

**SUPPORTING FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS IN THEIR JOURNEY TO
COLLEGE SUCCESS**

by

Kristin Brown-Massey

An educational leadership portfolio submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational
Leadership

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The doctoral journey was never, if I would obtain this prestigious degree it was always when I would begin the journey. From the beginning of my educational career, God has guided me every step of the way. Despite the challenges and obstacles that I faced, I remained steadfast in the words from Isaiah 41:10, 'Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.' I am deeply grateful for the divine guidance and unwavering support that God has provided me every step of the way.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xii
Chapter	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 PROBLEM ADDRESSED.....	3
Problem Statement.....	3
Organizational Context.....	5
CRHS Programs and Demographics.....	5
Curriculum and High-Quality Instructional Materials.....	6
Advanced Course Offerings.....	6
Impact of COVID-19 on CRHS Advanced Course Offerings.....	8
PSAT and SAT Assessments.....	9
Organizational Role at CRHS.....	11
My Personal and Professional Journey.....	11
3 IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES.....	13
Strategy 1.....	13
Strategy 2.....	14
Strategy 3.....	15
Addressing the Problem.....	15
Artifact 1: Logic Model.....	15
Artifact 2: Literature Synthesis.....	15
Artifact 3: Focus Groups.....	16
Artifact 4: Executive Summary.....	17

Artifact 5: Codebook.....	17
Artifact 6: Teacher Guide.....	22
Artifact 7: Parent Presentation.....	24
Artifact 8: Student Success Portfolio.....	25
4 IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES RESULTS.....	27
Improvement Strategy 1.....	27
Overview.....	27
Logic Model.....	28
Strategy 1.....	28
Strategy 2.....	29
Strategy 3.....	29
Literature Review.....	30
Social Capital.....	30
Family and Community Involvement.....	30
Academic Preparation.....	31
Mental Health Concerns.....	32
Financial Constraints.....	32
Improvement Strategy 2.....	33
Overview.....	33
Focus Groups.....	34
Executive Summary.....	35
Teacher Guide.....	36
Parent Presentation.....	37
Improvement Strategy 3.....	37
Overview.....	37
Student Success Portfolio	37
5 REFLECTIONS ON DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION.....	39
Improvement Strategy 1.....	39
Improvement Strategy 2.....	44
Improvement Strategy 3.....	48
6 MOTIVATION.....	51

Personal Goals.....	51
ELP Development.....	52
My Journey.....	55
Appendix.....	63
A ELP Proposal Document.....	63
B First Generation Logic Model.....	83
C Literature Review.....	84
D An Analysis of Focus Group Findings/Executive Summary.....	106
E Code Book.....	122
F Teacher Guide.....	127
G Parent Presentation.....	129
H Student Success Portfolio.....	152
I Teacher Focus Group Protocol.....	159
J Student Focus Group Protocol.....	161
K Parent Focus Group.....	165

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Caesar Rodney High School Demographics 2022–2023 School Year	5
Table 2 Caesar Rodney High School Dual Enrollment 4-Year Enrollment.....	8
Table 3 Caesar Rodney High School Advanced Placement 5-Year Enrollment.....	9
Table 4 CRHS and State PSAT/SAT Data 2021–2022 School Year.....	10
Table 5 CRHS Yearly Discussion Topics.....	15
Table 6 Focus Group Demographics.....	33

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 ELP Structure	25
Figure 2 First-Generation Model	27
Figure 3 First-Generation Model	37

ABSTRACT

Our educational system must constantly change and evolve to fully equip our students with the support and resources needed to succeed. However, the needs of first-generation students—students who desire to go to college but whose parents did not attend—are oftentimes not considered as part of these educational changes. These students encounter significant barriers in accessing the resources and support that can aid them in preparing for college and being successful once they get there. Research suggests that to address these obstacles comprehensively, schools need to better understand their responsibility in providing access to knowledge and resources that can help these students be successful. The aim of this Educational Leadership Portfolio is to address the lack of preparation of first-generation students at Caesar Rodney High School and identify precollege interventions that can enhance these students' ability to thrive in a college environment. These strategies include identifying the students early in their academic careers and providing the support they need as they move through high school.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Caesar Rodney School District (CRSD) provides educational services to over 7,000 students from K-12. Educational services are provided through one early childhood center: McIlvaine Early Childhood Center; seven elementary schools: Star Hill, David E. Robinson, Nellie H. Stokes, W. Reily Brown, Major George E. Welch, W.B. Simpson and Allen Frear; four middle schools: Fred Fifer, Air Base, Magnolia, and Postlewaite, one county school for students with disabilities: John S. Charlton Countywide Programs, and one high school: Caesar Rodney High School. The district and the high school are committed to excelling in education by developing exemplary programs in the areas of the 4As: academics, arts, athletics, and school atmosphere. Additionally, the four 4A's are embedded in the vision and mission of the district:

Vision – The vision is to see CRSD expand and offer more opportunities and programs for both the students and the community to cater to the changing needs of the global community. Its expansion will be a big achievement because it is the center of learning in our community. We will focus on continued and enhanced academic achievement, expanded educational opportunities for the community, and necessary facilities and resources.

Mission - Recognizing the value of each individual and building upon our commitment to excellence, the CRSD is dedicated to the mission of preparing students for a successful,

productive, and purposeful life in a diverse, global community by providing quality educational opportunities for all students; and promoting caring attitudes through the school community.

However, although the mission and vision statements highlight the district's dedication to providing quality and expanded educational opportunities for students and the community, anecdotal evidence from CRHS graduates, along with an increasing amount of research, suggests that CRHS is not providing the educational opportunities to one important group of students. Research demonstrates that approximately 56% of all college students are from families with parents or guardians who have not earned a Bachelor's or higher degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These students are commonly referred to as first-generation college students (FGSs), and in the last decade, representation of FGS at U.S. colleges and universities has risen from approximately 30% of students in 2011 (Weaver, 2011) to over 40% of first-year students in 2022 (Startz, 2022). This rise makes FGSs a significant educational demographic whose specific needs are not currently being addressed in CRHS. Meeting their needs is the focus of this ELP project.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Problem Statement

Attending college is often considered the ultimate goal of a young person's K-12 preparation, and first-generation students (FGSs) represent a rapidly growing student demographic, comprising around 34% of the college freshmen population. This group has also been recognized as an at-risk student population with the highest dropout rates in postsecondary education (Lightweis, 2014). Research shows that students whose parents did not attend college are considerably less likely to be prepared for college than their continuing generation peers (Choy, 2001) and are at risk of leaving college before degree completion (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). The fact that only 56% of first-generation college students earn a baccalaureate degree within 6 years compared with 74% of students with a parent who graduated from college (Cataldi et al., 2018) demonstrates that FGS continue to face a number of challenges that their continuing generation peers do not.

Compared to their continuing-generation peers, first-generation students are more likely to come from marginalized populations, such as low-income households, minority backgrounds, immigrant families, and alienated cultures (Conway, 2010; Stebleton et al., 2014). Therefore, before these students enter college, they are already facing economic, social, and structural

barriers that can impede their participation in the college preparation process (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Second, because FGS, by definition, have parents who did not attend college, they do not have the experiential resources of those students with parents who have attended college and who have both the social capital that comes with college attendance and the experience navigating the journey to and through college (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Because of these barriers, FGS often have less social and academic support for the journey to college and, therefore, have lower academic and career-related expectations, which manifest relatively early in these students' educational careers. Gibbons and Borders (2010) found that seventh-grade students from families without college education already perceived a high number of barriers to college attendance. Additionally, Choy (2001) found that as early as eighth grade, FGSs have low expectations about the highest level of education they will receive (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). These attitudes not only negatively impact FGS academic preparation (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005), but they also impact their persistence to degree completion (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008; Engle & Tinto, 2008) and performance in their college courses (Stephens et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is crucial that secondary schools, like Caesar Rodney High School, provide early support and interventions for FGS. These should include access to rigorous college preparation coursework, institutional infrastructure to identify and support FGS needs and the needs of their families, and school teams that are dedicated and prepared to help students to navigate the complex and multifaceted college process (American School Counselor Association, 2019). Currently, this infrastructure is missing at Caesar Rodney High School.

Research shows that FGSs are transitioning to college with a lack of academic knowledge and study skills necessary to be successful (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). However, instead of identifying and supporting FGS students, CRHS identifies FGS too late in their high school careers, which jeopardizes our ability to effectively prepare them for this transition into college. The purpose of this ELP, therefore, is to better understand the barriers that contribute to FGSs' lack of success and to identify research-validated supports that can be instituted at the secondary school level to better prepare FGSs to be successful in college.

Organizational Context

CRHS Programs and Demographics

CRHS currently serves 2,300 students and has over 200 staff members. We offer the core courses (Mathematics, English, Science, and Social Studies), nine CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs, seven languages (Spanish, Arabic, German, Latin, French, Chinese, and Italian), and an extensive fine arts department (Music, Arts, and Drama). Along with a diversity of course offerings, CRHS is also a relatively diverse school, with equal numbers of Caucasian students and students of color. Table 1 shows the demographics of CRHS's student population. Each assistant principal is assigned a section of the alphabet, which forms five cohorts of students with approximately 460 students per cohort.

Table 1*Caesar Rodney High School Demographics 2022–2023 School Year*

Race	Male	Female	Total
African-American	383	349	732
Caucasian	578	548	1126
Indian	5	3	8
Multiracial	93	96	189
Hispanic	121	120	241
Asian	49	49	98
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	3	1	4

Curriculum and High-Quality Instructional Materials

The ability to have access to highly qualified instructors during K-12 education has a lasting effect on a student's college academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2010). Over the past few years, CRHS has ensured that teachers are highly qualified and trained in utilizing “High Quality Instructional Materials” (HQIM). High quality instructional materials (HQIM) provide a road map for teachers on how to plan, teach, and assess student learning throughout the year (*Delivers: HQIM - Delaware Department of Education*). The goal of using HQIM is to better ensure equitable access for all students to course content and to prepare them to take college admission assessments (ex. PSAT, SAT, ACT). However, utilizing HQIM at CRHS also provides CRHS school personnel with a clear understanding of what is being taught to students each year. HQIM plays an important role in the learning process for students in the classroom. It allows teachers to utilize effective instructional tools to engage students, facilitate understanding, and promote critical thinking skills.

Advanced Course Offerings

In high schools that push students toward college, the instruction often lacks the necessary rigor to adequately prepare students for the academic demands of college (Athanases et al., 2016). On paper, this does not seem to be the case with CRHS, which currently offers 32 advanced placement courses (AP) and one dual enrollment course. Enrollment in our AP courses averages 15–20 students per course, and each course culminates with a national assessment. Dual enrollment in high school is viewed by many as one mechanism for increasing college admission (An & Taylor, 2019). Students who participate in dual enrollment come from advantaged backgrounds and have strong grades (Rivera et al., 2019; Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). Currently, we have 18 students in our English composition course. This is the only dual enrollment course that we were able to offer for the 2022-2023 school year. Low minority enrollment is problematic because AP allows students access to rigorous coursework. FGSs are often from minority groups; this low percentage seems to say that FGSs at CRHS are not given equitable access to these courses.

Increasing enrollment in our AP and dual enrollment courses is important because the rigor of the courses and the college credit that students can earn eliminate some of the barriers that students face. However, there is still a problem of access at CRHS. First, students' families must shoulder the financial responsibility for payment of dual enrollment course(s). The cost of one course averages \$500.00, depending on the type of course. We have provided some financial assistance for students who have registered for a dual enrollment course, but many students are unable to pay for the course.

Another barrier that students encounter is the lack of knowledge and information about AP and dual enrollment courses. Some of them are unaware of the variety of AP and dual

enrollment courses that are available at the high school, while others do not understand the significance these courses can play in their own college preparation. When students are registering for courses for the following school year, they meet with their school counselor to discuss courses and review the ones they have selected. During this time, the student's counselor can provide knowledge about AP and dual enrollment courses even if the student does not inquire about them. However, it is unclear at this time if these discussions are intentionally occurring.

Additionally, teachers are an integral part of informing and encouraging students to enroll in these courses. However, CRHS does not have the infrastructure to identify FGSs, prepare teachers to meet their specific needs by recommending rigorous courses and educate students about the course offerings that can better prepare them for the rigors of their college programs.

Impact of COVID-19 on CRHS Advanced Course Offerings

Upon returning to school face to face from COVID-19, we have experienced a significant increase in students enrolling in our dual enrollment courses (see Table 2 for dual enrollment data). Our AP enrollment has decreased by 20% over the past 5 years (see Table 3 for AP enrollment), and this has resulted in the elimination of many of these courses. We currently have a memorandum of understanding with Delaware Technical Community College in providing dual enrollment courses. They require a minimum number of students to be enrolled in the dual enrollment courses, and if that requirement is not met, then we cannot offer the course. Table 2 reflects the increase in the amount of dual enrollment courses offered and the student enrollment in each course. We eliminated a barrier for students by creating a financial system that lowered the cost for these specific courses. When CRHS began offering dual enrollment, each course was \$500.00 if you did not qualify for free or reduced lunch. For the 2023-2024 school year, we were

able to lower the cost to \$100.00 per course. Reducing the cost has allowed more students to enroll and take multiple dual-enrollment courses.

Table 2

Caesar Rodney High School Dual Enrollment 4-Year Enrollment

	2021	2022	2023	2024
DTCC English	8	24	18	45
DTCC Math	10	23		18
DTCC Psychology	13	14		14
DTCC Sociology	14			13
DTCC Anatomy and Physiology		7		17

Table 3

Caesar Rodney High School Advanced Placement 5-Year Enrollment

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total AP student enrollment	508	457	437	511	441
AP Students with Scores 3 +	344	290	310	278	269
Percentage (%) of Total AP Students with Scores 3+	68%	63%	71%	54%	61%

In addition to financial costs and the lack of knowledge that students have about AP and dual enrollment courses, students are either not enrolling or dropping courses due to the rigor and expectations of these courses. During the pandemic, many of our students experienced learning loss, inconsistent routines, and a lack of in-person support from educators. Anecdotally, students who were dropping AP or dual enrollment courses expressed that the courses were too much work or extremely overwhelming. Therefore, as an administrator, I have found it challenging to convince students that they both need and can be successful in AP and dual enrollment courses since the return from the pandemic. Research shows that because dual enrollment students enter

college with at least a few college credits earned, they are less likely to take remedial courses in college (An, 2013; Grubb et al., 2017). AP and dual enrollment courses are a gateway for students who plan to attend college, especially FGS.

PSAT and SAT Assessments

When a student enters CRHS, they are required to take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) during their 9th, 10th, and 11th grade school year. This assessment is used as a practice assessment for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a test that is still widely used for college admission. Junior students at CRHS are administered the SAT in the spring. It is a statewide requirement that every high school has a designated school day to administer the SAT. This opportunity minimizes some barriers for FGS that are not clearly identified at CRHS since testing is scheduled and is free for Delaware students. Table 4 shows the percentage of students at CRHS who met and did not meet the benchmarks for math, English, reading, and writing for the PSAT and SAT. This data is separated by each grade level in which students completed the PSAT and the in-school SAT day.

Table 4

CRHS and State PSAT/SAT Data 2021–2022 School Year

	% Met Both Benchmarks	% Met ERW Benchmarks	% Met Math Benchmarks	% Met no Benchmarks
9th				
CRHS	29%	49%	33%	47%
State	29%	50%	33%	42%
10th				

CRHS	32%	61%	34%	37%
State	26%	56%	27%	43%

11th (PSAT)

CRHS	25%	52%	26%	46%
State	32%	65%	33%	34%

11th (SAT)

CRHS	26%	51%	28%	47%
State	21%	45%	23%	53%

CRHS students' benchmark scores were higher than the states across all grade levels for the PSAT and SAT, with the exception of PSAT 11. Although the PSAT 11 scores were lower than the state average, there was a 5% increase in all three categories with the exception of those that met no benchmarks category.

Organizational Role at CRHS

My Personal and Professional Journey

Supporting FGSs as they journey to college is personal, as I was a first-generation student. From my own experience, I know that the better a student is prepared to take the leap from high school to college, the less likely he or she will stumble over the challenges that the college environment will present (Van Rooij et al., 2018). Upon graduating with my bachelor of arts in elementary/special education, I knew that I wanted to teach so that I could help students develop their talents and improve their lives. For 13 years, I taught elementary students in first grade and then made the transition to administration.

During my first 2 years in administration, I was appointed to the position of dean of student achievement, an important role in effecting change for FGS, and I am currently one of five assistant principals at CRHS in the CRSD. As one of five assistant principals, one of my responsibilities is to support the vision and mission of the district, and preparing FGS to be more successful in college is directly related to the mission of expanding opportunities for these students.

CHAPTER 3

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

The problem this ELP intends to address is that CRHS identifies FGS too late in their high school careers, which jeopardizes our ability to better prepare these students for college. Identifying research-validated supports can be instituted at the secondary school level to better prepare FGSs to be successful in college. As such, the improvement goal for this ELP is to enhance CRHS's "infrastructure" around FGS. This will include systems for identifying FGS early in their high school career and systematic support that will aid students as they move toward graduation. The improvement strategies are listed below:

Strategy 1

Develop a visual representation of the inputs and expected outputs and a knowledge base about supporting FGS. Preliminary research will be conducted through a literature review on best practices in supporting FGS.

- *Resources Needed:* IRB approval to conduct a survey and interview with minors. Contact information of local colleges admission office.
- *Evidence to Collect:* Identifying their needs will allow CRHS to review and develop an infrastructure that will address those needs and provide support for FGS to be successful. Additional literature synthesis will be utilized to determine the barriers and areas of concern that FGSs encounter upon entry into college. The research conducted through

this literature review will also develop support that will address students' needs in order to be successful in that environment.

- *Artifacts Associated:* Logic model (Appendix B) and literature synthesis (Appendix C)

Strategy 2

Conduct three focus groups with students, teachers, and parents to gather data analysis on their needs and perspectives of FGSs. This will include conducting targeted focus groups to determine their needs and the support that CRHS can provide them. An executive summary will be written to highlight the needs and concerns of each group. This summary will also highlight themes from each group and supports that could be implemented. Additionally, a parent presentation will be created based on the needs discussed in the literature review and focus group. This presentation will be uploaded and linked to an online portal that parents can easily access to also check their child's grades and attendance.

- **Resources Needed:** IRB approval to conduct focus groups for students, teachers, and parents. Approval from the district office to contact parents to participate in focus groups. Technology support in developing and structuring the presentation to be connected to a current platform that parents are able to access to check their students' grades, attendance, and assignments.
- **Evidence to Collect:** Feedback from the focus groups will be needed to aid in the development of providing resources and support for parents. Resources that are currently available to families and how they are supporting their FGS. The support and resources that are developed will be transformed into a presentation that is accessible to FGS and their families.

- Artifacts Associated: Focus Groups (Appendix D), Executive Summary (Appendix D) Codebook (Appendix E), Teacher Guide (Appendix F) and Parent Presentation (Appendix G)

Strategy 3

Develop a multi-year system that tracks FGS students' academic progress and their needs. Upon entry into their freshman year of high school, each student will create a student success portfolio. This portfolio will be updated a minimum of three times each school year.

- Resources Needed: Access to PowerSchool (database that contains student contact information, schedule, grades, attendance, and transcript) to review the number of students enrolled in AP, Dual enrollment, and higher-level mathematics courses. Review enrollment data of these high-level courses for the past three school years.
- Evidence to Collect: A review of enrollment and grades in all courses, more specifically AP and dual enrollment courses. A student success portfolio will be developed for every student upon entry into high school. The school counselor and assistant principal will meet with students quarterly throughout their high school tenure to review the plan and discuss course enrollment, post-secondary plans, extracurricular activities, and summer programs. The discussion topics during each meeting will be based on FGSs' needs and research-based support strategies. A preliminary outline of the grade-level focus is outlined in Table 5.
- Artifacts Associated: Student success portfolio (Appendix H)

Table 5*CRHS Yearly Discussion Topics*

Timeline	9th	10th	11th	12th
Aug - Oct	Identify FGS	Explore colleges (2 yr. and 4 yr.)	Discuss Majors and Courses for college	College application submissions
Nov - Feb	Develop an academic and after high school plan	Review academic plan	Attend in-person and virtual college tours	Apply for scholarships and financial aid
Feb - Apr	Course selection for 10th grader	Course selection for 11th grade	Course selection 12th grade	Review college(s) acceptance letter(s). Confirm college acceptance

Addressing the Problem

The goal of this ELP is to address the deficiencies that CRHS demonstrates in accurately identifying FGS and supporting them throughout their high school careers as they prepare for college. In order to address this problem, I designed seven artifacts. A detailed summary is provided under each artifact.

Artifact 1: Logic Model

The logic model is a graphic representation of the resources, activities, and expected outcomes of this ELP initiative to support FGS at CRHS (see Appendix B). It provides a structural design of how to address a problem with specific outcomes. This model also allows for change to occur, identify gaps in the plan, and evaluate the effectiveness of the program in achieving the end goal of FGS being identified early in their high school career.

Artifact 2: Literature Synthesis

The literature review is a selected review of literature that is focused on the challenges that FGSs face and the research-based supports that can help FGS overcome those challenges

(see Appendix C). In this synthesis, I delve into the components that have an effect on FGSs being prepared and successful throughout their college career. My findings determined that there are several areas that can have a profound impact on FGSs: (a) impact of social capital, (b) family and community connection, (c) academic integration, and (d) family and mental health barriers.

Artifact 3: Focus Groups

Three focus groups (parents, teachers, and students) were conducted over the course of three months. Each focus group was asked between 8 and 10 questions that were specific to that group of participants, and each group was 45 minutes long (see Appendix D). The questions were to gather an understanding of their FGS feelings, concerns, and needs.

Due to my administrative position at CRHS, I did not conduct focus groups for teachers and students to avoid influencing their responses because of my institutional authority. A facilitator conducted the focus groups for teachers and students. The students that were targeted to participate in this focus group were either in the 9th or 10th grade. A short survey was given to 9th and 10th English and math teachers to identify FGS. Based on the responses from the survey, determined who would be asked to participate in the focus survey.

The student focus group questions were concentrated on first-generation awareness, academic preparation, and support systems. Questions for the teacher focus group were centered around knowledge of students and their needs, classroom rigor, and increasing student enrollment. Parent focus group questions were centered around motivation and support to attend college, college application and financial aid resources, and ideas/core values about college. All three focus groups' responses were analyzed and compiled into an executive summary.

Artifact 4: Executive Summary

An executive summary was created to analyze the data collected from the three focus groups. The summary was organized by each focus group (student, teacher, and parent) and provided the questions that were asked during each group (see Appendix E). An overview was provided on the duration of each group, who facilitated it, and how many were a part of each focus group. Based on the responses to the questions, they were then grouped into themes. By creating the themes, there was more of a central focus on the key responses from each group.

Each theme provided a summary of the results from the collective of questions that were asked. There were quotes in each theme, which provided a direct perspective of the participants' responses to questions within each theme. At the conclusion of each theme, there was a transition to the next theme. A recommendation section was added at the end of each theme. The purpose of this section was to provide resources and connections to artifacts developed for this ELP. These recommendations will aid in the responses that were given from each focus group.

Artifact 5: Codebook

Supporting First Generation Students in Their Journey to College to College Success - Code Book.

Themes	Code	Code Definition	Code Exemplars	Connection
Desire and support to attend college	Family support in attending college	Utterance that indicates family members are supportive and encourage FGS to attend college.	<i>My family is very supportive of me attending college.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to several students in the focus group expressing how their families wanted them to attend college. The families express how they will be the first in the family to attend college.
			<i>Although my mom did not attend college, she now has a career. They always talk about</i>	

			<i>how I will be the first in the family to attend college.</i>	
			<i>My brothers have pushed me to go to college because they didn't attend.</i>	
	Pride and Belonging	Utterance indicates that FGS want to make their families proud to attend college.	I want to make my family proud by attending college since they did not.	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to a student from the focus group feeling a sense of pride of being the first in their family to attend college.
Understanding obstacles families encounter	Family financial concerns	Utterance that indicates students understand that they will need financial assistance to attend college	<i>It will be imperative that I find good scholarships, because I also know that I will have to work to help fund college.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to a student from the focus group needing access to financial resources such as scholarships in order to pay for college. Accessing this type of support will help alleviate the financial burden they will incur attending college.
			<i>If there are no scholarships that I can obtain, how do I access financial aid.</i>	
			<i>I try to tell him things about life that I know others have not told him about college such as expenses if he stays on or off campus.</i>	
		Utterance that indicates parents have financial concerns on being able to pay for their FGS to attend college.	<i>We want her to strive and gain her own independence, since we cannot provide any financial support.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to parents knowing that they cannot pay for college. They want to ensure that their FGS can financially support themselves while attending college.
	Access to resources	Utterance that indicates that parents are unable to access information that will help them in preparing their	I do not know specifically what is needed, but I want to support my child.	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to a parent wanting to help their child attend college. They are unaware of how to find or retrieve resources that will help

		FGS for college.		them and their FGS prepare for college.
			<i>It would be helpful for me as a parent if there were seminars that were easily accessible for students and parents.</i>	
			<i>It would be helpful if the school provided tutorials and information nights.</i>	
			<i>It would be helpful if there were more after school activities to help students understand the financial aid process.</i>	
			<i>Unfortunately, I have not been able to access any information or know of any resources to help in navigating the college process parents</i>	
Path to success	Academic challenges	Utterance that indicates students understand certain courses are challenging but will help them in their career path.	<i>I find my algebra course very challenging and difficult, but I know learning math will be helpful in my career.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to students being fully aware of which courses are challenging and which are not. They know that these courses will prepare them for courses that they will take in college to achieve a degree in their career.
			<i>My culinary class is very challenging, because I have to learn knife work and how to cook and maintain heat and all that. It's preparing me because I want to attend a culinary college.</i>	
			<i>Out of all of my courses I find Spanish the easiest as it can be helpful communicating with patients and their families that only speak Spanish.</i>	
	Rigorous advanced courses	Utterance that indicates teachers firmly believe that students should	<i>Students who want to attend college should be in AP courses</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to teachers regarding advanced courses as an opportunity to be more

		enroll in advanced level courses.		prepared for college.
			<i>The hugest thing is confidence, when students say I don't think I can do this, I stated I think you can do this. I actually contacted 10 students individually after registration for classes and said, you know I hope you signed for AP next year, I think you would be a great fit for the class.</i>	
		Utterance that indicates teachers consider advanced courses as the gateway in helping FGS obtain specific academic skill sets.	<i>A rigorous course teaches students to work at their own pace without a teacher guiding their every motion.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to teachers wanting FGS to understand that rigorous courses will provide them with specific skills. These skills will increase their college readiness standards.
			<i>By selecting these rigorous courses they will put forth the effort and will see the impact of being able to earn college credits.</i>	
			<i>One of the things we've talked about in the English department is, um particularly in our English courses most people who are college bound, we'd love to see in our advanced courses. Certainly anybody who's not going to college too. We think basically based on the college readiness standards that the advanced courses best prepare students for the college level reading and writing, they're gonna be expected to do.</i>	We want her to strive and gain her own independence, since we cannot provide any financial support.

			<i>I want students to be aware of what AP classes will look like and that they don't just go in expecting it will be easy. Once they get in there, and realize it is not an easy class and they do worse than what they would have done in a non-AP course.</i>	
			<i>Taking these courses could prepare them for managing their time, and taking ownership of doing the work, and taking a book home to read due to them not being able to read the book in class. As the expectation is a lot more work than non-AP courses where they read and discuss the work in class.</i>	
		Utterance that indicates teachers have minimal investment in the curriculum due to a perceived lack of rigor.	<i>I don't wanna, like the curriculum itself, I don't feel like it has a bunch of rigor in it. I feel like there's opportunities for it, but it's kind of like if the teacher, it's up to the teacher almost. I don't think that the course prepares them for note taking and studying habits. They could, but along with the homework part, the studying kind of goes hand in hand.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to teachers not taking accountability for the lack of rigor in curriculum.
	Counseling and Advising	Utterance indicates that parents want their FGS to work with her school counselor to receive advice on academic and emotional needs.	<i>There are things that I cannot provide, and an advisor can provide more resources and support especially for academics.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to parents wanting their FGS to have access to a counselor. Parents feel as though a counselor can support their FGS in making academic and emotional decisions.
			<i>My child needs a good advisor in high school and college that can be there for her academically and emotionally.</i>	

TEACHER GUIDE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

INFOGRAPHIC

1 PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

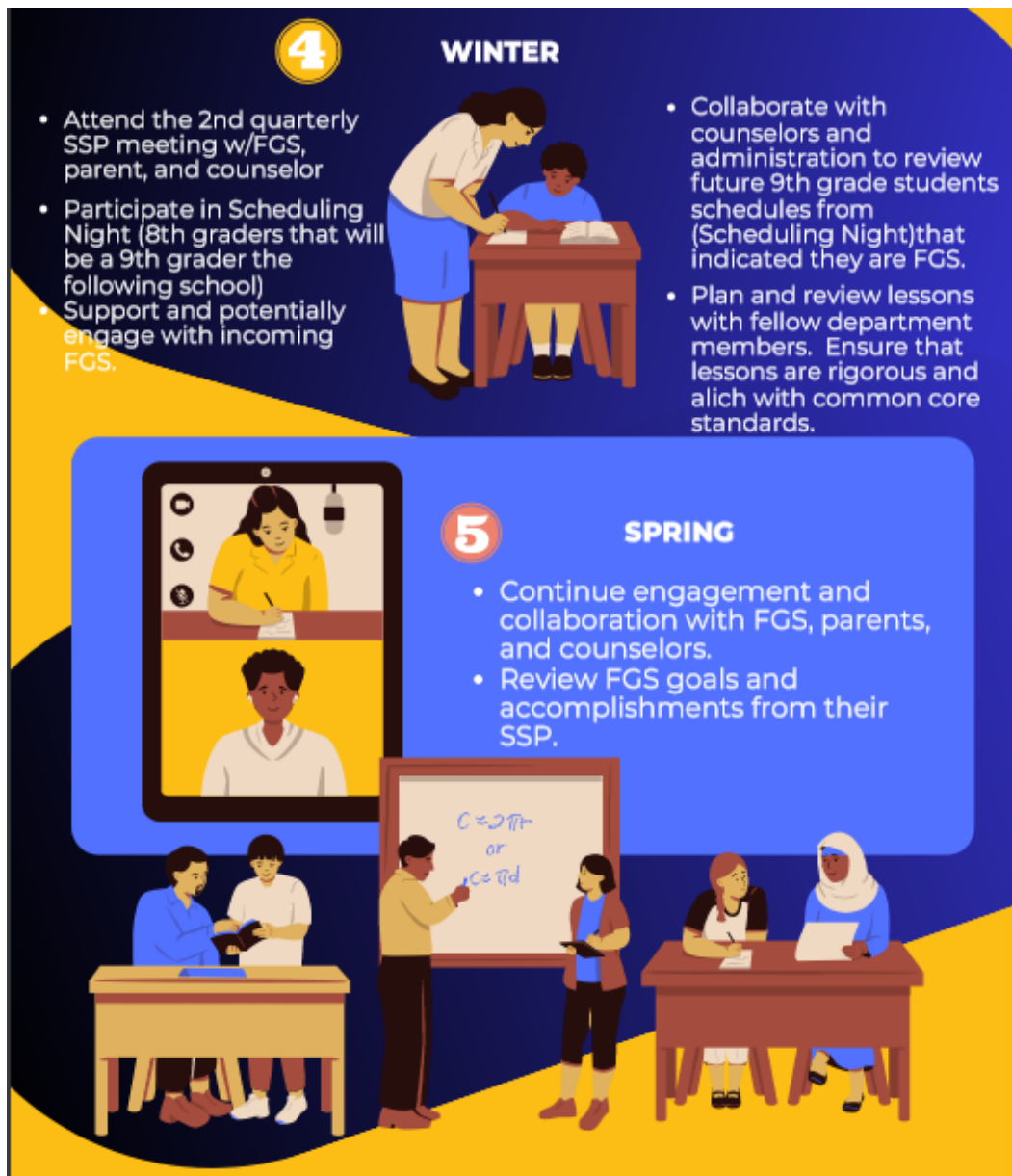
Build prior knowledge of FGS and their families through accessing the parent presentation and student success portfolio (SSP). This will enable teachers to understand the needs of FGS and their families. The information provided in the presentation and SSP will also help teachers navigate supports that can be given and the goals that FGS develop while in high school.

2 SUMMER

- Attend PD with a central focus on FGS and supports needed to be successful
- Connect with counselors to review incoming FGS for the new school year.

3 FALL

- Meet with counselor after the first quarterly SSP meeting with FGS
- Discuss and review the goals of FGS, and implement supports



Artifact 7: Parent Presentation

A parent presentation was developed for FGS parents to access through a district-wide online portal, the home access center (HAC; see Appendix G). In the portal parents are able to check the status of their child’s grades, course schedule, attendance, and other resources. These resources will consist of assistance with completing college applications, financial aid, college tours, scholarships, and college expectations. Additionally, this presentation will contain

previous FGS families who will discuss how they were able to support their children in navigating college.

Artifact 8: Student Success Portfolio

Based on the research that was conducted in the literature synthesis, informal conversations with colleagues, and conducted focus groups at CRHS. I developed a student success portfolio that students would use upon entering high school (see Appendix I). Each student will access the portfolio through Schoology, which is an online platform that students are familiar with and utilize to access courses and submit assignments.

The school counselor and administrator will meet with FGS at the start of their freshman year to explain the portfolio and how to access the file. They will meet with the student over the course of three times throughout each school year, with a total of 12 times during their high school career. The topics for each meeting will be concentrated on developing their high school plan, course selection, exploring colleges through virtual/in-person tours, and financial aid/college/scholarship application process. Also, during these meetings, the school counselor will support the FGS in outlining their future career plans, needs/supports, and course schedule. This portfolio will be reviewed quarterly to make changes/updates and ensure FGS students are being identified and supported.

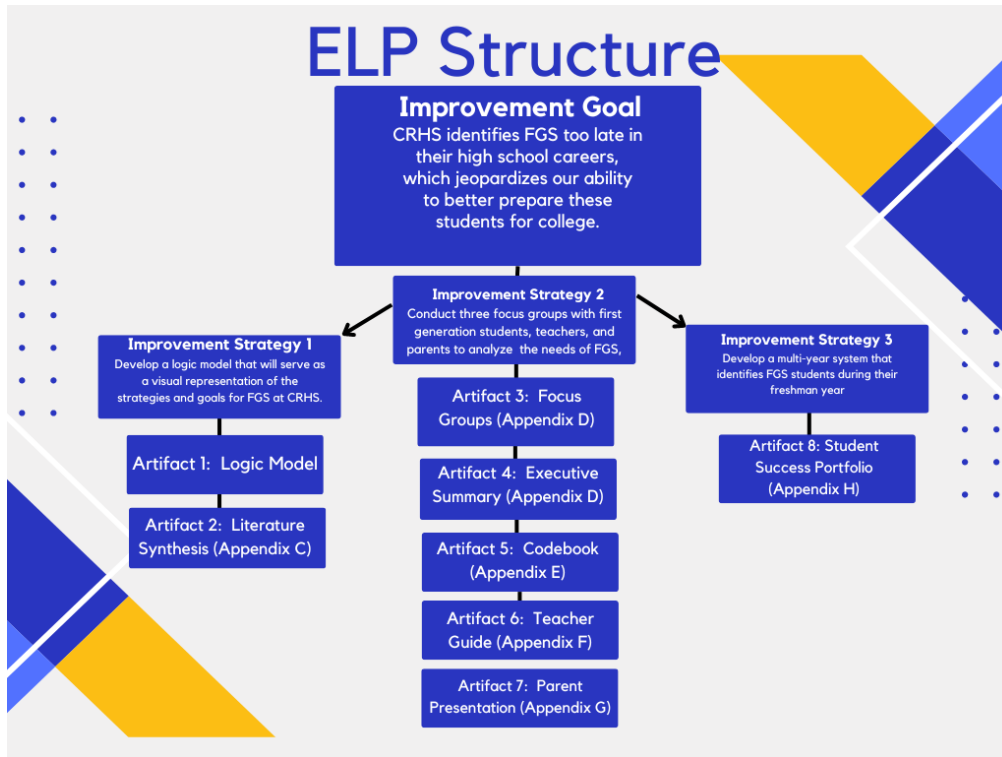
CHAPTER 4

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES RESULTS

The focal point of this chapter will be to explain the results I obtained from the three improvement strategies: (a) develop a logic model that will serve as a visual representation of the strategies and goals for FGS at CRHS and conduct a literature review. (b) conduct three focus groups with FGSs, teachers, and parents to analyze the needs of FGSs, understand their unique perspectives, and share my findings through an executive summary and parent presentation 3) develop a multi-year system that identifies FGSs during their freshman year and supports them throughout their high school career through a system that will track their academic progress and provide targeted supports based on their grade level needs and a parent presentation that provides parents with a list of resources.

Figure 1

ELP Structure



Improvement Strategy 1

Improvement Strategy 1 is to develop a logic model that will provide a visual representation of strategies and goals for FGS at CRHS and conduct a literature review on best practices in supporting FGS.

Overview

Identifying first generation students upon entry at CRHS is a significant element of being able to fully support them in their journey to college. As an administrator, I have the privilege of meeting with students in all grade levels, but unfortunately, most FGSs are not identified until their junior or senior year in high school. Getting such a late start is a barrier to preparing FGS in high school for the rigors of college attendance and the often-complex application and financial

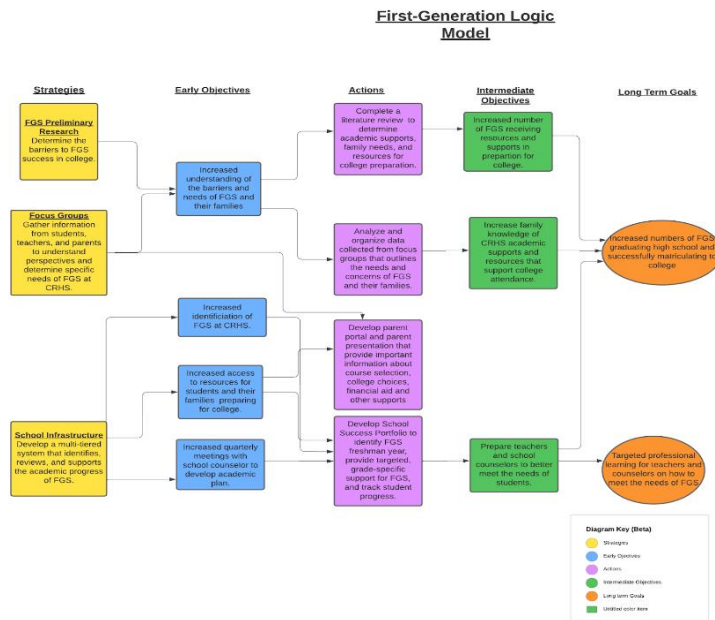
aid processes. The logic model was a way to identify goals and how inputs can help achieve a cadre of better-prepared FGSs.

Logic Model

The problem that I am addressing in this ELP is the lack of identification of FGSs upon entry into CRHS and support for them and their parents as they move through their high school careers. To address this problem, I initially designed a logic model that displays a visual representation of the three strategies that I am using to support FGS’ college attendance. The three strategies in this logic model serve as a foundation for supporting FGSs at CRHS.

Figure 2

First-Generation Model



My first strategy focuses on the preliminary research I conducted on FGS, and the early objectives are increasing the identification of FGS. My objectives are centered around

developing resources and increasing advisor support for FGS. In the first strategy, the preliminary research that I conducted was a literature review. This logic map shows that if I increase the action items such as academic support, family needs, and resources for college preparation, then my intermediate objective of increasing the number of FGSs receiving the resources and supports created will be achieved. The long-term goal for my strategy is to ensure that all FGSs are using the resources and supports that were created based on the research I conducted.

The second strategy was to conduct focus groups to better determine the specific needs of FGS students and their parents at CRHS to build the knowledge I gained from the literature review process. Additionally, I designed the focus groups to understand the needs and supports of students and families, as well as the concerns that teachers have in order to support FGS in their classes. I analyzed that information, and based on the results from the focus groups, I developed an executive summary to share my findings. Through actions in this model, a parent portal and presentation were created for parents to access information about course selection, college choices, financial aid, and other supports. The intermediate and long-term goal of this strategy is to ensure that families understand CRHS's academic support and resources to graduate high school and are fully prepared for college.

The third strategy I created was a multi-tiered system for FGS once they are identified at CRHS. The student success portfolio supports FGS from the time they enter high school until they graduate. The objective for FGS is to engage in quarterly meetings with their counselor and assistant principal. The information gained from the quarterly meetings will evolve into actions that will increase the academic support available for FGS. Additionally, the intermediate objective is to prepare teachers and school counselors to better understand the needs of FGS. The

long-term goal is for teachers and school counselors to attend professional development that will support the needs and academic preparation for FGS.

Literature Review

FGSs encounter a myriad of challenges while attending high school and preparing for college. My purpose in conducting this literature review was to better understand FGSs's challenges and needs, which would then inform the rest of the strategies that I developed to meet their needs. What follows is a brief summary of the key understandings that I came to as a result of conducting this preliminary research.

Social Capital

When I conducted the preliminary research that went into my literature review, one pattern in the literature that stood out was that FGS lacked social capital to aid them in their pursuit of college attendance and their ability to receive support and assistance. Social capital, as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2001), is the value one gains from being in a relationship with another person who can provide support and assistance in a given social situation. Due to the lack of identification of FGS at CRHS, they are unaware of the support that can be provided by staff in order to increase their social capital. It will be imperative that staff understand the impact that they can have on FGSs in terms of being able to provide resources and information. Providing sufficient resources and information can be evaluated through the implementation of the student success portfolio (Appendix H). FGS at CRHS having more access to these opportunities will better prepare them for college.

Family and Community Involvement

In my literature review, I found that family and community support is crucial for the success of FGS. FGS rely heavily on their families, even though they may not be able to provide

a significant amount of academic and financial support. According to Azmitia et al. (2018), the amount and types of support received from parents are mixed, but research demonstrates that FGSs have reported that emotional support from family members and friends from home was one of their main reasons for not dropping out of college. FGS will seek support from community resources. The community resources consisted of teachers, churches, and local organizations, which were able to provide recommendations for colleges, scholarships, and social capital. CRHS can support families by ensuring the parent presentation artifact that I designed is accessible and addresses the needs expressed during the parent focus groups. Also, families can be involved in the implementation of the student success portfolio artifact, where they participate with the school counselor in the three meetings throughout the school year. CRHS can also partner with community stakeholders as they play a pivotal role in the preparation for college.

Academic Preparation

This literature review provided evidence that FGS are often not academically prepared for the rigors of post-secondary education. Research shows that FGSs are entering post-secondary institutions with limited preparation in mathematics and critical thinking skills; these represent a significant barrier to their future success (Aruguete, 2017). Overcoming academic obstacles is crucial since first-semester grades and self-reported confidence in math both predict higher education persistence for FGSs (Dika & D'Amico, 2016). Based on the research gathered, FGS at CRHS must receive academic support that will aid in their preparation and success in college.

Mental Health Concerns

Additional information in this literature review revealed that FGS face significant mental health barriers, and these have a negative impact on FGS as they attempt to attain their post-secondary degrees. FGS often report feeling isolated both at home and college (House et al., 2020), are sometimes overwhelmed by their college and home responsibilities, and feel lonely and homesick (Stebleton et al., 2014; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2021). The research from this literature review correlates with responses from the parent focus group, where parents often expressed a desire for their children to attend college closer to home. CRHS must create opportunities for FGS and their families to be aware and participate in college tours and opportunities to speak with recruiters to determine the best academic fit. This will require counselors and administrators to ensure that information about a large variety of colleges and universities is easily accessible. CRHS will need to build ongoing relationships with various colleges and universities in order to ensure they are providing our FGS with information and resources about their organization.

Financial Constraints

Financial barriers pose a significant problem for many FGSs, and this literature review uncovered research on how to assist FGSs with the financial burdens of college and to develop financial literacy. In order to better prepare students for the financial decisions they must make as college students, colleges must first ensure that FGSs develop financial literacy. Financial literacy is the ability to understand and effectively use various financial skills, including personal financial management, budgeting, and investments. Schools must determine the financial literacy needs of their students and how it can best be measured and provided for (Hung et al.,

2009). Once FGS's financial needs are determined, they can begin to navigate their financial strengths and weaknesses.

Research in this literature review suggests that FGSs do not have a thorough understanding of the costs of college, such as weighing college costs relative to the benefits of college, such as higher income, more job options, and a lower likelihood of unemployment. By conducting this literature review, I now understand that it is imperative to support FGS and their families by providing them access to high-quality information about scholarships and financial aid. Therefore, my parent presentation contains a substantial section that highlights these financial resources and the benefits of college to both parents and FGS. FGS will have multiple opportunities to delve into these financial supports with the quarterly meetings to complete their student success portfolio. Additionally, some of these financial resources and new resources will also be available for parents to access in the parent presentation.

Improvement Strategy 2

Improvement Strategy 2 is to conduct three focus groups with students, teachers, and parents to gather data analysis on their needs and perspectives of FGS.

Overview

In improvement strategy #1, my literature review highlighted some significant barriers to attending college, and this information served as a guide for further determining the needs of FGS and their families. It also provided insight into how FGS and their families are being supported by teachers and other CRHS staff. Improvement strategy #2 consisted of conducting three separate focus groups. These groups concentrated on the needs of FGS, parents, and what teachers can do to support them. The students who participated in these focus groups were in the 9th and 10th grades, and they were given a survey to determine if they were an FGS. It was sent

out to 9th and 10th grade English and Math teachers, who administered it to 500 students. The survey had 195 students who responded, and 11% of the students indicated that they were an FGS. I compiled the data collected from the focus groups into an executive summary (see Appendix E). From the original survey, 11% of the FGS agreed to participate, and the demographics are highlighted in Table 6.

Table 6

Focus Group Demographics

	Black	White	Indian	Mixed Race
Students	2	7	1	2
Teachers	1	5		
Parents	2	3		
Total	5	15	1	2

Focus Groups

Student Focus Groups. When I conducted the focus groups with students, teachers, and parents at CRHS, I provided an opportunity for them to express their concerns, needs, and access to resources more specifically. Participants in the student focus group were asked to answer questions candidly about who supports them on their journey to college, engages in conversations about college, and guides their enrollment in high school courses.

Teacher Focus Groups. Teachers were the second group of participants. I sent out an invitation to every 9th and 10th-grade teacher who taught English or Math, asking for their participation in the focus group. Based on the responses to the invitation, I had a good balance between Math and English teachers. They were asked questions about how they engage with potential FGSs and whether their courses are rigorous enough to prepare students for college.

Parent Focus Group. The third focus group was composed of FGSs' parents. In this focus group, parents were asked to answer questions about how they felt about their child being a first-generation student, what resources or supports they need, and concerns they have about their child attending college. Due to my leadership position within CRHS, the teacher and student focus groups were facilitated by another colleague who is not in a leadership position.

Executive Summary

Based on the data analysis from the three focus groups, I created an executive summary (see Appendix D). Based on the responses from each group, that information was organized into three themes that highlight the desire and support FGS have to attend college, understanding the obstacles families encounter, and the path towards educational success. Below I briefly summarize the themes in the Executive Summary and provide some exemplary quotes from the members of the focus groups that are related to that theme.

The first theme focused on FGS wanting to attend college and how their families support that desire despite them not attending or understanding how to prepare for college.

One student states, *“My dad and I talked a lot about why he did not go to college.”*

Another student said, *“I want to make my family proud by attending college since they did not.”*

The second theme focused on the significant financial barriers that families encounter as they prepare for FGSs attending college.

A student explains the importance of obtaining a scholarship, *“It will be imperative that I find good scholarships because I also know that I will have to work to fund college.”*

One parent discusses, *“We want her to strive and gain her own independence, since we cannot provide any financial support.”*

The third theme concentrates on how FGS are being academically prepared by teachers and school counselors for college.

A teacher states, “I want students to be aware of what AP classes will look like and that they don’t just go in expecting it will be easy. Once they get in there, and realize it is not an easy class and they do worse than what they would have done in a non-AP course.”

Another teacher explains, “Taking these courses could prepare them for managing their time, and taking ownership of doing the work, and taking a book home to read due to them not being able to read the book in class. As the expectation is a lot more work than non-AP courses where they read and discuss the work in class.”

My executive summary provided clear and detailed information needed to develop other other strategies in this ELP.

Teacher Guide

Based on the data collected from the teacher focus group, I created an infographic (see Appendix F). The data revealed from the focus group that teachers do not have access to resources or support in order to help FGS and their families.

Teachers expressed concerns with the curriculum not being rigorous enough to fully prepare FGS for college. They felt as though the curriculum is not rigorous, the only courses that have rigor embedded in the curriculum are advanced level courses. Although there are concerns with the rigor, CRHS has adopted HQIM. Through ongoing professional development in the future, this will need to be the focus in changing the perception that not all curriculum is rigorous.

I created an infographic that is a yearly guide for teachers to utilize as they support FGS and their families. The guide will create opportunities for teachers to collaborate with school

counselors by meeting with them several times throughout the year to understand the goals of FGS. My goal for this artifact was to ensure that teachers have a tangible resource that they can access immediately, but they need to be provided opportunities to attend ongoing professional development. Professional development will need to occur beyond the research conducted in this ELP.

Parent Presentation

The parent presentation (see Appendix G) I designed provides parents with a step-by-step process for supporting their child's journey toward college. The research conducted in the literature review discusses the importance of parental support, and the participants in the parent focus groups expressed their need for support and resources. Therefore, I designed a parent presentation to fill the information vacuum for parent stakeholders. I addressed the benefits of attending college, how parents can help their students prepare for college, and how they can overcome the financial burdens of college through grants and student loans. A few parents expressed wanting more access to resources that will help them in navigating the college process. With this resource, parents will have the opportunity to understand what their child needs during their high school career in order to be successful.

Improvement Strategy 3

The third improvement strategy is to develop a multi-year system that tracks FGS students' academic progress and their needs.

Overview

Student Success Portfolio. Based on the needs and supports discussed in the literature review, I felt it would be beneficial for FGS to design a system where they would be identified during their first year of high school and tracked throughout their career at CRHS until they

graduate. The Student Success Portfolio I created was designed and implemented to identify potential FGS, address their academic and social needs, and provide a clear schedule for counseling meetings where progress is checked and course selection can be discussed (Appendix H). Each meeting topic is based on the student’s grade level to address the specific needs that FGSs have and to review their academic plan as they move toward graduation (Table 7). These meetings also create a space for FGS to have an open dialogue with their counselor to discuss their career goals, what the best college will be, courses they should take in college, and financial aid.

Table 7

CRHS Yearly Discussion Topics

Timeline	9th	10th	11th	12th
Aug - Oct	Identify FGS	Explore colleges (2 yr. and 4 yr.)	Discuss Majors and Courses for college	College application submissions
Nov - Feb	Develop an academic and after high school plan	Review academic plan	Attend in-person and virtual college tours	Apply for scholarships and financial aid
Feb - Apr	Course selection for 10th grader	Course selection for 11th grade	Course selection 12th grade	Review college(s) acceptance letter(s). Confirm college acceptance

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS ON DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter will highlight my reflections on the design and implementation of the following three improvement strategies: (a) develop a logic model that will provide a visual representation of how to prepare FGS for college and preliminary research conducted through a literature review focused on supporting FGS; (b) conduct three focus groups with students, teachers, and parents to gather data on their needs and perspectives; and (c) develop a multi-year system that tracks FGS academic progress and their specific needs at each grade level. In each improvement strategy, I will provide an in-depth reflection on artifacts that were created to improve CRHS's identification process and how they support FGS in being more adequately prepared for college.

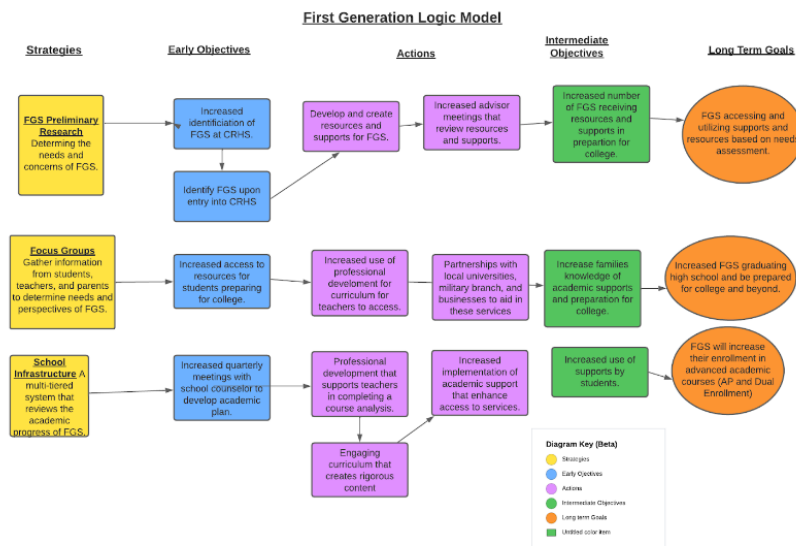
Improvement Strategy 1

In Improvement Strategy 1, my goal was to display a visual representation of the inputs and expected outputs for identifying and preparing FGS and their families for college. Initially, in creating this logic model (see Appendix B), I gathered data on FGSs at CRHS and determined that they were not identified until their junior or senior year. It then allowed me to map out all strategies and how they connect to objectives and actions that then result in three goals. I discovered that having this visual representation allowed me to narrow my focus and view how I would be able to effectively address the problem in this ELP. The information in this model

(Figure 3) correlated with the research that was conducted in my literature review. My literature review focused on the impact of social capital, academic integration, family/community connection, and financial/mental health barriers.

Figure 3

First-Generation Logic Model

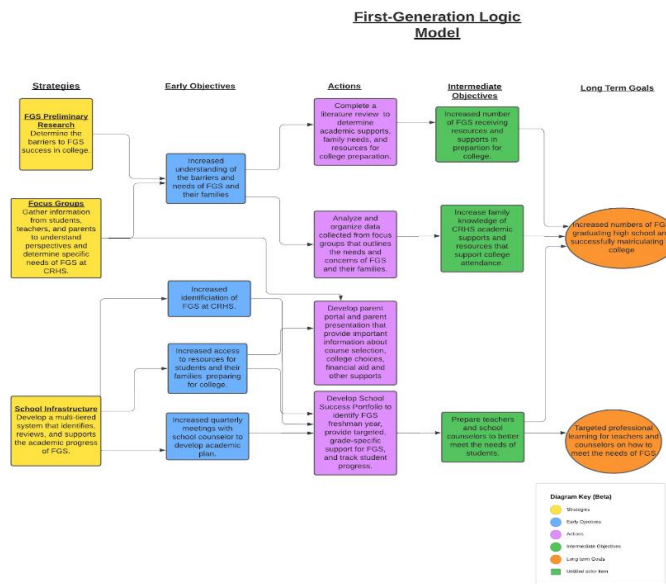


As I continued to gather information and review my logic model, I realized that the model would have to be restructured to target specific actions, intermediate objectives, and long-term goals that were highlighted in Figure 3. It became evident that I could not address everything at once in the first logic model. As a leader, it is important to recognize when you need to restructure your ideas in order to achieve the best outcome. The changes made to the revised logic model (Figure 4), honed in more on condensing the early objectives that were more specific to strategy 1 and 2. The actions and intermediate objectives were also reduced to be

streamlined and connected to the early objectives. This restructure also minimized the overall goals from three to two.

Figure 4

First-Generation Logic Model



An area that I could have improved within this strategy would have been including more stakeholders within CRHS and the district to determine other possibilities for addressing the problem in this ELP. Involving various stakeholders within CRHS, such as assistant principals, deans, district instructional specialists, and community programs specialists, would have allowed me to incorporate additional resources and perspectives on how to support FGS in CRHS.

Additionally, the most influential group of people that I did tap into were my fellow AP's who

were in leadership roles within the building. I also did not initially include school counselors when conducting my research. If I had initial conversations with my fellow assistant principals about how FGS are identified and supported while at CRHS, I may have produced different research for the literature review, questions for my focus groups, and artifact development.

Including more stakeholders and colleagues, advice could have helped me to better conceptualize how this problem could be solved. The biggest takeaway that I gained in developing these strategies is the understanding that I could not determine the needs of FGS by myself. Solving problems as an engaged educational leader is not something that can be navigated alone. It truly takes a village and team to support the academic and emotional needs of all students. The important members of the village that were involved were students, parents, and teachers, but in the future I could expand that stakeholder group.

Literature Review

A logic model was the first portion of strategy one, and it was developed to provide a visual representation of how the problem in this ELP would be addressed. The second portion of Strategy 1 focused on research conducted on the best practices for FGSs. The research that I conducted provided a foundation for understanding the challenges that FGSs encounter and how these challenges contribute to their lack of success. Researching these challenges also created a space to identify research-validated supports that could be implemented at the secondary level. Implementing these supports would be influential in addressing the problem at CRHS, which is that FGSs are not identified upon entry into high school. FGS were not being identified, supported, and prepared for college, which led to the research that I conducted in the literature review.

Initially, when I was gathering research for this literature review, I struggled with organizing this information in a manner that would help me conceptualize the problem at CRHS.

The barrier I encountered was determining whether or not I should focus on FGS entering into college or preparing for college. The research I began to gather directed me to concentrate on FGSs being identified and supported in preparation for college. I wanted my research to focus on supporting FGSs and their families as they navigate the college process. In order to support FGSs and their families, I wanted my research to focus on several areas (social capital, family and community connection, academic support, mental health, and financial barriers). Each area was organized in a manner that exhibited what FGS needed to be successful in college. Additionally, there were various research-based supports that FGS and their families could utilize.

These research-based supports would consist of academic support such as schools developing partnerships with programs such as TRiO or Summer Bridge, which have a high enrollment of FGSs (Stebbleton & Schmidt, 2010). Mental health supports for FGS would be culturally sensitive counseling services should be provided, programs and resources that are specific to the needs of FGSs should be developed, and increased access to mental health providers, counseling, and support groups (Crawford, 2018). Financial literacy support that would help FGS is individual advising, which allows advisors, counselors, or campus staff to engage in one-on-one conversations with first-generation students (Eichelberger et al. 2017).

My initial goal of this literature review was to identify the main issues that students have and possible supports that led me to really think through what I could do at CRHS to support their needs. Ultimately, the literature review served as a foundational step in shaping and addressing the needs of FGSs at CRHS and implementing policies that support FGSs and their families within the educational community.

Improvement Strategy 2

The information in my literature review informed my focus group questions. My literature review focused on the lack of social capital that FGS have compared to their continuing generation peers in preparation for college. This affects their academic integration, as far as navigating academic advising, course selections, career planning, and study habits. A clear example of the problems FGSs have with academic integration and utilizing university resources can be seen by looking at academic advising. Academic advising offers an effective retention strategy for individuals considered at most risk for dropping out, including FGSs (Vander Schee, 2007). The information gathered and analyzed assisted in the development of three focus groups. Just like the research conducted to create the literature review, I needed to obtain explicit perspectives from students, teachers, and parents of FGS at CRHS through focus groups. Their perspectives created an opportunity to focus on what FGS and their parents need and how teachers and school counselors can support their preparation for college.

Once I developed the questions for each focus group, I did not have a preconceived idea of how the participants in each focus group would respond to each question. The questions from each focus group were designed for participants to give explicit responses about the needs of FGS, resources needed for parents, and how teachers support FGS. Even though the development of each question was created for that specific group, they ultimately were designed to determine how to support FGS in their journey to college. I was intrigued by some of the responses in each focus group. For instance, one student responded that although their Spanish course may be challenging, they know that it will be beneficial for their career as a nurse to be bilingual.

Although I did not facilitate the student focus groups, due to my position as an administrator and the perception of having influence on their responses. I had high expectations

for the responses that they would provide and the data that I could collect. In reviewing the transcripts, however, students gave very minimal responses, and the facilitator had to often restate or ask the question in a different manner in order to get a response that could potentially be used as data. A few of the students merely repeated the same responses as their fellow peers. I think that the reason they gave such vague or repetitive responses was due to being in a group with fellow peers and possibly not wanting to give an in-depth response on why they wanted to attend college. If we had conducted interviews, I think they would have given more explicit responses. By conducting an interview, the FGS may have given responses that may or may not have garnered more data on addressing their needs and providing support.

Another aspect that I feel played a role in their limited responses was the age group (freshman and sophomores), as opposed to possibly receiving more informed responses from juniors and seniors. Although my expectation was for students to give more in-depth responses, many expressed that they are thinking about and want to attend college. They did provide some responses in regard to the courses they are currently enrolled in and how they are preparing them for college. A few felt that these courses will also prepare them for their careers. I still appreciate their willingness to participate and give me information that was still helpful.

The expectations that I had for the teacher focus group were different than those of the students, as I felt they might not be as willing to give explicit responses. Based on the design of the questions, I felt that they might be more connected in knowing who the FGSs at CRHS are and how they support them. In reviewing the transcripts, their responses created a level of concern for me in how FGS are being supported. Teachers expressed their frustration that the current curriculum is not rigorous enough. They felt that if the curriculum had more rigor embedded in it, they would not have to supplement additional resources in their lessons and

assignments. However, from their responses it is unclear if teachers are concerned about rigor, which is the standards and expectations set by educators to ensure students are challenged to think critically and engage in deep meaningful learning with subject matter that is shown through thorough understanding and application of knowledge (Conley, 2007). A student's academic disposition, which are the behaviors, attitudes, and habits that students showcase in their learning experiences such as motivation, persistence that fuel their approach to academic success (Costa, Kallick, 2000). CRSD has adopted HQIM across the district, these materials are rigorous and aligned with standards. If teachers are not seeing rigor in the curriculum then there is a significant disconnect for teachers that needs to be addressed. As stated by the authors, Kylene Beers and Robert Probst (Beers & Probst, 2012) rigor is not the quality of the texts in the curriculum but what you have students do with those texts. If teachers do not understand this concept then administration will need to conduct more professional learning with these teachers. Several of the participants are veteran teachers who have been teaching for more than 15 years. My concern is that if a few of them have these strong feelings about the lack of rigor in the curriculum, then novice teachers, who do not have the experience and access to additional resources, will have even more difficulty meeting the needs of FGS students.

Although I am not dismissing these teachers' frustration with the lack of rigor in the curriculum, I still have a concern with some of the teachers' low expectations for students enrolled in their courses. Even though there may be some teachers who have low expectations, there are others who want their students to excel academically whether it is in their class or an advanced level course. Several teachers expressed how they encourage and support students to enroll in advanced-level courses and discuss how they have the capability to be successful in these types of courses. If more teachers engage in the mindset that all courses should be rigorous,

it will then transfer into increased enrollment of FGS taking AP or dual enrollment courses. This will be an additional support in FGS being prepared for college.

Although teachers expressed their frustrations, there is a lack of accountability for their instructional practices. There is a disconnect between how teachers should be supporting FGS and how they are preparing them for college. The goal is to support teachers in implementing the best instructional practices. It will take support from administration and instructional coaches to provide professional development that delves into their curriculum and teaching strategies. This level of support will benefit FGSs' academic success and preparation for college.

Teachers can receive additional support through ongoing professional learning with the district instructional team, local colleges of education, and digital professional development. The support from administration can help guide the type and timeline of when the professional learning can take place. Additional support should be given with high quality instructional materials (HQIM) as this has been a district initiative that was implemented a few years ago. Teachers receiving this type of training would help them implement rigorous tasks such as practicing reading, writing and speaking about grade level concepts. These rigorous tasks will better prepare FGS for college.

The parent responses provided insight into the level of support they are able to provide their FGSs, accessing various resources, and understanding the college process. I felt as though the parents who participated in the focus group were open and vulnerable with their responses. They were able to fully express their feelings about their FGS and what they needed. FGS parents want the best for their children, and although they did not attend college, they understand the importance of their child attending. Several of the parents were transparent about not being able to financially support their child to attend college. Even though they are unable to support

their child financially, they are actively seeking ways to obtain financial aid, scholarships, and grants.

The responses from all three focus groups allowed me to reflect upon not only the lack of identification of FGS at CRHS but also having equitable access to resources. Participants in the student and parent focus groups embrace the fact that first-generation college attendance is important. Therefore, they want access to resources in order to make informed decisions regarding course enrollment, the college application process, and financial aid. If CRHS is able to better support FGSs and their families, that could lead to significantly more FGSs successfully matriculating to college.

Improvement Strategy 3

In Strategy 2, I conducted three focus groups with students, teachers, and parents to gather data on their needs and perspectives on FGSs. Results from each focus group delved into the needs of first generation students. One thing that was consistently stated was the need to have ongoing support from the time they enter high school until they graduated. In my literature review I discussed how first generation students do not have social capital, which is their ability to seek support. This affects their academic integration and being able to navigate academic advising, course assignments, and career planning. The information gathered from the focus groups and the literature review, I developed a multi-year system Student Success Plan (SSP) that FGS will utilize from the time they enter high school until they graduate.

The structure of the SSP is designed for FGS to be identified upon entering their freshman year of high school. It was also designed to create a space for school counselors and FGS to engage in ongoing conversations about their goals for college. Based on the responses from the student focus group, several of them indicated that they need support with determining

the best college, the financial aid process, and the college application process. The consistent area in which the participants stated that they needed support was financial aid. They discussed that they need more resources to complete the financial aid process as they will not be able to receive any financial support from their families. Reading through these responses reminded me of when I was an FGS and experienced minimal resources or support in trying to navigate the financial aid process. Based on the student responses, they want to attend college, but the largest obstacle they face is being able to fund their college education.

My goal and vision for the student success portfolio was to create a living document that would follow FGS upon entry into high school until they graduate. This document would be accessible to FGS, parents, school counselors, and administrators. Once an FGS is identified, the goal is for the school counselor and administrator to meet with them three times throughout the school year. Each meeting would consist of a topic to help drive the conversation but still provide space for FGS to ask questions and explore various opportunities. During the freshman year, the focus of the SSP is on identifying FGS and developing a plan for post-secondary attendance. It is during this year that school counselors and administrators are able to develop a relationship with FGS and their families to lay the groundwork for college. As stated in the literature review, research demonstrates that upon graduating from high school, FGSs have a difficult time transitioning to college because they are not fully prepared with key skills that are crucial to college success (Pascarella et al., 2004).

During an FGS sophomore year, the focus of the SSP concentrated on reviewing various types of 2-year and 4-year colleges and course selection for their junior year. Exploring these different types of colleges provides FGS and their families with options. I think during their sophomore year, the parents should attend at least one meeting to engage in conversations about

the colleges they want to explore and courses for the following school year. In order for this to be successful, the school will need to accommodate the parents' schedules. The meeting should be flexible, potentially being held in the evening so that parents could participate live or set up a Zoom. During the meetings with a parent, it will provide opportunities for FGS and their families. As stated by the researchers in the literature review, there are several benefits that come with higher education, including better working conditions, higher earnings, higher rates of employment, better health, lower rates of unemployment and poverty, and longer life expectancies (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Ma & Baum, 2016). Developing a plan while in high school will help FGS be more prepared for college and the career path that they decide to travel.

When an FGS enters their junior year of high school, they will begin discussing colleges, majors, and the courses they would need to take in high school and college based on their major. Additionally, they will start visiting various colleges and universities with their families to determine the best institution for them. This is a crucial school year for FGS as they will take PSAT 11 and the SAT in the spring. These assessments will also determine which college they may be admitted into based on their scores. Once they enter their senior year, they will apply to various colleges and universities where they can thrive academically. I wanted to ensure that through this ELP, FGS will have access to multiple resources, which can be accomplished through the yearly meetings between the FGS and the school counselor.

CHAPTER 6

MOTIVATION

As an FGS, I know all too well how the journey can present unforeseen challenges, particularly when students and their families have limited access to resources, as the parents who participated in my focus group did. It was my parents' number one priority that I attend and obtain a college degree. Attending college would afford me a multitude of opportunities to accomplish the various goals I had set. Most importantly, my parents wanted me to have more opportunities and accomplish goals that they themselves could not attain without a college degree.

Through this ELP, I wanted to evoke change in how FGS are identified, supported, and prepared for college at CRHS. Despite the lack of support I had during my high school career, I was making it my mission to change that narrative. I knew that once data was collected and analyzed, I could develop a plan that would be beneficial for FGS and change the infrastructure at CRHS in terms of how they support FGSs and their families.

Personal Goals

When reflecting on my educational leadership journey, one of my early goals was to become a teacher, give back to my community, and provide students with the same kinds of positive experiences that I had in school. For 13 years, I taught first grade, and even though my students were six and seven years old and just starting their educational journey, I was always

discussing various careers and the importance of making good choices. I wanted my students to know that they could be anything they wanted to be, and in order to accomplish their career goals, many of my students would have to go to college. Over time, I made the choice to change my career path in order to empower more students beyond the four walls of my first-grade classroom. This decision led me to pursue more training and take on leadership roles in my district.

Prior to starting the Ed.D program, I was a dean of student achievement at CRHS. The scope and sequence of that role involved managing and regulating students' behavior and supporting students who had a 504 plan. It was through the interactions and conversations that I had with students that I discovered there was a disconnect in identifying and supporting FGS at CRHS. In that role, I was limited in the amount of support I could provide and had limited influence to make a change in the infrastructure at CRHS. Knowing my limitations, I decided that it was time for me to expand my educational background and apply to the Ed.D program. I knew this program would stretch and propel me to the next level in my career. It also would provide me the opportunity to explore how I could support FGS. However, a year into this program, I transitioned to the position of assistant principal. This position has provided me the opportunity to have a larger landscape in not only supporting students, their families, and teachers but also cultivating effective change and implementing systems that will make providing support more impactful.

ELP Development

When I started gathering my preliminary research on FGS, I was uncertain of the direction that I wanted to take in how to support FGS. On one hand, I felt that it would be helpful to research former CRHS-FGS who are currently attending college to explore how they

navigated through their first year of college and the skills and resources that made this possible. On the other hand, I thought it would be equally helpful to explore how FGS are being prepared while in high school and the specific needs of CRHS FGS and their families. It became evident that I had a powerful platform as an administrator to effect change in CRHS, and by following the second path, I could better identify and support FGS students and provide targeted resources for them and their families.

Identifying FGS at CRHS was one section of the problem in this ELP. The next section focused on how to identify FGSs and support their families in obtaining valuable resources. Many questions began to formulate, such as how I would identify an FGS once they are identified, what I would do next, and how I would disperse this information to the administration and staff at CRHS. My first course in this doctoral program was 846- Collection and Analysis Data. Through this course, we explored how to identify a problem and collect and analyze data to eliminate or minimize the problem. It was through this course I was able to identify and explore the problem of low enrollment of minority students in advanced placement courses. The data collected for this project revealed that a small percentage of minority students are enrolling in these courses, a problem that is connected to FGS preparation. Research demonstrates that students of color who are first-generation have a higher percentage than white students. Students of color would especially benefit from enrolling in advanced-level courses that can help mitigate the barriers that they encounter. Gathering data and analyzing the information allowed me to narrow down how I would conduct my research for this ELP. This led me to review our school's graduation rate, course offerings and completion, PSAT/SAT and AP scores, and college enrollment upon graduation. In reviewing these areas, it was clear that I needed to implement a systematic approach to identifying and supporting FGS at CRHS.

My initial leadership style, being transactional, allowed me to review the problem, set a goal, develop a plan, implement, and evaluate. A transactional leader emphasizes the exchange that takes place between them and their followers. Determining the problem at CRHS was complex, as it involved deciding how to address and solve the problem. One course that helped me review a problem was 828 - Research in Education Decision Making. One of the many resourceful assignments was creating an annotated bibliography. This assignment allowed me to review several articles centered around my problem of FGSs and the support available for them and their families. An additional assignment was constructing a data inventory; I observed that we have a significant amount of data in CRHS, but we are not utilizing it in a coherent way. Each piece of data that was collected is significant in not only the growth of our students but also teachers.

Throughout my doctoral journey, another course that impacted my research was 863 - Evaluation in Education. Its major focus was understanding how to evaluate educational programs and the significant impact they will have on student achievement. Several assignments that I completed allowed me to evaluate the effectiveness of programs that have been implemented at CRHS. The dual enrollment program was evaluated utilizing the responsive, empowerment-driven approach. I chose to implement the responsive approach for CRHS's dual enrollment program to shed light on how the program can increase enrollment, strategic partnerships, and financial support. Evaluating one of the programs discussed in this ELP allowed me to understand the importance of evaluation and the impact that it can have within a school.

Once completing significant research about FGS and reviewing the data at CRHS, I realized that I needed to narrow my research to changing the infrastructure at CRHS and how we

identify FGS along with the resources they and their families are provided. In order for students to be prepared for their first year of college, I needed to have a clear understanding of what they needed prior to graduating high school. The research conducted in my literature review provided a significant amount of information that was utilized as a foundation for the next step in my plan. Conducting the three focus groups presented relevant information due to the fact the participants were students, families, and teachers who are a part of CRHS. I was able to apply my knowledge of analyzing data to determine how to support FGSs and provide resources that are needed.

Through this program, I learned how to collect and analyze data in a manner that would be presented in a format that anyone could understand. A key component once my data was collected and analyzed was reflecting on how it could evoke change. Change can oftentimes be perceived as a negative, but based on how it is presented and executed, it can be positive. My goal for this problem was to collect, analyze, and reflect on how the data would change how CRHS identified and supported FGS.

My Journey

An authentic leader has the ability to invoke empowerment amongst the people that they lead. Throughout this doctoral journey, my leadership style has shifted from transactional to transformational. While enrolled in course 890 - Leadership Theory and Research, we reviewed and discussed several theorists. One particular book we read and reflected on was "Changing on the Job" by Jennifer Garvey-Berger. This book focused on a transformational mindset, which began to change my perspective as a leader. When people exhibit this form of mind, they are able to understand the perspectives of others and use those perspectives to continuously transform their own system.

A Transformational leader focuses on inspiring and motivating their followers to obtain and achieve goals that will enhance their own leadership abilities. They also create an environment where people are able to grow and support other colleagues. Transformational leaders are visionary, charismatic, and able to articulate a compelling vision for the future. They empower and develop their followers by fostering trust, encouraging innovation, and providing support and guidance. Through this ELP, my goal was to transform how CRHS supports FGS and their families in preparing for college. I not only wanted FGS to know that college is obtainable, but all students should understand the importance of attending college if this is the path that they choose. Additionally, I wanted to ensure that parents of FGSs are connected with the administration and counselors and have a plan on how to support their FGS and obtain resources in preparation for college.

Leadership is not just having the ability to make decisions and implement them but inspiring and influencing others towards a common goal that will invoke positive change. Constructing this ELP has afforded me the opportunity to research, collaborate, and restructure how CRHS identifies and supports FGS and their families in preparing for college.

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Appendix A

ELP Proposal Document

A student who aspires to attend college is influenced by the norms and expectations that are set by family members, teachers, community members, and peers, and research shows that college-related decisions occur within and depend on the contexts in which students are embedded (Perna, 2006; Perna & Jones, 2013). FGSs whose parents did not attend college are, therefore, disadvantaged in the college preparation process compared to their continuing generation peers (those students where one or both parents attended college). These students often have less knowledge of the college preparation process and demands of higher education and, because of this, have less post-secondary preparation in their high school programs. This Educational Leadership Portfolio (ELP) intends to address the lack of preparation of FGSs at Caesar Rodney High School (CRHS) and identify pre-college interventions that can enhance these students' ability to thrive in a college environment. These strategies include identifying these students early in their academic careers and providing the support they need as they move through high school. This Education Leadership Portfolio consists of five sections, including 1) Introduction; 2) Organizational Context and Role; 3) Problem Statement; 4) Improvement Goals and Strategies, and 5) Artifact Narrative and Timeline.

Overview

CRSD provides educational services to over 7,000 students from K-12. Educational services are provided through one early childhood center: McIlvaine Early Childhood Center; seven elementary schools: Star Hill, David E. Robinson, Nellie H. Stokes, W. Reily Brown, Major George E. Welch, W.B. Simpson and Allen Frear; four middle schools: Fred Fifer, Air Base, Magnolia, and Postlewaite, one county school for students with disabilities: John S.

Charlton County, and one high school: Caesar Rodney High School. The district and the high school are committed to educational excellence through the development of exemplary programs in the areas of the 4As: academics, arts, athletics, and school atmosphere. Additionally, the four 4A's are embedded in the vision and mission of the district:

- *Vision* - The CRSD, the center of learning in our community, will expand programs and educational opportunities for students and the community to provide for the changing needs of a global society. We will focus on continued and enhanced academic achievement, expanded educational opportunities for the community, and necessary facilities and resources.
- *Mission* - Recognizing the value of each individual and building upon our commitment to excellence, the CRSD is dedicated to the mission of preparing students for a successful, productive, and purposeful life in a diverse, global community by providing quality educational opportunities for all students, and promoting caring attitudes through the school community.

However, although the mission and vision statements highlight the district's dedication to providing quality and expanded educational opportunities for students and the community, anecdotal evidence from CRHS graduates, along with an increasing amount of research, suggests that CRHS is not providing educational opportunities to one important group of students.

Research demonstrates that approximately 56% of all college students are from families with parents or guardians who have not earned a Bachelor's or higher degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These students are commonly referred to as first-generation college students (FGS), and in the last decade, representation of FGS at U.S. colleges and universities has risen from approximately 30% of students in 2011 (Weaver, 2011) to over 40% of first-year students

in 2022 (Startz, 2022). This rise makes FGS a significant educational demographic whose specific needs are not currently being addressed in CRHS and is the focus of this ELP project.

Organizational Context

CRHS Programmatic and Demographics

CRHS currently serves 2,300 students and has over 200 staff members. We offer the core courses (Mathematics, English, Science, and Social Studies), nine CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs, seven languages (Spanish, Arabic, German, Latin, French, Chinese, and Italian), and an extensive fine arts department (Music, Arts, and Drama). Along with a diversity of course offerings, CRHS is also a relatively diverse school, with equal numbers of Caucasian students and students of color. Table 1 shows the demographics of CRHS’s student population. Each assistant principal is assigned a section of the alphabet, which forms five cohorts of students with approximately 460 students per cohort. This data also depict the diverse backgrounds that FGSs are a part of at CRHS.

Table 1

Caesar Rodney High School Demographics 20222023 School Year

Race	Male	Female	Total
African-American	383	349	732
Caucasian	578	548	1126
Indian	5	3	8
Multiracial	93	96	189
Hispanic	121	120	241
Asian	49	49	98
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	3	1	4

Curriculum and High-Quality Instructional Materials

The ability to have access to highly qualified instructors during K-12 education has a lasting effect on a student's college academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2010). Over the past few years, CRHS has ensured that teachers are highly qualified and trained in utilizing “High-Quality Instructional Materials” (HQIM). High-quality instructional materials (HQIM) provide a road map for teachers on how to plan, teach, and assess student learning throughout the year (*De delivers: HQIM - Delaware Department of Education*). The goal of using HQIM is to better ensure equitable access for all students to course content and to prepare them to take college admission assessments (ex. PSAT, SAT, ACT). However, utilizing HQIM at CRHS also provides CRHS school personnel with a clear understanding of what is being taught to students each year.

Advanced Course Offerings

In high schools that push students toward college, the instruction often lacks the necessary rigor to adequately prepare students for the academic demands of college (Athanasios et al., 2016). On paper, this does not seem to be the case with CRHS, which currently offers 32 advanced placement courses (AP) and three dual enrollment courses. Enrollment in our AP courses averages 15 - 20 students per course, and each course culminates with a national assessment. Dual enrollment in high school is viewed by many as one mechanism for increasing college admission (An & Taylor, 2019). Students who participate in dual enrollment come from advantaged backgrounds and have strong grades (Rivera et al., 2019; Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). Currently, we have 18 students in our English composition course. This is the only dual enrollment course that we were able to offer for the 2022-2023 school year. Minority enrollment

in our AP and dual enrollment courses is below 5% because research demonstrates that FGS often come from minoritized groups.

Increasing enrollment in our AP and dual enrollment courses is important because the rigor of the courses and the college credit that students can earn eliminate some of the barriers that students face. However, there is still a problem with access at CRHS. First, students' families must shoulder the financial responsibility for payment of dual enrollment course(s). The cost of one course averages \$500.00, depending on the type of course. We have provided some financial assistance for students who have registered for a dual enrollment course, but many students are unable to pay for the course.

Another barrier that students encounter is the lack of knowledge and information about AP and dual enrollment courses. Some of them are unaware of the variety of AP and dual enrollment courses that are available at the high school, while others do not understand the significance these courses can play in their own college preparation. When students are registering for courses for the following school year, they meet with their school counselor to discuss courses and review the ones they have selected. It is during this time the student's counselor can provide knowledge about these courses even if the student does not inquire about them. Additionally, teachers are an integral part of informing and encouraging students to enroll in these courses. However, CRHS does not have the infrastructure to identify FGSs and educate them about the course offerings that can better prepare them for the rigors of their college programs.

Impact of COVID-19 on CRHS Advanced Course Offerings

Upon returning to school face to face from COVID-19, we have experienced a 20% decrease in students enrolling in our AP and dual enrollment courses (see Table 2 for AP

enrollment and performance data), and this has resulted in the elimination of many of these courses. We currently have a memorandum of understanding with Delaware Technical Community College in providing dual enrollment courses. They require a minimum number of students to be enrolled in the dual enrollment courses, and if that requirement is not met, then we cannot offer the course.

Table 2

Caesar Rodney High School Advanced Placement 5-Year Enrollment

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total AP student enrollment	508	457	437	511	441
AP Students with Scores 3 +	344	290	310	278	269
Percentage (%) of Total AP Students with Scores 3+	68%	63%	71%	54%	61%

In addition to the financial cost and lack of knowledge that students have about AP and dual enrollment courses, students are not enrolling or dropping the course due to the rigor and expectations of these courses. During the pandemic, many of our students experienced learning loss, inconsistent routines, and in-person support from educators. Students who were dropping AP or dual enrollment courses expressed it was too much work or extremely overwhelming. As an administrator, it has been challenging to convince students that they could be successful or that they need to engage in rigorous coursework to enroll in AP and dual enrollment courses since the return from the pandemic. Most dual enrollment students enter college with at least a few college credits earned, and they are less likely to take remedial courses in college (An, 2013; Grubb et al., 2017). AP and dual enrollment courses are a gateway for students who plan to attend college, especially FGS.

PSAT and SAT Assessments

When a student enters CRHS, they are required to take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) during their 9th, 10th, and 11th grade school year. This assessment is used as a practice assessment for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a test that is still widely used for college admission. Junior students at CRHS are administered the SAT in the spring. It is a statewide requirement that every high school has a designated school day to administer the SAT. This opportunity minimizes some barriers for FGS that are not clearly identified at CRHS since testing is scheduled and is free for Delaware students. Table 3 shows the percentage of students at CRHS who met and did not meet the benchmarks for math, English, reading, and writing for the PSAT and SAT. This data is separated by each grade level in which students completed the PSAT and the in-school SAT day.

Table 3*CRHS and State PSAT/SAT Data 2021–2022 School Year*

	% Met Both Benchmarks	% Met ERW Benchmarks	% Met Math Benchmarks	% Met no Benchmarks
9th				
CRHS	29%	49%	33%	47%
State	29%	50%	33%	42%
10th				
CRHS	32%	61%	34%	37%
State	26%	56%	27%	43%
11th (PSAT)				
CRHS	25%	52%	26%	46%
State	32%	65%	33%	34%
11th (SAT)				
CRHS	26%	51%	28%	47%
State	21%	45%	23%	53%

CRHS students' benchmark scores were higher than the states across all grade levels for the PSAT and SAT, with the exception of PSAT 11. Although the PSAT 11 scores were lower than the state average, there was a 5% increase in all three categories with the exception of those that met no benchmarks category.

Organizational Role at CRHS

My Personal and Professional Journey

Supporting FGSs as they journey to college is personal, as I was an FGS student. From my own experience, I know the better a student is prepared to take the leap from high school to college, the less likely he or she will stumble over the challenges that the college environment will present (van Rooij et al., 2018). Upon graduating with my bachelor of arts in elementary/special education, I knew that I wanted to teach so that I could help students develop their talents and improve their lives. For 13 years, I taught elementary students in first grade and then made the transition to administration.

During my first two years in administration, I was appointed to the position of dean of student achievement, an important role in effecting change for FGS, and I am Currently, I am one of five assistant principals at Caesar Rodney High School (CRHS) in the CRSD. As one of five assistant principals, one of my responsibilities is to support the vision and mission of the district, and preparing FGSS to be more successful in college is directly related to the mission of expanding opportunities for these students.

My Membership in a Student Support Team

CRHS has five school counselors, three deans of student achievement, and three mental health therapists who are assigned to work with an assistant principal and their cohort of students. This structure allows for each student to have a supportive team composed of an assistant principal, school counselor, dean, and mental health therapist. Because this team approach is already in place in CRHS, we can be more effective in addressing students' academic and social needs as we build the additional infrastructure to better support FGS. FGS at

CRHS need to feel assured that although they may be the first in their family to attend college, they will be prepared for their journey beyond high school. The process will include support from not only myself but also additional educators within the building (e.g., school counselors, teachers, coaches). As an assistant principal, I am able to make changes to systems, structures, and processes (e.g., senior meetings with counselors registering for classes) that are not meeting students' needs.

In preparing my cohort of students for graduation, the school counselor and I meet with our seniors a minimum of four times throughout the school year. Depending on the needs and background of the student, we may meet with them every three weeks to provide the support they need. During our meetings, we discuss student grades, mental health, and where they are in the college application process, and we help them advocate for themselves in their courses. These meetings offer an important framework for supporting FGS as they move toward graduation and college. As administrators, we strive to provide a clear path to graduation at CRHS, but the journey can be challenging. We currently do not have any data that indicates how many students at CRHS identify as FGS. This missing data is a contributing factor in preparing and providing the right support for FGS who desire to attend college.

My Work in Building School-Family Connection

An important component that aids in shaping an FGS decision to enroll in college is parental support (Ross, 2016). Helping to bridge the gap between parents and school is part of my responsibility as an AP at CRHS. Previous studies have found that students whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree are less prepared academically and are less likely to have the expectation of earning a bachelor's degree themselves (Cataldi et al., 2018; Chen & Carroll, 2005).

Providing additional parental support for parents whose students are at the secondary level can have a significant influence on FGSs's success. Research demonstrates that children benefit from their parent's involvement in school-related activities, and has positive impacts on students' academic outcomes, behavior, motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy (e.g., Domina, 2005; Fan & Williams, 2010; Jeynes, 2005). However, middle and high school programs aimed at increasing parental involvement are often uninformed by research and research-validated best practices (Hill & Chao, 2009). Part of my goals in my current role is to build school-to-home bridges that more effectively engage the parents of FGS students.

My ELP will assist in reviewing current support for FGSs at CRHS and improve what I term "the infrastructure" of support for these students. This will include infrastructure that will allow us to identify FGS students early in their high school careers and support them throughout their tenure at CRHS. Through this ELP, I will obtain a better understanding of the barriers that CRHS FGSs encounter and how the infrastructure should be designed to better prepare them for what is next in their academic journey, be it post-secondary education, a career, or the military.

Statement of Problem

Attending college is often considered the ultimate goal of a young person's K-12 preparation, and FGSs represent a rapidly growing student demographic, comprising around 34% of the college freshmen population. However, this group has also been recognized as an at-risk student population with the highest dropout rates in postsecondary education (Lightweis, 2014). Research shows that students whose parents did not attend college are considerably less likely to be prepared for college than their continuing generation peers (Choy, 2001) and are at risk of leaving college before degree completion (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). The fact that only 56% of

first-generation college students earn a baccalaureate degree within 6 years compared with 74% of students with a parent who graduated from college (Cataldi et al., 2018) demonstrates that FGSs continue to face a number of challenges that their continuing generation peers do not.

First, compared to their continuing-generation peers, FGSs are more likely to come from marginalized populations, such as low-income households, minority backgrounds, immigrant families, and alienated cultures (Conway, 2010; Stebleton et al., 2014). Therefore, before these students enter college, they are already facing economic, social and structural barriers that can impede their participation in the college preparation process (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Second, because FGS, by definition, have parents who did not attend college, they do not have the experiential resources of those students with parents who have attended college and who have both the social capital that comes with college attendance and the experience navigating the journey to and through college (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Because of these barriers, FGS often have less social and academic support for the journey to college and, therefore, have lower academic and career-related expectations, which manifest relatively early in these students' educational careers. According to Gibbons and Borders (2010), families without college education make seventh-grade students perceive a high number of barriers to college attendance. Choy (2001) also found that FGS begin having low expectations about their highest education attainment as early as they are in eighth grade (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). These attitudes negatively impact FGS academic preparation (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005), as well as compromise their persistence to degree completion (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008; Engle & Tinto, 2008) and performance in their college courses (Stephens et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is crucial that secondary schools provide early support and interventions for FGS. These should include access to rigorous college preparation coursework, institutional infrastructure to identify and support FGS needs and the needs of their families, and school teams that are dedicated and prepared to help students to navigate the complex and multifaceted college process (American School Counselor Association, 2019). Currently, this infrastructure is missing at Caesar Rodney High School.

Research shows that FGSs are transitioning to college with a lack of academic knowledge and study skills necessary to be successful (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). However, instead of identifying and supporting FGS students, CRHS identifies FGS too late in their high school careers, which jeopardizes our ability to effectively prepare them for this transition into college. The purpose of this ELP, therefore, is to better understand the barriers that contribute to FGSs' lack of success and to identify research-validated supports that can be instituted at the secondary school level to better prepare FGSs to be successful in college.

Improvement Goal and Strategies

The problem this ELP intends to address is that CRHS identifies FGS too late in their high school careers, which jeopardizes our ability to better prepare these students for college. FGSs that contribute to their lack of success, and to identify research-validated supports that can be instituted at the secondary school level to better prepare first generation students to be successful in college. As such, the improvement goal for this ELP is to enhance CRHS's "infrastructure" around FGS, with one aspect of which may be related to earlier identification. Increasing CRHS's "infrastructure" will aid in supporting FGSs from when they enter high school until they graduate. Strategies such as administering surveys, conducting interviews, developing a system, and resources that support FGS in preparing for college.

Strategy 1

Conduct a needs review which will identify and determine the supports needed for FGS in preparation for college. In preparing FGS for college, a review of the lack of preparation will be derived from a literature review. Additionally, an interview will be conducted with admission counselors from local universities.

- *Resources Needed:* IRB approval to conduct a survey and interview with minors. Contact information of local colleges admission office. Access to research databases to conduct an inquiry into the barriers that FGS encounter in college.
- *Evidence to Collect:* The results from the survey and interview will identify FGS needs and supports. Identifying their needs will allow CRHS to review and develop an infrastructure that will address those needs and provide support for FGS to be successful. Additional literature synthesis will be utilized to determine the barriers and areas of concern that FGSs encounter upon entry into college. The feedback and insight from the local college admission office on the requirements for admissions and the skills that students need to be successful in that environment.

Strategy 2

Develop a multi-year system that tracks FGS students' academic progress and their needs. Upon entry into their freshman year of high school, each student will create a student success portfolio. This portfolio will be updated a minimum of four times each school year. The logic model will provide a visual representation of the strategies, objectives, and long-term goals for FGS in preparation for college.

- *Resources Needed:* Access to PowerSchool (database that contains student contact information, schedule, grades, attendance, and transcript) to review the number of

students enrolled in AP, Dual enrollment, and higher-level mathematics courses.

Enrollment data of these courses for the past three school years.

- Evidence to Collect: A review of enrollment and grades in all courses, more specifically AP and dual enrollment courses. The course audit analysis will be created to assist teachers in reviewing these courses' curricula and increasing enrollment in these courses. A student success portfolio will be developed for every student upon entry into high school. The school counselor and assistant principal will meet with students quarterly throughout their high school tenure to review the plan and discuss various topics. The discussion topics during each meeting will be based on FGSs' needs and research-based support strategies. A preliminary outline of the grade-level focus is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

CRHS Yearly Discussion Topics

Timeline	9th	10th	11th	12th
Aug - Oct	Identify FGS	Explore colleges (2 yr. and 4 yr.)	Discuss Majors and Courses for college	College application submissions
Nov - Feb	Develop an academic and after high school plan	Review academic plan	Attend in-person and virtual college tours	Apply for scholarships and financial aid
Feb - Apr	Course selection for 10th grader	Course selection for 11th grade	Course selection 12th grade	Review college(s) acceptance letter(s). Confirm college acceptance

Strategy 3

Creation of parent resources for FGSs, which include interviewing and surveying parents to determine their needs and supports. These resources will be compiled into a website for

parents to access and utilize. The website will contain links and provide information for FGS parents in preparation for college.

- *Resources Needed:* Approval from the district office to contact parents to participate in a survey, interview, and parent conference. Technology support is needed to develop and structure the webpage to be easily accessible and user-friendly for parents.
- *Evidence to Collect:* Feedback from the survey will be needed to aid in the development of providing resources and support for parents. Resources that are currently available to families and how they are supporting their FGS. The support and resources that are developed will be transformed into a website that is accessible to FGS and their families.

Table 5

Artifact Table

No.	Name	Type	Audience	Action Steps	IRB Needed	Timeli ne	Status
1	Literature Review	Synthesis of literature on the needs of first-generation students	K-12 school leadership, Counselors, College Leadership, Advisors	Revise and edit	No	Nov. 2022	Draft; submitted by October 25, 2022
2	Logic Model	A graphic depiction of resources and activities to produce outcomes	K-12 school leadership	Created	No	Jan. 2023	
3	Course Audit and Analysis	Review courses for FGS	Administration, Counselors	In Progress	no	March 2023	
4	FGS Initial Questionnaire and Survey at CRHS	Creation of survey and analysis of the data	College Leadership, Advisors, Counselor	Created	Yes	Nov. 2022	
5	Interview with first generation students at CRHS	Creation of interview protocol and analysis of the data	College Leadership, Advisors, Counselor	Created	Yes	Nov. 2022	

6	Interview College Admission Counselors	Obtain information on what colleges are looking for and the needs expressed by students	Administrati on, Counselors, Teachers	In progress	no	Februa ry 2023
7	Webpage	An online platform with accessible resources for first generation students to utilize	Students, Families	Created	No	Dec. 2022
8	Parent Presentation	Provide families with resources that address needs of FGS and families	Students, Families	In progress	No	April 2023
9	Student Success Portfolio	A living document that will be updated quarterly from the time a student enters high school until they graduate.	School Counselors, Administrato rs	In progress	No	April 2023

Artifact 1: Literature Synthesis

The literature review is a selected review of literature that is focused on the challenges that FGSs face and the research-based supports that can help FGS overcome those challenges.

Artifact 2: Logic Model

The logic model is a graphic representation of the resources, activities, and expected outcomes of this ELP initiative to support FGS at CRHS.

Artifact 3: Course Audit Analysis

A presentation will be created for teachers to review and reflect upon their course(s), curriculum, and instructional practices. Reflecting and reviewing will allow teachers with guidance from content/instructional specialists to ensure they are utilizing HQIM. In addition to utilizing HQIM, are they using student data to drive instruction? The instructional practices are being implemented with fidelity and opportunities for students to be engaged in rigorous content.

This presentation will be designed based on CRHSs current curriculum for each department. It will provide a step-by-step layout of how to analyze their course(s). The first step will be to review the goals and curriculum themes, ensuring they align with standards. In the second step, teachers will analyze each lesson, resources, and the assessment that accompanies the unit. By reviewing each lesson, teachers can determine misconceptions that students may have and lessons that may require more instructional time than is suggested. During this presentation, teachers will work with fellow colleagues to collaborate and navigate the course analysis.

Artifact 4: Survey/Questionnaire

I will distribute and analyze data from a survey that will be given to FGSs. The purpose of this survey is to gather data on the financial support FGS received from their parents when attending high school and what resources are available at their college. The data will be analyzed to determine what resources and infrastructure should be implemented at the high school level. Proposed questions to be asked in the survey.

Artifact 4: Interview

I will conduct an interview utilizing 4-5 participants who completed the survey. The purpose of the interview is to gain additional information from the participants of the survey on FGSs' perspective, specific family support, and college transition. The participants will be determined based on their responses about receiving minimum support from family, resources, and preparation for college. The data gathered from the interview will be analyzed to determine what resources are sufficient or insufficient. Proposed questions to be asked in the interview.

Artifact 6: Interview with Local College Admission Counselors

An interview will be conducted with local college admission counselors to understand the skills and knowledge that colleges want students to be prepared with, as well as the needs and challenges that FGS face.

Artifact 7: Webpage

A web page will be created as a resource for FGS and families to utilize that links them to scholarships, college application material, and financial aid tutorials. The resources linked in this webpage will be centrally located for students and families to access at their convenience. Additionally, the webpage will contain modules on how to select courses for high school, post-secondary career options, and resources for selecting a college that best fits the needs of the student.

Artifact 8: Parent Presentation

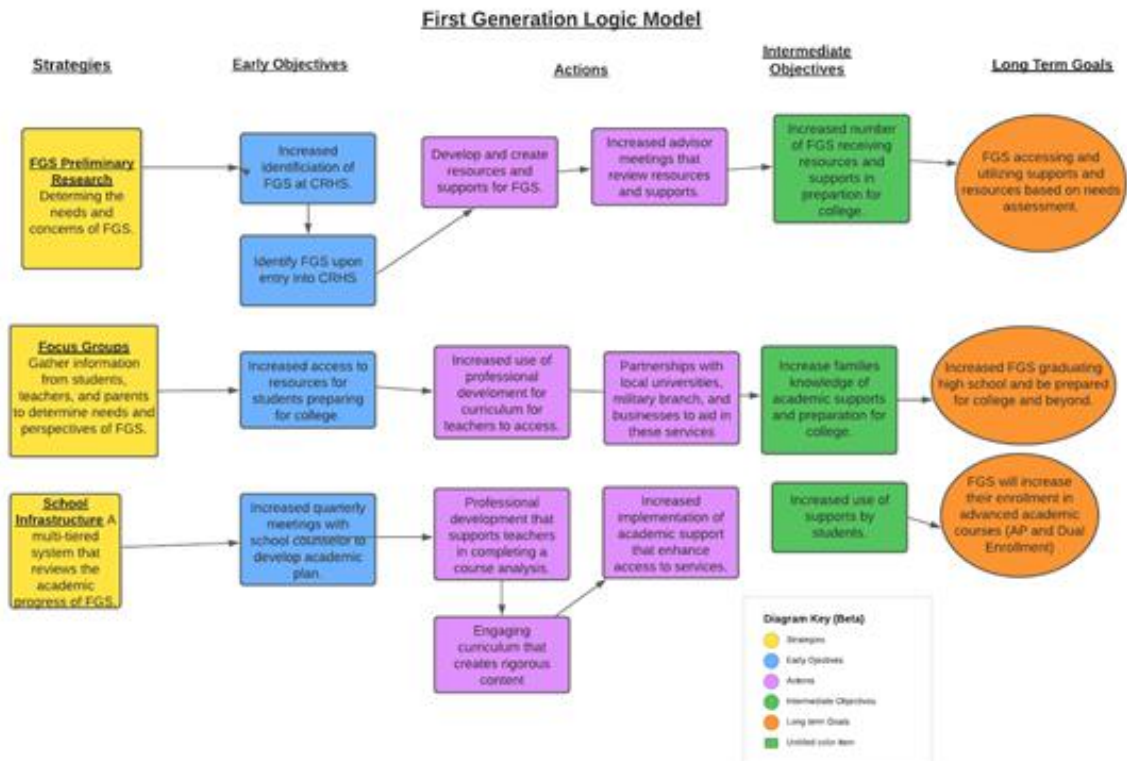
A parent presentation will be developed for FGS parents to access on the web, which will provide a variety of resources. These resources will consist of assistance with completing college applications, financial aid, college tours, scholarships, and college expectations. Additionally, this presentation will contain previous FGS families that will discuss how they were able to support their children in navigating college.

Artifact 9: Student Success Portfolio

A portfolio will be developed with students upon entering high school. Each student will develop a portfolio with their school counselor that will outline their future career plans, needs/supports, and course schedule. This portfolio will be reviewed quarterly to make changes/updates and ensure FGS students are being identified and supported.

Appendix B

First Generation Logic Model



Appendix C

Literature Review

Meeting the Needs of First-Generation Students

Introduction

Higher educational attainment is a major gateway to upward mobility (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). However, FGSs continue to enter college with less preparation for obtaining their undergraduate degree compared to their continuing-generation student peers. Research demonstrates that upon graduating from high, FGSs have a difficult time transitioning to college because they are not fully prepared with key skills that are crucial to college success (Pascarella et al., 2004). These include financial literacy skills, academic skills, and the knowledge to utilize the advisory supports that are available to them once they get to college. Educational institutions need to provide a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of FGS, which includes a commitment from multiple players to improve college access and success for these students (Perna & Jones, 2013). This is in the recognition that higher education benefits individuals in various ways, including higher rates of employment, longer life, better health, higher earnings, and lower rates of poverty (Ma & Baum, 2016; Carnevale & Smith, 2018). The

purpose of this literature review, therefore, was to better understand the particular challenges FGSs face that contribute to their lack of success and to identify research-validated supports that can be instituted at the secondary school level to better prepare FGSs to be successful in college.

The Impact of Social Capital on First-Generation Student Success

FGSs comprise approximately 30% of total post-secondary enrollments in the United States (Cataldi et al., 2018). However, this significant demographic of students faces obstacles that their continuing generation peers do not. These obstacles make the transition into college more difficult for FGS and lead to poorer academic outcomes for this group. First, these students often have inadequate financial support and a lack of role models who have attended or graduated college (Chen, 2016; Falcon, 2015). However, research also demonstrates that one explanation for poor academic outcomes among FGSs is that this group often has less *social capital* to draw upon when engaging in the university environment compared to other students (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Wainwright & Watts, 2021). Social capital, as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2001), is the value one gains from being in a relationship with another person who can provide support and assistance in a given social situation. Because FGSs do not have ready access to parents who have attended college or university, they often have less social capital than their continuing-generation peers and less access to the navigational tools needed to access university resources and build relationships through networking.

In order to explore the impact of social capital on FGSs, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) conducted a study on FGSs' perceptions of social relationships with formal institutional agents (e.g., professors, counselors, teaching assistants, and student services) and informal agents (e.g., classmates) and how these relationships impacted their success in college. In this study, the researchers used purposeful random sampling to identify full-time FGSs at a community college

in northern Nevada where seventy-one percent of the students enrolled at the college identified as White/non-Hispanic. The interview questions that were utilized in the study were based on the theoretical assumptions of social capital theory and prior research on first-generation college students (Moschetti and Hudley, 2008). In completing the data analysis for the study, the researchers discovered that four themes dominated the conversations of these students, all of the themes related to issues of social capital. These themes centered around access to institutional support (80%), personal characteristics (40%) that lead to college success, the lack of clear family support (90%), and the impact of fewer financial resources (70%).

A majority of the participants discussed family support throughout their interview and how their families are limited in providing financial support and encouragement to them as students. Additionally, many stated in their interviews that the lack of financial resources necessitated working off campus, which contributed to not being able to forge relationships or utilize campus support, an important element of building social capital. The participants also indicated that due to their parents being unfamiliar with college, they were unable to assist them with accessing institutional guidance. Not realizing the importance of academic and social networks in college, these parents of FGS did not encourage students to integrate socially or intellectually into the life of the institution (Moschetti and Hudley, 2015)

Institutional support ranked as the next important domain, with students identifying the difficulties inherent in the transition from high school to community college and the overall lack of institutional support (e.g., tour guides, confusing registration procedures, and lack of communication between offices on campus) that were targeted at the needs of FGSs. Many of the participants indicated that they desired additional institutional support but encountered

roadblocks upon their transition, such as offices on campus not being organized and having centralized information. The students in this study believed that their own personal characteristics primarily contributed to their success rather than the help they received from institutional agents. Institutional support is the foundation for any student to be successful during college. More specifically, if FGSs do have adequate institutional support, they will not develop social capital, which will have a profound effect on their success in college.

Overall, the researchers' findings demonstrate that incoming FGSs are at a disadvantage when compared to their non-first-generation peers, who have greater amounts of social capital that are transmitted through their parents, a finding that aligns with previous research (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Therefore, institutions must continuously evolve in understanding the needs of low-socioeconomic FGSs in order to retain them and successfully support them through graduation.

More recently, researchers (Almeida et al., 2019) conducted a study at a private college in the Southwestern United States with FGSs who were in their junior and senior years to explore how academic support can build social capital and impact a student's "grit mindset." In this instance, a "grit mindset" can be defined as the willingness to continue trying in the face of significant challenges. The participants consisted of 86% of FGSs who were asked in a survey to identify peers and faculty on campus from whom they have received academic support. The researchers developed a grit scale as a 12-item assessment, the results of which are placed into two categories: Perseverance of Effort and Consistency of Interest. Grit scores have been shown to help predict educational attainment for adults and academic success among freshman psychology majors at a selective higher education institution when the scores are added to measures of cognitive ability (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). In two studies conducted by

(Strayhorn, 2013 & O'Neal et al., 2016), the grit scale was correlated with higher grades and with the ability to overcome other obstacles in higher education, specifically financial and institutional barriers.

FGS juniors and seniors at a 4-year, private university took part in an online survey that asked about students' student status, employment, mentoring and support systems, demographics, GPA, and standardized test results along with the Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007). FGS responded to two primary network questions. They identified up to seven staff members and seven student peers from whom they previously received informational support. The findings of the study showed that students who took part in the survey received informational support more frequently from peers than they did from faculty and staff. It was also evident that the students in the sample had stronger relationships with their peers as compared to the faculty from whom they got informational support. The study's findings showed a relationship between grit scores and the ability to have more information support networks. Participants who had above-average grit scores were more likely to have larger information support networks and benefit from faulty advice compared to those who managed below-average scores. The findings also helped determine that students with above-average GPAs had larger peer information support networks than students with below-average GPAs.

“FGCS, maintaining a grit mindset and employing grit to navigate college and overcome obstacles to succeed is intertwined with the use of embedded resources in one's social network on campus. Educators or the institutions can support students by being more engaged in the following areas: (a) with their network to have up-to-date knowledge of the interests of network members and resources within one's network; (b) with students by encouraging grit through engaging students' interests in manifold ways and (c) with the campus leadership, insofar as the

institutional agent can influence the design and implementation of student programs and social spaces with the intention of facilitating social capital that particularly benefits FGCS and encourages their perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Almedia, 2019, p.55).

Family and Community Connection

Family Support of FGS

First generation students’ families provide these students with important socialization and learning opportunities, information, social interactions, guidance, and resources.

However, because FGS are the first in their family to attend college, they face many family challenges that continuing generation students do not face. Despite families of FGS often having limited information or experience with college, many FGS look to their family as their first source of both emotional (e.g., listening, encouraging, advising) and instrumental (tangible, physical, financial) support during the transition to college and throughout college (LeBouef & Dworkin, 2021). According to Azmitia et al. (2018), the amount and types of support received from parents are mixed, but research demonstrates that FGSs have reported that emotional support from family members and friends from home was one of their main reasons for not dropping out of college. The study conducted by McCulloh (2020) focused on the perceptions of parental support in FGS students in order to understand how family support impacted FGS.

Twelve students participated in the study at a small private, faith-based university located in the Midwest United States. In a structured interview, researchers asked the participants to share their high school and college enrollment experiences, family relationships, and personal challenges as FGSs. Although the participants revealed that parental support was one form of support, there are others who have provided support as well. They have received support from extended family and community support. Parents were able to provide financial resources such as cosigning for a

loan, helping with living expenses, and other incidentals that occurred while attending college. Noting the importance of this kind of financial help from parents, one participant stated, “I know by attending this university, I am sure I asked them to help with things like finances, of course. In everything, my parents go above what is necessary to make sure that I have this opportunity” (McCulloh, 2020, p.156). These family connections have been a significant part of FGSs's ability to maintain themselves during their college experience.

The researchers found that extended family support was also identified by participants as essential and beneficial to their ability to attend and stay in college. The extended family was able to be another resource for information about college, selection of a college and major, and just to vent when a student was under stress. One thing that many enjoyed was having extended family visit them on campus, mail care packages, and receive a home-cooked meal. Speaking about the importance of extended family, one participant stated, “I have a very close family, and they are supportive of college and whatever I choose to do. They were all happy to hear that I was going to college to further my education (McCulloh, 2020, p.157).” The encouragement and support from the participants' families provided a level of security in their journey to college. Another participant stated “One of my aunts went to college for sign language, and she said pick a school somewhere where you might want to stay. That is where you find a job, because people know people in that area and not from where you come from. This really helped me a lot (McCulloh, 2020, p.157).” According to the researchers, families that are able to FGSs’ specific guidance in choosing a college, will also contribute ongoing insight throughout their college journey.

McCulloh’s findings are backed by previous research (Kranstuber et al., 2012; Palmer et al., 2011) that demonstrated that FGS receive important information on both selecting and

enrolling in college from their parents, as well as messages of encouragement that are memorable and meaningful to them. Participants noted that Having daily communication with their parents through calls, text messages, electronic mail, and postal mail provided the emotional support that they needed to decide to persevere in college. Additionally, participants stated that parental support was crucial in receiving financial assistance and helping FGS obtain general information about selecting and enrolling in college, a finding that past researchers also noted (Kranstuber et al., 2012; Palmer et al., 2011).

Community Support of FGS

In addition to parental involvement, McCulloh (2020) found that there are other supports that had an impact on FGS lives, and one important part of that support came from the community that surrounds FGS. The community support provided a network for FGS when their families were unable to provide adequate information or support. This type of community support helped foster student retention through the provision of information, encouragement, and resources (McCulloh, 2020).

During the interview, the participants discussed that one key element of their community support was their guidance counselor. These discussions consisted of the college they would like to attend, the importance of higher education, and pursuing a career they would be passionate about. Many participants' guidance counselors encouraged them to enroll in honors courses, helped them through the college process, and wrote letters of recommendation. One participant stated, “She (guidance counselor) definitely helped me make the decision to go to school, where to look, and what to look for (McCulloh, 2020, p.158).” The researchers found that community support and guidance is another much-needed layer for FGSs starting their college journey. Other community networks consisted of teachers,

coaches, churches, and local organizations that also supported students with recommendations for colleges, scholarships, and social capital in achievement.

Academic Integration

According to Tinto (2015), academic integration is academic progress, cognitive growth and having positive learning experiences. Academic integration also consists of a student understanding the structure of the university and its resources and how those resources can be utilized in a way that leads to success. Because FGSs often lack social capital, this deficit makes it difficult to engage in the type of academic integration that students need to be successful. Lack of understanding of the resources and support available to them has contributed to the dropout rate for FGSs within their first year (Irlbeck et al., 2014)

The Importance of Academic Advising

A clear example of the problems FGSs have with academic integration and utilizing university resources can be seen by looking at academic advising. Academic advising offers an effective retention strategy for individuals considered at most risk for dropping out, including FGSs (Vander Schee, 2007). However, first generation students often do not take advantage of this important method of academic integration.

A study by Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby (2013) illustrates the important role that academic advice can play in the academic success of FGS. In this study, the researchers tracked the number of advising appointments that 363 first-generation participants were enrolled in the fall of 2009 and how many of those students remained in good standing in the fall of 2010. The researchers found that for every advisor meeting that was conducted with a first-generation student, the odds of that student being retained until the end of the year increased by 13%. The researchers suggested, therefore, that institutional leadership must increase the number of

personnel who provide consistent academic advising or a format that allows a core group of advisors to work more specifically to meet the needs and challenges of students. In order for this to be successful, institutions must be intentional by increasing the capacity for advisors to reach and spend time with FGS to support them in being more engaged in the life of the institution. The fact that only 83 of the 363 FGSs were in good academic standing after one year of college demonstrates the importance of these changes (Swecker, Fifolt & Searby 2013).

Academic Preparation Skills

Addressing the differences in social capital and academic integration of FGSs and their continuing generation peers can lead to more academic success and persistence for FGSs. However, research has shown FGSs are also entering post-secondary institutions with limited preparation in mathematics and critical thinking skills that present a barrier to their future success (Aruguete, 2017). Overcoming academic obstacles is crucial since first-semester grades and self-reported confidence in math both predict higher education persistence for FGSs (Dika & D'Amico, 2016).

Illustrating this point, Aruguete (2017) conducted a study with 160 students at a small public university comparing first-generation and continuing-generation students in mathematics. They wanted to analyze the types of academic and social support that are needed for first-generation and continuing-generation mathematics students to be successful.

The participants received a packet that contained demographic questions (e.g., age, gender) that focused on critical thinking and a measure of student support. They were required to list their current cumulative grade point average (on a 4.0 scale) for their year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). Overall course grades were collected from mathematics course instructors and reported on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. They measured critical

thinking abilities by using 17 items from the ARST (Advanced Reasoning Skills Test).

Additionally, they were measured on the student support using the Student Support Needs Scale (SSNS; Hardy & Aruguete, 2014). The SSNS support scores are correlated with student success measures. Such measures include the frequency of visits to the professor office hours and grade point average (Hardy & Aruguete, 2014).

The results from this study demonstrated that FGSs showed significantly lower mathematics course grades and critical thinking scores than continuing-generation students, and that FGS reported having less time and energy for academic work. The researchers also found that FGS reported less personal contact with college personnel and that this variable was significantly correlated to college persistence. Before FGS enters college it is important to ensure that you have the necessary preliminary preparation to succeed.

Academic Supports

Preliminary academic preparation may present a unique challenge for some FGS transitioning from high school to college (Mikell & Davis, 2022). There are potential synergistic effects that result from using a comprehensive or integrated approach to college transition programming for student success—addressing factors affecting retention and success in a multifaceted manner (Kezar & Kitchen, 2019). Recent research has demonstrated the value of comprehensive and integrated programs that combine several interventions to create a seamless learning environment for supporting students academically, socially, and personally (Maton, Domingo, Stolle-McAllister, Zimmerman, & Hrabowski, 2009; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000; Perna & Jones, 2013).

A comprehensive program that college counselors can develop is partnerships with programs such as TRiO or Summer Bridge, which have a high enrollment of FGSs (Stebbleton &

Schmidt, 2010). The TRIO program is a federally funded outreach and student service program that identifies and provides services for Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO programs consist of (Student Support Services, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement, and Upward Bound) targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to college (2023). These types of programs aim to enhance both the academic and social engagement of FGSs, which includes helping these students to find a stronger sense of belonging on campus.

Upward Bound is a federally funded program that is a part of TRIO. This program offers an array of services such as academic tutoring in preparation for college, support in the completion of college entrance exams (e.g., SAT, ACT), assistance in completing financial aid applications, and counseling for parents to improve their financial and economic literacy. Research by the U.S. Department of Education (2020) showed that this program is successful in increasing college enrollment and graduation rates among participants. In preparation for college, this program also focuses on outcome goals for participants that include meeting secondary school retention and academic performance targets as measured through standardized tests and grade point averages.

Additionally, targeted academic interventions can overcome some of the deficits that FGS face as they transition into college. The University of Manchester has developed a research-based program entitled TransMaths that is designed to support students in transitioning into university-level mathematics courses (Pampaka et al., 2012). This program's focus is to provide students with “connectionist” teaching methods that favor structured, applied, and interactive problem-solving instead of “transmissionist” practices that utilize traditional lecture-

based techniques. This mathematics intervention contained problem-solving strategies that combined with goals of academics and social integration by focusing on student-centered activities that involved faculty members playing responsive and dialectic roles. This approach has increased student's mathematical confidence and disposition toward math (Wake, 2011). Based on the researchers' findings, it was revealed that poor academic integration is a major obstacle for first-generation college students. Additionally, FGSs are very reluctant to take the initiative to engage with faculty members (Dennis et al., 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Stephens et al., 2012). In order for first generation students to be successful they must engage in intervention programs that have an academic integration component. TransMaths approach is more holistic and increases university success among first generation students in mathematics courses. In order to address first generation students' academic integration, college campuses should continue to design, implement, and review intervention programs that will aid in this area.

Mental Health Barriers

Family Achievement Guilt

When FGSs matriculate into college, they encounter various obstacles and unique circumstances that are different from those of their continuing generation peers. However, research also shows that some FGS who leave to attend college can experience mental health issues that are qualitatively different from other college peers who are not first-generation. For instance, FGS often report feeling overwhelmed by their college and home responsibilities, isolated both at home and college (House et al., 2020), and lonely and homesick (Stebbleton et al., 2014; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2021). Although some first-generation students transitioning to a post-secondary institution may experience feelings of pride and accomplishment from their families, others experience feelings of guilt and obligation due to their families making sacrifices

for them to attend college. Specifically, FGSs have reported feelings of guilt surrounding attending college while their parents struggle at home or guilt for choosing college activities over family (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Covarrubias & Fryeberg, 2014; Olenchak & Hébert, 2002; Stieha, 2010). One of the specific types of guilt that first-generation students experience is what researchers call “family achievement guilt.” This is the guilt that arises when students have more educational success than their parents or siblings, and it can significantly affect students’ mental well-being.

To determine the impact of family achievement guilt on FGS, Covarrubias, Romero, & Trivelli (2015) carried out a study with 255 participants consisting of 195 females and 60 males, of which 60% were White and 40% Mexican. The percentage of FGSs was 19%, and 81% were non-FGSs. The researchers administered an online survey to the participants, which they completed individually. Several questions that were developed to measure family guilt were adapted from the original Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire (O’Connor et al. 1997). The three items focused on how the students felt about academic success around them siblings, how they felt about having more academic opportunities than their parents or siblings, and their comfort level with being more successful than their parents and siblings. Additional survey questions addressed depression and student self-esteem.

The results from this study indicated that family achievement guilt was a predictor of more depressive feelings, low self-esteem, and decreased mental well-being. Previous studies show that first-generation college students are more likely to prioritize family ties than non-first-generation college students (Freeberg & Stein 1996; Gaines et al. 1997; Ramirez et al. 2004; Stephens et al. 2012). First-generation students may encounter conflict with their families if they do not adhere to the norm of obtaining a job immediately after high school graduation or

beginning a family of their own. “FGS families are more likely to suffer hardships of poverty and family dysfunction that may be difficult for students to separate physically and emotionally” (Covarrubias, Romero, & Trivelli, 2015, p. 2036).

Belonging and Mental Health

Along with family guilt, FGS often have more difficulty finding a sense of belonging when they go to college. Sense of belonging is related to more positive mental health outcomes, which in turn tends to positively affect student retention (Kitzrow, 2009). In a study conducted by Stebleton, Soria, and Huesman (2014), the researchers explored how first-generation students sought a sense of belonging on campus and the impact that search had on their mental health. A survey was administered to 145,150 students across six large public research institutions. The survey the researchers utilized was derived from Student Experience at the Research University (SERU), which is based at the Center for Studies of Higher Education. Students were administered a set of core questions and were randomly assigned to one of four modules, each module addressing a specific theme: academic engagement, civic engagement, global knowledge and skills, and student life and development. Questions that were derived from the student life and development area specifically examined students' mental health.

The results from the survey indicated that the FGSs rate lower when it comes to the sense of self-belonging and connection on campus than non-FGSs. Researchers also found that the sense of belonging among students has a huge significance in robust mental health. As such, FGSs are more likely to experience signs of poor mental health, such as depression, compared with other non-FGSs. The mental health data collected indicates that first and non-FGSs' mental health needs are not being met (Stebblton et al., 2014).

Specifically, first-generation students are reporting higher responses of needing mental health services but not utilizing them in comparison to non-first-generation students. Within this study (Stebbleton et al., 2014), participants provided reasons as to why FGSs do not utilize counseling services is due to the location (84.5%), not knowing services are available (80.4%), hours of availability are inconvenient (77.8%), and not having enough time to utilize the services (76.1%). FGS that engage in these services could be more mentally and emotionally healthy.

Mental Health Supports

Low-income FGSs encounter challenges in accessing and completing college. Since first-generation students who come from low-income backgrounds encounter mental health barriers, navigating the higher education system can be a challenge as it is not specifically designed to meet their needs. According to mental health professionals, to better support these students, colleges and universities should provide more comprehensive mental health services, including increased access to mental health providers, counseling, and support groups (Crawford, 2018).

The schools that FGSs attend should provide support to assist them in better managing their mental health. These supports could consist of workshops and seminars that focus on stress management, mindfulness, and self-care. If schools are able to provide this support, it can create a more inclusive environment for FGS and improve their ability to navigate the higher education system (Mak, 2017).

Recognizing the unique cultural and social factors that influence the mental health of FGS should be a priority for schools. According to Fernandez (2019), culturally sensitive counseling services should be provided, programs and resources that are specific to the needs of FGSs should be developed, and spaces should be created for students to connect with peers from similar backgrounds. A priority for colleges should be creating an environment that is free of

stigma around mental health. This could include providing more education and training to faculty and staff on the prevalence and impact of mental health issues and encouraging open dialogue about mental health and wellness.

Financial Barriers

The purpose of financial aid is to increase college access for students who are pursuing a post-secondary degree. However, although aid is available, financial barriers still pose a significant problem for many FGS. In order to better prepare students for the financial decisions they must make as college students, colleges must first ensure that FGS develops financial literacy. However, schools must also determine the financial literacy needs of their students and how it can best be measured and provided for (Hung et al., 2009).

A study conducted by Eichelberger and colleagues (2017) examined the cultural and social influences that contribute to how students enrolled at post-secondary institutions utilize the financial tools that are available to them. “In order to gather data for this study, three sources were utilized for cross-campus collaboration: (a) a survey, (b) a focus group, and (c) individual interviews” (Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 74). “A survey was administered to 50 employees within the nine resource centers across the university, including faculty, staff, and student employees”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 74). They discussed their perceptions based on their years of advising students and the experiences they have encountered during those interactions. The study focused on the following three questions.

- “What are the current barriers to, and best practices for, overcoming financial issues facing our student population” (Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 74)?
- “What are the specific needs of underrepresented students”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 74)?

- “What tools and processes should be considered to help students develop financial stability”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 74)?

Research questions one and two focused on the current barriers to best practices for overcoming financial issues facing our student population and the specific needs of underrepresented students. “The researchers found that first-generation students encounter barriers that revolve around a lack of awareness of the true costs of college, tuition, room, board, and opportunity costs”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 76). “They also encounter challenges such as weighing college costs relative to the ideal benefits of college, such as higher income, more job options, and a lower likelihood of unemployment”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 76). In research question three, the focus was on the tools and processes that should be considered to help students develop financial stability. They expressed a need for safe spaces, trust, and persistence, which would eliminate barriers to accessing financial information.

“The support that was recommended by researchers to address these questions suggested that post-secondary institutions need to increase financial education for students, specifically improving their students’ understanding of loans, budgeting, and time requirements of attending college through degree completion”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 75). “Additionally, FGS should learn how to apply effectively and independently for scholarships and financial aid”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 76). If leadership at institutions assists students with financial concerns by providing more information that will support them in understanding financial issues and making informed decisions with basic financial skills. “The participants also indicated a need for workshops, videos, and better online access for underrepresented students to attend and use in safe spaces and specific points of access”(Eichelberger et al., 2017, p. 80)”.

Financial Supports

Navigating the various barriers that first-generation students encounter during their post-secondary career can be daunting and lead to withdrawal from college. Studies have found there is no one-size-fits-all approach to building financial skills, and distinct financial education delivery options may be more useful for specific minority groups (Goetz, Cude, Nielsen, Chatterjee, & Mimura, 2011). Based on the studies conducted on financial literacy barriers, there are supports that post-secondary institutions can implement that would help first-generation students connect to campus resources and increase their financial literacy knowledge.

The implementation of several practices that could increase first-generation students' financial literacy was stated in the study conducted by (Eichelberger et al. (2017). The implementation of interactive online resources and training on how to use these resources in order to increase their financial literacy. The group also acknowledged the need for follow-up and student accountability and, therefore, suggested that colleges utilize technology to provide follow-up emails to students, provide general workshops, stage scheduled financial conversations, and provide students with referrals to services and courses.

Additional support would be individual advising, which allows advisors, counselors, or campus staff to engage in one-on-one conversations with first-generation students (Eichelberger et al. 2017). Although these three practices were consistently discussed in the study, there are supports that can also aid in increasing underrepresented students' financial literacy. According to Eichelberger et al. (2017), post-secondary institutions should engage in cross-campus, cross-disciplinary efforts with a focus on financial services that should be offered to students. By having the departments interact with others throughout the campus, the barrier to accessing financial resources can be reduced, and staff can provide these students with basic financial

tools. Improving financial capability and the diverse needs of postsecondary students will assist them when they enter college in managing their resources.

Implications for Secondary Education

First-generation students in high school often face unique challenges when it comes to preparing for college. The identification of FGSs at the secondary level is critical to providing the necessary support that FGSs will need. According to a study published in the Journal of Higher Education, FGS college students are less likely to have access to college-preparatory resources such as Advanced Placement (AP) classes, college counseling, and test preparation programs (Chen, 2019). Another study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicated that FGS are less likely to have completed a college preparatory program and to have taken college-level courses in high school (NCES, 2021). These studies connect with research mentioned earlier on FGS entering colleges with limited preparation in mathematics and critical thinking skills and the barrier it presents for them to be successful.

Families play a critical role in supporting first-generation students in high school as they prepare for college. The research study McCulloh discussed earlier discussed the importance of family involvement and additional support from extended family and community support for FGS. This type of support should be formulated prior to their entry into college. It would aid in the transition and success throughout an FGS tenure at college.

An important aspect of an FGS college readiness is their advocacy and engagement in high school. Advocacy and engagement refers to the actions and initiatives that students take to advocate for themselves and their peers, as well as their level of engagement in school activities

and programs. Research has shown that students who are more engaged in school are more likely to succeed academically and have better outcomes in terms of college persistence and completion (Lopez, 2017). The benefit of advocacy and engagement allows FGS to participate in opportunities such as college fairs, campus visits, and college application workshops to be more informed about college options and the application process. FGS should be encouraged to communicate with teachers, counselors, and coaches to gain a better understanding in preparing for college. This level of advocacy can aid in eliminating the barrier FGSs encounter upon entering college, which is a limited level of engagement with professors to receive academic support. FGSs that are academically integrated and take advantage of institutional support will also decrease the barriers that they encounter in college. Therefore, continual advocacy and engagement at the high school level will prepare FGS even more in college.

Conclusion

First-generation students enter college to obtain a degree and establish a career. However, for many FGSs, the specific barriers and challenges they face compared to their continuing generation peers disproportionately impacts their ability to successfully complete their degrees. The success of a first-generation student is contingent not only upon their utilizing resources and support but also on the administration, counselors, and outside agencies that aid in providing those needed components for them to be successful.

As an administrator, my goal is to develop and foster relationships with students and families by assisting them in preparing for college. It is through those relationships that I can determine what support and resources FGSs will need in high school that will ultimately help them prepare for college. The research conducted in this literature review revealed that the more support first-generation students are given, the more retention they will have beyond their first

year in college. Additionally, in my role, I will work with fellow leaders to review our organization's infrastructure to ensure that it supports first-generation students in being more academically and socially prepared for college.

Appendix D An Analysis of Focus Group Findings



Note: Developed by Kristin Brown-Massey, a doctoral candidate at the University of Delaware, in collaboration with Caesar Rodney High School.

Background

Attending college is often considered the ultimate goal of a young person's K-12 preparation, and FGSs represent a rapidly growing student demographic, comprising around 34% of the college freshmen population. However, this group has also been recognized as an at-risk student population with the highest dropout rates in postsecondary education (Lightweis, 2014). Research shows that students whose parents did not attend college are considerably less likely to be prepared for college than their continuing generation peers (Choy, 2001) and are at risk for leaving college before degree completion (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). The fact that only 56% of first-generation college students earn a baccalaureate degree within 6 years compared with 74% of students with a parent who graduated from college (Cataldi et al., 2018) demonstrates that FGSs continue to face a number of challenges that their continuing generation peers do not.

Caesar Rodney High School is the largest high school in the state of Delaware, and it provides educational services and opportunities to over 2,300 students. Although they have the largest population of students in the state, we are identifying FGS too late in their high school careers, which jeopardizes our ability to better prepare these students for college. Therefore, identifying research-validated supports that will contribute to first-generation students' progress at the secondary level and preparing them to be successful in college is important for serving the needs of these students.

The goal of this project, therefore, is to understand the needs of FGS and their families in order to enhance CRHS's "infrastructure" around identifying FGS once they enter high school and support them until they graduate. This report summarizes the data collected and analyzed from three focus groups. The three populations identified for the focus groups were students,

teachers, and parents to determine the support, academic advice, and resources that FGS students need to attend and be successful in college.

Method

The participants of all three focus groups were a mixture of gender, age, and cultural backgrounds. Each focus group consisted of 8-12 questions. The students who participated in these focus groups were in the 9th and 10th grades. Participants in the student focus group were asked to answer questions candidly about who supports them on their journey to college, engage in conversations about college, and enroll in college preparatory courses. Teachers were the second focus group of participants. They were asked questions about how they engage with potential first-generation students and whether their courses are rigorous enough to prepare students for college. The third focus group was composed of parents of potential first-generation students. The parents who participated were married and had multiple children. In this focus group, parents were asked to answer questions about how they felt about their child being a first-generation student, what resources or supports they need, and concerns they have about their child attending college. Due to my leadership position within CRHS, the teacher and student focus groups were facilitated by another colleague who is not in a leadership position.

All three focus groups involved participants who were Black, White, American Indian, and mixed race. Table 1 shows the demographics of each focus group.

Table 1

Focus Group Demographics

	Black	White	Indian	Mixed Race
Students	2	7	1	2
Teachers	1	5		
Parents	2	3		
Total	5	15	1	2

The focus groups were conducted over a 2-month period of time, and each session was approximately 45 minutes in length. Student and teacher focus groups were conducted in person, but due to logistical constraints, the parent focus groups were held via Zoom. The student and teacher focus group were conducted by a facilitator who met with 3-4 participants at a time. She conducted four rounds with students, and during each session, anecdotal notes were taken, and voice recordings were made. The teacher focus group consisted of two rounds, with the same process of anecdotal notes and voice recording. I conducted the parent focus group in two rounds, with anecdotal notes and voice recordings. Some of the participants in the student focus group also had parents participating in the parent focus group. Additionally, students who were in the focus groups also had one of the six teachers from the teacher focus group during the school year. At the conclusion of all three focus groups, the voice recordings were transcribed, and the anecdotal notes were reviewed and analyzed.

The data from the focus groups was analyzed using a qualitative constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1978; 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). As Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, 2008) discussed, constant comparison analysis can be used to analyze many types of data, including focus group data. There are three stages that are connected with constant

comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the first stage, the data from the focus group is condensed into various themes. During the second stage, a claim and findings are developed for each theme based on the responses from the focus group participants, along with supporting quotes from participants. It is during the third and final stage each theme contains recommendations that are developed based on the focus groups and proposed evidenced-based educational interventions.

Theme 1: Desire and Support to Attend College

Claim

FGSs and their families understand the importance of post-secondary education and desire to attend college. They know that obtaining an undergraduate degree will help FGS become successful, and college attendance is part of FGS family conversations.

Findings

First-generation students and their parents expressed their desire to attend college or supported their child's attendance. They also indicated that they want the staff and administration at Caesar Rodney High School (CRHS) to know about their desire to attend college and to support their journey to college. This type of support will be imperative as an FGS chooses and completes courses throughout their high school career, begins the college application process, and applies for financial aid.

Several of the students in the focus group explained how their families have encouraged their journey to college, one student saying his family was "very supportive" of their attendance and another parent sharing how "*I want her to attend a college that she is comfortable in.*" Other parents spoke of the hands-on approaches they take to ensure that their students are completing assignments and meeting deadlines as a way to support their student's academic progress.

However, some students explained that their families were especially supportive because of their first-generation status and that they are seen within their family as change-makers, one student saying, “Although my mom did not attend college, she now has a career. They always talk about how I will be the first in the family to attend college. Another student spoke directly about their brother’s support, saying, “My brothers have pushed me to go to college because they didn’t attend.” From this response, it is clear that college attendance is a topic of conversation among FGS families. Parents encourage college attendance and want to engage in conversations about college, as they do not want their children to become disengaged or discouraged about wanting to attend college. It is also clear that students’ role as the first of their family to attend college has had an impact on students in the focus group, with some students in the group expressing a sense of familial responsibility, one student saying, “I want to make my family proud by attending college since they did not” Family support is important for first-generation success in college and the parents and students who I spoke with feel a sense of pride that college attendance is a possibility.

Recommendations

Although parents may not have a college degree, they understand the importance of attending college, and they support their children’s journey to college. Students, too, understand the importance of college and feel a sense of pride that they can be the first of their family to attend. Although I will talk more about this in other sections, these responses demonstrate that first-generation students and parents should have more access and opportunities to work with school counselors and advisors to aid in the ongoing support of their journey to college. If parents can be connected with school counselors and college advisors early in their students’ high school careers, this would aid in them understanding the processes of choosing

academically rigorous classes, applying and attending college, and, overall, would provide another layer of support to FGS. The more that parents are involved academically and emotionally, the more they are able to provide consistent support for their children in their pursuit of college attendance and completion.

Theme 2: Understanding Obstacles That Families Encounter

Claim

Although understanding the benefits of attending college is important for FGS and their families, first-generation families often encounter financial barriers that can prohibit college attendance. Providing students and families with information about financial aid and a systematic way to access important resources can support college attendance.

Findings

The financial burden of attending college is a concern expressed by both FGS and their parents. Navigating the financial needs of families requires resources, access to information, and people who can assist them. Many students in the focus group mentioned a clear need for financial aid to attend college, one student saying: “It will be imperative that I find good scholarships, because I also know that I will have to work to help fund college”. Another student expressed feelings around financial needs: “If there are no scholarships that I can obtain, how do I access financial aid?”

Both of these students understand that financial help is needed in the form of work, scholarships, and other forms of aid, but they might not know how to access the financial help they need. Parents, too, showed that they understand the need for financial support and that they are engaging their students in conversations about the financial realities of attending college. One parent expressed that they have conversations with their FGS about the expenses they will

encounter while attending college. The parent stated, “I try to tell him things about life that I know others have not told him about college, such as expenses if he stays on or off campus. “ When asked about financial concerns, another parent participant responded, “We want her to strive and gain her own independence since we cannot provide any financial support”.

It is obvious that these parents understand the financial realities of college attendance. However, parents in the focus groups also expressed how difficult it is to find information on overcoming these financial barriers. During the focus group, parents provided several responses that directly addressed what they needed to help their first-generation students navigate the college application process. A parent from the group spoke candidly about their lack of knowledge, arguing, “I do not know specifically what is needed, but I want to support my child.” Another respondent spoke about their inability to access financial aid information. As noted by the respondent: “Unfortunately, I have not been able to access any information or know of any resources to help in navigating the college process.”

Obtaining access to resources for FGS and their families was discussed as a challenge throughout all focus groups that were conducted. However, as these quotes demonstrate, some families are not able to articulate more specifically what they need. However, several parents did recognize that CRHS can be an important partner in the dissemination of financial aid information that could help prepare families to overcome the financial burdens of college, one parent suggesting, “It would be helpful for me as a parent if there were seminars that were easily accessible for students and parents.” Another parent stated, “It would be helpful if the school provided tutorials and information nights.” One student acknowledged the need for support for themselves as well as their parents, mentioning that “It would be helpful if there were more after-school activities to help students understand the financial aid process. From these comments, it is

clear that the school has an important role to play in helping families overcome the financial barriers to college.

Recommendations

Financial resources are crucial for first-generation students and their families, and these families rely on the support of schools to navigate these financial barriers. In order for FGS to successfully matriculate to college, CRHS must take on the responsibility of being a better resource for FGS and their families. Therefore, CRHS must provide a central location for parents to systematically access the information they need about financial resources. Additionally, CRHS should be providing parents with online or face-to-face sessions that provide the financial information that they need and develop an infrastructure that allows parents and students to express their needs to school officials.

Theme 3: Path and Guidance Towards Educational Success

Claim

The teachers and students who participated in this study expressed their belief that some high school course content can be beneficial in the preparation for college. However, teachers also expressed concerns that FGS need to enroll in more rigorous courses to adequately prepare for college. The lack of academic preparation for college that FGSs are receiving was an additional concern expressed by teachers. Based on responses from some teachers, they are not taking up the mantle of responsibility for delivering rigorous academic coursework across the curriculum.

Findings

FGS revealed during the focus groups that the courses they are currently enrolled in are helpful. Even though some of them may not be enrolled in advanced-level courses, they

understand the importance of working hard to do their best in all courses. FGSs believe that these courses will provide them the ability to succeed academically and help prepare them for the rigorous courses they will be taking in college. Many FGS expressed their desire to attend college in our focus group conversation. The student participants understood that in order to be successful in college and in their chosen professions, they must do their best academically while in high school. One respondent said:

I find my algebra course very challenging and difficult, but I know learning math will be helpful in my career. I want to be a nurse, and I have to be able to do math if I'm giving patients medications.

Another student noted "My culinary class is very challenging because I have to learn knife work and how to cook and maintain heat and all that. It's preparing me because I want to attend a culinary college. Another student from the focus group stated, "Out of all of my courses I find Spanish the easiest as it can be helpful communicating with patients and their families that only speak Spanish."

These students clearly see that even though their high school courses are of varying difficulty levels, they are still beneficial in helping them attend college and achieve their career goals. Although students believe these courses are preparing them for college, teachers, on the other hand, think differently. Teachers acknowledge that FGSs are not applying themselves or performing at their highest academic abilities. In order for them to excel in college, they need to experience the structure and rigor of college courses. This can be achieved if FGS are enrolled in advanced-level courses. One teacher expressed their concerns in supporting students to enroll in AP and dual enrollment courses:

I want students to be aware of what AP classes will look like and that they don't just go in expecting it will be easy. Once they get in there, and realize it is not an easy class and they do worse than what they would have done in a non-AP course.

Although teachers are concerned about the lack of rigor in courses, they at times speak to students in ways that actually dissuade them from taking the course. Teachers also expressed concerns that first-generation students do not understand what is needed for college and, as such, do not take advantage of the opportunities provided to them in high school. This includes participating in extra-curricular activities as well as taking more rigorous coursework such as AP courses. Rigor is the expectation, educational practices, curriculum which involves students being engaged in deep meaningful learning, and critical thinking. Although teachers perceive there is a lack of rigor in curriculum, there needs to be exploration with students' academic disposition. Academic disposition is the behaviors, attitudes, and habits that students showcase in a learning environment which fuels their approach to academic success. If teachers understand the difference between the two then they can fully understand the deficiencies that students may have.

Even though teachers are concerned that FGS are not enrolling in rigorous courses, several of them do not express any type of accountability to ensure they are teaching and implementing their course curriculum. This can also affect how FGSs are challenged and stretched academically. As noted by a teacher who participated in the focus group:

Students who want to attend college should be in AP courses. They should have exposure to the rigor and the workload as it is eye opening for students. This would strengthen their ability to manage their time and have good study habits. Teachers typically spend a significant amount of time building relationships and establishing routines. Although

building relationships with students is an important goal of teachers, teachers in the focus group acknowledged that they do not have direct conversations about college with students who are identified as FGSs. The conversations are more directed at the class as a whole and centered around the general importance of attending college and how students can prepare, particularly by taking AP classes. One teacher explained their thoughts on students enrolling in rigorous courses that would prepare them for college, stating:

One of the things we've talked about in the English department is, um particularly in our English courses most people who are college bound, we'd love to see in our advanced courses. Certainly anybody who's not going to college too. We think basically based on the college readiness standards that the advanced courses best prepare students for the college level reading and writing, they're gonna be expected to do.

Teachers may understand the importance of enrolling in higher-level courses such as advanced placement and dual enrollment courses. However, they are not making the connections between these courses and college attendance clear to first-generation students. Although some teachers witness students enrolling in AP classes and not earning the same grades as in a non-AP course. They have conversations with students that the course may be hard, but they will be challenged in a positive way. Others are encouraging students to enroll in AP and dual enrollment courses. These courses are an indication of the structure and rigor of college courses. One teacher stated:

The hugest thing is confidence, when students say I don't think I can do this, I stated I think you can do this. I actually contacted 10 students individually after registration for classes and said, you know I hope you signed for AP next year, I think you would be a great fit for the class.

Another teacher discussed how enrolling in rigorous courses will help with time management:

Taking these courses could prepare them for managing their time, and taking ownership of doing the work, and taking a book home to read due to them not being able to read the book in class. As the expectation is a lot more work than non-AP courses where they read and discuss the work in class.

A lingering apprehension still remains that teachers solely prioritize AP courses and fail to examine the rigor that is possible in other courses. They are not making the connection that rigor should be in all courses, not just in AP or advanced courses. One teacher stated:

A rigorous course teaches students to work at their own pace without a teacher guiding their every motion. By selecting these rigorous courses they will put forth the effort and will see the impact of being able to earn college credits.

Another teacher expressed her concerns of the lack of rigor within the high school curriculum:

I don't wanna, like the curriculum itself, I don't feel like it has a bunch of rigor in it. I feel like there's opportunities for it, but it's kind of like if the teacher, it's up to the teacher almost. I don't think that the course prepares them for note taking and studying habits. They could, but along with the homework part, the studying kind of goes hand in hand.

Although students feel that they are getting what they need, teachers expressed that FGSs are not enrolling in rigorous courses that will prepare them for college. Teachers are not making the connection that even though the curriculum does not contain the level of rigor they deem necessary, they still have an obligation to implement district and statewide instructional practices that will ensure that students achieve their goals. There must be additional staff to support

teachers and students academically and emotionally. If they are not aware, the question then becomes how they are guiding them through their high school experiences, helping them achieve their academic goals, and collaborating with teachers to support FGS in reaching those academic goals. School counselors can also support bridging the gap between teachers and students to enroll in AP or advanced courses. Ultimately, the impact and accountability lie within the teacher, as they serve as the daily instructor who provides a level of service that no other educator can do. Teachers taking accountability for their role as educators can change the trajectory of how successful an FGS can be while attending CRHS.

The school counselor's role should be the liaison between the FGS and teachers ensuring an understanding of the courses offered and the expected outcome. In addition to the academic challenges that FGSs encounter there are emotional needs that must be addressed. Depending on how involved a school counselor is with a first-generation student will determine if they are aware of their needs. This presents additional obstacles for FGS to navigate. One parent expressed their concern for their FGS, saying, "There are things that I can not provide, and an advisor can provide more resources and support, especially for academics."

Another parent participant responded: My child needs a good advisor in high school and college that can be there for her academically and emotionally."

Recommendations

The relationship that teachers have with FGSs is crucial, but teachers must fully understand the unique challenges and barriers that FGSs encounter. It is clear that FGS should be encouraged to take more advanced courses, but some teachers' implicit bias can impede their viewpoint on who should be enrolled in AP, dual enrollment, and advanced courses. In order for teachers to support FGSs fully, they must recognize and accept accountability for the role they

play in FGS success. The key to supporting teachers' instructional practices is they need the opportunity to attend professional development and online courses. This type of training would be centered around mentorship, diverse learners, cultural responsiveness, and how to develop a supportive learning environment. This form of support can provide teachers with more background knowledge on first-generation students and the courses offered, more specifically, AP and dual enrollment courses.

As teachers should have more academic accountability, the same is true for school counselors. Although the focus groups did not include school counselors' perspectives, it was evident that several parents felt the need for school counselors to support their FGSs and that school counselors can bridge the information gap between students and their teachers. School counselors can build capacity and the ability to assist FGS through the implementation of the Student Success Plan throughout the course of the school year. Administration at CRHS can continually review and assess how school counselors can provide even more extensive support for FGSs.

The question that emerged from this study is how teachers are supporting FGS to change this narrative and suggests that school counselors play a crucial role in assisting FGS and their families in various aspects, including course enrollment, college applications, financial aid, and emotional well-being. School counselors are seen as key figures for both academic and social/emotional support for FGS and their parents.

Action Steps/Conclusion

The students, teachers, and parents who were participants in this study provided a wealth of information on how to better support first-generation students, and the focus groups helped me to understand that there are a few clear action steps that CRHS can take to better support this

demographic of students. Since these stakeholder groups all stated that academic preparation and access to financial information are crucial for college attendance, I will be creating a Student Success Portfolio (SSP) that will be utilized by the school counselor. The SSP will be implemented with FGS and their assigned school counselor through quarterly meetings. During these meetings, FGSs can work closely with their counselor to choose courses that will best prepare them academically for college, evaluate their academic performance, explore colleges through virtual or in-person tours, and be given timely guidance about the financial aid/college/scholarship application process. These conversations will create opportunities for FGS to receive the support and guidance they need to attend college and obtain an undergraduate degree. An online parent presentation has also been created for CRHS parents. The presentation outlines resources that can assist FGS and their families in academic preparation, preparing for, paying for, and attending college. This presentation will be linked to HAC (home access center), an online portal that CRHS utilizes to help families check their students' grades and attendance. It is also going to be crucial that teachers are supported with professional development and curriculum training to aid in the progress of FGS at CRHS.

This study provided a better understanding and perspective of the academic and financial barriers that FGS and their families encounter. It also created a gateway to bridge the gap between teachers' and students' perspectives of advanced-level courses that can be supported by the school counselor to maintain relationships and ongoing communication. CRHS news will review whether the needs outlined in this study are being effectively addressed through these initiatives and whether these initiatives are leading to more FGS matriculating to college.

Appendix E Code Book

Supporting First Generation Students in their Journey to College to College Success - Code Book

Themes	Code	Code Definition	Code Exemplars	Connection
Desire and support to attend college	Family support in attending college	Utterance that indicates family members are supportive and encourage FGS to attend college.	<i>My family is very supportive of me attending college.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to several students in the focus group expressing how their families wanted them to attend college. The families express how they will be the first in the family to attend college.
			<i>Although my mom did not attend college, she now has a career (attendance - P). They always talk about how I will be the first in the family to attend college student</i>	
			<i>My brothers have pushed me to go to college because they didn't attend.</i>	
	Pride and Belonging	Utterance indicates that FGS want to make their families proud to attend college.	"I want to make my family proud by attending college since they did not"	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to a student from the focus group feeling a sense of pride of being the first in their family to attend college.
Understanding obstacles families encounter	Family financial concerns	Utterance that indicates students understand that they will need financial assistance to attend college	<i>It will be imperative that I find good scholarships, because I also know that I will have to work to help fund college.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to a student from the focus group needing access to financial resources such as scholarships in order to pay for college. Accessing

				this type of support will help alleviate the financial burden they will incur attending college.
			<i>If there are no scholarships that I can obtain, how do I access financial ai .</i>	
			<i>I try to tell him things about life that I know others have not told him about college such as expenses if he stays on or off campus.</i>	
		Utterance that indicates parents have financial concerns on being able to pay for their FGS to attend college.	<i>We want her to strive and gain her own independence, since we can not provide any financial support.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to parents knowing that they can not pay for college. They want to ensure that their FGS can financially support themselves while attending college.
	Access to resources	Utterance that indicates that parents are unable to access information that will help them in preparing their FGS for college.	I do not know specifically what is needed, but I want to support my child.	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to a parent wanting to help their child attend college. They are unaware of how to find or retrieve resources that will help them and their FGS prepare for college.
			<i>It would be helpful for me as a parent if there were seminars that were easily accessible for students and parents.</i>	
			<i>It would be helpful if the school provided tutorials and information nights.</i>	
			<i>It would be helpful if there were more after school activities to help students understand the financial aid process.</i>	
			<i>Unfortunately, I have not been able to access</i>	

			<i>any information or know of any resources to help in navigating the college process.</i>	
Path to success	Academic challenges	Utterance that indicates students understand certain courses are challenging but will help them in their career path.	<i>I find my algebra course very challenging and difficult, but I know learning math will be helpful in my career.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to students being fully aware of which courses are challenging and which are not. They know that these courses will prepare them for courses that they will take in college to achieve a degree in their career.
			<i>My culinary class is very challenging, because I have to learn knife work and how to cook and maintain heat and all that. It's preparing me because I want to attend a culinary college.</i>	
			<i>Out of all of my courses I find Spanish the easiest as it can be helpful communicating with patients and their families that only speak Spanish .</i>	
	Rigorous advanced courses	Utterance that indicates teachers firmly believe that students should enroll in advanced level courses.	<i>Students who want to attend college should be in AP courses.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to teachers regarding advanced courses as an opportunity to be more prepared for college.
			<i>The hugest thing is confidence, when students say I don't think I can do this, I stated I think you can do this. I actually contacted 10 students individually after registration for classes and said, you know I hope you signed for AP next year, I think you</i>	

			<i>would be a great fit for the class.</i>	
		Utterance that indicates teachers consider advanced courses as the gateway in helping FGS obtain specific academic skill sets.	<i>A rigorous course teaches students to work at their own pace without a teacher guiding their every motion.</i>	This exemplar was coded in this manner due to teachers wanting FGS to understand that rigorous courses will provide them with specific skills. These skills will increase their college readiness standards.
			<i>By selecting these rigorous courses they will put forth the effort and will see the impact of being able to earn college credits.</i>	
			<i>One of the things we've talked about in the English department is, um particularly in our English courses most people who are college bound, we'd love to see in our advanced courses. Certainly anybody who's not going to college too. We think basically based on the college readiness standards that the advanced courses best prepare students for the college level reading and writing, they're gonna be expected to do.</i>	
			<i>I want students to be aware of what AP classes will look like and that they don't just go in expecting it will be easy. Once they get in there, and realize it is not an easy class and they do worse than what they would have done in a non-AP course.</i>	

			<p><i>Taking these courses could prepare them for managing their time, and taking ownership of doing the work, and taking a book home to read due to them not being able to read the book in class. As the expectation is a lot more work than non-AP courses where they read and discuss the work in class.</i></p>	
		<p>Utterance that indicates teachers have minimal investment in the curriculum due to a perceived lack of rigor.</p>	<p><i>I don't wanna, like the curriculum itself, I don't feel like it has a bunch of rigor in it. I feel like there's opportunities for it, but it's kind of like if the teacher, it's up to the teacher almost. I don't think that the course prepares them for note taking and studying habits. They could, but along with the homework part, the studying kind of goes hand in hand.</i></p>	<p>This exemplar was coded in this manner due to teachers not taking accountability for the lack of rigor in curriculum.</p>
	<p>Counseling and Advising</p>	<p>Utterance indicates that parents want their FGS to work with her school counselor to receive advice on academic and emotional needs.</p>	<p><i>There are things that I can not provide, and an advisor can provide more resources and support especially for academics.</i></p>	<p>This exemplar was coded in this manner due to parents wanting their FGS to have access to a counselor. Parents feel as though a counselor can support their FGS in making academic and emotional decisions.</p>
			<p><i>My child needs a good advisor in high school and college that can be there for her academically and emotionally.</i></p>	

Appendix F Teacher Guide

TEACHER GUIDE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

INFOGRAPHIC

1 PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Build prior knowledge of FGS and their families through accessing the parent presentation and student success portfolio (SSP). This will enable teachers to understand the needs of FGS and their families. The information provided in the presentation and SSP will also help teachers navigate supports that can be given and the goals that FGS develop while in high school.

2 SUMMER

- Attend PD with a central focus on FGS and supports needed to be successful
- Connect with counselors to review incoming FGS for the new school year.

3 FALL

- Meet with counselor after the first quarterly SSP meeting with FGS
- Discuss and review the goals of FGS, and implement supports

4

WINTER

- Attend the 2nd quarterly SSP meeting w/FGS, parent, and counselor
- Participate in Scheduling Night (8th graders that will be a 9th grader the following school)
- Support and potentially engage with incoming FGS.



- Collaborate with counselors and administration to review future 9th grade students schedules from (Scheduling Night) that indicated they are FGS.
- Plan and review lessons with fellow department members. Ensure that lessons are rigorous and align with common core standards.

5

SPRING

- Continue engagement and collaboration with FGS, parents, and counselors.
- Review FGS goals and accomplishments from their SSP.



Appendix G Parent Presentation

Caesar Rodney High School, First-Generation Students



Kristin Brown-Massey, University of Delaware

Abstract

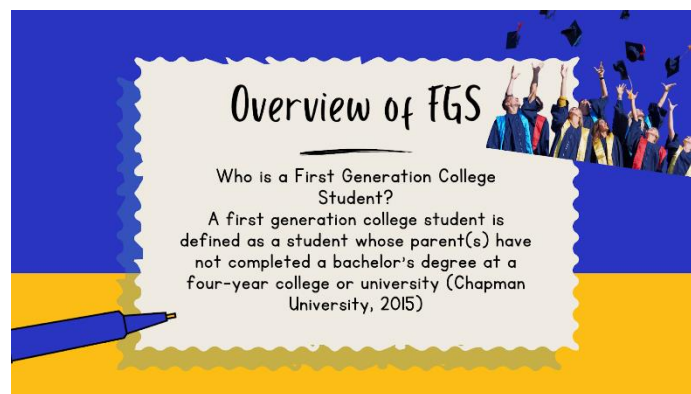
This parent presentation is an artifact for my ELP that was designed to support and provide resources to the parents of FGSs (FGS) at CRHS. The goal of this presentation is to better prepare these parents to support their children's journey to college. The individual sections of this presentation were informed by both my literature review and the needs expressed by the parents who participated in my focus groups. Information in each slide will help parents work together with faculty and staff at CRHS to plan, prepare, and put into action the steps needed for their FGS to attend college.

I have designed this presentation into four sections. The first section focuses on the benefits of attending college. In this section, I provide a summary of the reasons why FGS should attend college. The second section of the presentation delves into how parents can help FGS prepare for college. Parents will have the opportunity to understand what their child needs prior to and during their high school career in order to successfully matriculate to college. In the third section, there will be a strong emphasis on how to pay for college. There are multiple financial options, such as FAFSA, scholarships, grants, and loans, that parents do not often know about. Additional information on how to access and complete financial aid forms will also be addressed in this section of the presentation. The last section focuses on resources and the variety of online tools and platforms that parents can access.

The problem I am addressing in my ELP is the lack of college preparation that FGSs at Caesar Rodney High School (CRHS) are experiencing, despite the fact that pre-college interventions can enhance these students' ability to thrive in a college environment. This parent presentation will be one intervention to address the problem stated in my ELP. Providing parents

with this comprehensive presentation will provide immediate access to a significant amount of resources in one location. The presentation will demonstrate that CRHS is intent on identifying FGS early in their academic careers and providing the support they need as they move through high school, including helping families support their children. Enhancing first-generation parents' ability to support their child's journey to college will create opportunities that they themselves were not afforded.

Slide 1: Overview of FGS



The first slide in this artifact provides a definition of who is considered a first-generation student. This slide was chosen to provide parents with a clear definition of the term and information about the challenges that FGS may encounter. Each parent who participated in the focus group expressed a strong desire for their student to attend college even though they themselves did not attend college. However, the research conducted in my literature review states that upon graduating from high school, FGSs have a difficult time transitioning to college because they are not fully prepared with key skills that are crucial to college success (Pascarella et al., 2004). These include financial literacy skills, academic skills, and the knowledge to utilize

the advisory supports that are available to them once they get to college. If parents understand what an FGS is and the challenges that FGS face, then they will be better prepared to support their children's needs and take advantage of the resources in the rest of the presentation.

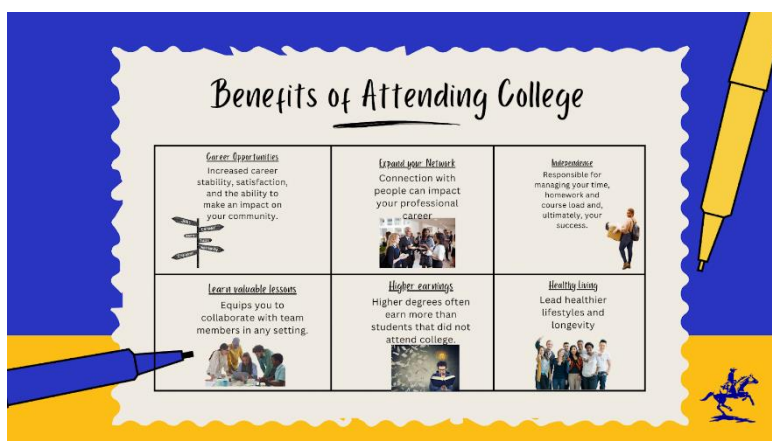
Slide 2: Parent Needs and Concerns



The slide above was chosen to outline the needs and concerns of parents, which were derived from the literature review and focus groups conducted in this ELP. My literature review provides that the lack of understanding of the resources and support available to FGSs has contributed to the higher dropout rate for FGSs within their first year (Irlbeck et al., 2014).

Although my journey to college was well over twenty years ago, I, too, was a first-generation student. My parents had the same aspirations and goals for me to attend college, just like the parents who participated in the focus group. However, both my parents and the parents in the focus group expressed the feeling that there is a disconnect between themselves and schools when it comes to supporting their children's journey to college. FGSs and their parents need support and unlimited access to various resources to aid the process of preparing for college.

Slide 3: The Benefits of Attending College



I designed slide 3 based on the research conducted in my literature review on how higher educational attainment is a major gateway to upward mobility (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). By pursuing higher education, FGS gain the knowledge, skills, and expertise necessary to thrive in their chosen fields, and attending college opens doors to a plethora of career opportunities that may have been otherwise inaccessible. Additionally, this slide not only addresses the benefits that wait after college graduation. It also highlights how attending college expands students' professional and social networks. They are exposed to a diverse landscape of people during their tenure at college, such as professors, researchers, professional staff, and fellow peers. These interactions can lead to a myriad of opportunities, such as internships, mentorship, and valuable connections for future jobs.

FGS that attend college are offered improved career prospects and earning potential and provide opportunities for socioeconomic mobility. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2024), college graduates typically earn significantly higher salaries than those with only a high school diploma. The NCES (2021) stated that college also fosters independence, personal growth, and development, including the development of critical thinking skills and adaptability. The combination of independence and valuable skills acquired in college lays a solid foundation for FGSs to lead fulfilling and successful lives. The research conducted in my literature review states that FGS receive important information on both selecting and enrolling in college from their parents, as well as messages of encouragement that are memorable and meaningful to them (Kranstuber et al., 2012; Palmer et al., 2011). This slide, therefore, provides a number of important rationales for attending college that parents can share with their children.

Another reason why I added this slide to the presentation was the economic benefits that FGSs could gain by attending college. This type of economic stability can also have a positive influence on FGSs' families and communities. As stated in the focus groups, parents want their FGSs to have a better life than they were able to have. Providing parents with a comprehensive list of both personal and financial benefits is a way to help parents support their students.

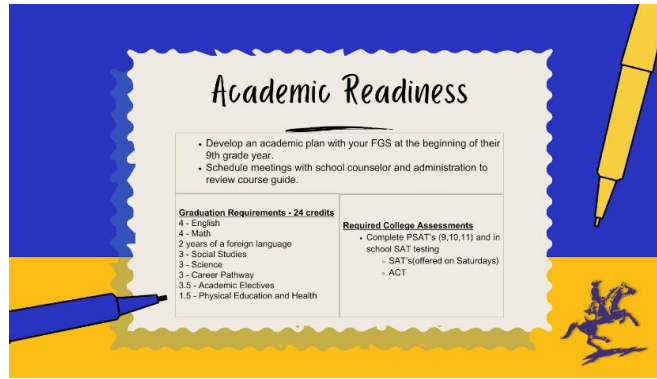
The last benefit of college attendance that I wanted to include in this presentation is the improvement of health and wellness. A health benefit is afforded to a first-generation student, as well as the ability to create a network, balance their professional and social schedules, and create a legacy for their family and future. Attending college aids in personal growth, improved self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment that can have a positive impact on an FGS's mental health. Additionally, it contributes to a holistic improvement in FGS's health and well-being, guiding them toward a healthier and brighter future. FGSs often face unique challenges in

navigating the complexities of higher education, including managing their health and well-being amidst academic demands and unfamiliar systems.

Preparing for College

The reason I created the next set of slides was that parents from the focus group expressed to me that they do not know what is specifically needed to support their students attending college, yet still have a critical desire to support their FGSs despite this lack of knowledge. Preparing a first-generation student for college is a journey that cannot be traveled alone. The research I completed in my literature review demonstrates that FGS look up to their families for both instrumental (tangible, physical, financial) and emotional support (e.g., listening, encouraging, advising) throughout college. This is notwithstanding the fact that their parents have very little information regarding college, which itself is a challenge to the learners (LeBouef & Dworkin, 2021). Further, research from my literature review discusses how preliminary academic preparation may present a unique challenge for some FGS transitioning from high school to college (Mikell & Davis, 2022). It is, therefore, important that this information is explicitly addressed in this section of slides since parents must play a key role in supporting their students.

Slide 4: Academic Readiness



In this section, I created slide 4 to provide parents with an outline of the academic requirements for FGSs in their preparation for college. A parent from the focus group expressed that although they did not attend college, they are excited for their daughter to attend. Unfortunately, however, excitement is not enough. Parents need information about college preparation and how to take advantage of the programs the school offers. It is integral for educators to create integrated and comprehensive programs aimed at making the learning environments of FGS less challenging (Maton, Domingo, Stolle-McAllister, Zimmerman, & Hrabowski, 2009; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000; Perna & Jones, 2013). Parents need information to make sure they can take advantage of these school programs that can support their students. The graduation requirements at CRHS can be overwhelming for parents to understand what they need in order to graduate. It is imperative that they understand the academic electives and various career pathways. FGSs are required to complete a certain number of ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies courses.

Creating the slide on academic readiness for my presentation involves understanding the complexities of course selection and establishing a balance between core requirements and elective opportunities that are designed around the student's interests and future career goals. Understanding the courses that CRHS offers and how the courses can relate to college attendance can be an overwhelming task for first-generation parents, so they must have a clear

understanding of the process. Lack of understanding of the resources and support available to students has contributed to the dropout rate for FGSs within their first year (Irlbeck et al., 2014). Although this research is geared towards a college student it is imperative that they have these same resources and support while in high school, and that their parents are made aware of these resources.

Slide 5: Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment



Slide 5 in this presentation highlights the amount of advanced placement and dual enrollment courses that are offered at CRHS. They provide a level of academic rigor that will challenge and enhance FGSs' academic abilities. Although CRHS offers a significant number of advanced placement, dual enrollment courses, and extracurricular programs after school, there is a disconnect in that FGS and families are often not fully aware of what is offered. Increasing parents' understanding of these types of courses will support FGS by making sure they take courses with academic rigor. Additionally, enrolling in these courses can also count towards college credits, depending on the higher institutions' regulations.

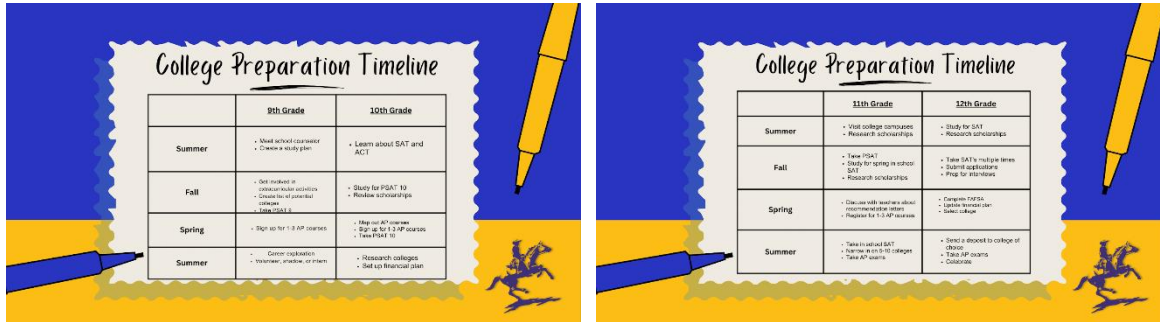
Academic rigor does not just occur in AP and dual enrollment courses, but parents should encourage their child to complete more than the required 2 years of a foreign language. CRHS offers seven different languages, along with a variety of advanced courses in math.

Understanding the course guide ensures that FGSs have the opportunities to have a diversified and robust academic foundation in preparation for college. One student expressed during the student focus group that they feel a sense of pride by doing their best academically, and we want to make sure that they have the courses they need to succeed academically once in college.

A significant contribution that teachers mentioned in the focus group is students being enrolled in advanced placement courses. They believe that there are clear benefits to FGSs enrolling in rigorous courses and that by putting forth the effort these courses require, they will be better prepared to earn college credits. AP and dual enrollment courses provide another opportunity to take college-level courses at the secondary level. Enrolling in these courses will also be useful as they prepare and complete various standardized tests in order to enroll in college.

Those standardized tests are the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the American College Test (ACT). These assessments can be taken multiple times throughout a first-generation student's high school career. FGSs and their parents must understand that these assessments are important for some college and university admissions and are a way to assess one's own academic preparation.

Slides 6 and 7: College Preparation Timeline



The reason I designed slides 6 and 7 in my presentation is to discuss a timeline that parents can utilize in helping the FGS prepare for college. A few parents from the focus group told me directly that they believe that their FGS should have a good advisor in high school and college who can be there for them academically and emotionally. Therefore, in this set of slides, I explain what should be happening in the school counselor meetings during the fall, winter, and spring of each year so that, along with the school counselor, parents are prepared to advise and support their students.

At the start of their 9th-grade year, parents will develop an academic plan that will also help FGS organize their course assignments and progress. The school counselor will start meeting with FGS at the conclusion of summer to begin a dialogue between the school counselor, FGSs, and parents. Throughout their 9th grade year, the school counselor will meet with the FGS to complete their Student Success Plan (SSP; Appendix G). The SSP is an artifact that is a part of this ELP. An FGS's 9th grade year is when they are becoming acclimated to high school and thinking about their plans post-high school. The SSP will help FGS and their parents create an academic plan during high school, prepare for college, and navigate resources for them and their parents.

During their 10th-grade year, FGSs should prepare to take the PSAT10, as it will help them determine career paths and colleges that they may want to attend. As the year concludes, they should research their top colleges and develop a financial plan to pay for college. Additionally, they should review their academic progress in completed courses from 9-10 and prepare to enroll in advanced-level courses. Advanced-level courses can prepare them for the rigor and structure of college courses. A few teachers from the focus group discuss the importance of enrollment in rigorous courses that will help FGSs put forth the effort, and they will see the impact of being able to earn college credits.

As stated in my literature review, preliminary academic preparation may present a unique challenge for some FGS transitioning from high school to college (Mikell & Davis, 2022). The transition from high school to college for FGS can be challenging if they are not equipped with the necessary support and resources offered while attending high school. Once an FGS enters their 11th-grade school year, parents should continue researching colleges and preparing to take the in-school SAT assessment in the summer and fall. By the winter and spring, families should be participating in in-person and virtual college visits. It is during these visits that they review their academic and financial plan that was created in 9th grade. As FGSs enter into the summer of their 12th-grade school year, they should be finalizing college choices and ensuring all application materials are ready. It is during the fall that parents begin assisting their children in completing college applications and FAFSA. The financial plan that was created at the beginning of their high school career will help parents know how they can support their FGS financially.

One parent in the focus group discussed how it would be helpful for them as a parent if there were seminars that were easily accessible for students and parents. According to the research conducted in my literature review, additional support would be individual advising that

allows advisors, counselors, or campus staff to engage in one-on-one conversations with FGSs (Eichelberger et al. 2017). Although this support is geared toward college, it would be beneficial for FGSs in high school as it would increase their financial knowledge prior to entering college. The goal at the end of this timeline is for FGSs to be completing the student success plan and graduating from high school.

Slides 8 and 9: College Visits



In this presentation, I wanted slides 8 and 9 to provide parents with a list of local colleges and universities in Delaware. This list will prepare parents and FGS to visit these local colleges and universities as part of the preparation process. The college preparation timeline is outlined in the next set of slides. For each college and university mentioned in the slides, I provide a direct link to open houses, virtual tours, and opportunities to schedule a personalized visit. This list will aid parents in having access to resources, as a few parents stated from the focus group that they have not been able to find resources for their FGS. Visiting these local colleges and universities provides parents with the opportunity to view the landscape, culture, and climate of the schools, and what they offer academically and socially. Research from my literature review indicated that FGS often report feeling isolated both at home and college (House et al., 2020), are sometimes overwhelmed by their college and home responsibilities, and feel lonely and homesick (Stebleton

et al., 2014; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2021). These visits can help FGS determine which college or university they will feel comfortable with while obtaining their post-secondary degree. A few parents indicated from the focus group that since they have not been able to find information and resources on their own they seek assistance from other family members. Parents are afforded an opportunity to delve into the community that is created at each institution and assist their children in making informed decisions about their educational journey. Participating in these visits also allows parents to speak directly with admission representatives and ask specialized questions about what the higher institution has to offer. One parent from the focus group stated that when their son expressed an interest in attending college, they did not think it would be possible. However, once families engage in visits and talk with admissions and financial aid professionals at colleges, these things allow FGS to visualize themselves as students on that campus when completing the admission process discussed in the next few slides.

Slides 10-12: College Admission Process



In the next section of my presentation, I created slides 10 through 12 to concentrate on the various steps parents should take to help their students complete the college admissions process. During the focus group, a parent explicitly requested that the school district provide seminars for FGS and parents to help navigate the college application and financial process, and these slides are an important part of filling that desire. When a parent begins the process with their FGS, they must first understand deadlines and the difference between regular admission, early decision, and early action options. Understanding the difference between these various options will save time when applying for multiple colleges. One tool that can support FGS and their families is the Common Application (Common App).

The common app is an online college application platform that allows FGS to apply to multiple colleges utilizing one application. Parents of FGS are often not aware of this resource and all of the benefits that it provides when applying to colleges. A section in the application requires students to complete an essay. This is an opportunity for parents to support their children in completing their studies to ensure they capture academic achievements and extracurricular activities. Parents can support their FGS by helping them highlight awards that they have achieved through documentation in their student success portfolio and an academic plan created from the preparation timeline.

As parents of FGS navigate through the admissions process, they must develop a list of individuals who are willing to compose recommendation letters. In my literature review, McCulloh (2020) found that there are other supports that had an impact on FGS lives, and one important part of that support came from the community that surrounds FGS. One avenue that parents can assist in supporting an FGS is identifying teachers, mentors, or community leaders

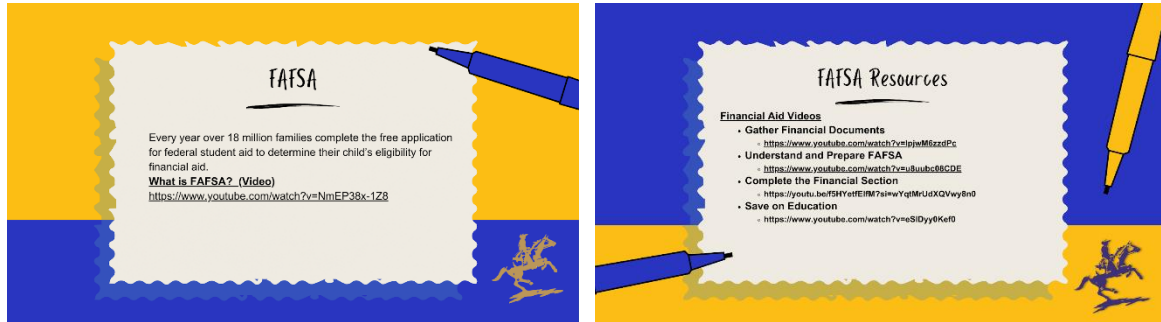
who can provide insightful and compelling recommendations. If parents and FGS contact these key people early in the process, they may be more willing to write a detailed letter, as opposed to waiting until the last minute. The final stages in completing the admission process include requesting a transcript(s) from the school counselor, having another person review the application, and examining the application one more time before a final submission. The actual process of completing an application for parents may be overwhelming and time-consuming, but the benefits will be well worth the sacrifice. The next section of this presentation will focus on how to access resources such as financial aid, scholarships, grants, and loans to pay for college.

Paying for College

The next section in this presentation focuses on how FGS and their families can pay for college. Research from my literature review states that students often have inadequate financial support and a lack of role models who have attended or graduated college (Chen, 2016; Falcon, 2015). Slides 13 - 20 will provide detailed financial options for parents and FGS. Those various financial options will also be discussed when the school counselor meets quarterly with FGS to complete their Student Success Plan (SSP)

The school counselor will have access to resources that will help FGSs and their families navigate the financial process. This presentation addresses the needs of parents who expressed their desire for supportive institutional advising in high school and college that can be there for them both academically and emotionally. The school counselor will play a crucial role in helping FGS understand and access the various financial pathways. When the FGS and school counselor meet quarterly to complete their student success portfolio, they will delve into the financial component of college. Several parents during the focus group discussed wanting more information and resources in regard to the financial component.

Slide 13 and 14: Financial Aid



In this presentation, I created slides 13 and 14 to give a brief explanation and a short video explaining the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Slide 13 provides a link to a video that explicitly explains FAFSA and the process. FAFSA is the gateway to obtaining financial support for FGS and their families. Students from the focus group expressed how they want to attend college but have anxiety about the financial burden of college. Therefore, it is imperative during this presentation that I ease their anxiety by providing helpful information about the FAFSA.

In order to be awarded any type of financial assistance, all families must complete the FAFSA, as it is a requirement to apply for federal grants, loans, and work-study programs. A researcher from my literature review, Azmitia et al. (2018), stated that the amount and types of support received from parents are mixed, but research demonstrates that FGS has reported that emotional support from family members and friends from home was one of their main reasons for not dropping out of college. This collaboration will provide another level of support and a proactive approach for FGSs and their parents to manage the financial portion of their journey to college.

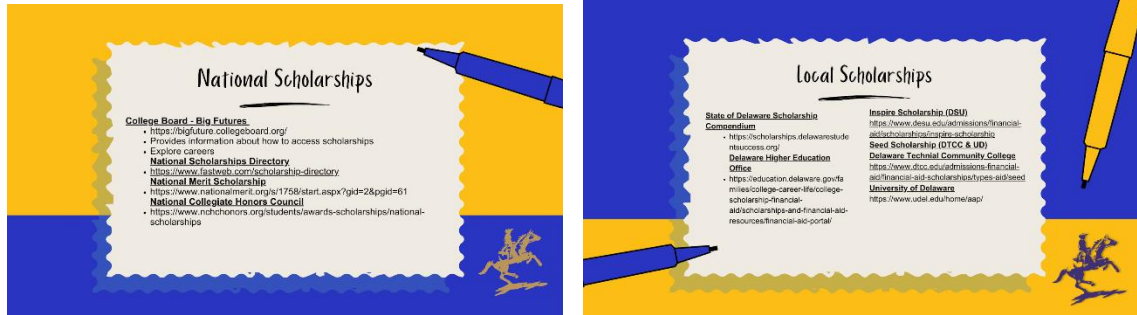
Once parents understand FAFSA and its role as a gateway to FGS's journey to college, they can move forward in the process. Slide 14 provides a list of video links for parents on how to access the FAFSA form, understand and prepare the form, complete it, and save on education.

Understanding and attempting to navigate the financial landscape of funding their child's education can be daunting.

A parent from the focus group expressed how they have been unable to find resources to support their FGS. The first link on slide 14 is to a video for parents on how the financial documents are needed to start the process. Parents must first gather important documents such as their tax returns and other documentation. These documents will provide the government with an accurate depiction of your economic status. Colleges and universities utilize FAFSA to determine FGS eligibility for need-based funding. The next link is on how to prepare the FAFSA. Once they have gathered the necessary documents, they can begin the online application. They are asked questions about their income, assets, and household size. It is imperative that the information documented is accurate, as it determines eligibility for receiving financial assistance. The last link is a video that takes them step by step on how to complete the financial section.

The deadlines for the FAFSA often align with college application deadlines, and this is why it is critical that parents should adhere to the college preparation timeline discussed in previous slides and to develop a financial plan before these deadlines. If FAFSA deadlines are not met, this could impede the FGS application and the consideration of assistance. The complexities of the FAFSA should not solely rest on the parents but should be a collaborative initiative with FGS, school counselors, other family members, and community support.

Slides 15 and 16: National and Local Scholarships



In this section of my presentation I wanted the slides above to highlight the various scholarships that may be available to FGS and their parents. There are two types of scholarships that FGS can be awarded, national or local. Understanding the difference between national and local scholarships will be crucial for parents. As these scholarships can aid in FGS understanding of loans, budgeting, and time requirements of attending college through degree completion. Each state releases a scholarship compendium that provides an extensive list of scholarships for students to apply. FGS can explore a multitude of scholarships that are offered nationally by private organizations, foundations, and corporations, tailored to various fields of study, extracurricular achievements, and demographic backgrounds. Researching and applying for scholarships should be a collaboration with the FGS, parent, and school counselor. The resources that school counselors are provided access to may not be easily accessible for parents.

FGS that apply for local scholarships oftentimes have a higher rate of being awarded the scholarship. It is imperative that when parents are supporting FGS in applying for these scholarships that they highlight various components of their high school careers. These components consist of extracurricular activities, community involvement, and academic progress. A student indicated from the focus group that they will have to find good scholarships, because they will also have to work in order to help fund college. Scholarships provide another level of financial opportunities for FGS and their parents in their journey to college.

Slide 17: Grants



The next level of financial opportunities provided in this presentation are grants. I created slide 17 above for this presentation explaining the various types of grants, another important financial resource that can be used to eliminate the financial burden of college. Just like a scholarship, a FGS that is awarded a grant is not required to repay the grant. The Federal grants, also known as the Pell Grant, are awarded to students based on their family's income. I was fortunate enough to be awarded a Pell Grant that paid for my enrollment at University of Delaware, and I included this slide to make sure that FGS students and families have the same opportunity that I did.

Slide 18: School Counselor Support (FAFSA, Scholarships, Grants, and Loans)



The purpose of slide 18 in this presentation is to delve into the support the school counselor can offer. During their quarterly meetings with FGS, counselors can assist FGS with research and applying for various financial tenets such as FAFSA, scholarships, grants, and loans. Supporting FGS in accessing and applying for grants provides another gateway for FGS to minimize or eradicate the financial burden of helping them and their families afford higher education. By tapping into these grant opportunities, FGSs can pave the way for a more accessible and affordable path to higher education.

Slides 19 and 20: Loans

Loan Name	Pro's	Con's
Sallie Mae	You will get the convenience of the money for your child's education for 10 years or longer.	You may not be able to afford the amount you are approved for.
College Avenue	Offers up to \$100,000 of the financial assistance.	Defaulted when you fail to make payments on your child's loan.
SoFi	Member benefits, such as career coaching and financial planning.	May not prepay payments for financial hardship.
Credible	You are offered several repayment options.	They have the highest interest rate of all parent loans.
Private Loans	You will get the lowest interest rate if you are an excellent borrower.	If you have a poor credit score, you may not qualify for the loan.

Loan Name	Pro's	Con's
Sallie Mae	One of the few lenders to provide more repayment options.	You can't seem to qualify and receive the loan or you have to wait a long time.
College Avenue	They have low-cost and flexible payment options.	You need to be the primary borrower for at least half of the disbursement amount.
SoFi	No fees and no hidden underpayment protection fee repayment.	You will have only one lender to be notified and contact them if you are in trouble.
Credible	You can compare products and get a good feel about looking over their rates.	You will have to pay a fee and offer them to take it if you are in trouble.

In this section of my presentation, I address the top 5 loans that parents and students can apply for to pay for college. Loans are an essential financial tool that can help FGS and their families afford a college degree. Each loan listed for parents and students outlines the pros and

cons. While many of the parent loans may cover 100% of tuition, have low-interest rates, and some member benefits, there are concerns with these loans. The concerns are not being able to afford the amount approved for, issues that surround repayment of the loan, and high-interest rates. Just like the parent loans, the positives with the top 5 student loans are flexible payment options, unemployment protection, and low-interest rates. It is imperative that parents of FGS understand the relief loans can provide for tuition and expenses, and it is one of my goals in designing this presentation to make sure that they understand these financial tools and ask for guidance in order to make informed decisions.

Slide 21: Resources



The slide above was created for this presentation to provide a curated list of resources for parents of FGSs. The resources that I include on these slides in this presentation are links to summer programs that are tailored for FGSs. The research in my literature review delves into the comprehensive program that college counselors can develop partnerships with progSummer BridgeTRiO or summer bridge, which has a high enrollment of FGSs (Stebleton & Schmidt, 2010). In this presentation, the links highlight an array of services such as academic tutoring in preparation for college, support in the completion of college entrance exams (e.g., SAT, ACT), assistance in completing financial aid applications, and counseling for parents to improve their

financial and economic literacy. Research by the U.S. Department of Education (2020) showed that this program is successful in increasing college enrollment and graduation rate among participants.

The purpose of this presentation was to capture the needs of parents, as many indicated during the focus group, regarding the lack of access and information for college preparation. During the focus groups, a few parents indicated that they would like support in accessing resources for programs that their children can participate in that will help them be successful in college. These programs would help support their child's academic progress. Each link will equip FGSs with a guide in growing academically and in personal development. The links listed in these resource slides can direct parents on how to alleviate the pressure and stress of being able to fund their child's education. Providing these resources to parents is an easy go-to guide for them to understand the college process and how to support their FGSs' journey to college.

Appendix H Student Success Portfolio

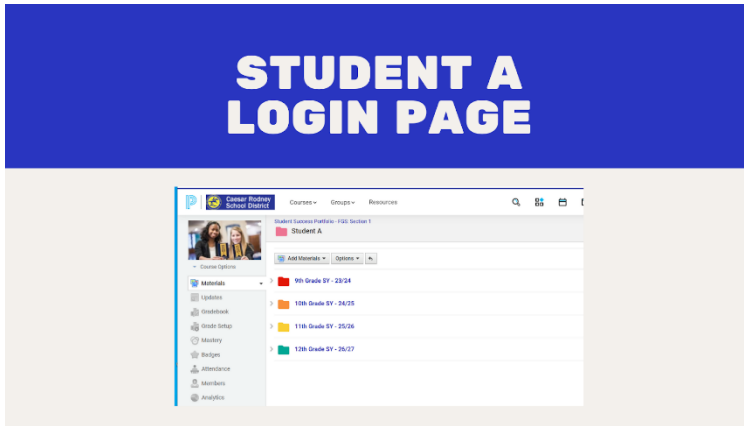


Kristin Brown-Massey, University of Delaware

The design and purpose of the Student Success Portfolio (SSP) (Appendix G) was to ensure that FGS are being identified and tracked throughout their high school career. The SSP is for FGS to meet with their counselor and administrator three times a school year. According to

the research conducted in my literature review, additional support would be individual advising that allows advisors, counselors, or campus staff to engage in one-on-one conversations with FGSs (Eichelberger et al. 2017). The meetings would occur at the end of three marking periods in a school year. Each meeting has a discussion topic highlighted. At CRHS, students access their course assignments through Schoology, an online platform. FGS and their school counselor will access their portfolio in Schoology with the course entitled SSP. This Schoology course will display a folder for each grade level, and within the grade level folder, there will be the discussion topics for each meeting. During each meeting, the counselor and administrator take anecdotal notes on the discussion topics. FGS is able to go back and access these notes to reference and discuss them with family members, educators, and community members.





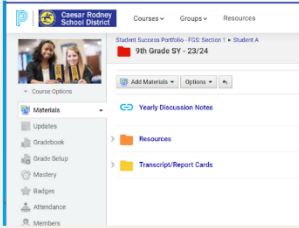
Implementation of the SSP started with providing all freshman students with a short survey to identify if they were an FGS. Every freshman is enrolled in a 9th-grade English course. Therefore, each 9th-grade English teacher administered the survey to 600 students. The survey had 349 respondents, and 13% of them indicated that they were FGS. Based on that information, the students who responded that they were FGS met with their school counselor and administrator.

9th Grade (Freshman)

I created the freshman questions to be centered around identifying FGS. Once they are identified, the mid-year conference will determine a plan once they graduate. FGS are able to discuss their plans during this meeting as to whether or not they want to enroll, enlist, or become employed. The last meeting focuses on course selection for the upcoming year. It is during this time the counselor and administrator can review the FGS grades and have discussions about required and advanced courses. In the literature review, it was discussed how a comprehensive

program that college counselors can develop is a partnership with programs such as TRiO or Summer Bridge, which have a high enrollment of FGSs (Stebleton & Schmidt, 2010).

9TH GRADE YEARLY NOTES



➔

9th Grade Notes		
Aug- Oct	Nov-Feb	Feb-Apr
Discussion Topic: Identify FGS	Discussion Topic: Develop an academic and afterschool plan	Discussion Topic: Course selection for 10th grader

10th Grade (Sophomore)

The questions for a sophomore begin to explore 2 and 4-year colleges and careers. FGS is given the opportunity to explore the various types of colleges and determine which one may be the best for them and their future career. Research from my literature review demonstrates that upon graduating from high school, FGSs have a difficult time transitioning to college because they are not fully prepared with key skills that are crucial to college success (Pascarella et al., 2004). This will connect with their second meeting to review their academic plan that was created during their freshman year. They will have the opportunity to change or keep the same

plan. Starting the year by discussing the different types of colleges will also drive the last meeting on selecting courses for their junior year.

**10TH GRADE
YEARLY NOTES**

10th Grade Notes		
Aug- Oct	Nov-Feb	Feb-Apr
Discussion Topic: Explore colleges (2 yr. and 4 yr.)	Discussion Topic: Review academic plan	Discussion Topic: Course selection for 11th grade

11th Grade (Junior)

As FGS are matriculating through CRHS, their junior year discussion will be geared towards discussing colleges, majors, and the courses they would need to take in high school and college based on their major. By the second meeting, they will discuss their attendance or plan to attend in-person and virtual college visits. If they have visited colleges, they can narrow their major(s). My literature review discusses how higher education produces countless benefits for individuals, including higher earnings, better working conditions, higher rates of employment, lower rates of unemployment and poverty, better health, and longer life expectancies (Ma & Baum, 2016; Carnevale & Smith, 2018). At the end of the year, they will have selected their courses for their senior year. Per Delaware law, high school students must graduate with 24 credits. They are required to take 4 years of English, Math, 3 years of Science, Social Studies, 2 year of a foreign language, 1 year of physical education, ½ year of health, 4 years of a career technical education course, and electives. As stated by one student from the focus group, “The

courses that I have completed so far have given me a sense of belonging and working towards a

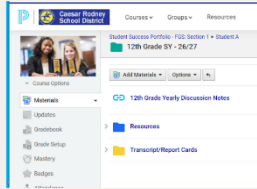
11th Grade Notes		
Aug- Oct	Nov-Feb	Feb-Apr
Discussion Topic: Discuss Majors and Courses for college	Discussion Topic: Attend in-person and virtual college tours	Discussion Topic: Course selection 12th grade

common goal.

12th Grade (Senior)

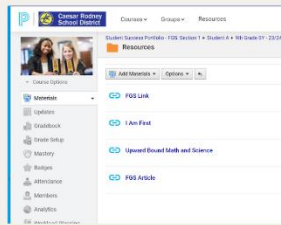
The FGS senior year discussions will focus on which college visits were conducted and reviewing college applications. During the focus group, a student expressed, I want to attend college, but have anxiety about the financial burden of college. An outside agency (Stand by Me) meets with seniors in September to explain the financial aid process. Research from my literature review states that students often have inadequate financial support and a lack of role models who have attended or graduated college (Chen, 2016; Falcon, 2015). By their second meeting, we will be assisting FGS with applying for scholarships and the financial aid process. The last meeting prior to graduation will be assisting FGS in selecting which college they will attend based on acceptance, calculating the amount received from scholarships, and completing FAFSA forms. My research conducted in the literature review stated that parental support was crucial in receiving financial assistance and helping FGS obtain general information about selecting and enrolling in college (Kranstuber et al., 2012; Palmer et al., 2011).

12TH GRADE YEARLY NOTES



12th Grade Notes		
Aug- Oct	Nov-Feb	Feb-Apr
Discussion Topic: College application submissions	Discussion Topic: Apply for scholarships and financial aid	Discussion Topic: Review college(s) acceptance letter(s). Confirm college acceptance

RESOURCES



Appendix I Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Can you provide me with the names of three students that are identified as FGSs in your classes?

1. How do you prepare these students in your courses to go to college?
2. Who do you think should be enrolled in the most rigorous courses?
3. How do you define academic rigor?
4. Are your courses rigorous and how do they prepare students for college?
5. How are students at CRHS that take AP and Dual Enrollment courses better prepared for college than students that do not take these courses?
6. Why do you think enrollment for AP and Dual Enrollment courses has decreased over the past two years?
7. How do you encourage students to take AP/Dual Enrollment courses?

Protocol

Knowledge of Students and Their Needs

Can you provide me with the names of three students that are identified as FGSs in your classes?

How do you prepare these students in your courses to go to college?

Talk about own experiences, review announcements daily, talk to students about joining clubs and getting involved in school activities

Ø Was a first-generation college student, did not go to college directly out of high school

Putting in work at home students can complete the material individually with less distractions

Provide students with information about scholarship opportunities and the options they have available as FGSs

Have students start an academic resume and hold them responsible for its content

Intertwined skills, excel the learning experience

Ø Students need to go past doing the bare minimum in their classes

Ø Lack of homework doesn't help students

Ø Students need to learn note taking and study habit skills

Classroom Rigor

How do you define academic rigor?

Ø Rigorous courses help students with time management

Ø Rigorous courses have high expectations, students have to complete the work and take ownership of their work

Ø Rigorous courses teach students to work at their own pace without a teacher

Ø Rigorous courses are a wake-up call to students

Are your courses rigorous and how do they prepare students for college?

Ø SAT Prep

Ø Scholarship opportunities

Ø Students reading whole novels, writing longer papers, exposure to work load, high expectations, working within deadlines, studying, flashcards, learning different study types - things students need to be exposed to

Who do you think should be enrolled in the most rigorous courses?

Appendix J Student Focus Group Protocol

1. What is the difference between a first-generation student and a non-first-generation student?
2. What types of conversations have you had with people about FGSs?
3. Who or what influenced your decision in wanting to attend college?
4. How does it feel to be the first in your family to attend college?
5. How does your family support or not support your goals of attending college?
6. What resources or support do you need in preparing for college (ex. financial, academic tutoring, social interaction)?
7. What adult(s) did you discuss your college aspirations with at school and how have they supported or not supported you in the process?
8. In what ways will AP and Dual-enrollment courses help or hinder your college journey?
9. How are the courses that you are currently enrolled in rigorous and challenging in preparing you for college?

Protocol

Support System

How does your family support or not support your goals of attending college?

Family is very supportive, they have a college fund, lives with dad who helps with finding programs for college.

1. **Wants to have a good job**
2. **Ø Family wants them to go to college**

What resources or support do you need in preparing for college (ex. financial, academic tutoring, social interaction)?

Believes 1:1 work with teacher and tutoring in what ever subject a 1st generation student needs the most support in

Ø Communication/social interaction go hand-in-hand – need to know how to communicate to interact with people socially

1. Financial would be the biggest stress relief, doesn't think he will need tutoring but think it is great if someone needs it.

Help with finding scholarships and finical aide options

Ø After school activities and social events are resources that support students in preparing for college

What adult(s) did you discuss your college aspirations with at school and how have they supported or not supported you in the process?

1. Discussed with the band teacher in middle school who has been supportive and inspired to do band at the high school. Middle school counselor has also been supportive in aiding finding programs.

Have spoken with the Arabic teacher about college – he has written a recommendation and taking Arabic has helped with communication

Who or what influenced your decision in wanting to attend college?

Brothers have pushed her to go to college

1. Family was the main contributors, for a while was not financially stable and realizing a college degree affords a better lifestyle. Anxiety about the financial burden of college

Teachers have provided information on what to put in scholarship essays

Ø Will be going to Del State during the summer for a summer program

Ø Teachers have helped with the college essay and application proces

Academic Preparation

In what ways will AP and Dual-enrollment courses help or hinder your college journey?

1. **AP will always help, but if your stressed would not recommend taking AP course. Dual enrollment should not be for everyone, thinks its strange to limit yourself to one thing.**
2. **Ø Ø Getting college credits early could lead to getting burned out early**

How are the courses that you are currently enrolled in rigorous and challenging in preparing you for college?

The courses completed have given a sense of belonging and working towards a common goal.

Understands the classes, feels as though he is lucky that does not need as much academic support. Band and school in geneal has been a good experience and very grateful for those experiences.

Culinary is challenging, it helps with listening skill and maintaining focus

Finds Algebra challenging and difficult but things thinks math will be helpfully in her career in the medical field

Ø Spanish is also helpful because she can communicate with patients who speak Spanish

First Generation Awareness

What is the difference between a first-generation student and a non-first-generation student?

1. Its not a big deal if you do not attend college, but has felt a pressure personally to go to college. Friends feel as though it is not a big part. Family has always made it a top priority.

2. **1st level/person in family to go to college**

2. What types of conversations have you had with people about FGSs?

1. Focused on why his father did not go to college, dad was homeschooled and had a job. Mom couldn't go due to paying for sister and family could not afford, but his mother has his own career. First time talking about being a FG in his family

2. **Direct information about programs and scholarship**

How does it feel to be the first in your family to attend college?

I feel a lot of pressure to do better

1. Feels a sense of pride and doing very well academically in high school. A lot of pressure to do well and do what his family was unable to do in attending college, but wants to do it for his self.

Appendix K Parents Group Protocol

- (1) How do you feel about your child being the first in your family to attend college?
- (2) What motivated your child to want to attend college?
- (3) How did you support their decision to attend college?
- (4) What information would be needed in completing the college application process with your child?
- (5) What resources were available for you and your family to access in preparing your child for college?
- (6) Describe the ideal college or university you want your student to choose and why?
- (7) What concerns do you have around the financial aspect of your child attending college?
- (8) What does your child need the academic and emotional challenges of preparing for and attending college?
- (9) What resources would you need to prepare your child to transition to college life, both academically and emotionally?
- (10) What concerns or fears do you have about your child's college experience?
- (11) What hopes and dreams do you have about your child's college experience?
- (12) What do you want your child to gain from the college experience?

Protocol

Motivation and support to attend college

- (2) What motivated your child to want to attend college?

She is following her aunt's footsteps

Since she was young she always wanted to be a doctor and she has remained wanting to attend college

WH has wanted to pursue culinary, and knowing that he could attend college for that career was a motivation

Tells child personal stories, and living better than what he was growing up, kids like nice things but understanding you have to work hard, success and possibilities

(3)How did you support their decision to attend college?

Havent had a chance to really discuss attending college

Informed her if that is what she wants to do they would figure it out when they get there and has her full support

Didnt think it was a possibility, a lot of feedback from school and did well in helping him figuring out what he wanted to do and the staff at CRHS

It is supported 100% and tell them what no one has told him, the expenses, paying loans back, understand its multiple siblings and try to get scholarships, grants, to help pay for school, also encourages trade school

College application and financial aid resources

(4) What information would be needed in completing the college application process with your child?

She is going to need help filling out, due to make them more independent and completing paperwork themselves. If they dont understand then she will help

Tutorials, information nights, and access to school administration

We do not know where to start in general with the college application process

Seminars for students and parents, how to handle financial aid and easily accessible

(5) What resources were available for you and your family to access in preparing your child for college?

So far has not received or know of any resources, but would like to have resources and seeks assistance from family members

No resources have been available, more at home discussing college, a little bit of searching here and there

Completed a program (delaware college scholars) over the summer, completed zoom meeting throughout the summer and overview of the program and support offered, will work with him for seven years and will stop by the school to check in on him

Ideal college would be an HBCU, but whichever one is pose the best education their personality and character, like and HBCU to get the cultural aspect

(7) What concerns do you have around the financial aspect of your child attending college?

Realizes that she cannot contribute financially due to biological parents are not contributing financially

Alot of concerns, depending on what she wants to major and it being expensive

How to get the financial aid is started and what are the options

Main concern getting the work completed, remaining focused, trust they are focused if they are attending an out of state college, safety is also a concern.

Ideas/core values about college

(1) How do you feel about your child being the first in your family to attend college?

Feel really good,

Ecstatic

Excited, very excited and proud

(12) What do you want your child to gain from the college experience?

Gain their own identity, strive to do better than their parents, siblings, and grandmother.

Do what you want to do, understand people, just strive to best.

Be able to know for certain if you put your mind to something and the work ethic

anything is possible

Does his own routine, not being afraid to try new things but may find something different than culinary that he enjoys as well.

(6) Describe the ideal college or university you want your student to choose and why?

Does not know because the student has not stated what she wants to major, therefore cannot make an assumption

Attend a school as close as home as possible, but one that will provide her the help and best education. Push her to help her strive to reach her goals and challenged

Completely up to student on where they want to go, but leaning towards Culinary Institute of America

(10) What concerns or fears do you have about your child's college experience?

Concerns of determining which college she will be attending, as far as the distance and the cost

Everything, more specifically if she attends school out of state and gets involved with the wrong crowd, or homesick

Other students that attend and what has been going on in the world and on college campuses

(11) What hopes and dreams do you have about your child's college experience?

That she can find a place they are comfortable, an area where family members are near by to help if there is a situation. Be able to strive and get your independence, due to not be able to depend on their parents

Hope it is everything she thinks it will be.

Be able to be even more independent and experience things that he is interested, create a life for himself and that is not low income currently like his parents

Academic and Emotional Support

(8) What does your child need the academic and emotional challenges of preparing for and attending college?

So far not for sure until she can have a conversation with the student, the main focus will be finding a scholarship to pay for college

She needs to be more focused, to help her deal with not failing

No academic challenges and very independent student

Hopes that their child learns a lot of life lessons, successful at whatever they want to pursue

(9) What resources would you need to prepare your child to transition to college life, both academically and emotionally?

A good advisor that can be there for her academically and emotionally be there when need. Support from home

Strong support of counselors at the college when in need

Gain the experience of being on their own, college is setting you up for the work field,
better paying jobs, handle their finances, live on their own, be more responsible,