

## Project Teach Evaluation Summary

Did you know students begin making decisions about college and career plans as early as middle school? When students have access to necessary resources and support, they're more likely to make informed decisions about their post-secondary options and develop a college-going identity.

### **The Program**

Project Teach, Harvard's Official College and Career Awareness program, has been operating in Cambridge public schools for more than 20 years and more recently Boston Public Schools. The program aims to help middle school students explore their options for post-secondary education using a framework that engages students at school, during a campus visit, and at home. The program is based on research by Harvard Graduate School of Education's Mandy Savitz-Romer, Faculty Director of Prevention Science and Practice & Senior Lecturer in Human Development and Education. Mandy Savitz-Romer and researcher Suzanne Bouffard's 2012 publication, *Ready Willing & Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success*, suggests that fostering a college-going identity begins at an early age.

### **The Study**

Our most recent study concluded in 2018 and collected feedback from more than 350 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. We administered pre and post-program surveys to students in Boston Public Schools located in Allston/Brighton and Cambridge Public Schools. The study sought to measure the impact of the Project Teach framework by answering the following questions:

- Does the program increase students' desire to attend college?
- Does the program positively affect students' perceptions of college?
- Does the program help students talk to their teachers and families about college?

The surveys included 4-point Likert scale questions regarding students' feelings about college and their academic and social interests, written response questions, and general demographic questions.

### **The Findings – Program Impact**

Post-program surveys indicated a number of positive results across all demographics. Most significantly, students increased their belief that college can be fun, that diversity exists on college campuses, and that they felt they knew where to go to ask questions about college:

- Students showed a 4% increase in their belief that college can be fun. More students (10% increase) listed "meeting new people" as one of the most exciting things about going to college, and fewer students (5% decrease) listed "failing" as the hardest part of going to college.
- Data showed an increase of 6% in students' belief that people who look like them go to college.
- There was a 9% increase in how confident students felt about knowing where to go to ask questions about college. Fewer students (4% decrease) expressed worry that going to college will take a lot of work.

## **The Findings - Written Feedback**

While survey questions gathered statistics about the impact of Project Teach, we also wanted to know how students felt about the visit itself. We asked students to share their thoughts on the different sections of the campus visit. This is what they told us:

- The majority (72%) of students enjoyed the undergraduate presentation at the beginning of the visit. They said they felt it was informative, and they liked being able to ask the students questions.
- Most students (71%) said they really enjoyed the participation in a college class of their choosing. Beat Boxing, Poetry, and Zebrafish classes ranked at the top of the list.
- The walking tour component of the visit was liked by 72% of students. Students enjoyed being able to see the campus, hear stories about Harvard, and see college students walking around.

## **Responsive Programming**

We're continuing to look for ways to help students feel confident starting a dialogue about college with their parents. To this end we send home a family letter explaining the visit that has been translated into six languages. Another initiative may be to link college workshops and family events at the Harvard Ed Portal with targeted Project Teach partner schools.

In 2019, we launched a Project Teach Website: [Harvard.edu/ProjectTeach](https://Harvard.edu/ProjectTeach) which provides educators with pre and post visit activities to engage students in considering their own post secondary options. These activities, along with allowing students to choose which "college class" they'd like to attend, can help students express the emerging sense of autonomy over their future.

Project Teach staff, including interns, is diverse to show students that anyone, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status can attend college. Continuing this pattern of diversity will help maintain the positive impact indicated in the study.

Some feedback suggested that college-style lectures may not be engaging enough for middle school students. Based on this feedback, we've worked with Crimson Key Society undergraduates to redesign the presentation for greater engagement.

Ongoing student feedback helps us identify classes that are the most appealing for 7th graders. In 2018-19, we added additional "college classes" including a Behind the Scenes Tour of the American Repertory Theater, a Hip Hop Class, and an Astronomy class where students used a solar telescope.

Weather is notoriously uncooperative in New England, so we ask teachers to check the forecast ahead of time and remind their students to dress appropriately. In the meantime, we're working on a back-up plan for the walking tour in case of inclement weather - we plan to pilot this in 2019-20.

## **Further Research**

Thanks to these findings, we're researching ways that Project Teach can have an even stronger positive impact and how we can better understand the program. Future studies will aim to collect feedback from teachers on other aspects of the program, so we can determine how to make pre-visit and post-visit activities most effective.