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Kansas City Scholars Program: Year 2 Evaluation: Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FALL 2018

The Kansas City Scholars (KCS) program is an ambitious attempt to invigorate the college-going culture in greater Kansas City. In two short years since its launch in 2016, KCS has become a vital and broadly recognized institution in the metro area with effective collaborations with about 120 high schools and 17 institutions of higher education.

120

High Schools

17

Postsecondary
Institutions

It has successfully implemented two cycles of scholarship applications and awards. Building on the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's initial investment, the three-pronged KCS scholarship program recognizes that the region's jobs will increasingly require some form of postsecondary credential. The scholarships are designed not only to improve access to and completion of higher education, they are also intended to reduce opportunity gaps across age, income, and ethnicity.

In 2017, the program awarded 635 scholarships. In 2018, 919 awards were made.

The number of awards made annually is based on the additional funds raised.



The KCS program targets low- and modest-income students in high schools, whether public, charter, private, or home-based, as well as low- to modest-income adults with some college and no degree. KCS has established annual targets for each of its three scholarship opportunities.



Traditional / 250 awards

Two hundred fifty awards are targeted for currently enrolled eleventh graders, who will receive up to \$10,000 per year, paid directly to the college, renewable up to five years.



Adult Learner / 200 awards

Two hundred awards are targeted for adults age 24 and older who have previously earned at least 12 college credits but did not receive a postsecondary degree or credential; they will receive up to \$5,000 per year, paid directly to the college, renewable for up to five years.



College Savings Accounts / 500 awards

Five hundred ninth graders will receive \$50 in a 529 College Savings Plan. Among these, 50 will be selected to receive a four-to-one match for any contribution made to the plan, not to exceed a total of \$5,000, with the potential for an additional \$2,000 for students who achieve college-ready milestones during high school.

In addition to the financial awards, the program offers supports during high school, in the community, and through higher-education partners to facilitate successful college enrollment and completion.

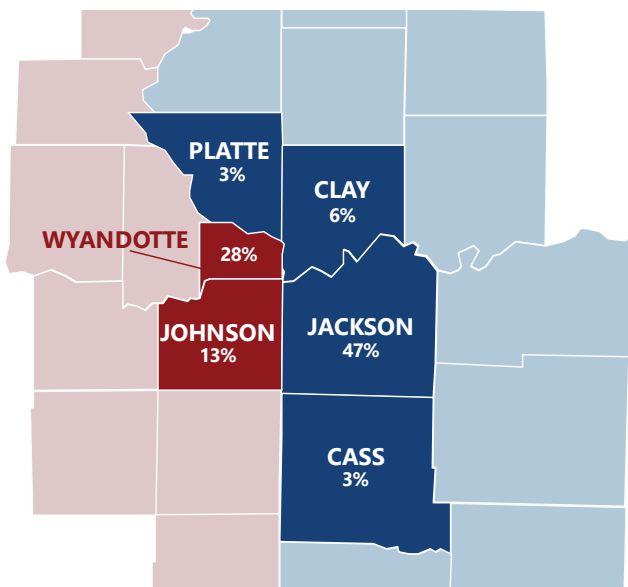
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Traditional

Since the first cohort of these students only just started college this fall, and the second cohort is still in high school, most findings are qualitative and pertain to students' high school experiences. From 2017 to 2018, the total submitted applications increased by 33 percent and the total number of scholarships awarded increased from 287 to 345, a 20 percent increase.

Jackson and Wyandotte Counties together have approximately 45 percent of the region's population and eleventh-grade public school enrollment, and 63 percent of the region's low-income population, but they end up with about 75 percent of traditional scholarship awardees.



Students are more engaged with college-going activities.

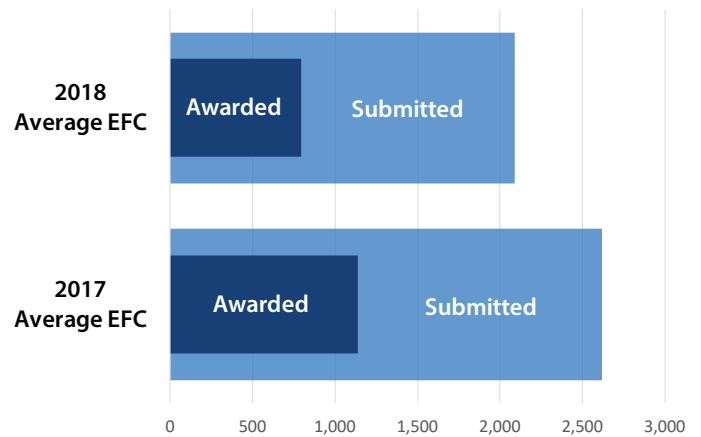
- **Students are thinking about college earlier:** Applicants appreciate that the scholarship application gets them thinking about college choice in their junior year. Previously, conversations with college representatives and advisors had mainly been reserved for seniors.
- **High-quality college advising is key for applications:** Students and high school representatives consistently cite staff from College Advising Corps and other college access programs including Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), as instrumental in the scholarship application process.
- **Awardees are more confident they will go to college:** Most awardees feel incredibly fortunate to have such postsecondary opportunities available. Several believed they likely wouldn't be going to college without the award.
- **When asked about college choice if they were to win the scholarship, applicants aim higher:** The share of students whose first or second choice is a four-year university rises from about 40 percent to about 75 percent.

- **Awardees are putting more effort into their senior year of high school:** Since awards are announced in May of their junior year, awardees feel it is too late to change course taking for their senior year. However, several indicated that, because of the award, they have increased academic effort their senior year in preparation for getting into—and doing well at—their preferred college.

The scholarship is reaching its intended audience, but there is still room for improvement.

- **Scholarship targeting by need and merit improved from the first to second cohort:** Both applications and awardees in the second year had lower expected family contributions (EFC, an indicator of greater financial need) and higher GPAs than in the first year.

Among applicants, average EFC fell from 2,600 to 2,100 across cohorts; for winners, it fell from 1,150 to 800.



- **Applicants and awardees are mainly female and students of color:** Over two-thirds of applicants and over three-quarters of awardees in the second cohort are women; similarly, over two-thirds of applicants and over three-quarters of awardees are students of color.
- **Applicants and awardees are more likely to come from some counties than others:** Relative to those from other counties in the region, school districts in Wyandotte County (KS) have apparently marketed the scholarship most effectively: the county's share of applications and awards far exceeds its share of the total eligible applicant population.

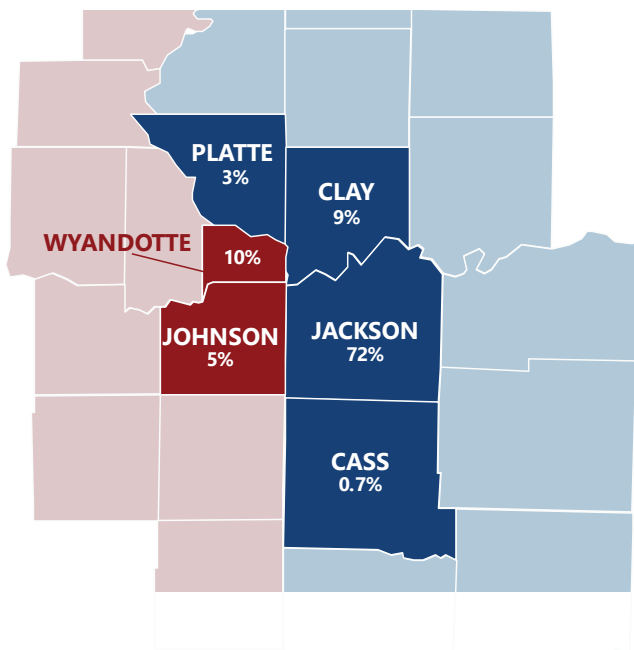
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Adult Learner

The first cohort of adult learners have been reenrolled in college for over a year, with the second cohort just beginning enrollment this fall. Although most findings are again qualitative, impact analyses on college retention for the first cohort are available.

More than 72 percent of adult learner scholarship awardees are from Jackson County, MO.



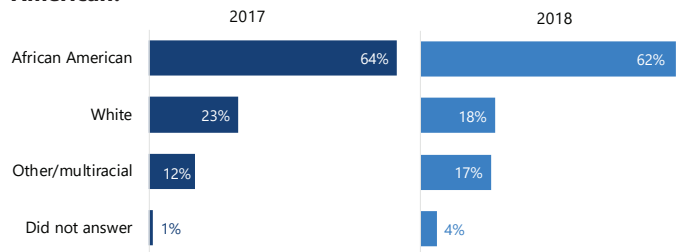
✓ The scholarship led to significantly greater retention to the spring semester.

- **The scholarship had a large, positive impact on college retention for the first cohort:** Awardees were approximately 20 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in Spring 2018 than a statistically matched comparison group. The enrollment advantage translates to an average of an additional one-half class successfully completed in that second semester.
- **Most of the first cohort of adult awardees are still progressing toward their credential:** As of Fall 2018, 70 of the 90 awardees are still enrolled, half part-time and half full-time. Two winners have received degrees. Of the remaining awardees, about half are approved stopouts and the remaining half—just 10 students—have been dismissed from KCS for academic reasons.

✓ Most adult awardees are women, people of color, and from Jackson County.

- **Over 90 percent of second cohort adult awardees are women:** This share is higher than the first cohort's, which was three-quarters women.
- **Three out of five awardees identify as African American:** Fewer than one-fifth indicate they are white, and the remaining one-sixth are of another ethnicity or are multiracial.
- **About three-quarters of adult awardees reside in Jackson County:** In contrast to the traditional scholarship awardees, many of which are from Wyandotte County, KS, most adult awardees are from Jackson County, MO.

In 2018, more than three out of five awardees identify as African American.



✓ Adult learners are interested in career-oriented majors and want to study locally.

- **Adult awardees had formerly been in career-oriented degree programs:** The vast majority of adult learners had previously pursued a bachelor's or associate's degree, about equally split, and most frequently studied majors related to health care, business, and education.
- **Adult awardees still wish to pursue career-oriented programs:** Many express an interest in entrepreneurship and are enrolled in business-related pathways or health-related education.
- **Adult learners are overwhelmingly enrolled in local institutions:** Both cohorts have a strong preference for college choices in the immediate Kansas City area, both in intent and realization.

💡 Adults are hard to reach and often need different supports for success.

- **Initial targeting for adult learners has not met expectations:** The number of applicants for the first two cohorts did not reach the targeted number of 200 awards each year, although the number did increase from year one to year two with 94 awardees in 2017 and 137 awardees in 2018.
- **Adult learners feel coaching aid is vital for success:** Several adult learners praised the work of KC Degrees in easing the transition into and navigation of colleges.

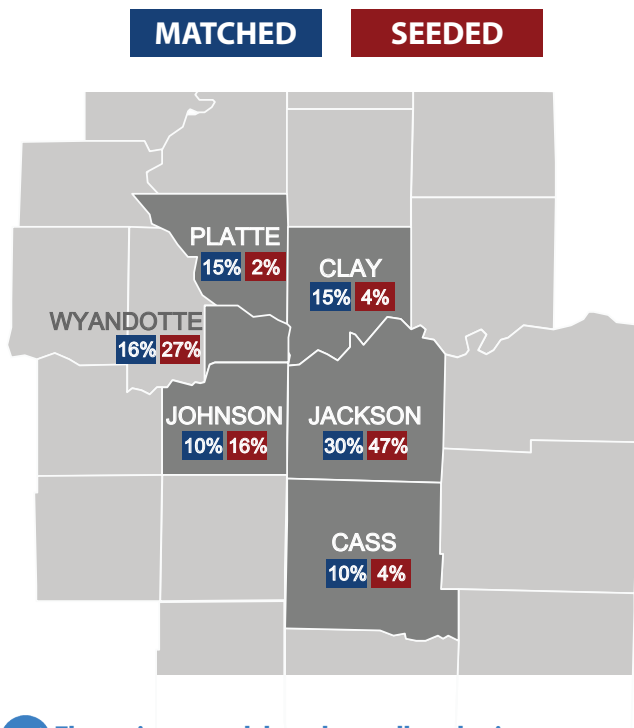
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College Savings Accounts

The first cohort of these students have begun their junior year of high school, and the second cohort are now sophomores. Most findings pertain to student experiences and understanding of the savings accounts. Unlike the other two scholarships, students for the College Savings Match are selected within each county, and KCS uses different cut scores for applicants from different counties.

County of Residence of CSM Matched and Seeded Awardees



✓ The savings match broadens college horizons.

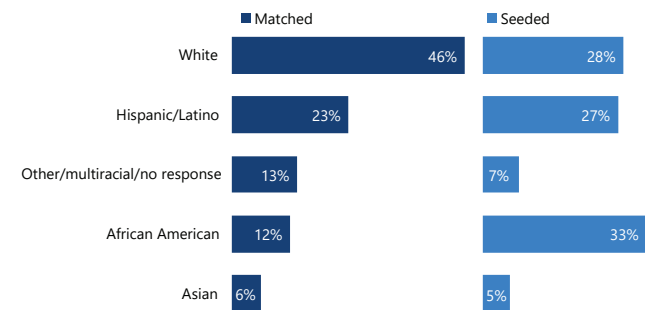
- **When asked about college choice if they were to win the savings match, students switch from community colleges to universities:** Under the scenario of winning the matched award, the five most popular college choices are all four-year public universities and account for 69 percent of total responses; community colleges draw 10 percent. However, if students were not to receive the match, the top-five university share drops to 40 percent, and the community college share jumps to 26 percent.



While most savings program participants are women, persons of color are underrepresented in the matched versus seeded awards.

- **Students receiving the match are more likely to be women than those receiving seeded accounts:** In the second cohort, women hold two-thirds of seeded accounts, but three-quarters of the more valuable matched savings accounts.
- **Students of color are underrepresented among those receiving matched accounts:** White students represent slightly under half of students getting matched accounts, but only about a quarter of those getting seeded accounts. In contrast, African American students hold only one in eight of the matched accounts, but nearly one-third of the seeded accounts. These differences largely result from assigning matched accounts by county.

46% of the matched awardees identify as white, but only 28% of seeded awardees do.



The concepts of savings accounts, matching, & portfolio choice are complicated for early high schoolers.

- **Marketing a college savings match program to 9th graders is challenging:** For both cohorts, the college savings account component has not reached targeted levels of application or participation, although there has been improvement. While there were 70 matched awards in both years, seeded awards rose from 256 in 2017 to 438 in 2018.
- **Students often lack full comprehension of how their savings programs work:** As demonstrated in focus groups, neither students who received a seeded account nor those who also got the savings match fully understand the nature of their award.
- **Lack of understanding may relate to lack of participation:** A substantial share of the second cohort participants, 24 percent, withdrew from the program after the award was announced.

The Upjohn Institute is serving as an outside evaluator of the KCS program. Upjohn Institute staff members conduct both formative (qualitative) and impact (quantitative) analyses. The former relies on two site visits each year in which interviews or focus groups are conducted with all of the scholarships' stakeholder groups. The impact analysis examines the educational—and eventually labor-market outcomes—of scholarship awardees.