

College and Career development is an important part of School Counselor's role across all grade levels in the state of Oregon and also United States according to *Oregon Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Framework* (Oregon Department of Education, 2012) and *ASCA National Standards for Students* (American School counselor Association, 2004). Especially, with legislative policies such as Oregon's "40-40-20" goals (Oregon University System, 2012), by 2025 it is aspired that 80% of the young Oregonian will have some college degree in order to meet the growing demands of economy. In this type of scenario, it is extremely important for the students to receive consistent college and career guidance in schools.

According to *Lumina Foundation's Report* (2013), 39% of Oregonian between 25-64 holds a two- or four-year college degree. This number is at par with the overall U.S. data. However, it also shows that young Oregonians in the age group of 25-34 are less educated, than the older generation, at 38%. It is also lower compared to the overall U.S. average of 40% for the same age group. Not only that, according to *From Goal to Reality 40-40-20 Report* (2012) the highest education levels of age 25+ individuals in Oregon varies by ethnicity. This report cites data from US Census, American Community Survey 2010, and founds that 44% Hispanic/Latino have less than high school education compared to 11% of total Oregonian and 8% White.

Cedar Park Middle School, the research intervention site, in Beaverton School District has about 18% Hispanic/Latino students. The 2012-13 *School Report Card* shows the same gaps in academic achievement between Hispanic (Latino) or Black (African American) students and their White or Asian counterparts. For the academic year 2013-14, the *School Improvement Plan* laid emphasis on working with Hispanic/Latino students (second major ethnic group after White) to improve their academic achievement. Simultaneously, when a few of the school students were informally surveyed for the counseling purposes, based on behavioral data and teachers'

referral, it was found that some of these students had limited educational goals whereas others had none. On the other hand, these students reported perception of high expectations from their parents to succeed in school and have better education. Many of these students would be the first generation to go to a college if they choose that path. Majority of these students are left on their own with limited adult guidance to prepare for higher education. They rely exclusively on school for career guidance.

Based on these information, in this research-study, following research questions were asked:

1. Whether a field-trip to a local university and meeting successful college Latina students would influence middle school students aspirations to go for higher education?
2. Whether the students would learn about the available post-secondary options and would it help to develop their own post-secondary plan at the end of the study?
3. Whether the overall career exploration intervention with a small group of at-risk Latina students would increase their commitment towards their academic work?

These questions are significant as it tends to identify effective intervention strategies that is culturally sensitive with at-risk middle school students. It tries to address equitable practices in terms of career development (Welton & Martinez, 2013). If schools want to address the achievement gap with the at-risk first generation students they must look for a solid career related work. School counselors, along with teachers and community, play a vital role for career and college education. Traditionally, high school counselors work with students in their process of high school graduation, post-high school planning, applications and reference letters. Not all middle school counselors or teachers provide career related exposure to the students.

In this study, the researcher examined the effect of career awareness and career exploration through different mediums of intervention. First of all, this study would help the middle school counselors to gain more information about using an intervention such as a university visit. This type of intervention is not planned for the first time as several universities offer campus tours and visits. However, through this study, we would be able to identify the students' experience of not only visiting the local university but also meeting successful college Hispanic/Latina students. This opportunity would inform whether the middle school students were able to connect with their college role models who had same ethnic and racial background as well as similar stories of systemic barriers and experience of microaggressions in the educational environment.

Secondly, this study would examine the effect of career exploration workshops and individual post-secondary planning meetings at the middle school level. Several research studies support this types of interventions (Arrington, 2000; Curry, Belser, & Binns, 2013; Johnson, 2000; Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez & Cooper, 2009). This particular study would help the counselors understand whether a front load of information about post-secondary planning through series of interventions would help the middle school students. Whether it would lead the students to understand the connection between their academic work in middle and high school to that of their career and future life. Hence this study is significant due to it's head-start nature regarding career development. Particularly, in this particular school district, students receives career development information at their high school. However, that might be very late for some students as found by Johnson (2000).

Thus, this study would contribute to the existing research and determine the cumulative impact of different short-term interventions on seventh grade at-risk Latina students in an urban middle school setting.