

Helping Parents Fill Their Role in Preparing Middle School Students for College

A recent report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy, *From Aspirations to Action*, shared findings from a national survey of middle school students' parents concerning the college application process. While most middle school students cite their parents as the primary source of college information, more than a third of parents had no source of information on college, college preparation, or the application process. While most (87%) expect their children to go to college, slightly less than half (45%) had not yet taken any steps to plan for college. Of those who had started planning, the most common activity was starting to save for tuition. The reported rates of planning and saving varied by parental level of education.

The report included a review of an intervention and awareness program called Kids to College (K2C) developed by Sallie Mae (who also funded this study), with the Association of Independent Colleges and the University of Massachusetts. The program brings together low-income middle school students with local college students and staff to participate in sessions exploring careers, study skills, and high school course choices, and includes a visit to a college campus. While 91% of K2C students reported that their parents expected them to go to college, less than two-thirds (62%) reported that their teachers expected them to go to college, and only 37% felt their friends expected them to go. School counselors can play an important role in managing expectations among staff and students through instruction and college fair activities.

The report provides a clear snapshot into middle school college planning activities and highlights some activities school counselors can implement to assist their students and families. Two recommendations from the report directly impact counselors. First, state and local governments should coordinate with middle and high schools to ensure the distribution of information about college, the application process, and financial aid, including increased support to school counselors. Second, school counselors should reach out to parents and students to explain the importance of course selection and planning for college starting in middle school.

For a copy of the complete report visit <http://www.ihep.org/Publications/ihep-publications.cfm>. For more information about K2C visit www.thesalliemae.com/smfnew/pdf/K2C_InfoPacket_Final.pdf.

The report is based on a sample of 50,000 parents of whom 10,000 responded. Reported percentages are 95% certain to be plus or minus a 3.5 percentage points. K2C data were collected in 2007 from programs in California, Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, and North Carolina.

While most middle school students cite their parents as the primary source of college information, more than a third of parents had no source of information on college, college preparation, or the application process.

Eleven percent of parents could not identify any form of financial aid, including scholarships or grants.

Kids to College (K2C) is an awareness program for low-income students.

Counselors can play a key role in expanding outreach to parents and students starting in middle school.