

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Course to College Program

EARLY COLLEGE AWARENESS

College awareness and exploration are essential on a student's path to postsecondary success. Through exploration of college programs, areas of study and career options, students ensure that their high school academic record and extracurricular involvement position them to enter and succeed in colleges that will meet their academic, social and emotional needs. Moreover, early college and career exploration leads students to choose colleges that offer programs in their desired areas of study and to potentially make education more affordable by completing programs in a timely manner. Alarming, qualified first generation, low-income, minority students are less likely to apply to college and more likely to undermatch – a term used to describe students who apply to or attend a college which is less selective than their academic ability. As a result, such students are less likely to persist and complete college degrees.

Early College Awareness programming will ensure that all students are applying to colleges and universities that are an academic match and a good college fit. College fit refers to dimensions like distance from a student's home and geographic location, campus atmosphere and degree of inclusivity, level of accommodation of and services for first-generation students, academic programs offered, and more. Early College Awareness program component will include a toolkit for schools and corresponding training opportunities for educators, including Iowa Go Alliance Academy modules. For students, activities in this program component prepare them to make postsecondary plans and to complete college applications with sufficient college and career exploration. Early College Awareness programming is intended to supplement a school's existing college and career exploration and readiness efforts, including organized and individual college visits, ACT/SAT completion and participation in college fit and match programs and events. As early college awareness spans all years of high school, schools may choose activities that best suit particular grade levels, such as administering ACT Aspire, or customize activities to supplement current college access efforts. Iowa College Aid's *Your Course to College* student guide is an excellent resource to use when advising students, developing interventions and planning college access events.

COLLEGE APPLICATION CAMPAIGN

Iowa College Application Campaign is part of a national effort to engage and inform Iowa students about the college application process. The primary purpose is to help high school seniors, especially those from underserved populations, navigate the college admission process and ensure they apply to at least one college.

Support for participating schools includes:

- Site Coordinator Planning Guide and training
- Free promotional posters and materials to use during events
- Assistance with press releases and working with the media
- End-of-campaign reports
- Assistance from VISTA and AmeriCorps members in capacity-building and direct service to students and families (*selected schools only*)

FAFSA COMPLETION INITIATIVE

The importance of FAFSA completion is seen in the strong correlation between FAFSA completion and college enrollment, as well as its necessity for students to receive financial aid. While most in need of financial aid, FAFSA completion rates are lower among first-generation, low-income and minority students. Schools with high percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch tend to have lower FAFSA completion rates. Through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, Iowa College Aid can help high schools identify seniors who have not completed a FAFSA so they can provide follow up assistance and ensure that all students complete this crucial step in the college enrollment process.

To participate, schools must complete the FAFSA Completion Data Share Agreement. Schools will have access to ICAPS, Iowa College Aid's online processing system, where they will upload a student roster and download FAFSA Completion Files. Schools are encouraged to use student-level FAFSA completion information to provide targeted FAFSA assistance and to plan FAFSA completion workshops and events.

Support for participating schools includes:

- FAFSA Completion Initiative toolkit and training
- FAFSA Completion website: <https://fafsa.iowa.gov>
- Training resources for volunteers providing FAFSA assistance (*coming 2018*)
- Free promotional posters and materials to use during events
- Access to ICAPS and training for counselors on its functions
- Assistance from VISTA and AmeriCorps members in capacity-building and direct service to students and families (*selected schools only*)

COLLEGE DECISION DAY

The goal of College Decision Day is to recognize high school seniors for their college plans and encourage the college aspirations of underclassmen. College Decision Day is held on or around May 1 to coincide with the date most seniors must inform a college of their plans to enroll. School events recognize all students for their postsecondary plans, but can also serve as an opportunity to assist students who may not have completed necessary steps to enroll in college, such as completion college applications or FAFSA, taking a placement test or registering for orientation. Schools are encouraged to host events that include the entire community, including the nonprofit and business sectors and students from lower grades who may only be exploring careers and college for the first time.

Support for participating schools includes:

- College Decision Day toolkit, training and suggestions for hosting successful events

- Design assistance and materials to use during events
- Assistance with press releases and working with the media
- Assistance from VISTA and AmeriCorps members in capacity-building and direct service to students and families (*selected schools only*)

SUMMER TRANSITION

Some college-intending students, even after signaling their intention to enroll and completing necessary steps, fail to enroll anywhere in the fall after high school graduation. This phenomenon is often referred to as “Summer Melt”. Summer melt rates are higher among students who come from low-income families, have lower academic achievement and who intend to enroll at community colleges. Schools with high percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch tend to have greater rates of summer melt. Iowa College Aid’s Summer Transition program provides a framework for schools to mitigate summer melt and ensure that students who intend to attend college take the necessary steps during the summer months and enroll in the fall after graduation.

After making their decision on or before College Decision Day, students who intend to enroll may not be aware of required actions during the summer months, or may need assistance with completing them. Iowa College Aid adopted and customized the *SDP Summer Melt Handbook: A Guide to Investigating and Responding to Summer Melt*, authored by Benjamin L. Castleman, Lindsay C. Page and Ashley L. Snowdon of Harvard University’s Center for Education Policy Research. Iowa College Aid’s Summer Transition toolkit will include research, approaches and interventions from the Handbook as well as Iowa-specific data and content.

Support for participating schools includes:

- Summer Transition Program toolkit and training
- Assistance with data analysis and determining the rate of “summer melt” in your district/building
- Assistance with creating interventions based on resources and student needs
- Assistance from VISTA and AmeriCorps members in capacity-building and direct service to students and families (*selected schools only*)