Evaluation Report Brief

Gateway to College: Gateway to College Program

What are the goals of the program?

Gateway to College serves students who have dropped out of high school, or are at risk of dropping out, by providing the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and credits towards a postsecondary degree. Students complete Gateway to college courses then are transitioned to mainstream community college. The Gateway to College program is a national network of 43 colleges in 23 states, maintaining partnerships with more than 125 school districts.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

Gateway to College conducted an implementation study to better understand the Gateway to College model, assess the extent to which it was implemented as designed, and draw lessons for Gateway to College sites. The implementation evaluation was conducted at three Gateway locations, with one site per state: California, Colorado, and Washington.

What did we learn from the evaluation?

The evaluation was guided by four primary questions: Who does the model serve? Were the core elements of the Gateway to College model implemented as planned? What kinds of adaptations were made to meet the needs of the local context and student population? What factors facilitated or impeded successful program implementation? Here are some of the important findings from this study.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Gateway to College Program

Subgrantee: Gateway to College

Intermediary: Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

Focus Area(s): Youth Development

Focus Population(s): At-risk and dropout youth

Community(ies) Served: California, Colorado, Washington

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Implementation Study

Study Population: Students age 16-20

Independent Evaluator: MDRC

Level of Evidence before by Evaluation*: Preliminary

Level of Evidence achieved by Evaluation**: Preliminary

Study Population: Students age 16-20

* SIF-supported interventions undergo a level of evidence assessment at the point of program entry and are expected to advance that base of evidence through rigorous evaluation during the grant period.

**SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

Who does the model serve?

- The population served at these three sites is both challenged and promising. Many of the students enrolled in the program had not been disconnected from education for long periods of time. This finding suggests that the program may have a stronger focus on dropout prevention than dropout recovery.

Were the core elements of the model implemented as planned?

- At a high-level, the participating sites implemented the core model as designed. This is a promising finding since implementing elements of the core model is what makes this program most effective.

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What kinds of adaptations were made to meet the needs of the local context and student population?

- The main adaptations across the three sites included how the career development course was implemented and how the learning communities were formed. *What factors facilitated or impeded successful program implementation?*

- One important factor that most students found useful was the strong relationships they developed with instructors and Resource Specialists (counselors/ advisors). Students at the three sites appreciated being treated with maturity and respect by program staff. If a student began to fall behind, program staff worked with the student to identify ways of mitigating their challenges, as opposed to punishing the student.

- The biggest challenge experienced by the program was retaining students in the program during the initial term. Less than half of students were able to pass all of their Gateway to College courses and successfully transition to a mainstream community college.

Notes on the evaluation

Initially, the evaluation was designed as an implementation study as well as a student-level random assignment impact evaluation across nine sites. However, due to challenges with student recruitment and site attrition that affected the sample size ,the study shifted to an implementation evaluation of the three sites.

How is Gateway to College using their evaluation experience and findings to improve?

The findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the three sites, due to the small number of program sites used in this study. However, as a result of the study, the Gateway to College program reports that numerous changes have been made to improve the implementation of the program. For example, program directors have set performance goals to provide a uniform and clear directive to shape continuous improvement efforts; sites have begun offering more developmental courses to meet the needs of student who could benefit from additional time and support to build their academic skills and content knowledge; sites have made their intake process more rigorous and reflective of what it would be like to be enrolled in a Gateway to College program.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.