

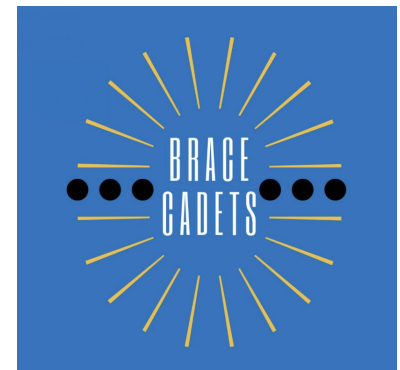


Leveraging Peer-to-Peer Influence for College-Going Success: Broward County Public Schools Introduces BRACE Cadets

Challenge:

College counseling improves the likelihood students will pursue education beyond high school. Yet, according to a report that examined 10-year, state-by-state trends in student-to-counselor ratios, Florida's ratio (485:1), while on par with the national average (482:1), is well above the recommended rate of 250:1¹. Postsecondary attainment rates in Broward were 44.2% in 2018 and have held relatively steady over the last 3 years, despite labor predictions that indicate 60% of working-age Floridians will need some form of postsecondary credential by 2025.

- An additional high school counselor increases 4-year college-going rates by approximately 10 percentage points².
- After meeting 1-on-1 with a counselor to discuss college or financial aid, the chances of a student going to college **triples** and they are **seven times** more likely to apply for financial aid³.



Broward Advisors for Continuing Education (BRACE) are advisors that work with guidance counselors to provide students with information on scholarships, financial aid and the college application process.

¹State-By-State Student-to-Counselor Ratio Report: 10-Year Trends, National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and American School Counselor Association (ASCA), 2014-2015. <https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/state-by-state-ratio-report.pdf>

²Measuring the Impact of High School Counselors on College Enrollment, College Board Advocacy & Policy Center Research Brief, February 2013 <https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/advocacy/policycenter/research-brief-measuring-impact-high-school-counselors-college-enrollment.pdf>

³How Can High School Counseling Shape Students' Postsecondary Attendance? Exploring the Relationship between the High School Counseling Context and Students' Subsequent Postsecondary Enrollment, National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/high_school_and_beyond/HSL%20Phase%20III_Final%20Report.pdf

"We showed Cadets the data – FAFSA completions by school and the money left on the table from students not completing the FAFSA – related to college admissions and success. The students were shocked. It motivated the Cadets to help more students reach their goals."



Yvonne Green,

Broward County Public Schools College & Career Readiness Specialist and BRACE Cadet project manager.

Promising Practice:

Through funding from a Title IV grant, the Broward County Public Schools wanted to test if peer support could expand college and career advisement capacity, particularly for students who are first in their families to attend college, low-income students and/or students of color. Called peer-to-peer advising, the concept involves training high school students in the college-going process, such as applying to college and completing financial aid, so they can assist their peers.

In the spring of 2019, Broward County Public Schools piloted BRACE Cadets, a peer-to-peer initiative that leverages the power of peer influence to help more students complete the steps needed to apply to and succeed in college.

Training. Sixty-five highly motivated students were selected as BRACE Cadets from the nearly 400 that applied to serve 32 schools in the first cohort year. They participated in two days of training on writing college essays, the college application process, financial aid and scholarships, and project planning. The students learned about the various steps necessary to fill out a FAFSA, and how to help students think through career and college options. Students practiced various styles of communication and influence to inspire students to act as well as how to talk with administrators.

Peer projects. With guidance from their BRACE Advisor, Cadets designed and implemented school-based projects that helped build a college-going culture and guided peers through the steps to attend college. These projects included creating Twitter (@bracecadets) and Instagram accounts to share college application and financial aid resources on social media and translating college lingo into words students and their parents would understand. They also built the website for Broward Bridge to Life (B2L), the local college access network (LCAN), to bring in more community support. Students received support from their advisors and staff to help implement their projects.



Early Results:

In addition to completing their project to build a college-going culture at their school, the first BRACE Cadet cohort helped their peer students take action in a number of key areas of the college-going process:

248

College Applications:

Researching, selecting and applying to college; creating a Common app⁴ account

301

FAFSA:

Creating an FSAID and completing the FAFSA

103

Bright Futures:

Creating a profile; researching and applying for Bright Futures

351

Scholarships:

Researching options, creating a scholarship calendar, writing scholarship essays, and applying for scholarships

The college discussions Cadets had with their peers also inspired students to enroll in rigorous coursework and test preparation.

"I feel so proud that I could help my fellow students complete their college applications. I am motivated to do more now that I know I can make a difference."



Jheannelle Johnson,
Cohort 1 BRACE Cadet

Lessons Learned:

Program leaders leveraged lessons learned through the pilot year to inform the next cohort:

Leaders, not projects. Initiative leaders saw their role as developing leaders, influencers and game-changers, not just managing students implementing a project. Cadets relished their role as influencers, which motivated them to complete their project. Cadets also learned about themselves along the way, seeing the impact they could make and the influence they had. Broward B2L provided further opportunities for Cadets to develop their leadership capabilities by serving on its steering committee along with community leaders and creating the LKAN website.

Envision impact. Students longed to have impact. The Cadets engaged school board members and other influencers to create champions for the larger work of creating a college going culture. Their presentation to the school board earned continued funding for the college and career software used by the district.

Personal agency. Students created projects aligned with priority areas that addressed issues of deep resonance to them, allowing Cadets to bring their personal power, empathy, and excitement when inspiring others.

⁴Common App simplifies the college application process with one application that is accepted at nearly 900 colleges and universities.

“Everybody wants them (Cadets), including our charter and middle schools. Our goal is to eventually place a Cadet in each school. Their spirit and passion are contagious.”



Carol Lopez, Supervisor,

College and Career Readiness,
School Counseling & BRACE,
Broward County Public Schools

Equity. While students are affected by inequities in the educational system, students can also be a critical part of the solution. By helping their peers who, in many cases, are first in the family to go to college prepare for college and career, BRACE Cadets help mitigate inequities their peers face.

Walk the talk. The application process to become a Cadet mirrored the steps students had to take to prepare for college and career, so Cadets came into the training with some familiarity of career exploration, college application steps and the FAFSA process.

Clear vision. Initiative leaders cast a compelling vision that aligned with the District’s strategic plan and which resonated with students. They articulated clear goals around which students built their projects and were able to impact their peers.

Leverage partnerships. Broward B2L partners provided space for trainings and were thought partners in the training sessions. In the 2nd cohort, B2L partners led parts of the trainings for students.

Plan to fund. Each student received a \$500 stipend/scholarship. Funds were also needed for incentives, meals, trainers, and incidentals. B2L had a celebration at the end of the year to acknowledge Cadet success. The first-year cost of the program was \$35,000 and required \$10,000 to cover staff time for oversight.

Next Steps:

In the second year, the Cadet force nearly doubled to 120 Cadets, and included charter school students. Broward B2L secured funding to support additional students and deepened its partnership in the initiative. To further develop their leadership skills, Cadets from the first cohort participated in training the next one.



Want to learn more?

You can find more resources about how communities across Florida are increasing postsecondary attainment at www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org

If you’d like to learn more about the Broward BRACE Cadets program, contact Carol Lopez, carol.lopez@browardschools.com.