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Central Coast High School Student Scholarship Fundraiser

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Abstract

Central Coast Continuation High School (CCCHS or CCHS) is designed around the philosophy of giving students in danger of not graduating a second chance at a diploma with alternative education strategies. The problem this Capstone aims to remedy is that many of these students cannot access college for a variety of reasons after graduating high school. These students are stigmatized for attending a continuation school, are in low socio-economic (SES) brackets, and lack scholarship access - these issues prevent college access. Consequences of this problem include future lack of access to higher paying jobs, loss of societal potential, and continuing the cycle of poverty these students often currently inhabit. The project itself is a blueprint for a yearly scholarship fundraiser for CCHS to give out to their students to improve college access. For the 2020-21 school year, CCHS can and should implement this scholarship fundraiser as soon as possible in order to best serve their student population.

Keywords: Scholarship, low SES/socio-economic status, continuation school, fundraiser

Agency & Communities Served

Central Coast High School (CHHS) is a continuation high school located in Seaside, California. Their mission statement is “to provide a flexible setting for students with unique academic and social emotional needs. We encourage students to develop an enthusiasm for life-long learning and pursue a post-secondary education.” The vision statement of the school is “Central Coast High School: Where your past will not define your future” (CCHS, 2019). The flexible setting referred to is the credit recovery program the school operates around.

The school has a student population of around 140 students in the 2019-2020 school year (CCHS, 2019). The school only contains Senior and Junior grade students. All of these students attend Central Coast High because they are in danger of not graduating within the typical 4-year high school frame. Of these students, 70.6% are Hispanic, 16.5% are White, and 8.2% are Black or African American. 87.1% of the students are socioeconomically disadvantaged in some capacity: whether that means they are homeless, live in multi-family dwellings, low family income, etc. In addition, 22.4% of students are English Language Learners, 11.8% of students are classified as having some form of disability, and 1.2% of students are foster youths (CCHS, 2019). All of these percentages lead to one conclusion: the students of Central Coast High School are a largely disadvantaged population.

The objective of the school is to combat those disadvantages and encourage students to continue their education. One can understand just how much of a deficit in credits the students of CCHS have to overcome: the overall average GPA of Juniors at CCHS is 1.08, and for Seniors, the average GPA is 1.92 (CCHS, 2019). These numbers are understandable when the disadvantages of the students are brought into consideration: how is an English learning,

socioeconomically disadvantaged student expected to succeed in a traditional high school setting akin to the other high schools in Monterey County? This hypothetical student would not even be considered the most disadvantaged: as previously shown, some students are homeless, and others have disabilities.

Problem Description

CCHS students do not want to go to college or do not have access to further education. Students with GPAs like the ones at Central Coast High School may not be the model of college-aspiring students to some. As previously shown, the students in either grade at CCHS do not average anywhere close to what is considered acceptable to many scholarships and colleges. According to the National Center For Education Statistics (2019), only 35.9% of students with a GPA under 2.0 received any form of non federal grant aid. The average amount of aid received for these students was \$3,600 (pg. 11). In essence, a little over a third of students with GPAs comparable to those of CCHS students received scholarship funds, and those funds would make only a small difference in affording a full year of tuition at a 4-year institution.

Contributing Factors

Stigma of continuation school students is a factor to examine when considering why many CCHS students are unaware of how to afford and attend college or do not aspire to attend college. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of stigma is “a mark of shame or discredit” (2019). Attending a continuation school could definitely be considered an easy target for stigma; the school is a breeding ground of stereotypes that come with negative connotations.

For example, because of the low GPA averages of the school, the students could be considered failures - lazy, unmotivated, and unintelligent. One study found continuation schools to be stigmatized as “dumping grounds” for “throwaway kids,” since the moment students walk into these institutions they are labeled as “failures” (Hernandez, 2018). This view of students in an alternative education setting is damaging and dehumanizing. In a way, stigmas such as these are essentially promoting “disposing” of continuation high school students, as if they were a defective product. The vocabulary exhibited in those stigmas poses the young minds of students like the ones of CCHS as garbage - not students who require different kinds of help than “regular” teenagers.

Another factor contributing to the problem of academic failings and the inaccessibility to college for CCHS students is the income level of their families. Once again, 87.1% of students at CCHS are considered to be socioeconomically challenged: many students are already at a predisposition for failure (CHHS, 2019). Students have to work, find alternate transport to and from school, and lack access to resources more wealthy students may have, such as private tutoring. The American Psychological Association (APA) estimates that youth from low-income families are up to eight times less likely to receive a Bachelor’s degree by the time they are 24 years old as students from high-income families (2016). In brief, growing up in a low-income household correlates to difficulty in attending college.

Another factor contributing to the lack of access to college for CCHS students is the accessibility of scholarships. According to the School Office Supervisor at CCHS, 18 students from the 2019 graduating class received scholarships - many of those students receive multiple scholarships. Two students received the Kiwanis Scholarship: \$3,000 a year for four years

(Kiwanis of Monterey County, n.d.). At first glance, this may seem like a great starter fund for a student's 4-year Bachelor's program. However, the National Center for Education Statistics found that the average yearly tuition at a 4-year institution to be over \$17,000 a year (2019). If the students who received the Kiwanis scholarship (the biggest reward of all scholarships received at CCHS in 2019) saved the entire \$6,000 they received the first two years of the scholarship funds, they would only be a little over a third of the way to paying for a year of school. As discussed above, students with GPAs under 2.0 received less than \$4,000 of non federal aid yearly: this still would not get them close to affording college past a community college such as MPC (Monterey Peninsula College).

Consequences

The first consequence to examine in the case of CCHS students who are not able to attend college is their lack of preparedness for adult life. In April of 2018, the unemployment rate for college graduates was just over 2%: less than half that of the 4.3% unemployment rate when concerning workers with only a high school degree (Torkey, 2018). This shows that even if CCHS students manage to overcome their credit deficiencies and get their diploma, they are still over two times as likely to be unemployed in the future as students who received some form of a college degree. If students from CCHS are not attending college, they are simply placed in front of another seemingly insurmountable task: living in California, already disadvantaged in many ways, trying to stave off unemployment.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2018), the median income of full-time workers with a Bachelor's Degree was \$1,173 weekly, over double of those without a high

school diploma at \$520 weekly. Workers with a high school diploma averaged a \$712 income weekly, a \$461 gap from a Bachelor’s Degree: this adds to a yearly gap of nearly \$24,000. This is one of the dangers of a Central Coast High school student not being able to attend college. As previously stated, a vast majority of the students are already economically disadvantaged - the lack of a college degree simply furthers that disadvantage by handicapping the student’s potential earnings. Leaving these students out in the cold with no access to college is simply perpetuating the cycle of poverty: without a degree, the climb out of the hole is exponentially harder for them.

According to the APA,

“Low SES [Socioeconomic status] and its correlates, such as lower educational achievement, poverty and poor health, ultimately affect our society ... Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of socioeconomic inequities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad” (APA, 2019).

A society that fails to provide adequate resources for its youth is not providing for its own future: if low-income and low-GPA students like those of CCHS are not given second chances at a better life, the community of Monterey County will suffer through losing what those students have to offer.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Stigma of attending a continuation school	CCHS students do not want to go to college or do not	Not qualified for high paying jobs

Students come from families with low income and/or poorly paying jobs	have access to further education	Loss of societal impact and potential
Lack of access to scholarships		Cycle of poverty continues

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

The Capstone Project proposed would be a donation coalition to get the students of Central Coast High School that are intending to attend college some financial support. Local businesses and individuals would be asked to donate money for the students to use in order to pay tuition costs and to buy textbooks, parking passes, supplies, etc. The staff of CCHS would decide which students would receive scholarship money, and how much they would receive. Ideally, this coalition would be an ongoing and growing yearly scholarship fund.

Project Purpose

This project will help assist college-aspiring students at Central Coast High School to attend college by granting them access to a scholarship fund. By gathering donation funds from businesses and individual benefactors, the scholarship fund would in essence be a scholarship only available to CCHS students. This eliminates the competition of students from other high schools, and makes college financial aid more accessible for CCHS students.

Project Justification

Many other merit-based scholarship programs (often referred to as “Promise” programs) have found definite success. For example, a study conducted in Pittsburgh found that among senior students, on-time (attending college the school year after high school graduation) enrollment rates skyrocketed under a Promise scholarship: “...on-time college enrollment rate was higher than the two-years immediately before. Specifically, on-time college enrollment rose from 48% among graduates in 2005-06 (two years prior to the Promise) to 54% among graduates in 2009-10...” (Bozick, Engberg, & Gonzales, 2015). Promise scholarships are not unlike the program suggested in this paper. The results speak for themselves: providing college access through merit-based scholarships improves college attendance rates. Merit is defined by classroom behavior, work ethic, and staff assessment of character.

Project Implementation and Assessment Plan

This project was developed in the Spring semester of 2019 with the staffwide agreed-upon notion that the students of CCHS deserved a more consistent passage of aid to college. The project was approved shortly after. A donation request letter template was created in the Fall of 2019. The letter is easily customizable to send to different businesses, groups, and individuals. In addition, the letter suggests further contact, and encourages the donator to continue donating on a yearly basis. This letter should be continuously sent out, and funds should always be accepted up to the end of the Spring semester, as to evenly and decisively divide the funds between students. The scholarship was intended to be launched and running from March to May (or further, if need be) of 2020. However, right after the fundraiser was launched, the

COVID-19 lockdown went into effect. This made fundraising challenging in a technical and ethical manner: Businesses were harder to reach due to phone lines not being answered (as the employees were sent home), and the ethics of asking local businesses to donate their money during trying times were complicated. In the first half of March 2020, a website (99pledges.com) was approved by the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District.

Expected Outcomes

This project was expected to benefit senior students at CCHS by assisting a selected group of students afford college. These funds were and are not expected to fully pay for all college expenses for the students, but only provide some financial support. Another expected outcome is the maintenance of an ongoing fund for Central Coast High School to award to students on a yearly basis, thus creating consistent assistance in student access to college.

Project Results

The outcome of the project was less than desirable, due to inadequate fundraising methods/timeline and the COVID-19 pandemic forcing school and nonessential businesses down only days after fundraising began. In a more streamlined and proactive project timeline, fundraising would have begun far before the actual start date of the fundraiser. While the fundraiser is scheduled to run until May 9th, production is expected to be far below the expected outcome for the project. The fundraiser was further impacted by donor availability being diminished by the COVID-19 pandemic - many phone numbers went directly to business offices, which were shut down. E-mail communication proved to be ineffective, whether due to lack of

donor engagement or to donor fund availability; the virus was very difficult for individuals and businesses to navigate financially. This may have greatly impacted donations, as businesses and individuals struggled to pay rent, buy groceries, pay employees, etc.

It is imperative to this project that one of the primary objectives should be ongoing learning of the CCHS student population: this will be an assessment of general student college accessibility, interest level in attending college, modes of transportation, and overall demographic knowledge. This will not only help cater the project to the specific needs of the students, but may also be useful in achieving donations from demographically-oriented groups (i.e. groups, businesses, or individuals who are looking to benefit socio-economically disadvantaged youth).

Conclusion & Recommendations

In future years, the already-created scholarship panel will decide on student recipients throughout the end of the semester. This group will choose how many students will receive funds, along with how much money each chosen applicant will receive.

The donation letter should be revised yearly as to best represent the ever-diversifying student population of CCHS. Potentially, this letter could be sent out year-round in order to gather more donations and, therefore, help more students access college education. In addition, a living-document spreadsheet should be kept in order to track donors, amount donated, and contact information, in order to continue communication and future donations.

In addition, the scholarship application should be created (likely via Google Form) by the end of March of the current year. The application should be marketed to students by teachers,

front office staff, and posters around the school site. The application should be open until the end of May.

After the recipients are chosen, the process will be evaluated. This evaluation should take place in the first half of April. This will include revision of the donation letter and evaluation of the effectiveness of the scholarship fund process as a whole. After this process, a report containing details about the fund will be distributed to the group of donors. This report will contain information about how many students received funds, how much each student received, as well as demographic information about the students chosen. The report will also ask the benefactor to continue donating to the fund in the following school year. In addition, student recipients will be asked to complete a post-scholarship form asking them to answer questions relating to their access to college and if the CCHS scholarship will be effective in assisting them to pursue further education.

The foremost potential barrier to this project is lack of donations from benefactors. Failure to create a fund for the scholarship to pull from will result in Central Coast High School not being able to provide assistance to senior students. A detailed timeline of all project steps can be found in Appendix A.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Ongoing learning about needs and accessibility levels of students	Summary of Research	Fall 2019 - Spring 2020	Araceli Canchola, Teaching Staff, Office Staff
Gauge school staff interest in participating in selection board	List of interested teachers and staff	December 2019, board already created	All school staff
Send grant proposal to potential donors and receive donations	Letters, emails, phone calls, in-person visits	On-going through March, unable to continue due to COVID-19	Araceli Canchola
Create draft and final scholarship form	Google Form application	Unable to complete due to COVID-19	Araceli Canchola
Market to students through teachers, posters, and front office.	Flyers	March 2020 - Unable to complete due to COVID-19	Teachers
Open scholarship application.	Student interest and responses	April 2020 - Unable to complete due to COVID-19	Araceli Canchola

Count scholarship funds, decide the appropriate number of students to divide funds between.	List of funds and donors	Ongoing through end of May 2020, unable to complete due to COVID-19	Selection board, Araceli Canchola
Selection board meets for one hour weekly to decide which students will receive scholarships, and how much each student will receive.	Decisions related to scholarship distribution: which students, how many, etc.	April - May 2020, unable to complete due to COVID-19	Selection board
Process evaluation, revision of draft.	Evaluation of effectiveness, new draft of donor letter.	Continuous	Araceli Canchola, Selection Board
Continue communication with donors, provide which students were helped along with the amount of money given. Confirm re-donation for the following year.	Funding report - how much money, how many students.	Spring 2019 to May 2020, unable to complete because of COVID-19	Araceli Canchola, Selection board