594/$250	$4,594/$250	$4,594/$250
Graduate Tuition/Fees	$4,964/$250	$4,964/$250	$4,964/$250
Books/Supplies	$864	$864	$864
Room	$3,624	$4,748	$1,336
Board	$2,948	$2,464	$1,718
Transportation	$1,436	$1,436	$1,016
Personal	$2,308	$2,654	$1,756
Undergraduate/Graduate Average Loan Fees	$72/$172	$72/$172	$72/$172
UNDERGRADUATE TOTAL	$16,024	$17,010	$11,534
GRADUATE TOTAL	$16,394	$17,380	$11,904

The total is your estimated cost of attendance for an in-state student. Tuition and fees for an out-of-state student are outlined below.

EXPENSES: OUT-OF-STATE	ON-CAMPUS	OFF-CAMPUS
Undergraduate Tuition/Fees	$14,428/250	$14,428/250
Graduate Tuition/Fees	$10,986/250	$10,986/250
Books/Supplies	$864	$864
Room	$3,624	$4,748
Board	$2,948	$2,464
Transportation	$1,980	$1,980
ersonal	$2,308	$2,654
Undergraduate/Graduate Average Loan Fees	$72/$172	$72/$172
UNDERGRADUATE TOTAL	$26,222	$27,208
GRADUATE TOTAL	$22,960	$23,946

Source: Undergraduate Admissions, University of Northern Arizona. n.d. Program Website. http://home.nau.edu/admissions/finaid/CollegeCosts.asp (accessed February 6, 2008).

Unit Plan – 11th Grade

Paying for College

Purpose: By the 11th grade, students should have already started taking college preparatory coursework to ensure that they qualify for the Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG), and they should have received information on savings, eligibility, and basic differences in types of financial aid. It is in 11th grade that students can begin delving into the nuances of federal and private loans; understanding the key differences in interest rates, repayment plans, and borrowing limits; and making the financial decisions necessary for enrollment and persistence in college.

Target Information

<u>Federal Loans</u>: Explain how common it is for students to borrow money for college, what benefits federal loans offer over private loans, the key issues students and families should consider, and the options available to them.

<u>Private Loans</u>: Explain how common it is for students to borrow money for college, under what pretext students and families should take out private loans after maximizing federal loans, the key issues students and families should consider, how interest rates and other such concepts can affect choices, and the options available to them.

Sample Resources

<u>Federal Loans</u>:

- **Student Loans, FinAid.** This website divides student loans into four categories: student loans, parent loans, private student loans, and consolidation loans, with links to detailed explanations of each. The site also provides a chart that depicts how common it is to find students who borrow for college by the type of institution they attend.
  http://www.finaid.org/loans/

- **Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid (2008-2009).** This federal publication provides a detailed explanation of the federal loans administered by U.S. Department of Education. See pages 8-13 and 26-35.
  http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/FundingEduBeyondHighSchool_0809.pdf

- **What Every Student Should Know about Federal Aid.** This brief was created by the American Council on Education to provide an overview of federal student aid and details various types of loan programs and the process for loan application, along with borrower limits and repayment on pages 9-16.
http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2005paying4college.pdf

- **Student Loan Options in a Tight Credit Market.** This one-page summary produced by the Project on Student Debt alleviates common concerns students and families have about obtaining federal student loans.
http://projectonstudentdebt.org/files/pub/market_options.pdf

- **A. St. Pierre and D.M. Printz. 2005. *The Simple Guide to College Admission and Financial Aid*. The Simple Guide Company, Inc.** This book provides extensive information on financial aid, including a clear and thorough description of each type of federal aid program on pages 58-60.

Private Loans:

- **Education Lenders, Guarantee Agencies, Servicers, and Secondary Markets. FinAid.** This website provides an explanation and links to different organizations involved in managing student loans. The site also includes a list of websites that offer comparisons and directories of different private loan programs.
http://www.finaid.org/loans/studentloans.phtml

- **Private Student Loan Consolidation, FinAid.** This website provides information on consolidating private loans, as well as a table of lenders that offer private student loans.
http://www.finaid.org/loans/privateconsolidation.phtml

- **A. Bellia. 2007. *Financial Aid for the Utterly Confused*. New York: McGraw-Hill.** This book provides comprehensive financial aid information across a full range of topics. Specific to private loans, it details the use of home equity loans and how alternative loans can be used to pay a portion of the family's EFC (pages 180-185).

Sample Figure

This chart shows the variety of student loans administered by the federal government. The eligibility requirements, award amounts, interest rates, and length of repayment for private loans vary greatly and, therefore, are not included below. Check FinAid's site for more specific information on private loans at:
http://www.finaid.org/loans/studentloans.phtml

Student Loan Comparison Chart

Loan Program	Eligibility	Award Amounts	Interest Rates	Lender/Length of Repayment
Federal Perkins Loans	Undergraduate and graduate students	Undergraduate—up to $4,000 a year (maximum of $20,000 as an undergraduate) Graduate—up to $6,000 a year (maximum of $40,000, including undergraduate loans) Amount actually received depends on financial need, amount of other aid, availability of funds at school	5 percent	Lender is your school Repay your school or its agent Up to 10 years to repay, depending on amount owed
FFEL Stafford Loans (subsidized and unsubsidized)	Undergraduate and graduate students; must be enrolled at least half-time*	Depends on grade level in school and dependency status (see chart on page 11) Financial need is required for subsidized loans Financial need not necessary for unsubsidized loans	Fixed rate of 6.8 percent for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2006 The federal government pays interest on subsidized loans during school and certain other periods The borrower pays all interest on unsubsidized loans	Lender is a bank, credit union or other participating private lender Repay the loan holder or its agent Between 10 and 25 years to repay, depending on amount owed and type of repayment plan selected
Direct Stafford Loans (subsidized and unsubsidized)	Same as above	Same as above	Same as above	Lender is the U.S. Department of Education; repay Department Between 10 and 25 years to repay, depending on amount owed and type of repayment plan selected
FFEL PLUS Loans	Parents of dependent undergraduate students enrolled at least half-time* (see dependency status) Graduate or professional degree students enrolled at least half-time* Borrower must not have negative credit history	Student's Cost of Attendance* – Other aid student receives _____ = Maximum loan amount	Fixed rate at 8.5 percent for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2006; borrower pays all interest	Same as for FFEL Stafford Loans above
Direct PLUS Loans	Same as above	Same as above	Fixed rate at 7.9 percent for loans first disbursed on or after July 1, 2006; borrower pays all interest	Same as for Direct Stafford Loans above, except that the Income Contingent Repayment Plan is not an option

The information in this guide was compiled in summer 2007. For any changes to the federal student aid programs since then, visit www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov and click on "Students, Parents and Counselors." Any new information will appear in the "Announcements" section.

Source: Federal Student Aid. 2007. *The Guide to Federal Student Aid / 2008-09*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Unit Plan – 11th Grade

Forms and Processes

Purpose: Students in 11th grade are preparing to apply for various forms of financial aid. Students may currently be in the process of applying for scholarships, deciding on the school of their choice, and determining what it will cost them both with and without financial aid.   At this stage, students need specific information on the steps to be taken to apply for aid. While students may not actually complete the FAFSA and other aid forms until 12th grade, it is in 11th grade that they should understand the intricacies of the financial aid process, specifically the various forms to anticipate, along with deadlines, and all the steps needed to complete the forms.

Target Information

FAFSA: Describe the process students and families need to take when completing the FAFSA, prior to doing so and the follow-ups necessary after completion of the form.

State and Institutional Forms: Expose students and parents to the other types of forms they may need to complete in addition to the FAFSA. Include the cost of such forms, such as the CSS profile, in the discussion.

Sample Resources

FAFSA:

- **FAFSA4caster.** This U.S. Department of Education website helps students determine their eligibility for Pell Grants and provides estimates of likely awards. Data input on this site pre-populates the actual FAFSA (www.FAFSA.ed.gov). http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/

- **FAFSA 5-Minute Video.** This video can serve as an introduction to completing the FAFSA. It indicates what information will be needed and which websites to visit to complete the form online. Students may relate better to a multimedia approach than standard reading material. http://www.finaid.org/fafsa/video.phtml

- **Federal Student Aid FAFSA.** This site hosts FAFSA online and provides detailed instructions for its completion. http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/

- **National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) Financial Aid Night Presentation.** This website contains a presentation on completing the FAFSA that can be used to host a financial aid education program. It also contains a number of useful supplementary handouts.
  http://www.nasfaa.org/redesign/fanight.asp

- **Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid (2008-2009).** This federal publication provides a comprehensive explanation of the entire FAFSA process, including obtaining the PIN, compiling key information before completing the FAFSA, and the Student Aid Report. See pages 18-24.
  http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/FundingEduBeyondHighSchool_0809.pdf

- **National College Access Network: Advisor Training Module.** This training module describes the entire FAFSA process, including completion of the renewal FAFSA and how to obtain help when filling out the FAFSA. See pages 14 through 28.
  http://www.collegeaccess.org/ncan/uploads/advisortrainingmodule.pdf

State and Institutional Forms:

- **National College Access Network: Advisor Training Module.** This training module describes the process students must undergo to find and apply for state and institutional aid. Information on the CSS Profile, including its fees, is on page 23. See page 30 for types of information required by states and institutions.
  http://www.collegeaccess.org/ncan/uploads/advisortrainingmodule.pdf

- **CSS Profile.** This website, hosted by the College Board, provides information on the additional financial aid form that some institutions may require and accompanying fees.
  https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/index.jsp

- **State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO).** This resource allows a review of all state aid programs, eligibility requirements, deadlines, and application processes.
  http://www.sheeo.org/agencies.asp

Sample Figure

This figure breaks down the FAFSA process into eight steps, including what needs to be done before filling out the FAFSA and what follow-up steps are required to ensure that a student receives financial aid.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID?

STEP 1 — Get free information and help from your school counselor, the financial aid office at the college or career school you plan to attend, or the U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid at www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov or 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). Free help is available any time during the application process. You should never have to pay for help.

STEP 2 — Get a Federal Student Aid PIN, a personal identification number. A PIN lets you apply, "sign" your online *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA), make corrections to your application information, and more—all online. Apply for a PIN at www.pin.ed.gov.

STEP 3 — Collect the documents needed to apply, including income tax returns and W-2 forms (and other records of income). A full list of what you need is at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Tax return not completed at the time you apply? Estimate the tax information, apply, and correct information later.

STEP 4 — Complete the FAFSA between Jan. 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009 (no exceptions to either date!). BUT, apply as soon as possible on or after Jan. 1 to meet school and state aid deadlines (see note at bottom of page). Apply online (the faster and easier way) by going to www.fafsa.ed.gov.

STEP 5 — Federal Student Aid will send you a *Student Aid Report* (SAR)—which is a summary of the information from your FAFSA. Review your SAR, and if necessary, make changes or corrections and submit your SAR for reprocessing. Your complete, correct SAR will contain your Expected Family Contribution (EFC)—the number used to determine your federal student aid eligibility.

STEP 6 — If you are selected for verification, your school's financial aid office will ask you to submit tax returns and other documents, as appropriate. Be sure to meet the school's deadlines, or you will not receive federal student aid.

STEP 7 — Whether you're selected for verification or not, make sure the financial aid office at the school has all the information needed to determine your eligibility.

STEP 8 — All students: Contact the financial aid office if you have any questions about the aid being offered.

First-time applicants: Review award letters from schools and compare the aid being offered. Decide which school to attend based on a combination of (a) how well the school suits your needs (programs of study and academics) and (b) its affordability after all aid is taken into account.

Note: You also might be able to get financial aid from your state government, your school or a private scholarship. Research nonfederal aid early (ideally, start in the spring of your junior year of high school). Be sure to meet all application deadlines!

Source: Federal Student Aid. 2007. *The Guide to Federal Student Aid | 2008-09*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Paying for College

Purpose: By this point, all the earlier information about paying for college should be reinforced, but students still need more detailed information to guide them in the upcoming years. Students and families should already have a general idea of how they will pay for college and what resources are available to help with the costs. However, pointed information that is immediately relevant should take precedence at this stage.

Target Information

Work-Study: Provide students with general information that allows them to understand work-study opportunities.

Tax Benefits: Relate to students and parents that they may qualify for certain tax benefits after paying for college.

Sample Resources

Work-Study:

- **Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid (2008-2009).** This federal publication provides a comprehensive explanation of the three forms of aid available through the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office: grants, loans, and work-study. Information specific to work-study can be found on page eight. http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/FundingEduBeyondHighSchool_0809.pdf

- **What Every Student Should Know about Federal Aid.** This guide, created by the American Council on Education, provides an overview of the federal student aid programs. Information about work-study is found on page 14. http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2005paying4college.pdf

- **Your College Student Employment Website.** Most colleges have a work-study website that answers questions about eligibility, work hours, earning limits, and rates of pay. Sometimes this website is located under career services and other times it is administered by the financial aid office.

Tax Benefits:

- **Tax Benefits for Education. IRS Publication 970 (2007).** Though this information is very dense, it is the most complete and accurate source of tax information related to higher education expenses. Program officials can use this guide as a reference when counseling parents and families.
http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p970.pdf

- **NASFAA Parent and Student Guide to Federal Tax Benefits for Tuition and Fees.** This guide provides comprehensive information about tax benefits for college.
http://www.StudentAid.org/TaxBenefitsPSIntro.html

- **What Every Student Should Know About Federal Aid.** This American Council on Education publication includes information on tax benefits on page 17.
http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2005paying4college.pdf

- **Peter V. Laurenzo. 2002.** *College Financial Aid: How to Get Your Fair Share*. **Hudson Financial Press:** This book is designed for parents, students, and guidance counselors. It includes information about tax incentives and answers questions about eligibility.

Sample Figure

This is a sample of a website for finding work-study jobs, provided by the University of Notre Dame. Students can search for different types of jobs, find out how much each job pays, and look up contact information if they are interested in applying. While information at this level of detail may not be necessary until students have decided which college to attend, showing students how to access this information ahead of time will make the process easier when they do it on their own.

Source: http://www.nd.edu/~finaid/jobboard/

Unit Plan – 12th Grade

Forms and Processes

Purpose: Students must understand the forms and processes related to financial aid in order to make informed decisions about college. Being able to navigate the process of receiving financial aid is especially important to students for whom money is a major factor in deciding whether to attend college. For all students, the importance of financial aid in their decision making is underscored by the ability of students and families to understand the steps necessary to access that money.

Target Information

Financial Aid Award Letter: Familiarize students and parents with the layout and information provided in an award letter. Walk students through sample award letters before they receive their own to make the process less daunting. Note the difference in the award letter between money that needs to be repaid and money that does not. Compare several award letters noting differences in these types of amounts.

Disbursement: Direct students to the financial aid office of the individual school the student will be attending because the method and timing of disbursement will be different for each college. Inform students that any grant or scholarship aid exceeding direct charges can result in a refund check that can be used to pay for other expenses.

Reapplication: Inform students that it is necessary to reapply for aid every year, which can include completing federal, state, and institutional forms. Remind them that the aid award is subject to change upon reapplication.

Sample Resources

Financial Aid Award Letter:

- **Financial Aid Award Letter Comparison Tool**. The Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) offers a tool that allows students to input information to compare financial aid awards from different colleges. Though the site is hosted by a Vermont organization, the information is widely applicable to students in other states as well, as it contains broader information on college planning and financial aid in general. Look for the Award Letter Comparison Tool under the Calculate Your Costs heading. http://services.vsac.org/ilwwcm/connect/VSAC/Pay+for+College/

- **Financial Aid Award Letters: Decision Time.** This website from *Peterson's* provides some questions that students and families should ask themselves when analyzing an award letter.
  http://www.petersons.com/common/article.asp?id=984&path=ug.pfs.advice&sponsor=1

- **Princeton Review: Understanding the Financial Aid Award Letter.** A site explaining award letters, including links to steps to take after receipt of the award letter, and a sample award letter.
  http://www.princetonreview.com/college/finance/articles/compare/aidawardletter.asp

Disbursement:

- **Your Federal Student Loans: Learn the Basics and Manage Your Debt.** This guide from the U.S. Department of Education explains many aspects of federal student loans, including how to get the money and how to return funds you may not need. Information about disbursement is found on page ten.
  http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/Loan-pub-working-draft-updated.pdf

- **Peter Laurenzo. 2002.** *College Financial Aid: How to Get Your Fair Share, 6th Edition*. **Hudson Financial Press.** This book is designed for parents, students, and guidance counselors. It explains how the aid process works and how to evaluate an aid package, among other information related to planning and saving for financing a college education.

Reapplication:

- **FAFSA Information, U.S. Department of Education.** This website directs students to links where they can reapply without having to re-enter all of their financial aid information.
  http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/fafsa.jsp?tab=funding

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Sample Figures

This is a sample of an award letter that a student might receive. Counselors could walk students through this and help them understand each piece. Focusing on the amount of loans that need to be repaid is vital.

UNIVERSITY OF LEARNING
FINANCIAL AID AWARD LETTER
2003-2004

Date: 1/21/04
ID#: 000000009

Award Information

Your awards are based on the information you reported on your Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Your eligibility for these awards may change if new information is received, including information we may receive with regard to your Satisfactory Academic Progress. The University of Learning reserves the right to adjust your awards.

Please read the Award Letter Guide, enclosed with your initial Award Letter. The Guide explains how to complete the financial aid process. Award information, the Guide, and terms and conditions for receiving aid at the University of Learning are online. You are responsible for understanding these terms and eligibility requirements.

Awards

We are pleased to offer the following assistance for the 2003-2004 academic year.

	Fall	Spring	Summer	Total
Federal Pell Grant	$1,150	$1,150	$0	$2,300
Federal Perkins Loan	$1,000	$1,750	$0	$2,750
Federal Work Study Program	$1,000	$1,000	$0	$2,000
University of Learning Assistance Grant	$2,000	$2,000	$0	$4,000
University of Learning Assistance Grant	$0	$1,000	$0	$1,000
Direct Loan Subsidized	$1,313	$2,187	$0	$3,500
DC Tuition Assistance Grant Program	$3,257	$3,257	$0	$6,514
Other External Aid	$750	$750	$0	$1,500
Total:	$10,470	$13,094	$0	$23,564
Term Bill Credit	$5,444	$8,055	$0	$13,499
(see Award Letter Guide)				

What To Do Next:

- Verify that accurate assumptions have been used to determine your awards.
- Carefully review and follow the instructions on the Data Changes Form.
- To reduce or decline all or part of your loans, you must complete and return the Data Change Form.
- We will assume you fully accept the awards above unless you submit changes to us immediately.
- Return corrections and required documents promptly.
- Retain this letter for your records.

Source:
http://www.educationplanner.com/education_planner/deciding_article.asp?sponsor=2859&articleName=Financial_Aid_Award_Letter_1

Though this graph is not an award letter, it might be helpful for students to see a graphic breakdown of a possible financial aid package. The information also provides an estimation of loan amounts a student would need to borrow.

FIGURE 18: SAMPLE FINANCIAL AID PACKAGE
STATE COLLEGE, RESIDENT STUDENT

Total Expenses..............................$14,500

Need-Based Grant Aid....................$7,300
   Federal...............................$5,300
   State..................................$2,000

Work and Loan Burden....................$7,200
   Federal Work Study.............$2,100
   Federal Direct/FFELP Loan..$2,600
   Federal Perkins Loan..........$2,500

Note: The actual work and loan burden facing students may exceed the amounts above because of lower state need-based aid and Federal Perkins loan amounts.
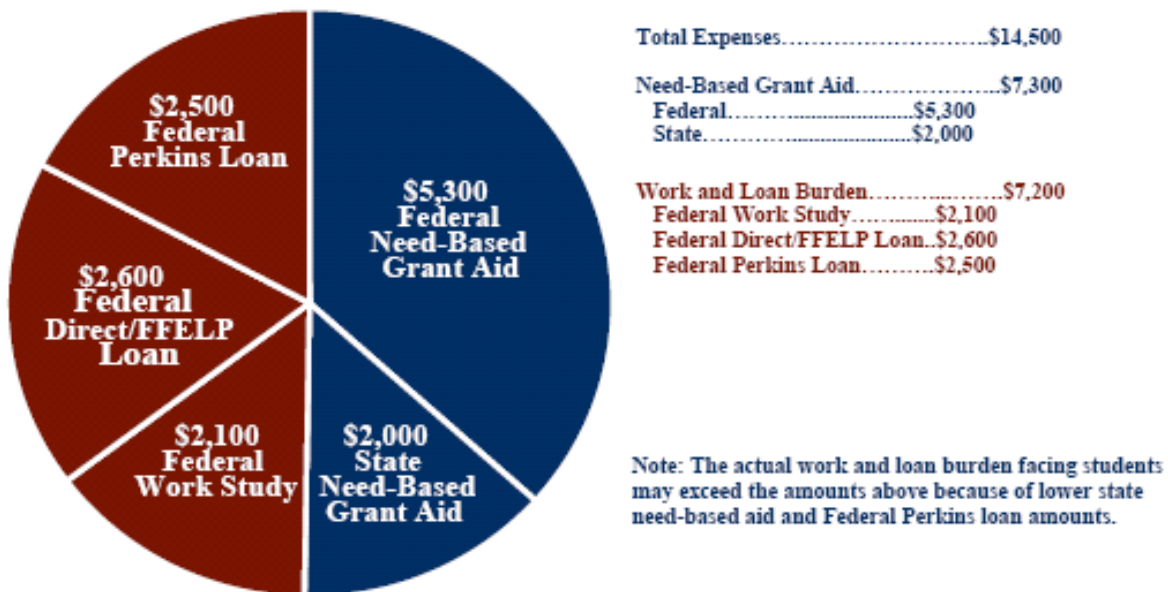
Source: Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. 2006. *Mortgaging Our Future*. Washington DC.

EPILOGUE: NEXT STEPS

This report has proposed a comprehensive system of delivering early financial aid information to help students make the college attendance decision. The report addresses the necessary information, guidelines for delivering that information, and a timeline for dissemination. As a program moves from conceptualizing its own system of delivering early financial aid information to implementation, several questions should be addressed that can only be answered by practitioners. The answers to some may be immediately apparent, but others will require thought and discussion to determine effective ways of integrating the delivery of information within the program's current structure. The following inquiries lay out the initial questions programs might ask:

- **What are the financial aid information needs of the service population?** There are variations in preparation among populations, and assessing the basic knowledge level of a program's students will enable the intervention to focus on the framework areas of highest concern.

- **Which of the guidelines are currently in practice and how can the program be expanded to include others?** A program may already incorporate some guidelines, but practitioners should also brainstorm about others that can be integrated into the current approach.

- **How does comprehensive financial aid information delivery fit in with the program's other goals?** Early intervention efforts cover many areas, and practitioners must determine how to balance these multiple goals.

- **How will the information be delivered over the complete timeline from middle to high school?** Most intervention programs do not work with the same students for seven years; thus, exploring partnerships with programs that target other age groups may be helpful in ensuring all information is delivered.

- **What are the resources available to devote to adopting this system of information delivery?** Limitations on time, money, and staff may necessitate a step-by-step implementation, and high-priority areas must be identified.

The Advisory Committee's work does not end with this report, which is the most complete resource of compiled information and research on early financial aid information to date. The Committee plans to disseminate this blueprint to teachers, guidance counselors, principals, superintendents, college access professionals, outreach organizations, the early intervention community, and foundations, as well as local, state, and federal policymakers through its network of contacts.

The Advisory Committee also offers to serve as a resource to consult with any individual or organization trying to employ this framework, timeline, and set of guidelines to improve information efforts. With the application of this comprehensive and integrated

system of financial aid information delivery, we hope to help achieve a higher rate of access and persistence in postsecondary education across the country.

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APPENDIX A

PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTED IN THIS REPORT

Intervene by 6th Grade and Continue Through High School

Kids 2 College   http://www.kids2collegedc.org/about/whatIsK2C.asp

Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI)   http://www.usc.edu/ext-relations/nai/

Involve Parents and Families in the College-Going Process

Access ASU   http://www.asu.edu/accessasu/principles.html

Puente Project   http://www.elpuenteproject.com/

Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering   http://www.dapcep.org/
Program (DAPCEP)

Mentor Each Student

Cleveland Scholarship Program   http://www.cspohio.org/csp/AboutUs.aspx

Baltimore College Bound   http://www.collegeboundfoundation.org/

Sponsor-A-Scholar   http://philadelphiafutures.org/sas_high_school/

Complete the FAFSA

College Goal Sunday   http://collegegoalsundayusa.org/

Cash for College   http://www.calgrants.org/index.cfm?navId=16

College Match   http://www.collegematchla.org/

Adapt the Program to the Individual School Community

Neighborhood Academic Initiative   http://www.usc.edu/ext-relations/nai/

GEAR UP   http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html

Integrate Language and Cultural Differences

Cash for College   http://www.calgrants.org/index.cfm?navId=16

CAL-SOAP, Central California   http://www.calsoap.com/

Partner with Community Organizations

Reach4Success   http://www.reach4success.org/page/page/2244661.htm

Take Stock in Children   http://www.takestockinchildren.com/

Encourage Peer Integration

Posse Foundation   http://www.possefoundation.org/

Puente Project   http://www.elpuenteproject.com/

Formulate Program Evaluation Standards

College Match   http://www.collegematchla.org/

Project GRAD   http://www.projectgrad.org/

Admission Possible   http://www.admissionpossible.org/

Discuss Financial Literacy alongside Financial Aid

Aggie Summer Institute   https://financialaid.tamu.edu/summercamp/

Virginia Tech Financial Literacy   http://www.finaid.vt.edu/nestegg/
Program

PROGRAMS CONTACTED BY ACSFA

Program	Contact	Website	Location
Aggie Summer Institute	Rene Valdez	https://financialaid.tamu.edu/summercamp/	TX
ASU University Initiatives	Dr. Mistalene Calleroz	http://www.asu.edu/accessasu/principles.html	AZ
California Student Opportunity and Access Program	Beto Hernandez	http://www.calsoap.com/	CA
Cash for College	Alma Salazar	http://www.calgrants.org/index.cfm?navId=16	CA
Chicago Public Schools	Regina Dixon	http://www.postsecondary.cps.k12.il.us/	IL
Cleveland Scholarship Program	Maria Boss	http://www.cspohio.org/csp/AboutUs.aspx	OH
College Goal Sunday	Marcia Weston	http://collegegoalsundayusa.org/	DC
College Match	Harley Frankel	http://www.collegematchla.org/	CA
The College Place	Felice Douglas	http://www.thecollegeplace.com/	VA
College Success Foundation	Steve Thorndill	http://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/tacoma/index.htm	WA
College Summit	Jeraul Mackey	http://www.collegesummit.org/	DC, MD, VA
ECMC Foundation	March Kessler	http://www.ecmcfoundation.org/	NM, OR, VA
FinancialAid Podcast	Chris Penn	http://www.financialaidpodcast.com/	MA
Fulfillment Fund	Sherry Banks PhD	http://www.fulfillment.org/	CA
Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation	Latoya Sykes	https://www.mygreatlakes.org	OH
I AM	Victor Garcia	No website available.	CA
The Kauffman Foundation	Dennis Cheek	http://www.kauffman.org/	KS

Kids2College	Judy Bunnell & Andrea Thomas	http://kids2collegedc.org/about/whatIsK2C.asp	DC, MD, VA
National College Access Network	Kim Kiely	http://www.collegeaccess.org/NCAN/	DC
Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI)	Kim Barrios Thomas	http://www.usc.edu/ext-relations/nai/	CA
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency	Vee Blaine	http://www.pheaa.org/	PA
Project College Bound	Linda Zimring	No website available.	CA
Puente Program	Frank Garcia	http://www.puente.net/	CA
Reach4Success	Jane Richstein	http://www.reach4success.org/page/page/2244661.htm	DC
The Sallie Mae Fund	Kathleen Delaski	http://www.salliemae.com/about/sm_fund/	DC
Texas Guaranty	Richard Sapp	http://www.tgslc.org/	TX
TRIO	Karen Keim	http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html	
Virginia College Guides	Nicole Hurd	http://www.virginia.edu/cue/guide.html	VA

PROGRAMS THAT PARTICIPATED IN FOCUS GROUPS

Program	Contact	Website	Location
Admission Possible	Jim McCorkell	http://www.admissionpossible.org/	MN
Aggie Summer Institute	Rene Valdez	https://financialaid.tamu.edu/summercamp/	TX
ASU University Initiatives	Dr. Mistalene Calleroz	http://www.asu.edu/accessasu/principles.html	AZ
Chicago Public Schools	Regina Dixon	http://www.postsecondary.cps.k12.il.us/	IL
Cleveland Scholarship Program	Maria Boss	http://www.cspohio.org/csp/AboutUs.aspx	OH
College Match	Harley Frankel	http://www.collegematchla.org/	CA
GEAR UP	Weiya Liang	http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html	
Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI)	Kim Barrios Thomas	http://www.usc.edu/ext-relations/nai/	CA
Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency	Vee Blaine	http://www.pheaa.org/	PA
each4Success	Jane Richstein	http://www.reach4success.org/page/page/2244661.htm	DC
TRIO in Maine	Karen Keim	http://mets.maine.edu/ABOUT/	ME
Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority	Brian McGill	http://www.uheaa.org/	UT
Virginia College Guides	Mark Tenekjian	http://www.virginia.edu/cue/guide.html	VA
	Maggie Lewis		

APPENDIX B: ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Ms. Judith N. Flink
Chairperson
Executive Director of University Student
Financial Services
The University of Illinois
Appointed by:
The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert (R-IL)

Dr. Claude O. Pressnell, Jr.
Vice-Chairperson
President
Tennessee Independent Colleges and
Universities Association (TICUA)
Appointed by:
The Honorable Theodore Stevens (R-AK)

Mr. Clare M. Cotton
1272 Beacon Street - #8
Brookline, Massachusetts 02446
Appointed by:
The Honorable Robert C. Byrd (D-WV)

Mr. René A. Drouin
President and CEO
New Hampshire Higher Education
Assistance Foundation
Appointed by:
The Honorable Theodore Stevens (R-AK)

Ms. Norine Fuller
Executive Director
The Fashion Institute of Design and
Merchandising
Appointed by:
The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert (R-IL)

Mr. Scott A. Giles
Vice President for Policy, Research, and
Planning
and Assistant to the Board of Directors
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation
Appointed by:
The Honorable Margaret Spellings

Mr. Allison G. Jones
Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic
Affairs
Office of the Chancellor
California State University
Appointed by:
The Honorable Margaret Spellings

Mr. Darryl A. Marshall
Director, Student Financial Aid
Florida State University
Appointed by:
The Honorable Roderick R. Paige

Mr. Juan C. O'Connell
Student Member
Appointed by:
The Honorable Margaret Spellings

Mr. Joseph A. Russo
Director, Student Financial Strategies
University of Notre Dame
Appointed by:
The Honorable Margaret Spellings

Mr. Robert M. Shireman
Founder and President
The Institute for College Access & Success,
Inc.
Appointed by:
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)

APPENDIX C: ADVISORY COMMITTEE STAFF

William J. Goggin
Executive Director

Michelle Asha Cooper
Deputy Director

Julie Johnson
Associate Director

Brent J. Evans
Associate Director

Jodut Hashmi
Assistant Director

Zakiya Smith
Assistant Director

Jeneva Stone
Senior Writer

Tracy D. Jones
Senior Administrative Assistant

APPENDIX D:
Authorizing Legislation

The Advisory Committee was established by an act of Congress in 1986. Section 491 of the Higher Education Act as amended contains the Committee's Congressional mandate. A copy of this section as it appears in the law follows:

SEC. 491. ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE.--(1) There is established in the Department an independent Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (hereafter in this section referred to as the "Advisory Committee") which shall provide advice and counsel to the Congress and to the Secretary on student financial aid matters. (2) The purpose of the Advisory Committee is-- (A) to provide extensive knowledge and understanding of the Federal, State, and institutional programs of postsecondary student assistance; (B) to provide technical expertise with regard to systems of needs analysis and application forms; and (C) to make recommendations that will result in the maintenance of access to post-secondary education for low- and middle-income students.

(b) INDEPENDENCE OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE.--In the exercise of its functions, powers, and duties, the Advisory Committee shall be independent of the Secretary and the other offices and officers of the Department. Notwithstanding Department of Education policies and regulations, the Advisory Committee shall exert independent control of its budget allocations, expenditures and staffing levels, personnel decisions and processes, procurements, and other administrative and management functions. The Advisory Committee's administration and management shall be subject to the usual and customary Federal audit procedures. Reports, publications, and other documents of the Advisory Committee, including such reports, publications, and documents in electronic form, shall not be subject to review by the Secretary. The recommendations of the Committee shall not be subject to review or approval by any officer in the executive branch, but may be submitted to the Secretary for comment prior to submission to the Congress in accordance with subsection (f). The Secretary's authority to terminate advisory committees of the Department pursuant to section 448(b) of the General Education Provisions Act ceased to be effective on June 23, 1983.

(c) MEMBERSHIP.--(1) The Advisory Committee shall have 11 members of which-- (A) 3 members shall be appointed by the President pro tempore of the Senate upon the recommendation of the Majority Leader and the Minority Leader, (B) 3 members shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives upon the recommendation of the Majority Leader and the Minority Leader, and (C) 5 members shall be appointed by the Secretary including, but not limited to representatives of States, institutions of higher education, secondary schools, credit institutions, students, and parents. (2) Not less than 7 members of the Advisory Committee shall be individuals who have been appointed on the basis of technical qualifications, professional standing and demonstrated knowledge in the fields of higher education and student aid administration, need analysis, financing postsecondary education, student aid delivery, and the operations and financing of student loan guarantee agencies.

(d) FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMITTEE.--The Advisory Committee shall--(1) develop, review, and comment annually upon the system of needs analysis established under part F of this title; (2) monitor, apprise, and evaluate the effectiveness of student aid delivery and recommend improvements; (3) recommend data collection needs and student information requirements which would improve access and choice for eligible students under this title and assist the Department of education in improving the delivery of student aid; (4) assess the impact of legislative and administrative policy proposals; (5) review and comment upon, prior to promulgation, all regulations affecting programs under this title, including proposed regulations; (6) recommend to the Congress and to the Secretary such studies, surveys, and analyses of student financial assistance programs, policies, and practices, including the special needs of low-income, disadvantaged, and nontraditional students, and the means by which the needs may be met, but nothing in this section shall authorize the committee to perform such studies, surveys, or analyses; (7) review and comment upon standards by which financial need is measured in determining eligibility for Federal student assistance programs; (8) appraise the adequacies and deficiencies of current student financial aid information resources and services and evaluate the effectiveness of current student aid information programs; and (9) make special efforts to advise Members of Congress and such Members' staff of the findings and recommendations made pursuant to this paragraph.

(e) OPERATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE.--(1) Each member of the Advisory Committee shall be appointed for a term of 3 years, except that, of the members first appointed-- (A) 4 shall be appointed for a term of 1 year; (B) 4 shall be appointed for a term of 2 years; and (C) 3 shall be appointed for a term of 3 years, as designated at the time of appointment by the Secretary. (2) Any member appointed to fill a vacancy occurring prior to the expiration of the term of a predecessor shall be appointed only for the remainder of such term. A member of the Advisory Committee shall, upon request, continue to serve after the expiration of a term until a successor has been appointed. A member of the Advisory Committee may be reappointed to successive terms on the Advisory Committee. (3) No officers or full-time employees of the Federal Government shall serve as members of the Advisory Committee. (4) The Advisory Committee shall elect a Chairman and a Vice Chairman from among its members. (5) Six members of the Advisory Committee shall constitute a quorum. (6) The Advisory Committee shall meet at the call of the Chairman or a majority of its members.

(f) SUBMISSION TO DEPARTMENT FOR COMMENT.--The Advisory Committee may submit its proposed recommendations to the Department of Education for comment for a period not to exceed 30 days in each instance.

(g) COMPENSATION AND EXPENSES.--(1) Members of the Advisory Committee may each receive reimbursement for travel expenses incident to attending Advisory Committee meetings, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, as authorized by section 5703 of title 5, United States
Code, for persons in the Government service employed intermittently.

(h) PERSONNEL AND RESOURCES.--(1) The Advisory Committee may appoint such personnel as may be necessary by the Chairman without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, and may be paid without regard to the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of

such title relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates, but no individual so appointed shall be paid in excess of the rate authorized for GS-18 of the General Schedule. The Advisory Committee may appoint not more than 1 full-time equivalent, nonpermanent, consultant without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code. The Advisory Committee shall not be required by the Secretary to reduce personnel to meet agency personnel reduction goals. (2) In carrying out its duties under the Act, the Advisory Committee shall consult with other Federal agencies, representatives of State and local governments, and private organizations to the extent feasible. (3)(A) The Advisory Committee is authorized to secure directly from any executive department, bureau, agency, board, commission, office, independent establishment, or instrumentality information, suggestions, estimates, and statistics for the purpose of this section and each such department, bureau, agency, board, commission, office, independent establishment, or instrumentality is authorized and directed, to the extent permitted by law, to furnish such information, suggestions, estimates, and statistics directly to the Advisory Committee, upon request made by the Chairman. (B) The Advisory Committee may enter into contracts for the acquisition of information, suggestions, estimates, and statistics for the purpose of this section. (4) The Advisory Committee is authorized to obtain the services of experts and consultants without regard to section 3109 of title 5, United States Code and to set pay in accordance with such section. (5) The head of each Federal agency shall, to the extent not prohibited by law, cooperate with the Advisory Committee in carrying out this section. (6) The Advisory Committee is authorized to utilize, with their consent, the services, personnel, information, and facilities of other Federal, State, local, and private agencies with or without reimbursement.

(i) AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.--In each fiscal year not less than $800,000, shall be available from the amount appropriated for each such fiscal year from salaries and expenses of the Department for the costs of carrying out the provisions of this section.

(j) SPECIAL ANALYSES AND ACTIVITIES.--The Advisory Committee shall-- (1) monitor and evaluate the modernization of student financial aid systems and delivery processes, including the implementation of a performance-based organization within the Department, and report to Congress regarding such modernization on not less than an annual basis, including recommendations for improvement; (2) assess the adequacy of current methods for disseminating information about programs under this title and recommend improvements, as appropriate, regarding early needs assessment and information for first-year secondary school students; (3) assess and make recommendations concerning the feasibility and degree of use of appropriate technology in the application for, and delivery and management of, financial assistance under this title, as well as policies that promote use of such technology to reduce cost and enhance service and program integrity, including electronic application and reapplication, just-in-time delivery of funds, reporting of disbursements and reconciliation; (4) assess the implications of distance education on student eligibility and other requirements for financial assistance under this title, and make recommendations that will enhance access to postsecondary education through distance education while maintaining access, through on-campus instruction at eligible institutions, and program integrity; and (5) make recommendations to the Secretary regarding redundant or outdated provisions of and regulations under this Act, consistent with the Secretary's requirements under section 498B.

(k) TERM OF THE COMMITTEE--Not withstanding the sunset and charter provisions of the
Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. I) or any other statute or regulation, the Advisory Committee shall be authorized until October 1, 2004.