

Abstract

Providing career development services is an important task of middle school counselors. It is important that our students graduate from high school as college and career ready, in order to compete in the global world. This is particularly crucial with the underrepresented Hispanic/Latino students. We conducted a qualitative study on the impact of career exploration work with at-risk Latina students. Our study included meeting college Latina students at the university, participating in after-school workshops, and individual meetings with the counselor. The study provided students with knowledge of post-secondary options and observed if students were able to work through their own post-secondary plan. Some of their responses showed an increase in positive attitude towards school and the subjects. We also observed a noticeable impact in their aspirations to pursue higher education, which was reflected through their post-secondary plans. While we did not observe improvements in their current academic grades, we believe that it was due to extraneous factors which were outside the control of the study. Since other measurements point to an increased awareness of higher education and career options, we believe that our intervention was successful. Hence collaborative work between counselors and teachers is recommended to gain long-term academic outcomes.

Introduction

College and Career development is an important part of School Counselor's role across all grade levels in the state of Oregon and also United States according to *Oregon Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Framework* (Oregon Department of Education, 2012) and *ASCA National Standards for Students* (American School counselor Association, 2004). Especially, with legislative policies such as Oregon's "40-40-20" goals (Oregon University System, 2012), by 2025 it is aspired that 80% of the young Oregonian will have some college degree in order to meet the growing demands of economy. In this type of scenario, it is extremely important for the students to receive consistent college and career guidance in schools.

According to *Lumina Foundation's Report* (2013), 39% of Oregonian between 25-64 holds a two- or four-year college degree. This number is at par with the overall U.S. data. However, it also shows that young Oregonians in the age group of 25-34 are less educated, than the older generation, at 38%. It is also lower compared to the overall U.S. average of 40% for the same age group. Not only that, according to *From Goal to Reality 40-40-20 Report* (2012) the highest education levels of age 25+ individuals in Oregon varies by ethnicity. This report cites data from US Census, American Community Survey 2010, and founds that 44% Hispanic/Latino have less than high school education compared to 11% of total Oregonian and 8% White.

Cedar Park Middle School, the research intervention site, in Beaverton School District has about 18% Hispanic/Latino students. The 2012-13 *School Report Card* shows the same gaps in academic achievement between Hispanic (Latino) or Black (African American) students and their White or Asian counterparts. For the academic year 2013-14, the *School Improvement Plan*

laid emphasis on working with Hispanic/Latino students (second major ethnic group after White) to improve their academic achievement. Simultaneously, when a few of the school students were informally surveyed for the counseling purposes, based on behavioral data and teachers' referral, it was found that some of these students had limited educational goals whereas others had none. On the other hand, these students reported perception of high expectations from their parents to succeed in school and have better education. Many of these students would be the first generation to go to a college if they choose that path. Majority of these students are left on their own with limited adult guidance to prepare for higher education. They rely exclusively on school for career guidance.

Based on these information, in this research-study, following research questions were asked:

1. Whether a field-trip to a local university and meeting successful college Latina students would influence middle school students aspirations to go for higher education?
2. Whether the students would learn about the available post-secondary options and would it help to develop their own post-secondary plan at the end of the study?
3. Whether the overall career exploration intervention with a small group of at-risk Latina students would increase their commitment towards their academic work?

These questions are significant as it tends to identify effective intervention strategies that is culturally sensitive with at-risk middle school students. It tries to address equitable practices in terms of career development (Welton & Martinez, 2013). If schools want to address the achievement gap with the at-risk first generation students they must look for a solid career

related work. School counselors, along with teachers and community, play a vital role for career and college education. Traditionally, high school counselors work with students in their process of high school graduation, post-high school planning, applications and reference letters. Not all middle school counselors or teachers provide career related exposure to the students.

In this study, the researcher examined the effect of career awareness and career exploration through different mediums of intervention. First of all, this study would help the middle school counselors to gain more information about using an intervention such as a university visit. This type of intervention is not planned for the first time as several universities offer campus tours and visits. However, through this study, we would be able to identify the students' experience of not only visiting the local university but also meeting successful college Hispanic/Latina students. This opportunity would inform whether the middle school students were able to connect with their college role models who had same ethnic and racial background as well as similar stories of systemic barriers and experience of microaggressions in the educational environment.

Secondly, this study would examine the effect of career exploration workshops and individual post-secondary planning meetings at the middle school level. Several research studies support this types of interventions (Arrington, 2000; Curry, Belser, & Binns, 2013; Johnson, 2000; Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez & Cooper, 2009). This particular study would help the counselors understand whether a front load of information about post-secondary planning through series of interventions would help the middle school students. Whether it would lead the students to understand the connection between their academic work in middle and high school to that of

their career and future life. Hence this study is significant due to its head-start nature regarding career development. Particularly, in this particular school district, students receive career development information at their high school. However, that might be very late for some students as found by Johnson (2000).

Thus, this study would contribute to the existing research and determine the cumulative impact of different short-term interventions on seventh grade at-risk Latina students in an urban middle school setting.

Review of the Literature

Based on the developmental level and need of students, there are specific tasks to accomplish in terms of Career Counseling. Kelly Arrington (2000), identifies three aspects of career counseling at different grade levels. According to her, elementary grades could lay the foundation for career awareness. That could include personal development and life skills, knowledge of career clusters and understanding the role of work along with building self-confidence. Then the next phase is career exploration at the middle school. This is the phase where middle schoolers explore their interest, personality, achievement, values, strengths and weaknesses, etc. trying to set a tentative career goal. Career exploration work helps them to identify a match between themselves and the world of work. Another part is to help student understand the access to career information websites and resources. This is a stage where a middle school student explores the postsecondary options in order to make right choices at high school. It is a preparatory stage for the next and final step of career planning and preparation at

high school and beyond. At the high school, the students should have a post secondary career goal and are learning some specific skills. The last four years of the high school, prepares them to create their respective career plan and helps them to take necessary actions to secure a job, training or college admissions. Thus, according to Arrington (2000), each grade levels have a specific job in terms of career development. Especially, at middle school, students make decisions that would affect their educational and career paths. Hence, appropriate training and guidance program would help them become more aware of the educational and career opportunities available to them and how to take steps to make it possible.

For this effort, Trusty, Niles and Carney (2005) suggested a framework for counselors based on the data for educational-career planning systems in middle schools. This system underscores the need for effective career planning, in order to help students develop “college ready identity”. According to this framework, several tasks are of high priority such as the student’s educational and occupational exploration; student’s current long-range career goals; education, training or certification steps required to accomplish those goals; student’s educational experiences; educational plans; as well as extracurricular experiences. These tasks along with other tasks were found to be highly correlated with effective educational-career planning work for middle school students. According to Trusty, et al., (2005), this should be a collaborative effort between students, teachers, counselors and parents.

Going back to Oregon’s education plans (*From Goal to Reality 40-40-20 Report*, 2012) and *Lumina Foundation’s report* (2013), the Oregonian youths are behind with their National counterparts and ethnic minority youths are far behind. This considerable achievement gap based on the background of the individuals was referred to as ‘achievement debt’ by Ladson-Billings

(2006). Reference to this as the achievement gap puts the individuals responsible for their lower achievement. Whereas achievement debt reflects the systemic responsibility to provide equitable educational and college information to the marginalized groups.

Similarly, Castro (2013) argues that the current practices and policies to create college readiness doesn't consider the broader racial and structural barriers and inequalities. Castro (2013) as well as Welton and Martinez (2013), asserts for a culturally sensitive and responsive process for college readiness programs for students of color. The process that is "race conscious" and "equity minded". Through their qualitative study Welton and Martinez (2013) have identified this process that comprises of: Understanding the structural challenges for students of color and helping them to explore and rely on their cultural assets. Other factors includes establishing caring and trusting relationships, integrating college-level work and resources into all classes as well as encourage students to earn college credit in high school.

Liou et al., (2009) examines data from two secondary schools to determine efforts to prepare their Chicana/os and Puerto Ricans students for college. As this group of populations are underrepresented in higher education, this study examines the impact of creating *college ready* identity in them. By providing relevant exposure and making it as an essential component of secondary education. It also examines educators' role in sharing college related information with the students as current secondary education emphasis college pathway by increasing their academic resiliency. Their findings supports the community resources and grassroots level interventions by schools as helpful in preparing this students for college.

Referencing the above literature, the career development work becomes crucial for middle school students and especially Hispanic/Latino students. To the contrary, Kimura-Walsh,

Yamamura, Griffin, and Allen (2008) demonstrates the differentiated practices for college bound and college preparations of one of the high school in California towards high-achieving and non-high-achieving latina/o students. As the Hispanic/Latino population is increasing in United States, this issue is critically important from the standpoint of social justice and equity as well as economic stability for the fastest growing population. Nevertheless, differentiated treatment also accounts for high student:counselor ratio in the high schools in California and limited resources for non-high achieving students. Some of the narratives shared in this article, shows the demoralizing impact these first-generation students experiences due to restricted access to college preparatory informations and limited adult guidance. “*Opportunity to Learn (OTL) Framework*” in this article is especially important as most of these students rely exclusively on school for career guidance. Thus, it is becomes important that in order to achieve Oregon’s 40-40-20 goal and to bring equity in schools, work and society at large, Oregon schools have to make major steps for the Hispanic/Latino students career development. Schools have to invest time and resources for this community.

It should be a collaborative approach by school counselors, teachers, parents and community to provide a safe web for the students. Some studies showed the importance of social support from peers and adults as vital component. To take this premise further, Kaplan, Turner, Piotrkowski, and Silber (2009) found that having positive role models and mentors in adolescent Latina students’ life enhances their self-esteem. Their emotional and social competence are also enhanced due to strong Latina identity. They assessed the importance of mentoring Hispanic/Latina middle school students by college students of same background. Latina school students are provided with role models to talk about importance of Latina identity by maintaining one’s

heritage while acculturating in United States. This program trained the mentors in addressing issues such as social roles and identity, beauty, clothing and feminism, school achievement and to have positive impact on middle school students. This research finds that students' self-esteem and their emotional and social competence are enhanced due to strong Latina identity.

Making the local college a partner into career development program is also very popular. Google search for "university campus visits by middle school students" gives about 409,000,000 results as of May, 2014. It shows that several of the universities in United States in open to K-12 students for campus tour and visit. Some of these universities also have specialized program inviting middle school students. Portland State University, the university visited for this study, also has a special web page to plan a visit for K-8 students.

Another area of culturally sensitive practices with Hispanic/Latino students relies strongly on social relationships. Garcia-Reid, Reid, and Peterson (2005) asserts the importance of social engagement and support for middle school students from their peers, parents, teachers, school and neighborhood. They found that social support provided by friends, teachers and parents were positively associated with students' school engagement. These variables, that are community oriented, work as protective factors in students' life, especially for minority students, against the specific risks of ethnic minority adolescents in urban setting.

In another study by Strobel, Kirshner, Donoghue, and McLaughlin (2008), they identified the qualities that attracts the minority and low-income urban youth to after school programs and promises their continued participation. In their qualitative study they found that participating youth identified three features that were valuable to them: supportive relationships with adults and peers; safety; and opportunities to learn. Thus, it draws conclusion that it is important to

meet the needs of the youth while planning and implementing the after school program. They also conclude that the person is more important than the program for the students to feel a sense of community. The quality of the relationship and rapport could yield positive results by encouraging the young students to stay engaged.

Procedures

This research was conducted by a school counseling intern as part of her graduate course requirement at a middle school site. The research intervention was conducted with 7th grade Hispanic/Latina students (N=8) identified by teachers, counselor and community liaison as at-risk students for school success. One student was dropped in the later part of the study, as she could not attend the school and school related activities lacking immunization record. Thus, the participants reduced to N=7.

These students were invited for a counseling group with the researcher prior to this study. During the counseling process, it was found that these students do not feel engaged to the academic work. They reported perceived discrimination from several school staff based on their race and lack of positive adult support. The boundaries between discipline and discrimination was very blurred for these students. One of the main strategies that they used against perceived discrimination was avoidance of school work. On the other hand, they also shared in the group about the high parental expectation to succeed academically. Some of them were not sure of their academic goals and a few aimed to successfully graduate from the high school. Based on these preliminary data, counselor intern and school counselors decided to further focus on this group for career awareness and career exploration work.

The rapport was already established with these students prior to the study. In order to recruit officially for this study, parents were contacted for consent through a written letter in English and Spanish (Appendix 1), with a follow-up phone call by the community liaison to get their permission for field trip, after-school workshops as well as the entire research study. Once we had parental permission, the students were given an accent letter (Appendix 2) to inform their participation as they were all 12 years old or above.

As a next step, the participants were called for an orientation meeting for 30 minutes during the school hours. In this meeting, the information about the steps of intervention such as field trip, after-school workshops and individual meeting was shared. Students also filled up pre-intervention sheet at this time.

Career awareness and career exploration work is necessary in middle school to create a *college ready identity* (Liou et al., 2009; Trusty, et.al., 2005). For this study, the field visit was planned to spark an interest in college education. The researcher had coordinated with Las Mujeres student leaders group at Portland State University to provide an hour of interactive panel session with successful college Latina students. It was also planned to help them connect with the successful college student of same ethnic background. Thus, bringing in the social connection and positive community involvement that has been found to be very important for Latina school students (Kaplan, et.al., 2009; Garcia-Reid, et.al., 2005). Apart from meeting the Latina college students, the participants took a brief campus-tour to know the campus resources.

Next we had scheduled three after-school workshops in the school. The workshops were conducted once per week for three weeks. They consisted of 40 minutes each. The workshop was to help the student explore the post-secondary options available to reach the college and career

dream. It was also planned to provide a friendly and safe environment with an opportunity to learn based on Strober, et.al. (2005) research findings. This was also favorable, compared to during school hours, as it will not affect classroom instruction time. The lessons were planned based on students' report during pre-intervention data collection. Students had reported that they did not receive any career related information from their elementary school teachers and counselor as well as their middle school teachers. Hence, during this workshops, students debriefed their field visit to Portland State, learned about post-secondary options after high school, played a jeopardy game related to career exploration and took a career interest inventory. Through this workshops, students learned about their interest, personality and work style and were encouraged to take a deeper look into the world of work. At the end of the three workshops, the students were reminded that they would be invited for an individual meeting with the counselor intern.

Finally, the individual meeting time was planned to consolidate the learning. Based on their interest, motivation and information about career choices and post-secondary options, the researcher worked with each student on individual planning. This time was also utilized to address the unique questions and concerns these students had about their career path. Additional information regarding high school classes, earning college credits at high school, Advance Placement classes, funding for college were shared. As a last step, the researcher encouraged the students to seek further opportunities in grade 8th as well as high school by staying in touch with their classroom teachers and school counselors. Thus, the researcher brought a sense of closure with these students during the final individual time.

The interventions were planned for a period of 5 weeks, however due to inclement weather and Spring break, it took 7 weeks to complete it. There was two weeks gap between field visit and workshop as well as end of workshop and individual meeting.

This study utilized the qualitative tools to collect the data about the impact of different career awareness and exploration interventions on seventh grade Latina students. A field trip record (Appendix 3) was used to record the effect of visiting a college and meeting successful college students from same ethnic background. Secondly, to measure the effect of entire study, pre- and post-planning worksheet (Appendix 4) were used to record the academic and career related goals, knowledge of steps/education needed to achieve those goals and overall clarity about one's post-secondary option.

Results and Discussion

This study was conducted with a small group of 7th grade Latina student to observe the effect of career awareness and career exploration work on their academic goals and post-secondary planning. One of the research question was, whether a field-trip to a local university and meeting successful college Latina students would influence the middle school students' aspirations to go for higher education?

The intervention implemented to address this question was a visit to Portland State University and interacting with successful college Latina students from Las Mujeres group. The objective of this intervention was to introduce successful college role models as mentors who also shares the same background of that of our students. There were similarities in ethnicity,

socio-economic and immigration status, as well as some of the same experience of racial and institutional oppression.

In order to measure the effect of this visit on students' aspirations to go for higher education, the participants filled out a field trip record after the visit. Participants were asked to report their learning from that day after meeting the mentors. Some of the responses that showed direct impact of the visits are shared below:

Field Trip Record findings:

Participant 1 writes, "College can get you through a lot of things and a better life in future." They also wrote, "I would like to be a surgeon in the future and plan to go to college."

Participant 2 writes that they learned, "how much college cost" and that "I would like to go to college and join the airforce."

Participant 4 writes that "we talked about racism and about the struggles and successful things that happened in each woman's life" and they learn that "how Pam (*mentor*) was discriminated but is still (hella) successful."

Participant 5 writes, "I learned that college is really important" and "you need education for everything." They also mentioned that, "I would attend college if I would have enough money."

Participant 7 writes, "that you can still go to college even if you weren't born in USA." In response to whether they would like to attend a college sometime in your life, this participant wrote, "yes, because I want to learn more about what I want to do when I grow up."

Thus, 100% of the middle school students showed positive attitude towards college education. They all expressed their desire to go to college. About 71% (5 out of 7) students connected their ethnic identity with that of the mentors in their field trip report. It could be

concluded that this intervention is a helpful tool in strengthening the college aspirations among the Latina middle school students.

Pre- and Post-worksheet findings:

The second and third research questions were as follow:

- Whether the students would learn about the available post-secondary options and would it help to develop their own post-secondary plan at the end of the study?
- Whether the overall career exploration intervention with a small group of at-risk Latina students would increase their commitment towards their academic work?

In order to address these questions, other interventions that were implemented were three after school workshops and an individual meeting to discuss the career steps and work on career path. In order to assess the effect of all the three interventions, participants were given a planning worksheet (Appendix 4) prior to the beginning of the research study and at the end during the individual meeting. This planning worksheet had a few questions regarding education and employment, that ended in a sentence formation at the end. This was also a qualitative assessment.

Participant	Pre-worksheet responses	Post-worksheet responses
1	Plan to attend medical school to work in a field such as medicine and become a doctor. Will be employed by a school practicing medicine.	Plan to attend high school and community college to work in a field such as health care. Will be employed in health care field being a surgeon or in pharmacy.

An important information about this student was that they have indicated “going to school” as something they like to do in their post worksheet. With regards to what do they need to make their dreams come true, earlier they had mentioned to study hard and get good grades whereas after the intervention, they wrote to go to school and to go to college.

All of these responses shows that there has been some clarity for this student in terms of their career path. They received an understanding of health care field with many possible career path rather than a doctor or a surgeon. Another important information was that this student was not aware of the option schools in the district that caters to their interest. They learned in the individual meeting with the researcher, that they could apply to Health and Science school for their high school education.

Participant	Pre-worksheet responses	Post-worksheet responses
2	<p>Plan to attend a college and to get a degree to work in a field such as medical school, and help injured people in the army.</p> <p>Will be employed in the army and serving as a doctor.</p>	<p>Plan to attend community college to study culinary skills to work in a field such as a restaurant.</p> <p>Will be employed in food industry working in a bakery section.</p>

There have been several changes in the pre- and post-worksheet data. Some of their favorite subjects prior to intervention were drama, math and PE whereas after intervention it was reported as math, humanities and science. Remarkably, humanities and science were under least favorite subjects previously. This participant changed their career interest from that of a doctor to a cook or culinary artist. It seems that there might be some realistic thinking in terms of career planning. Earlier they had mentioned that in order to achieve their dreams they have to “get a degree and

do good in school so I can go to medical school”. Now, they are reporting that “go to college and study what I need to get the job I want”.

Participant	Pre-worksheet responses	Post-worksheet responses
3	Plan to attend a college to work in a field such as cooking college. Will be employed as a doctor.	Plan to attend cooking school to work in a field such as cooking college. Will be employed in social work field helping others.

As noticed, there is a discrepancy in this participant’s report. There is discrepancy between education and the employment in both pre- and post- worksheet. It seems that student might be unclear about what this worksheet is asking them to report. Or the student might be unclear about their career options and needs more intensive training.

Participant	Pre-worksheet responses	Post-worksheet responses
4	Plan to attend high school, finish high school with good grades and make my decision for what I want to be to work in a field such as military or counseling. Will be doing whatever I can to help others and make a difference.	Plan to attend the air force to work in a field such as health and medicine, then become eligible to get money for college education for studying counseling. Will be employed in air force and then counseling.

This participant shows similar consistent interest in the field of defence and counseling. In the post worksheet they have mentioned going to air force and then to college to get a degree in counseling. In response to the question, what do they want to learn more about, this participant earlier mentions that they want to learn “how to actually dance; how to deal with myself better; and how to keep myself motivated to do my best and not give up and believe in myself.”

Whereas post intervention they have reported that they want to learn more about “myself, my heritage//culture and my life options”. It seems that this participant is raising some reflective questions that is more specific to self-awareness, cultural awareness and options in their life. In another question about further steps, post intervention, they seem to show clear idea of moving from high school to air force to college education. They understand that air force will help them to pay for their college education after interacting with one of the college mentor.

Participant	Pre-worksheet responses	Post-worksheet responses
5	Plan to attend military school to work in a field such as Marines. Will be employed in the Marines.	Plan to attend high school then PSU and then the Air Force to work in a field such as Armed Forces. Will be employed in Air Force protecting the nation. .

This participant had shown an interest in joining Armed Forces before the intervention. Later in the post report they make it clear about their career pathway. They retained the same interest with a change in the branch, however, more important factor is their understanding of working through the high school and possibly college to join the Forces at a better rank. Another change that was reported in the post data was around the school subjects. They had included Science under the favorite subject and had removed reading from the list of subjects they do not like. Earlier they were interested in knowing more about how hard is Army, how many years of training and also what happens if you die. Later their question was more specific around what kind of grades are required for Air Force. Thus, showing the connection between grades and career choice.

Participant	Pre-worksheet responses	Post-worksheet responses
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6	Plan to attend military school to work in a field such as Army. Will be in the Army serving the country.	Plan to attend high school, community college and 4 years university to work in a field such as Air Force. Will be employed in Air Force as an Officer.
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This participant had also shown an interest in joining Armed Forces before the intervention. Later in the post report they make it clear about their career pathway. They retained the same interest with a change in the branch, however, more important factor is their understanding of working through the high school, community college and possibly college to join the Forces at a better rank of that of an Officer. Another important information about this participant was that they wanted to join Air Force to shoot people during war. This came out during post-data and it was further discussed with them. It seems that at this stage they were influenced by external messages from war news and have not understood their career choice in a realistic sense.

It seems that both participant 5 and 6 were inspired by one of the mentor at PSU who was also in Air Force. Later during the after-school workshop and one-on-one meetings, it was made clear to them about the difference between enlisting and joining as an officer.

Participant	Pre-worksheet responses	Post-worksheet responses
7	Plan to attend a Veterinary College to work in a field such as Veterinary. Will be a Veterinarian to help animals.	Plan to attend 4 year college to work in a field such as Veterinary. Will be employed in the healthcare field helping animals or people.

This participant showed consistent interest in their career choice. One thing to notice was that they figured out the need for a four year college education in order to become a Veterinarian. Secondly, they have also expanded their field of employment from only a Veterinarian to health

care, possibly helping animals or humans. Earlier in their response they wanted to learn more about soccer, drama and Vet and later in the post report they have noted several questions close to their career choice. Such as, how to work with an animal, how to use technology and how to take health classes. This shows a direct connection between career choice and preparation to achieve that.

Thus, there were several common themes that emerged from this qualitative data. It was observed that most participants identified specific career steps in order to reach their goal. They showed an awareness to complete high school and identified various options such as armed forces, community college, 4-year university, and vocational school. Another theme around positive attitude towards school, core academic subjects and one's heritage was observed in their responses. Some of them showed a change in their career goal after the intervention. Further clarifications are required in order to understand this change. However, in individual instances, responses shows higher clarity about post-secondary options than before. Finally, they also seemed to understand the direct connection between grades, career planning and required trainings to their career choices. Thus, the results show that most of the students did capture the post-secondary options available to them and were able to create a career plan with the help of the researcher.

Finally, in order to reflect upon the third research question, we decided to also look at the academic grades. We looked at the grades of these students in core subject areas such as Mathematics, Science and Humanities. Although, it is not possible to establish a direct correlation between the intervention and the grades, the researcher thought it would be helpful to know the difference, if any, for future intervention.

The grades for the students have been recorded in December, February and May. The intervention happened between late February (21st) to late March (20th). So, the researcher observed the trajectory between the grades recorded from December and February (before intervention) to May (after intervention). Whereas, the trajectory of grades from December to February could be used as a reference point in absence of intervention. Again, it is impossible to establish a direct correlation between the intervention and the grades due to several factors responsible for the differences. We could still learn from the grade results.

For all the 7 participant, we selected three core subjects and gave a value of 1 point to each subjects per student. That means we have a total of 21 points for all the students . Based on the observations, there was a decrease in the grade performance by 57.14% from February to May. On the other hand, only 14.29% increase in the grade performance was noted; while 35.29% remained the same.

In order to find a reference point, two performances before the intervention were noted. It showed that between December and February grading, there was 25% increase in the grade performance and 15% decrease in the grade performance. Whereas, a large number 60% remained the same.

While this data suggests that there was a decreased in the grades of all the participants after the intervention, we note that such a decrease was predicted at the beginning of the year due to a new report card system. In absence of a controlled study, it is difficult to ascertain what influence our intervention had in the end of the year grades.

We also note that, the data from a future study where such an intervention was not done, but using the same report system may be helpful to evaluate the influence of our intervention. It

would also be helpful to study the effect of intervention within the same team of students in the school. Current participants belonged to different teams within the school and hence had different teachers. Moreover, some participant moved from one team to another in the middle of the intervention. For future study, it would be appropriate to control such variables in order to identify the relationship to the grade performance.

Thus, it seems that this research study had some influence on the students with regards to their academic goals and post-secondary planning. After meeting the college students, they expressed their desire to go for college education and deemed it as important. They learned that there are ways to achieve college education irrespective of any obstacles due to being a minority, first-generation, poor or even undocumented. This was noticed as a positive change in their attitude towards academics.

During the workshops, the students got to learn about the post-secondary options and learned more about the careers that interested them. There were intergroup differences as expected, however, this intervention started a dialogue about career and college within the group. Some of these students started to talk about their career aspirations with their parents as well. At the end of this study, 100% participants had a post-secondary plan with an aim to continue post-secondary education compared to 57.14% prior to the intervention.

This being a qualitative study it is difficult to show concrete outcomes. Moreover, this interventions being a head-start in nature, long-term observation or follow-up of the group members could reveal the significance of the influence.

Conclusions

It is extremely important for schools to help students connect their academic work with their future life. More often than past, we are emphasising the importance of education in a student's life in order to succeed as an adult in the dynamic and competitive work world. Although some might argue that college education is not for all, we no longer can assume that students will gain college related information if they are inclined to pursue higher education. According to Whitehouse website (n.d.), U.S. ranks 12th in the world with regards to 4-year college education among its 25-34 years old population. Additionally, higher education is becoming a prerequisite for many jobs and is required for strong economy. One of the major education related policy from Obama administration is to emphasize and increase the high school graduation rates as well as access to post secondary information. Thus, Obama administration acknowledges the importance of high quality K-12 education where students graduate as college and career ready. It is also taking steps to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable for low-income groups.

In order to reach these goals, elementary and middle school years are the best time to encourage students and incite their interest in future goals. Curry, et al., (2013) have reviewed the literature and practice of college and career preparatory work at middle school level and has confirmed it's importance. To support the middle school work, Johnson (2000) compared the sixth grade students to ninth grade students in their study. One of the finding was that sixth grade students found their school work more useful for future than the ninth grade students. This shows that by the time a student is in ninth grade, in their perception the importance of school work has decreased. Somehow, they do not find school to work connection appealing. It these findings still

hold true as a generalized trend, then early work regarding college and career identity is crucial.

Based on these and similar research backdrop, this research study invited seventh grade Latina students to participate in college and career exploration interventions. They visited a local university and met successful college Latina students, they participated in three after-school workshops and met with the researcher one-on-one to work on their post-secondary planning. This happened across a time frame of 7 weeks.

It was found that the visit to local university had a positive influence on all the participants. Whereas, the after-school workshops and individual meetings were reasonably successful in helping students understand the post-secondary options for themselves. All the students exited this study with a post-secondary plan outline. However, there was no improvement on students' current academic grades after this study.

It seems that even though this intervention was successful in inviting students to look at post-secondary education, we need more robust and long-term goals in the area of career development that implements culturally sensitive approaches. Curry et al., (2013) have appealed to include the career information to be part of middle school curriculum not only taught by the counselors but also the teachers. Trusty, et al., (2005) also asserts that this should be a collaborative effort between students, teachers, counselors and parents. Moreover, with high student-counselor ratio, an integrated educational-career planning program would help laid a solid foundation for helping all middle school students to become engaged in school, both academically and socially.

In a note to the school counselors and teachers at Cedar Park Middle school, we would recommend to create a collaborative career development program for all the 6-8 grade students.

Apart from this, building a culturally sensitive and equity minded program should be a priority. This could be achieved by inviting community partnership with professionals, businesses and colleges that the students could identify with. We need programs that not only raises the expectations for post-secondary education but also is able to nurture positive relationships with the students of minority and underrepresented population.

This study was just the beginning in this area. We need to ensure that we have programs with robust assessments to predict the long-term outcomes. Moreover, the qualitative interpretations could be biased due to researcher's expectations. So, in order to strengthen the validity of this study, we invite expert views on our findings along with an opportunity to follow-up with these students as they transition.

In conclusion, we believe that school counselors must take a lead in collaboration with administration and school staff to deliver career development work at all grade levels in order to achieve Oregon's 40-40-20 goals as well as better economy for United States.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Informed consent (English and Spanish)

Dear parents/guardians,

Your daughter is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dhara Sheth from Portland State University (PSU), School of Counselor Education. She is also a counselor intern at Cedar Park school. She hopes to learn the effects of half-day visit to Portland State University and after-school workshop at Cedar Park school on student's academic and future goals. This research study is part of the requirement for Dhara Sheth to graduate with school counseling master's degree. Hence, this entire research would be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lisa Aasheim at Portland State University. Your daughter was selected as a possible participant in this study because subject teachers, school counselors and community liaison referred her.

If you decide to let your child participate,

- she will be asked to meet Dhara for 30 minutes prior to the visit to PSU. They would travel in Trimet Max Light rail to PSU. They would take a campus tour and meet Hispanic (Latina) College student to learn and share about their experiences.
- After the field visit, they would be invited to participate in after-school workshop (45 minutes) for three Thursdays and
- Then an individual meeting to work on their future academic goals.

While participating in this study, it is possible that the student will miss some part of their regular school work. Their peers might want to know more about their participation in these activities. Students will be talked about it prior to the visit. The field visit will be organized in the afternoon to save study time. We would be careful while on the public transport and avoid any possible risk. There are chances that the student might feel anxious during the visit. Counselor intern would be available for any support needed during this time.

Your daughter will also receive certain benefits by participating in this research study. They will

learn about PSU and an opportunity to meet and talk with successful college students. By participating in the after-school workshops and individual meeting they will work on their future academic/work planning. All expenses, during this study, will be covered by the counseling intern from the school counselor's fund.

Any written information that is obtained in connection with this study will be kept private. This study involves working with the group of students. So, students will be informed about confidentiality but cannot be guaranteed in the group setting. This is a risk but participants would be asked to respect each other's privacy by not talking about who attended the group or what was said. The results of the study would be shared with the school counselors, school administration and to report the research without using any specific names. This will help for similar future work with students. All the information gathered will be stored in a locked placed in the school counselor Elizabeth Williams's office.

Participation of your daughter is voluntary. She does not have to take part in this study, and it will not affect your daughter's grade or relationship with Cedar Park school and school staff. If you do not wish your daughter to participate in this research, you may leave the signature blank. Also, your daughter may withdraw from this study at any time without affecting her grade or relationship with Cedar Park school and school staff. She just have to let any of the following person know about her decision.

If you have questions or concerns about your daughter's participation in this study, you may contact the following people:

Dhara Sheth (Counseling intern) at Cedar Park Middle School on Thursdays or Fridays (503) 964-9406. Lourdes Flores (Community Liaison for speaking in Spanish) at Cedar Park School (503) 672-3620 ext. (3620). Elizabeth Williams (School Counselor) at Cedar Park Middle School (503) 672-3620. This project is being conducted as an educational activity for the course COUN 589, Action Research in School Counseling, under the supervision of Lisa Aasheim, Instructor and Program Coordinator. She can be reached at 503.725.4253 if any questions or concerns arise. Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and agreed for your daughter to take part in this study. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own records.

Signature

Date

Print name

Daughter's name

Consentimiento informado

Estimados padres/tutores,

Se le invito a su hija/pupilo a participar en un estudio de investigación realizado por Dhara Sheth de la Universidad Estatal de Portland (PSU), Escuela de Consejero Estudiantil. Ella también es una consejera en entrenamiento en la escuela Cedar Park. Ella espera conocer los efectos de la visita de medio día a la Universidad Estatal de Portland y los talleres después de clases en la escuela Cedar Park en las metas académicas de los estudiantes y las aspiraciones educativas. Esta investigación es parte del requisito para que Dhara Sheth se gradué con una Maestría como consejera estudiantil. Por lo tanto, toda esta investigación se llevará a cabo bajo la supervisión de la Dra. Lisa Aasheim de la Universidad Estatal de Portland. Su hija/tutor fue seleccionado como posible participante en este estudio porque los profesores de asignaturas, consejeros estudiantiles y la asistente en enlace comunitario la recomendaron para tener éxito académico.

Si usted decide que su hija participe, ella se reuniera con la consejera en entrenamiento por 30 minutos en una reunión de orientación para prepararse para ir a una visita de medio día a PSU. Viajaremos en el Tren Ligero Trimet Max para PSU. Daran un recorrido por el campus y conocerán a estudiantes universitarios hispanos (Latinos) para aprender y compartir sus experiencias. Después de la visita, se les invitara a participar a un taller después de clases (45 minutos) durante tres jueves y a una reunión individual para trabajar en planes post-secundarios.

Al participar en este estudio, es posible que el estudiante sentirá que recibe una atención especial en la escuela. Perderán alguna parte su clase regular. Sus compañeros puede que deseen saber acerca de la participación de los estudiantes en estas actividades. En la reunión de orientación, se hablara sobre estas preocupaciones con los estudiantes. Con el fin de reducir el tiempo de instrucción perdida, la visita se organizará por la tarde. Otra posibilidad es el riesgo y los inconvenientes de tomar el transporte público. Por esta razón se mantendrá ratio de estudiante:adulto. Hay posibilidades de que el estudiante podría sentirse abrumado durante la visita. La consejera en entrenamiento y los consejeros de la escolares estarán disponibles para cualquier apoyo necesario durante este tiempo. Su hija también recibirá ciertos beneficios al participar en este estudio de investigación. Ellas recibirán una exposición a una organización de educación superior como PSU y una oportunidad de conocer y hablar con estudiantes

universitarios exitosos. Al participar en los talleres después de clases y reuniones individuales van aprender más sobre la planificación post-secundaria con una atención personalizada a sus necesidades únicas.

Cualquier información escrita que se obtenga en relación con este estudio y que puede estar relacionado con su hija o identificar a su hija se mantendrá en privado. Este estudio consiste en trabajar con un grupo de estudiantes, por lo que la confidencialidad de cualquier información oral compartida por el estudiante no se puede garantizar en el grupo. Esto es un riesgo, pero se les pidió a los participantes a respetar la privacidad de los demás de no hablar de quienes asistieron al grupo o lo que se dijo. Los resultados generales del grupo serán compartidos con los consejeros de la escuela y la administración escolar, sin revelar nombres específicos. Esto les ayudará en la decisión de una mayor intervención de grupos más grandes en el futuro. Toda la información recopilada se guardara bajo llave en la oficina de la consejera de la escuela Elizabeth Williams.

La participación de su hija es voluntaria. Ella no tiene que participar en este estudio, y no afectará las calificaciones o la relación con la escuela de Cedar Park y el personal de la escuela. Si usted no desea que su hija participe en esta investigación, deje en blanco la sección de la firma. Además, su hija podrá retirarse de este estudio en cualquier momento sin que le afecte su calificación o la relación con la escuela de Cedar Park y personal de la escuela. Ella sólo tiene que dejarle saber a cualquiera de las siguientes personas acerca de su decisión.

Si tiene preguntas o inquietudes acerca de la participación de su hija en este estudio, puede comunicarse con las siguientes personas:

Dhara Sheth (Consejera en entrenamiento) en la Escuela Secundaria Cedar Park los miércoles o los viernes (503) 964-9406. Lourdes Flores (Enlace Comunitario para español) en Cedar Park (503) 672-3620 ext. (3620). Elizabeth Williams (Consejera de la escuela) en Cedar Park (503) 672-3620. Andrew Witt (Consejero de la escuela) Cedar Park (503) 672-3620.

Si usted tiene preocupaciones acerca de los derechos de su hija como sujeto de investigación, por favor póngase en contacto con la Investigación y Alianzas Estratégicas, Edificio Market Center 6^{to} piso, de la Universidad Estatal de Portland, (503) 725-4288.

Su firma indica que usted ha leído y comprendido la información anterior y esta de acuerdo que su hija participe en este estudio. El investigador le proporcionará una copia de este formulario para sus propios registros.

Firma

Fecha

Escriba el Nombre

Nombre de su Hija

Appendix 2: Assent letter (English and Spanish)

Student's name _____

Your parents (guardian) have said that it is okay for you to take part in a project to learn about higher education options like Portland State University (PSU) and interacting with college Hispanic (Latina) students that might influence your current academic goals and future educational dreams. If you choose to do it, you will be asked to attend a 30 minute orientation meeting for the PSU visit during your school hours. Secondly, you will visit PSU for half a day with the counselor intern and other adults from the school via Trimet Max Light rail. During this visit you will take a campus tour and meet successful college going Hispanic (Latina) students. You will learn and share each other's experience about education in a safe group setting. After the visit, you will be invited to participate in a after-school workshop for three Thursdays (45 minutes each) and an individual meeting with the counselor intern to share and document your learning, make post high school plan, as well as to celebrate your participation in this study.

If you want to rest or stop completely, just tell me - you won't get into any trouble for your grades or your relationship with teachers or school. In fact, if you don't want to do it at all, you don't have to. Just say so. Also, if you have any questions about what you will be doing, just ask me to explain.

If you do want to try it, please sign your name on the line below. Remember - you can stop to rest at any time, and if you decide not to take part anymore, let me know.

Signature_____
Date_____
Print name

Carta de Consentimiento

Nombre del Estudiante _____

Tus padres (o tutores) han dicho que está bien que puedes participar en un proyecto para aprender sobre las opciones de educación superior, como la Universidad Estatal de Portland (PSU) e interactuar con estudiantes universitarios hispanos (Latino) que pueden influir en tus metas académicas actuales y futuros sueños educativos. Si decide hacerlo, se te pedirá que asista a una reunión de orientación de 30 minutos para la visita a PSU durante las horas de escuela. En segundo lugar, se visitara PSU durante medio día con la consejera en entrenamiento y otros adultos de la escuela a través del Tren Ligero Trimet Max. Durante esta visita, haremos un recorrido por el campus y conoceras estudiantes universitarios hispanos (latinos) exitosos. Van a aprender y compartir experiencias de los demás acerca de la educación en un grupo seguro. Después de la visita, se te invitará a participar en un taller después de la escuela por tres jueves (45 minutos cada uno) y una reunión individual con la consejero en entrenamiento para compartir y documentar tu aprendizaje, hacer publicar el plan de estudios secundarios, así como para celebrar su participación en este estudio.

Si deseas descansar o parar por completo, sólo me lo tienes que decir - no te afectara tus calificaciones o tu relación con los maestros o la escuela. De hecho, si no quieres hacerlo, no tienes que hacerlo. Sólo dejamos saber. Además, si tienes alguna pregunta acerca de lo que vas a hacer, sólo pídemelo que te lo explique.

Si quieres intentarlo, por favor firma tu nombre en la línea de abajo. Recuerda - que puedes parar para descansar en cualquier momento, y si decides no participar más, déjamelos saber.

Firma_____
Fecha_____
Escribe Nombre

Number:

Appendix 3: Field-trip Record

Name _____

Date _____

List everything you did during your field trip **at PSU campus**. Then underline one or two that were most interesting.

Write two-three things that you **learned** from this fieldtrip. (It could be something that inspired you, something new you saw/heard, something that might change how you act or think, etc.)

Write a short description of the kind of **career path** you wish to have in the future. (Do you think you would like to attend a college sometime in your life?)

Appendix 4: Pre- and Post-Planning Worksheet

Education

There are no right or wrong answers. Answer all questions honestly.

1. What are your favorite school subjects?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. What subjects (if any) you do NOT like?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

3. What do you want to learn more about? (These do not have to be school subjects; they can be anything that interests you.)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

4. Where do you want to continue learning? This could include high school, technical training, community college or university college.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Using the above information, write a sentence about what you would like to learn more about and where. For Example: I, Mara, plan to attend computer classes at PCC or at a college, to work in field such as a computer programmer.”

I, _____, plan to attend

_____, to work in
a field such as

Employment

There are no right or wrong answers. Answer all questions honestly.

1. What things do you like to do? List your likes, skills, and talents.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. What things you do NOT like to do?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

3. If you could have any job, what would it be?

- a. _____

4. What do you think you would like most about the job?

- a. _____
- b. _____

5. What other jobs do you think you might like to try?

- a. _____
- b. _____

6. What do you need to make your dreams come true?

Using the above information, write a sentence about what job(s) you would like to try or learn more about. For Example: "I, Mara, will be employed in the education field, doing the following: teaching science.

I, _____, will be

_____ ,
doing the following:

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