MONTGOMERY
COUNTY PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Formative Evaluation of ACES Program: Findings from Surveys and Interviews Year One, Grades 11 and 12

Office of Shared Accountability

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Executive Summary

The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is conducting a multiyear evaluation of the Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) program. The ACES program is a collaboration between MCPS, Montgomery College (MC), and the Universities at Shady Grove (USG) to create a seamless pathway from high school to college completion. The first year of the program was implemented in both Grades 11 and 12 in 10 schools. The schools were selected because they have a significant number of students who are underrepresented in higher education and who would be the first in their family to attend college.

This is the first of a series of reports provided for the first year of the ACES program and focuses on a portion of the formative evaluation. This report examined two questions:

- How is the ACES program perceived by students and program staff?
- To what extent did the ACES program increase student knowledge and assist in their participation of the college application and financial aid process?

Summary of Methodology

A combination of methods was used to address the formative evaluation including surveys, interviews, and program documents. A total of 474 ACES students (a 49% response rate) completed an anonymous online survey about their participation in the first year of the program. All 10 ACES coaches and all 10 resource counselors (RCs) from the participating schools (a 100% response rate) completed an online survey at the end of the school year. These same staff members also were interviewed in the middle of the school year.

Summary of Findings

How is the ACES program perceived by students and program staff?

   Student surveys. Students learned about the program in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, their school counselor, during a class presentation, through the ACES coach, or during an assembly.

Students had very positive ratings about their experiences in the program, with the vast majority of students agreeing with the statements addressing the different components of ACES. They were particularly positive about recommending the program to other students, the helpfulness of the information provided and guidance from the coach, and the coach's availability as needed.

Student respondents also gave positive ratings for their overall experience and the overall quality of the program, with only 8% and 6% giving it an average or poor rating, respectively. The vast majority of student respondents reported that the ACES coach was what they liked most about the program, and almost all of the comments submitted at the end of the survey either were positive about the ACES program or were personal thanks for the program or coaches.

Despite a high rating for the coach being available as needed, one fourth of the students reported that it was hard to find time to meet with the ACES coach, and one half reported that workshops were at times they could not attend. A variety of suggestions on improving the ACES program were made by one third of the student respondents including: more field trips (especially to colleges) and more flexible and accommodating schedule times for ACES activities. Additionally, one student mentioned a misconception among some of their peers that they only would be able to attend MC if they were a program participant. This coincides with a survey finding among a few of the counseling staff who disagreed that the ACES program helps students get accepted to a 4-year college.

ACES coach and resource counselor surveys. Various methods for recruiting students were reported by coaches and RCs, which coincide with the student findings. These included: meeting with potential students, counselors referring students to coaches, presenting the ACES program to students in class or during an assembly, school advertising, and other methods. Although students were accepted into the program by meeting one of the stated criteria, interviews revealed some varying strategies for recruiting and enrolling students such as including everyone in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, recruiting English for Speakers of Other Languages students, and recruiting students receiving Free and Reduced-price Meal System services, while eliminating students with attendance issues or those not on track to graduate.

Almost all coaches and RCs reported that coaches provided updates and information to the RC, if not other counselors, on ACES activities and ACES students. Almost all coaches reported in the survey that they personally attended counseling department meetings regularly or sometimes. The reasons given by coaches for not attending meetings were that they had to be at an MC meeting; the information at the counseling meeting was not related to ACES, or they were not included in the meetings. Although almost all coaches reported in the survey that they received student data through the Online Administrative Student Information System, interviews earlier in the year revealed that some coaches did not have easy access to student data. Lack of access to student data also was mentioned in the survey as a challenge coach's faced.

Ratings varied among the coach and RC survey respondents regarding the successful implementation of various aspects of the program this first year. Most of the coaches and RCs reported the collaboration between them was successful. Although ratings varied, a few coaches reported a difficultly with implementing the recruiting process, the enrollment process, and collaboration with the college and career information coordinator (CCIC) at their school. Coaches also were very satisfied or satisfied with the support they received from the ACES staff at MC. But several indicated that they were dissatisfied with the school resources (such as space or equipment). The majority of coaches also strongly agreed that they had someone in the school to provide support. Furthermore, one half of the coaches indicated they would like to see more of the following: cooperation between the program and the school, collaboration with the CCIC, flexibility in meeting with students, and just to be part of the school.

All the staff survey respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the opportunities that the ACES program provided students and agreed or strongly agreed that overall, ACES met the needs of the students in the program.

To what extent did the ACES program increase student knowledge and assist in their participation of the college application and financial aid process?

This section reports student and staff perceptions on the program's assistance with the college application process. Data on college applications and acceptances, financial aid applications, and scholarship applications among all graduating ACES students will be in a subsequent ACES Year One outcome report.

Student surveys. More than 80% of the students surveyed reported that they expect to receive a Bachelor's degree or higher. Almost all student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the ACES program assisted them with exploring colleges and universities, exploring majors and career interests, preparing them academically for college, and providing their parent or guardian with helpful information. Among the Grade 12 respondents, almost all agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to get the guidance they needed for the college application process and that the program assisted them in understanding the college application process and how to apply for financial aid and scholarships. Additionally, almost all senior respondents who were accepted to a 4-year college found the program very helpful to their gaining acceptance.

ACES coach and resource counselor surveys. Most of the coaches strongly agreed, and most RCs strongly agreed or agreed, that ACES motivates students to go to college who might not have otherwise, helps students get accepted into a 4-year college, and helps students obtain financial aid.

Recommendations

During this first year of implementation, ACES staff, ACES coaches, and MCPS school staff had to establish procedures and roles for the program, create a comprehensive database for capturing student information, locate office space for the coach and meeting space for ACES activities, coordinate the location and schedule of student meetings, complete the recruitment of students, etc. Despite these first-year challenges, there were many successes. Surveyed students were very happy with the program and its guidance for college applications; staff also agreed that the program was successful.

The following recommendations are to provide feedback for the program's improvement and ongoing development and are based on findings from this part of the evaluation.

- Continue to establish helpful and positive relationships between coaches and students.
- Continue to build relationships between the ACES coach and school staff.
  - Areas of concentration, depending on specific school, include: procedures for sharing student information, coach's use of equipment, attendance at counseling department meetings, clarification of roles for staff and for students, and regular communication between counseling staff and coaches.
- Continue to provide clear and frequent communication with school staff members and ACES coaches about program updates and expectations.

- Explore providing more resources for coaches such as classroom and/or office space availability and equipment.
- Explore scheduling of ACES activities to accommodate more students.
  o Consider duplicating important workshops and information sessions.
  o Consider altering coach's schedules to more closely align to MCPS school schedules and increase coach's availability (i.e., Fridays at school, spring breaks).
- Explore possible misconceptions among some students and some counseling staff that students are required or encouraged only to attend MC and will not receive help applying to a 4-year college.
- Consider adding more college field trips, especially early in the school year, and information regarding scholarship opportunities.
- Schedule time for ACES school-level teams from the 10 schools to come together to clarify roles and responsibilities and share best practices with each other.

Formative Evaluation of ACES Program: Findings from Surveys and Interviews – Year One, Grades 11 and 12

Natalie Wolanin and Shaphar Modarresi, Ph.D.

The Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is conducting a multiyear evaluation of the Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) program. The year one study uses a multimethod design to conduct formative evaluations as well as immediate outcome or output evaluations. This is the first of a series of reports provided for the first year of the ACES program. This report focuses on a portion of the formative evaluation, the goal of which is to document how well the ACES program components are being implemented and to provide feedback to relevant stakeholders for the program's improvement as well as its ongoing development. ACES student and staff perceptions on their experiences and satisfaction with the first year of the program were collected through surveys and interviews and are described here.

Background

MCPS collaborated with Montgomery College (MC) and the Universities at Shady Grove (USG) to create the ACES program. The ACES program seeks to create a seamless pathway from high school to college completion. It focuses on identifying and supporting both students who are underrepresented in higher education and those who would be the first in their family to attend college.

The first year evaluation of the ACES program focused on students in Grades 11 and 12 in MCPS schools with the ACES program who met one or more of the following risk factors: low income or single parent household; member of an underrepresented race/ethnicity group in higher education (such as Black or African American or Hispanic/Latino students); first generation college student; students with disabilities or in special education; immigrant or child of immigrant parents; homeless students or those living in unstable conditions. For the 2013–2014 school year, students had to apply to the ACES program and were considered eligible for acceptance if they met at least one of the criteria listed above.

The ACES program provides the following services to students in Grades 11 and 12 (see Appendix B for full flyer):
- Academic coaching
- Career exploration and how to choose a college major
- College tours
- Preparation for college placement tests
- Individual assistance with college applications and financial aid
- Information sessions for parents
- Summer programs at MC and the USG
- Transition services to college

A central element to the ACES program is the presence of coaches who mentor, advocate, and advise ACES students. They work one-on-one with students on how to be successful in high school, completing college admission applications, negotiating the scholarship and financial aid process, and transitioning from high school to college, as well as providing weekly activities, group meetings, and college trips. Parents also were invited to attend select workshops such as completing financial aid paper work and applying for scholarships. An ACES coach, employed by MC, works at each of the 10 participating high schools four days a week, where they meet with ACES students and coordinate college readiness activities. Coaches work with the counseling department in their school to manage the ACES program and share student information. These program activities are in addition to, and align with, the college and career supports provided by MCPS staff members. Students are expected to commit to their own academic success and participate in planned activities, as well as to meet with their ACES coach on a regular basis.

The next phase of the ACES program occurs after graduation from high school. If students choose to attend MC and the USG, they will receive continued support from an ACES academic coach at these colleges. However, the goal of the ACES program is for students to complete a 4-year degree. Therefore, students do not need to plan on attending MC and the USG to participate in the high school ACES program.

Eight high schools were initially identified to implement the ACES program, and schools began recruiting students in the spring of 2013. At the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year, two additional high schools were added to implement the ACES program, for a total of ten schools. All the ACES coaches were hired during the summer and began working at the schools in the fall of the 2013–2014 school year.

The 10 MCPS schools participating in the ACES program are: Montgomery Blair, Clarksburg, Albert Einstein, Gaithersburg, John F. Kennedy, Northwood, Rockville, Seneca Valley, Wheaton, and Watkins Mill high schools.

Evaluation Questions

The following are the formative questions for the Year One study that were developed in collaboration with ACES program administrators.

1. Who were the students enrolled in year one of the ACES program?
2. To what extent are the program activities and/or features as proposed in the program design being implemented at schools, and how consistent is the level of implementation across schools?
3. To what extent do students participate in program activities?
4. **How is the ACES program perceived by students and program staff?**
5. **To what extent did the ACES program increase student knowledge and assist in their participation of the college application and financial aid process?**

This report addresses the formative evaluation questions 4 and 5. The remaining formative evaluation questions, as well as outcome questions, will be addressed in subsequent reports.

Literature Review

The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2006) stated that because attainment of a bachelor's degree is essential to America's economic future, narrowing income-related gaps is of critical importance. Doing so requires that college-qualified high school graduates from low- and moderate-income families have the financial resources to enroll and persist through degree completion. However, our nation is nowhere near achieving this goal, and significant gaps in the attainment rate of a bachelor's degree by family income continue to exist.

A study done by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2012 on higher education and access gaps reported:

> "Many studies have documented the associations between student background and educational outcomes (e.g., high school graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and attainment rates). Demographic factors known to be linked to these outcomes include socioeconomic status indicators (e.g., poverty, family income, and parents' education), parental involvement, student disabilities, and native language." (p. 7)

> The study explains that, "poverty poses a serious challenge to a child's ability to succeed in school and its prevalence is markedly higher among certain racial/ethnic groups than in others. Research has suggested that living in poverty in early childhood is associated with lower than average academic performance that extends through elementary and high school and can lead to lower than average rates of [high] school completion." (p. 7)

The study also cites research by Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) who report that,

> "Among beginning postsecondary students in 1989–90, first-generation college students (college students whose parents had never enrolled in postsecondary education) persisted in postsecondary education and attained credentials at lower rates than their non-first-generation counterparts. This finding held for students at 4-year institutions as well as public 2-year institutions. Even when controlling for many of the characteristics that distinguish first-generation college students from their peers, such as socioeconomic status, institution type, and attendance status, first-generation student status still had a negative effect on persistence and attainment." (NCES, 2012, p. 7)

MCPS, using StudentTracker Data from the National Student Clearinghouse, examined graduated students from 2001 to 2010 and found that in total, 70% of MCPS graduates went to college in the fall immediately after high school: 47% went to 4-year institutions, and 23% went to 2-year institutions (Zhao, 2012). The University of Maryland at College Park received the most MCPS graduates among 4-year institutions, and Montgomery College at Rockville enrolled the most MCPS graduates among 2-year institutions. Among the 2001 to 2010 high school graduates who received Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) services in Grade 12, 51% went to college in the fall; 43% of graduates who received special education services in Grade 12 went to college in the fall; and 34% of graduates who received English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in Grade 12 went to college in the fall. Fifty-eight percent of African

American graduates and 50% of Hispanic graduates went to college in the fall; this compared to 78% among Asian graduates and 79% among White graduates.

The ACES Task Force studied best practices of similar programs including the Pathway to the Baccalaureate program (MCPS, MC, and USG, 2012). This program is a consortium of 10 educational institutions in Northern Virginia consisting of K–12 public school systems, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), and George Mason University. Its goal is to support students as they make the transition from high school through NOVA to George Mason University or another public university in Virginia.

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) has the highest participation in the Pathway to the Baccalaureate program (FCPS, 2013a). Program services are provided onsite at participating high schools during regular school hours and include a one-stop case management model for student services (e.g., placement testing, academic advising, and early course registration). The program also includes financial aid/literacy training and the availability of program specific grants and scholarships; a learning community/cohort-building model beginning in high school; and an early, continuous investment in student success by all participating institutions. Reports show that 86% of students in the program's first six cohorts have transitioned from high school directly into postsecondary education and 90% of students in the program at NOVA are retained from the first to the second semester (FCPS, 2013b).

Methodology

To answer the two evaluation questions, this study utilized a multimethod data collection strategy, including staff surveys (resource counselors [RCs] and ACES coaches), student surveys, and midyear staff interviews (RCs and ACES coaches). The evaluators, in collaboration with ACES administrators, developed instruments for these activities. Many of the survey questions were developed from information gathered through the midyear interviews, interviews with ACES administrators, and relevant literature.

Data was collected from ACES coaches, RCs, and ACES students within the 10 participating schools.

Data Collection

Student Surveys

The purpose of the student survey was to collect information pertaining to the experiences of students who were in the ACES program. The surveys also were designed to capture ACES implementation challenges, benefits to students, and areas for improvement.

An anonymous online student survey was offered at the end of the 2013–2014 school year. ACES coaches were sent the link to the survey in May and were asked to direct all participating students to complete the survey before the end of the school year. Several reminders were sent to coaches to increase the response rate. There were a total of 968 students in the ACES program

the first year, and 474 students responded to the survey (a 49% response rate). A breakdown of the response rates by grade and school may be seen in Table 1. For example, there were 406 students in Grade 11 in the ACES program and 204 responded, for a 50% response rate among Grade 11 ACES students. The schools' response rates ranged from 19% to more than 100%. One school had more than a 100% response rate because five more surveys than students enrolled in the program were submitted at that school. It is speculated that several students submitted more than one survey; however, due to the anonymity of the survey, the duplicate surveys could not be identified and all data was included.

Table 1
Student Survey: Number and Percentage of Respondents and
Response Rates by Grade Level and School

		Response Rates per Grade Level and School (N = 968)		
		N	n	%
	Total[a]	968	474	49.0
Grade level	Grade 11	406	204	50.2
	Grade 12	562	270	48.0
School	Blair	90	56	62.2
	Clarksburg	85	90	105.8[b]
	Einstein	92	17	18.5
	Gaithersburg	112	29	25.9
	Kennedy	69	34	49.3
	Northwood	122	87	71.3
	Rockville	104	53	51.0
	Seneca Valley	116	31	26.7
	Wheaton	59	19	32.2
	Watkins Mill	119	55	46.2

Note. Three student respondents did not indicate their school.
[a]Some students who are in Grade 10, based on completion of specific courses, are included in the Grade 11 count here.
[b]More students completed the survey than enrolled; see discussion in text.

Staff Surveys

The purpose of the staff surveys was to collect information pertaining to the experiences of school staff who were implementing the program at the school level. The surveys also were designed to capture ACES implementation challenges, benefits to students, and areas for improvement.

An anonymous online survey was offered at the end of the 2013–2014 school year to all 10 ACES coaches and all 10 RCs in the participating schools. All 20 staff members completed the survey for a 100% response rate.

Staff Interviews

The purpose of the staff interviews was to gain a comprehensive perspective about coaches' and RCs' experiences and opinions pertaining to the implementation of ACES during the first several months of the program.

All 10 ACES coaches and all 10 RCs in the participating schools were interviewed by evaluators in January 2014, and interviews were performed face-to-face, employing a structured questionnaire. Interview findings were presented in an internal MCPS memorandum dated April 2014 and provided evaluators with guidance for creating the end-of-year surveys. Many of the interview findings are mentioned in this report where applicable.

Analytical Procedures

Qualitative Data

Information gathered through interviews and open-ended survey questions was analyzed through content analysis. Researchers looked for themes in the data, and where appropriate, category frequencies were reported. In addition, responses to open-ended interview and survey questions provided examples and context for the quantitative information presented in the findings.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative information was compiled from closed-ended survey responses; analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics.

Strengths and Limitations

In drawing conclusions from the current study, several strengths and caveats must be noted.

Strengths

First, the existing program documents, as well as initial program staff interviews were used to guide development of survey items for coaches, RCs, and students. This strategy improved the construct validity of measures by developing a set of survey items (or questions) that were both relevant and valid.

Second, before administering the student surveys, the questionnaire was examined by several ACES staff members to ensure that the questions were appropriate and clear. Furthermore, the survey instrument was piloted by a few ACES students to reduce measurement errors using the following types of questions as recommended by Isaac & Michael (1995): Are the directions/instructions for the survey clear? Is the language of the questions appropriate for high school students? Are the questions easy to understand? Are the response choices to the questions appropriate? Are the questions leading in any way—i.e., do they suggest a particular way to answer? Do any of the questions ask sensitive information that might make a student uncomfortable? Do any of the questions seem unimportant to a study of the ACES program? Are there questions about the ACES program that should be added? Does the survey seem too long or too short?

Third, all 10 ACES coaches and all 10 RCs were interviewed in January, and all completed an end-of-year survey (100% response rate) ensuring the external validity of findings from coaches and RCs.

Finally, this study addressed the evaluation questions by means of cross-method comparisons. Although the interview and survey data were collected independently, they still focused on the primary objectives of the evaluation. Therefore, convergent findings between the interviews and surveys in some instances increase the validity of findings.

Limitations

First, at the system level, about half of the ACES students did not respond to the survey questions (response rate = 49%; n = 474), therefore, the generalization of the student survey results (external validity) is limited only to those students who responded. Second, some schools had a much lower representation of students in the student survey data than others. Due to variation in the school-level response rate, caution should be exercised when viewing these findings in the context of an individual school. Third, 18 of the 474 student surveys (from a variety of schools) were partially completed. The survey data of those students were still included in the analyses because many of the survey questions were answered by students. In addition, one school had five more surveys (including three partially completed) than the total number of students enrolled in the program, yielding more than a 100% response rate. It is speculated by the evaluators, but unknown, that several students submitted more than one survey. Due to the anonymity of the surveys, the duplicates could not be identified and all data were included in the analyses. Finally, causality cannot be inferred from the findings because the data are from an uncontrolled study. In contrast to controlled experiments, studies that are based on survey designs are inherently uncontrolled and lack strong internal validity.

Findings

Student Enrollment in ACES

First Learned About ACES Program

Students were able to select more than one response to the question addressing ways that the student first learned about the program. As shown in Table 2, more than one third (35%) of responding students reported they were contacted by a school counselor about the ACES program and more than one fourth (27%) said they learned about ACES during class or were contacted by the ACES coach (26%). Additionally, one fifth (20%) reported they learned about the program during an assembly.

Table 2
Student Survey: Ways that Students First Learned about the ACES Program

	N = 474	
	n	%
Contacted by a school counselor	165	34.8
During a class	129	27.2
Contacted by the ACES coach	122	25.7
During an assembly	95	20.0
Contacted by a teacher	60	12.7
From another student	57	12.0
A flier or bulletin	49	10.3
Contacted by the college and career information coordinator	33	7.0
Contacted by an administrator	15	3.2
Other: mother/parent	5	*
Other (e.g., AVID program, mail, lunch, Connect Ed)	16	3.4

Note. More than one response could be chosen.
*Less than 1%.

Recruiting ACES Students

In interviews, ACES coaches and RCs indicated that the RC, many in partnership with the other school counselors, provided the initial list of participating ACES students to the ACES coach upon their arrival in the fall. For most of the schools, the ACES coach did additional recruiting in the fall to increase the number of students enrolled. In the case of the two schools added to the program in the fall, the ACES coach did the bulk of the recruiting.

Both interviews and online surveys of the same staff members found that various methods for recruiting students were used across the schools. Examples of recruiting methods used were: meeting with potential students, referrals from counselors to coaches, presenting the ACES program to students in English class, holding an ACES assembly, informally approaching students, advertising at the school or using the Connect-ED all-call program, mailing applications home, utilizing the support of the Parent Teacher Student Association, and obtaining additional student referrals from teachers and counselors.

According to interviews with coaches and RCs, all the students who were in the program were accepted because they met at least one of the ACES criteria of being underrepresented. The acceptance criteria included but were not limited to underrepresented students in college including: those receiving FARMS services, Black or African American or Hispanic/Latino, first generation college student, or immigrant. Interviews revealed that most students who applied were accepted because they were recruited, and the few that were not accepted did not meet any of the qualifying criteria. Several interviewees explained their specific strategies for enrolling students, such as including everyone in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, recruiting students in ESOL classes, and recruiting students receiving FARMS services while also eliminating students with attendance issues or those not on track to graduate. A couple of interviewees also indicated that a grade point average (GPA) minimum was not required.

Evaluation Question: How is the ACES program perceived by students and program staff?

Student Responses

Reasons for applying to the ACES program. As shown in Table 3, more than two thirds of student respondents selected answers related to preparing for college as reasons for applying to the program including: support preparing for college, such as standardized testing, study skills, etc. (69%); assistance with applying to college (68%); assistance with applying for scholarships (67%); assistance with applying for financial aid (67%); and to explore options for attending college (67%). More than one half (56%) of the students responding reported that they liked the opportunities that ACES offers.

Table 3
Student Survey: Reasons for Applying to the ACES Program

	$N = 474$	
	n	*%*
I wanted support with preparing for college (such as: SAT/ACT, ACCUPLACER, study skills, course selection, etc.).	328	69.2
I wanted assistance with applying to college.	324	68.4
I wanted assistance with applying for scholarships.	319	67.3
I wanted assistance with applying for financial aid.	318	67.1
I wanted to explore options for attending college.	315	66.5
I liked the opportunities that the ACES program offers to students.	263	55.5
I wanted one-on-one/individual guidance.	203	42.8
I wanted to continue to have a coach guide me after high school.	129	27.2
My counselor/parent told me to apply.	94	19.8
Other (AVID required, heard about coach, unspecified).	4	*

Note. More than one response could be chosen.

Experience with ACES. Students were asked to rate a series of statements to address their experiences with the ACES program. As shown in Table 4, almost all ACES student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the program to other students (99%), that the coach provided them with helpful information and guidance (99%), that the coach was available to meet if needed (98%), that the application process was easy (97%), that the workshop topics were useful (97%), that they looked forward to ACES activities (96%), that participation was important to achieve goals (96%), and that ACES has motivated them to go to college (93%). A large majority (86%) agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop times available were convenient; however, less than one third (32%) strongly agreed with this statement.

Table 4
Student Survey Respondents' Experience with ACES

Survey Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
I would recommend the ACES program to other students. (*N* = 465)	319	68.6	141	30.3	3	0.6	2	0.4
The ACES coach provided me with helpful information and guidance. (*N* = 463)	296	63.9	161	34.8	4	0.9	2	0.4
The ACES coach was available to meet if I needed any assistance or information. (*N* = 461)	289	62.7	164	35.6	5	1.1	3	0.7
The ACES application process was easy for me. (*N* = 464)	241	51.9	210	45.3	9	1.9	4	0.9
Overall, the ACES workshop topics were useful to me. (*N* = 449)	187	41.6	248	55.2	10	2.2	4	0.9
Overall, I look forward to ACES activities, such as the workshops, meeting with coach, etc. (*N* = 449)	211	47.0	219	48.8	15	3.3	4	0.9
Participation in the ACES program is important for me to achieve my future goals. (*N* = 464)	227	48.9	216	46.6	19	4.1	2	0.4
The ACES program has motivated me to go to college. (*N* = 444)	233	52.5	180	40.5	25	5.6	6	1.4
Overall, the times available for the ACES workshops were convenient for me. (*N* = 448)	145	32.4	241	53.8	53	11.8	9	2.0

Using a 5-point scale, more than one half of the students surveyed rated their overall experience as excellent (58%) and the overall quality of the program as excellent (60%), as shown in Table 5. Approximately one third gave a rating of good for overall experience (35%) and overall quality of the program (34%).

Table 5
Student Survey Respondents' Overall Experience with ACES

	Excellent		Good		Average		Poor		Very Poor	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Overall experience (*N* = 452)	260	57.5	156	34.5	32	7.1	1	0.2	3	0.7
Overall quality of the program (*N* = 445)	267	60.0	151	33.9	25	5.6	0	0.0	2	0.4

Positive aspects of the ACES program. A vast majority (84%) of students reported that the ACES coach is what they liked about the program (Table 6). Almost two thirds or more also reported that they liked receiving information on scholarships and financial aid (69%), information on colleges and universities (68%), and meeting individually with their coach (65%). More than one half (57%) also reported that they like receiving information on careers and majors. Less than half identified workshops, field trips, or connecting with other students as what they liked.

Table 6
Student Survey: Aspects of the ACES Program which Students Liked

	N = 474	
	n	%
ACES coach	399	84.2
Information Scholarships/Financial Aid	326	68.8
Information on Colleges/Universities	322	67.9
Meeting individually with Coach	309	65.2
Information on careers/majors	271	57.2
ACES workshops	225	47.5
Field Trips	184	38.8
Connecting with other ACES students	166	35.0
Other	3	*

Note. More than one response could be chosen.
*Less than 1%.

Challenges with the ACES program. One half of the student respondents reported that the workshops were at times they could not attend (50%), as shown in Table 7. One fourth reported that they found it hard to find time to meet with the coach (25%) and to keep motivated to participate in the program (25%). Finally, one fifth (20%) reported that they were not sure whether to go to a counselor, ACES coach, or College and Career Information Coordinator (CCIC) for assistance.

Table 7
Student Survey: Challenges with ACES

	N = 474	
	n	%
Workshops at times unable to attend	239	50.4
Hard to find time to meet with ACES coach	120	25.3
Keeping motivated to participate	116	24.5
Not sure whether to go to ACES coach, counselor, or CCIC for assistance	93	19.6
Other (e.g., overwhelmed, participation, coach's demeanor, not enough help, etc.)	9	1.9

Note. More than one response could be chosen.

Students' suggestions for the ACES program. In an open-ended question where students could offer suggestions to improve the ACES program, 17% (*n* = 26) of the 152 students who offered suggestions stated that they would like to see more trips to colleges and field trips in general (Table A1 in Appendix A). Approximately 15% (*n* = 22) made a suggestion related to accommodating their schedule, such as offer more convenient times, more times available, more flexibility, more times during the day, etc. Just under 10% gave the following suggestions: offer more individualized and one-on-one assistance (*n* = 15, 10%); have a more motivated and involved coach (*n* = 13, 9%); offer more scholarships opportunities and information (*n* = 13, 9%); offer other topics such as tips on college and tips on personal finance and careers (*n* = 11, 7%). One student suggested to "make it clear you won't send people straight to Montgomery College. A lot of junior guys that need assistance didn't join as they were under the impression you had to go to MC if you joined." This is a misconception worth exploring further and

coincides with a survey finding among a few counseling staff who disagreed that the ACES program helps students get accepted to a 4-year college.

Gratitude for the ACES program. Students had the opportunity to leave a comment at the end of the survey. Of the 149 students who left comments, 95% were either positive towards the ACES program, sent a thank you to the coach or ACES program, or both. Table 8 shows some examples.

Table 8
Examples of Student Survey Comments (Open-ended)

"ACES pushed me to be a better student and strive to meet goals."
"Since I only live with my mom, and she only attended a few weeks of community college, ACES has been extremely helpful in guiding me in what I should be doing/looking for in the college process. Since my mother doesn't know how to help me, my ACES coach has been so great to have! I am looking forward to it next year! And since I will be a senior next year, my coach will be so much more of a help!"
"The ACES program pushed me to want to get more involved with my future."
"I am so glad and very relieved that I am in the program. I feel it has helped me so much since the first day. I don't think I would have been able to do everything by myself if I wasn't in this program. I do want to thank the coach for helping me with everything."
"The ACES coach is very helpful and respectful. The coach takes the time to call you individually, to get to know you better and to understand your situation better. The coach does everything that they can to keep you motivated and see you succeed in school. I think that the ACES program is very helpful based on my experience."
"It made me realize that there are so many teens like me who really need this program. All the questions we did not get a chance to ask while we were in class, we were able to ask those questions there and not feel out of place."

Staff Responses

Although the staff surveys yielded a 100% response rate, there are only 10 ACES coaches and 10 RCs; therefore, only numbers, not percentages, are shown in the survey findings. Additionally, midyear interviews were conducted with these coaches and RCs. Relevant findings from the interviews are reported throughout.

Ways in which coaches and counseling staff work with each other. In the online survey given at the end of the school year, ACES coaches were asked to self-report the ways in which they worked with the RC, the other counselors, and the CCIC at the school. The RCs also were asked their perspective of how the ACES coaches worked with the same school staff. As shown in Table 9, the majority of coaches and RCs reported that the coaches provided updates on ACES activities to the RC, counselors, and CCIC ($n = 16$ or 17); the coaches provided updates about ACES students to the RC, counselors, and CCIC ($n = 13$ or 16); and the coaches exchanged information about students with the RC, counselors, and CCIC ($n = 14$ or 16).

Although 15 of the 20 staff members reported that coaches worked with the CCIC on college plans, more RCs reported this than coaches ($n = 9$ and $n = 6$, respectively.) Similarly, of the

13 staff members who reported that the coach collaborates on students' college plans with the RC, more RCs reported this than coaches ($n = 8$ and $n = 5$, respectively).

One half, to just under one half, of the staff members surveyed reported that the coach coordinates the planning of ACES workshops, activities, and assemblies with the CCIC ($n = 10$) and RC ($n = 8$). One fourth reported this coordination with other counselors, and four of the five who reported this were coaches. Finally just under one half reported that the coach collaborated with the RC and/or the CCIC on parent communications ($n = 9$).

In interviews conducted in January, all of the RCs stated that they (or the other counselors) worked with the coach on a regular basis. A variety of ways in which they met were reported: informally, as needed, 2–3 times a week, and at a regular weekly meeting. Working together on caseloads, assisting the coach with getting in touch with students and resources, and coordinating activities also were examples that were reported by RCs.

Table 9
ACES Coach and RC Survey: How ACES Coach works with School Staff

| | How Coach works with…. | | |
	RC (N = 20)	Other Counselors (N = 20)	CCIC (N = 20)
Provide updates on activities offered through ACES	17	16	16
Provide updates about students in the ACES program	16	16	13
Exchange information about ACES students	16	14	16
Collaborate on students' college plans	13[a]	10	15[c]
Coordinate planning of ACES workshops/activities/assemblies	8	5[b]	10
Collaborate on parent communications	9	6	9
Not applicable, does not work with RC/other counselors/CCIC	1	0	1
Other	3	3	3

[a]Five coaches and eight RCs
[b]Four coaches and one RC
[c]Six coaches and nine RCs

Attendance at counseling meetings. Almost all coach survey respondents reported that they attended counseling department meetings either regularly ($n = 5$) or sometimes ($n = 4$). The reasons given for not attending meetings were: they have to be at a MC meeting; the information at the counseling meeting is not related to ACES; or they are not included in the meetings.

Collaboration between staff. Almost three fourths ($n = 14$) of RCs and coaches reported that collaboration between the ACES coach and RC was successful with no challenges; four reported some challenges; and two reported it was difficult (Table 10). Most respondents were split about whether the processes for coaches and school staff members to work on students' college plans and for the coach to provide regular feedback about students and ACES services and progress were successful with no challenges or some challenges. Two respondents reported that each of these processes was difficult. The coaches' reports on collaboration between the

CCIC and other school counselors varied, with four reporting collaboration with the CCIC was difficult.

Table 10
ACES Coach and RC Survey: Experience with Other Staff in ACES Program

	Successful with no challenges	Successful with some challenges	Difficult implementation …need to address challenges
Resource Counselors and Coaches (*N* = 20)	*n*	*n*	*n*
Collaboration between the coach and RC	14	4	2
Process for coaches to provide regular feedback about the services students are receiving/progress students are making	10	8	2
Process for ACES coach and school staff to work on students' college plans	8	10	2
Coaches (*N* = 10)			
Collaboration between the coach and CCIC	5	1	4
Collaboration between the coach and other school counselors	3	6	1

Support for ACES Coaches

Access to student data.   In interviews with coaches and program staff (i.e., ACES co-chairs and director) earlier in the year, it was mentioned that some coaches did not have easy access to student data. However, when asked in the survey about access to student data, almost all coaches (*n* = 9) reported that they received student data through their access to the Online Administrative Student Information System (OASIS), and 7 of 10 also reported that they ask the counselor for student information or ask the student directly (Table 11).

Table 11
ACES Coach Survey: Access to Student Data (*N* = 10)

Access to Student Data	*n*
Through my access to OASIS	9
Ask counselor for the student information	7
Ask student directly	7
Through my access to Naviance	6
Through my access to FileMaker	5
Not applicable, do not receive data on students	0
Other: College Track, OASIS through counselor's help	2

Note. More than one response could be chosen.

When both RCs and coaches were asked a different survey question about the coach's access to student data, the responses varied between "successful with no challenges," "successful with some challenges," and "difficult implementation…need to address challenges" (Table 12).

Table 12
ACES Coach and RC Survey: Respondents' Experience with Access to Data

	Resource Counselors (*N* = 10)			ACES Coaches (*N* = 10)		
	Successful with *no* challenges	Successful with *some* challenges	Difficult implementation…need to address challenges	Successful with *no* challenges	Successful with *some* challenges	Difficult implementation…need to address challenges
	n	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*
Coach's access to student data as needed (i.e., GPA, grades, test scores, demographics)	3	6	1	5	2	3

Coach satisfaction with supports. All or almost all of ACES coaches were very satisfied or satisfied with the professional development they received for their position, support from the staff at MC, and support from their assigned school (Table 13), with eight reporting they were very satisfied with the support from the staff at MC. Four coaches reported that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the school resources available such as meeting space, office space, and equipment or use of equipment.

Table 13
ACES Coach Survey: Satisfaction with ACES Program

	ACES Coaches (*N* = 10)			
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
	n	*n*	*n*	*n*
The professional development I have received for my position as ACES coach	4	6	0	0
School resources available for ACES (space for group meetings, office space, equipment)	2	4	3	1
Support I've received from the ACES staff at Montgomery College	8	2	0	0
Support I've received from my assigned school	2	7	1	0

All or almost all ACES coaches agreed or strongly agreed that they have someone at the school they can go to with questions (*n* = 10), and they have the support they need to run the program at their school (*n* = 9).

Coaches' caseload. When asked, most coaches reported that their caseload included too many students (*n* = 7) or just the right amount of students (*n* = 3).

Support needed for coaches. ACES coaches were asked, in an open-ended question, what supports they still needed (responses are shown in Table A2, Appendix A). Five indicated more cooperation between the program and the school such as schoolwide awareness and recruitment, collaboration with the CCIC, flexibility in meeting with students, and just to be part of the school. Five also indicated a need for resources such as a space with several computers to hold meetings with multiple students and more available school resources. Finally, a few coaches

stated a need for access to data, referring to either MCPS student data or a full functioning ACES database to enter comprehensive student information.

Implementation and Success of Program

Success of program aspects. In the staff surveys, both ACES coaches and RCs were asked about the level of success implementing various aspects of the program this first year (some of these findings were reported above). Most RCs (*n* = 7) reported that the process for recruiting students and the enrollment process were successful with some challenges, whereas the coaches were divided on these areas, with three reporting that the process for recruiting students was difficult (Table 14). Five of the RCs reported that compiling and managing records was successful with no challenges; two reported it was not implemented. Six coaches reported compiling and managing records was successful with some challenges, and three reported it was difficult. Finally, almost all coaches (*n* = 9) reported that the process for offering workshops to ACES students or for meeting with students individually was successful with either no challenges or some challenges.

Table 14
ACES Coach and RC Survey: Respondents' Experience with Implementation of
ACES Program

	Resource Counselors (*N* = 10)			ACES Coaches (*N* = 10)		
	Successful with *no* challenges	Successful with *some* challenges	Difficult implementation …need to address challenges	Successful with *no* challenges	Successful with *some* challenges	Difficult implementation… need to address challenges
	n	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*
Process for recruiting students into the ACES program	2	7	1	3	4	3
The enrollment process for the ACES program	2	7	1	5	4	1
Compiling and managing records of all ACES student activities and participation	5	3	0[a]	1	6	3
Process for offering workshops to ACES students	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	6	1
Process for meeting with students individually	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	5	1

[a]Two selected "not implemented."

Clarity of program aspects. From the end-of-year surveys, almost all RCs and coaches agreed or strongly agreed that the goals of the program were clear, their role with the ACES program was clear, and the responsibilities of the students were clear (Table 15). Four RCs disagreed that they've been kept informed about ACES program decisions and changes to the program, and two disagreed that their role with the program is clear. Midyear interviews with coaches and RCs revealed that many felt that more clarity of roles between coaches and school counseling staff was needed. Additionally, many felt that communicating to the RCs and school staff members about program goals and program updates was needed.

Table 15
ACES Coach and RC Survey: Respondents' Experience with ACES Program

	Resource Counselors ($N = 10$)			ACES Coaches ($N = 10$)		
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
	n	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*
The goals of the ACES program are clear.	4	5	1	4	6	0
My role with the ACES program is clear.	3	5	2	5	5	0
Responsibilities of the students in the ACES program are clear.	3	6	1	3	7	0
I have been kept informed about decisions and changes to the implementation of the ACES program.	4	2	4	5	5	0
The ACES coach is able to provide additional support to students in the program.	7	3	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
I have been able to provide adequate one-on-one time with students who need it.	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	4	1
I am able to address the needs of the students in the ACES program.	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	6	0
Overall, ACES has met the needs of the students in the program during school year 2013–2014.	5	5	0	7	3	0

Meeting program goals. All RCs agreed (*n* = 3) or strongly agreed (*n* = 7) that the coaches were able to provide additional support to students in the program (Table 15). Most all or all of the coaches agreed or strongly agreed that they have been able to provide adequate one-on-one time to students who need it and have been able to address the needs of students in the program. All RCs and coaches agreed or strongly agreed that overall, ACES met the needs of the students in the program.

When ACES coaches and RCs were asked how satisfied they were with the opportunities the program provides students, 9 reported very satisfied, and 11 reported satisfied.

Positive aspects of the ACES program. Coaches were asked in an open-ended question, "What is going well?" Categories and examples of responses are shown in Table A3 of Appendix A. One half or more commented that school and staff support plus communication were going well (*n* = 6), and individual meetings with students and/or parents (*n* = 5) were going well. Four RCs reported that the collaboration and communication from the ACES coach and the support and interaction that the coach provided to students was going well.

Resource counselors were asked the same open-ended question (Appendix A, Table A4). Only 7 of the 10 RCs left a comment. Four reported collaboration and communication from the ACES coach was going well and that student support and interaction by the coach was going well.

In interviews conducted in January, there was a wide variety of comments about what was going well. The top themes that emerged were: relationships among coaches, counselors, and school staff (14 of 20 interviewees); work being done with students (12 of 20 interviewees); relationships among coaches and students (7 of 20 interviewees); and workshops (7 of 20 interviewees).

Challenges with the ACES program. When asked in the survey about challenges, some coaches cited the difficulty of meeting and communicating with students as needed (*n* = 5), lack of resources (*n* = 5), and getting school support while building a new program (*n* = 3). Categories of findings and examples of responses may be seen in Appendix A, Table A5. Seven RCs left a response about challenges, but no more than two responses with similar challenges were reported (Appendix A, Table A6). Some of the challenges that emerged in an earlier interview of coaches and RCs were student attendance in activities (9 of 20), communication about the ACES program (8 of 20), implementing a program while it's still being developed (4 of 20), recruiting students (4 of 20), and the office location for coaches (4 of 20).

Suggestions for the ACES program. As shown in Appendix A, Table A7, one half of the coaches made suggestions in the survey surrounding resources needed to improve the program such as office space, buses, computers, and classrooms. This coincides with an earlier interview of coaches and RCs where one fifth of the interviewees suggested different office spaces for the coaches. Also in the survey, several made suggestions to increase the communication between the coaches and school staff. In an earlier interview with coaches and RCs, just over half of the interviewees suggested frequent and clear communication from leadership and between coaches and counselors. Other suggestions by one or two interviewees were: wait to expand the program next year, more communication about the program with students, involve those at the school in decision making, make ACES into a course, have a central place for record keeping, and have more after-school dates available.

Of the eight RCs who provided suggestions, one half were related to improving communication between all parties (Appendix A, Table A8). A variety of other suggestions were given, but due to lack of frequency, no common themes emerged. Examples of suggestions included: change the application deadline, involve school staff members more, provide coaches with access to student records, offer more flexible recruitment process, etc.

Evaluation Question: **To what extent did the ACES program increase student knowledge and assist in their participation of the college application and financial aid process?**

Data on college applications and acceptances, financial aid applications, and scholarship applications among all graduating ACES students will be reported in a subsequent ACES year one outcome report. This section presents student and staff perceptions, obtained through surveys, on student degree expectations, the effect of application fees, counselors' approach to college planning, and ACES program assistance with the college process.

Student Responses

College degree expectations. When students were asked what would be the highest college degree they expected to receive, 28% of the student respondents said a bachelor's degree, and another 56% reported a master's or doctor's degree (Table 16).

Table 16
Student Survey: Highest Degree Expected to Receive among Respondents

	N = 458	
	n	%
High School Diploma	27	5.9
Associate's or trade/business/technical degree	21	4.6
Bachelor's degree	130	28.4
Master's degree	139	30.3
Doctorate (Ph.D.) or professional degree	116	25.3
Undecided	25	5.5

College application fees. Almost two thirds (65%) of seniors surveyed who applied to a 4-year college reported that they were able to apply to the number of colleges they wanted; whereas more than one third (35%) reported that they were not able to apply to all the colleges they wanted because of the application fees.

ACES program assistance. As shown in Table 17, almost all students surveyed (90–94%) agreed or strongly agreed that the ACES program assisted them with exploring colleges and universities (50% strongly agreed), assisted them with exploring majors and career interests (47% strongly agreed), helped them prepare academically for college applications (45% strongly agreed), and provided their parent or guardian with helpful information (47% strongly agreed).

Table 17
Student Survey: Experience with Program Assistance

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The ACES program assisted me with exploring colleges and universities to which I might want to apply. (N = 446)	223	50.0	194	43.5	24	5.4	5	1.1
The ACES program assisted me with exploring college majors and career interests. (N = 452)	214	47.3	207	45.8	27	6.0	4	0.8
The ACES program helped prepare me academically for the college application process. (N = 443)	199	44.9	212	47.9	26	5.9	6	1.4
The ACES coach provided my parent(s)/guardian with helpful information and guidance. (N = 445)	208	46.7	194	43.6	37	8.3	6	1.3

The Grade 12 ACES students were asked to rate a series of statements about program assistance (Table 18). Almost all students (a range of 97–99%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to get the guidance they needed for the college application process (63% strongly agreed), the program assisted them in understanding the college application process (65% strongly agreed), the program assisted them with how to apply for financial aid (67% strongly agreed), and the program assisted them in understanding how to apply for scholarships (63% strongly agreed).

Table 18
Student Survey: Experience with Program Assistance – Grade 12 Only

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Overall, I was able to get the guidance I needed for the college application process. (*N* = 259)	162	62.5	94	36.3	3	1.2	0	0.0
The ACES program assisted me in understanding the college application process. (*N* = 260)	169	65.0	86	33.1	5	1.9	0	0.0
The ACES program assisted me in understanding how to apply for financial aid. (*N* = 259)	173	66.8	81	31.3	5	1.9	0	0.0
The ACES program assisted me in understanding how to apply for scholarships. (*N* = 261)	164	62.8	89	34.1	8	3.1	0	0.0

Grade 12 respondents who were accepted into a 4-year college were asked the helpfulness of the ACES program to their acceptance. Most respondents (94%) found the program very helpful (53%) or helpful (41%) to their acceptance into a 4-year college.

Staff Responses

College plans. RCs reported that the counselors, CCIC, or both work with students on their college plan, with no typical method reported across all the schools (Table 19).

Table 19
Resource Counselor Survey: Approaches to Handling Student College Plans
(*N* = 10)

College Plan Approaches	*n*
A student's counselor typically works with the student on a college plan.	3
The CCIC typically works with the student on a college plan.	1
Both CCIC and student's counselor above were chosen.	4
A CCIC will start a college plan with a student and then a counselor will finish/follow up.	2

ACES assistance with college. As shown in Table 20, almost all coaches strongly agreed that ACES motivates students to go to college who otherwise might not have gone (*n* = 9); that ACES serves students who are motivated to go to college, but face barriers (*n* = 8); and that ACES helps students get accepted into a 4-year college (*n* = 8). A few RCs disagreed that ACES motivates students to go to college who might not otherwise (*n* = 3) and that ACES helps students get accepted into a 4-year college (*n* = 3).

Table 20
ACES Coach and RC Survey: Respondents' Perception on ACES Program

	Resource Counselors (*N* = 10)			ACES Coaches (*N* = 10)		
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
	n	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*	*n*
ACES motivates students to go to college who otherwise might not have gone.	5	2	3	9	1	0
ACES serves students who are motivated to go to college, but face barriers.	6	3	1	8	2	0
ACES helps students get accepted into a 4-year college.[a]	4	2	3	8	2	0
ACES helps students achieve financial aid for college.[a]	5	3	1	7	3	0

[a]Resource counselors, *n* = 9.

Summary

Students were recruited to the ACES program in a variety of ways across the schools. Students learned about the program directly through the ACES coach or their counselor, a presentation during class, an assembly, or school advertisement. Although students met one of the qualifying criteria to be accepted into the program, schools focused on varying criteria and used a variety of methods to identify students to recruit.

ACES students who completed an end-of-year survey (49% of all ACES students) had very positive ratings about their experience and the overall quality of the ACES program. They reported the coach and program were helpful in guiding them through college information and the application process, and they would recommend the program to other students. The aspect of the program they especially liked was the coach. Almost all students who left a comment at the end of the survey left a positive comment about the program or a thank you to the program or their coach. Some students expressed challenges with the workshop schedule or scheduling meetings with the coach and would like to see more options or flexibility in this area. Also, some students were not clear as to whom in the counseling office to see for assistance. Students' suggestions on improving the ACES program were to offer more convenient meeting times, more field trips, more scholarship information, and more individualized attention. One student also pointed out a possible misconception that some students believed they had to attend Montgomery College if in the program.

All 20 ACES coaches and RCs (100% response rate) responded to an end-of-year survey and participated in midyear interviews. Most thought the collaboration between the coach and RC was successful, and most RCs strongly agreed that the coach was able to provide additional support to students in the program. Most coaches strongly agreed that ACES motivated students to go to college who might not otherwise have gone (although a few RCs disagreed); ACES helped students get accepted into a 4-year college (although a few RCs disagreed); and overall, ACES has met the needs of students.

Although most ACES coaches and RCs reported working together on various aspects of ACES, such as exchanging information about ACES activities and students, there is variation among the respondents on what has been implemented well and what presented challenges. Challenges that were cited by at least some coaches and RCs were the process for recruiting and enrolling students, collaboration with the CCIC, and the coach's access to student data. At least half of the coaches indicated a need for cooperation between them and the school staff members; the ability to meet with all students; and resources such as office space, computers and the use of equipment. When asked, 7 of 10 coaches reported that the student caseload was too high. Some RCs indicated that they are not always kept informed about the implementation of the program and would like to see more communication between all parties.

It is pertinent to point out that some of the main findings from the midyear interviews of ACES coaches and RCs centered on more frequent communication to school staff members about the program and its expectations as well as clarifying roles among the ACES coach and counseling staff. The findings from the survey administered in May did not highlight these concerns, indicating a shift in improvement in these areas. In fact, the program staff organized a full-day retreat for the summer of 2014, and a follow-up retreat in October, to bring ACES coaches and MCPS staff members directly involved with the program together to focus on clarification of roles and responsibilities, team building, and sharing of best practices.

Recommendations

During this first year of implementation, ACES staff, ACES coaches, and MCPS school staff had to establish procedures and roles for the program, create a comprehensive database for capturing student information, locate office space for the coach and meeting space for ACES activities, coordinate the location and schedule of student meetings, complete the recruitment of students, etc. Despite these first year challenges, there were many successes. Surveyed students were very happy with the program and its guidance for college applications; staff also agreed that the program was successful.

The following recommendations are to provide feedback for the program's improvement and ongoing development and are based on findings from this part of the evaluation.

- Continue to establish helpful and positive relationships between coaches and students.
- Continue to build relationships between the ACES coach and school staff.
  o Areas of concentration, depending on specific school, include: procedures for sharing student information, coach's use of equipment, attendance at counseling department meetings, clarification of roles for staff and for students, and regular communication between counseling staff and coaches.
- Continue to provide clear and frequent communication with school staff members and ACES coaches about program updates and expectations.
- Explore providing more resources for coaches such as classroom and/or office space availability and equipment.
- Explore scheduling of ACES activities to accommodate more students.
  o Consider duplicating important workshops and information sessions.

- o Consider altering coach's schedules to more closely align to MCPS school schedules and increase coach's availability (i.e., Fridays at school, spring breaks).
- Explore possible misconceptions among some students and some counseling staff that students are required or encouraged only to attend MC and will not receive help applying to a 4-year college.
- Consider adding more college field trips, especially early in the school year, and information regarding scholarship opportunities.
- Schedule time for ACES school-level teams from the 10 schools to come together to clarify roles and responsibilities and share best practices with each other.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Table A1
Student Survey: Suggestions for ACES (Open-ended)

	N = 152	
	n	*%*
Workshop + Activity Suggestions		
More college trips/more field trips	26	17.1
More scholarship opportunities/information	13	8.6
Offer other topics (e.g. college tips, personal finance, careers, world after high school, etc.)	11	7.2
More on choosing a college/college topics	10	6.6
More workshop opportunities	7	4.6
More SSL opportunities	6	3.9
Coach's Approach		
More individualized/more one-on-one	15	9.9
More motivation/involvement	13	8.6
Make time for everyone who needs it/treat everyone the same	9	5.9
More frequent communication/more emails/better organization such as a calendar	9	5.9
Meet with other students/group meetings + activities/students help students	6	3.9
Push 4 year colleges more/don't just target MC and USG	3	2.0
Scheduling		
Meeting times (i.e., more convenient, more flexible, more times, more times during the school day, etc.)	22	14.5
More available workshop times/repeat	5	3.3
Meet more often	5	3.3
Start earlier in High School career/college visits in junior year	5	3.3
Meet at lunch/during school hours	4	2.6
Change SAT prep time/offer SAT prep after school	3	2.0
Coach Support		
More coaches/get an assistant coach/get coaches more help	5	3.3
Offer more food	5	3.3
More/better computers	4	2.6
More space to meet with students	3	2.0
Participation		
Advertise ACES program more	2	1.3
Students should be committed/have obligation to participate in program	2	1.3
Other		
Other suggestions	15	9.9

Note. More than one comment could be given.

Table A2
ACES Coach Survey: Support Needed (Open-ended)
($N = 10$)

Needed Supports	n
Cooperation between ACES & the school/school staff	5
Schoolwide awareness of the ACES program.	
It would also help if ACES recruitment was embraced as a schoolwide initiative during which all key stakeholders actively participated.	
Supportive collaboration with the CCIC.	
Flexibility in meeting students in the last 5 to 10 minutes of an elective class once a week.	
To be considered a part of the school.	
Need for resources (office, classroom, computers, etc.)	5
Space is critical to provide SAT prep for the ACES students in the upcoming school year.	
It would be nice to get an office with a few computers in order to work with a small group of students at a time.	
I would also like to be able to have a permanent space/time to offer student workshops.	
Make school resources more available.	
The lack of resources has hindered the program.	
Databases (ACES & MCPS)	3
Access to certain databases that would give me more updated information regarding student's academic status (grades).	
Access to student grades and progress reports.	
A functioning and completed ACES database for all of our ACES data.	

Table A3
ACES Coach Survey: Positive Aspects (Open End) (*N* = 10)

Categories	Examples	*n*
School and staff support + communication	Collaboration with (school) staff. The support from my school is appreciated. My resource counselor and I work well together. The school principal and resource counselor have been helpful. Being adaptive as changes take place help in an environment where things are constantly changing and where we as coaches have no real authority in the school system even though we are all high performing professionals. Collaboration with counseling department -autonomy given to me by administration - a good office space…..- a very good relationship with CCIC… The collaboration from the Counseling Department has been phenomenal. It really does take a village to make the students become aware that they can be successful.	6
Individual meetings with students and/or parents	Individual meetings with students and parents (especially with financial aid process). I think that the students have been able to benefit greatly from the services and individual assistance. The parents also appreciate the one-on-one support as well.	5
Coaches time flexibility to meet with parents and provide multiple workshops	The flexible schedules of the coaches allowed parents who work multiple jobs to have better access to school resources. Providing workshops at multiple times for students.	2
Other	Providing snacks Successful kick-off Space to meet and conduct workshops	3

Table A4
Resource Counselor Survey: Positive Aspects (Open End) (N = 7)

Categories	Examples	n
Collaboration and communication from ACES coach	My ACES coach is wonderful. She collaborates with the counseling department on a regular basis and makes sure that we are kept informed. The coach was very proactive in working with counselors and staff.	4
Support and interaction provided by ACES coach to students	I can see that the students in the ACES program have clear goals. Before ACES, some of the students seemed to be clueless about the college preparation process. The students were motivated to pursue a college track and received the extra support they needed. The coach was very proactive in reaching out to students.	4
Other	100% of the students applied to college.	1

Table A5
ACES Coach Survey: Challenges (Open End) (*N* = 10)

Categories	Examples	*n*
Difficult to communicate with and meet with students as they need	Locating students because many are involved in multiple afterschool activities. Meeting with the students to be able to be more concrete on their goals. Being able to meet and identify the needs of all students. Each student has a different need and being able to accommodate them all can be a challenge. Racing against time. So many students to work with and very little time.	5
Lack of resources (e.g., computers, space, for students)	Limited spacing to conduct workshops, not having access to certain school resources. No access to student transcripts. If I had an office with at least 10 computers, it would help a lot when I'm working with students. It is more time efficient working with a small group on some projects verses one-on-one. Accessing student grades and progress reports.	5
Building new program and getting school support	The lack of support … at times and schoolwide awareness of the ACES Program. Developing a new program, establishing relationships not only with the students but with the school itself.	3
ACES Database	Lack of a completed, functioning ACES database.	2
Other	At times it has proven to be a challenge to complete all the tasks at hand with the college as well as meeting the needs that are addressed at the high school. Attendance at after-school sessions has been spotty.	5

Table A6
ACES Resource Counselor Survey: Challenges (Open End) ($N = 7$)

Categories	Examples	n
To include 12th graders in first year	Having the coach spend the first semester getting to know the seniors and miss out on building a stronger relationship with the juniors. The coach should have only worked with juniors this year, so next year they would already know the rising seniors well (their needs and their plans for college). Meeting with every student in ACES.	2
Division of responsibility	Understanding the logistics of the program and what role does the school play when it comes to preparing our students for the ACES program. Creating clear responsibilities and domains for the ACES Coach, Counselors, and CCIC as it relates to working with students we all share.	2
Recruitment and Referrals	Recruiting students was difficult at first and is still an intensive process.	2
Other	Coach's access to student information. Availability of coaches. Family involvement. Workshops not held.	4

Table A7
ACES Coach Survey: Suggestions (Open End) (*N* = 10)

Categories	Examples	*n*
Provide resources (e.g., space)	Provide a permanent space for ACES workshops and meetings. Additional options for afterschool transportation so that more afterschool workshops can be held. Having a classroom for each ACES coach would prove a tremendous asset. It would eliminate having to chase down a space and utilize our time appropriately in implementing the program… Even a smaller size classroom would be beneficial…. The only challenge has been having an ongoing space to provide workshops.	5
Increase communication between coaches and counseling department/ school staff	I suggest the ACES coach and counseling staff meet on a regular basis regarding the program and students. Strengthen the collaboration with school-based MCPS staff.	4
Recruitment and selection of students	Encouraging schoolwide involvement during recruitment. I think the schools should be more active and aware of what ACES is doing on a broader level.	3
Other	Minimize caseload.	1

Table A8
Resource Counselor Survey: Suggestions (Open End) ($N = 8$)

Categories	Examples	n
Communication between all parties	Communication between the ACES Coach and RC is imperative in order for me to address questions on this survey. There is a chance the ACES Coach has surpassed every expectation, however without my knowing, I am unable to express her work. Communication between all stakeholders with advance notice of changes would be helpful. A group meeting with all ACES readiness staff and ACES staff to help coordinate services. Efforts should be made to model and set a tone that this is a team and everyone is expected to work together. This division plays out with issues with ACCUPLACER, enrollment with college classes and recruitment for MC…..all be expected to team together so there is less confusion about a range of processes and issues.	4
Other	Change application deadline. Involve school staff more. Provide coaches access to student records. More flexible recruitment. More availability among coaches to work with students.	7

Appendix B